



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

**A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF GENDERED DISCOURSES OF
SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN IN MIDDLE MANAGEMENT**

by

ANNALIE PAUW

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ABSTRACT

This study is a qualitative exploration of the gendered discourses 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. It is conducted from a social constructionist framework.

The broader South African context is fraught with a contradiction between policy and practice. South Africa's progressive constitution does not erode women's tenuous and vulnerable position as is seen in the high incidence of violence against women, sexual harassment and women's specific vulnerability to and rates of HIV infection. This contradiction is also evident in the labour market where South Africa echoes a global tendency of the continuation of gender stratification in the workplace. This is characterised by 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. This results in continued gender stratification of management and executive management positions. Women make up approximately 50% of the global, economically active population yet they have not been successful in entering the management world with the same proportion.

Using social constructionism and a focus on discourse, this study examines the discursive construction of the gender stratification of the workplace. It starts by exploring how available literature on the topic constructs the problem as related to internal and individual matters, societal and social factors or organisational and institutional processes. It further explores the developments in the field of gender, discourse and organisations.

Interview data from semi-structured interviews with women in middle management are analysed using discourse analysis. Different and contradicting discourses emerge from this analysis illustrating different discourses and associated identity positions available to women. The discourse analysis shows how different and contradicting discourses support the status quo by structuring certain subject positions into desirable explications of femininity but also how these contradictions allow space for

resistance. The study argues that establishing a feminine identity remains vital to participants and that this requires ‘identity footwork’ within complex and contradictory discursive positions.

Key terms:

Social constructionism; feminism, discourse; discourse analysis; gender; women in management; organisational discourse; gender equity in organisations; the discursive construction of gender in organisations; contradiction; gender and identity.

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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.

CHAPTER 4 THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER IN ORGANISATIONS

A number of different frames for understanding the functioning of gender in organisations were discussed in the previous chapter. These explanations ranged from focusing on numbers and demographics, individual characteristics, social processes to a perspective that focuses on the symbolic, often invisible ways in which certain patterns of power construct and organise organisations.

This chapter explores the notion of the symbolic and invisible patterns further in a discussion on the discursive constitution of organisations, focusing first on developments in the field of organisational studies which follow the linguistic turn or interpretive turn (Putnam & Cooren, 2004) and then on specific ways in which organisations are constituted into gendered structures. From this perspective, the gendered nature of organisations is discursively constructed. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of different discourses at work in the construction of gender in organisations.

The Discursive in Organisations

The linguistic turn in the social sciences (as discussed in chapter 2) has also found its way into organisational studies in recent years (Deetz, 2003) and in organisation studies it involves the study of organisations by focusing on the patterns of meaning and discourse in the workplace and the use and significance of language (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000). As such, it incorporates the ideas of social constructionism in terms of viewing knowledge and social structures as co-constructed and rooted in language practices (Hardy, 2004, Heracleous & Barrett, 2001). This has led to the emergence of organisational discourse theory, defined by Hardy (2004) as “the structured collections of texts that bring organisationally related objects into being as they are produced, disseminated and consumed” (p. 416). Organisational discourse theory generally sees institutions as constituted through language and discourse rather than action (Hardy, 2004; Phillips, Lawrence & Hardy, 2004). The discursive is seen as constitutive – as bringing into being “objects of knowledge, categories of social subjects, forms of self, social relationships, and conceptual frameworks” (Hardy, 2004, p. 416). Grant, Michaelson, Oswick and Wailes (2005) define discourse in

organisations as “referring to the practices of talking and writing, the visual representation, and the cultural artefacts which bring organizational related objects into being through the production, dissemination and consumption of texts” (p. 7). In this way, discourse is seen as a strong organising and structuring facet of organisations (Hardy, 2004). The discursive is evident in the textual as it influences ways of talking and also what can be talked about and therefore has an impact on organisational behaviour. It makes certain actions possible and others impossible or costly. Discourse also delimits the knowledge that is available of what can be constructed about these issues (Hardy, 2004; Phillips, Lawrence & Hardy, 2004).

Discourse further forms the basis of how people give account of themselves, to themselves and also to others (Doolin, 2003) and is therefore fundamental in the creation of individual identities in organisations. Identity is here defined as “the individual’s self-understanding as constituted through the regulatory effects of power/knowledge relations” (Dick & Hyde, 2006, p. 549). Identity is the site of struggle of competing discourses and therefore personal identities are not fixed but are constantly negotiated and changed in discourse (Dick & Hyde, 2006; Meriläinen, Tienari, Thomas & Davies, 2004).

Individuals are constituted as subjects through discourses and disciplinary practices and are complicit ... in this construction process, turning themselves into particular kinds of subjects. Identities are mobile sites of contradiction and discontinuity – nodes where various discourses temporarily intersect in particular ways (Meriläinen et al., 2004, p. 544).

Individuals draw on a range of competing discourses to define and structure their subject positions, what Foucault refers to as technologies of the self (Meriläinen et al., 2004.)

Discourse provides “socially constituted, self-regulating mechanisms that enact institutions and shape individuals’ behaviour” (Phillips, Lawrence & Hardy, 2004, p. 635) and so organisations become self-regulating mechanisms with discourse as the basis of the mechanisms of control and coordination (Doolin, 2003). From a discursive perspective, this process is seen as the result of the production of texts and

not by direct action. Texts have transcending properties that are more enduring than the transitory nature of actions in different settings. Discourse and the textual are thus closely linked to the process whereby institutions are produced and reproduced and how they are maintained and resist change (Phillips, Lawrence & Hardy, 2004). Phillips, Lawrence and Hardy conclude that “institutions are constituted by the structured collections of texts that exist in a particular field and that produce the social categories and norms that shape the understandings and behaviors of actors” (p. 638). They attempt to explain how some discourses manage to reproduce and gain salience when others do not. Certain actions are more likely to lead to the production of texts, certain texts are more likely to become part of influential discourse and then certain discourses have more impact in the production of institutions. In terms of action, they consider actions that are new and surprising or that have an impact on legitimacy as likely to lead to the production of supporting texts, as these require sense-making in the organisation. Texts generated by those who have legitimacy, power and resources are likely to become part of influential discourse and texts in recognisable forms or genres have a greater chance of becoming entrenched in discourse. Texts that draw on other texts are also more likely to become more permanent and significant. In terms of discourse, coherent and sound discourses are more likely to create institutions as well as discourses that are supported by or not contested by other discourses. The process of the organisation as constituting texts and being constituted by texts is an ongoing process of structuring and organising and the organisation is therefore not static (Doolin, 2003).

Discourse and Power

A discursive perspective of organisations allows for the study of language in organisations as relational and political and Deetz (2003) calls for more radical explorations of how groups and their interests are formed. A mere focus on language without an awareness of the establishment and continuation of systems of advantage and disadvantage is, according to him, a failure to reach the maximum potential of the linguistic turn. He also argues against research language which is still representational rather than generative and states that “most contemporary research looking at narratives, discourse, texts, and language retains a kind of neo-positivist distance and inability to see their work as moments unfolding in the life and time of concrete people and organizations” (p. 427).

The awareness of power discourse relations in organisations is informed by critical theory. Critical organisation theory examines the relations of control and repression as they exist in organisations and how these practices of power are linked to generalised assumptions and truths as they appear in broader social, economic and political structures (Ogbor, 2001). As such, it explores how power becomes legitimised into unquestioned truths and practices. The critical approach in organisation studies is a “discourse of suspicion” (Mumby, 2004, p. 237) focusing on the underlying and unseen structures of power and resistance and how these are motivated by the interest of certain groups. Mumby states that the critical approach in organisations studies aims towards liberating individuals from domination in this way. It is part of the modernist project, but also social constructionist in its investigation of the use of language in discourse in creating oppressive structures. The feminist nature of this study aims toward greater understanding of how the status quo is maintained and also how it can be challenged.

Institutions arise from a variety of possible descriptions and possible conflict in between the versions is often unseen (Deetz, 2003). The discursive production process can be seen as “sites and objects of/for struggle. Different groups do strive for control of (and for) the production of fixed meanings in both ideology and practice” (Chan & Garrick, 2002). Once produced, they seem self-evident and given and not as the outcome of possible conflict. As Deetz (2003) puts it: “We see the winner and not the latent conflict process in formation” (p. 423). The discourses are not passed on explicitly but rather become part of language and practice, invisible in their constitutive effect but also inevitably political in their creation of some things at the cost of others. Power relations are entrenched and rooted in the construction of institutions that are protected and maintained by various discursive processes such as naturalisation (Deetz, 2003). The political is an intrinsic part of organisations and a discourse perspective makes it possible to consider the “politics of representation” (Deetz, 2003, p. 427).

The discussion so far illustrates how the discursive perspective in organisation studies provides an alternative framework for viewing the issue of the gender stratification of the workplace as it allows for an exploration of how language use and discourse

within existing power relations informs aspects of identity and gender. Before I move into a discussion of the discursive construction of gender in organisations the use and study of discourse in organisations needs to be clarified.

Clarifying Discourse

The term discourse is used in a variety of ways in organisational studies (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000) and there are a number of different interpretations and methodologies in working with discourse in organisational studies. This perhaps necessitates introductory comments on the different ways of studying discourse in organisations before embarking on a discussion of the discursive construction of gender and the gendered nature of organisations.

The different approaches to the study of discourse in organisational studies lead to different distinctions in terms of the kind of discourse one can work with as well as the point of investigation in discursive studies (Hardy, 2004). The distinctions that emerge from the literature are: text/context (Hardy, 2004); language/context (Grant, Hardy, Oswick & Putnam, 2004); close-range/long-range or determinism/voluntarism (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000); micro discourse/macro Discourse (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000); radical constructivist/realist (Fairclough, 2005) and constructivist/critical (Hardy, 2004). These distinctions will be discussed in more detail below.

Text/context.

Hardy (2004) states that distinguishing between *text* and *context* can be useful in discourse studies. She notes that the focal point of exploration could either be the directly textual or the contextual. The textual refers to the immediate features of interactions such as ways of talking and positions from which talk is happening, where the contextual refers to the wider, broader social context and how it is part of and constitutive of the text. Texts are considered as “symbolic, permanent inscriptions that have a degree of coherence, and equate agency with the ability to use texts as a way to contribute to the constitution of organizations” (p. 418). Texts become a source and medium of agency through the process of textualisation where “one actor makes sense of the utterances of another and embeds the interpretation in a second conversational act and, in doing so, objectifies, and shares background assumptions”

(p. 418). In this way texts become material and durable with increasing organising properties and capacities. The type of text, the type of actor, the dissemination of the text and the grand discourses are all relevant factors in the process of textualisation.

Language/context.

The language/context differentiation of Grant et al. (2004) is similar to the text/context distinction of Hardy (2004). One end of the spectrum involves focus on language in use in organisations with studies such as conversation analysis, speech act schematic and interaction analysis. Heracleous and Barrett (2001) refer to this as a functional approach that considers discourse as a communicative tool with purpose. Language is then studied as a tool that can be used in organisations to achieve certain goals. On the other end of the spectrum is a more context sensitive approach, involving aspects such as socio-linguistics, institutional dialogue, social semiotics and critical discourse analysis.

Micro/macro and determinism/voluntarism.

Alvesson and Karreman (2000) postulate a distinction similar to the text/context distinction although they describe it as a micro/macro continuum. Micro or local discourse here refers to language in use (similar to what Hardy (2004) calls text) and Macro to more universal and generalised phenomena referred to as **D**iscourse. (This is similar to what Hardy calls context). Micro discourse involves a detailed study of language in its specific context, Meso discourse is a sensitivity to language while at the same time focusing on broader contextual patterns, Grand Discourse involves an assembly of discourses and the integrated frames they represent and Mega Discourse refers to the universal connection of discourse material as it constitutes phenomena. For them, the tension between the micro and the macro, and the need to address both is one of the difficulties of discourse work. A focus on only Grand discourse can lead to disregarding the empirical and reducing complexity to one or two **D**iscourses where a micro discourse does not view the impact of the social reality and its impact. They argue for more attention to the details and variations of discourse as well as considering its production before moving into the level of **D**iscourse.

Apart from the micro to macro discourse distinction, Alvesson and Karreman (2000) also refer to another dimension of distinguishing discourse. They see discourse as

acting on a spectrum of determinism and voluntarism where discourse either precedes meaning or creates meaning. This means that the meaning of discourse can be seen either as transient or durable. The transient side of the spectrum considers discourse to be unrelated to broader meaning structures and rather as an action within a particular time and place. A transient view of discourse does not see it as constitutive or with much power and considers it to be autonomous. The other side of the spectrum, the durable side, considers discourse to be a structuring force of social reality with an influence that encompasses all aspects of it. Alvesson and Karreman (2000) refer to this as the “muscular” (p. 1 130) use of discourse, or a deterministic view of discourse.

Constructivist/critical.

The determinism/voluntarism distinction described above is similar to what Hardy (2004) refers to as the constructivist/critical distinction. A critical approach would typically focus on how structures of power and ideology inform discourse (similar to determinism) where a constructivist approach is more concerned with the complex ways in which realities are brought into being and how social practices are constructed by means of the discursive (similar to voluntarism). A constructivist approach focuses on the interpretive (Heracleous & Barrett, 2001), in the sense of its influence on the thoughts and interpretations of people. The critical approach, largely informed by the work of Foucault (Doolin, 2003), focuses on the political implications of discourse and sees discourses as “power/knowledge relations embedded in social practice” (p. 755), thus more than linguistic and textual but essential to social and material actions and procedures. A critical approach to organisational discourse seeks to understand the broader “bodies of knowledge, language and associated practices that organizational actors use to make sense of and control their world” (Doolin, 2003, p. 755) which influence the processes within organisations. It seeks to understand the social, linguistic and historical locations of these practices and aims at uncovering how individuals are set as subjects of discourses and practices of power. From this position, a critical explanation requires radical social change (Heracleous & Barrett, 2001).

Radical constructivist/realist.

Fairclough (2005) reflects on the difference between radical constructivist and realist

approaches to discourse and advocates for a critical realist social ontology as having greater potential value for organisation studies. This involves a combination approach that pays attention to both durable discourses as they present in texts as well as detailed linguistic analysis. The approach to discourse is here seen as relational matter, a relation between the linguistic on the one hand and the social or material on the other. Discourse becomes “the principal means by which organization members create a coherent social reality that frames their sense of who they are” (p. 918), thus a structure and structuring process at the same time. Organisations are in the same way simultaneously process (organising) and structure (organisation). A realist position on discourse also reflects “pre-structured” (p. 918) elements that could be discursive and non-discursive objects. Here, discourse is an object and a subject and an organisation is a “network of social practices [which] includes an ‘order of discourse’, a relatively stabilised and durable configuration of discourses (as well as other elements)” (p. 919).

To summarise the discussion on clarifying discourse so far: It seems that working with discourse in organisations involves two tensions. The first being a tension of focal point where one can either focus on the detail acts of texts and discourse (the Micro or textual level) or the broader contextual and social aspects (Macro or Grand discourse). The second is a critical versus constructivist tension where one can either focus on the political implications of a text or the constructive and constructed nature of a text. These tensions partly explain the diversity of approaches to the study of discourse. Although the use of discourse analysis in this study will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5, the aims of this study necessitate that both the critical and the contextual or Macro aspects of discourse are worked with.

Gender, Discourse and Organisations

After the preceding discussion on the different ways of studying discourse I now turn to a discussion of the discursive construction of gender in organisations. The patterns of meaning in the workplace are fundamental in terms of the reproduction the gender stratification of the workplace. A focus on discourse examines the ideologies that exist in communities instead of the traits and attributes of organisations. It explores the ideologies that reconcile people to their options and existing structures. Ideology is seen here as a belief system that maintains asymmetrical power relations. Silence

also forms an integral part of the discursive constructions of social systems (Gatenby & Humphries, 1999). When the operations of discourse are observed, the underlying assumptions are made visible and challengeable. Thus a focus on discourse can involve a challenge to theory or practice in terms of its basic foundational notions and involve a rethink of theory instead of mere additions. As such, a focus on discourse could involve challenging the basic assumptions of organisational theory instead of attempting to add more representative theory (Gatenby & Humphries, 1999).

Four Frames for Gender, Discourse and Organisations

In terms of the gendered nature of organisational discourse, Ashcraft (2004) distinguishes four frames to view the interaction between gender, discourse and organisations.

Firstly, discourse can be seen as an outcome, a certain communication style, or ways of talking and using language that are reflections of existing identities. In other words, the socialised nature of gender is seen as producing certain predictable communication habits. Secondly, discourse can also be seen as performance and therefore a way of creating or constituting gender in social scripts. The social scripts in organisations are acted on and acted out and “(re)producing difference inevitably amounts to (re)producing inequality” (p. 281).

Thirdly, discourse can be seen as a text-conversation dialectic. From this perspective, the organisation can be seen as constantly in an (en)gendering process, where interaction among members in the form of conversation is a form of organising and the organisation itself is a text. Thus the organisation emerges as members invoke it in discursive activity and at the same time it is also a prerequisite for communication as a text that guides discursive activity. Organisations are seen as “gendered discourse communities” (p. 282), producing gendered discourse and also a product of gendered discourse. If viewed in this way, the discursive construction of gender on the meso level is explored with a focus on the symbolic, abstract gendered nature of organisations as they become the structural and normative forces that inform interaction and action. In this way, everyday organising processes in organisations are guided by the meso discursive structures that provide the frame or structure of that which is possible, normal and desirable. The work of Maier (1999) referred to in

Chapter 3 is an example of an exploration of how masculinities and related hierarchies are carved into organisational shapes and structures. Feminists working from this position then call for new maps of communication that re-look and re-think the gendered nature of the discursive realm of organisations by pointing out that a “fundamental contradiction between feminist ideology and the demands of organizing amid patriarchal capitalism erodes the best of egalitarian designs” (p. 283). Alternative discursive constructions are then needed to change the structural design of organisations. A focus on the text-conversation dialectic also brings the notion of contradiction in relief where the contradiction between ideology and practice becomes evident. Contradictions create a complex interplay of problems that members of organisations have to negotiate and manage. A focus on the text-conversation dialectic emphasises the recursive relation between micro and meso layers of discourse with a focus on the constitutive nature of discourse: “Structure is steady and shaky; practice is inventive and derivative; and organizational form is the productive, promiscuous and fleeting site where structure and practice meet” (p. 283-284).

Fourthly, discourse can be seen as a social text and the focus is here on how societal discourse (en)genders organisations. This perspective looks at the macro face of discourse and the “broader societal narrative embedded in systems of representation, which offer predictable yet elastic and lucid, yet contradictory tales of possible subjectivities” (p. 284). Societal discourses on gender circulate in organisations, with some discourses with more support from institutions having more power to persuade and describe. Public discourse is seen as an organising principle that structures organisations. From this perspective, the textual gains more importance than the micro or actual interactions between people.

Mumby and Ashcraft (2006) advocate a discourse-based communicology perspective which considers the organisation to be “a nodal point for the articulation of a set of experiences, discourses and power relations” (p. 74). Within this, “gender is a complex, fragmentary, ongoing and contradictory accomplishment that unfolds at the nexus of communication and organizing” (p. 74). They argue that subjectivity is constructed through dynamic and unstable processes of communication but add that gender is not only discursive and textual but rather “situated, embodied communicative praxis” (p. 75) which is “enacted in a complex field of discursive and

non-discursive relations of power, accommodation and resistance” (p. 75). The “flesh-and-blood subject” (p. 75) needs to be rediscovered and examined by paying attention to the actors who speak and act with the constructed world. This does not require viewing gendered organisations as essences but rather as being performed in communication. They distinguish between discursive and non-discursive acts of communication and see the body, a “constitutive and constituted element in the crafting of subjectivity” (p. 75-76), as the organising process of organisations happens in an embodied way. They consider discourse as the available possibilities which circulate with varying levels of institutional support but want to explore how these possibilities are acted upon and take place in the material world and how communication practices happen within this sphere. Discourse should be examined, according to them, not only as text but as “dynamic, embodied communicative acts that shape organizational sense-making and relations of power ... examining gendered identity therefore involves understanding the ways in which social actors take up particular discourses, contest others and shape still others for their own particular ends.” (p. 78-79). There is a reciprocal and dialectical relationship between the symbolic/discursive and the material, material here not only referring to the political practices but also to micro practices involving the body and sexuality. Thus communication is seen as a material undertaking in which people take up discourses and “as they go about these performances, they breathe life into identity and difference” (p. 80). Mumby and Ashcraft (2006) continue to add “all feminine and masculine subjectivities are jointly crafted in the larger context of (gendered) relations of power” (p. 81). With power relations in mind, they argue for a project which is committed to studying the effects of gendered organising processes and how “some differences are produced precisely as a means to marginalize certain groups and privilege others” (p. 82).

