

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND PERSONAL LOCATIONS

This study is a qualitative exploration of the gendered discourses in the talk of South African women in middle management. It explores the locations and perspectives from which middle management women speak, the institutions and traditions that inform their discourses and the challenges to dominant discourses on gender present in their talk. The study therefore aims to explore the complex interplay of different meanings and how these influence the experience and identities of middle management women.

It is conducted from a social constructionist framework that assumes that all research and knowledge is a process of creation where the context, beliefs and ideas of researchers form part of the process of the construction of knowledge (Gergen, 1985). (This approach is discussed in more depth in chapter 2.) Thinking about knowledge creation and research in this way does not result in an ‘anything goes’ approach but acknowledges, by way of reflexivity, the position of the researcher. It requires researchers to reflect on their own locations and positions and how these inform the research process. It also requires visibility of these positions to readers (Adkins, 2002; Coffey, 2002). This point of view does not consider it appropriate to remain neutral and invisible and to write in an obscured third person but requires from researchers to show themselves in order to overcome the split between the knower and the known (Parker, 1992). In this way, the locations and positions that I am embedded in become important in this study and therefore I take some time to describe and reveal some of them. Therefore, this chapter serves as an introduction to the study by introducing my personal positions in terms of this project and how it developed. My theoretical positions and locations are discussed in chapter 2.

How it Started: Personal Reflections

I have often been asked about the choice of topic of this research project: Gendered discourses of women in middle management. Given my current position, a clinical psychologist in an academic setting, my choice to focus on women in middle management seems rather odd to most. The answer to this question lies in two aspects: my curiosity about contradiction and disillusionment. At its most fundamental,

this study is an inquiry into contradiction and specifically the contradictions that surround gender in our world as we live it. I have always been fascinated by the many layers of meaning and truth that support human interaction, by the fact that most families, groups and communities are involved in complex webs of the said and the unsaid, where one often contradicts the other, and it is the very contradiction that keeps the system in place, that keeps everyone happy. Often the naming and speaking of the contradiction, making it explicit, causes tremendous upheaval and discomfort and leads to all sorts of manoeuvres to silence the disturber of the peace. On the one hand, it is my basic interest in contradiction and its workings and on the other hand, it is probably disillusionment that gave rise to this project.

The disillusionment emerged slowly as I encountered the working world and realised that the notion of equality in the workplace is not a given, is not a complete project but is still very much in the making. As a white, liberal young woman, I started my career with the belief that inequality in terms of gender is a thing of the past, that we are all sexless and genderless as workers and that all that matters is what you do and how well you do it. This expectation was probably partially a product of my background of privilege. Had it been different, I might not have had this naïve picture of a just playing field where all parties were treated the same. However, it did not take long before I began to see that gender informed many of the formal and informal mechanisms of the organisation I was part of and that gender still plays a fundamental yet subtle and almost invisible role in how people conduct themselves in the workplace. So here I was confronted with different layers of meaning, involving contradiction and complex interaction that keep the status quo intact. Some attempts to talk about this were met with resistance and a clear reminder that all were treated equally; the only result from these discussions was my newly acquired label as the ‘unreasonable feminist’.

This experience led me to start reading about women in the workplace and I started encountering concepts such as the wage gap, the glass ceiling, gender stratified task divisions and the scarcity of women in top management. It became clear to me that there is a fundamental contradiction between policy and practice in most working environments, and that this seems to be a global phenomenon. Given my interest in

the discursive, the level of meaning making, I became curious to think more about and explore in which ways this situation is discursively constructed.

The South African Context

The broader South African context is fraught with this same contradiction between policy and practice. The South African constitution, being one of the most progressive constitutions in the world, forbids discrimination based on gender and provides legislation that renders the advancement of previously disadvantaged groups possible. Many structures have been created to promote gender equality, such as the Commission for Gender Equality, the Office of Status of Women (OSW) and the Parliament Committee for Improvement of Quality of Life of Women in South Africa. The South African parliament also contains a high representation of women as compared to international standards. There is clearly a commitment to non-sexism when it comes to policy and there has been a movement towards equality on the level of legislation (De La Rey & Kottler, 1999). However, South Africa's status as a world leader in terms of progressive gender policy seems to be in contrast with everyday practice. Despite the progressive policy, women's positions remain tenuous and vulnerable in many ways as seen in the high incidence of violence against women, sexual harassment and women's specific vulnerability to and rates of HIV infection. South Africa has one of the highest rates of rape and domestic violence and low conviction rates of rape (Strebel et al., 2006). This contradiction between policy and practice can be seen as a reflection of the different discursive sets of meaning that exist in terms of women in the South African community. These contradictions in the discursive field influence and inform the lives of women in South Africa. This study focuses on these contradictions and their effects on the lives, contexts, but especially the work institutions women find themselves in.

Women in the Workplace

With a greater emphasis on gender equality in contemporary society, women have become part of the economic sphere and form a large percentage of the work force, resulting in a drastic change in the labour market from a mostly male occupied arena to more or less equal proportions of men and women (Charles & Davies, 2000; Wentling, 1996). Despite these changes in the labour market, sex differentiation continues with a tendency towards gender traditional occupations, a continuing wage

gap, discontinued career paths for women, gender stratification of task division at work and unequal work division on the home front (Alvesson & Billig, 1997; Cook, 1993). Thus the workplace seems to remain gender stratified and this is reflected in the low percentages of women in executive management positions. Globally women make up approximately 50% of the economically active population, and yet, they have not been successful in entering the management world with the same proportion (Charles & Davies, 2000; Marlow, Marlow & Arnold, 1995; Wentling, 1996). The increased representation of women in the professions does not lead to a similar increase in management positions (Charles & Davies, 2000). When it comes to management positions, women rarely exceed a figure of 20% and they comprise only two to three percent of top management positions in the most powerful companies of the United States of America (Benschop, Halsema & Schreurs, 2001). A similar position exists in South Africa where women are under-represented in top management positions (Employment Equity Analysis Report, 2003).

This study focuses particularly on middle management women as middle management is the position where many women reach a plateau in their career progress. Middle managers are also prone to experience contradictory messages as they are simultaneously subordinates and managers, thus adding complexity to the negotiation of their work environment (Martin, 2004). A broad definition of middle management is adopted here where middle management is defined as a position that involves both managing subordinates and reporting to the executive structures of the organisation.

The gender stratification of the workplace is inevitably linked to the family and the division of labour that exists there. Although gender divisions of labour in the family show some variation across cultures, women are largely responsible for the main aspects of the domestic sphere: care of children and food preparation (Shafets, 1998). Despite changes in the labour market and women's participation in paid work, the unpaid labour associated with child-rearing and domestic maintenance still seems to remain their responsibility (Alvesson & Billig, 1997; Nordenmark, 2002).

It seems that many fundamental forms of the gender stratification of our society persist despite changes in legislation that aim towards gender equality by removing discriminatory practices and also changes in the labour market, leaving women and

men with many contradictory ideas, practices, expectations and beliefs. Looking at discourse provides one way of explaining this dilemma as the discursive domain or the patterns of meaning in a community play an important role in the reproduction of the gender stratification of it. These discourses become ideologies in as far as they maintain systems of asymmetrical power relationships and reconcile people to existing structures and their roles therein (Wetherell, Stiven & Potter, 1987). This is achieved by discursive strategies that deem the existing structures as natural and normal. So on the one hand, communities are faced with discourses maintaining gender stratification but on the other there is also the widespread, socially acceptable discourse of gender equality in South Africa. This discourse of equality is often used in conversation and adherence to it is considered appropriate in most public contexts. The contradiction of the discourse of equality with other discourses leads Knudson-Martin (1997) to speak of the myth of equality where she considers the effects of the contradiction as completely undermining of real equality. Weedon (1987) refers to this contradiction as a contradiction of theory and practice where institutional and legal definitions are in clear contrast with practice and considers dealing with this issue as an important theoretical project. The aim with this study is further exploration of this notion. Does the contradiction make equality impossible? Or does it leave spaces and gaps for resistance and change? Thus, the contradiction of those discourses that support gender stratification with a discourse of equality and equal opportunities lies at the heart of this study.

The Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to explore the complex interplay of sets of meaning and how these are present in middle management women's talk about their experience of the workplace and further to explore which discourses inform decisions on appropriate action and identity. The aim is also to explore how women construct their own gender and which discourses are operative in these constructions. The sense-making processes involved in the active process of construction are studied as well as how contradictory systems of meaning influence the construction of the self and world and how these discourses support or challenge institutions and the status quo.

Research Questions

Given the contradiction between the socially accepted discourse of equality and the gender stratified nature of the workplace, I will focus on the following research questions to explore a discursive ecology. The term discursive ecology here refers to the interrelated nature of discourse as discourse and statements have meaning in terms of their relation to and impact on other discourses (Livingston, 1997).

- Which gender discourses are present in women's talk about their own experiences of the workplace?
- Are there contradictory discourses present?
- What are the discursive mechanisms that keep these contradictions in place?
- How do women negotiate contradictory discourses in the workplace?
- Which subject positions are available?
- Do women strategise with and deploy contradictions to maintain and improve their position?
- How are dominant discourses challenged or entrenched?
- Which institutions are supported by the discourses?
- How does the discourse of equality operate in relation to other traditional discourses on gender?
- What are the ideological impacts of the contradictions in the workplace?

As a feminist researcher I am committed to the national project of obtaining equality for women and thus this is not a value free project (Sunde & Bozalek, 1993) but it is aimed at explicating the ambiguities, contradictions and silences that keep women in subjugated positions. It is ultimately directed towards political action and strategies for change in an attempt at making the unsaid said and investigating the discursive practices that either sustain or challenge the status quo.

Linking back to my personal reflections, this project is part of my own process of making sense of some of the things I have seen and noticed. It is a way of developing the ideas that have been forming and growing quietly and a way of formulating, expanding and challenging them. It is also a way of giving voice to concerns to make them heard with the hope that speaking them in combination with the voices of other

women will change them and remodel them into moments of hope for change and agency.

Outline of the Thesis

The rationale and context for the study was discussed in this chapter and the reader was also introduced to my personal locations and positions in terms of the project. The aims of the study are also introduced.

Chapter 2 involves an exploration of my theoretical positions and locations as they relate to and inform this study. It gives an exposition of a social constructionist approach to gender and how it offers alternatives to essentialist approaches. It looks briefly at feminist positions on the construction of gender and the sexed body. It also provides a description of the understanding with which I use the terms discourse and discourse analysis.

Chapter 3 discusses how gender equality and the gender stratification of the workplace are portrayed in academic discourses. In terms of academic discourse it looks at the current situation of women in the workplace and organisational research and theories on the topic. It also examines strategies suggested in organisational theory to tackle the issue.

Chapter 4 explores the discursive construction of gender in the workplace by conceptualising discourse in organisational studies and by describing some gendered discourses prevalent in the workplace. It also discusses the notion of the gendered body at work.

Chapter 5 discusses the research procedures of the project. It reflects on the issues of feminist social constructionist research and the trustworthiness of this research. It explains and describes the research procedures such as the interview structure, obtaining the participants and also transcription and analysis of data.

In chapter 6 I give the results of the discourse analysis. Here I attempt to track and map a discursive ecology that becomes evident in the transcribed interviews. This

reveals some of the discursive tricks and strategies that support and also challenge the status quo. I also offer personal reflections on the interview process.

The conclusion in chapter 7 uses a metaphor from fiction to summarise and clarify the discourses present in the participants' talk and to show how these discourses relate to each other and operate within the broader social structure. I also offer personal reflections on the research process as a whole and propose some suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL LOCATIONS

Feminist objectivity means quite simply situated knowledges

(Haraway, 1991, p. 188)

The notion of situated knowledge as described by Donna Haraway (1991) runs deeply through this project as I proceed to weave my way through the complicated and complex webs of meaning that enfold this topic. Therefore, declaring my situatedness as researcher and woman is fundamental to my work and attempts towards accountability as researcher.

This chapter is a snapshot of my epistemological positions as the context of my work. This is done within awareness that this is a view from a specific point in time, and that this view and description does not entail the complete picture or account of my position. Speaking from a body always implies a view “from somewhere” (Haraway, 1991, p. 195) and means that we are not fully present or available to ourselves (Haraway, 1991). So I proceed from this point of embeddedness, with cognisance of the impossibility of providing a complete and absolute account of my academic identity and the knowledge of the constitutive, transforming nature of this writing process. The inhabited position I wish to describe now will change by the very act of the description.

I wish to sketch a location, to invite you, the reader, to a partial view of the epistemological landscape I inhabit which also inhabits me. I start by introducing the approaches that inform my thinking, conceptualisation and questioning as I proceed through the research process of making sense of the discourses that inform and influence the lives of women in middle management. This involves a description of my understanding and application of social constructionism as an epistemology, an approach towards creating and understanding knowledge.

This discussion is followed by a focus on the social construction of gender and the knowledge and understandings of women as created by the scientific disciplines of psychology and academic feminism with specific reference to the essentialism and

constructionism debate. I also illustrate how social constructionist feminism provides a valuable framework for exploring the topic of women in middle management.

The use of discourse analysis as part of my methodology is inextricably linked to social constructionism, thus I also discuss my understanding and application of discourse and discourse analysis as an appropriate methodology for the aims of this project.

The backdrop to this sketch is what can be referred to very broadly as ‘new epistemology’ thinking. ‘New epistemology’ thinking refers here to developments in the social sciences which led to different ways of thinking about knowledge and science. Generally speaking, this involves a move away from positivism or empiricism towards social constructionism or constructivism (Durrheim, 1997). This epistemological move is discussed briefly in the following section.

Epistemological Shifts

A discussion of the epistemological shifts that characterise the social sciences, psychology and feminist studies can inevitably lead to a confusing number of -isms. I discuss these shifts in the following section to avoid the confusion and interchangeable use of concepts and terms that sometimes arises.

The shifts in the social sciences, psychology and feminist studies have been described in many ways and different labels are used to describe the current era of scientific thinking. In psychology literature terms such as postmodernism (Kvale, 1992), poststructuralism (Sampson, 1989), social constructionism (Gergen, 1985), constructivism (Maturana & Varela, 1987), post-empiricism (Durrheim, 1997), post-enlightenment (Seidman, 1998) are all used to describe the development of a new approach to the creation of knowledge and an understanding of the role of science. This change is also described as the interpretive (White, 1995), linguistic or discursive turn (Bayer, 1998; Parker, 1992). These different labels or descriptions all describe what could be referred to as a new epistemological tradition. One should take care not to equate these different approaches and treat them as interchangeable since these approaches differ in the specifics of their epistemology, methodology and intervention. I will use the umbrella-term ‘new epistemology’ in the following section and discuss different theories that fall under the umbrella of ‘new epistemology’.

This thesis does not warrant an in-depth discussion of the specifics of all the different approaches that could be called ‘new epistemology’ approaches. My aim in this discussion is to sketch a clear picture of my epistemological positions as they relate to and are informed by the broader ‘new epistemology’. Therefore it would suffice to discuss some central aspects and concepts of this new epistemology briefly and then give a more extensive discussion of social constructionism. The discussion of social constructionism is preceded by this broader exploration of new epistemology approaches to locate social constructionism within a broader historical, theoretical and academic context.

There are many different theories, descriptions and approaches in the realm of new epistemology research that involve different interpretations and descriptions. Yet a few core features seem to emerge from the different approaches that I see as central to the new epistemology.

- Most of these approaches share the view that social research cannot be seen as an objective process that can be separated from the researcher (Hoffman, 1992). Science is thus not seen as a value-free process but rather as a process where the observer forms an integral part of the process (Kvale, 1992; Nicholson, 1990). The absolute nature of knowledge as objective, individualistic and a-historic is questioned (Bohan, 1992; Gergen, 1985; Gergen, 1992; Nicholson, 1990). The scientist is no longer seen as one possessing “a God’s eye view” (Nicholson, 1990, p. 2) but as an embodied, located and situated practitioner. With this questioning of the objective nature of knowledge also comes the connection of meaning and power (Kvale, 1992). The process of creating knowledge is seen as a powerful process of creating realities, naming objects and exercising authority (Gergen, 1985; Gergen, 1992; Nicholson, 1990). Scientific knowledge is therefore also a cultural construction (Gergen, Gulerce, Lock & Misra, 1996) and historically and culturally specific (Burr, 1995).
- The issue of self, identity, personality and psyche and comes under investigation here and the self is seen as a construction (Gergen, 1992; Hoffman, 1992) and as something that exists in social conditions and is embodied dialogically or relationally with shifting boundaries (Shotter, 1997). The idea of a fixed, stable, unified and coherent personality is undermined (Burr, 1995). Thus identity as a singular entity is questioned and seen as

consisting of multiple contradictory possibilities (Butler, 1990). As Burr (1995) so eloquently puts it: “There is good reason to believe that a person is never a coherent system of consistent elements” (p. 26.)

- The inclusion of the observer into the research process makes a reflexive stance necessary (Hoffman, 1992). The reflexive position asks of researchers to reflect back upon themselves and how their context, ideas, experience, aims and beliefs become part of the research process (Adkins, 2002; Coffey, 2002). Reflexivity replaces traditional notions of objectivity and neutrality and acknowledges the presence of the researcher as an integral and necessary part of the process.
- The position of the professional researcher or practitioner as expert is also questioned. In psychotherapy this question results in the undermining of the central role of the therapist and therapists adopt different strategies to acknowledge the constructive nature of the therapy process (as an interpersonal construction) (Fruggeri, 1992) by adopting a not-knowing approach (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992) or a decentred position (White, 1995). In research methodology an emphasis on collaboration (Gatenby & Humphries, 2000) develops with researchers investigating and exploring different ways of interacting with research participants that undermine that traditional power relationship. The new epistemology finds its way into the sphere of both the researcher and the practitioner with both groups moving towards collaborative and participatory ways of working with clients or research participants.

After this brief (by no means comprehensive) account of some central features of the new epistemology I now discuss in more depth aspects of social constructionism as they relate to women and gender and this project specifically.

Social Constructionism: A Skeleton

Kenneth Gergen published the influential article entitled *The Social Constructionist Movement in Psychology* in 1985 and this work describes the cornerstones of my (and many others’) understanding of social constructionism. In this publication he mentions four basic assumptions of social constructionism. These assumptions can be considered to form the skeleton of social constructionism and are the epistemological baseline that I work from and I discuss them briefly here. These ideas will be explored in further depth later in the chapter.

The first assumption involves the experience of the world and reflects on the notion that the experience of the world is not irrevocably linked to the understanding of the world. In other words, knowledge does not stem directly from observation but there are processes at work that influence the understanding of the world apart from mere perception or sensation of the world (Gergen, 1985). Burr (1995) refers to this as taken-for-granted knowledge where we experience the world in terms of categories that seem fundamental such as woman/man without questioning how these categories came into existence or how they achieved such prominence.

Secondly, the fundamental way in which the world is understood is a social creation or social product, manufactured by culture. Thus the basic assumptions and ideas on the world do not arise in a vacuum as irrefutable truths but are the products of active social or collective endeavours, rendering them questionable and negotiable (Gergen, 1985). What seems 'natural' at any given stage in history is the product of the social and economic conditions of that time. Knowledge is seen as an artefact of the culture that produces it (Burr, 1995). Making sense of the world is a process of communal participation (Gergen, 2001).

Gergen (1985) continues to discuss a third aspect, namely the importance of social processes such as negotiation, communication, rhetoric and conflict in establishing what is experienced as the fundamental understanding of the world. The product of scientific endeavours is also seen as the result of the same processes. The negotiations, motivations and the influencing institutions that form part of scientific activity are made visible and open for investigation. Science is communal rhetoric, with scientists working within the parameters of agreements or conventions about what constitutes science (Gergen, 2001).

The last aspect of social constructionism that Gergen (1985) discusses introduces a connection between action and description or understanding. A change in description can threaten a certain action or invite another action. A focus on the relationship between action and description or action and meaning inevitably launches an investigation into the impact of descriptions and understandings and questions the scientific metaphors used to describe people. This explicitly stated connection between meaning and action is what underlies my choice of methodology of discourse analysis in this project as it allows for a thorough

exploration of socially created understandings and assumptions. (A detailed discussion of discourse analysis will follow later in this chapter).