Gendering Practices and Practising Gender: The Practice of Discursive Possibilities

Martin (2003) does not use the term discourse when referring to gender but her description of gender practices and practising gender makes use of the social constructionist notion of gender as a social construction, thus partially a process which happens on the level of meaning. She describes the gender process in organisations as a dynamic, mutual process of construction in which men and women construct each other and which has an effect on people’s work experience. These

gendering practices impair women's identities and possibilities. She considers attention to the invisible ways in which gender is constructed as vital in uncovering how inequalities are perpetuated. The construction of gender in the workplace happens through the dual process of gender practices and practising gender. Gender practices involve the possible and available actions, the "repertoire of actions or behaviour – speech, bodily, and interpretive – that society makes available to its members" (Martin, 2006, p. 257). Practising gender entails the actual doing or acting of gender according to the available gender practices, "the literal saying or doing of gender" in real time and space (Martin, 2006, p. 258). The gender practices thus involve, among other things, the level of available meanings and interpretations. Gender practices generally take place in an unreflexive fashion and are multifaceted and subtle. Gender is therefore a social institution that involves inter alia certain meanings, expectations, and normative behaviours. Normative behaviour or practising gender happens with the institution (or gender practices) as backdrop. Gender is present in all work organisations in unhealthy ways for men and women as non-reflexive normative enactments of masculinities and femininities. Thus gender as socially constructed institution creates the framework for gender as practice. The practice of gender is a "system of action" (p. 351) that is constantly developing and changing. People act according to the available gender practices and do so "in the heat of the moment" (p.351). Gender emerges within a discursively constructed normative system and gendered action and practice takes place in local and particular contexts in terms of how it is learnt in childhood and therefore becomes automatic, like riding a bicycle. The material body becomes gendered through discourse and the behaviour of individuals comprises action within this system. She also refers to the work of Butler (1990) and her description of the performativity of action which seems act-like in the moment but is rather a replication and repetition of a set of norms. Practising gender is unreflexive and only sometimes intentionally gendered, but masculinities and femininities are enacted nevertheless and often denied as such, particularly by those in power (Martin, 2003).

Practising gender further involves agency, "the capacity to take action" (Martin, 2006, p. 259), in a manner that either complies with or resists established norms. Agency involves a possibility for transformation or a perpetuation of the status quo. As such, organisations act as gender practising agents, as do individuals, whether it be with

awareness of it or not. Gender reflexivity, thinking about one's actions and its effects, is often absent, and this means that the intention of an act might differ from the effect or nature of the act. This means that "what one intends – or thinks one is doing or saying – may differ from what one actually does or thinks and that the effects of one's actions may differ from those one intended" (Martin, 2006, p. 260), making gender reflexivity a valuable practise in understanding more about how gender works in organisations. Martin adds to this that gender is often practised in contexts where there are great differences in power and where men often hold more of the positions of power.

Given the invisible and undermining nature of gender practices, it is important to make these processes explicit and an understanding of how femininity and masculinity is practised needs to be developed (Martin, 2003). It is clear from the above that gender practices are multifaceted and therefore Bird (2003) describes femininity practices as complex actions that involve "different levels of reflection about, consent to, and complicity with masculinity practices. Women may in some cases feel cast into femininity practices but in other cases take them up quite strategically to preserve investments in the existing gender order" (Bird, 2003, p. 367). A focus on the practice of masculinities and femininities contains the possibility of undermining that order. A critical question can then be asked:

Perhaps we can someday erase the taken-for-granted association between certain practices and 'masculinity' and between other practices and 'femininity', but if the result is that women, like so many men, are consumed by a form of 'success' that requires one to be obsessed by paid labor, will our 'degendering' have been worth it? (Bird, 2003, p. 368).

Discourse is a useful tool in the endeavour of making gender practices explicit and allows one to understand inequality and its production and reproduction within the context of programmed social processes which obscure how women may be "constrained to collude to their own disadvantage" (Garnsey & Rees, 1996, p. 1 044) and how men "may enact inequality with or without intention" (p. 1 044) in assumptions about what is normal and expected. The multiplicity in the functioning of discourses as they are rooted in language "requires unravelling before the weave of

preconceptions which render inequalities acceptable and inevitable are identified” (p. 1 045).

Gender and Power

The discursive practice of gender in organisations takes place within relations of power and struggles for meaning between different groups and this process is contradictory and discontinuous, therefore discourses cannot be seen as being only dominant or resistant, but rather as constantly at play or in struggle (Mumby & Aschcraft, 2006). The construction of gendered subjectivities takes place within the context of these power relations. The study of gender in organisations should therefore inevitably consider power relations as a vital aspect of gender organising. Gender constructions and the gendered subjectivities as they are produced are generally not neutral but rather involve the privileging of one group over another or the marginalising of certain groups. Some discourses have more opportunities to present themselves and occupy more space in the discursive, allowing them more influencing power while alternative discourses are generally present and these can challenge the dominant discourses (Meriläinen et al., 2004).

From this perspective, power is seen in a Foucauldian frame where it is explored, not in terms of its source, but rather in terms of how it works to reconcile individuals to their positions. It acts as a normalising structure that individuals use to examine, shape and transform themselves. As such, it becomes a disciplining force. Resistance lies in the continuous presence of contradictory and competing discourses, as individuals take up some positions and not others. When individuals are faced with a situation where identity as performed differs from identity as prescribed through discourse, it creates discursive possibility to take up different positions and discourses (Dick & Hyde, 2006).

In terms of this Foucauldian perspective, the relationship between power and knowledge is maintained through language and leads to self-policing of the identity against external notions of the ideal. Power is not deterministic but relational and lies in the relationships between different concepts or structuring ideals. It lies in the creation of what is accepted as truth and powerful discourses achieve their status in the posture of natural authority (Pullen, 2006).

Resistance then “takes the form of counter-discourses and reverse discourses, which produce new knowledges and new truths and thereby constitute new powers” (Meriläinen et al., 2004, p. 545). This can take place by exploiting contradictions and gaps in discursive patterns that open space for different versions of reality. Resistance lies in the individual’s capacity to employ alternative discourses as it arises in the “surplus of meaning” (Holmer-Nadesan, 1996, p. 57). This can happen through counter-identification or dis-identification with the normative dominant discourse. Counter-identification is the rejection of a dominant discourse if it seems unable to adequately describe the individual. This becomes possible with an awareness of contradictions or tensions in the discourse, or an awareness of how others’ interests are being supported by it. Dis-identification as resistance is the taking up of an alternative discourse and replacing the dominant one. Counter- and dis-identification create space for different action (Holmer-Nadesan, 1996).

Paradox, Contradiction and Irony

Power does not operate in simple identifiable ways in organisations and this is further complicated by paradox, irony and contradiction. Tretheway and Ashcraft (2004) see paradox, irony and contradiction as part of the fabric of organisational life and with this view, introduce the notion of irrationality into the study of the workplace. For them, irrationality is then fundamental to organisations. This emerges from the post structuralist notion that the world is not as rational as it appears and that representations of rationality and fixedness are discursive strategies. Organisational irrationalities are often gendered and these irrationalities are often expressed as organisational tensions. As such, organisations are littered with contradictions between ideology, practice and structure and these contradictions make organising within the organisation particularly difficult but also offer pathways for resistance.

Organisations have historically favoured terms such as rationality, reason, public, mind and male over emotional, female, private and body but these dominant discourses cannot completely deny these, giving rise to a perpetual tension between the dominant and the marginalised. Sexuality and emotionality are perpetually repressed in the organisational world but this does not erase it, it merely places it in the domain of contradictory tension and so everyday practice remains irrational yet

often invisible. The discursive becomes the space where these invisible tensions struggle for dominance, in terms of describing and ascribing fixed meaning and identity, also in terms of gender. Contradiction and conflicting descriptions are particularly evident in gendered discourses and exposing these tensions is important in creating a better understanding of the complexity of the gender debate.

Tretheway and Ashcraft (2004) suggest that the resolution of tension and paradox might not be the desired outcome but that ways of living with tension, paradox and irony should be pondered. Organised irrationality is a status quo and this form of “(dis)organization of gender relations is a particularly powerful, tangible way to explore normal irrationality of organizational life” (p. 85).

Martin (2004) illustrates different kinds of paradox in organisations: paradox of structure; paradox of agency; paradox of identity and paradox of power. Paradox of structure involves requiring different forms of participation, paradox of agency involves different expectations in terms of initiative; paradox of identity deals with membership and inclusion in different positions, and paradox of power involves the simultaneous positions individuals occupy. Within these paradoxes it is more difficult to adopt a female identity where messages about what women are interact with different messages about one’s position in the organisation. She shows how being a woman is in one way contrary to being a professional. She then indicates how middle management women use humour as a way of negotiating their position (which contains both power and marginalisation) in reflexive, creative and playful ways.

Gender Discourse in Organisations

Studies of discourse in organisations have shown that the everyday talk of people does not involve the expression of single ideas and unitary approaches to life but that it contains different and often contradictory accounts of the world (Nentwich, 2006). Common sense understandings often contain opposing ideas and these are negotiated in everyday talk without necessarily solving them. One side of the position is sometimes favoured above another, allowing both to remain intact. The use of different “interpretive repertoires” (Nentwich, 2006, p. 505) can thus maintain the gender status quo.

A prominent example of this is the co-existence of equal opportunities talk and practical considerations talk in the workplace. Wetherell, Stiven and Potter (1987) were of the first to explore these discourses. They noticed how both equal opportunities discourses and practical considerations discourses co-existed in people's talk about gender in the workplace. Discourses on equal opportunities claim that everyone in the workplace is equal and that there should be equality between men and women. Equal opportunities talk seems to be considered a socially acceptable and correct discourse to adhere to. This discourse values general liberal values of egalitarianism and freedom of choice. People often position themselves within this discourse and contrast themselves with those who do not adhere to these values.

In contrast to this is the practical consideration discourse that does not draw on internal choice or internal beliefs but relies on the inevitability of biology and the natural order of some things. In this discourse there are natural constraints to the equal opportunities discourse. These beliefs, however, do not reflect the sexist attitudes of the person but are seen as simply natural, indisputable fact that men and women are biologically different. It is in this kind of talk that women are a risk not worth taking or not suitable for higher positions in the organisations. The discursive strategy at work here is the reference to common sense notions of gender that are portrayed as self-evident truths to support the discourse of practical considerations (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998).

The practical considerations discourse has various implications in the workplace, one of which is the so-called mommy-track: a separate career pathway for women choosing to have children. The practical considerations discourse upholds the idea that if the individual chooses to parent, one cannot help but consider her as part of this track as it is a logical consequence of her choice. This is seen as a 'practical inevitability' and women who do not want to form part of this have to work hard to convince the organisation that they do not fall into the category of needing 'practical considerations' and assistance. Some women report that they have to be careful of even mentioning their children, much less take some parent-related leave or use flexitime facilities made possible by some organisations (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998).

Some women are ‘allowed’ to become showpieces within this discursive structure as successful women in high positions, which prove that women are allowed to occupy any position in the organisation. They act as evidence of non-discrimination and typically bear the ambiguous burden of such a position. They are very visible and they are paraded as the pride and joy of the organisation. They have to work hard to prove that they deserve their position and they also act as role models to other women in the organisation. Their presence in the organisation is considered to be evidence of non-discrimination but they generally co-exist with a mommy-track constructing the mommy-track as a choice of individuals (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998).

The practical considerations discourse constructs women as burdened with certain aspects of ‘femininity’ and requires of women to distance themselves from all these aspects if they want to benefit from the equal opportunities discourse. These practical burdens associated with ‘femininity’ mean that there are unnoticed associations between masculinity and the ideal worker (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998). If one wants to be considered as such and one happens to be female, it takes some work to make sure that the female burdens are not associated with one. Benschop and Doorewaard (1998) report that successful women tend not to associate themselves with femininity, do not mention their children and do not make use of any organisational policies intended for those burdened by domestic responsibilities such as flexitime and even maternity leave. Garnsey and Rees (1996) also indicate how inequalities permeate equal opportunity programmes and texts such as Opportunity 2000 in the United Kingdom. They show how a notion such as work flexibility is introduced and used but that women making use of this option will still be disadvantaged by this choice.

Dick and Nadin (2006) refer to this notion as the natural differences discourse and see it as fundamental in establishing the notion in organisations that inequality cannot be avoided. They also point to a common sense notion of parenthood where women are often considered to be the best parent. The assumption of a natural difference between men and women leads to a further assumption that career paths are influenced by choices or preferences based on this natural difference. Within this discourse there is little acknowledgement of the social, cultural and political nature of this distinction or the political implications of this discourse and it becomes a way of ascribing

inequality to the inevitable forces of nature and individuals' choices within this structure. It paints a picture of consent, where women and men are happy with the choices they made and are reconciled to the status quo.

Nentwich (2006) points out that the discursive patterns used in everyday talk often mirror the dilemmas of feminist theory, referring to the sameness/difference debate and its consequences. She illustrates how equal opportunity officers choose different discursive repertoires, depending on the context and topic of conversation. Sameness ideas are used when discussing contemporary dilemmas of equity but difference discourses are used when trying to draw a vision for the future. "Shifting from one repertoire to another could therefore be interpreted as a strategy of dealing with the tensions inherited from feminist theory" (p. 515). She argues for seeing different discourses as equal, allowing them space in discursive investigations and "playing around with many possible understandings and perspectives without favouring one side over the other and forcing a decision" (p.516).

The point here is that these two kinds of talk exist simultaneously. Language use can be varied from moment to moment. This is what makes traditional social psychology studies problematic as traditional surveys might miss the complexity of these issues. There seems to be a theory/practice split with the practice undermining the theory. In this way the contradiction does not change the ideology but rather strengthens it (Wetherell, Stiven et al., 1987). Gender inequalities in the division of labour are often covered with a "cloak of equality" (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998; Benschop, Halsema & Schreurs, 2001, p.3) and the equal opportunities discourse can be and is mostly reduced to a marketing rhetoric (Whitehead, 2001). The explicit statements of equality often serve the purpose of legitimising invisible practices of inequality (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998).

Kugelberg (2006) refers to the existence of two opposing discourses, namely the company-based discourse and the experience-based discourse. The company-based discourse deals with the requirements of companies to grow and focuses on aspects such as productivity, competition and financial gain. Parenting becomes the domain of women within this discourse where men are considered as workers and women as possible mothers. The experienced-based discourse emerges in employees'

description of their experience of parenthood. Within this discourse, different meanings of parenthood emerge and there is more reference here to fatherhood as well as motherhood. It is from the company-based discourse that women remain discursively linked to motherhood and therefore make use of flexible options and policies more than men do. The gender neutral nature of the policy does not translate into practice and this turns the policy into a gender segregating mechanism (Kugelberg, 2006). The complex discursive struggle between these two discourses is influenced by the local context and different subject positions. When speaking from a position of management, parenthood was equated with motherhood but when speaking from the position of employee, parenthood and the combination of work and family was seen as something both men and women struggled with. There was some shifting between these two discourses in participants' talk and the company-based discourse seemed to have some dominance in the discursive space.

Runté and Mills (2006) trace the difference discourse to historical developments in the Second World War era in the USA. They note how women are still seen as problematic, both in organisations and also in organisation management theory, due to the above work-family conflict and the entrenched association between the female and the domestic or the female as the site where intersection between the discourses of work and family takes place. They trace this to the necessary move of women into the workforce during the war. Women were required to see themselves as capable of performing activities that were seen as masculine up to that point. This workforce participation was seen as a way of keeping the home front going, thus part of their domestic duty. The post-war period required a necessary retreat back to the domestic home sphere after the war, which entrenched the notion of the natural inevitability of the work-domestic division but also the desirability of the domestic for women. It also constructed female workers as temporary and helpers. They also point out how management theory has been active in the reproduction of this discourse, not only the reflection thereof, by viewing to the work-family debate as a female problem.

Diversity discourse.

Diversity management has emerged in recent years as another model of working towards equality (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000). It moves toward management of different working styles and aims to improve work-life balance for all individuals, not working

women only, thus moving away from viewing family and family friendly policies as the domain of women. This diversity approach aims to allow individuals to determine their own working patterns, despite age, race or gender (Smithson & Stokoe, 2005), tries to acknowledge difference and diversity and to create space for different groups to flourish in organisations.

Smithson and Stokoe (2005) identify a contradiction between official discourse and employees' talk when it comes to diversity management. Within diversity management programmes, official organisational policy is gender-neutral but Smithson and Stokoe (2005) found that employee's talk about gender still constructs the generic parent as female despite gender-neutral organisational policies. The use of gender-neutral terms in policies such as 'diversity policy' does not translate or transfer into the adoption of gender-neutral terms in everyday talk and "changing the terminology of equality does not in itself contribute significantly to advancing gender equality" (Smithson & Stokoe, 2005, p. 165). Everyday talk is still permeated by a fundamental connection between flexible arrangements and being female. The diversity discourse is used to claim the existence of a level playing field from which there is a choice to opt for flexible options. This choice is then strongly associated with being a mother. This means that diversity work policies are still considered to be for women. If this is the case, despite gender-neutral attempts, these policies are still used by women only which then maintains rather than subvert gendered practices in organisations. The diversity management approach, which is based on the notion of difference, then does not consider the power differential or possible systemic imbalances (Smithson & Stokoe, 2005) and thus has the "ironic effect of dissolving the basis of disadvantage" (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000, S24). Diversity management programmes often manage to establish the notion that given its policies, the work environment is fair, leaving the structure of the hierarchical organisation unexamined. It is supported by a discourse of individual achievement which assumes that success is based on work and integrity without acknowledging that attainment or achievement for women is often twofold in the form of home and work performance (Dick & Cassell, 2002).

The diversity discourse, with the notion of difference as fundamental to it, also establishes a bounded group: 'the diverse' (or those who are different from the

white, male and middle-class) and creates a “split between ‘those who manage’ and ‘the managed diverse’” (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000, S23) which then becomes a way of cloaking discomfort with difference in language of tolerance. The ‘diverse’ becomes boundaried into a subject position of difference, and this ultimately perpetuates inequalities as the position of being the different ‘other’ invites being assigned essential categories and characteristics (Zanoni & Janssens, 2004). Being part of the diverse group also often implies a reduction in one’s status (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000).

The construction of difference between groups can lead to that difference as being constructed both as an additional value or as lack and Zanoni and Janssens (2004) illustrate how managers move between these discursive positions. They also note how references to difference are always used in reference to the process of organisational productivity. The diversity discourse then forms part of a power relationship between managers and employees and is employed as a mechanism to enhance the goal of the organisation within broader discourses of economic rationality and organisational competence. The diversity discourse tends to obscure management practices and management employee relations (Zanoni & Janssens, 2004).

Competitive masculinity.

The discourse of competitive masculinity is discussed by Meriläinen et al. (2004) and Knights and Kerfoot (2004) as a discourse which links certain characteristics such as work orientation, assertiveness and rationality with masculinity while privileging this form of work behaviour over others. Masculinity and instrumental rationality have been historically associated since classical Greek philosophy and deeply influential of Enlightenment and modernist thought and the relationship between these concepts seems to be tenacious and persistent (Ross-Smith & Kornberger, 2004). Meriläinen et al. (2004) note that work addiction and self-assertion is typically associated with a professional identity. Competence is associated with control, masculinity and performance where incompetence is associated with weakness, femininity, lack of assertiveness and lack of performance (Chrisholm, 2001). Positions and duties that are higher in organisational structure are also associated with masculinity and lower duties and positions are associated with femininity (Benschop, Halsema & Schreurs, 2001).

Knights and Kerfoot (2004) argue that the competitive notion of masculinity can be repressive as it has to be attained and drives individuals into subject positions “of a compulsive, cognitive and goal centered design or a purposive, rational design of the world” (p. 436) and the compulsive tendency towards control and power. Instrumental rationality with its goal directedness is in contrast to, and eliminates non-instrumental intimacy and becomes a disembodied way of being in and relating to the world. It is also overly concerned with the development of the identity and self-mastery.

Competitive masculinity and instrumental rationality is in contrast to recent developments towards more feminised management styles (Fondas, 1997) and an assumption that a basic difference between the genders can also lead to an attempt to increase the status of ‘feminine’ qualities by emphasising and valuing these. This is a form of resistance to the notion of competitive masculinity with women seeing themselves as more empathetic, collaborative, supportive and thus more democratic, enacting a more socially sanctioned style. The discourse of different and feminised management styles encounters a number of difficulties as the discourse does not seem to have enough persuasive power to overrule the dominant notions of leadership (Chrisholm, 2001). It also leads to other problems such as essentialism or reinforcing only traditional notions of femininity (Benshop, Halsema & Schreurs, 2001). Thus these 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). Ross-Smith and Kornberger (2004) indicate that the masculine view of rationality is still predominant in ideas about management despite the development towards the feminisation of management. They argue that rationality has become masculinised and that it serves better to deconstruct and illuminate this process rather than to step into further gender dichotomies by trying to introduce the opposite so-called feminine. Suggesting an alternative to the dominant norm can increase the distance between the two opposites and inadvertently re-establish the dominance of the original norm. Rather, an exploration of the concept rationality and alternative forms of rationality does not further increase the dichotomy between rational masculinity and soft and emotional femininity and creates a more complex and holistic view of rationality.

The managerial discourse.

The managerial discourse is privileged in organisations and influences the organisational space through the publication of policies and texts, the performance of certain rituals and the codes of practices with its requirements of employees. This discourse is supported by other discourses such as bureaucracy, patriarchy and class that are sedimented into the broader socio-political context (Holmer-Nadesan, 1996). The discourse of bureaucracy centres on a rational, rule-governed system that orders organisations with administrative regulations. This discourse generally intersects with the discourse of patriarchy in the traditional masculine status of bureaucracy and the practice and expression of bureaucratic systems that have historically been dominated by men. This further intersects with class as the discourses of patriarchy and bureaucracy are typically expressed by certain individuals with upper-middle class positions (Holmer-Nadesan, 1996). The managerial discourse is seductive and seduces the person into a sense of influence, power and status providing a concrete and grounded sense of self that minimises anxiety (Whitehead, 2001). It also intersects with a discourse of individuality and the conclusion that inequality must be the fault of the individual (Whetherell, Stiven et al., 1987).

The discussion of discourses of equality and difference so far illustrates how limiting the ideologies people have access to can be. A way of talking is the product of the material conditions, power relations and vested interests. Inequality is naturalised and this keeps the status quo intact while simultaneously making it possible for people to enhance their self-presentation by using the equal opportunities discourse. Women have different reactions to this naturalisation of inequality. Some women accept the status quo as legitimate, some separate themselves from other women who take part in the "natural" functions of mothering and others aim to change the criteria of superiority (Whetherell, Stiven et al., 1987). People often tend to soften the impact of the status quo with a discourse of change that states that change will happen but that it must happen slowly and naturally and that the best is still to come (Whetherell, Stiven et al., 1987).

Different discourses at play/ intertextuality.

The existence of multiple, complimentary and contradictory discourses in organisations makes it possible for individuals to position themselves in a number of

different and sometimes contradictory ways within these discourses. This allows them to change and move their positions in their talk. Different individuals will not draw on discourses in the same way with a resulting choice in terms of the subject position taken. Thus the understanding of discourse, power and position in organisations should take account of the complex and varied ways in which discourse operates. Discourses, as they emerge, are therefore mediated and changed by the intertextuality with other discourses. As such, Leonard (2003) illustrates how gender difference discourse can be used in different ways. Organisations can, for example, evoke a feminine discourse when attempting to change managerial styles or women can use a masculine discourse to support their managerial role. She notes how doctors and nurses draw on a number of different discourses in their talk. These include discourses of professionalism, gender difference, performance and home. The different discourses can simultaneously empower and disempower in a play of gender and power for example when a subject position is taken with awareness and consciously deployed in workplace interaction. Negotiating different discourses becomes a complex process with a wide range of possible responses in a constant process of interplay between discourses. This means that work identities are constantly changing within this interplay (Leonard, 2003).

Organisations are stabilised by means of repeated speech patterns of what usually happens and what is usually said (Anderson, 2005). Organisational change starts when members try on different utterances and voices and project them into the future to evaluate their usefulness or worth in terms of the old practices. The introduction of new discourse generally involves an intertextual process that draws on old discourses. In this way, new ideas or discourses have to find a way into the dominant ones, showing some kinship, in order to prevail. New ideas are formed by interpreting past events differently and renewing them, making the ideas and notions of the past instrumental in the introduction of difference and newness. Past ideas can be used either by quoting and mimicking them or by referring to them with parody or irony. The new discourse is then linked in an intertextual manner to the dominant discourse or past idea. The speaker then takes up different voices and speaks from different positions in order to introduce new discourse. The speech act then contains the words of others and this aids in the persuasive value of what is said. Belova, King and Sliwa (2008) describe how Bakhtin's notion of polyphony can be used in the study of

organisations to illustrate how different voices compete for power and being heard. An examination of voice (who speaks) makes it possible to reflect on scientific products in terms of authorship and representation and how authors are placed in their own scientific narratives. It also makes it possible to explore the different voices of contradiction and dissent in organisations.

Davies, Browne, Gannon, Honan and Somerville (2005) further add that although discourses can be separated from one another it is possible for discourses to leak into one another. As such, discourses are not necessarily in binary positions but rather inextricably intertwined. The site of leakage or the nexus of the connection is the embodiment of discourses or the speaking person.

Discourse and the Body in Organisations

The more recent developments in the field of organisation studies towards discursive, linguistic or symbolic understandings of sex and gender have been discussed in this chapter so far. It is evident from these studies that this approach yields much and contributes to understanding the gender dilemma in organisations, particularly in understanding the often invisible and unsaid aspects of this complex phenomenon. Some concerns emerged about this way of studying organisations. Some of these concerns are similar to those discussed in chapter 2 and involve unease with the possible over-emphasis of the linguistic and the symbolic at the expense of the embodied and material aspects of individuals and their experiences and actions in the social world.

In the field of organisational studies, these concerns are with discursivism (Conrad, 2004), postmodern obscurity or elitism (Gergen, 2003) and a general neglect of the bodily and non-linguistic. Put differently, there is a concern with a discursivisation of the body (Styhre, 2004) and a collapse between the discursive and the non-discursive (Conrad, 2004). A number of authors tend to these issues specifically in the field of organisational studies and address it in a number of different ways to offer possible remedies for the dangers of ‘verbocentrism’ (Sampson, 1998) as discussed in the following section.

A starting point in this discussion is a mere call for research in postmodern organisational research to be useful. Gergen (2003) warns against organisational research that is removed from organisational life and caught up in postmodern obscurity or elitism. He states that the aim of research should rather be to produce “actionable discourses, that is, forms of language that can be put to use more directly within the sphere of work” (p. 454). Researchers then act as “participatory intellectuals” (p. 454) which could make postmodern or social constructionist research useable and palatable. This means a move toward forms of understanding that are linked to action and are actionable, and are therefore of use in organisations.

The knowledge-based nature of many workplaces today (as opposed to the physical-based labour of the past) combined with the linguistic turn in organisation studies both contribute to a disembodied science (Styhre, 2004) which creates forms of knowledge and understanding that do not catch or grasp either action or embodiment. When dealing with sex and gender, this becomes even more important and Martin (2006) reminds us that part of the challenge of studying gender at work is exactly that these dynamics are fluid, interpersonal, interactional, individual and collective. The dynamics of gender at work are “rich and complex, and difficult to record [and] even if one made video tape-recordings, much about gendering processes and relationships would be missed. As a result gender dynamics routinely elude researchers’ efforts to capture them” (Martin, 2006, p. 269). Thus there is a danger in reducing events to words which “can take the heart and heat out of action” (p. 268-269).

The move towards an embodied study of discourse does not merely view the individual as a result of discourse but also in terms of her actual action and experience. To study individuals working in organisations requires that they be seen as part of a broader social context with a direct, bodily experience of it. These experiencing bodies should also be allowed to speak and therefore researchers should remain open to encounters with “lives, bodies and desires” (Morris & Beckett, 2004, p. 81) as the starting point of knowledge and learning. To ignore and neglect the body at work is to overlook the centre of the possibilities and experience of employees and the discursivisation of the body can be restrictive and exclude other possible descriptions. This privileges the “textual (i.e. intellectual) over the carnal (‘lived’) being” (Styhre, 2004, p. 111) and can inadvertently increase the unreflective

administrative use of the body. As such, the flesh-and-blood subject of discourse remains important (Mumby & Ashcraft, 2006).

Another result of a collapse of the discursive and the non-discursive can be that social or organisational structures are seen solely as discursive practices. This makes causal explanations impossible and creates a view of the social world as devoid of actors, making material aspects less visible. It is vital to consider discourse as rooted in the material and social practices by keeping in mind the social context of participants (Conrad, 2004).

The overemphasis on the linguistic and the verbal (as discussed in Chapter 2) can be seen as creating another disconnection between word and world where the word becomes separate and all encompassing. This is an inadvertent reproduction of the pervasive Cartesian dualism of our time. In this particular format it takes the shape of the textual being separated from the carnal, or the intellectual from the lived. This is remarkably reminiscent of the traditional divisions of mind/body, male/female and active/passive. These remain ever present and prevalent in organisational life and are experienced as real and natural (Baxter & Hughes, 2004). This dualism is difficult to overcome as it is pervasive in modern culture. This dualism is experienced as natural and real and not learnt. The learnt nature of the dualism can be made explicit and deconstructed by means of transgressive and creative language.

Davies et al. (2005) draw on the biological term *chiasma* (from Ziarek) as metaphor to describe the interchange between embodiment and discourse. This interchange involves both being constituted by discourse and constituting discourse. The biological term *chiasma* refers to the process when two chromosomes exchange genetic material. Embodiment is thus not only inscription it also inscribes as the site of agency, responsibility and rebellion. There is a *chiasma* of the constituted and constituting nature of the body and this notion “contests biologism, [and] it also challenges a constructivist reduction of the body to the passive surface of linguistic inscription and the corresponding abstraction of language from the body” (Ziarek, 2001, p. 5). On one hand, the body is constituted through language, and on the other the body is essential in the production of language. Memory serves as a good example

here and memory can then be seen as “stored as language on the deep surfaces in/on the body, and that memory is embodied language” (Davies et al., 2005, p. 344).

Doolin (2003) argues that although the insights gained from discourse analysis can be useful there is something missing namely an appreciation of technology as part of the ever changing process in organisations. He argues that “we should be careful not to construct a form of discourse analysis that excludes the non-discursive, rather than engages with it” (p. 756). In this regard, he uses the work of John Law on narratives or strategies of organisational ordering or structuring which aims to include materiality, including socio-technical realities. Law (in Doolin, 2003) considers organisations to be the result of different and unfinished attempts at ordering in the form of “‘strategies’ or ‘narratives’” (Doolin, 2003, p. 756) where narratives are the telling and performance of the institution. Ordering narratives offer descriptions and prescriptions of what reality is like and should be like, in this way strategic without a necessary emphasis on subjective intention. Narratives are discursive, involving meaning making and meaning giving and also performed as interpersonal actions and achievements. They are materially heterogeneous, as they result in the embodiment of different social, material and technical forms which provide more stability and durability to the discursive. The social ordering process sediments into the technical, such as organisational information systems and “the ordering of the social is never purely social but rather is sociotechnical, in that the social and the technical mutually define one another” (p. 758). Despite relative sturdiness and permanence of such organisational structures, these are still, at the same time, incomplete and resistances and alternative narratives always exist, making the organisation precarious and unstable at the same time.

Organization, and the ordering narratives that comprise it, are at once discursive in their action, relational in their performance and heterogeneous in their materiality. They simultaneously concern meaning effects of discourse, collectivities and social context, and technology and materiality, while not being reducible to any of these ... In this view, social relations are embodied and played out in the ordering of technology and organizations (p. 758).

The challenges of including the body.

Despite concerns with working with disembodied discourse, an awareness of embodiment and an intention to study organisational life in ways that also makes this visible are challenging. In terms of this difficulty, Styhre (2004) argues that four different perspectives can enhance the understanding of the body in organisations: phenomenology, feminist theory, theories of practice and postmodern theory. A phenomenological view of the matter such as that of Merleau-Ponty assumes that all experiences are embodied experiences. Organisations are therefore not prior to human bodies but embodied. Where a phenomenological approach considers the body as prior to other structures, feminist theory contributes with a view of the body as the interface of the biological, social and symbolic. Feminist theorist's concern with the body (as discussed in chapter 2) springs from the general avoidance or overlooking of the body in social sciences. Theories on the performative see the body as something that becomes as much as it exists. In organisations, bodies are then both apriori aspects but they are produced to perform certain actions and to fulfil certain requirements. Theories of practice such as the work of Bourdieu (as discussed in chapter 2) also have a contribution to make in reflecting on the body in organisations. This theory considers habitus as the practised functions of the body which acts either aware or unaware but according to certain explicit or implicit rules in the social field. The social field is littered with rules, norms and artefacts and bodies interact in this. Postmodern theories on the body either view the body as an invention and destabilise the idea of the naturalistic body or see the body as inscribed. Thus the body is no longer seen as fixed but rather constructed and performed. This view allows for an exploration of the body which does not only see it as factual but also as symbolic and social. However, many postmodern studies in organisational science tend to emphasise the textual and the linguistic at the expense of an understanding of the embodied nature of it.

Conrad (2004) argues for forms of analysis that are more rhetorical and less linguistic and focus on “the symbolic processes through which the social and organizational actors draw upon existing social-linguistic structures to produce, reproduce, and legitimize systems of privilege and domination” (p. 429). He considers discourse analysis that allows for movement between the close-range and long-range

investigation as worthwhile in this endeavour. This approach to discourse as described by Alvesson and Karreman (2000) was discussed in more detail earlier in this chapter.

Styhre (2004) argues that the acknowledgement of the body and an attempt to move away from Cartesian reductionism can open new research agendas such as studying how employees use their bodies in their work, or how management activities are experienced in the metaphor or experience of the body. Research can also focus on how bodies impact organisation practices such as recruitment and appointments. Researchers can also look at how organisations deal with bodily difficulties such as weight gain and burnout as a result of work styles and requirements.

Ontological enquiry, as a method of studying and exploring practical embodied actions, is another suggestion made by Beckett and Morris (2001). Ontological enquiry involves the study of that which occupies the world and people and allows for a study of the conative (conscious action) and actual experience (social and affective aspects). This form of enquiry is seen as a method which renders sufficient accounts of the encounters with the world (Beckett & Morris, 2001). Linked to this although not identical in approach is a focus on stories and narratives. Collecting stories and letting people describe their own experience is seen as another way of catching action or experience in time and space (Martin, 2006). Davies et al. (2005) also use memory and the collection of stories (collective biography) as a way of embodied telling.

The female body at work.

A number of studies have emerged that attempt to address the body as it is lived and constructed in organisations. Davies et al. (2005) note how bodies at work are constituted into desirables and non-desirables with gender and sex inscribed onto the flesh. A somatic norm is identified and this normative body is a white, male body which renders other bodies problematic (Ziarek, 2001).

Trethewey (1999) describes how women's bodies are normalised and constructed in the workplace in terms of three prescriptions: fitness, communication and control. The body is considered professional when it is fit, when it communicates in an appropriate manner with appropriate non-verbal behaviour and gesture and when appropriately controlled and not overly sexual. The female body must be kept from its tendency to

overflow. Failing to carry and manage the body appropriately has negative consequences. Trethewey (1999) further describes how the emphasis on fitness can have negative consequences for those who are no longer able to or cannot portray such an image, such as the disabled or older people. She argues for scholars to continue studying women's embodied experiences in the workplace and how different women and women from different groups can resist some dominant discourses through their bodies. She notes how women's bodies are not unrelated to their positions in organisations and this warrants further exploration and study.

The professional body is also a young body, as she illustrates in her interviews with midlife women (Trethewey, 2001). These women are aware of a discourse of aging as decline that has implications for their career development. The entrepreneurial discourse becomes prominent in their talk as an entrepreneurial spirit is seen as an antidote to the dangers of aging. Thus their recourse lies in the individual taking up the challenge and managing the process for themselves which involves "aging successfully" (Trethewey, 2001, p. 214) and making careful choices and attempting to pass as younger women.

Dellinger and Williams (1997) reflect on women's use of makeup as a way of responding to the requirements of professionalism and the constraints set by the workplace. From their interviews with women she deduces that women generally feel that wearing makeup was associated with being healthy, credible and heterosexual. Their analysis suggests this requirement reproduces assumptions about gender and therefore reproduces inequality. Despite this they note that women view their makeup in a number of ways, as fulfilling a requirement, as a way of bolstering their confidence and also as a way of gaining power. Their analysis of interviews with women shows very little in the way of complete resistance against norms of appearance, but rather an awareness of and knowledgeable stance about appearance expectations. They therefore conclude that women participate in appearance practices with awareness but also strategically. The conclusion is that this practice reflects some of the docile body theory but also that agency cannot be written out of the picture and she therefore warns against a view of women as completely passive in this process. It remains important to explore women's experience within the complex process of appearance management.

Weitz (2001) also emphasises that women do not engage with beauty routines (in her analysis, hairstyles) in a passive and docile way but that women are aware of and manage their hairstyles as ways of seeking and managing power. Thus, it is a complex process of accommodating expectation while at the same time resisting it, where women are aware of expectations and either challenge them overtly or adhere to these as a way a gaining ground in society. What remains is that women adopt strategies of self-care and management within gendered constraints and expectations. Thus women use cultural expectations to achieve certain things and this is a process of agency, but at the same time women are not free to ignore these completely. Thus power obtained by appearance management is at most “fragile, bittersweet and limiting” (p. 683). The strategies then used by individual women to gain power has a counter effect for women as a group, by sustaining and strengthening the existing expectations and discourses.

The female working professional body is not only physically healthy but also mentally healthy and competitive as Blum and Stracuzzi (2004) illustrate in an analysis of articles on Prozac. This analysis reveals how this medication is used or seen as enhancing productivity, giving ambitious workers an edge they would not otherwise have. They found this discourse particularly linked to working women in need of a competitive edge. This is yet another way of structuring and enhancing the female working body.

The restraints, constraints and expectations of the female working body, as discussed in the previous paragraphs, are particularly pertinent and important as it relates to the construction of an invisible norm that is white, heterosexual and able-bodied (Dellinger 1997; Trethewey, 2001; Weitz, 2001). Thus these power restraints manage to ascribe more power to those women who are closer to the norm. Prescriptions for and inscriptions on bodies, are on the nexus of gender, sexuality and race. This gives some women in this matrix more power than others. As such, strategising within these constraints to achieve power means achieving it within a very complex web.