Social Constructionism and Gender

Social constructionism has been fundamental in allowing me to approach gender and sex in a different way. All the above-mentioned aspects of social constructionism make it a suitable approach in the questioning, revising and reworking of the problematic social structures and institutions linked to gender. Thus adopting this approach for this project and my work in general was an attempt at finding a practical, constructive and effective way of investigating and thinking about fundamental understandings of gender, gender relations and gender-based identity. The social constructionist approach of this project places it firmly on the constructionist end of the essentialism versus constructionism debate.

Essentialism and Constructionism

Essentialism assumes that there is a core and essence of humanity that makes people what they are and that this essence can be studied and discovered (Burr, 1995; Gergen & Davis, 1997). An essentialist approach to women focuses on the essential similarities in women regardless of race, class and ethnicity and sees “woman” as a coherent and unitary category devoid of multiplicity and cultural, social and political positions (Butler, 1990). This focus on the essential similarities between women has the effect of creating a presumably neutral subject or woman who is white, middle-class and heterosexual (Chanter, 1998).

Many theories developed in the fields of feminism and psychology of women have been essentialist in their description of women. As such, approaches that have developed during the past decade and a half in an attempt to understand women better have developed along the two opposing positions of either stressing or minimising difference between the sexes (Gergen & Davis, 1997). Hare-Mustin and Marecek (1988) refer to this as alpha and beta bias. The alpha bias exaggerates difference and the beta minimises difference. Recent alpha bias approaches express a belief that men and women are fundamentally different but that women’s unique and different nature should be celebrated and valued and offers a counter position to the traditional devaluing of what is seen as feminine (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988).

Examples of this approach can be seen in the work of Carol Gilligan (1982) and her relational views on female developmental psychology (1982), Belenky and her focus on women's connected and collaborative ways of knowing and learning (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986) and Nancy Chodorow's (1978) focus on the socio-structural, psychological reproduction of women as mothers. The alpha bias also emerges in management literature that aims for more feminine styles of management. Here, traits traditionally associated with women such as collaboration, sensitivity, nurturance, connectedness, democracy, and negotiation are encouraged. In the workplace this notion can also be problematic as it reinforces only traditional notions of femininity (Benshop, Halsema & Schreurs, 2001). These alpha bias approaches are essentialist in their belief that women and men possess different qualities that are located within them as individuals and are fundamental to them irrespective of social context (Gergen & Davis, 1997). Thus recent developments towards 'valuing the feminine' can be a further colonisation of the feminine and a continuation of describing the feminine as the opposite of the norm: the masculine (Gatenby & Humphries, 1999).

Concerns with Essentialist Approaches

The purpose of essentialist approaches is often admirable in that they attempt to create better and more accurate descriptions of women where traditional science has failed. They aim to improve women's lives by repositioning them. These approaches also have a comforting appeal in their commonsense feel. They often describe the gendered reality in a way that is congruent with everyday understandings of men and women. In this way they appear quite appropriate and relevant in their description of women because their depictions are often similar to the prevalent, dominant ways of thinking about men and women (Gergen & Davis, 1997). They also prove to be comforting in creating easy-to-understand categories: 'women are like this and men are like that'. These categories seem to make the world easier to understand and negotiate. Clear identity categories would also make intervention into any family, community or organisation easy and applicable. But essentialist theories do pose some serious problems despite their apparent attractiveness as they do not describe the complexities of gender accurately (Gergen & Davis, 1997) and it is my belief that they cannot provide sufficient descriptions of the rich and complex phenomenon that is studied in this project. Apart from this concern there are also others, which are discussed below.

Firstly, they are problematic in the universalising assumptions they make. Any model that assumes that women have a particular nature, trait or developmental process is assuming that it applies to all women. It fails to acknowledge diversity and runs the risk of excluding women who do not adhere to these notions (Gergen & Davis, 1997). These models generally colonise the experience and understanding of the non-western women of the world by decontextualising and separating women from other aspects of identity such as class, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation (Butler, 1990). Voices that differ from the voice of the Western, middle-class woman are silenced and suppressed by these assumptions of universal all-encompassing principles (Nicholson, 1990). Essentialist theories describe women as unsituated and ignore their specific and particular location (Nicholson, 1990). Butler (1990) also reflects on the construction of an essential woman as an “unwitting regulation and reification of gender relations” (p. 5) that is contrary to what feminism aims to achieve. The cultural diversity of the South African context clearly leads to difficulty with any approach that aims to establish a ‘universal truth about women’ or a ‘universal feminism’. The category “woman” (the essentially feminine) is not to be found as issues of class and race confound this category. (This is not a uniquely South African debate but the South African context has brought the issues dominantly to attention.) Debates on race and representation have been part of South African feminism. Questions such as ‘who is allowed to speak for whom in which contexts?’ have been raised leading for instance to a move in 1991 to bar white South African women from attending a conference in Nigeria and presenting papers with black women as subjects. Arguments in the difference debate range from the position that white women should not and could not speak for black women from their own unique positions of privilege (Funani, 1992) to claims on the commonality of humanity and shared experiences (Fouche, 1992).

The aim of this study is not to provide a universal truth concerning the women of South Africa but to make contextual statements, taking into account the diversity as well as different power relations with a temporary focus on overlapping, specific aspects of the identities (Zietkiewky & Long, 1999). This project aims to allow competing voices to be heard to reveal the varying nature of women’s subjective experiences (Sunde & Bozalek, 1993) by adopting social constructionism as a perspective that focuses on diversity, multiple identities, truths and subjectivities within a network of power relations. The notion of language, meaning and power is dealt with later in this chapter.

Another concern with essentialist models is that they do not investigate the qualities associated with femininity as potential products of oppression (Gergen & Davis, 1997, McNay, 2000). If it were the case that women's ways of being as described by these different models are the result of oppressive social systems, then a celebration of these ways and a call to return to them will inevitably keep the oppressive social structures in place (Gergen & Davis, 1997).

Essentialist models that focus on the internal structure of women are in danger of developing person-blaming explanations of women's role in society and might seek to intervene on the individual level, changing women's so-called 'psychological make-up' as a response to discrimination and subordination (Gergen & Davis, 1997). Focusing only on the internal and psychological can easily become a process of blaming the victim, creating a 'pull yourself up by your own bootstraps' scenario. Such interventions often serve the exact opposite purpose, to perpetuate rather than undermine the status quo. Psychology, and psychotherapy specifically, has been criticised by many feminist thinkers for perpetuating patriarchy and often helping clients to fit into the existing power structures (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988; Hare-Mustin, 1997). What happens in the therapy room can so easily become a mirror of the power structures that exist outside (Hare-Mustin, 1997; Waldegrave, 1990) as they relate to gender, race and culture (Soal & Kottler, 1996). In the workplace this often translates into situations where subtle networks and nodes of power are ignored and women are expected to achieve and climb the organisational ladder. Failure to do so is then attributed to internal characteristics such as lack of motivation, fear of success and even being a "career-and-family woman" as opposed to a "career-primary woman" (Schwartz, 1989, p. 69).

Essentialist models also fail women by offering restrictive ways of being. Any model that associates certain qualities with women and men respectively limits the scope of behaviour available to them and confines people into specific roles and modes (Gergen & Davis, 1997).

What Social Constructionism Offers

The above-mentioned concerns with essentialist approaches point towards the need for different ways of conceptualising women and men or sex and gender. This is what constructionism offers, a different way of thinking about gender that does not make essential

or universal claims but offers tentative, sometimes tenuous descriptions that demands from researchers the ability to contain paradox, difference, multiplicity and ambiguity. It leaves us in a place where the answers are not easy and simple yet provides the possibility for rich descriptions that make available complexity, intricacy and density. When we move into a social constructionist landscape there is constant negotiation between the search for different meanings and the danger of falling into a state of disillusioned, unanchored despair of abstraction and relativism. Haraway (1991) illustrates this clearly when she says:

I, and others, started out wanting a strong tool for deconstructing the truth claims of hostile science by showing the radical historical specificity, and contestability, of *every* layer of the onion of scientific and technological constructions, and we end up with a kind of epistemological electro-shock therapy, which far from ushering us into the high stakes of the game of contesting public truths, lays us out on the table with self-induced multiple personality disorder (p. 186).

This description of the risks of social constructionism does not nullify its attempts or proclaim it as a complete relativist notion. Rather it serves as an illustration of the constant tensions we should be working with. It shows social constructionism as an incomplete attempt at making sense of the world while holding onto and inviting complexity. Social constructionism is not the epistemological answer in a utopian sense but an attempt at thinking about the world while at the same time always being already embedded in the world. For me this is the cutting edge of constructionist theory and work: dealing with the paradox of inhabiting a language in order to represent it as problematic (De Kock, 1996), the “double optic” (Eagleton, 1990, p. 24) or the “double gesture” (Jay, 1992, p. 56). The tension is one of revealing the constructed nature of science without undermining ourselves completely, to render accounts of the world that can command change while at the same time acknowledging the constructed nature of the account (Haraway, 1991). Working with a view “from somewhere” (Haraway, 1991, p. 195) and embodiment are part and parcel of this process.

So with the above tensions and complexities in mind (and an undertaking to return to them in more depth later), let me consider what social constructionism has to offer in terms of rendering useful accounts of the gendered nature of our world.

A central feature of constructionism is that it brings language into the picture and provides descriptions of the constitutive and central nature of language.

Embedded in Language

The social constructionist view of language sees it as a constitutive factor, not merely a mirror reflecting reality but fundamental in structuring and creating the world. As certain descriptions of objects or the outside world become accepted, those descriptions achieve the power to create and mediate the experienced reality (Gergen & Davis, 1997; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988). The language we end up using constitutes a form of social action in the perpetual creation of social realities giving language a performative nature (Burr, 1995). We are born into a world where frameworks and language categories exist and these shape the preconditions of our understanding of the world. One of the most primary categories that we are born into is that of girl/boy or woman/man. The announcement “It’s a girl!” or “It’s a boy!” evokes a host of associations, expectations, attachments and understandings that become prerequisites of our gendered existence and how we will end up performing our gender. Thus our sexed human condition is pre-named and pre-constituted by those who have the power of naming. Powerful groups in societies have the means to name, define and describe different realities. Historically, this naming and defining power has been located in the patriarchal system (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988) and this power is reflected at its most basic in the use of ‘man’ and ‘he’ to mean humankind (Weedon, 1987).

So our everyday understandings and experiences of gender are communal constructions and cultural artefacts, which are dependent on the language communities that give rise to them and maintain them (Burr, 1995; Gergen & Davis, 1997). We are so embedded in these language webs that they become invisible in their constitutive nature and acquire taken for granted, natural status. This leaves us in a language-constituted body, time and place that we experience as given and inherent to our existence. Being a woman or a man is experienced as an unproblematic biological state, has unquestionable status and only becomes problematic to those on the margins who do not have this experience, who want it to be different, who do not have a ‘natural’ fit between body and self (Chanter, 1998). So the body, male or female, is experienced as natural, ontological and essential and biological sex differences are felt as

fundamental and central, and the influence of the language practices of the community invisible unless they are placed under direct scrutiny.

The constructionist position is in contrast to an essentialist view that sees sex differences as a ‘reality’ and the difference between women and men as fundamental. Such an essentialist position often pays no attention to the ways in which meaning is ascribed to biology and biological categories (Butler, 1990; Delphy, 1993; Gergen & Davis, 1997). Thus even biological sex comes into the realm of social construction where the descriptions thereof and labels attached to it are constitutive of experienced realities and where each description and label holds social and political consequences (Nicholson, 1998).

The constructionist focus on language and how language operates to create categories for life and identity serves this project well as a focus on language provides one way of showing up some of the invisible webs, foundations and structures that inform identity. Understanding human beings as “beings of language” (Braidotti, 1994, p. 190) creates a clear comprehension of a primary location of those we study and an appreciation of the constant attachment to culture, language and a symbolic order.

A focus on language also provides space for resistance and change as it offers a way of conceptualising change by intervening on the level of language (Glover & Kaplan, 2000). The categories ‘man’ and ‘woman’ lock individuals into an uneven hierarchical relationship where we are positioned into the language of the male and the female. This language, however central, presents the opportunity to play with and rethink the meaning and boundaries of gender. When we become aware of the making of masculinity and femininity in language, we become open to the opportunity to language in a different way (Glover & Kaplan, 2000). One of the aims of this project is to show some of the making of femininity in the workplace so that the possibilities of difference become available.

Embedded in Culture

It is a small and almost superfluous step from language to culture so a constructionist emphasis on the historical and cultural locations of any created reality including gender hardly seems surprising. Thus sex and gender categories are seen as having institutionalised, cultural and social status (Gergen & Davis, 1997; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988; Lorber &

Farrell, 1991) where all domains of life and most structural arrangements are influenced by these categories (West & Zimmerman, 1991). Being a competent member of society involves performing all the routine, methodological and recurring accomplishments involved in displaying one's gender. Most cultures see a division between the two sexes a natural and necessary process and as fundamental and enduring and supported by the division of labour (West & Zimmerman, 1991). So the cultural context creates the lived experience and performance of gender and sex. However, the cultural embeddedness is not a linear process but a recursive one where we create our social context and when we are created by it at the same time (Burr, 1995).

Important for this project is also how social constructionism views the creation of knowledge and the research process: a cultural and social creation. In this way it has a lot to offer any research process where the aim is to create locally and culturally relevant knowledge as opposed to the universal truth claims that mainstream psychology has been striving towards. This means that it is not only the research participant that is rooted in a culture which constitutes her but also the researcher. Traditional Western psychology has a colonising style that assumes that its research based on Western populations can be applied effortlessly to all others regardless of race, class, gender and culture (Gergen & Gergen, 1997). It also colonises in terms of methodology, assuming an empiricist metatheory as a way of representing different cultural realities (Gergen & Gergen, 1997). The empiricist metatheory is a product of western tradition that stems from a time and place where the individual was seen as central and his (literally) conscious, observing, objective and rational mind was seen as the path towards knowledge and truth (Gergen, et al., 1996). These values are exported to other cultural contexts, such as the South African context, and colonises local understandings, misconstrues specific realities and either exoticises or disregards non-western contexts (Gergen, et al., 1996). The South African context of this study calls for a context-dependent research strategy that acknowledges the constructed nature of knowledge and undermines the taken-for-granted master narratives of mainstream psychology. Constructionism offers this as a possibility as it invites exploration of alternative forms of understanding (Gergen, et al., 1996). It is also tolerant to multiple and even contradictory worldviews that result from different cultural locations and does not demand a singular truth as research outcome (Gergen & Davis, 1997).

The above section describes how social constructionism offers a vision of individuals as social, relational beings, embedded in language and discursive practices of culturally and historically situated communities. It illustrates how sex and gender are also rooted in the same web of discursive, cultural and historical meanings. So where does that leave the individual, the person traditionally seen as the ‘subject’ of psychology, the individual woman or man and her or his identity?

Identity

A constructionist notion of identity merits some discussion here, as this project relates to identity in a fundamental but not traditional way. When we talk gender and sex, identity and gender identity become an integral part of the discussion, as these two are often linked and viewed as stable, fixed and inextricably woven together (in both everyday understandings of gender as well as psychology literature). Traditional and essentialist notions of identity see identity as a fixed, coherent and integrated entity that reveals the essence and core of a person that drives, motivates and explains behaviour (Kitzinger, 1989; Sampson, 1989). The person is seen as self-contained, individuated, firmly bounded, with a strong cognitive centre of awareness (Sampson, 1989).

Constructionism undermines this view of identity in favour of a view that acknowledges identity as conceived in an ideological framework where the language or symbolic system that constitutes the subject contains sociohistorical traces (Kitzinger, 1989; Sampson, 1989). Sampson refers to this as the “interpenetration of society and the individual” (p. 4), a recursive relationship where both constitute each other. Identity becomes social, relational and dialogical (Burr, 1985; Gergen, 1992; Shotter, 1997). The dominant patriarchal social order actively permeates what we experience as ‘our’ identity and this identity is constructed in terms of the social, political and moral order. Identity is not private property but social (Kitzinger, 1989).

It is important to note here that social order and its traces in identity do not imply singularity, one meaning only attached to identity. The embedded identity is not one-dimensional proclaiming a singular person but multidimensional and contradictory (Kitzinger, 1989; Sampson, 1989). Gender identity is not fixed but carries multiple, contradictory, conflicting and changing meanings. It involves permanent multiplicity and instability (Seidman, 1998).

Individuals are positioned on multiple social axes or orders, all of which are related in difference and in different positions of the social hierarchy (class, race, sexuality) and bear different social codes and expectations (Seidman, 1998).

Identity moves into the realm of process, it is no longer an essence but becomes a process whereby identity is achieved by means of the interactions of social process. The question changes from ‘what is the nature of gender and gender identity?’ to ‘how do we create our gendered and gender identities together?’ or ‘how do we do our gender?’ (Burr, 1995). Gender identity is a continuous performance and process, never complete but constantly being enacted by means of our social action and interaction (Lorber & Farrell, 1991). It is embedded in a social order and is expressed in patterns of relational performance that include bodily activities, objects, ornaments and physical settings (Gergen, 1997).

This project is an attempt at revealing some of these multiple and contradictory sociohistorical traces that permeate and penetrate women’s experience and understandings as they make sense of their career lives, in other words as they live their sense of identity as reflection and construction of the social order. There is a basic scepticism towards any truth or reality claim, any statement that asserts essential isolated facts about the nature of women and removes them from mediating social processes (Burr, 1995; Gergen & Davis, 1997). The taken for granted truths about women and men are in fact undermined and questioned in favour of more creative ones. No description of reality needs to be fixed and there can be openness towards searching for a new perspective (Gergen & Davis, 1997). In terms of the restrictive taken-for-granted truths about gender, this gives hope for change and news of difference.

The discussion so far illustrates how individuals are embedded in social matrices of language and culture and how these matrices have implications for identities and selves. Although postmodernism and social constructionism are sometimes criticised for not taking up moral or political standpoints (Gergen, 2001), the view of language as constitutive of social realities and practices allows for reflecting on power and language as language has the power to create and constitute social structures. There is therefore a relationship between language and power (Burr, 2003).

Power, Knowledge and Foucauldian Thought

The relationship between power and language is vital in the understanding of gender and discourse and a focus on power aspects in social constructionism is strongly influenced by the work of Foucault (Burr, 2003). Although the work of Foucault is extensive and complex, a brief discussion of some Foucauldian concepts as used in some social constructionist or postmodern psychology is warranted here. From a Foucauldian perspective, power is the effect of discourse as certain versions of events or commonsense understandings of the world create social practices and draw on other discourses (Burr, 2003). Power is also an instrument of discourse (Powers, 2001) and we exercise power by drawing on discourses as forms of defining the world or people into different categories that are unequal. Foucault describes the order of discourse (in Hook, 2001) as the rules and systems and procedures of discursive practice or the “conceptual terrain in which knowledge is formed and reproduced” (p. 522). The power of discursive practices lies in the fact that it is near impossible to think outside discourse. Power and resistance are, however, two sides of the same coin as the power in one discourse is only “apparent from the resistance implicit in another” (Burr, 2003, p. 69).

Power masks itself and is often invisible in its operations. Relations of power form the conditions wherein relation and interaction take place. Power is also complex and exists in a web of shifting power negotiations (Powers, 2001). Power is productive as it produces rights, truths and the conceptualisation of individuals. A Foucauldian understanding of power sees it as part of knowledge and Foucault referred to this as power/knowledge where the two are connected in a relationship of resistance (Burr, 2003; Powers, 2001). Power is performed and embodied through relations and power is identifiable through its effects on people’s lives. Power is not seated in the hands of individuals or institutions and does not function in a top-down or intentional manner but rather exists in a complex web of discourse and practice.

Discourse from a Foucauldian perspective also refers to bodies of knowledge or disciplines and also to disciplinary practices (McHoul & Grace, 1993). Power therefore operates within different social science disciplines as practices of people management (Powers, 2001). Social science disciplines then use rational procedures to obtain bodily effects or induce behaviour. Power is disciplinary and uses different techniques and instruments in its operations. The Panopticon is an example of such an instrument that relies on surveillance (McHoul & Grace, 1993). The Panopticon as described by Foucault is an architectural structure designed to

improve the efficacy of dealing with prison inmates that creates permanent visibility so assuring that inmates ultimately discipline themselves. Behaviour is therefore changed by surveillance that becomes self-surveillance thus creating docile bodies (McHoul & Grace, 1993).

The social sciences and psychology are therefore contemporary technologies of such surveillance and self-surveillance (Parker, 2005) that render technical advice to individuals, in this way controlling, managing and reproducing docile bodies and a docile workforce through bio-power. Capitalist economies require large amounts of trained workers who are healthy and stable (Powers, 2007). Disciplinary power or power/knowledge is bio-power as it has its effects on the bodies of individuals. Bio-power therefore aids in the construction of willing able bodies that support the status quo of capitalism and therefore supports basic aspects of the social structure (Powers, 2001). The social sciences are therefore a disciplinary technology of power/knowledge. The notion of the psy-complex, originally described by Rose (in Parker, 2005) is an example of such surveillance and technology. The private thoughts and secrets of individuals are observed and the psy-complex informs the individuality in western culture through discipline and confession. The psy-complex individualises, essentialises and psychologises aspects of individuals (Parker, 2005). The social sciences form such an integral part of social understanding that they become a social principle. This social principle marginalises radical statements or positions as these are seen as irrational, illogical and against science thus against a fundamental persuasion principle (Powers, 2001). As such, the discursive practices establish themselves “and to be outside of them, is by definition to be mad, to be beyond comprehension and therefore reason” (Hook, 2001, p. 522).

Social Constructionism and Feminism(s)

The discussion so far has dealt with some basic aspects of social constructionism but up to this point in this chapter I have used the term ‘feminism’ often and without clear discussion or definition. This needs to be remedied before I continue this discussion on the different aspects of social constructionism. I also need to discuss the intersection of feminism, postmodernism and social constructionism before the next section that will deal more specifically with developments in the field of social constructionism, feminist theory and embodiment.

Feminism as not a singular political or academic grouping and it would be more suitable to speak of 'feminisms' (Potgieter, 1997) and developments in feminist theory since the 1970s have rendered an explosion of different feminisms (Zalewski, 2000). The feminist project and problem was much clearer and more defined in its earlier years but has become more complex in the 1990s. Initially, there was a clear commitment towards understanding and overcoming the oppression of all women with an assumption that this would be the same for all women despite their context, but this assumption has been dislodged recently (Zalewski, 2000). When the term 'feminism' is used here, it is with an acknowledgement that it does not refer to a singular movement or approach but a grouping of approaches with the broad central feature of acknowledging women as important to study and recognising the need for social change and changing women's position in society (Weedon, 1987; Wilkinson, 1997). The developments in feminism have taken many different academic and theoretical turns and positions (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2001). An in-depth exploration of these developments is not needed for purposes of this discussion, but I will gloss over some of these to arrive at an adequate illustration of what the social constructionist position in feminism might entail. In order to achieve this goal it seems inevitable that certain categories, labels or positions be used. Although these categories have to be used quite commonly and are generally agreed upon, one must also guard against reifying these and taking them as absolute (Zalewski, 2000). The reader should consider use of these categories as pragmatic distinctions and not complete descriptions.

Feminism, since its inception from first-wave feminism (with its struggle to improve the civil, legal, economic and political position of women's lives) to second-wave feminism (a focus on the interpersonal politics of domination), has taken many different lines in attempting to solve the problem of patriarchy and the subjugation of women, and many of these strategies are contradictory to each other in both method and application (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2001). Perhaps the general distinction between liberal, radical and socialist feminism is useful here as a starting point to show how a constructionist position emerges (Seidman, 1998; Weedon, 1987; Zalewski, 2000).

- The liberal feminist position advocates legal equality and women's rights within the social mainstream. Zalewski (2000) uses six words to describe this movement:

“Freedom, choice, rights, equality, rationality and control” (p. 6). One of the main aims of the liberal movement is to create equal positions for women and men before the law. It strives towards achieving this by advocating for different legislation such as the South African Employment Equity Act of 1998. Liberal feminists therefore maintain an acceptance of the social and political system and strive to place women in their rightful place in this system, without advocating major structural changes (Seidman, 1998; Weedon, 1987).

- Radical feminists focus on the following themes: “Woman-centred, patriarchy, oppression, experience, control and the ‘personal is the political’” (Zalewski, 2000, p. 10). The radical position emphasises the power of patriarchy as a form of structural domination where the masculine is favoured or valued over the feminine. It advocates fundamental and radical change in the patriarchal system by politically scrutinising patriarchal institutions such as heterosexuality, marriage and the family.
- Socialist feminism focuses on “class/capitalism, revolution, patriarchy, psychoanalysis, subjectivity, and difference” (Zalewski, 2000, p. 16) and investigates how women’s work is exploited. It offers a different critique on liberal feminism by pointing towards the intersection of class, race and gender and seeks a full transformation of the economic-based social system (Seidman, 1998; Weedon, 1987). Also included in this grouping is a channel into psychoanalytic theory that calls for not only economic but also psychic revolution. Zalewski also clusters standpoint theorists that work towards separate and different knowledges, such as Carol Gilligan (1982) and Nancy Chodorow (1978) with their theories relating to the difference in women’s psychological makeup, in the socialist group.

Despite the emergent differences between the liberal, radical and socialist approaches, there remained a feminist movement which still represented a unified gynocentric movement that united women in their shared oppression and struggle for equality (Seidman, 1998). Women of colour and lesbians challenged this position and brought questions of race, class and sexual orientation into the foreground, raising doubts about this unified picture of women portrayed by earlier feminist pictures and undermining the singular category ‘woman’, thus paving the way towards a different approach sometimes referred to as postmodern feminism (Seidman, 1998) or poststructuralist feminism (Weedon, 1987). Thus, feminism was not to escape the

tensions that developed in broader social science circles and could not stay immune to the epistemological shifts in social scientific endeavours.

The social constructionist feminist position that I adopt in this project lies within this broader framework of postmodern or poststructural feminism. It incorporates the facets of constructionism discussed earlier (language, culture and identity) into feminist theory and a feminist position emerges where the category 'woman' is no longer seen as fixed and stable, where language is seen as a system that rests on relations of difference, where discourse is seen as producing codes of practice within power systems, and sexism is seen as having a larger, historical and social language based dynamic (Seidman, 1998). This position acknowledges the social position and context of knowledge. It rejects absolute truths and theories for a method that incorporates diversity and contradiction. Yet the focus on context and location still allows for a political position to be taken. It provides opportunity for identity politics: the organisation around a social category (De la Rey, 1997).

These developments in the political segment of feminism translate into scientific or academic feminism as well and here the work of Sandra Harding (1986) serves as an excellent discussion of the question of scientific inquiry in feminist science. She distinguishes three approaches to feminist science: empiricist, standpoint and postmodern feminisms.

- An empiricist approach to feminist inquiry attempts to overcome the problem of sexism in science by opting for more rigour and stricter adherence to methodological requirements.
- Standpoint approaches aim towards privileging women's positions and focusing on the margins of society as a wealth of knowledge and information, trusting the view from the bottom. It also incorporates a scientific critique of ideology and uses different methodologies in a search of research tools that allow access to the true lived experience of subjugation, and aims to overcome the traditional misrepresentation of women in science. Its project is to allow women's voices to be heard and it uses solidarity and the bond between women to create research projects that work on a subject-to-subject basis where affinity and compassion remain part of the process and the essentially female is uncovered.

- Harding (1986) describes the postmodern position in scientific inquiry as a way of splitting the humanist package described by standpoint approaches. The postmodern position (as it is also adopted in this study) no longer advocates a specific vision of womanhood and is sceptical towards truth claims regarding the essential feminine. Complexity and diversity in the category ‘woman’ are acknowledged by seeing her as always already in culture, language and power. It aims towards tracking some of these aspects by employing research strategies that portray diversity, multiplicity, process, and the languaged nature of identities (Harding, 1986).

The Picture so Far: In the Grip of Language?

My theoretical position as sketched so far is one that considers the reality and lived experience of the women participating in this study as embedded in a complex web of language, culture and power where the individual and the social are inextricably, irrevocably and recursively linked. Identity is seen as a social, relational, multidimensional and even contradictory process instead of product, always already immersed in a social order. I also assume a feminist position that works towards change in the social order heading for greater equity, here specifically using discourse analysis towards exposing some invisible, discursive constraints and also unseen possibilities and practices of resistance. Yet a concern I share with some authors such as Bayer (1998) and Sampson (1998) is that the emphasis on language and meaning might create an image of a disembodied individual who relates to a world mainly through language, with language and meaning the most basic, constitutive force. This might create an unintentional inscription of the traditional Cartesian dualism between body and mind where our worlds are “in the grip of language or interpretation” (Bayer, 1998, p. 5) and language is separated from the body (Burkitt, 1998). I agree with Betty Bayer (Bayer, 1998) when she asks the following question: “We might well ask where the body is in social construction?” (p. 5). Thus the following section aims to speak to some of these issues by referring to recent developments in feminist and constructionist theory.

Embodied and Embedded

As stated above, some of the concerns within constructionist circles relate to the possible overemphasis of the linguistic, conversational and literary aspects of discourse at the expense of other aspects of lived experience. In this way it does not overcome what it set out to do, it does not move away from the ahistoric, asocial, and disconnected view of the person that

mainstream psychology ascribes to. Constructionism set out to create a different depiction of the individual as fundamentally connected and embedded, yet the overemphasis on the linguistic might have created yet another disconnection, producing a different kind of realism and mechanistic worldview where the ‘word’ replaces the earlier deterministic concepts of traditional psychology (Bayer, 1998). Sampson (1998) refers to this as “verbocentrism” (p. 23), the failure to deal with “the embodied nature of discourse itself” (p. 23) that gives a constricted, mainly linguistic description of corporeal identity (McNay, 2000). This ‘verbocentrism’ persuades us to develop a “spectator-like connection to the world” (Sampson, 1998, p. 23). So we fail to appreciate that all talk, all linguistic and conversational activity, is intrinsically embodied. This is a pitfall that needs to be avoided in this project and the research tools used need to be combined with reflexive moments in order to stay aware of this danger. Part of this research project is then a search for “tools and techniques to rethink the intricacies of bodies as objects *and* subjects, as sites of cultural inscription and emancipation, and as entities of pleasure and pain, desire and repugnance, adoration and repudiation” (Bayer, 1998, p. 6).

Another criticism levelled against the overemphasis of the linguistic is that it happens at the expense of acknowledgment of the material or economic. It only elucidates the symbolic and ignores the material. This focus on the linguistic and discursive can tend to problematise the symbolic with a focus on marginal sexualities because these marginal sexualities succeed in destabilising the symbolic social order but do not work with or theorise heterosexuality as a problem. Thus heterosexuality and the lived material, economic conditions such as the wage gap, new forms of inequality and the lack of change in domestic divisions of labour are all not put forward as avenues for consideration (McNay, 2000). A focus on embodied social practices can allow for a psychology of materiality as suggested by Durrheim and Dixon (2005) who argue that language and located bodily practices are in a dialectical relationship.

The call upon the body does not symbolise a simple return to the ‘body’ of the Cartesian body-mind dualism; it does not leave us in a state where we can call on the body to speak clearly, in an uncomplicated, straightforward way (Bayer, 1998). (Perhaps this is exactly why this body has been so neatly avoided in much constructionist writing.) The call upon the body seeks ways to express “univocity of mind and body” (McNay, 2000, p. 32) that will also shed some light on the incomplete and unstable aspects of corporeal existence (McNay, 2000).

Feminists have been aware of the difficulties, obscurities and murkiness surrounding the body. Therefore the question of the body is particularly pertinent in feminist theory and has been present in feminist writing from the start (Bayer 1998; Butler, 1990). There is a long history of cultural association of the body with the feminine. Masculinity is traditionally associated with disembodied reason, rationality and logic where femininity is related to the body and the instinctual (Burkitt, 1998; Butler, 1990). Some feminist writers such as Judith Butler aim to find ways of grappling with the complexities of being female, located in a body traditionally inscribed as a site of subjugation, where the very femaleness of the body represents the instinctual, untameable location with need and desire, all of which undermines the mind, the power of reason, thus the masculine (Bayer, 1998). These ideas, as well as the notion of ‘habitus’ as described by Pierre Bourdieu (2001), will all be used in this attempt to think through the body and embodied discourse.

Constructionism asserts that talking about the world in part creates it. This can be taken one step further with an awareness of embodied discourse that acknowledges that talking about something and talking with something is a simultaneous process. We are constantly talking with something, a body that we cannot stand outside of (Sampson, 1998). This distinction drawn by Sampson (1998) urges constructionists to refrain from “remaining trapped in the *about-aspect* while failing to experience the *with-aspect*” (p. 24). Constructionism tackles the discursively constituted nature of human experience but it also needs to tackle the intrinsically embodied nature of discourse. Our socialisation teaches us to use our bodies in certain ways just as we choose certain words and expressions. The way we stand, speak, breathe, the vocal tone we use are all forms of inhabiting certain social positions, female and male, being one of those positions (Sampson, 1989). This illustrates the point that thought is a bodily activity and not something which precedes the activities performed by a body. This thinking body and its practices are embedded in a social world (Burkitt, 1998). Burkitt further emphasises how social relations and networks activate the body and bring it into being. Social relations have such a fundamental influence on humans that he considers humans to be socio-natural. Bodily characters and capacities are therefore not uniform as they are influenced by different social relationships. He argues that a purely textual view of the body is one-dimensional as humans are not only speakers but doers with complex materiality. The body is not only influenced by the social but also the basis for it. The social is constructed

from the body as the body is influenced by the relationships. The body is productive with corporeality providing possibilities for change. Thus the mind (or thoughtful activity), the material and the social are inextricably connected. As human beings then, according to Burkitt, we are embodied beings with socio-physical capacities for change, through collective action, which involves changes in our bodies and actions as mediations between the material, the social and the idea. Actions take place within thinking bodies that come into being through culture and tradition.

Habitus

What becomes clear from the description so far is that the body is a site where the social and the historical are put down in such a way that it influences bodily action in the finest detail. Pierre Bourdieu's concept *habitus*, "a set of historical relations 'deposited' within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation and action" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 16) is a good theoretical explication of this. Linked to *habitus* is his concept *field*: "A set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital)" (p. 16). *Habitus* is a bodily or somatic knowledge that reflects a person's position in the social (the node where the different social levels interact) but it also constitutes the social structures that informed it to begin with (Sampson, 1998). *Habitus* thus has the same recursive nature of language as was discussed earlier in this chapter; it reflects a social reality while at the same time creating it, it is "a structuring and structured structure" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 139). It is seen as entrenched in cultural practices such as language yet it

refers to that aspect of our cultural learning that is deeply carved in our bodies, so deeply carved in fact, that it generates a kind of 'feel for the game' that describes a practical rather than theoretical kind of knowledge (Sampson, 1998).

The feel for the game or "practical sense" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 22) is pre-reflexive knowledge unaware of its own assumptions or as McNay puts it: *le sens pratique* is a form of knowledge that is learnt by the body but cannot be explicitly articulated" (2000, p. 39).

For Bourdieu, habitus and field intersect at the moment of praxis or practical living, which contains the juncture of symbolic and material (McNay, 2000). The cultural inscriptions and social norms that are scripted into the body are the “cultural arbitrary” (McNay, 2000), creating the body as the centre of social control. The habitus, as carved body, contains durable dispositions that mediate the interaction between the individual and external conditions. The body should not be seen as only an object. People are embodied agents with embodied knowledge of the body and its place in time and space as well as a pre-reflective sense of the environment that enables bodies to move around and interact with it without having to plan it or think about it (Crossley, 2001).

It is clear from the above that this emphasis on embodiment does not ask for a realism of the body, where the body becomes a central, pure and absolute physiological given and baseline. It rather calls for an acknowledgement of how cultural processes and knowledges become part of our bodies. It also changes our position as knower or spectator into that of an active performer of culturally inscribed actions (Sampson, 1998). “We are thereby not in the world through language or through the body, but because language is in-itself embodied even as the body in-itself is enworded; we are in the world in both ways, deeply intertwined” (Sampson, 1989, p. 26).

Constructing a Sexed Body

When it comes to what has become one of the fundamentals of our lived experience, namely our biological sex, unpacking the social construction of being male or female is exceedingly important for feminist thinkers as much of patriarchy is based on the so-called inevitable and natural (even God-given, depending on the historical and cultural version) biological differences between men and women.

A social constructionist understanding of biological sex sees it as inscribed with cultural practice where the body is arbitrarily named and described. Theorists such as Butler (1990) and Bourdieu (2001) argue that the body does not exist outside culture and that there is no independently real body with a pre-given natural, definitive state. “There is no recourse to a body that has not always already been interpreted by cultural meanings; hence, sex could not qualify as a prediscursive anatomical facticity. Indeed, sex, by definition, will be shown to have been gender all along” (Butler, 1990, p. 8).

The body is discursively constructed into female and male and it is these constructions of what is male and female which attain status of the real and natural and become like fixed laws of nature (Bourdieu, 2001). As Bourdieu states so eloquently:

The social definition of the sex organs, far from being a simple recording of natural properties, directly offered to perception, is the product of a construction implying a series of oriented choices, or more precisely, based on an accentuation of certain differences and the scotomization of certain similarities (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 14).

The naturalisation of these differences, embedding them in so-called biological nature, legitimates social power structures and inequalities whereby power hierarchies become difficult to challenge given their pre-cultural status, and so bodies acquire a natural, taken-for-granted status. This idea links with the Foucauldian notion of the body and sexuality as a major site of power relations (Burr, 2003).

This naturalness is challenged by constructionist accounts of the body and it questions how we have come to what is taken for granted and deemed real. The focus here is on how the body is constructed, formed and built; “bildung” as Bourdieu (2001, p. 24) refers to it, by social and cultural practices. This process is not explicit or expressed but rather is automatic and agentless. The physical and social order is inscribed invisibly according to the androcentric principle. The social order creates two genders that exist due to a process of construction that accentuates and heightens bodily difference. The genders exist relationally where the body of one gender is socially differentiated from the opposite gender (Bourdieu, 2001). “The acquisition of gender identity does not pass through consciousness; it is not memorized but enacted at a pre-reflexive level” (McNay, 2000).

Gender becomes a “lived set of embodied potentialities, rather than an externally imposed set of constraining norms” (McNay, 2000, p. 25). The process remains a recursive one and this recursive relationship between the social order and sexed body is described by Bourdieu in the following way:

It is not the phallus (or its absence) which is the basis of that worldview, rather it is the worldview which, being organized according to the division into *relational gender*, male and female, can constitute the phallus, constituted as the symbol of virility, of the specifically male point of honour, and the difference between biological bodies as objective foundations of the difference between the sexes (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 22).

What is important to note here is that the process of ‘Bildung’, constructing a sexed body, is never straightforward or complete but rather dynamic and fluid. There is no complete concurrence between the body and subjectivity and this opens spaces for moments of indeterminacy where the person is situated in but not fully determined by the dominant social discourse (McNay, 2000). These moments are played out in what Butler describes as the “performative - that is constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed” (Butler, 1990, p. 25). The performative is an ongoing process without beginning or end, where the body repeatedly acts gender within the social frames that regulate notions on gender and where “parodic proliferation and subversive play of gendered meanings” (Butler, 1990, p. 33) also become possible. The concept of repetition is important here as it is through the repetitive acting of gender that the cultural inscription continues but also where the instability of the cultural meaning is seated (McNay, 2000). Butler (1990) uses the example of the repetition of heterosexual dynamics in homosexual relationships to show how repetition of certain cultural descriptions can serve the function of destabilising them at the same time. This shows the arbitrary nature of the cultural inscriptions. Introducing gender as performative has at its core elements of change, resistance or subversion, as it shows the inherent possible instability of that which is performed (McNay, 2000). Resistance happens on the boundaries of the norm with sexual practices that are considered illegitimate or radical. Burkitt (2002) views performativity as a performance which takes place through acquired techniques, skills and habitus. He views the linguistic system and language as only one of the possible aspects involved in performativity such as ritual and ceremony. He points out that language also becomes a bodily technique in that we can use language without having to think about every word. Performance takes place in terms of available technologies of the self which include language and habitus. These technologies of the self are rooted in and products of institutionalised systems and often involve the unthinking repetitive action. Foucault’s

notion of bio-power is also relevant here as an account of how western social science manages to control through a general faith in and uncritical nature towards science. The body is the space where the micro-practices of bio-power operate, and control over bodies takes place through medicalisation and clinicalisation amongst other things (Powers, 2001).