Conclusion

This chapter involved an exploration of the discursive construction of gender in organisations and how this complex process is described and grappled with in different versions of organisational theory. In order to do so, the discussion started with a number of different ways of conceptualising discourse itself as well as different points of investigation when dealing with discourse. A range of focus points can exist in discourse studies ranging from a micro focus that involves explorations of the detail of speech acts to a macro focus that explores the universal and generalised aspects of broader societal discourses as they construct gender.

The discussion on discourse and how it is used was followed by a discussion on the discursive construction of gender. Gender is discursively constructed on the micro level in daily communication habits and it also takes place as a performance of already existing discourse. The process of gender construction was described as a dialectic process where available local texts inform conversation acts while they are at the same time constructed by acts of conversation. These local texts are then informed by societal and public discourses.

The discussion then moved to a description of different gender discourses in organisations and the complex interplay of these as they produce, reproduce and also undermine the status quo. The discourse of equality was shown to be used by many in their everyday talk while this discourse is at the same time contrasted with a discourse of practical considerations or natural difference. Here it became clear how the presence of both these discourses act to establish a status quo of differential treatment and positioning. The diversity discourse as it was recently established in organisations forms a discursive attempt at undermining the gender difference discourse and its common sense truth-value. What emerged from this discussion is the tenacity of the gender difference discourse and while the diversity discourse operates on a formal level, everyday talk returns to ‘natural’ versions of masculinity and femininity.

The discourse of difference further informs certain discursive constructions of masculinity as competitive, logical and instrumental in a pervasive construction of masculine and feminine as opposites, where one has more value and power in the organisation. This form of masculinity is also constructed as a norm that requires hard

work from women to position themselves as part of this discourse, often by negating aspects related to their femininity or by establishing distance from women as a group.

Discursive construction takes place in a complex web of different, opposing and contrasting discourses where the power relations involved in the discursive struggles are rendered invisible despite their substantial impact on this process. The presence of contradiction and contesting discourses maintains and manages the status quo while it also provides opportunity for resistance and destabilising the status quo.

The discussion then addressed concerns with an overemphasis of the linguistic at the expense of the material, here specifically referring to discourse studies in the field of organisational theory. This discussion is an echo of the discussion in chapter 2 that also reflected on some of these issues. Embodied research in organisational studies was discussed and a number of different attempts at including the body were explored. The female body at work was shown to be constructed into professional, fit, restrained, appropriate and competitive forms within strict norms of appearance. Women manage their bodies within this structure with some awareness and manage their own bodies strategically to fit in with the norms but also to gain certain positions by doing so. The management of the female body involves restricting its tendency to overflow and structuring it so that it can be considered as acceptable and fit to work.

To conclude this chapter, it seems that the discursive construction of gender in the workplace is a multi-faceted process of contradiction and contest within existing gender power relations that manage to reproduce themselves by invoking discourses of natural gender differences. This process largely manages to establish invisible norms of the ideal worker as embodied in a male, white body. The inclusion of those different from this norm then requires discursive effort and strategy both on the formal level of policy and organisational structure as well as the personal where individuals have to manage, structure and shape their identity accordingly and I am curious to see which strategies the participants in this study use in this regard.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH POSITION AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter serves as a description of the research position of this study as well as the research process that took place in this study. The chapter starts with a description of the aim of the research and then explores the research position and its implication for the research methodology used. The actual research process is then described.

From the discussions in chapters 3 and 4 it is clear that the sphere of gender discourse is characterised by different and sometimes contradictory discourses. Each discourse has a certain imaginary audience and each audience determines what is considered to be appropriate action (Bevan & Bevan, 1999). The meanings attached to gender are by no means singular and clear, but rather, present day meanings and discourses render a multitude of possible descriptions, subjectivities and actions. To mention but a few: women are workers, women are mothers, women are equal, women are competent, women are intelligent, women are sex-objects, women are superheroes, women are frail, women are seductresses and women are pious, women are acknowledged and rewarded and women are abused and raped. It is within this frame that this study takes place.

Confronted with all these discourses, how does a contemporary middle management South African woman construct her own 'self/selves'? How is it related to context and audience? Which audiences are influential and which are inconsequential? Which determine appropriate action? Which discourses are linked to prevalent practices and which remain subverting voices of contradiction? With these broad and general questions in mind, I formulated the actual research questions of this project that are discussed below.

Aim of The Study

The aim of this study as described in chapter 1 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

The following guiding research questions were mentioned in chapter 1. They are repeated here for further clarification on the aim of the research:

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?

Research Position: Social Constructionism, Feminism and Self-reflexivity

In chapter 2, I discussed my epistemological position and approach to this project as a social constructionist feminist study. This epistemological position has certain implications for research and research methodology and the following section discusses the research implications of social constructionism and feminism and then continues to illustrate how discourse analysis is a suitable method of analysis to use in this study.

Feminist Social Constructionist Methodology

The social constructionist nature of this study requires methodology that takes account of the social nature of knowledge and meaning and further explores how social and cultural understandings construct and are constructed by identities and subject positions.

The feminist lens of this project seeks to apply the chosen methodology in a feminist manner (Gatenby & Humphries, 2000). This means that this research has a commitment to emancipatory values and the aim is to produce research that does not continue patterns of oppression, domination and silencing. The intention is to approach research participants in a collaborative style as a feminist approach to research encourages collaborative and participatory research. Knowledge is further seen as usable for purposes of political action (Gatenby & Humphries, 2000). Feminist psychological research from a social constructionist or postmodern stance involves seeing gender as performative, as role enactments where multiple selves are produced and reproduced. Feminist social constructionist research is therefore different from a standpoint feminist position that aims at uncovering the essential truths regarding women and their position. It sees the research process as a co-creation where researchers are involved in self-reflexivity, where they reflect on how they co-construct the research process (Gergen, 2008). A reflexive research stance means that the researcher reflects back on her own position and location and how that relates to the research process (Eagle, Hayes & Sibanda, 1999). In this way, objectivity does not mean eliminating the person and values of the researcher but accounting for the researcher's own position by self-reflexivity. The knowledge becomes *situated* in a specific context and locality (Haraway, 1991).

The perspective of the feminist researcher is embodied, specific and partial and it is this position of partiality that is considered or reflected on to make responsible knowledge claims possible. The researcher is always speaking and observing from a position and it is this position or location that the self-reflexivity is directed towards. This reflexivity is not directed towards a one-dimensional or linear subject but on a split or fragmented self that is contradictory, complex and continuously being constructed. This fragmented self is never entirely accessible or intelligible. Due to the multi-dimensionality of the self the researcher cannot be completely immersed in subjugation or privilege but is partially connected to both. Reflexivity requires a *critical* view on the different positions the researcher occupies within complex webs of positions and alliances and the power relations between them (Haraway,

1991). Reflexivity and the complexities associated with it will be discussed in more depth later in this chapter.

Feminist methodology also focuses on explicating the different subject positions of women and the aim in this study is not to provide universal truths 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 (Gatenby & Humphries, 2000; Zietkiewky & Long, 1999). The study aims to allow competing voices to be heard and to reveal the varying nature of women's subjective experiences and ideas (Sunde & Bozalek, 1993). Focusing on the power relations in the interview situation is also important and researchers take care not to replicate exploitative and dominating conditions and to presume to speak for others (Knudson-Martin, 1997). A commitment to ethics is vital in feminist research, where the nature of data, being in-depth interviews, can sometimes compromise participants and it is therefore important to remain vigilant about this and to protect participants in this regard (Gergen, 2008).

The methodology of the study will be discussed later in this chapter. At this stage of the discussion, it suffices to mention the following: the implications for the methodology of this study with its aim to explore discourse, meaning and the constructions and constructedness of gender is that a participatory and collaborative research process is needed where my situation, location and position is considered to be part of the process. In this study I therefore include my reflections on the research process and interviews. The interview process and data analysis needs to allow space for differences and similarities to emerge to allow for an exploration of the interplay of different discourses and meaning sets and how these make different subject positions available.

Self-reflexivity.

Self-reflexivity is an important part of this study and warrants some further discussion and exploration here as it can be understood and applied in a number of different ways. My basic starting point and approach to self-reflexivity is to avoid the God-trick as Harraway (1991) calls it: "Ways of being nowhere and claiming to see comprehensively" (p. 191) by "unravelling and making explicit the cultural and historical values of the project and removing the category of 'privileged knowers'" (Lohan, 2000, p. 112). A social constructionist position requires a method that takes account of the constructed and co-created nature of knowledge, and self-

reflexivity therefore provides visibility of the author's position and the presence of the author in the text (Coffey, 2002). Self-reflexivity is also used in this study to enhance the legitimacy of the study (Adkins, 2002) as it involves the reader in the interweaving of different meaning sets. It is a means to allow the reader into the process of the construction of meaning and to provide some criteria by which the reader can ascertain the reasonableness of statements.

In terms of applying self-reflexivity, Gergen (2008) states that self-reflexivity can either be detailed descriptions of one's own involvement in the research process or a process of reflecting on the power relations involved in the research. Thus reflexivity does not necessarily involve a long personal narrative but rather observing the research process to understand how the project was created and how conclusions were reached (Lohan, 2000). In this study, I reflect both on myself and my involvement in the research process and also on the research process and the power issues related to it.

Adkins (2002) discusses the limits of reflexivity and uses the distinction between endogenous and referential reflexivity of May and the meta- and infra-reflexivity distinction of Latour. She argues that reflexivity can easily lead to research accounts that centralises the identity of the author, thus undermining attempts to change power relations in research. The distinctions of May and Latour have in common that one form of reflexivity (May's endogenous and Latour's meta-reflexivity) refers to the process of reflecting back on the self to make the text more believable. The other side of the distinction (May's referential reflexivity and Latour's infra-reflexivity) refers to an outward-looking process of reflection where reflexivity takes place in the world. Adkins (2002) suggests that referential reflexivity should form part of self-reflexivity to create social science that says something about the world it studies and not only something about the scientists. Thus one avenue of overcoming one of the limitations of reflexivity is to make it referential.

In this study, self-reflexivity does not involve exploring the complexities of myself or writing confessional tales (Coffey, 2002) but it is rather an attempt at acknowledging that I am part of the research. I am mindful of the danger of creating a self-indulgent or narcissistic text that makes my position central but I wish to be visible to enhance the credibility of the text. I do this in a number of ways, firstly with the brief description of who I am in chapter 1, then by stating my epistemological position and approach to this research topic and then by reflecting on the research process as it transpired, including the interviews and the data analysis. I am guided by

the suggestions of Beverly Skeggs (2002) that argue for care to be taken with self-telling, the process of providing readers with narratives about the researcher. Instead she suggests that reflexivity should involve paying attention to research practice and research participants. This would involve a

feminist reflection on power and practice which folds into thinking about how social change can occur ... this [means] attention [is] given to power relationships, attention to the representation of research participants, and attention to issues such as ethics, reciprocity and responsibility (Skeggs, 2002, p. 367).

Reflexivity then aims to avoid assuming the right to speak for the 'other' and aims to enhance collaborative authorship and a more self-conscious approach to representation in texts.

Discourse Analysis

After the preceding discussion of the social constructionist feminist research position and the implications thereof in this study, I now turn to a brief description of discourse analysis as a suitable method of data analysis. Discourse and discourse analysis was discussed in chapter 2 and chapter 4 and the discussion here serves to link the method of discourse analysis with the research position. The data analysis procedure followed in this study is discussed later in this chapter.

This study is an exploration of gendered meanings and how meaning is constructed and also how meaning constructs identities and social systems and institutions. Discourse analysis is a method that explores this as it studies accounts and conceptions and how these become fixed (Durrheim, 1997). Discourse analysis further focuses on the organisation of language and the consequences thereof, the constructions people have and the effect of these accounts. With discourse analysis it is possible to focus on the broad types of versions that people have of reality and the themes and theories people use to structure the world (Whetherell, Stiren & Potter, 1987). As a qualitative approach, discourse analysis assumes that words do not come in packages with specific meaning but that meaning is created in the interweaving of words and phrases in different contexts. Therefore the analysis of texts is always against a cultural backdrop that provides a shared system of meaning with sensitivity to language (Parker, 1999). Discourse analysis as a method of data analysis makes it possible to reflect on the

functioning of power in language and how knowledge and power relations produce different identity positions and social institutions.

The Research Process

The previous section of this chapter described the important aspects of the research position and the implications for research. It illustrated how this study aims to understand more about middle management women by focusing on the socially constructed nature of knowledge as expressed in discourse but also focusing on aspects of power. The research aims to understand more about how women's position in organisations are supported or challenged by language and discourse practices and further has an emancipatory value or intention. The research process of semi-structured interviews transcribed and analysed with discourse analysis is discussed in the following section.

Research Participants

This study was conducted by interviewing women with experience as middle managers in organisations. A woman was considered to be in middle management according to the description of her own organisation. Participants were obtained through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling involves approaching one case that helps with information on similar persons (Strydom & Venter, 2005). I asked each participant to refer me to another person whom they know who is in a similar position to them. In this way I obtained participants who are similar in position (Neuman, 2000). (The participants are introduced in the next chapter).

Given the multiracial and multicultural nature of South Africa as well as a history of exclusion and oppression, it was important for me to interview a diverse group of women, to allow for different and possibly competing accounts of reality to emerge. In the end, the participants represented women from different racial groups as I actively attempted to ensure this during the recruitment process and the sample is therefore heterogeneous. This was not achieved to enhance the representational value of the study, as accurate representation of an outside reality is not the aim of the study, but rather to make space for diversity and to allow different voices to be heard within a historical context of exclusion and discrimination. South Africa's particular history of privileging some voices over others (White over Black and male over female) has particular effects in terms of the discursive structure and a homogenous sample would access only a limited number of available discursive repertoires.

Participants were women from different types of organisations, and women from different organisations such as government, non-government and private businesses were interviewed. After two pilot interviews to explore the structure and questions of the interview, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten women. Interviews ranged from between 30 to 60 minutes and were audio-recorded using a mini audio-recorder.

In terms of number of interviews Kvale (2007) notes: “Interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need” (p. 43). This is clearly influenced by the aim of the research, here to explore signification and not to be representative. He further notes that it is common for interview studies to have 15 ± 10 interviews and comments that researchers can benefit from doing fewer interviews with more time to analyse the interviews. Wood and Kroger (2000) also support this idea and comment that discourse analysis researchers should not apologise for small samples “as bigger isn’t always better” (p. 81). In this study, I found a saturation point after ten interviews as there was enough data to work with in order to explore and analyse discursive structures relevant to the topic. Qualitative researchers use saturation to help determine sample size and saturation is traditionally framed as the point of completeness where no new information or ideas are generated (Holloway, 1997) or the major categories of the study have gained sufficient depth and breadth to allow the researcher to develop the category or theme in depth in terms of its properties and dimensions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In discourse analysis, saturation is framed slightly differently and it occurs when there was sufficient data to make, warrant and justify an argument. In other words, saturation in this study occurred when there was enough data to make a number of significant arguments in enough detail (Wood & Kroger, 2000).

The Interview

Semi-structured interviews were used in this study as the aim of the study is to understand how women use, deploy, make sense of and are constructed by gender discourses. Interviews as data gathering procedure can provide detail and depth accounts of women’s talk. Semi-structured interviews with an interview guide were used as the interview guide provides some structure to the conversation and allows for specific topics to be covered without over-structuring the conversation or completely inhibiting spontaneous speech and interaction.

Kvale (2007) distinguishes between two metaphors for interviewing, namely mining and travelling, and my approach toward the interviews was informed by the metaphor of the

interview as a journey where the interviewer and interviewee are co-travellers. The epistemology of this project lends itself toward travelling interviews where the interviewer and interviewee wander through landscapes and explore different parts of the area together as a mutual journey unfolds. This journey does not only bring knowledge to both parties but also changes the traveller. Thus interviewing is an intertwined process of knowledge construction. Kvale (2007) notes that postmodern interviews are sites of construction of knowledge - an “inter-view, an inter-change of views between two persons conversing about a common theme” (p. 21). The interview is therefore an active process and an act of constituting knowledge through social interaction where meaning is created. The interviewee is not seen as a “vessel waiting to be tapped” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004, p. 151) but as someone who brings alternate possibilities and ideas. In a discursive study such as this, interviews aim to develop a variation of responses and to allow diversity to emerge in an informal exchange. Such an interview can also stimulate confrontation between different discourses and be sensitive to differences between participants’ and researchers’ discourses (Kvale, 2007).

I used an interview guide in the study (see Appendix A) in order to provide some structure to the interviews and to keep the conversation focused on the broad research questions. Interview guides can range from a rough guide to detailed worded questions (Kvale, 1996) and I used the guide simply as a broad structure for the interview conversation. This structure provided a list of topics or areas to cover as well as possible questions to assist me make use of the available time effectively while at the same time retaining systematic comprehensiveness (Patton, 2002). I then developed questions around these topics as the interviews progressed. The topics in the interview guide included the participant’s experience of being a woman in the workplace, covering such aspects as career path development, career strategies used and obstacles encountered. The guide also includes the general topic of the interaction between the work and home contexts as well as asking about participants’ ideas on gender equality. I also sometimes enquired about contradictions and how women negotiate and make sense of them. The broad structure of the interview ranged from initially asking women about their personal experience of being a woman in the workplace to asking about their views on gender equality in the workplace as well as how they would advise young women entering the workplace. Thus the beginning part of the interview dealt with their own experience and the latter part more with their ideas about the topic in general. The intention of asking women about their own experience was not to uncover the essential truths of their experience but rather to provide a platform for diversity and to discover the different meaning

structures. I found that the questions about women's own experience in the workplace sparked the development of ideas and prompted them to start thinking about the topic, sometimes differently than before or in more depth than before.

The kinds of interview questions asked in the interviews aimed at both the thematic (uncovering the topic of the interview) and also the dynamic (promoting good interview interaction). The aim was to remain largely unstructured to allow more spontaneous and unexpected answers to emerge. In general the interview moved between thematic questions such as 'tell me about' and dynamic questions that promote more interaction and the flow of the conversation (Kvale, 1996). Different kinds of questions as described by Kvale (1996) were used:

- Introducing questions
- Follow up questions that prompt for more response
- Probing questions such as 'could you say more about that?'
- Specifying questions that aim to operationalise behaviour
- Direct questions
- Indirect questions such as 'how do you think others think about this?'
- Structuring questions that introduced different or new topics
- Silences that provide time for reflection and associations
- Interpreting questions with rephrasing or clarifications such as 'or is it correct that?'

See Boxes 1 and 2 below for excerpts from interviews and examples of interview questions:

Box 1: Excerpt from interview with Andy

A: Uhm, could I ask you. As you know I am doing a research project on women in the workplace. Could you just broadly and generally reflect on your experience as a woman and in your career and we will take it in more detail from there.

Andy: Ok, so. When I started ... way back when twenty-five years ago, uhm, I think things were very unequal, visibly and you can just feel it. You can just feel that you were almost substandard in the workplace [strange noise no talking]. And I worked in the department of health, for government. And ...yes I, my main job function was counselling but I had to go to set up programmes in hospitals and communities. Do HIV/AIDS projects, water projects. Whatever the need was, kind of getting to the general health framework for government. [Ok. Followed by [But it was very tough. And this is the part of being a woman in the workplace that is not sexist. The nice thing about being in the Department of Health is that it is full of women, it is nurses and social workers, and they tend to all be women. I mean, the few and far between are men. But the dynamic as well about being in a government setting was like 'ag, just watch out, you are a newbie and you are going to burn out. We were also as enthusiastic when we started. And now we are just these burntout resentful bitter people'. And also almost setting me up to fail so that they can say 'you see, we told you so'. Squelching that young energy, you know. Ja...



A: So that is where you started. Talk me a bit through it. Of your experience particularly as a woman in your career path, changes that progressed?