The Praxeological Moment

This notion of the praxeological moment attempts to replace the dichotomy of the mind-body dualism with a dialogical view that emphasises the praxeological or lived practices of a corporeal being. The body is inscribed in terms of cultural practice and these are lived, played out and also transformed in our lives (McNay, 2000). The praxeological moment is a dialogical temporality where the inscribed is also lived in a particular way in a particular field, making habitus a generative structure (McNay, 2000). The generative nature of habitus comes in the potentially vast patterns of behaviour, thought and expression available, given the limits of the field. The interaction between field and habitus is “a double and obscure relation” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127) where the field conditions and structures the habitus but there is also cognitive construction where the “habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world” (p. 127). Bourdieu makes use of the term ‘social agent’ instead of subject to indicate the dynamic and variable nature of habitus (McNay, 2000). Temporality becomes significant in the moment of praxis, or practical activity, as any act carries the past and the future. The past in the form of the bodily tendencies and regularities, the future in reference to these regularities: “Because it implies a practical reference to the future implied in the past of which it is the product, habitus temporalizes itself in the very act through which it is realised” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 138). This indicates different layers or dimensions of experience, where sometimes the sedimented aspects defy active self-reflection and resist new practices and structures. So some tendencies become more enduring and can outlast new ones that are introduced. These are pre-reflexive notions, deeply entrenched into identity and gender identity, dealing with basic issues of masculinity and femininity, such as sexual desire and maternal feelings (McNay, 2000). These aspects of the identity, even if they are the traces of social structures indicate relative closure in terms of identity due to the marked entrenchment of these sediments but are still an “open system of dispositions that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 133).

Sampson (1998) criticises Butler's view that there is no pre-discursive or pre-cultural body by arguing that this description denies the embodied nature of the discourses that constitute the body. He states: "While it is indeed reasonable to join with Butler and others in insisting that words construct the body, it is also reasonable to insist that words are themselves embodied. In short, discourses that construct the body are not simply *about* the body; they are also discourses carried within the body" (Sampson, 1998, p. 29). He considers Butler to fall into the trap of ocularcentrism where visual position is privileged. He continues to remind us that disembodiment also has political implications as it can create dominating systems by trying to ignore the particularities of our different embodiments and assuming that we can stand outside our world. As such, this seems to happen in many contexts where the embodied particularities of women are ignored and it is exactly this oversight that often causes certain inequalities to continue.

The Scholarly Gaze

I started this section on embodiment by referring to the dangers of creating a disconnected and disembodied knower. A discussion of the social construction of the body does bring the body into the picture, yet it does not speak to all issues of the interaction between body and discourse and how we are embodied as scientists and researchers. The disconnected or spectator position, a position where the talking-with body aspect is ignored, is rooted in what can be referred to as the intellectualist bias, scholarly gaze or ocularcentrism of the Western philosophical tradition (Sampson, 1989). Ocularcentrism here refers to the emphasis on vision as a metaphor for understanding and describing that world. The visual metaphor depicts the Western knower or philosopher as one with a clear, unencumbered vision or a disembodied scholarly gaze. It is interesting to note here that much feminist work emphasises a different metaphor, namely that of voice, of speaking in a different voice, of being heard, of not being silenced (Belenky, et. al., 1986).

The visual metaphor has become deeply entrenched in social scientists and Bourdieu sees it as one of our most basic biases, the "theoreticist or intellectualist bias" or "epistocentrism" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 69). It involves an intellectual posture that inevitably involves a withdrawal from the world where the eye we use to observe is removed from a body and becomes a pondering or contemplative eye (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Using

vision as a mode of experiencing the world involves a step back, while using another mode, the vocal, as an example, involves getting closer and involves dialogue and interaction (Belenky, et. al., 1986). We tend to forget as social scientists that the theory we create is the product of this intellectual bias and that this bias is a fundamental influence in the end product, the theory. The conditions under which knowledge is created are more often related to a drive towards theory instead of practice and this creates a gap between theory and practice. Perhaps it is due to this bias that there are such vast contradictions between policy and practice, policy often being the result of scholarly inquiry and investigation. The question then comes up: Will this project, inspired by the glaring contradictions in our society, fall prey to the same fate, driven by an intellectualist bias to produce scholarly, contemplative work that makes its translation into practice irrelevant or improbable? Perhaps framed in another way: Can anyone do anything with this work and the results of this project? Or will it become part of the canon of theoretical products that stand either in contrast to practice or has no relevance for those not part of the academic world where the intellectual posture forms the basis of all scientific activity? In this study I attempt to work with the data in a manner that allows the material to speak in more than one way such as using discourse analysis and also by reflecting on the process and my direct experience of it and lastly using a metaphor from fiction to bring the data closer to different readers.

Epistemology and Embodiment

The notion of embodiment brings me full circle, back to where I started this chapter, with a reflection on epistemology and embodied objectivity and feminist politics of location. This project thus replaces traditional notions of objectivity with “views from somewhere” and “situated knowledges” (Haraway, 1991, p. 196). So the researcher is declared in a specific context that is part of the knowledge production. Here different levels of social positions such as race, class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality overlap to create specific social relations from which knowledge is produced. As Haraway puts it “feminist embodiment is not about fixed location in a reified body but about nodes in fields, inflections in orientations, and responsibility for difference in material-semiotic fields of meaning.” (1991, p. 195). The politics of location here creates an epistemology that is counter to dominating knowledge practices that create exclusionary truth claims (Bayer, 1998). Knowledge has an inherent historicity and materiality and is an active process and not a passive reflection on the nature of reality and the world. Thus the research position of this project is an embodied one,

thinking with a body, located in time and space where the encounter with research participants happens in a praxeological moment where different discursive fields and inscribed bodies connect. In this study I do this by firstly reflecting openly on my own position and motivation in terms of this study. I also not only analyse the data using discourse analysis but provide the reader with descriptions of the interviews and my experience of the interview and research process. Lastly, in my interaction with participants I ask and talk about having a female body.

The Study of Discourse and Social Constructionism

The discussion so far has referred to discourse and discourse analysis as chosen methodology of this project. A clearer description of discourse is now needed to illustrate how this method fits with the project and the theoretical positions. The word ‘discourse’ has gained tremendous popularity in the social sciences. Once reserved for linguists and language practitioners only, it is now the hunting ground of any social scientist with an interest in the ideological and social creation of structures and practices and the impact of language on social and personal structures. Given the emerging popularity of the word ‘discourse’ it is also used in many different contexts with many different meanings in mind. So a clear ‘definition’ of discourse seems appropriate at this stage as part of the sketch of my theoretical locations. An essentialist approach to a definition of discourse would be completely counter to the epistemology underlying discourse work. Thus the one-and-only definition of discourse is not the aim here, rather a description of what I mean when I talk about discourse. The working definition given by Ian Parker (1992) of discourse as a “system of statements which constructs an object” (p. 5) serves as a good starting point for this discussion on discourse. This definition clearly brings the constitutive nature of discourse into the picture, which fits with the aims of this project, which are to explore the complex interplay of different meanings and how these influence the experience and identities of middle management women. Discourses are not objects but they are “*rules and procedures* that make objects thinkable and governable” (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008, p. 105). From this basic notion of the constitutive nature of discourse, let me attempt to flesh out this description.

The study of discourse fits into the social constructionist framework as it involves a shift from representation to signification. The researcher no longer attempts to create an exact representation of something outside to capture and express in the right terms, but is involved

in searching for information on signification – the process of forming things. In this project, the search is to describe how women are constituted and how their identity-behaviour is informed by the different discourses in the social symbolic system. Thus the researcher is trying to find her way through the patterns of signification and trying to make sense of the "horizon of meaning" (Parker, 1999, p.3) in terms of gender and how women are informed by this. So we are still firmly entrenched in the domain of language where the exploration is on how the language of the symbolic system and language categories chosen constitute objects, subjects, experiences and a sense of self (Willig, 1999). Fundamentally, the study of discourse involves a "study of language 'in use'" (Van Dijk, 1985). The process is one of mapping out the place of words or phrases in the framework of a symbolic system and also asking questions about the contradictions in the system (Parker, 1999).

Discourse is realised in texts and we find discourses at work in text. The text in the discourse analytic sense is a tissue of meaning in any form that can be given an interpretive glance. In this way the entire world we understand and give meaning to can be considered textual (Parker, 1992). The text used in this project is the transcription of interviews with women in middle management positions. Although these texts are the products of individual interviews, the meanings conveyed go beyond individual intention and become transindividual. The importance of the author of the text is diminished in this way as the focus moves towards the broader meaning-context of the author as the connotations, allusions and implications in the text are explored (Parker, 1992).

Historical and Cultural Situatedness

Discourse, as a coherent system of meanings and regulated system of statements, employs cultural understandings. Competing cultures use different understandings and actions. Behaviour and events are characterised and evaluated according to these cultural understandings. Discourse presents a picture of the world according to a certain cultural understanding and discourse analysis involves cartography of this world (Parker, 1992). The multicultural nature of the South African location of this project makes this particularly interesting and the aim here is to create a map of the cultural complexities of this context and to show the intersection of different cultural understandings and how meaning is created in the given context. One should take care not to over-simplify the notion of culture here and assume that cultures in themselves have singular meaning sets but take into account that

multiple and contradictory discourses exist within communities and cultures. The melting pot of the South African community also renders culture fluid and permeable in a way that the different cultures can no longer be considered pure and separate but most individuals are constantly faced with situations where different aspects of culture (their own and ‘other’ cultures) intersect and create unique social contexts. The study of discourse is particularly useful in exploring the intersections of different cultures and contexts. It can allow access to the emergence and change of discourses within specific historical, temporal locations and how the taken-for-granted realities that form part of cultural understandings acquire commonsense and unquestionable truth-value (Durrheim, 1997). The multiple discourses on women that proliferate in the South African community can thus be explored.

The issue of the self or the subject in the text is important as discourse contains subjects and makes available different types of selves or subjects. As Parker (1992) puts it: “A discourse makes available a space for particular types of self to step in” (p. 9). The selves that emerge from the discourse have a relation with the addressee that implies certain rights and limitations of the addressee. When exploring discourse one considers the questions ‘what types of person are we talking about?’ and ‘what can they say in the discourse?’. Apart from interpreting the content of the text, the researcher also considers who has the right to speak in the text as that has an impact on the meaning created in the text (Parker, 1992). So one of the questions in this project is then: “What kinds of women are talked about in the text?” to consider what kinds of appeals are made to them and also what positions they can take in terms of these appeals and requirements.

Power and Ideology

This brings us to the issue of power as it emerges when dealing with language. “We use language and language uses us” (Parker, 1999, p. 4). A study of the discursive considers the constitutive power of the language we use, how we are not in complete control of the language we use and how the words and phrases we use have meaning that are organised into systems and institutions. These are the discursive practices that position us in relations of power where meaning, power and knowledge are closely linked (Parker, 1999). As discussed earlier, power is not seen here as a force from a single person or point but rather as the result of multiplicity of discourse (Levett, Kottler, Burman, & Parker, 1997).

Discourses are not autonomous entities but they co-exist in relations of power (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008). Thus discourses reproduce power relations and the study of discourse allows one to observe which categories of person gain and lose from employment of certain discourses and to explore who would want to promote and who would want to dissolve certain discourses (Parker, 1992). The constitutive and powerful nature of discourse leads to the ability of discourse to support or undermine institutions. Material practices are always invested with meaning and in this way Parker (1992) draws on Foucault to claim that discourses and practices are the same thing. Discursive practices reproduce institutions and scrutiny of institutions that are reinforced or opposed by discourse can be constructive during discourse analysis. The reproduction of institutions points one immediately to the ideological effects of discourse. One can show how discourse connects with other discourses that sanction oppression and how discourse allows dominant groups to tell their narratives and prevent subjugated ones from doing so (Parker, 1992). The researcher can draw on marginalised discourses to illustrate how the dominant discourse becomes constructed (Durrheim, 1997). Thus the mechanism of power as it operates in terms of gender can become more evident as discourse analysis can make the invisible ideological effects of language visible, and show how women remain situated in certain oppressive structures and institutions and how these are maintained and supported by the discursive ecology.

Given the productive, constitutive power of discourse and ideology, a political enquiry into discourse seems a plausible and useful enterprise. As such, the discursive reproduction of social institutions becomes the object of investigation making an investigation into the discursive reproduction of sexism possible. Such a practice would look at the way ideas are used to sustain certain societal concepts and at the linguistic representation of gender. The practical ideologies – the contradictory and fragmented notions that organise, conduct and justify gender inequalities, can become known. Gough (1998) mentions that gender inequalities are upheld by multiple and conflicting sets of ideas in everyday talk and that gender inequalities are justified with various repertoires such as referring to nature and socialisation. As is the case with racist discourse, so it is with sexist discourse in the sense that prejudice presents in a subtle and complex way, utilising unspoken contradiction as a supportive device where speakers remove themselves from sexist or racist practices by utilising ideologies of equality while at the same time using references to natural difference between groups. Thus the contradictions help in the production of justification of positions

that are seen as undesirable (sexist or racist) (Gough, 1998). The focus is on how the meanings are constructed in the text. The constitutive nature of these meanings is also reflected on and the researcher is interested in the practice of the meaning, what the meaning systems are doing and creating (Parker, 1999).

Contradiction and Resistance

Any discussion of power and how certain oppressive structures are held in place by discourse is incomplete without mention of the importance of contradiction and resistance in the discursive. A focus on contradiction is an important aspect as this allows the complexity of the matter of power to come into view. Thus the search is not for an underlying theme that will uncover the real meaning of the text and show the singular power force at work but rather for the contradictions between the significations and the way different pictures are formed. In this way, the dominant and subordinate meanings that form part of the 'cultural' myths are unearthed as well as processes of resistance. This can be achieved by referring to other discourses. Metaphors and analogies are always available from other discourses and are an integral part of the process. The importance of contradiction does not only refer to contradiction within the text but also with other texts. By setting contrasting discourses against one another the researcher elucidates different objects. Points of overlap constitute 'same' objects (Parker, 1992). The discursive nature of culture renders it as contradictory. It is the contradiction that allows for resistance as contradiction makes refusal to respond to dominant meanings possible. A Foucauldian view of resistance sees power and resistance as inextricably linked: "Wherever there is power, there is resistance that is implicit to the situation" (Powers, 2001, p. 17). Power and resistance are found at the same point in discursive webs. Thus marginalisation of alternative discourses provides a tension that simultaneously undermines and supports the status quo as in the toleration of alternative discourses (Powers, 2001). Discourses therefore do not determine things, as there is always a possibility of resistance and indeterminacy (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008).

Billig, Condor, Edwards, Gane, Middleton, and Radley (1988) describe contradiction as ideological dilemmas. Ideology does not imprint single images but dilemmatic quandaries that contain the possibilities for resistance and the conditions for 'thought' which should be provoked and supported as an end and a means. Contradiction is an integral part of enlightened modern thought and tension is always part of the modernity discourse. We need

to open up disputes not try to settle them (Parker, 1992). This awareness of contradiction and its relation to resistance can make the practices of resistance that the women in this study use become clear and evident. This is an important aim of this project, to discover the agency and strategies used by women within the given discursive domain and the expectation is that it is exactly the contradictions in the discursive domain that give space to resistance and action.

The Application of the Study of Discourse

Earlier in this chapter I expressed concerns with the scholarly gaze and the resulting gap between theory and practice. The question that emerges now is if this study will render a product that will continue and preserve this situation. How can this study be applied? Willig (1999) mentions that the application of discourse analysis is not without difficulty and warns against a number of risks in applying discourse analysis into some form of intervention for social change. She refers to Potter's discussion of the ideology of application where the application of psychological knowledge obscures the underlying, often socioeconomic, reasons and hidden interests in developing certain measures or interventions. There is also the danger of using psychological research findings in order to justify the political and economic goals of powerful groups such as government and large corporations. Often the very attempts at empowering disempowered groups can have the opposing effect of locking them into new restrictive discourses. Despite these risks she offers different ways in which discourse analysis can be applied. One such approach is discourse analysis as social critique where researchers show how language contributes to the continuance of unequal power relations. In this way discourse analysis as social critique can be seen as resistance, which does not lead to an explicit intervention but rather exposes discursive practices. This study can definitely be used in this way as many discursive practices involved in the context of the workplace need to be exposed.

Another approach to the problem of application is what Willig (1999) describes as discourse analysis as empowerment. Here researchers are concerned with the recognition of counter-discourses and the encouragement of subversive discursive practices and spaces of resistance. The focus of the resistance strategies are localised and often places emphasis on diversity. This is also an important aspect of this study, to explore how participants negotiate, strategise and position themselves within the discursive domain.

In reporting on this study, I keep in mind Parker's (2005) use of Foucauldian ideas: reversal, exteriority, specificity and discontinuity as methodological requirements. Reversal involves that existing research is questioned in terms of its assumptions and traditions that allows for different ways of thinking about the topic. In the next chapter I discuss the literature on the topic of women in the workplace by referring to how different frames of understanding construct the issue. This also involves some implicit reflection on exteriority or the external conditions of possibility for research in the field of organisation studies. In the data analysis I keep discontinuity in mind by thinking about the different ways of examining the topic with an aim to open space for alternative accounts to emerge. Specificity is also important here as it involves paying attention to specific events that do not fit and therefore remaining open to the chance that the unexpected might emerge. In the conclusion of the study discontinuity means not trying to tie everything together in reductionistic manner but offering different possible interpretations.

Conclusion

In this chapter I gave an account of the theoretical positions underlying this project. I started by sketching the broad epistemological backdrop of the study by referring to the broad epistemological shifts that inform my thinking and my social constructionist position. I have also discussed this position in more detail, trying to flesh it out after giving the skeleton of the constructionist position. I argued for a social constructionist feminist position, which takes an anti-essentialist stance towards the study of women and provides a framework for exploring the social and personal situations of women's lives. I have included some reflections on possible dangers of social constructionism and tried to provide alternative or rather expanded possibilities of dealing with the issue of language and discourse in a more embodied way by taking cognisance of bodies in the discursive field. The chapter ends with a discussion of the study of discourse as the chosen research method for this study where I have given some definitions and descriptions and also reflected on the application of this study.

This process of situating myself in theoretical (and also personal, as I have done in chapter 1) locations is important for various reasons. One of these is that it aims to increase the accountability of this research project. It creates the opportunity for the readers to know where I am coming from and to give them a vantage point from which to reflect on the consistency, dependability and soundness of arguments in this work. It gives the basis for a

different kind of objectivity, a situated objectivity, one that acknowledges and works with my situatedness in a time, place, community, country, body and skin.

CHAPTER 3

ACADEMIC DISCOURSES ON WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

Chapters 1 and 2 involved a sketch of the personal and epistemological positions that embed the work in this project. This chapter now situates the topic of the project: *Gendered discourses of women in middle management* within the broader academic discourses on women in the workplace. Here, I look at how the issue of women in management is discussed, problematised and approached by academics and researchers and I will show how and in what way these discussions reflect and perpetuate dominant discourses on the issue or allow for marginal discourses to emerge.

When looking at research on women in the workplace one is struck by how much of the research is on women in management and not on women in other positions in organisations (Calás & Smirich, 1996). Organisation studies tend towards a managerial bias, studying mostly the managerial sectors (Mumby, 1996). This project forms part of this collection of work. The choice of topic (by myself and all the other researchers focusing on women in management) reveals some assumptions on the nature of women and men in organisations, and also about that which is important to study. Focusing on women as managers and asking why they are not reaching the top as rapidly as men reveals the assumption that climbing the corporate ladder and reaching the top is an important, desirable and fundamental aspect of people's lives. It assumes that this is what women and men automatically strive for and that this is an enviable state. In this way, it forms part of a broader western mindset that views individualism, capitalism and rationalism as desired values and ideas. I am clearly embedded in this frame but at times uncomfortable with it, rooted inside this way of thinking yet aware of perspectives from the outside. Doing this research is, in a way, an implicit agreement with the hierarchical structure of organisations and society; but it is also a pragmatic acceptance of these structures and an attempt at trying to make women's lives better within them. The trend towards greater research emphasis on women in management can also be considered to be an outcome of the broader tendency to do research on white, middle-class groups and neglect those who do not fall into those categories as the invisible 'other'.