Andy: Ok, so. I mean, you know, the story that I always tell about my first job, was ... The Deputy Director at the time was male, and was giving me at the time a little bit of extra attention. You know, and I think the thing that was fascinating of that is that everybody could see that I was uncomfortable ... but also treated me that as if I was in some way responsible and to blame for all this attention that I was getting. Nobody ever came to my rescue, nobody ever you know, assisted me. It was my first job, you know, I didn't know what to do with the person in power who is fawning all over you and being inappropriate. You know, even my female boss. And I am sure she saw it, but left it there. And she also in turn victimised me even further or held me responsible for his behaviour. Uhm, which was an interesting thing [unclear], also that silence. You see that inappropriate behaviour but everybody is just silent. And everybody is just looking the other way. And so, as the victim, you don't know where to turn, I mean, everybody can see it. [It is clear. Followed by] It is clear, why isn't it, you know, why is nobody helping me. Like I am only twenty or whatever, twenty-two you know?

A: Ja, and instead of helping you they were actually [Blaming me, they are blaming me.]

Andy: Uhm, but very clear was that I was at the bottom of the rung uhm, that I really have to work to prove myself. And I did, you know. I became a workaholic, really slogged. And it was also very clear that I worked harder than the male counterparts. Because almost that mentality of you have to be more, run faster, you know. I thought that they were just, you know, they were just doing the bare minimum and getting recognised for it, I do more than my share and was still criticised and still under the fire there. You know, I was in the firing line a lot for some reason.

A: And the firing line, what was that?

Andy: For instance in meetings. Uhm, if I was doing a project. The meeting would rip the project completely apart and criticise and so on and so forth. A male colleague would say 'oh, I am doing like this and this', and we 'oh, very well done', and with just that distinction. And I constantly felt, so at the time, now that I am reflecting on it, and being quite rational, but at that time I felt inadequate, I felt that I had to do more, work harder, work harder, can you see you are just not getting it right, can you see you are just not getting it right. And I really believed it, because I think at that stage that I had the, uhm, the [unclear] of what was happening. I was just pushing pushing ... And I think that women in particular are pushed to have that drive. You know? And I did have that drive. Then I moved to provincial government. Also a female boss. Even worse. Like so hardcore. So hardcore. I mean, I was expected to come in at work at 6:30, and lucky to leave at 8:00 or 9:00. You know. [Laugh] Uhm, and she was, the work load was just immense. Just immense. And things would just get dumped. It would just get dumped, and dumped and dumped on my desk. But I was also in that mentality that 'I will show you, I can do this'. I was a bit blindfolded. [Bring it on. Followed by [Ja, I can do it with my hands tied. [Laugh] With a cloth in my mouth and my eyes blindfolded. You know, so I really just pushed and pushed and pushed.

Box 2: Excerpt from interview with Linda

A: What strategies did you use to work yourself up?

Linda: Hard work

A: Hard work ...

Linda: Hard work and networking and I use my contacts, the different projects that I was exposed to from the time that I came into the company uhm it was a very interesting time for Company X we where uhm ...the strategic equity partnership the American partnership and came into the company for several years. I made very good use of people I knew in higher offices and I made absolutely sure that they knew who I was that I knew them and when positions became vacant uhm I was ... actually, I've only actually applied for one promotion in Company X the other, the other promotions I was given ... so that was, once again I got to where I am through hard work, integrity, honesty and by playing the political game, if you don't play the political game you are not going to get anywhere and that's basically its based on who you know ... and where they are in the game and waiting for a gap to come.

A: And obstacles?

Linda: Other women,

A: Other women?

Linda: Other women have always been obstacles, that's it, that's my answer, other women.

A: In what way?

Interview Transcription

The interviews were recorded with an audio-recorder and transcribed. In terms of interview transcription convention it seems that transcription conventions and techniques fall on a broad continuum with naturalistic transcription conventions on one hand and denaturalistic transcription on the other. Naturalist transcription involves the detailed capturing of every speech utterance where denaturalistic transcription involves standardising interview material, by correcting grammar and removing interview noise and stutters and pauses (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005). The research design and paradigm is important in determining the researcher's choice in this regard where a naturalist approach involves a view of representation that aims to discover the real world where a denaturalised transcript focuses more on the meaning contained in speech as it constructs realities. Naturalised transcription techniques are generally related to conversation analysis studies. Denaturalised transcription techniques are a verbatim depiction of speech content without the focusing on the detailed actions of speech acts. The accuracy concern in denaturalised transcription is to ensure that accurate meanings and perceptions as presented in conversations are transcribed. This form of transcribing is more linked to ethnography, grounded theory and critical discourse analysis and therefore more appropriate in this research project as the field of interest is more related to meaning rather than the mechanics of speech. Kvale (2007) also notes that detailed and specialised transcription are not necessary for meaning analysis where the focus is not on linguistic style, speech or social interaction and that the decision on how detailed the transcription should be depends on the aim of the research. This research project therefore lends itself more towards denaturalised transcription.

It is also important to note here that a social constructionist understanding of transcription does not view transcription as a representation of the reality of the interview. It is rather already a construction. Transcription can never be transparent as the relationship between language and meaning is not transparent (Lapadat, 2000). Transcription can then be seen as initial "thematic anticipations" (Parker, 2005, p. 65). Oliver, Serovich and Mason (2005) note that it is difficult to find clear guidelines for transcriptions in discourse analysis and emphasise

that it is impossible to present everything in transcription and that researchers always need to make decisions about what kind of detailed information to include.

There is some difference of opinion regarding whether the researcher should transcribe all tapes. Some feel that the researcher should transcribe all material where others feel that the researcher should transcribe a few interviews and then develop a transcription protocol (Lapadat, 2000). It remains important for the researcher to always remain aware of the difficulties surrounding transcribing.

In this project I opted for a denaturalised version of transcription. After transcribing two interviews I developed a transcription protocol and used the assistance of a transcriber. The transcription protocol was loosely based on guidelines of Parker (2005) and preserved some of the messiness of ordinary speech (Devault, 1990) but also removed some the detail related to speech act mechanics.

The transcription guidelines as set out were:

- Indicate who is speaking by an initial, eg. A:
- Indicate emphasis by underlining
- Shouting by capital letters
- Interrupt by one person [Followed by [
- Overlap =
- Hesitation ()
- [unclear]
- Pause ...
- [other things: noises laughter etc]

In terms of direct quotations from interview material used in the data analysis section in chapter 6, it is important to note that these quotations are used to give examples of participants' expressions and to indicate how certain discourses, ideas and meanings are represented in the interviews. As the purpose of these quotations is to reflect meaning, most of these quotations were 'cleaned up' in terms of grammatical errors and other speech aspects not directly related to the meaning of what was said.

Discourse Analysis

The use and study of discourse was discussed in chapter 2 and also in chapter 4 and will here be discussed only in terms of the use and application of discourse analysis in this study particularly. As can be seen from the previous chapters, discourse analysis as a methodology has developed tremendously in recent years and a number of different approaches to this method exist. The discussion in chapter 2 illustrated how discourse analysis is a study of signification and the “horizon of meaning” (Parker, 1999, p. 3) of texts. The discussion in chapter 4 illustrated how discourse studies differ in terms of conceptualisation of discourse as well as the point of investigation. The focus point of discourse studies broadly falls on a continuum from micro focus (with detailed explorations of speech acts) to macro focus (with exploration of universal and generalised broader societal discourses) (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). The purpose of this study is to analyse middle management women’s talk to explore the gender discourses that inform their talk and their ways of making sense of the world and to explore how they negotiate dominant and marginal discourses of gender in the construction of their own gender and identity as well as the production and resistance of the status quo. Thus for purposes of this study, a form of discourse analysis that focuses on the text as well as the broader societal dominant and marginal discourses is indicated.

In terms of Alvesson and Karreman’s (2000) distinction (earlier described in chapter 4), this study’s point of focus therefore falls in the category of a meso-discourse analysis where sensitivity towards language use is combined with an awareness of broader patterns of meaning and discourse. In the attention towards the broader societal patterns of meaning and dominant discourse, this version of discourse analysis leans toward critical discourse that aims to render an “account of intricate relationships between text, talk, social cognition, power, society and culture” (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000, p. 1 132). The distinction of Alvesson and Karreman (2000) stems from organisational theory and is somewhat different from the recent distinction between discursive psychology and Foucauldian discourse analysis that has emerged in psychology research publications (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008; Wiggins & Potter, 2008; Willig, 2008). Discursive psychology is described as being strongly influenced by conversation analysis principles and it is concerned with discourse practices and the performative nature of discourses and how discourses act in the talk of participants (Willig, 2008). Discursive psychology sees discourse as both constructed and constructive, action-oriented and as situated in a sequential speech, institutional and rhetoric environments

(Wiggins & Potter). Foucauldian discourse analysis is described as focusing on discursive resources or what Willig (2008) describes as the “discursive economy” (p. 172) and its role in selfhood, the power issues involved and how the “discursive economy” supports institutions and social practices. Willig (2008) describes the work of Parker (1992) as an expression of Foucauldian discourse analysis and notes the steps he sets out as a guide to practising Foucauldian discourse analysis. Hook (2001), however, notes that Parker’s (1992) version does not address historical context or genealogy of discourse, the social, historical and political underwriting conditions of knowledge or the materiality of discourse adequately. Hook (2001) further comments that Foucault did not reduce discourse to meaning and this notion differs from Parker’s (1992) idea that discourse analysis can be done where there is meaning. Hook (2001) notes that a Foucauldian understanding of discourse involves more than meaning and includes historical and material contextualisation of discourse.

The data analysis procedure used in this study was heavily influenced by this work of Parker (1992) and is described in more detail below. Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine (2008) conclude their description of Foucauldian discourse analysis with the statement: “We also cautiously advised that perhaps there is no such thing as ‘Foucauldian discourse analysis’, and that if such a thing existed it would look quite different to linguistic versions of discourse” (p. 105). This statement reflects some of the difficulty with categorising and distinguishing different forms of discourse analysis and illustrates some of the complexities in defining the discourse analysis used in this study. It therefore makes sense not to consider discourse analysis as a singular thing but rather a process of observation and exploration.

The version of discourse analysis used in this study is informed firstly by Alvesson and Kärreman’s (2000) focus of meso-discourse, where the broader discursive patterns are explored with a sensitivity to the language use of participants. In terms of the distinction between Foucauldian discourse analysis and discursive psychology, the analysis fell more in the domain of Foucauldian discourse analysis while retaining some elements of discursive psychology as it retained some focus on the language use and speech acts of participants. It is, however, not Foucauldian in that it does not offer a genealogy of the discourses discussed and explored (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008). The Foucauldian aspects that were addressed in this study were the technologies of the self, subject positions and subjectification (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008) and exploring how these technologies are used to govern the self, the different subject positions as well as the ethics of self-formation. There was a focus

on the interface of discourse and practice and discourse and subjectivity dimensions (Willig, 2008) .

Data Analysis Procedures

Given that no clear step-by-step approaches exist in terms of discourse analysis, I used the point of focus (meso-approach) as guideline and starting point for approaching the data. With an awareness of the aim of the study and a point of departure I immersed myself in the data and read and re-read it a number of times until a manner of approach and structure emerged. I first analysed each interview separately in detail before a cross-analysis between the different interviews started.

I read the transcribed data of each interview separately. The first step here involved reading the text and making notes and free-associating on words and themes as they emerged. The second step involved re-encountering the interview, this time with a few specific questions in mind, to see what emerged. The answers to these questions formed further free associations and notes. The questions I used to assist my reading of each interview were:

- Which objects are spoken about and how are they constructed?
- What kind of subject positions are available in this text? Who must one be to understand the text?
- Are there any explicit or implicit contradictions in the text?
- What does the text want me to think, believe and feel?
- How does the text achieve this?
- Which institutions are supported by this text?

Some of these questions were taken from the work of Parker (1992) and others were developed as I sat with the data.

The questions that were taken from the work of Parker (1992) came from the following criteria for distinguishing discourse that he identified. Parker (1992) identified 20 steps originally and the following were particularly useful in the analysis:

- The transcription of interview material into text – the object of study becomes a text.

Initial exploration of the text includes free association on aspects and ideas. This free association involves exploring the connotations and links associated with the text.

- Distinction between two layers of objectification: the objects or topics the text refers to and the discourses present in the text.
- Identifying the subjects of the text and the knowledge necessary for participation in the discourse.
- Identifying which cultural understandings are employed by the text. Identifying contrasting discourses and points of overlap between them. Identifying reflexivity in the discourse which can point to other discourses present. Reflecting on the historical situatedness of the text.
- Investigating which institutions are supported by the discourse and how the text would deal with objections.
- Investigating the reproduction of power relations and examining the ideological effects of the discourse (from Parker, 1992).

The questions I developed allowed me to identify and reflect on specific discourses as they emerged in the texts and the third step in working with individual interviews then involved identifying specific discourses in each interview.

After dealing with each individual interview separately I then reflected on a cross-analysis by reflecting on the discourses as they emerged in the different interviews to see how different discourses and patterns or ideas developed and if there were any differences in the discourses. I would typically use phrases that made an impression on me such as ‘it’s my fault’ as an expression of a certain discourse. This process therefore involved isolating different discourses as far as possible. With these discourses in mind I re-read the data, searching for expressions of these discourses as well as their effects, contradictions and silences around them. I used coloured pens to identify certain discourses in the text and then started writing about these discourses. Writing about the discourses, how they emerged, what they represented and which other discourses they referred to formed another part of the process as it sometimes caused me to revisit some of my ideas about how a discourse operates.

In the end, I found that some discourses crystallised into shapes and forms that gained structure. They propelled me into different lines of thought, they engaged my imagination,

reminded me of images, stories, books and films. As such, they perturbed me and gained a sort of externalised shape. This allowed me to communicate with them and to feel their effects. While all of this was happening, I was moving around, walking in the veld, sitting in the sun with pages of interview text and free association notes. An internal dialogue started that prompted me to write. As such, my experience of these discourses involved a whole body immersion experience with excitement and curiosity as different discourses, ideas, feelings and arguments developed.

Criteria for Establishing the Trustworthiness of the Study

Fixed quality criteria for qualitative research from postmodern or interpretivist standpoints are not available and where earlier positivist qualitative researchers struggled to develop set criteria for qualitative research, this has become even more problematic with the advent of postmodern qualitative research (Seale, 2003). The acknowledgement of the inability of language to reflect a complete picture of the world renders all scientific accounts vulnerable and introduces a crisis of validity (Gergen & Gergen, 2003). Early criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness of qualitative research include those of Lincoln and Guba (1985) and also Marshall and Rossman. Lincoln and Guba (1985) use criteria such as credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability and later also included authenticity (Schwandt, 2001). Marshall and Rossman (1999) use credibility, transferability, confirmability, and replicability as quality criteria for qualitative research.

The above criteria were kept in mind in this study but the work of Parker (2005) was found very useful with regards to setting up criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness of social constructionist research and this study. Parker (2005) mentions the importance of grounding work in existing research. In this study this is particularly important as much has been written on this topic and the existing research and literature is important in terms of the available constructions of the issue. The next criterion is coherence and I focus on coherence of argument in this study. The next criterion of importance is that of accessibility with clear accounts of and descriptions of the research process, the background to the research and the interpretations. In this study this was aimed for throughout with description of and transparency of the research process and I include comments and reflections on the process as it progressed. The principle adhered to here is that adequate description increases the credibility of the research as Parker suggests that it is important to know how we know

instead of what we know and the “starting point is to emphasise *the activity or process of research rather than the objects we attempt to know*” (p. 3).

Reflexivity forms another way of increasing the accountability and credibility of the research, as the emotional investments, positions, and the moral political standpoint are made explicit to the reader (Gergen & Gergen, 2003; Parker, 2005). Reflexivity is engaged in here with the assumption that visibility of my position is important as it assists the reader to contextualise the study but at the same time, the main aim remains to reflect on and explore the conversations with the participants and how meaning and realities are constructed in these conversations. The issue of voice is often important in constructionist research and participants are often asked to comment on the researcher’s interpretations. In this study this was not undertaken as the aim was not to privilege the immediate perspectives of the participants but to explore the different discourses present in the texts. Triangulation in the context of this study involves showing different ways in which the issue might be understood and this is explored in the final chapter (Parker, 2005). Finally, in the last chapter I use some literary styling to express my conclusions and ideas of the data in a different manner. Gergen and Gergen (2003) describes literary styling as an alternative to realist approaches and the use of the literary mode indicates to the reader that the account is not an accurate map of reality but an interpretive act. In this study, this is used to a limited extent as I use a metaphor from fiction when concluding and summarising. This is clearly an interpretive act with the intention of allowing the material to speak differently and to be heard differently.

Given the complexities of quality criteria in qualitative research, the following statement by Alvesson (2002) serves as an apt summary of important factors and the need for research to be based on “(a) care, awareness and insightful handling of the production/construction processes; and (b) care in the interpretation of it” (p. 166). This statement informed much of my approach to creating trustworthy and credible research.

Ethical Procedures

The study received ethical clearance from the Ethics and Quality Control Committee of the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Pretoria. The ethical principles of confidentiality, privacy, consent and doing no harm were adhered to in this study (Olesen, 2005). Participants were contacted telephonically, informed about the aim of the study and asked if they were willing to participate in the study. They were informed that I would need about an hour of

their time and that the interview would be recorded. They were informed that their participation would be anonymous and that the research would be published in a research dissertation and academic journals. On the day of the interview I explained the purpose of the study again and reiterated confidentiality and that all identifying information would be removed from the raw data including names of organisations or employers that might come up during the interview. On completion of one of the interviews one participant requested that a particular section of the interview be removed and this was done accordingly. I also explained that participants were free to withdraw from participation at any time during the interview.

All the participants seemed to enjoy the interviews and none of them seemed to experience visible distress during the course of the conversations. Feminist approaches to ethics (Gergen, 2008; Olesen, 2005) consider issues of power and strive for research that is collaborative and participatory. I remained aware of this during interviews and was conscious of the power that the interviewer or researcher might have (Olesen, 2005). I think that participants felt free to express their own opinions even when they were under the impression that it differed from mine. My experience of the interviews is that they did not create a power relationship that silenced participants or privileged specific viewpoints or voices. Participants generally expressed the desire to be helpful but also expressed their own views with ease. There was also no deception used in the study. Part of feminist ethics further involves considering the impact of the research and how the research can contribute to improve or enhance the lives of women and the aim of this study is to gain further understanding of the gender stratification of the workplace in order to generate knowledge that can be used to address the issue (Brabeck & Brabeck, 2009). A number of participants became interested in the topic as the interview progressed and mentioned that they had not given the topic much thought before and that they had a few things to ponder after the interview. This is a good example of how interviews are more than data gathering conversations but rather creative and political interactions.

Conclusion

It is not advisable to aim for recipes of research within the framework of social constructionism and in the course of this research project the methodology and research processes used, although guided by literature on discourse analysis and social constructionism, developed in an organic way from the interaction of the researcher, the participants and the data. Thus the statement that discourse analysis is different for different

people. Within the difference and methodological diversity I aim for good practice in qualitative research, hoping to achieve trustworthy use and interpretation of the data by keeping the reader in the loop by disclosing my own orientation and making the research process and how it came to its conclusions clear.

CHAPTER 6

THE PARTICIPANTS, INTERVIEWS AND DATA ANALYSIS

The previous chapter involved a description of the research position and the research methodology followed. In this chapter I introduce the participants, describe and reflect on the interviews and the interview process and then engage in a discourse analysis of the transcribed interview data. The first section of the chapter serves as an introduction to the participants and description of the interviews themselves followed by reflections on the interview process in general. The second section of the chapter involves the discourse analysis of the transcribed interview data.