An awareness of these assumptions and the underlying shortcomings and dangers thereof will hopefully give me a watchful eye that will guard against an unquestioning and uncritical acceptance of that which the 'organisation' represents as well as a sensitivity for diversity, difference and those who have been silenced by these research practices.

Women In The Workplace: What Is Happening?

The issue of the gender stratification of the workplace has been discussed briefly in the introductory chapter but warrants a more in-depth discussion here. As already mentioned, the idea that the gender stratification of the workplace is rapidly disappearing and that it will disappear very soon might correspond more with fiction than fact and this is what I argue in this chapter. In spite of changes to gender stereotypes and gendered work divisions, the gender stratification of the workplace is still very much present and it is not disappearing as rapidly as is sometimes believed. In this discussion I aim to show how the gender stratification of the workplace remains and how influential its effects are. The fact that society in general and the workplace specifically remains gender-stratified despite all the change is referred to as "evolution rather than revolution" by Ellen Cook (1993, p. 227).

As stated earlier, the labour market has changed drastically in recent years from a mostly male occupied arena to more or less equal proportions of men and women (Charles & Davies, 2000; Wentling, 1996). Despite these changes in the labour market, gender differentiation continues with a tendency towards gender traditional occupations, a continuing wage gap, discontinued career paths for women and unequal work division on the home front (Alvesson & Billig, 1997; Marlow, Marlow & Arnold, 1995; Reskin & Bielby, 2005; Wentling, 1996). To some extent men and women live in different worlds with different orientations towards career achievement and different expectations and ensuing different choices (Alvesson & Billig, 1997; Cook, 1993). As mentioned earlier women generally make up 50% of the economically active population. However, they have not been successful in entering the management world in the same proportion (Charles & Davies, 2000; Gilbert & Rossman, 1992; Marlow, Marlow & Arnold, 1995; Wentling, 1996).

Statistics

There seems to be a definite increase in women's employment as well as in their representation in the ranks of management. Yet, globally women rarely exceed 20% in management although they constitute between 40 and 50% of the world's labour force (Benschop, Halsema & Schreurs, 2001; Gatenby & Humphries, 1999). The higher the position, the fewer women in that position and in the largest, most powerful organisations women in top management comprise only a small percentage: 13% in Fortune 500 companies and less than 5% in most countries (Powell & Graves, 2003). Women in the same positions as men seem to be better educated and qualified than the men, an indication that women have to work harder to reach the same goals (Marlow, Marlow & Arnold, 1995; Wirth, 1998). There is adequate evidence that women tend to have a much slower progression in organisational hierarchies (Morgan, Schor & Martin, 1993; Murrell, 2001).

The South African situation is comparable to the global situation where women are also not reaching top management positions (South African Department of Labour, 2003). To begin with, although women make up approximately 50% of the economically active population, female working time exceeds male working time by 22% (<http://nationmaster.com/country/sf/labor>). In the census on South African women in corporate leadership carried out by Catalyst in 2004, the following data emerged: in 2004 women made up 54% of the adult population of South Africa and 41% of the working South African population. Women made up 14,7% of executive managers and 7,1% of all directors in the country. This picture is similar to the international trend reflected on so far and shows that the relative representation of women in executive management and board positions is disproportionate to that of men. Of the 3 125 directorship positions in the census, 221 are held by women and only 11 women hold the position of chair of board. There were only seven female CEOs/MDs in the census (Catalyst, 2004).

In the rest of Africa there is a difference between Northern Africa and sub-Saharan Africa where women comprise 26% of the workforce in Northern Africa and 43% in sub-Saharan Africa (United Nations, 2000). In Northern Africa women are mostly active in the services sector and in sub-Saharan Africa in the agricultural sector (United Nations, 2000). Waged and salaried work is the most leading form of

employment in Africa with self-employment making up 11% of the female workforce. In both North and sub-Saharan Africa women's occupation of managerial positions was limited to under 23% by 1997 (United Nations, 2000).

Despite the general similarities in these trends there seems to be some variation in different countries of residence and therefore statistics do seem to differ between nations (Charles & Davies, 2000). These differences in context can be linked to the cultural beliefs in the context. The significance of context has been largely ignored and studies tend to focus more on organisational cultures, structure of labour markets and individual choices. Women's under-representation in senior management is clearly also linked to region or locality among other factors (Charles & Davies, 2000).

Salary Gap

Disparities in earning continue despite many efforts to establish equal pay for equal work and advances made so far (Calás & Smirich, 1996; McNay, 2000; Powell & Graves, 2003; Roos & Gatta, 1999; United Nations, 2000). Women of colour lag behind their white counterparts (Murrell, 2001). Wages earned in female-intensive occupations are generally lower than in male-intensive ones. It seems that reductions in the wage gap are largely in areas where women have entered male-intensive areas. The wage gap also does not diminish with educational level and exists at every educational level and also across racial and ethnic groups in the United States (Powell & Graves, 2003; Roos & Gatta, 1999). Literature suggests that it exists in most countries and that it occurs in countries such as Australia, Scandinavia, the United Kingdom, Germany and Japan (Roos & Gatta, 1999). Some argue that the wage gap has increased in the USA by 21cents for every dollar earned and that lower education levels and part-time work cannot be the only reason for this but that discrimination and stereotypical expectations and attitudes can also account for this (Salary gap..., 2002). Dreher and Cox (2000) indicate that male employees have an advantage over female and non-white employees in that they have a better chance of achieving better compensation when they move to new employers. This means that a change in position does not necessarily involve better compensation if you are female or non-white. This process can be seen as clearly augmenting the wage gap (Dreher & Cox, 2000).

Occupational Choice

Sex segregation is also maintained largely in terms of choice of occupation. Powell and Graves (2003) distinguish between male-intensive, female-intensive and gender neutral occupations and mention that segregation still exists in terms of this distinction. It seems that there are still occupations where the segregation between men and women is more prevalent than in others and those occupations which are female intensive tend to have a lower status in the social hierarchy (Mencken & Winfield, 2000; Powell & Graves, 2003; United Nations, 2000). Occupations that are female intensive also tend to pay less than others (Jacobs, 1999; Mencken & Winfield, 2000). Areas such as engineering, legal professions, health diagnosis (medicine), security, production, craft and repair remain male-intensive. Occupations such as health assessment and treatment (nursing), health technical occupations, administrative support, household, health and personal services are female-intensive. Where women have tended to enter more male-intensive occupations recently, men have not entered female-intensive occupations in the same way, probably partly due to the wage differences between the two (Powell & Graves, 2003). Powell and Graves mention that the segregation in terms of the overall management section of occupations (executive, administrative and managerial workers) has almost disappeared in the United States in the sense that management (as an occupation) is no longer male-intensive (where women occupy one third of the category). Despite this, a gap still exists in terms of top management positions (Powell & Graves, 2003). Their conclusion is that lower managerial ranks have become sex-neutral but that this does not translate into a similar situation in top management. It is also speculated that feminisation of occupations or women's entry into occupations traditionally associated with men tends to lead to a decrease in the wages and status of those occupations (Calás & Smirich, 1996; Fondas, 1997; Powell & Graves, 2003; Richter & Griesel, 1999). The concentration of women in female-intensive or female-dominated positions is regarded by some (Jacobs, 1999) as a major reason for the existing wage gap between the sexes.

In this way, it is easy to see how the gender segregation of occupations can lead to the feminisation of poverty (McNay, 2000; Mencken & Winfield, 2000). Another factor adding to this is the incidence of divorce where the financial position of women (who generally earn less) is weakened further by divorce and where her childcare

responsibilities and duties increase, making it even more difficult to earn an income (Jacobs, 1989).

The Glass Ceiling

Given the current situation it is hardly surprising that women are often advised in the following way: "Look like a woman, act like lady, think like a man and work like a horse" (Antal, 1992, p. 42). This situation has sparked the coining of the term 'the glass ceiling': an impenetrable organisational boundary that prevents the progress of women in organisations. It is based on gender and not on ability (Gilbert & Rossman, 1992; Stroh, Brett & Reilly, 1996). It is defined by Wirth (1988) as an "invisible barrier created by attitudinal and organisational prejudices that bar women from top executive jobs" (p. 93). Cook (1993) describes it as "a subtle, transparent yet strong barrier ... that keeps women stuck in jobs with little authority and lower pay than their male counterparts" (p. 233). The glass ceiling is not seen as an absolute barrier and some women do attain top positions in organisations but this can be seen as tokenism that presents a distorted illusion of fairness and availability in the organisation (Frankforter, 1996). The glass ceiling has also been shown to be more prevalent for women of colour as they experience a double disadvantage of invisibility in the male as well as the white networks (Murrell, 2001).

There are some authors who choose to use another more complex metaphor for women's position in organisations. Pascall, Parker and Evetts (2000) see the workplace more as a hierarchical crystal maze with clear focal points to aim towards but invisible barriers around every corner. Most women fight their way through this maze without the use of a ladder, only made available to men and women who are fast-tracked. Other authors also agree that the glass ceiling that seems to prevent women from entering top positions is not the only barrier in organisations and that there are barriers at all levels in organisations (Murrell, 2001).

From the above, one could say that the changes in education and in the labour market have not necessarily led to greater independence and that "the restructuring of gender relations does not involve a steady increase in women's autonomy but a shift to new forms of inequality exemplified in [the] idea of the move from private to public patriarchy" (McNay, 2000, p. 16).

Academic Discourses On Women In Management

The gender division of labour and management as described above has not escaped theorists and researchers and this issue has been under investigation from many different angles, using various paradigms and methodologies. A number of authors have already reviewed this mass of literature (see Calás & Smirich, 1996; Jacobs, 1995; Powell & Graves, 2003) and this chapter does not aim to only reproduce this work. This chapter rather aims also to reflect on the constructed and constitutive nature of research on the topic. In other words, the focus is on the realities that are reflected and created by the current research as well as the discourses and ideologies that support and inform research on the topic of women in management.

In order to make this task manageable, I have chosen to use specific distinctions or classifications in my reflection on the literature: individual, societal or organisational. In my view it seems that much of the research can be classified in terms of a focus on one of these three areas.

The area of focus of a research project implies a certain view and understanding of the world, also an interpretation of the major point of intervention and change. It also holds true that these areas cannot always be separated clearly and that there is often overlap in many studies. However, the general trend is that the focus tends to fall on one specific factor while taking the others into account and it is this main focus that will be considered in this discussion.

The distinction or classification I have chosen serves as a navigation chart, an aid to direct me to certain ports or points of fixedness in the fluid masses of information. This navigation chart clearly implies personal preference and I fully acknowledge and assume that another traveller might choose to take a different route when attempting a similar journey.

The Individual: Constructing the Individual, Constructing Difference

Research with the individual as main focal point tends to explore how individual qualities, attributes, choices and behaviour serve to explain the gender stratification of the workplace. A consequence of this is a common focus on differences between

women and men in their approach to career and employment and how they make employment decisions. The studies tend to investigate internal factors such as career motivation, career attitude and decision-making processes. The intervention strategies that result from this focus often include employee assistance programmes or other forms of intervention that aim to help the individual person overcome some of these individual factors that might be hampering career development. Some of these intervention strategies will also be discussed in this section to illustrate how the focus of attention can influence the practical attempts at changing people's lives.

When internal attributes become the focal point of attention, what seems to emerge is a study of gender difference, focusing on how men and women tend to differ. Many topics are explored within this field ranging from career choice, career attitude and job search behaviour to cognitive processes such as pay expectations, self esteem and career knowledge. Studies in this field will be discussed here to illustrate how internal difference is seen as a contributing or explanatory factor in terms of gender stratification.

Career choice and career attitudes.

In terms of career choice there are a number of studies and authors that tend to show that traditional stereotypes as well as the requirements of these stereotypes have an influence on the way women and men choose careers or occupations. When it comes to the attributes of jobs, these studies show that women tend to choose occupations that align more with gender roles and traditional stereotypes and prefer occupations that will allow them to fulfil their obligations and additional responsibilities as homemakers (Konrad, Ritchie, Corrigan & Lieb, 2000; Powel & Graves, 2003). This notion implies that women choose according to traditional socialisation practices (Roos & Gatta, 1999). Research suggests that women seem to value aspects such as interpersonal relationships in the workplace where men tend to focus on more traditional breadwinner benefits such as income and promotion opportunities as well as autonomy in the workplace (Gati, Givon & Osipow, 1995; Konrad et al, 2000; Powel & Graves, 2003). The meta-analysis of Konrad et al. (2000) shows that some change has occurred between the 1970's and the 1990's with more of the traditional male preferred attributes becoming important to women and girls. These attributes include job security, power, prestige, task enjoyment and opportunity to use one's

skills. This change is supported by the finding that women and men do not differ in terms of the extent to which they seek positions with high status and recognition, (Powel & Graves, 2003) or pay and opportunity for promotion (Jackson, Gardner & Sullivan, 1992). The abovementioned research results in terms of difference seems to have become part of the accepted academic discourse and the notion of men and women being different in terms of their career attribute preference forms part of much of the literature. This difference is sometimes used as an explanation for the gender differences in the workforce. It is important to note that there are studies that do not support or agree with this notion such as the study by Browne (1997) in which she compared Australian and American male and female business students in terms of attitudes to work and job characteristics. She found that female and male respondents did show similar preferences and attitudes to work. She concluded that this is a strong indication that women and men's different positions in organisations are not the result of wanting different work conditions.

In terms of work activities, there are also a number of studies pointing to differences between female and male preference for career related activities (Aros, Henly & Curtis, 1998; Lippa, 1998; Powel & Graves, 2003). Some results show that women tend to prefer people-oriented career activities while men choose career activities that deal with things or objects such as computers and tools (Gati et al., 1995; Powel & Graves, 2003). This difference is reflected in research on Holland's occupational types which tends to show gender differences in terms of types, with women tending more towards the artistic (creation of art forms and products) and social (informing, training and developing others) and men towards realistic (manipulation of objects) and investigative activities (examination of phenomena) (Powel & Graves, 2003). This pattern of difference is also referred to as a People-Things dimension and gender seems to be linked to this feature of preference for work activities (Lippa, 1998).

There are also studies that do not support the notion of gender difference in terms of work values and preference. In an analysis of data of 12 national (USA) surveys, Rowe and Snizek (1995) found that job expectations of men and women depend more on their age, education and status and found that these variables play a greater role than gender. Thus factors other than gender are seen as important in the differentiation which relates more to women's differential positions in the workplace. They state

clearly that some earlier research tended to overemphasise difference and underemphasise similarities and that this emphasis on gender differences perpetuates a myth rather than reflects reality. Rowe and Snizek (1995) conclude that research on gender differences stemming from a gender socialisation model tends to ignore other variables and factors, leading to results supporting the notion of gender-based difference based on socialisation. For them, a social structural approach to difference would point researchers to include other factors and variables.

It is also important to note that correlation does not equate to causality. In the case of gender difference a correlation of certain career activities and values to gender can be the result of a number of factors such as the acceptable options in terms of occupational alternatives, different occupational expectancies or even self-efficacy (Aros et al., 1998).

There are indications of some change that has taken place in terms of occupational preference in recent years with women showing somewhat less interest in female-intensive occupations but men not showing much difference in their preference thus leaving the traditional gender segregation of the workplace somewhat but not radically changed (Powel & Graves, 2003). Speculations about the causes for the differences between women and men in terms of career choice tend to link this with traditional socialisation, gender identity, gender roles, gender stereotypes and culture. Girls and boys learn, by means of gender socialisation, what the desired behaviour for each sex is, in this way perpetuating the existing social structures and preparing the individual for the types of activities as well as restraints to expect (Konrad et al., 2000) The effect of the existing situation cannot be ignored as people will be less likely to enter occupations they think they are not suited for, thus serving as a perpetuation of the situation (Powel & Graves, 2003).

On the level of the individual, literature also points to other differences at play here apart from differences in preference for certain job attributes and career activities. There is some research that points to difference in the way women and men engage in job search behaviour with men spending more time and effort in finding suitable employment than women do (Powel & Graves, 2003; Wanberg, Watt & Rumsey, 1996). Some studies also show that men tend to employ different job search strategies

using formal and informal search strategies. Formal search strategies involve utilising aspects such as advertisements and employment agencies and informal strategies involve using networks. It seems that men tend to have more career-related networks and women more kin-related ones, a factor that will clearly have an impact on the value of these networks for job seeking behaviour (Mencken & Winfield, 2000; Powel & Graves, 2003). Mencken and Winfield found that women who have male contacts in their informal search strategy have a higher chance of obtaining positions that are not in female dominated environments. They deduce from this that men are situated in positions in society that are more conducive to building career or work networks thus providing them with more information and job opportunities. According to them, women who have access to men have a greater chance of finding employment in occupations that are not female-dominated. Drentea (1998) also concluded that when women use female informal networks they tend to end up in female-dominated jobs whereas if they use formal networks they end up in more gender-integrated jobs. This might suggest that informal networks can only be as effective to women as they are to men if the networks involve male contacts. It also suggests that women's contacts are not as effective as men's. There could be less available information in female networks due to the segregated nature of networks mentioned above. In addition to this Leicht and Marx (1997) found that women tend to refer other women to female-dominated positions.

The work of Murrell (2001) suggests changes in career attitudes of women with women becoming more focused on factors other than their performance that can enhance their careers. These non-performance-based means include career mobility, lateral transfers, changing companies, strategic downward movements and the instrumental use of social relations with co-workers, supervisors and organisational mentors. Murrell (2001) notes that this careerist attitude could ironically have a negative impact on relations with co-workers and companies. It is also pointed out that not all career mobility adds to career advancement and that job changes, interruptions and part-time work often hamper the career advancement of women (Murrell, 2001).

Research focusing on the individual also attempts to explain the wage gap discrepancy by pointing to individual attributes such as attitudes, expectations and

preference and claims that the wage gap results from internal/individual differences between the sexes. These differences typically involve aspects such as level of education, experience, number of years spent in the work force as well as work effort (the attachment to work reflected in allocation of energy to the job) (Roos & Gatta, 1999). The perception also exists that women are “quitters”, who leave their employment to attend to family responsibilities, with a higher turnover rate than men (Stroh et al., 1996, p.100) In terms of the wage gap, earlier studies point to differences in the salary expectations of women and men with women expecting on average lower salaries than men (Jackson et al., 1992; Major & Konar, 1984; Martin, 1989) but more recent studies tend to not support this (Gunkel, Lusk, Wolff & Li, 2007; Sallop & Kirby, 2007). Gunkel et al. further did not find support for stereotypical expectations of difference between men and women and they point out that there is more support for gender similarities than differences. Hyde (2005) also supports this notion in a meta-analysis of studies on gender differences and similarities where the results show that men and women are more similar than different. Hyde warns against the danger of overvaluing differences between the genders as this has implications for the workplace.

Reflections on studies of the individual.

The above section involved a brief overview of some studies which construct gender difference on an individual level and describe factors relating to the gender stratification of the workplace in terms of differences between individuals in terms of behaviour and internal factors such as motivation and choice. These studies generally place their focus of investigation and exploration on factors relating to the individual such as choice of career, career attitude, career preference, job search behaviour, pay satisfaction, career knowledge and self-esteem. Although there are some studies that do not confirm this, many of these studies suggest and describe definite gender differences in terms of these factors. They thus construct women and men as different individuals who go about the choosing and development of their careers differently. The question at this stage is: what are the implications of a construction of difference? Especially when the difference is on the individual, and often internal, level. Proponents of a construction of difference often advocate that an awareness of difference can lead to interventions that are sensitive to these differences but it is also argued that focus on differences between individual men and women ignore and deny

the social and structural factors involved in gender stratification. The resolution of this debate is not simple and the next section of this chapter will involve a brief look at examples of workplace interventions that typically work with internal factors and experience. The first example of the suggestions of Hughes (2000) in terms of organisational training and development deals with an awareness of difference between men and women and aims to take it into account when developing interventions. In this example, Hughes (2000) aims to intervene on the broader social and structural factors by taking differences into account. The second example deals with what is generally considered an intervention on the personal, individual level, namely stress management. Here, Meyerson (1998) deconstructs some traditional ideas relating to stress management and burnout.

Training and education in organisations: A sexless matter?

Hughes (2000) uses training and education in organisations as an example of the importance of considering gender differences. Training and education in organisations can be an important factor that influences the career path of employees and Hughes proposes that it is important to take gender differences into account when considering training and learning interventions in organisations. She states that traditional management learning theory does not take the gendered nature of learning into account. She does not propose an essentialist position that states that the learning processes of men and women are completely different but points to a number of issues that need to be investigated in terms of learning to provide a learning theory that will do justice to the learning and advancement processes of both men and women. Hughes (2000) draws on the work of Gilligan (1982) and Belenky and her colleagues (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986) and considers women's relational sense of self and co-operative ways of working as fundamental in the learning process. Learning, for women, is considered here to be context bound and depends on both personal, intuitive factors as well as connected knowing (Gilligan, 1982; Belenky et al., 1986). The work of Belenky and her colleagues postulates that women employ five different ways of knowing: 1) silence where there is no voice at all; 2) received learning when women learn by listening; 3) subjective knowledge where knowledge is personal and intuitive; 4) procedural knowledge where there is separate and connected knowing and knowledge is uncertain; and 5) constructed knowledge which integrates voices and judges knowledge in terms of context.

This different view of learning is often not considered in many continued learning and education programmes of organisations and Hughes (2000) warns against an uncritical acceptance of traditional learning theory such as Kolb's learning cycles. She considers an uncritical use of traditional theory in organisational training interventions as a possible mechanism of implicit support of the status quo by considering learning as an internal process that is not related to context. She then argues for an understanding of learning that acknowledges that there might be a difference between women and men in the way they learn and acquire knowledge. She points towards some possible gender difference patterns with women relying more on receiving, interpersonal, inter-individual knowledge (thus being more open to incorporating other perspectives) and men relying more on impersonal and individual knowledge with the focus on their own learning experience. She reminds her reader that an awareness of difference does not mean an absolute essentialist difference between men and women but rather highlights two modes of thought.

Hughes (2000) also challenges a predominant idea in organisations that useful learning only takes place in the workplace. This is accompanied by a tendency to see the years women may spend outside the workplace as 'doing nothing years'. She points out that a lot of learning takes place in these times in that skills such as home business, entrepreneur, volunteering and time-management skills can all be acquired outside the formal workplace. She encourages organisations to acknowledge these informal learning processes and advocates for research that documents and affirms women's formal and informal learning processes (Hughes, 2000). She thus urges organisations to take possible different modes of learning into account when devising learning interventions in order to allow for participants to receive maximum benefit from these interventions.

Stress management and burnout: An individual matter?

The next example looks at stress management programmes from a difference perspective. The widespread use of employee assistance in organisations has led some authors to note the importance of taking associated gender issues into account in these programmes in order to avoid the inadvertent and unintended support of the current gender stratification (Cook, 1993; Marlow et al., 1995; Meyerson, 1998).

Here, Meyerson (1998) uses her conceptualisation of stress and burnout as an example of how acknowledgement of gender issues could lead to changes in the implementation of stress management programmes. She challenges neutral and unbiased conceptualisations of stress and burnout and concludes with other authors such as Cushmir and Franks (1988) that there are many gender specific aspects that influence the experience of stress such as socialisation, discrimination, stereotypes associated with female employees (that they are not committed and an economic risk to take), conflicting demands of career and family, isolation and power differences as factors unique to women. All these factors increase and contribute to women's experience of stress.

She refers to a dominant conception of stress that deems burnout as failure of the individual to cope with stress. Within this approach the employment assistance officer would then be looking for objective cures and control. The individual is seen as the locus of disease and thus the locus of the cure. This conceptualisation would also include universal definitions of what is to be considered normal and abnormal. Meyerson (1998) argues for another way of conceptualising stress, which acknowledges ambiguity and devalues professional and individual control by emphasising the social nature of the condition.

The dominant conceptualisation of stress mentioned above would see a solution of stress as one that involves control over emotions (Meyerson, 1998). A central part of medical and organisational discourses involves a focus on science versus irrationality and working through and over feelings. It is a knowledge base that devalues and rationalises emotions. The subordination of rationality over emotions is considered important: a bounded rationality. Here, bounded refers to inherent limits on rational thought, depending on the organism and its environment. Emotion must be converted into another means to serve the organisation. This forms part of the gendered dichotomy that traditionally views men as rational and women as irrational. This medical view of stress also requires control over the body. Conditions are translated into diseases needing expert treatment with its associated power relations. Normally these treatments also separate a person from their own body. Control over the body can also be regarded as a gendered theme where the body is a site of power and a

locus of domination, the body is a female self (uncontrollable) needing discipline and rationality (Meyerson, 1998).

In the medical model, burnout is seen as an individual disease and the individual is the primary causal agent and unit of analysis needing diagnosis and pharmacology. This form of individualism informs much of management science. Meyerson (1998) considers this individualism to have a gendered nature. Men are seen as independent with the characteristics strength, autonomy, achievement, competition and provider. Women are seen as dependent. Meyerson (1998) argues for a framework which decentres the self as continuously being saturated, constructed and reconstructed. She argues for a view of the body as "in fluid motion continually constituting itself as well as the material and cultural conditions of its existence" (Flax in Meyerson, 1998, p. 109).

Meyerson (1998) postulates that the medical description is sustained by the discourse of rationality versus emotionality. She argues for a discourse that values emotion and does not see it as part of the rational/irrational dichotomy but a distinct realm of experience. The aim is then to help people feel rather than control, to get through and contain their feelings and to give recognition to experience with empathy and engagement. She considers it vital to recognise emotional experience without translating into a language of control. She criticises organisational scientists for becoming complicit in silencing emotions by their attempts to control and medicalise emotions. "Perhaps ... acknowledging, revealing and appreciating human emotion may be a crucial step in developing human communities that care for their members" (Meyerson, 1998, p. 113). Stress management in organisations can be embarked on in programmes that allow for the authentic expression of emotions such as anger, sorrow and joy. This would allow for authentic responses to these emotions. Authentic expression of emotions allows for the basis of a community that allows for care for others. If people could admit to feeling out of control then others can honour them and then care for them by permitting a person to rest and heal. By undermining the current dominant discourse of rationality, a different kind of community becomes possible: a community that allows for care, feeling for and filling in for the other (Meyerson, 1998). Social scientists have become part of a process of suppression of feelings and

Meyerson (1998) advocates an awareness of how social science texts perpetuate the suppression of feelings.

Apart from arguing for a community that allows authentic expression of emotion, Meyerson (1998) also argues for revising the body as a site of control and seeing the body as subjectivity. She mentions that the right to control the body is one of the most contested sites of political and domestic struggle with the personal seen as the political. A false separation of body and mind has developed. If this dichotomy is overturned and dissolved and a person is seen as 'mindandbody' that is, naturally 'in control of' their own body, then the power relation is suspended and the body becomes a legitimate form of subjectivity. Overturning the power relation entails a shift from categorising, disembodied attempts to control bodily experience to an appreciation of the body as an important source of subjectivity. Then stress is no longer something to be controlled but an important work situation indicator. This would mean taking the body seriously. Discourses resisting a gendered relationship of mind and body naturally embrace the practice and ideology of self-determination. Such a view would merge the conception and execution of work and avoid fragmented and alienated labour. From this perspective work refers to the process through which the individual maintains control and not the process through which the individual loses control.

By focusing on the authentic expression of emotion and the experience of the body and emotions as valid indicators and not only as something to control, the approach argued for by Meyerson (1998) allows for the authentic responses by others and therefore for the creation of a community of care. Burnout is not seen as a lack of control or lack of independence but a bodily and emotional experience that should be taken seriously and responded to with care. This conceptualisation of stress also transcends the implicit gender difference assumption.

The above examples serve to illustrate how different conceptions of the individual woman or man are utilised in intervening in organisations. Where some authors postulate gender differences as fundamental, almost pathological, inevitabilities, others use possible gender differences to change the nature and structure of organisations and organisational intervention.

Societal Processes: Constructing Social Patterns and influence

In the first section of this chapter, I illustrated how some authors and researchers place the spotlight on individual matters and also how these authors try to explain the gendered stratification of the workplace by pointing to the individual as the site of difference and significance. In this section, I will look at the construction of the problem as a social or societal issue, rooted in the structure and organisation of society in general. Some of this work falls broadly in the sphere of social psychology and focuses on processes such as sex-role socialisation, stereotypes and discrimination where others tend more towards an economic approach by looking at the market economy and factors related to this.

Traditional stereotypes and positions.

Scholars working in this field often judge stereotypes as important in explaining women's slow progression to the top and traditional societal task divisions and hierarchies are seen as still influencing the work sphere (Charles & Davies, 2000). Sex-role stereotypes tend to remain quite stable over time and often changing contexts and realities do not automatically imply resulting radical change in stereotypes (Powell & Graves, 2003; Prinsloo, 1992). Stereotype here refers to a set of ideas about the characteristics of a group of people and sex or gender stereotypes to the ideas about the characteristics or psychological traits typical of the two sexes (Powell & Graves, 2003). The workplace is seen as a context where much has changed but traditional stereotypes prevail. Gender stereotypes are linked to assumptions about what behaviour to expect or deem appropriate: the gender roles (Powell & Graves, 2003). As such, employers still assume that men have someone taking care of the home responsibilities and treat them accordingly in terms of expectations of work hours and commitments. The expectation exists in the workplace and society in general that the man's primary allegiance is to his career and men who choose not to act accordingly, by choosing non-traditional careers or asking for flexible work arrangements are ridiculed or viewed as deviant.

In exploring the history of stereotypes on the division of labour, Jacobs (1989) notes that anthropologists have documented a wide variety in the gendered nature of task divisions in different contexts. The historical sexual division of labour in different

societies does not necessarily correspond to what is expected as the norm today, thus pointing strongly to the constructed nature of this process (Jacobs, 1989). Tasks that are considered to be completely natural for a woman in one society might be considered natural for men in another. This notion undermines the idea that sex segregation is based on a natural or biological inevitability.

In the face of the current expectation that men are and want to be breadwinners, the family responsibilities of men are not taken into account when considering their performance and career path. It is taken into account when women are appointed, promoted and considered for tasks and assignments. To deal with this issue Schwartz (1989) makes a highly controversial distinction between the “career-primary woman and the career-and-family woman” (Schwartz, 1989, p. 69). Schwartz (1989) then suggests different treatment for the two types of women and argues for clearing the way for career-primary women in order to allow them to achieve in organisations and reach top management levels. She suggests that companies should try to retain career-and-family women in order to retain their investment in these workers. She suggests allowing these women more flexibility with more time off or flexible work arrangements such as working from home, part-time employment or shared employment (two people taking responsibility for one job). She also points out that it should be made clear that flexible work arrangements would lead to slower advancement in the organisation. She suggests that the career-and-family woman is more likely to leave her organisation and increase staff turnover. Stroh et al. (1996) investigated this assumption further and found that although female managers tend to have a higher turnover rate than male managers it was largely due to a perception of lack of opportunities or an awareness of a glass ceiling that led to a tendency to leave a company.

Authors then point out that both men and women have little support for developing gender-atypical lifestyles (Cook, 1993). Organisations often reflect a situation where career positions are traditionally reserved for men and routine work for women. Many organisations are still based on a division of labour that frees men from routine tasks. Thus although men and women might spend equal amounts of time on tasks in the organisation it is likely that women will be involved in more routine tasks that will not be beneficial to their career path (Cook, 1993). Discrimination in job or task

assignment is seen as one of the major factors related to retarding women's career paths (Murrell, 2001). Sex stereotyping often leads to the assumption that women do not want to work long hours, travel or relocate. The assumption that all women are like this keeps women out of strategic activities and trapped in routine activities, which forms a vicious cycle that keeps women in certain positions (Wirth, 1998). In general it can be said that women are often considered to be less committed to their work than men and many women report that they have to work much harder than men to prove themselves in organisations (Wentling, 1996). There seems to be an expectation that women must make it very clear to their employers that they are more committed to the organisation or their careers than their families (Morrison, White & Van Velsor, 1987).

Due to the seeming prevalence and tenacity of stereotypes, gender discrimination would be a logical consequence of these attitudes and therefore discrimination and sexism are identified as factors hampering the career development of women. Sexism as a broader term is generally used to refer to a wide-ranging negative attitude towards a specific sex (Powell & Graves, 2003) but finer distinctions have been made in terms of sexism. Glick and Fiske (1996; 1999) differentiate between hostile and benevolent sexism and their studies show that men tend to display a greater tendency towards accepting hostile sexism where women are more likely to accept benevolent sexism (Glick, Fiske, Mladinic, Saiz, Abrams, Masser et al., 2000). Some authors choose to distinguish between old-fashioned and modern sexism with the former being more blatant and hostile and the latter a denial of the existence of sex segregation and resentment towards any person wanting to show that segregation exists (Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995). Where old fashioned or hostile sexism is no longer seen as acceptable in the social sphere, modern or benevolent sexism still seems to exist in organisations. Thus women still report discrimination and sexism in the workplace. They report being treated with less respect, that they are not taken seriously, that they feel they must work harder to achieve and that they do not receive equal pay for equal work (Morrison, et al., 1987; Wentling, 1996). Some women report working for superiors who do not believe in advancing women (Wentling, 1996). It is almost as if a woman must prove to her superiors that she is not a 'typical woman' in order for her to be advanced into higher ranks. She must prove that she is tougher than most women, that she has more traditional masculine characteristics but

must also be careful not to become too macho as this would hamper her chances of success (Morrison et al., 1987). Thus there seems to be contradictory expectations: be strong but not too much, be independent but don't be too demanding, be autonomous but also follow others' advice (Morrison et al., 1987).

Traditional gender stereotypes also influence the work sphere in that when women seem to be able to move into positions they could not before, the power and the status of the feminised position diminishes. The income associated with this position also seems to diminish (Richter & Griesel, 1999). It seems that there is a cultural tendency to devalue traits traditionally associated with women and female dominated positions often utilise female-associated skills such as nurturing and reliance on interpersonal relations (Jacobs, 1999). This often creates what is referred to as the dual labour market phenomenon (Murrell, 2001). In this dual market the primary market is mostly dominated by men and secures better status and higher pay. The secondary market is dominated by women and minorities and involves lower status and lower earnings. There is little movement between the two markets, thus this dual market system is another structural barrier that hampers career advancement. It is interesting that change in the availability of jobs changes the gender stereotypes associated with them thus scarcity is also an influencing factor. The fewer people available for a position, the more likely that management will consider women as suitable candidates (Murrell, 2001).

Another way in which stereotypes seem to influence the workplace is in the assumptions about successful women. Successful women seem to be seen in a negative light. This factor can deter other women from seeking promotion. Women who are aggressive in the workplace are also frequently criticised for trying to act and become like men (Charles & Davies, 2000).

Stone (1995) is of the opinion that a wider and more comprehensive view should be taken with regards to the social aspects of segregation at work. Here, the view is that aspects such as social control or other mechanisms of segregation are linked in a broader sense to the functioning of patriarchy. This theory of patriarchy postulates that there is considerable effort by men to prevent women's entry into occupations or to push out women who gain entry, and to devalue female dominated occupations and

to deprive women of authority in the workplace. This perspective argues for a more explicit feminist approach to the issue of women and work (Stone, 1995).

Economic theory: Constructing the neutral market.

Some theorists argue that macro-level features of the economy influence factors such as equality, wage inequality and polarised wage structures and that gender based differentiation is linked to these broader economic structures in a more fundamental way than is sometimes accepted or suspected (Roos & Gatta, 1999). Although economic theory does not really fall in the scope of this study, some of the ideas stemming from economic theories will be discussed briefly in order to relate them to other explanatory and descriptive systems.

Traditional market theories such as the human capital theory states that men and women are equal substitutes and if their human capital is equal (in terms of levels of education, experience) they will have equal capacity and possibility (Mencken & Winfield, 2000). It states that women and men make rational choices to maximise their lifetime earnings and that these choices are not influenced by other factors such as social pressures (Jacobs, 1999). It also assumes that human capital investments such as education and sound career decisions would result in similar results for men and women (Stroh, Brett & Reilly, 1992) and that discrimination would be eradicated by the pressures of the market (Jacobs, 1999). In general it can be said that economic theory assumes a neutral and rational market (Jacobs, 1999; Mencken & Winfield, 2000) and that it states that differences between groups would be the result of the supply-side of the market economy chain, in other words that sex segregation is the result of differences between women and men (in aspects such as career choices, educational level and commitment). This theory constructs the market as neutral and male-female difference could then be attributed to general lower investment, in education, for example. Jacobs (1989) points out that this is not the case with his studies, which indicate that there is no empirical basis for this notion and that there does not seem to be a gender-based difference in the level of education attained between men and women in organisations. He expands on this idea by stating that the educational levels of men and women are generally similar in many societies but that similarity does not translate into similar levels of advancement. In his view, the education of women should not be seen as an attempt to create equality but rather as

rooted in the largely Protestant conception of the companionate marriage, the notion that husbands and wives should be friends and companions. This idea considers marriage to be a matter of individual choice and not social arrangement. Here, it is important for the wife to have a similar educational level in order to make it possible for her to share aspects of the husband's life. In this way, education becomes a way of attaining or keeping status. Thus education of women can be seen as for the improvement of marriages instead of a mechanism to improve women's positions in society.

This notion of a neutral market is contradicted by the work of Dreher and Cox (2000) which postulates that the dynamics of external labour markets may very well favour one group over another and that this could be the cause of the continuing differences in levels of compensation. In their study of white and non-white, male and female employees with MBA qualifications, they found that only the white male employees had a good chance of improving their salary when moving or changing organisations. The suggestion here is that men and women do not benefit equally from external labour market strategy.

The human capital theory also explains the wage gap by referring to the compensating differential, the idea that a lower wage is often compensated for by another benefit. The main thrust of this argument is that women receive other benefits from their positions and that they trade more pleasant working environments for a lower wage (Mencken & Winfield, 2000). The psychological contract theory attempts to explain this by referring to a psychological contract where women trade cash for family responsive benefits. This theory suggests an equal labour market economy and attributes gender differences to this contract. Jacobs and Steinberg (1995) state that the notion of the compensating differential, though quite central and accepted, is not supported by evidence. In fact, their analysis of the situation is that unpleasant working conditions and tasks often lower the wage instead of having the opposite effect. This theory would also hold that external markets would necessarily pay more than internal markets (marketing and promoting from within) (Dreher & Cox, 2000). Yet when male and female employees are tracked, this does not seem to be the case. This points to some discrimination in external markets (Brett & Stroh, 1997). Dreher and Cox (2000) show that the market economy responds differently to non-white men

too, not only to women. This research moves the emphasis away from an individual and psychological focus into a more sociological idea of discrimination. This discrimination can be explained by factors such as the format of search firms with databases which under-represent women as well as being connected to more male networks than female ones.

Social networks.

More sociological approaches, like the social network theory, describe the current status quo as a sociological process of discrimination. Here, social networks are seen as fundamental in career matters. Being part of a social network provides information on available career opportunities and knowing someone inside a system can also make more information available such as expectations and salary ranges (Dreher & Cox, 2000). People who share core identities such as gender or race are more likely to form informal ties and informal social networks. Given the white male dominance of the managerial core, it would be safe to assume that women and non-white men are at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to having information on issues such as salary ranges and structures, giving them less power in salary negotiations. These factors also play a role in the bargaining process which might be different when dealing with different groups. According to Dreher and Cox (2000), managers might be less willing to bargain with members of social groups that are different to them and might take a harder stance in negotiations.

Thus the importance of social networks emerges in terms of career path as it influences many aspects of the process. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, studies show that women tend to have kin-related and men have more work-centred networks (Powell & Graves, 2003). This translates into men generally having more high-status networks than women. These different networks can be seen as a result of the different socio-structural locations that men and women tend to occupy. Thus women have less information, more difficulty in forming alliances, resulting in fewer opportunities and a network disadvantage in the process of job searching (Brett & Stroh, 1997; Mencken & Winfield, 2000).