Introducing the participants and interview reflections

From my research position, as described in chapter 5, it is important to reflect the situatedness of the researcher but also of the research participants. I therefore wish to introduce the research participants and briefly describe and reflect on the interviews with each of them individually. The descriptions and my reflections of the interviews are intentionally quite direct and personal. The direct and personal descriptions of the interview contexts and processes aim to embody the data that will be presented in the discourse analysis that will follow later in this chapter. It is important for me to provide an embodied and contextualised account of the process, not in order to provide more truth-value, but to bring visibility to some of the physical, emotional and contextual aspects often lost in the process of working with interview data. My reflections on the interviews themselves, as well as the interview process in general, are a form of self-reflection to give a more detailed account of my involvement in the research process.

Linda

Linda is a white English-speaking woman in her 40's. She is married and has one 5-year-old son. She is a senior manager in a telecommunications company. She is originally from the United States and has lived in South Africa since she came here as a post-graduate student.

Interview reflections

Linda received me for the interview in her very neat office wearing a long skirt with her hair loose, hanging down almost to her waist. Linda seemed keen to discuss the topic at hand and seemed to have done a lot of thinking about this issue. She discussed her experiences and her ideas with enthusiasm. She spoke with a lot of confidence as she expressed her ideas with certainty and clarity. The interaction between us involved her sharing her ideas with me and almost instructing me on the skills one needs to succeed. I felt somewhat inadequate in her presence, not professional or experienced enough and a bit out of place in the corporate environment.

Magriet

Magriet is a white Afrikaans-speaking woman in her early 40's. She is single, has never been married and has no children. She is a manager in a telecommunications company.

Interview reflections

She received me at her workplace and was dressed in a business suit. We had the interview in a boardroom with a round table. She seemed keen to help me and she participated with openness and ease. It was clear from the discussion that the topic was not something that she spent a lot of time thinking about and initially it was somewhat difficult for her to talk about this. She became more interested as the interview progressed and said that the interview situation prompted her to think about things she had not thought of before and that she would probably spend some time thinking about it after the interview. From a feminist perspective it then seems that the interview had a conscientising effect on her. I felt comfortable during the interview and was grateful for Magriet's warm and open way of approaching the interview.

Nobesotho

Nobesotho is a black woman in her 40's. She is married with two small children and she is a BEE (Black Economic Empowerment) Manager at a research institution.

Interview reflections

Nobesotho had to fetch me from another building as I could not find my way to her office. She was dressed in a blouse and long skirt with a scarf around her shoulders. She said that she had a sinus infection and needed to blow her nose a number of times during the interview. She spoke in a soft and gentle voice and answered the questions with ease. She did not seem too interested in the topic and almost apologised at the end of the interview, saying that she thought it must have been boring for me leaving me to think that she felt that she did not give me what I wanted. In this way, this interview did not develop into mutual exploration of the topic and in retrospect I wonder if different questions would have allowed the process to develop in a different way.

Delia

Delia is a white woman in her late thirties. She is single with no children and she works in the administration division of an engineering firm.

Interview reflections

I met Delia at her home one afternoon after work and she was still dressed in formal work clothes. After she had let the cat out and poured us a sherry, we started the conversation. Delia was keen to participate but worried that she might not give me the information I needed. She seemed quite uncomfortable with the tape recorder initially but seemed to get used to it as the interview progressed. From the way she answered questions and spoke about the topic, it seemed that she had not given much thought to the topic before. She seemed to enjoy talking about it and also seemed to enjoy thinking about her career as the interview progressed. She stated during the interview and afterwards that she had not given her career much thought before as it had just developed naturally.

Catherine

Catherine is a white English-speaking woman in her mid thirties. She is single with no children and is a Division Manager in an Engineering Consultancy.

Interview reflections

Catherine offered to come to my house for the interview. We sat at my dining room table in the afternoon, drinking juice while we spoke. I know Catherine from another non-work related context and had not discussed the topic of the research with her before. As the interview started and I asked her about her experience as a woman in the workplace she surprised me with a clear and concise summary of the issues she had encountered. She had clearly thought about the matter before and pointed out aspects that bothered her in terms of equality and the workplace. Her solution to the problem is to take a more humanitarian approach to people in the workplace. I enjoyed the interview which was short due both to time constraints and to the fact that she articulated her issues with clarity.

Andy

Andy is a black woman in her late thirties. She worked for government in the health field for many years and recently started her own consulting and coaching business.

Interview reflections

I met with Andy at her home. We sat outside on the veranda overlooking a big garden with lots of birds and the dog lying around our feet. Catherine was dressed casually in a t-shirt top and skirt. She was keen to talk about the topic and had a lot to say and it was quite a long interview. She spoke eloquently and had a light and bubbly way of describing the issues, using a lot of humour. The conversation developed into a comfortable co-construction of ideas and discourses and we both enjoyed the process and we were still talking as I was on my way out. Catherine and I shared many views and opinions on the topic and this clearly added to our capacity to co-construct and develop a very informal interview style.

Dominique

Dominique is a black woman in her 40's. She is divorced and lives with her teenage son. She is a vice-principal at a government school.

Interview reflections

I met with her at her home in the morning during school holidays. She was wearing an old t-shirt as she had just coloured her hair. She offered me coffee and we sat on the

couches in her lounge. Dominique feels strongly about women empowerment and has attended a number of courses on empowering oneself in the education field. She had a strong need to remain balanced and reasonable during the interview and wanted to give people the benefit of the doubt. Her approach was quite serious and the interview remained quite formal.

Gillian

Gillian is an Afrikaans-speaking woman in her early 50's. She is divorced and has adult children. She is in the IT industry.

Interview reflections

I met with Gillian one evening at her home and we sat at the dining room table while her two maltese poodles were playing wildly around our feet. She seemed somewhat uncomfortable with the tape recorder and also somewhat uncomfortable in talking about the topic. Her position was that women should not make too much of equality as it has mostly been obtained and my feeling was that she was trying to convince me not to make such a big deal about gender as the struggle for equality was complete. In retrospect I wondered how I could have phrased the questions differently so that she did not feel the need to convince me or so that we could engage in more of a conversation and co-construction on the topic.

Lulu

Lulu is a black woman in her mid 30's. She works as a middle manager in the Human Resources division of a research institution. She is married with three small children.

Interview reflections

Lulu received me in her office and we sat down at the boardroom table. She was dressed in a business suit. She was comfortable to talk and she was willing to participate. Lulu was also interested to hear about me and my experience and asked me if I had children and a family. Thinking and talking about this specific topic was easy for her and she had clear ideas about her choices and actions in terms of the issue. In this interview I needed to use a lot of paraphrasing and clarifying questions to enhance the flow of the conversation but I found the conversation satisfying and interesting. The questions as such did not seem to perturb her much.

Fatima

Fatima is an Indian woman in her late 30's. She is single with no children and she currently works for a think tank organisation but has recently been awarded a scholarship to do a PhD at Harvard University in the United States and was due to leave for the States in the upcoming months.

Interview reflections

Fatima received me at her home, served tea she recently brought from China and we sat in her lounge. She was formally dressed and very well groomed. She was very keen to discuss the topic and also keen to be a participant and to help. She had a lot to say and seemed to enjoy the interview process. It was clear that some of the questions made her think and she responded to this by really revisiting her experience and sometimes expanding on her position. She was quite relaxed and managed to express herself with ease, using a lot of anecdotes and experiences. Her answers were generally quite long and I asked minimal questions, generally questions related to the topic without needing to prompt, clarify or rephrase much. She was also quite direct about her opinion and did not really mince her words. This was also one of the longer interviews as she elaborated on most questions and topics at great length. This interview also had quite a light feel to it despite the fact that she also described a difficult journey to get to where she is.

Personal reflections on the interview process

I generally felt quite comfortable during the interviews as the participants were all keen to assist me and they were generous with their time and their presence. While all of the women were available to help, some participants were more interested in the topic with a lot to say about it while others were less interested in it.

I generally introduced the research with a general comment such as “I am doing research on women in the workplace” and started many of the interviews by asking women to reflect on their experience of being a woman in the workplace. This clearly set up a certain expectation in terms of the content of the research topic but also in terms of my approach to the topic. A study of women in the workplace generally implies that issues of discrimination and gender stratification are under investigation and it seems to me that women generally have a position about the necessity of such

work. Some women feel strongly about the issue and the need to explore it, others have not given it much thought, others feel that it is no longer an issue necessary to discuss or explore, and others became aware of gender issues as the interviews progressed. In terms of an interview situation, it then makes sense that interviews with women who share concerns about the research topic have an easy conversational flow with a sense of being co-constructed. If one considers this research as activism, the interviews were a process of keeping some fires burning brightly, lighting a few new fires and also blowing on the dead embers of others.

Given the above, women who had different views on the topic felt that they were not giving me what I wanted and seemed almost apologetic about it. What contributed to this further was that some of the questions asked during the interviews were based on literature that pointed to gender differences in the workplace in terms of specific topics such as task divisions and salary. I was often curious about how their experiences were similar or different to those mentioned in the literature and enquired about this. This sometimes led to a situation where it seemed that I was ‘looking’ for a particular answer. I wonder how I could have enquired differently about these issues without introducing an expectation of a certain answer. This is probably one of the drawbacks of using an interview guide and introducing topics in the interview as the participant might experience this as probing for something. Not asking a specific question might communicate more openness or otherwise one could state specifically what the intention of a question is or talk about the ‘differences’ between the researcher and the participant openly during the interview.

My purpose with these questions on specific topics related to the literature was generally to provide structure to the conversation as the introduction of specific topics allows one to cover more conversational ground. Despite the drawback mentioned above, questions that introduced a new topic, or different aspect of the topic, seemed to work in that they opened new ground for discussion and sometimes managed to introduce and elicit new ideas in the conversation.

An interview situation with time constraints and an audio-recorder has its limitations in that the nature of it constricts or limits the spontaneous flow of the conversation to a certain extent. Despite this, the questions asked in the interviews, both questions

relating to experience and questions relating to participants' opinions of certain ideas or topics, did provide data to work with. Switching off the tape recorder at the end of the interviews had an interesting impact as it served as the punctuation at the end of the interview and then puts the conversation into a reflective space about the interview that just happened. Some of the participants stated afterwards that they enjoyed the interview and that it stimulated them to think about the topic but also about themselves and their careers. Some asked if the interview was satisfactory and if they had been able to give me what I needed. Spontaneous conversations then sometimes developed that I wished I could have recorded as they happened.

I think that my race also played an important role in the interview. As a white woman doing interviews I found that other white women generally did not comment on their race except for referring to it in terms of possible disadvantage, noting that being white in South Africa placed certain limitations on their career path. Black women also did not really refer to their race. When I gently enquired about race I found a general reluctance to talk about it, especially in interviews with black women. This is hardly surprising given that race is a very sensitive topic in South Africa and not something that people discuss easily or openly. This reluctance was probably partly due to the racial difference between us but also partly due to the artificial and somewhat uncomfortable nature of an interview situation such as this. So in effect, in interviews with white women whiteness attained invisibility and in interviews with black women it became something difficult to talk about. It would seem that gender remains an easier topic to discuss than race in a woman-to-woman interview where some aspects of a shared understanding of being a woman are implicit. My gender therefore also played an important role in the interviews. A male interviewer would have changed the nature of the interviews. A woman-to-woman interview does create a sense of shared understanding and I also think that it makes conversations about inequality easier. I have found this in my personal life where discussing gender equality is often easier with women than men. Conversations with men are often more careful and more tentative.

Discourse Analysis of Interview Data

The previous section was an introduction to the participants, descriptions of the interviews and reflection on the interview process as a whole. With this as context and

background, the next section involves an analysis of the transcribed interview data. The procedure of discourse analysis I followed was discussed in chapter 5. Appendix B further provides a step-by-step illustration of my work with one of the interviews and provides the reader with an illustration of how I reached conclusions based on raw interview data.

One of the most striking aspects of the analysed texts and the patterns and discourses that emerge from them is the complex and contradictory ways in which being female and being male are constructed and this is particularly pertinent in terms of the discursive construction of women and femininity. Contradictions abound and the task of separating different discourses is difficult but still indicated, perhaps particularly because of the complex nature of it. The discussion that follows will therefore attempt to isolate and discuss different discourses that inhabit the texts. This process is, however, similar to identifying separate strands of a web where perturbing one strand invariably perturbs and moves other strands as well. As such the discussion will also aim to include broader parts of the web. I will start the discussion by focusing on the different constructions of femininity and being female in the workplace.

The Career Woman Versus the Workingwoman

A discourse of the career woman inhabited many of the texts, albeit in different forms. The career woman discourse is constructed by the notion that some women are driven by a strong desire to get to the top and are therefore career women. These women place a high emphasis on job titles and status in the organisation and seek to achieve the highest level possible. The opposite of the career woman is a woman who is just doing her work (I will refer to her as the workingwoman) because she enjoys what she does and wants to do it well but she is not driven to reach the top and does not try to find ways to succeed. She is not so driven but can still be very hardworking and committed although she is not motivated by a drive to succeed in terms of status.

In terms of the career woman discourse, participants positioned themselves in terms of it by either distancing themselves from this position, for example by explicitly stating that they are not career women or by aligning themselves with the career woman deliberately.

Gillian starts her interview with the statement:

I just wanted to work I have never been a career woman. I have never been a driven person. I just do what I have to do, and what I enjoy.

She continues to define a career woman “as a person who wants to get to the top”. In contrast, she feels “I have never felt I want to achieve. I want to achieve in what I am doing now. I don’t want to achieve to make progress”.

She makes it clear that she enjoys her work, and this aspect also features in other conversations of participants who chose to distance themselves from the career woman. They indicate how they enjoy their work, how they spend a lot of time working and even how the other aspects of their lives suffer because of work but they state at the same time that they are not career women as they are not motivated by a need to get to the top. For these participants, the position of the career woman seems an uncomfortable position to adopt, almost as if being a career woman is something to be ashamed of, to be avoided or at least not admit to. However, not being a career woman does not translate into working less or even not enjoying one’s work. Magriet illustrates this when she advises young women to know who they are but not in “an ambitious women’s group” way.

The construction of the career woman is, on the other hand, embraced by other participants who place themselves clearly in this position, and describe themselves as being both hardworking and ambitious. Taking this position involves a distance from ‘mere’ workingwomen. As Linda (who describes herself as a career woman) states: “not all women are highly motivated and aggressive”. There is a mutual distancing process happening here.

One of the central characteristics of the career woman, as she is discursively constructed here, is ambition. Ambition features in many of the texts, often in complex and contradictory ways. For one, it has the power to categorise women into either career women or working women. The career woman is ambitious but the workingwoman is not and therefore ambition is something that working women are cautious of. Ambition here is constructed as both a need and a motivator or driver. It

is a need to get to the top and it is seen as being driven by an internal force. The use of it in many of the texts is ambivalent and contradictory: women will describe how hard they work, how motivated they are and how they act above and beyond the call of duty, but, at the same time, they do not consider themselves to be ambitious.

Delia also does not align herself with the career woman and says

I don't know. I don't live for my career you know. I don't feel that I have to reach the highest position or that I have to make my mark but it just happens. I just get involved with things. ... In terms of my company I am actually quite senior there and this is strange for me as I never thought that that is what I want to do.

In the interview with Magriet, she commented on ambition a number of times. First she said: "It must be because I don't have ambition to reach the next level. People sense that I am not competing for it" and later she states "I can say with all honesty, it is not my ambition to reach the next title but I do want acknowledgement. I want people to see that I am good at what I do."

I was curious about what seems to be a contradiction and when I asked her to reflect on this she responded by saying: "I want to find a niche for myself where I can know that nobody can do what I can. So if that is perhaps ambition, then I suppose I have it". And further on she comments: "The financial hierarchy does not matter, what matters is that I want to make a mark. That is probably ambition in a way."

Magriet's initial ways of talking about ambition are amended almost in the form of an admission of guilt. As if to say, 'you caught me out, I am actually ambitious'. Ambition is also associated more with 'women's libbers' (the construction of feminists and women's libbers will be discussed in more detail later).

There is therefore an opposition between the career woman and the woman who works, and participants generally took positions in terms of this. Within this opposition lies another discourse, generally not explicitly stated but often implicitly present: the discourse of the bitch. The bitch is a woman who is too aggressive in the

workplace and generally constructed as a “*big, big* turn off professionally” (as described by Linda). Men do not respect a bitch and neither do other women. The bitch breaks all taboos by not remaining feminine. The discourse of the bitch is an implicit and explicit presence in the texts and definitely viewed as a position to be distanced from. The bitch is implicitly present in much of the talk on being a woman in the workplace in that women make sure that they construct themselves as different from the bitch and distance themselves from her.

The discourse of the bitch is a dominant social discourse and seems to become internalised as a frame that serves to evaluate much of what is said about being a woman in the workplace. It is as if the images and memory of women ‘who act like men’ (as it is often described in everyday talk) are present. Images of these kinds of women (Margaret Thatcher or *The Devil Wears Prada*) loom in the background and warn the speaker against certain positions and the social rejection they involve. So if a woman is brave enough to align with the career woman discourse it becomes important to distance oneself from the bitch, explicitly so, and to make a clear commitment to the value of remaining feminine. As Linda (who describes herself as a career woman) stated: “I expect men to treat me like a lady but you can only expect a man to treat you like a lady if you act like a lady”. Women who have made it to the top are then described as women who have become bitches. Here Fatima says: “On the flipside of the coin, women that get to the top are either real bitches because they fight so hard and they have to be constantly a mean person to get there” and Andy reflects on this dilemma by stating that “executive women have two choices, they either have to become like a boy’s boy, you know, so they have to play golf ... or they become the bitch. You know, she is hard core”. The awareness of the very negative characteristics of the bitch seems to be present or at least inform a lot of identity work in women and can act as a barrier or inhibitor in terms of work behaviour. It is as if the bitch presents a line that should not be crossed and occupational functioning is therefore not only evaluated in terms of success but also in terms of the extent to which the success is achieved without becoming the bitch. This view of women at the top (by participants) is yet another distancing manoeuvre, another way of being different from women who make it.

This opposition between the career woman and the workingwoman can act as a discursive mechanism that maintains the status quo, with a warning towards those who choose to be a career woman, not to step over the line of femininity. Yet at the same time, this opposition makes it possible to slip into a committed working life, almost unseen and without having to be accused by the anti-bitch internal and external warning system. Distance from the career woman gives a strange permission and excuse that claims that even though the woman is working hard and committed to work, she cannot be categorised into a position that undermines her identity and position as a woman. This makes it possible to climb the career ladder and get promoted without compromising feminine identity.

The necessity to distance oneself from the career woman points to another more fundamental discourse where the combination of the concepts ‘work’ and ‘woman’ is still in some way considered to be irregular or non-standard. Perhaps more accurate here is the combination of career and woman. Working is one thing, having a career is another and remains something that has to be justified if one is a woman. Given workplace statistics, this notion seems almost ludicrous and too outdated to still have any persuasive power. Most people today who consider themselves reasonable would probably challenge the idea that there is some discursive structure that does not reconcile having a career and being a woman, seeing that this practice is commonplace in our society today.

Exploring the presence of this almost antiquated discourse would involve greater detailed reflections on how women and womanhood are constructed in the texts and this is what follows next in the discussion.

The construction of what it means to be a woman and also what is required of women is a discursive quagmire. It is messy, unpredictable, you never know what your next step will find or where it will take you.

The Natural Differences Discourse

The natural differences discourse (Dick & Nadin, 2006) as it was discussed in chapter 4 seems present and prevalent in the participants’ talk and presents itself in a number of different ways. The natural differences discourse is a discourse that calls on the

commonsense notion that women and men are naturally different and that these differences cannot be explained away. (The term commonsense here refers to ideas that are taken up in dominant discourses and everyday talk that have gained taken-for-granted truth value and are rarely questioned.) The natural difference discourse has a discursive mechanism that is sometimes used to support the status quo of gendered structures as it explains and therefore justifies differential treatment. When referring to how men and women are different, participants do so with ease, generally, as it normally only requires confirming some commonsense notion of womanhood. There are a number of differences that are alluded to and employed in explanations.