Jacobs and Steinberg (1995), discuss the tension between a sociological approach to work and an economic approach to work. Economic theory, according to them, tends

to deem the economy as efficient and it views differences between groups as resulting from differences in ability and skill. From this point of view, discrimination cannot exist, or at least, continue to exist. Jacobs and Steinberg (1995) consider a number of other factors in the social/sociological domain to be influential in the creation and maintenance of differences between groups. Aspects such as the interdependence of workers, the prevalence of long-term employment relationships, power relations, institutional inertia and the gendered nature of some institutions are all considered to be important. In other words, the social context and the interpersonal and relational aspects of work are considered fundamental in the creation and maintenance of social systems and cultural and social matters from part of this picture and are active in the choices people make but also the way in which people have to adapt to situations. They use the metaphor of an auction to illustrate this and to explain that it is not a simple matter of 'sold to the highest bidder' as traditional economic theory would hold but rather a more complex process involving factors located in a history, time and place.

Social control.

Jacobs (1989; 1995; 1999) proposes an explanatory model of social control in an attempt to shed more light on the intricacies of the social processes involved. He explains the persistence of sex segregation as the result of mechanisms of social control. From his perspective, gender socialisation is the first stage of this social control but it is not enough to maintain the status quo in terms of sex segregation. Sex-role socialisation begins early in life through parental role models, school and media influence, stereotyping in textbooks and other educational material as well as vocational guidance processes (Jacobs, 1999). Despite this, Jacobs mentions that the link between socialisation and career outcome is not as direct as is sometimes suspected as there are other factors that complicate the process. Jacobs finds adequate evidence to state that occupational aspirations are not fixed and that they tend to change in individuals over time. The second stage is the segregation of the educational system but he mentions that there is still enough mobility at tertiary level, therefore this system is not sufficient to maintain it either. The third stage is then the labour force where there is some mobility too, with women entering male-dominated fields or being employed in sex neutral or female dominated fields. Thus the process of social control is paradoxical, allowing some individual or micro mobility but

maintaining a macro system of lifelong segregation due to a combination of social forces: “Individuals move, but the system remains segregated” (Jacobs, 1989, p.10). The process begins in the early years with socialisation but extends into adulthood with “various discriminatory processes on the job” (p.187). Social control is thus a complex lifelong process not supported by a single institutionalised version of segregation but by the interplay of such systems together. From this perspective, the process is not one of cumulative disadvantage but rather of revolving doors where there is movement and mobility but also stagnant systems. From early childhood socialisation, from subtle pressures to choose female-appropriate positions to harsher practices of discrimination, there is a subtle and complex process of social control which assumes free choice within a free market system (Jacobs, 1999).

Jacobs (1989; 1999) proposes that it is a combination of historical discrimination, implicit contracts and workplace interactions that limit opportunities for change. A history of discrimination will imply that families invest more in those who would achieve the highest economic stature. Thus if school-aged women see that there are certain limitations in specific areas, they will probably not attempt entry into those areas and will also be less likely to receive support (economic or emotional) from their family to pursue such a career (Jacobs, 1999). The self-perpetuating nature of discrimination creates feedback loops from current to future segregation and Jacobs considers social movements, such as the women’s movement, as possible instruments of change in the residues of discriminatory practice. In the workplace itself, implicit contracts are an additional factor. Employers are motivated by the need to reap long-term rewards from their investments, thus there is an implicit contract in terms of length of employment, where firms are hesitant to make changes to the work arena that will result in changes to the willingness of employees to stay loyal to the organisation. Thus short-term wage minimisation is not always the most efficient if it will result in loyalty changes and demoralisation in existing employees. In other words, discriminatory practices might continue in the workplace, despite an economic force that drives in the opposite direction. Cheaper labourers (the victims of discrimination) are not always the most economic for the organisation if the morale and peace in the workplace is disturbed by it, thus changing the implicit length-of-employment contract and causing sizable financial losses resulting from workers leaving organisations. The economic and social drivers can be in opposition here,

making the simple economic route less desirable. The last factor that Jacobs (1989) proposes that keeps discriminatory practices intact is the necessity for co-operation between employees. Here again, the importance of the inter-related social aspects of work is considered. New workers can only function efficiently if they have access to the informal information systems and if they have co-operative colleagues. Male workers can then have influence in terms of who is hired and who stays. Thus, Jacobs is of the firm opinion that the economic notion that discrimination and a competitive market are incompatible is highly questionable and that there are many factors, more social than economic, that influence a simple relationship between market economy and discrimination.

Work and family.

Women's position in the family is often seen as a contributing factor to the existing patterns of gender segregation. Their responsibility for child care and other household tasks as well as interruption of careers is often used by some conservative economists and employers to defend the current status quo and argue that women cannot be fully committed to their work responsibilities. It is interesting to note that female-dominated occupations are populated by women who also bear family and household responsibilities, making the argument that women are not proper workers seem strange, given that they manage to maintain female dominated occupations such as teaching and nursing (Jacobs, 1989).

Many studies show that few couples develop an egalitarian relationship when it comes to the division of domestic and childcare duties and that women are often left with a double-day in which they are required to perform paid work and unpaid work (Alvesson & Billig, 1997; Gilbert & Kearney, 2006; Jacobs & Gerson, 2001; Linehan & Walsh, 2000; Nordenmark, 2002). The division of domestic labour is often such that the role of the husband is to help out instead of carrying a part of the responsibility. This is also the case in developing countries and Hendriks and Green (2000) point out that women in developing countries tend to be primarily responsible for household and childrearing tasks and that their financial positions have an impact on their ability to negotiate these tasks and duties.

In most cases there is economical inequality in dual career couples and it is a general tendency in marital relationships that the husband earns more than the wife thus the career of the woman is seen as secondary to the husband's and is usually less lucrative and prestigious (Cook, 1993; Gilbert & Kearney, 2006). Some theorists argue that the family member who provides the highest income for the family will have the highest level of power in the family. The person who earns less (generally the woman) will typically be placed in situations where they have to make sacrifices such as relocations for the other's career. Gilbert and Kearney (2006) note that traditional cultural norms about women and men's roles still influence dual career couples particularly in terms of prioritising male careers over female careers and also in terms of traditional views of motherhood and fatherhood. This is partly why some radical feminist writers consider that the family is the major site of oppression since most ideas of egalitarianism and equality fall away in the face of the practical organisation of the home front and daily living (Jacobs, 1989). Jacobs and Gerson (2001) indicate that men's work commitments have remained relatively stable and also that their domestic involvement has not increased enough to counterbalance women's rising work commitments. The increased work demands on women are coupled with increasing demands for intensive mothering.

Many researchers have attempted to gain more insight into this phenomenon. Harris (2004) and Greenhaus and Parasuraman (1999) note that much of the early research into this topic dealt with conflict between work and family as a unidirectional process where involvement in one area made it more difficult to be involved in another. Later studies started considering the process as reciprocal in nature and also considered the possibility of positive spill over (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999). Hochschild (1997) used the notion of the "time-bind" as a description of the demands of family life and the workplace. She describes how work and family obligations are perceived to be out of control and that there is a need for greater work-life balance. She illustrates how the home has become a place of many demands too and that the borders between family and work have become even more permeable. She discusses extended working hours because of the Internet as well as organisations' attempts to keep workers at work for longer by providing benefits such as free snacks, music and other comforts such as gymnasiums.

Suggestions are then made to reduce the experience of work-family conflict that include organisational work-life balancing programmes and flexitime arrangements in organisations. Harris (2004) notes that these interventions seem to have limited success. Tausig and Fenwick (2001) warn that alternate work schedules or flexible job schedules do not necessarily bring relief from the time-bind. What is interesting about these studies is that the gendered nature of these difficulties is often not considered and that organisational interventions are considered as neutral and available to everyone. I will return to this later in the section on organisational culture.

Reflections on studies of societal processes.

From research concentrating on societal processes, it seems that one can differentiate three general areas of focus: developments in the societal sphere (such as stereotypes, discrimination, devaluing of the feminine and the gendered nature of social networks), development in economic forces (such as the human capital theory) and a more personal focus on the interface between work and family. Studies focusing on societal processes tend to construct the problem as a matter of social process and pattern and views individual behaviour as a result of these processes. Possible injustices are seen as the result of these processes and it is interesting to note that there is a general sense of neutrality in these processes. Discrimination and stereotypes are not considered in terms of the power relations involved but more in terms of neutral players in a social field which acquires certain characteristics as it goes along. Economic theory tends to construct the market as basically fair and neutral and considers the status quo as a result of problems in the supply side of the market chain, in other words, the employees themselves. Studies focusing more on the interface of the personal and the social, the family, tend to construct the problem as a result of current difficulties of interface between the family and the workplace. These studies then often resort to suggestions of changes in workplace policies, with the assumption that changes in policy will lead to changes in structure. There is still a clear absence of reflection on the impact of power relations and how these might keep the status quo intact despite changes in policy.

Organisational and Institutional Processes

Moving on to the third area of focus, a focus on the organisation, reveals a different way of conceptualising the problem. Where the individual focus renders a picture of

internal matters and dynamics that can or need to be modified, and a focus on social processes describes the problem as the function of systems interacting, an organisational focus explores the organisation as system and site of examination and intervention. Studies in this area assume that it is not individual, internal factors or broad social processes that are useful in understanding this phenomenon but rather investigations into the nature and structure of organisations themselves. As such, the study of Stroh et al. (1992) on the career progression of men and women in the Fortune 500 companies in the United States found that women's career progression was slower than men's and that internal factors such as career-path choices and level of education/human capital could not be linked to this. They remark: "Perhaps the clearest message from this study is that there is nothing more for women to do. They have done it all and still their salaries lag" (p.258). They conclude by saying: "It is time for corporations to take a closer look at their own behaviour" (p.258).

Studies and theories about this area are not similar and vary greatly in terms of their impressions of the topic. They comprise a range of topics, from organisational demographics to looking at different forms of employee assistance, and consider many points of importance in terms of the structure and functioning of organisations as systems. These studies of the institutional level share the assumption that structural constraints and arrangements outside of individual intervention or control have implications for individual choice (Roos & Gatta, 1999).

Organisational demographics.

Some authors focus on the very basic structural elements in organisations, namely, organisational demographics and proportional representation. They state that the proportional representation of women in organisations has an influence on the culture and experience within those organisations. The more skewed an organisations tends to be in terms of diversity, the more stereotypical the views that emerge will be in terms of the minorities in the organisations. In other words, if there are few women represented in the structures of the organisation, the women who are there will be seen as different and outsiders. Women will be less stereotyped and discriminated against in organisations where there is greater balance in terms of representation (Murrell, 2001). Younger women in more balanced organisations tend to be more geared towards career mobility than women in skewed organisations. Ely (1994)

argues that the demographics of an organisation has an impact on the social identity of its employees and found that women in organisations with many senior women were more likely to think about their own career possibilities and consider their work as relating to advancement in the organisations. She also found that women have better relationships with female colleagues in organisations where there were more women in senior management.

This focus on organisational demographics provides a straightforward description that pictures organisations as gender neutral, within a gender-neutral broader system, containing gender-neutral individuals who are not actively constructing or performing gender. It reminds of the importance of minority experience yet seems to suggest that change is a numbers game and does not speak to the broader issues of power.

Organisational interventions: Mentoring in the workplace.

Studies on mentoring in the workplace often fall in line with the ‘organisational demographics’ line of reasoning with a belief that the absence of enough women in organisations has also led to insufficient mentoring relationships for women. Many authors suggest that there is a strong link between mentoring and career success both in terms of hierarchical advancement and financial gain for men and women and so supportive mentors are seen as a critical element in women’s career advancement (Gilbert & Rossman, 1992; Murrell, 2001; Parker & Kram, 1993; Schor, 1997). Given the difficulties and obstacles many women face in their career paths, mentoring relationships can be seen as a vital aspect to career advancement for women specifically. In a study of male and female senior executives, Schor (1997) found that most of the women who had advanced beyond the glass ceiling had had mentors and acknowledged the importance of informal networks. When discussing mentoring it can be useful to use Kram’s distinction (in Gilbert & Rossman, 1992) between exclusively career focused mentoring and psychosocial mentoring. A career-focused mentor is typically a person who coaches, protects and provides opportunities and challenging responsibilities to younger members of staff. The psychosocial mentor acts as a role model and gives acceptance, good feedback, counselling, friendship and enhances the person’s self esteem and sense of competence (Gilbert & Rossman, 1992; Murrell, 2001). It seems that women face greater barriers when it comes to mentoring, have fewer opportunities for mentors and informal relationships with male

colleagues and often only have access to lower ranking mentors which influences the outcome of the mentoring relationship (Cook, 1993). Sometimes women go outside the division or organisation to locate mentors (Murrell, 2001).

Given the current demographics in many organisations it follows that many mentors today are male and even though this situation can be beneficial it also has several complexities (Gilbert & Rossman, 1992; Parker & Kram, 1993; Schor, 1997). Men may be unaware of their dissimilar treatment of men and women and often do not struggle with the difficulties associated with the integration of work and family (Gilbert & Rossman, 1992). A cross-sex mentoring dyad is often more visible in organisations and this could lead to male mentors having higher standards for female protégés but also to a reluctance to mentor females as such a relationship is sexualised by other co-workers (Gilbert & Rossman, 1992). Yet women mentoring women, a seemingly obvious solution to this problem, also has difficulties of its own (Parker & Kram, 1993). Although it might seem easy for women to establish networks with their peers, some findings suggest that it seems that relationships between junior and senior women are not as easy to establish (Parker & Kram, 1993). Parker and Kram (1993) offer an interesting psychodynamic interpretation of the unique features that complicate mentoring relationships between women. They see unconscious fears of a possible mother-daughter relationship as a repellent of female mentoring relationships. Senior women stem from a different generation and often had to choose between family and career. Younger women might fear that the older women might not understand that they do not want to make that choice. The issue of career and family is a sensitive issue but of pertinent importance to women in the workplace. Yet a discussion of this can lead women to feel vulnerable and the anticipation of such uncomfortable discussions might lead senior and junior women to avoid mentoring relationships with women. Because senior women had to fight extra hard to get into their positions, mentoring can also be seen as an extra burden they cannot take on or too much of a risk as they could feel that they cannot afford for their protégés to fail (Parker & Kram, 1993). The dynamics of splitting, pairing and negative stereotyping, as described by Kanter (in Parker & Kram, 1993) also add to women's reluctance for female mentoring relationships. Splitting takes place when organisations oversimplify and label different women as complete opposites (successful/unsuccessful, tough/kind, reserved/outgoing). Such labels can undermine the person who receives

the negative pole of the two opposites. These labelled women will struggle to get mentors if they are junior, and senior women would not attract any junior women to mentor. Pairing involves treating women as undifferentiated units and women may avoid female mentoring relationships in order to escape the label of an undifferentiated dyad. The negative stereotypes often associated with successful, senior women sometimes also repel junior women from choosing them as mentors (Parker & Kram, 1993).

Given all these difficulties Gilbert and Rossman (1992) still argue for the development of female-female mentoring relationships. They claim that these relationships can be invaluable in the process of self-definition that young women are engaged in. The mentor can provide other images and destinies to strive for and female mentors can become new role models for junior women. They state that women mentors can be beneficial on the interpersonal level with mutual enhancement and empowerment (the psychosocial mentoring) but also conclude that male mentors may be more effective when it comes to career-mentoring in providing opportunities for younger employees. This is largely due to the fact that men still have more power to influence the structures of organisations.

Where do the mentoring studies leave us? With no clear answer or picture and perhaps somewhat baffled by the fact that seemingly simple solutions (such as female-female mentoring relationships) do not tend to provide the answers. In my opinion it reflects the complex, intrinsic, embedded and unaware events that gender our lives in organisations. In a way, these studies contribute towards creating images of complexity where their original questions reflect an understanding of the gendered nature of organisations; their results tend to show that power relations operate in more intricate ways than expected.

Organisational interventions: Career counselling and assessment.

Another intervention strategy that is used to improve the situation in organisations is career counselling and assessment. It can be a valuable tool to enhance equality in organisations by monitoring the career paths of employees and providing intervention where necessary. Feminist scholars point out that the practice of gender neutral career counselling can do more damage than good. They point out that models of career

development should explicitly recognise the importance of gender in the careers of women whether it is in the choice of career, the career development or career advancement as well as the socio-cultural conditions in which women function (Forrest & Brooks, 1993; Juntunen, 1996; McMahon & Patton, 2002). This is in line with a broader trend in career theory to become more contextualised by taking issues such as identity, diversity and social-exclusion into account (Collin, 2006). Models that do not reflect how women are expected to merge the domain of work and family are not adequate descriptions (Cook, 1993). Women's career problems should not be seen as the result of intrapsychic processes or pathology but rather due to the patriarchal work context that women find themselves in and the gender role prescriptions that are encouraged. These prescriptions (like attending to the needs of others, not expressing negative emotions and self neglect) play a negative role in women's career advancement. Women's difficulties should be seen as adaptive responses to societal oppression (Forrest & Brooks, 1993). Within this, it is also important to consider the unique situations of individuals and the fact that men also receive very little support for lifestyles considered as alternative (Cook, 1993). Career assessment models that fail to recognise diversity can unknowingly contribute to the status quo and be part of the oppressive practices and structures.

As such, Forrest and Brooks (1993) argue for the use of gender role analysis which shows how social and cultural forces are helping to shape women's career paths. It aims at understanding how a person has internalised gender role stereotypes and to what extent they are reflected in the person's strengths and weaknesses. The underlying assumption is that the political forces have negatively affected all women and that most women will be oblivious to these effects. They also take note of the many career barriers that can exist such as stereotyping, institutionalised sexism, discrimination and undervaluing of women's inputs. For them, it is also important to determine to what extent these external barriers have become internalised and then trace them to external sources to show clients the relation between external factors and their issues.

Career assessment strategies should then include attention to the client's capacity for emotional and economic independence; the degree of abuse and discrimination the woman was exposed to; and the woman's understanding of the relationship between

personal and social issues. It is therefore important to analyse personal problems in the context of larger groups, focusing on the common influences of the social and political, assessing the power dynamics in the workplace and society, highlighting the working together of women and focusing on solutions that create change through social action (Forrest & Brooks, 1993).

Failure to enquire about critical issues and abuses that affect women's lives or "errors of omission" continues the status quo and inadvertently amounts to further abuse. In the career area counsellors should be on the lookout for subtle, blatant or chronic discrimination; inadequate division of household and home responsibilities; sexual harassment; economic dependence and the advancement of the husband's career to the detriment of the wife's (Forrest & Brooks, 1993). Because the nature of women's distress is mostly political, career counselling cannot be done only on an individual basis. Solutions require social and political knowledge and action and political agendas to address the common problems women face in the workplace (Forrest & Brooks, 1993; Juntunen, 1996). The gendered nature of the work environment should also be taken into consideration by preparing both men and women who choose gender-atypical careers for the problems that they might face (Cook, 1993). The developments in career theory towards more awareness of contextual and political factors change the construction of organisational processes from neutral to embedded in power and complex interpersonal processes.

Sexual harassment: Dealing with hostile work environments.

A general focus on and awareness of sexual harassment in the workplace is mostly an attempt to eradicate or eliminate one of the substantial obstacles that women can face in working environments. Sexual harassment in the form of sexual remarks, sexual coercion and intimidation remains prevalent in the public and private work spheres (Bowes-Sperry & Tata, 1999; Gilbert & Kearney, 2006; Gross-Schaefer, Florsheim & Pannetier, 2003; Murrell, 2001; Sev'er, 1999). Defining sexual harassment is not a simple matter but acts are generally considered as harassment when they involve unwanted sexual attention, create discomfort and threaten well-being or performance (mental, physical or emotional). A wide range of behaviours from verbal abuse, jokes, leering, touching or any unnecessary contact to sexual assault and rape can be considered to be harassment. These behaviours are sometimes accompanied by a

threat of retaliation or actual retaliation if the person does not comply (Sev'er, 1999). Gender harassment, hostile or insulting behaviours to member of a specific sex, without the purpose of sexual cooperation, is also considered to be sexual harassment. The term ambient sexual harassment is used in a wider context, not involving person to person contact, if a group and its environment leads to frequent sexually harassing behaviours.