To begin with, women are constructed as being emotional, as Linda says: “Women are emotional, it’s the way we are built, we are more emotional, we tend to worry about the detail, we tend to worry about so-and-so said this and so-and-so said that”. She also states that “I don’t know one woman that doesn’t display some or other emotional issue”, excluding herself from this, however.

The natural differences between men and women are also used to explain why complete gender equity will never be attained. Linda formulates this as “human nature. Not all women are highly motivated and aggressive” and she continues to say that “I think it’s human nature and I don’t expect there to be gender equity but I expect there to be fair treatment in the workplace and home”. Gender equity is therefore not obtainable partly due to how women (and men) are made.

Then, in contradiction to the notion that women are too emotional and not ambitious enough arises the notion that women get the job done. Many of the participants voice the opinion that women are extremely efficient, sometimes more so than men. Linda states that “I believe that depending on the woman, women are actually more competent and efficient than men above and beyond all the other issues and challenges”. Catherine’s MD told her that “he preferred to work with women. He found they are more capable of getting the job done, and less involved in politics and if he wanted something done he would give it to a woman”. Magriet says that companies realise that “as long as your ‘core’ has more women, you make sure that you get the job done”. She then adds another interpretation to the competence discourse by stating “I think it is everybody’s excuse that women are more

‘dedicated’ and that they can ‘multitask’ and all those good things. I think the reality is that it is simply easier for men to say no”. Here she accuses the discourse of female competence to be a way of getting more out of women. I will come back to this in the discussion of women and their workloads later in the discussion.

So far, in this discussion of the differences between women and men, we see again some contradiction. Women are talked about as being too emotional, not ambitious enough but at the same time also more competent and efficient than men. These constructions are hard to reconcile, on the one hand opening space for resistance as new definitions can emerge but on the other it provides the space for the discourse of woman and career as incompatible to remain invisible yet present.

As seen above, the commonsense idea that women are ‘built’ this way is used to explain this difference. This turn to nature and biology makes a statement irrefutable (reminding us of another discourse that constructs differences between men and women as God given). The differences constructed as part of our natural structure relate to aspects that are considered less desirable in the workplace, such as being emotional or not driven enough but also relates to aspects that are considered useful such as being hardworking and getting the job done.

There is another difference between women and men that is noted in the analysed texts: women can’t say no. Men can and do so with confidence. As an example, Delia notes that “if something has to be done and nobody puts up a hand” she does it as “I am just like that” and “ I just don’t say no to extra work”. This difference between men and women is not constructed in the same manner as the difference discourse discussed so far in that it is not described as given or ordained by nature. It is depicted as a flaw that women have. “Stumbling blocks again ... You can’t say no, so you are seen as the person that will do everything” (Magriet). This flaw also results in larger workloads in “having more work than I can handle” (Delia).

Magriet notes that “it is as if men get away with saying they don’t have enough time or they don’t have enough resources” where this is “definitely not with women”.

When Gillian talks about her workload and explains that she has a bigger workload, she says “It’s something you take. It’s your choice. It’s my fault”. This last statement of “it’s my fault” is significant and warrants further discussion.

It’s My Fault

There are three discourses at play in this statement. The first is an internalising discourse where events and experiences, in this case, inequitable distribution of workload, is viewed as due to internal processes. This means that what could be framed as an interpersonal or social process is rather framed within an individual structure where the individual is considered as source of the process and therefore to blame for it. Social or interpersonal explanations for behaviour are scarce in the text and relate mostly to culture (another discourse that will be discussed in more detail later) where internalising language is very common with statements such as “it is just the inner me” (Magriet) or “it is not because I am a woman but because I am me” (Magriet) or “it is just the way I am” (Delia). Many women in these interviews described that they work too hard, that they struggle to say no and also noted that it was their fault. This theme then runs like a leitmotif through many interviews.

Further, the internalising aspect, the inability to say no to work, is described as a flaw that is particular to women in general.

In my view, we are all doing it. Submissive roles? I don’t know but my view is that we all want to succeed ... or perhaps we are allowing it to happen in a way, a bit (Gillian).

We do it to ourselves, probably, I don’t know (Magriet).

The only thing is about men, that they are not hard workers and that they don’t share information. That’s the only inequalities I can think of. But we allow them (Gillian).

This introduces a second discourse of psychopathology. These flaws are generally seen as psychological issues and therefore intervention on the individual level is required. Apart from the inability to say no, most of the women also mentioned the

well-known psychological drawback: lack of self-esteem or self-confidence, an aspect that many women mention when they describe their career obstacles. Statements such as “I think my biggest obstacle is myself” (Gillian), “it is about self image. We grow up being taught to be the least and that is where it comes from” (Magriet) or “We’ve got bad self-esteem and we need to achieve, we need to achieve” (Gillian). The idea that career progress would have been faster had it not been for this problem is also quite prominent with Catherine mentioning “my lack of self-confidence is a stumbling block. I could have progressed in certain areas earlier if I’d actually had the confidence to do those things”. Magriet reiterates the same notion when she says “Perhaps if I had more self-confidence I could have been in a different place right now”.

A striking feature of the use of the words ‘fault’ and ‘blame’ is that they are solely reserved or used in conjunction with the individual woman or women as a group. These words do not feature in the analysed texts in any other way (referring to men, society, the workplace) and even with a strong statement such as “men are lazy” (made by Gillian) the woman herself is still to blame for accepting this condition.

As such, internalising and pathologising discourses are rooted in a thorough individualism. The individual woman is to blame for her lack of self-confidence and her inability to say no. Sometimes this flaw is seen as the result of one’s culture or how one grew up. “We grow up being taught to be the least and that is where it comes from” (Magriet) or “I believe a lot of that comes through the home”, yet these constructions are an afterthought, a possible explanation but it does not translate into versions of reality that require social change. It is said with an acceptance and despite the fact that it might be due to a certain cultural upbringing. The flaw is still constructed as the woman’s own fault. In this vein Fatima states:

You know, I think you kind of become complacent, you kind of accept it a bit that you’re a woman and there are certain limitations. I don’t know why, maybe it is part of your socialising and upbringing. But you don’t, you say ‘well...’. So I am looking at myself critically and realise that complacency view of some of those things.

The individualist discourse, as it is prominent here, has a number of effects. It smooths over social issues or inequities and background. It locates the individual as the site for blame and also as the site of intervention. It is a form of essentialism with an acquired truth-value. In some ways this creates a sense of possibility in the sense that the individual can do something about it. The function of the individualist discourse here is that it constructs a sense of agency for an individual in that the point of intervention is the individual and change seems possible, as it only requires that the individual adapt to the situation. This construction detracts the focus from social inequities and serves to sustain the status quo as it draws the attention away from the social, into the realm of the individual.

The individualist discourse draws attention to the individual and particularly the psychology of the individual. This illustrates the centrality of the psychological discourse and the psy-complex as described by Rose (1985) as a causal and explanatory model in everyday talk. The psychological discourse, or rather, commonsense notions of it, is a prominent lens and is used to understand the person or the situation. The version of reality as described by this discourse prescribes individual intervention and attention. It encourages the individual to grow and to overcome obstacles, as these are largely internal anyway. It seems that individual psychology has won primacy as a causal and explanatory model in the context of middle management.

Other psy-complex terms also emerge such as the workaholic as seen in the following description by Andy:

But very clear was that I was at the bottom of the rung uhm, that I really have to work to prove myself. And I did, you know. I became a workalcoholic, really slogged. And it was also very clear that I worked harder than the male counterparts. Because almost that mentality of, you have to be more, run faster, you know.

Hard Work Above All

The phrase “hard work” is another leitmotif that runs through the text. This individual discourse is also seen in a commitment to hard work. Hard work is constructed as a

central aspect of any successful career path. There seems to be an almost unwavering commitment to this discourse and it is rarely questioned or resisted. Hard work is discursively constructed as an absolute essential to advance in a career but also something that women do quite naturally and easily. Hard work is required by the organisation and is also rewarded. The ability to work hard also adds worth to an individual. Individuals and here, particularly women who work hard, are considered to be valuable and worthy members of society. Most of the women I spoke to referred to themselves as hard workers and many mentioned that this was sometimes at the expense of the rest of their lives. This reminds of the protestant work ethic and is another expression of individualism.

Magriet describes her career progress: “You know, it was hard work, it was very hard work because I am a workaholic and I don’t have balance. This is a big problem on another level ... yes I believe I worked hard”. Linda also agrees with this: “What I can tell you is that I got where I am through hard work, integrity, honesty and by playing the political game”. Linda also mentions: “I think that the harder people work at their career, the more successful they are. I believe that ... if you work hard and lobby hard and network hard for a specific position ... I do believe there is a very good chance of that happening”.

In fact, when someone no longer wishes to work this hard, it is considered an obstacle and the only option for the person is to leave. Gillian states this clearly when she says:

I think my obstacle currently is that I don’t have the heart for it anymore. I want to get out of it. I am tired of corporate life, I am tired of the constant pressure and the unruly hours that you have to work. I think there is more in life, more to life than this.

Where hard work is described as a feature of success, it also emerges that women have to work harder than men and many comment on an increased workload because they are women and suffer from what they frame as the psychological flaw of the inability to say no.

In reflecting on the impact of gender on career, the issue of workload emerged a number of times. Referring to her gender, Gillian states that “I don’t think that it had an impact on my career at all. Because I *strongly* believe that I had equal opportunities, all the time. But I *do* believe that it has an impact on my *workload*”. Delia describes the impact of this as “the only thing it really influences is that I might have more work than I can handle” and “I sometimes miss the time to think more about things. There is sometimes too little time to really think things through, you just do. Either to finish things or just to get to everything”. There is some resistance to the idea of taking on a larger workload, and seeing it as a fault and problem implies that it is seen as an unwanted state of affairs.

The same cannot be said for the discourse of hard work. The discourse of hard work and its particular articulation for women ‘who can’t say no’ supports the institution of the organisation in its current structure. As I spoke to women and read the texts, Coser’s idea of the greedy organisation came to mind strongly (Coser in Maier, 1999). Very little implicit or explicit resistance to the discourse of hard work is to be found in the texts. That one must work extremely hard is constructed as a given and part of corporate culture and this is not questioned. Dealing with its effects becomes the individual’s problem. Linda has a husband at home dealing with all the complexities of a private life. Magriet reflects on this and says:

I don’t want to say that this is why I am still single, you know, but you are drained emotionally at the end of the day so you don’t want to go out and visit. And on weekends you feel that you have to recharge for the week ahead. So I don’t think I realise what a big role it played.

Elusive Balance

The discursive opposite of hard work as represented in these texts is not laziness but rather work/life balance. A number of women talk about work/life balance as something desirable and something to strive for. Balance here refers to the ability to work hard but to still have a life outside work that is satisfying and rewarding. It is languaged as something you must possess, once again still firmly rooted in the individual discourse. Not possessing this attribute is a problem and something that needs to be addressed.

When I conducted the interviews I was curious to know about the relationship between work life and private life and what prompted my interest in this was literature that discussed the impact of domestic life on women's careers. My aim was to allow the women some space during the interviews to reflect on the relationship between their work lives and private lives. My intention was to frame the question in such a way that they could respond to it as they wanted to. As the interviews progressed I used the phrase work/life balance when enquiring about this topic without intentionally enquiring about this discourse. The work/life balance discourse as it has emerged in recent years has become part of employers' and employees' vocabulary in an attempt to address the distress that emanates from very demanding work environments. It also forms part of the public discursive space in women's magazines, newspapers, and television programmes, and is powerfully constructed in the social domain.

It is ironic but not surprising that it is deployed here as another yardstick to measure oneself against and to fall short of. Magriet confesses: "I know there is a problem with balance in my life" and Delia is proud to announce: " I have at least started cycling and I've started with adventure racing ... so yes I am now getting a bit of balance". It seems that the introduction of this term work/life balance into these women's lives did not relieve their distress but rather introduced another possible pathology to suffer from and a commodity to obtain. Thus the self is now policed with this form of the psy-complex, according to the normative expectation of 'balance' to fit into the corporate machine as a mentally healthy individual.

In terms of this issue only one participant is not distressed. Catherine states that work/life balance "has been a feature of most of my career". She therefore feels that she has reached this expectation.

The reverberation of the discourse of hard work is thus strongly present here and it has an ambiguous hold on the person. It is something that is required of an individual, it adds self-worth and if you happen to be a woman, you have a natural talent for it, yet much of this positive attribute can also be a flaw that needs to be addressed. If you

take on too much work you are not assertive enough and if you don't have work/life balance it reflects poorly on your psychological make-up.

Public and Private Split

Other aspects on the relationship between work life and private life also emerged here. The work life and private life are constructed as two separate aspects that need to be split, and encroachment of one on the other is undesirable and possibly damaging. Linda reports that she has had mentors in her life but also that she would not discuss "anything personal" with them "never, never, ever, ever. I will not discuss any personal matter ... I will discuss no *petty* [my emphasis] matter with them whatsoever".

Women talk about ways and mechanisms used to keep these two separate, generally finding ways to keep a private and home life from being visible in or hampering the work life:

I will not say that I have two different personalities but I think each one of us *does* have it. I walk into a meeting and I look and talk the way I do. But in social situations it is harder (Magriet).

Fatima reflects on this and says:

But I think you know, when you look back also, you pay a price, because all of us, especially Indian women that get to the top end up sacrificing. You give your whole life for your career and you wanted to achieve and prove this, but at the same time you lose things like marriage, love and children, those kind of things, you know?

The Mother

The split between public and private life is also very pertinent in terms of children and motherhood. This aspect of women's lives is kept separate from the working life, generally with some effort. Single women feel that they are lucky, as they do not have to deal with the issue of children as they see what difficulties mothers are experiencing. The presence of children in a woman's life requires planning and

support from either husbands or family members and the possibility of motherhood is also a factor employers consider. Catherine reports that she was told “ja, but you are going to go off and have a child” and that “in terms of me being in management or me having a role in the company ... it’s a factor considered” and that “she is not as secure as a male counterpart”.

As with other private life issues, motherhood and its effects should not be allowed to encroach on the workplace but the assumption is that it will eventually do so, due to its very nature. Single women with no children are described by themselves and others as lucky as they are not burdened with such matters that would inevitably become an issue as they see it happen with their colleagues. When Lulu discovered that I had no children she said: “so you don’t have kids yet. One of the lucky people”.

Women with children describe themselves as lucky if they have supportive spouses or family members or if their children were bigger when they started working. “I was fortunate in that my family lives close by, so I had that support structure” (Dominique). The motherhood discourse constructs motherhood as such that the responsibilities would inevitably be problematic for the mother in terms of her work environment. Lulu says: “when you start having children your attention gets divided”.

Therefore the expectation is that most women who are mothers will have problems in this regard and that motherhood makes it harder to maintain a public life that is separate from the private. This is given and not resisted. If motherhood does not cause the expected problems this is considered to be an exception to the rule and something to be grateful for. The construction of motherhood as an aspect that invariably implies difficulties or problems, postulates motherhood as something that does play a role and does impact career functioning.

Fatherhood is something that does not enter the discursive space prominently and it is a clear absence, and not part of the discursive structures around children. From this perspective, the presence of children in one’s life is another aspect that should be kept very separate from the working environment if one wants to avoid one’s career being negatively influenced by it. In terms of parenting, there is an almost unwavering consensus that it largely remains the responsibility of the mother. Fathers are

constructed as those who help out, who assist but who cannot take away the ultimate fact that the responsibility of parenting is that of the woman. Motherhood is more fundamental than fatherhood in parenthood and this is inevitable: “you are still the mother, you are still the wife, you need to do what you need to do” (Dominique). Nobesotho agrees with this when she says: “but most of the time, men just don’t do enough in terms of taking care of the children, but I feel that my husband does more than what most men do”.

Motherhood thus creates the need for another fundamental split between private and work lives. The split is also one of paid and unpaid work where domestic work and childcare is unpaid work that is required but not acknowledged. The notion of domestic work as unpaid work is a silence in the text and none of the participants refer to the unpaid nature of domestic work. One wonders if they are paying other women to perform some of the domestic work. Children are also a messy aspect that should not be visible in a working life as they are an outcome of the unruly nature of female bodies that will be discussed later.

The Wife

The position of the wife accompanies the position of mother and the wife is a subject position that remains fixed with certain expectations and behaviours. If you are a wife, there are certain things you need to do. If you have a wife it makes other options available. When talking about working late, Lulu relates that “my sister would say ‘bye bye guys, let me leave, you have wives who fetch the kids, I am the wife so let me fetch the kids’” and Andy notes that “if I had a wife, my wife would also be taking my kids to the doctor”. Being the wife is problematic because “in the work place, you are judged by whether you can stay until eight” (Lulu) but one’s position as wife makes this problematic. Despite the fixedness of the role of the wife, being a housewife is not the solution. Workingwomen distance themselves from housewives and construct housewives as less intelligent and less independent. The discourse of housewives is evident when Lulu says: “there are housewives who are not stupid. So I wanted to be a housewife but it is not for me. I get bored, I get irritated with this begging like a child”.

Being a woman who works or a “mom who works” (Andy) is a way of avoiding the negative connotations of being a housewife, of being dependent, uninteresting and even less intelligent, but working does not change the role of the wife. The wife remains and has to be managed. Thus being a woman, an adult, independent, intelligent woman requires one to work and being a housewife is constructed as not fully reaching one’s adult potential and in this way remaining childlike. Having a career or being employed is constructed as a necessary developmental task to complete in order to be seen as a fully functioning adult woman. At the same time, one must not take the working too far, by becoming like a man or neglecting fundamental aspects such as motherhood, wifeness and one’s femininity. Where there was a time where being a housewife was constructed as the ultimate expression of femininity and what is considered to be feminine, this is now considered as a lesser form of womanhood. The norm of womanhood now includes a career, independence (but not too much) and intelligence (not taken too far) as part of the construction.

The Feminists and the Importance of Reason

The feminist is another category of woman that is present in the texts and constructed as an undesirable position that participants tend to distance themselves from. The dominant social discourse of the ‘bra-burning feminist’ is invoked with ease when the feminist comes into the conversation. The feminist or women’s libber is constructed as a woman who is radical, who takes things too far, who is hard and competitive, who wants to compete with men. She is aggressive and she is also unreasonable. Most women in this study construct themselves as reasonable, and the discursive persuasive mechanism of most of the interviews is one of reason. Reason is used as a device to convince and to situate oneself as a reasonable person/adult/woman. Feminists on the other hand are unreasonable and take things too far by not approaching the issue within the frame of reasonability. They act on feelings of hostility and they become aggressive. They do not wish to accept the status quo of the natural differences between men and women, they argue against the nature of things. They are therefore somewhat unnatural, they do not act according to their nature and design. When talking about feminists or radicals or competitive women, participants do not need to do a lot of explaining as there is an implicit understanding of what is meant with this. This reflects some of the dominance and the singularity of the ‘bra-burning feminist’ discourse and this discourse of the feminist has very little complexity and

contradiction in everyday talk. As there is no contradiction or complexity in everyday use of this discourse, use of it does not require explanation or effort as it is self-evident.

This is in contrast to other categories of being female such as the career woman or the mother that were discussed earlier. These categories are socially constructed in more complex ways and therefore require that the participants explain in detail what ‘version’ of worker or mother they are talking about. The discourse of the feminist as used here is assumed to be clear and refers to a singular undesirable category of woman. It therefore only requires a word or phrase to be evoked and also to be distanced from: “not because I was radical in any way” (Dominique) or “not in the form of an ambitious ‘women’s group’” (Magriet).