Feminist scholars consider it to be a means of subordination and discrimination and that it is based on a belief of male superiority and female inability to achieve (Gilbert & Kearney, 2006; Sev'er, 1999). It can hamper career advancement by creating a hostile working environment and there are still many incidents of sexual harassment that go unreported due to fear of retribution (Murrell, 2001). The effects of sexual harassment may include isolation from other colleagues and networks and quitting (Murrell, 2001). It can also influence productivity with employees being late or producing poor quality work thus costing companies in absenteeism, low productivity and turnover (Gross-Schaefer, Florsheim & Pannetier, 2003). It also has an impact on the victim's physiological or psychological health as well as the attitudes toward and experiences of other workers in the organisation (Bowes-Sperry & Tata, 1999).

Reporting sexual harassment often seems unwise as the disadvantages of reporting outweigh the advantages in most cases (Sev'er, 1999). Studies suggest that marginality, low-status, non-traditional female occupation, youth and marital status (being single) are all factors that increase vulnerability to sexual harassment. Women of colour are also more vulnerable (Murrell, 2001; Sev'er, 1999). Proportional representation of women in the workplace is important as sexual harassment can be more likely to occur in environments where gender roles spill into the workplace and change work-related roles and male dominated environments are more susceptible to this. Traditional male sexuality is then incorporated into the workplace where women are seen as sex objects and their behaviour is interpreted from this perspective (Murrell, 2001; Sev'er, 1999). Traditionally male dominated environments such as the police, army, navy and fire-fighters report higher rates of sexual harassment with blue collar workers reporting more than white-collar workers in male environments (Grüber, 1998). The legal case of women against the Ford Motor Company, where the firm was forced to admit that female employees should not be subjected to obscene

graffiti, verbal or physical abuse, and agreed to increase the number of women in supervisory positions to curb this situation, illustrates the proposition that male dominated environments increase the likelihood of sexual harassment (Gross-Schaefer et al., 2003). The workplace climate is also shown as important here, where a tolerance of harassment and lack of commitment of organisational leaders and officials also has an impact on sexual harassment incidences. This also affects victims' choices in terms of reporting the event or not (Grüber, 1998).

Workplace sexuality seems to be an inseparable or inextricable part of the working environment and workplace dating continues despite the risks associated with it. The workplace often provides a context for meaningful relationships, with consistent encounters providing opportunity to develop trust and intimacy, and to relate with people who share similar interests and skills. With increased stress and longer working hours the workplace often becomes the only place to meet people and high stress levels can also lead to lower emotional restrictions and defences. Workplace sexual encounters are also linked to defiance against the organisation (Gross-Schaefer et al., 2003). Sexuality in the workplace comprises a complicated system of communication, with many sexual symbols ranging from entertainment to harassment being sent in the workplace. When extramarital relationships develop in the workplace they are rarely secret and can lead to both dysfunction in the workplace and sometimes ultimately to divorce. In most cases of workplace romantic involvements the woman is seen as part of the problem and this often also influences the perception of sexual harassment claims (Finemore, 1996).

Feminist organisational theories.

Most dominant organisational theories consider developments within organisations as the result of the characteristics and demands of the labour process. The perspective is a neutral or gender blind one that is silent about the societal inequalities between the sexes and focuses on the functional demands of the workplace as if uninformed by other societal processes. Thus dominant organisational theory presents an inadequate explanation on the matter of the gender division of labour in the workplace (Benschop, et al., 2001; Alvesson & Billig, 1997). Feminist organisational theories offer a different perspective on the matter.

The liberal feminist perspective points to the structure of organisations as a causal factor of the gendered division of labour. Aspects such as lack of organisational opportunities, sex stereotyping, the glass ceiling and few mentors and available networks are all listed as contributing factors. Equal opportunities measures such as affirmative action are advocated as possible solutions to the problem. The liberal feminist perspective criticises any distinction or discrimination based on a group characteristic such as ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation and others. The focus on equal opportunities implies an acceptance of the hierarchical nature of organisations and accepts the need for a hierarchical division of labour. A liberal feminist orientation also involves a strong notion of agency and aims to enable people to change structures and organisations (Benschop, et al., 2001).

The socialist feminist perspective describes organisational inequalities as the result of the subordination of women in a patriarchal, capitalist society. The gendered division of labour is seen as a continuation of the split between the public and private that results in a structure where men and women also do different jobs in the workplace. The organisation is a reproduction of the gendered substructures and also produces individual identities. Socialist feminism aims for the restructuring of society in general and also calls for the restructuring of organisations and is not content with the notion of minorities gaining access to the scarce resources. The idea of hierarchy and division of labour is questioned and maximum participation of employees is advocated. The socialist perspective focuses on structure and agency, aiming to provide possibilities for people but at the same time acknowledging the social structure that underlies and influences the division of labour (Benschop, et al., 2001).

The postmodern feminist perspective places the emphasis on constructions of social gender and does not accept the division of labour as a result of the reality or 'nature' of organisations but rather looks into the plural and complex ways in which social identities are constructed. Benschop et al. (2001) consider the postmodern position to be of limited value in changing social realities and organisations as any effort at emancipation would involve a liberal position of privileging one position over another.

A feminist social closure perspective states that sex differences in organisational and labour markets are the result of patriarchal practices that have become institutionalised. Careers and organisations are considered to be gendered and cultural beliefs and traditional stereotypes influence the perception of the skills of women and men respectively thus influencing aspects such as hiring and promotion creating formal and informal barriers. According to this theory, many processes that seem to be sex-neutral are actually influenced strongly by sex and maintain the status quo. Informal networks are an example of this (Mencken & Winfield, 2000).

Organisational culture.

Theorising organisational culture often starts with a focus on demographics, moving on to the symbolic and discursive. At their most basic, these theories focus on managerial and organisational cultures and see most managerial cultures as male as they involve characteristics traditionally associated with men: the ability to manage, control and exert authority. These characteristics are not only valued but also rewarded in organisations (Gatenby & Humphries, 1999). This culture marginalises women and some men. A whole range of stereotypical masculine characteristics that are often not essential for the job have become identified with management. There is emphasis on competitiveness, preoccupation with individual power and even sexual aggressiveness and aggressive language (Cook, 1993). The focus is on aggressive competition, the suppression of emotions and the need to show commitment with long hours and mobility, all actions that were traditionally seen as appropriate for men. The show of commitment through long hours and mobility often hinges on a lack of responsibilities on the home front or elsewhere and the presence of a partner to take care of these responsibilities (Charles & Davies, 2000).

From this perspective, when senior managers are overwhelmingly male, the social culture is also male, with conversations revolving around sport and technology and social activities geared in the same direction. Male networks and male-only clubs for senior management add to this effect. Informal male networks and mentoring exist in organisations and it is very difficult for women to get into these networks, partly because friendships between men and women in the workplace are misinterpreted (Charles & Davies, 2000; Wentling, 1996). This ‘old boys’ network’ usually involves the development of informal networks and relationships outside of the work context

for example on the golf course (Schor, 1997). Seeing that it is difficult for women to enter into these informal networks they mostly engage in networks that happen in the work context (Schor, 1997). The existence of male only networks has implications for mentoring in organisations as mentoring often takes place on an informal basis and is related to the networks and social structures. In a study of middle management women by Wentling (1996) most of the women report on the importance of mentoring to their career paths and describe their mentors as very significant in providing feedback, opportunities, advice, acknowledgement and encouragement.

The focus on organisational culture instead of demographics points to a different picture. Where much of the previous research mentioned tends towards gender-neutrality, this theory states that some processes in the organisation are basically gendered and that the underlying gendered structure has ramifications even if they are not always clearly visible.

The masculine substructure of organisations.

The modern world continues to spawn organizations which ... make total claims on their members and which attempt to encompass within their cycle the whole personality. These might be called *greedy institutions*, insofar as they seek exclusive and undivided loyalty and they attempt to reduce the claim of competing roles and status positions on those they wish to encompass with their boundaries. Their demands on the person are omnivorous (Coser in Maier 1999, p. 69).

More detailed theories on the nature and structure of organisational culture are seen in the following conceptions: the masculine substructure of organisations (Acker, 1992); corporate masculinity (Maier, 1999) and the gender subtext of the organisation (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998).

Joan Acker described the important notion of the masculine substructure of organisations in the much cited chapter entitled *Gendering Organizational Theory* (Acker, 1992). In this publication she formulates the organisation as not gender neutral but in fact, gendered in its very nature. She stated that “gender may be deeply hidden in organizational processes and decisions that appear to have nothing to do with gender” (Acker, 1992, pp.251-252). According to her, organisations are

fundamentally gendered in the sense that “advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action, emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine” (Acker, 1992, p. 251). Acker describes the production of this masculine substructure of the organisation in terms of four processes. The first involves the production of gender divisions by means of structural arrangements such as allocation of personnel in hierarchical positions but also in the composition of jobs and tasks allocated to specific positions. The second process involves the creation of symbols, images and forms of consciousness that explicate and justify these divisions. These symbols and images assist in creating the perceptions of what is considered normal, desirable and inappropriate. The third process is the interaction between individuals, women and men, which enact dominance and subordination and create alliances and exclusions which permeate work activities. The fourth is the internal mental processes of individuals as they construct their interpretation and meaning of what is appropriate in terms of gender. This is derived from the explicit and implicit norms and rules that define what is considered gender appropriate behaviour. These understandings are typically translated into actions and behaviour which are in accordance with these ideas and are considered to be gender appropriate (Acker, 1992; Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998).

Martin (2006) reflects further on the dynamics of engendering the organisation and distinguishes between two ways of constructing or performing gender. She refers to practising gender, the literal practising of gender by means of actions in time and space, and gender practices, the cultural practices available with which to ‘do gender’. The literal practice of gender involves the ways in which gender is performed in terms of dress, talk, behaviour and many other means. Many of these gendered actions are performed consciously in our attempts to behave in gender-appropriate ways but many also happen out of the awareness. The cultural gender practices involve the repertoire of behaviour available to us, in other words potential actions. Martin contends that both these processes happen in a non-reflexive manner and that well-meaning people can practise gender in harmful ways by not being aware of practising gender. Sexism then happens in more subtle forms and goes unnoticed by those who do not experience the brunt of it.

Acker (1992) points out how the gendered substructure lies in spatial and temporal arrangements, the conventions that define workplace behaviour and the link between workplace and home behaviours. There is a central underlying understanding in organisations that work is separate from the rest of one's life, particularly the home life, and that being successful in an organisation depends on one's ability to fit into this picture. The resulting assumption from this is that most women do not fit in as they are not exempt from outside responsibilities that interfere. The irony about this is that organisations depend on this division of outside/inside responsibilities and that it requires and demands workers who has someone to take care of the outside life. Acker also emphasises the danger of assuming that processes and practices are neutral where there is an invisible substructure which is far from gender neutral. In her view, the wider question should be addressed, namely the privileging of economy over life or production over reproduction. This is a basic tension which underlies and informs much of what happens in organisational processes (Acker 1992; 1998).

Maier (1999) continues with Acker's idea of the masculine substructure, or what he terms to be corporate masculinity. He tends to take a more cultural feminist approach on the matter. He agrees with Acker (1992) on the idea of a fundamental masculine structure and substructure and considers it as part of the deep-rooted cultural structure, a specific worldview and an accepted definition of success. For him it as a matter of questioning and reflecting on these basic assumptions, rather than trying to fit into a system of which the assumptions are questionable. In his view, the industrialisation of society created a bureaucratic social order which is grounded on the norms and values traditionally associated with men. This means that for women to enter into this world means entering a masculine world and adopting the male worldview and behaviour. He describes it as a sort of cross-dressing required by women. His view is that women and men grow up and live in a society that creates greater status and worth for men and creates different systems, structures and values for each gender. These societal differences result in differences in interpersonal relations, ways of thinking, ethical frameworks, basically some fundamental differences between men and women. Yet despite these differences, the organisation is set up according to the male norm and value. According to him, society constructs men and women to function according to different intra- and interpersonal processes but organisations require and favour the male worldview (Maier, 1999).

On the intrapersonal level, he refers to differences in view of self and independence. He states that the female system requires women to maintain relationships and take note of the needs of others. This is in stark contrast to the view of the successful leader of whom ultimate independence is required. He notes that it is ironic that in order for men to achieve such independence at work, they probably need someone at home to take care of interpersonal and relational activities for them (Maier, 1999). He also mentions the concept of motivation, which has received much attention in organisations, and states that it is based largely on the Maslowian notion of self-actualisation as the highest possible human need. From a different (more cultural feminist) perspective, other aspects such as affiliation and mutual reinforcement might be higher in the hierarchy for women. Another aspect of the intrapersonal level that is discussed is the view of organisational commitment. Here he discusses organisations' tendency to want absolute loyalty from workers who do not have to respond to other claims. The current day still makes this kind of loyalty available to men where it is often not the case for women. Organisations still rely heavily on the fact that someone else will take care of non-work demands or what Acker (1998) calls the emphasis on production and the cost of reproduction. Thus women are often viewed as unmotivated or not committed enough to the organisation. Maier (1999) makes the point here that the implementation of organisational policies such as flexitime or on-site childcare are by no means a solution as it accepts the status quo of the demanding organisation instead of establishing a better work/non-work balance and he states that

allowing women to put in long hours of work and to act as though they have no primary responsibilities for family does nothing to challenge the beliefs and values about traditional ways of working or recognize the reality of the interdependence between work and personal lives (Maier, 1999, p. 81).

The unquestioning acceptance of the norm of corporate masculinity does not acknowledge the interdependence between work and family and allows organisations to spill over into the family but not vice versa. It is from this framework that organisations and employers sometimes feel justified in feeling that women must choose between career or marriage and a family but that they cannot have both

(Schwartz, 1989). The last difference that Maier (1999) sees as important is the base for reasoning and decision-making. Here he is referring to the traditional masculine emphasis on instrumental rationality and the resulting exclusion of other factors in decision-making such as intuition, connection or personal experience. The organisation tends to favour such masculine discourse of control and domination over a discourse of connection and interpersonal directives.

The interpersonal domain in organisations also reflects a masculine substructure with an emphasis on a hierarchical communication style which tends to signal status more than establish connections or co-operative relations. This is linked to a view of justice which uses abstract principles in its reasoning and not an ethics of care, generally more linked to female justice systems (Gilligan, 1982; Maier, 1999).

Maier (1999) incorporates Acker's (1992) reference to the reproduction of masculinity by means of images and symbols which display power by referring to the general image of the organisation as a pyramid with the most successful member at the top. Maier (1999) considers other possible images and symbols that can be used and sees the web as a more appropriate or gender inclusive symbol where the language of the team replaces the language of power. This is in contrast to images of power which require of leaders strength, intimidation and force. He notes that it is ironic that women who display these characteristics are generally criticised and marginalised for such behaviour (Maier, 1999).

Maier (1999) makes the important point that the nature and function of corporate masculinity is also to the detriment of men as it is the organisation which is the ultimate beneficiary of this system and not the male or female employee. The system ultimately advances the interest of the organisation and the privileges that men gain are often also at great cost to them. According to Maier (1999) as long as men and women try to fit into the masculine substructure, the system can preserve itself with its dysfunctional consequences for women and men. Thus it is a paradoxical dilemma:

The more we succeed in transforming the gendered substructure of organizations so that men and women of all races can break the glass ceiling and advance to the top, the less important and desirable the objective might

appear. After all, a preoccupation with occupational success is itself a hallmark of a masculinist substructure (Maier, 1999, p. 92).

For Benschop and Doorewaard (1998) it is not sufficient to demonstrate generally invisible subtexts and substructures of organisations but a theoretical viewpoint on power is necessary to explicate the operations of the underlying and often unnoticed structures. They differentiate between manifest power (violence or authority) and latent power (manipulation) and feel that a description of hegemonic power processes is vital to comprehensive understanding of the processes in organisations. The way in which people either use power or are subjected to it in daily activities without being aware of it forms a core part of the organisational structure. The power processes allow certain meanings or ideas to be formed, uttered as commonsense realities, based on consensus. This consensus demands compliance with discourses which legitimise practices that may be advantaging or disadvantaging certain groups or individuals (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998).

Reflections on organisational studies.

When scholars reflect on the nature and structure of the organisation and how it contributes to the gender stratification of the workplace, they explore a number of different avenues. Some authors choose to focus on organisational interventions to improve the situation. In the above section, changing organisational demographics, career assessment and mentoring studies were discussed as examples of different kinds of organisational interventions. Greater awareness of the political emerges in terms of conceptualising sexual harassment and feminist organisational theories aim to undermine gender neutral descriptions of the organisation. Lastly, a discussion of organisational culture and the gendered subtext of organisations bring the invisible and non-reflexive practising of gender into awareness by pointing to how structural arrangements, symbolic practice, real interactions and explicit and implicit norms and rules create organisations with fundamental gender subtexts. These studies show how deep-rooted cultural structures and practices inform the workplace structure and culture. These authors also indicate the importance of tracing the subtle processes of power as they co-determine and influence organisational structures.

Conclusion

This chapter comprises a review of theories and research on the current gendered stratification of the workplace. I chose to structure my review of this extensive body of knowledge by concentrating on the level of focus of the study, in other words whether the research focuses on the individual, societal or organisational as explanatory factor or point of intervention. Each focus area probably reveals a certain world-view and understanding of causality as well as an implication for intervention and transformation of current structures and difficulties. Each of these also implies a specific and distinct construction of the problem.

The individually focused studies tend to construct the problem as a result of internal dynamics and factors. They tend to explore issues such as career choice, career attitude, career preference, job search behaviour, pay satisfaction, career knowledge and self-esteem. Many of these studies also investigate the difference between men and women in terms of the attributes mentioned above. The resulting conclusion is then often one of difference, postulating that women and men differ as individuals engaging with the world of work and that they choose and develop their careers differently due to differences in internal dynamics and characteristics. It is clear that these studies do not take the broader social context into account and that they often refrain from considering the social and political elements of gender and how these elements impact on individuals. The ensuing interventions then take the form of organisational programmes or employee assistance programmes aimed at improving a wide variety of difficulties such as career development, further training and stress management. Some authors then argue that interventions that do not take the broader social context into account can be inefficient and even harmful (Cook, 1993; Marlow et al., 1995; Meyerson, 1998). Choosing the individual as focal point mostly then constructs the problem as a matter of individual and internal attention, almost blaming individual women for what is perceived to be a lack in knowledge, confidence and aspirations.

The studies with societal processes as focal point move the lens to a broader frame, exploring how societal factors influence behaviour. Here, developments in the societal sphere such as stereotypes, discrimination, devaluing of the feminine and the gendered nature of social networks are investigated. The interface between work and

family is also explored as a social factor relating to gender stratification. Economic theory posits that the market is neutral and therefore points the finger back to the individual. The implication of many of these studies is that interventions should be considered in terms of the impact of social processes on individuals and that their behaviour is the result of broader contexts and influences. Yet, many of these studies refrain from addressing the political directly and tend to view social process as neutral systemic patterns and interactions. These studies often lead to suggestions for intervention on the level of organisational policy and tend to assume that the impact of social processes can be changed by transforming policy and legislation.

Studies with an organisational focus vary in terms of their approach. Some consider it as a problem of demographics, basically numbers, and demographics must be changed to lead to transformation. A different approach is also evident in these studies where feminist scholars tend to focus on specific ways in which organisations perpetuate the inequalities of the broader social sphere. They actively call for descriptions that are not gender neutral and that take the political explicitly into account. Other authors choose to focus on the less visible or invisible and symbolic ways in which organisations sustain gendered practices and how current power remains insidious in its operations in organisations, reflecting broader patterns of power. These studies indicate that a change in policy or legislation might not have the desired effect as it does not necessarily make changes on the culturally-rooted structures and the symbolic reconstruction of broader societal processes in organisations.

Following these last authors with their focus on the power of the symbolic and culturally-rooted practices, the importance of meaning, interpretation and the discursive emerges as the next port of call in this journey. The next chapter aims to explore the emergence of the field of organisational discourse as an epistemology and methodology of understanding the complex phenomenon of gender in the workplace.