Some participants generally urge young women to “go ahead without having this anti men competitive nature” (Fatima) because being competitive results in losing “that wonderful feminine compassionate side” (Fatima). They are urged not to go overboard: “Now you go overboard the other way” (Gillian) and not to have such a strong focus on men:

Usually when I read things in magazines and so on about the oh, men are doing this to us and so. I don’t have that thing. What I have is what this person is doing. I don’t feel like this is a man’s doing (Nobesotho).

One or two participants urge women to compete:

And also just for them to, as I have done, keep on empowering. Because if you are a woman and you are empowered, then you can compete with the men. If you have done nothing to empower yourself then you won’t be able to control it, and you won’t be able to do that (Dominique).

Other Women

One of the aspects of the texts that I found most interesting was the construction of other women in the workplace. As we have seen in the discussion so far, there is a lot of distancing from certain female positions in the text. The woman who works

distances herself from the career woman and both the career woman and the woman who works distance themselves from the bitch. Women further generally position and situate themselves as not being feminists or radicals.

Other women in the workplace are constructed as problematic and obstacles as can be seen in the following quotations:

Andy: And as women ... we are so scared of each other. You know. Because the yardstick is 'Are the boys going to like you or not?' You know.

Annalie: Are you saying that women are competing for the boys?

Andy: For the patriarchy. For a space in the patriarchy. So even the women's networks are networks who by design, complement the patriarchy. There is no network that is completely outside of the patriarchy.

Andy further describes her biggest career obstacles as "other women. Women in power. And I think that the thing about that, about other women is that we are so easily threatened by each other".

Nobesotho also formulates this:

The problem is we might think men are standing against us in terms of our advancement. But I think it is worse what we women are doing to each other. Whether it is white women or black women. It is worse what we women are doing to each other. I think men have become more accepting about women in the workplace, than women being more accepting of other women advancing towards and beyond where they actually are.

Dominique reflects on her experience as a young woman:

I haven't really found that with the males, rather with some of the older females you know, because they look at you, you're young 'what do you know about the thing?' you know. So you gotta, even with the females you've gotta work harder to prove yourself because women can be just as bad as what men

are. Hey, they pull you down and especially when they see that you are younger and that you've made this progress.

Other women also try too hard to prove a point:

But other women feel that 'I can do it' and work long hours, get worn out and all those things because you are trying to cover. The day is eight working hours, but you work ten or fifteen because you want to cover everything.

Other women are constructed as competitive and as trying to hold other women down. The construction of women is that they fear each other and compete with each other. Where men are constructed as forming networks and supporting each other, women are doing the opposite. The discourse of other women being problematic has the function of isolating the speaker from other women, distancing herself from them and therefore taking a stance of a counter identity. This distance and counter identity can say 'I am the only one who deserves to be here' or 'I am not like those who act against female nature'. The distancing from other women provides legitimacy, a permission to be here, suggesting that being in the workplace is problematic to begin with and that it therefore requires careful identity-footwork. The distancing also creates isolation between women and reminds of the isolation of the Panopticon regulation happens through separation and self-regulation.

The discourse of women being competitive and aggressive towards each other is an interesting contrast to the discourse of women being cooperative, soft and focused on relatedness. On the one hand women are naturally caring and soft and feminine, and on the other they compete with each other and undermine each other in the workplace.

The Female Body

Most of the women in this study were asked about their experience of having a female body in the workplace. The most prominent construction associated with this question was dress and dress code, how to dress and what to wear to be considered professional. The body in the workplace needs to be structured or shaped into something that is professional. The professional dress code becomes a way of creating good impressions, protecting oneself against unwanted sexual advances (also

encouraging wanted sexual advances for other women) and making statements of identity. This was also apparent during the interviews and there was a remarkable difference between women in their work clothes and women in casual wear.

The female body is, however, unruly and has an impact on a woman's functioning. Menstruation causes distress as it makes emotions ungovernable, and it can also become visible in the form of pimples on the skin or dirty clothes, in this case, giving away a dirty secret, making one's irrationality and therefore vulnerability visible to everyone. Dominique describes some of this:

You know, when you uhm, like something when you have on a monthly basis, your period and you know, that women ... you don't feel nice that time of the month and even your emotions are different, so you always have to be worried about it. And I think people ... are wondering at some stage, do you give everything away, that type of thing you know, so yes, it probably does influence you. Because now you have got to even plan what you got to wear that particular week. It must not be light clothes it must be dark clothes, you know.

Bodies have to be managed, they have to be dressed properly, their biological functioning should not be allowed to slip into awareness and they should not be allowed to make one vulnerable in this way.

Bodies as the site of sexuality and sexual interaction make them even more complex. From Gillian's perspective the benefit to be gained from this is at most ambiguous. She describes how a young body draws attention and draws compliments but that those compliments fade in settings where one wants to be heard and therefore that the young attractive body as vessel makes it hard to be heard. One is seen and then "they make you feel good" (Gillian) but they don't listen to you. Linda comments on this too: "The younger you are, the harder it is to get respect". Gillian comments that now that she is older and "part of the furniture" she is free and "equal to everyone". Age and a female body are therefore closely related. A young body is more visible and the site of male interest and approval with young women being sometimes unaware of it as is seen in Dominique's experience:

You're young and you come into the profession. You know, this young student, and the males would now always be talking to you and laughing and stuff like that. So, there was now another connotation to that from the older females you see. So they read something else into that. And it was just being friendly, talking to the people, no ulterior motives or something like that.

Andy describes another more distressing experience:

The Deputy Director at the time was male, and was giving me at the time a little bit of extra attention. You know, and I think the thing that was fascinating of that is that everybody could see that I was uncomfortable but also treated me that as if I was in some way responsible and to blame for all this attention that I was getting. Nobody ever came to my rescue, nobody ever, you know, assisted me. It was my first job, you know, I didn't know what to do with the person in power who is fawning all over you and being inappropriate. You know, even my female boss. And I am sure she saw it, but left it there. And she also in turn victimised me even further or held me responsible for his behaviour.

The visibility of the female body as sexually attractive has the paradoxical effect of making the woman in the body less visible. Andy here explains her struggle of being respected and seen for who she is despite having big breasts:

And they are punishing me for it. They are punishing me for the physicality, and I mean, it is not even that I am thinking like that. I mean, I am not focusing on it, I am focusing on my brain and how smart I am, you know. And other people are concentrating like on my big boobs.

Thus, being taken seriously within a young body, especially if that body happens to be considered to be attractive, is a struggle that participants report. Early working experiences are described as struggles for acknowledgement of competence and contribution with a general experience that the contributions of men are more easily recognised. Participants observe a pattern where men's work is acknowledged where female colleagues are more harshly judged.

As age steps in, the sexual attractiveness of the female body becomes erased. This implies that a body is considered female largely because of its attractiveness. With the erasure of the femaleness comes freedom, being able to say what one likes. One has to become “part of the furniture” (Gillian) one has to be seen as losing one’s sexual attractiveness to become an equal participant. This is a double erasure as sexual attractiveness in women is constructed as a vital part of their femininity. Losing this attractiveness is then a further erasure, this time of femininity in itself. In other words, age steps in, making the body less visible and therefore erasing the femininity and only when this happens can the person perhaps become more visible and can she be taken seriously.

Thus the femininity of a female body is problematic. When visible, it creates another form of invisibility and it therefore has to be managed and controlled. Participants here are generally in agreement that dress code is vital in this process, from small aspects such as a decision to keep a jacket on or not, or more important factors of managing the hemline of the skirt and covering the cleavage. Andy describes being more unaware of this when she was younger “there was this wild massive hair to here you know, so I mean I just left it uncontrolled but at that stage I didn’t understand”. Later in her life this changed:

When I started my own business I put on my suit, I put on my armour ... so I also had fitted into the mould. So I had my suit and I had my hair and I power dressed you know and nobody is messing with you, nobody is making jokes. So that is the thing the dress did for me.

The way the body is dressed is constructed as of utmost importance when it comes to engaging in meetings, as clothes are the armour needed for the modern day battleground of challenge, of being discredited, of having to prove your worth.

Women’s management of their bodies in the workplace involves control of the unruly: hair, bodies, bodily fluids. It is a process of making the femaleness and sex of the body less visible. It is in interesting contrast to the notion of natural differences. Although there is an almost unwavering acceptance to a difference discourse with all

participants, this ‘natural’ difference should not be allowed to be present and evident in the physical. The injunction of remaining feminine at all times, not becoming the bitch, has a limitation or limit. Remain feminine at all times but do not become too feminine or too sexy by being a “girly-girl” (Andy) or a “whore” (Andy) as these are undesirable expressions of femininity.

Andy describes the reaction to being too feminine in this way:

We had this receptionist, who was this adorable like Tinkerbelle girl, you know, she was just fine and pretty, and soft and you know when she made signs they always had little flowers, you know, she was really this beautiful person, I got on really well with her. My boss tortured this poor girl. Every five minutes she was in trouble, it was just horrendous. Horrendous to watch.

Some women express dissatisfaction with this, with Catherine stating that she sometimes decides that she is “fed up and is not going to cover up her cleavage” or Andy stating:

And you know the women I am talking about, you know. Always with the cleavage, the too short skirt. I personally don’t think that there is anything wrong with that. I don’t think that they should conform to the suit and the tamed thing. You know, they can be smart, they can be good at what they do, but you know, by men and women, they are just crossed off as the whore.

Fatima also resists this notion and says:

I mean Sweden, the women, they are just all dressed up in this one fashion, uncolourfully, you know, everything is in this like jacket, tie, not showing any parts of their body, I don’t know, I just think that you are becoming void of who you are, fighting against your own race as female. ‘I am not a female I am male.

Fatima further comments:

And I think that is ridiculous, so I've used it in a positive way. Of course not to the extreme way, I have *never* used it to get favours, or to sleep with someone to get something. That is like out. But I will wear something sexy to work and show a bit of a cleavage if I have to, not that I want to entice to get the other thing, but it just it adds a bit of personality.

Constructions of Men

The discussion so far has focused mainly on constructions of being female and femininity. As we can see so far, the constructions of women are complex and contradictory and the same applies to constructions of men and masculinity with men and masculinity being constructed in a number of contradictory ways.

Where a number of participants reflected on the importance of hard work in their life and career, when they reflect on their workload in comparison to men, men are constructed as less hardworking. Gillian states this directly: "I believe that men are lazy ... and it I believe it because that is what I see". Men also tend to get away with more:

I mean, it was just astounding what the two good-looking men got away with. It was astounding. It was, I mean, it was, I can't even tell you. And then now in retrospect I know I was doing a lot of their work, but this is in retrospect.

(Interesting here that male attractiveness is constructed as allowing men to get away with more where female attractiveness is generally seen as creating invisibility.)

This reflects back to the earlier discussion of men having the capacity to say no and to manage their workloads. They are described as being more assertive, with the capacity to control or manage their workloads. Their ability to say no puts them in a better position in the workplace. Magriet reflects on this by saying:

I think it is because so much in their life is done for them, and now I am generalising wildly ... I really think, and as I say, I am generalising, but it is perhaps the way they grew up ... or perhaps it is the model we put them in. Everybody always says that they cannot do it and perhaps we want to believe

it ... Maybe we think they are stronger people, perhaps that they can just say no. They are dominant.

Men are further constructed as not being cooperative and not wanting to share information with women. Gillian says: “you don’t get information out of men. Men generally tend to keep information to themselves, they are not as sharing as women are”. Men also tend to stick together:

and although he is told, like you are supposed to be to promote women and give women the opportunity, but behind your back they will kind of give the information to men and they will outshine you in some way because they had more access to the information

or

“there is such a thing as an old boys network because men do look after each other, its an absolute fact” (Linda).

As such, organisational culture is often described as male centred and men are therefore more comfortable in the workplace and they can also have more fun there:

There is more, yes, there is more space for fun in the work life and because of this strong male orientation of the fun that is to be had in the work place. That is what enables you. Like I don’t see any work place having massage parties, facial parties. [Laughing] You know? It is that whole, it is just that whole club of drinking and watching sport and it is this and it is almost you know, designed that way. You know, how many work places have a book club? That’s fun, and I mean that’s where you get that kind of inculcation that seems to be there for men. Men seem to be able to tap into a sort of social life at work. There is no social life for us at work (Andy).

This male culture then also applies to organisational development strategies and Andy has a strong opinion on recent forms of team building activities:

Look at all the team building things, you know? And then the people who can't do that get hurt. So not only are they excluded from the team, they hurt as well, they are physically injured when they get back to the office and we call that team building. I think it is team destruction. [Laugh] Let's see who gets hurt.

Men also stick together and this is experienced as an overtly or covertly threatening process. Gillian remembers her early working days:

I started working when I was seventeen ... and I was so scared of those men, and they knew it, and they made fun of me. And they were right to make fun of me because I fell for it.

Andy also reflects on this:

When I worked in a clinic, the male clerks, security, they would make jokes about the nurses and us. And I am just thinking, 'guys!'. And I know it is very difficult to articulate, but it makes the work environment charged. Because I walk into work and I hear this joke, or something happens and then I am already, like I am already off balance. Now I must refocus myself but then something else would come and knock me off balance again.

Magriet also offers a further explanation of the men in her work environment (that she describes earlier in the interview as very Afrikaans male dominated):

I also think, it is because they, I am just thinking of Afrikaans culture, many of them, have women at home that do things such as check the vehicle licences and so on. And it does come through to the work environment as they don't have to take responsibility for it. But we [referring to women] take the responsibility for everything.

These quotations illustrate the natural difference discourse discussed earlier. This discourse constructs men as different from women, they do not have the same natural talent for working hard and they are not cooperative and sharing. They also tend to

stick together. Men's constructed ability to say no and to control their workload discursively creates dominance and in terms of social positioning where men are constructed as being more powerful in the social hierarchy because of their ability to say no.

While men are constructed as dominant and also as competent in terms 'assertiveness', this dominance is in contrast to statements of male incompetence. Men do not have the ability to work as hard as women, and, as was discussed earlier in the chapter, the ability to work hard adds worth. Men are also sometimes constructed as less efficient:

I would then delegate to the men, you know, because I thought they were not working. You know, to get the materials ready, correlate everything or get it to the venue and to the conferences. Always a mess up, always not done, never held responsible, you know. No sense of urgency. So, in retrospect I wonder, is it because they were inefficient that she just let them be, and completely overloaded the women, or was she too afraid to tackle them (Andy)?

Social dominance and competence here intersect in an intriguing way where work competence is not constructed as leading to dominance. Participants generally describe themselves as competent in terms of work but perhaps incompetent in terms of constructed personality traits such as assertiveness. It is, however, competence in the realms of assertiveness and related control of one's workload that is discursively linked to achieving social dominance.

Men are discursively constructed in a socially dominant position and generally viewed as having a preference to remain dominant to a certain extent. Here Linda says: "It depends on the individual but I would say that most men ... in my opinion, still prefer women to play a subservient role" although "you do run into people who genuinely do recognise talent when they see it and are willing to give people a chance". Men also "enjoy looking after one from a certain point of view ... I expect men to open doors for me" (Linda).

Men are not constructed as being overtly hostile but they challenge women more than they would their male counterparts “Because they always test. Men have this thing that they always test” (Lulu). They also “do undermine, they do treat you like ‘oh, you have breasts’”(Lulu). They do not maintain a position of social dominance through overt hostility but the dominance is constructed as being maintained through challenge of authority: “There was always a challenge, and more so especially from the male colleagues that I was working with” (Nobesotho). Dominique relates how a male colleague openly did not want to accept her authority “because he made it quite clear he was not gonna take instructions from a woman” but such utterances of overt refusal to accept female authority were rare in the texts. What was more common was awareness that women were challenged in meetings:

The men would, like, in a meeting, they would say to them, uhm, ‘no but your idea’s not a good idea’ you know, blatantly and ... put them off and say ‘but no you can’t do something like that’ and I would sit there thinking ‘but why can’t you?’ It’s, it’s making sense what this lady is saying but because she is a woman, you not gonna take her idea or her suggestion (Dominique).

The social dominance of men is constructed as being maintained by their competence in terms of asserting themselves, sticking together and subtly challenging female authority or work.

Equity and the Changing Social Structure

At the same time, the social situation is constructed as in the process of change although the change is still happening. Things are changing but have not changed completely. There is thus the discourse of the past where there was no equality and the discourse of change in process of moving towards equality and equity. Society and the workplace is constructed as changing: “In terms of gender, yes, things have progressed, but not in terms of race” (Dominique) but gender equality is generally constructed as an ideal that is impossible to reach. As Lulu says: “I don’t think we will ever be equal. You know, I don’t think we will ever, you know, it is in the minds, we can be equal in other things”. The natural differences discourse plays a strong role here where the fundamental differences between women and men make complete equality impossible. This is seen in the statement by Nobesotho:

I am very sceptical. I am hoping against all hope that some day we will all be equal. But I doubt it will ever happen. Gender-wise I do not think it is possible to ever be equal, because men and women are not the same. First in terms of physical strength, secondly, the way we portray our empathy and our emotional being, and just the way we do things. We are just not the same.

Magriet feels that equity is still a long way off: “I would like it to be a natural thing that happens but it is not going to come right soon because there are too many places with men in the majority” and Catherine feels that it makes more sense to replace equity with a search for humanity:

It is kind of a strange notion of what equity is, because I think it is almost like it is a personal thing. I think that rather than having equity in the workplace, you have to have humans in the workplace.

Apart from this construction of society as being in process towards more equality and the impossibility of the equality project, there is still reference to and belief in a ‘just world’ that will acknowledge and promote those who deserve it. In this regard, Lulu says: “If you know what you are doing, if you are the best at what you are doing, you would be able to do it” and Linda also reiterates this: “if you’re willing to work hard and lobby hard and network hard for a specific position or a specific career I do believe there is a very good chance of that happening”. Andy also reflects this:

I mean, I don’t even want to say the patriarchy, because I think that when you are confident and strong enough to find identity and then to say ‘this is my identity’, and this is how I work and you really do good work, work will be coming to you. And I think I have proven that now.

This belief in a ‘just world’ with reward for the hardworking is in contrast to the idea that complete equality does not and will never exist. The individualist discourse with its belief that the capacities and behaviour of the individual carries more weight than the social structure makes it possible for the social inequities to be denied and a strong belief in the agency of the individual makes inequalities in the social structure almost

invisible or at least less significant. Social inequities and inequalities are therefore constructed as an inevitability that has to be accepted but that also has to be overcome with hard work and dedication. This is a dominant feature of western capitalist societies and reflected in many cultural narratives, for example many books or 'manuals' on how to achieve in business as a woman.

Gender, Culture and Race

When talking about being in the workplace, the issue of culture emerges as part of the complexity of the picture. Culture is here often described as something that creates or impacts on how women and men relate to each other and what can be expected from women and men within certain circles. As such, culture is used as a category to understand behaviour and to know what to expect. Reference to specific cultures, one's own and other cultures, makes it possible to explain the gendered world. Culture functions as a determinant of ideas.

Culture featured in talk about men and what men are like and how men from different cultures can be expected to behave and think in certain ways. A number of different cultural groups were referred to: white Afrikaans men, Black men and Indian men.

Men from the different cultural groups are constructed in a number of ways:

Fatima: A lot of the African males still wouldn't absorb that kind of thinking, because it was seven years later, but their culture was still a factor very deep down.

Fatima: There were quite a lot of the white males coming from a very traditional background, with a very sort of selected kind of thinking and mindset that those males have. And alongside that goes with it the traditional views that those males have, you know, they haven't gone through the liberating process.

Andy: A very warped urbanised African male patriarchy, because African male patriarchy was not faded out, it is this kind of morphing of the urban patriarchy, you know, that is sick and disgusting

Linda: My approach to a young black man is very different than my approach to an old Afrikaans man, for example, so it depends entirely on the individual but I would still say that, that, that most men are inclined to do that because most men in my opinion still prefer women to play a subservient role.

Linda: I am married to your very, very typical Afrikaans-speaking man who was brought up in an Afrikaans ... I think it was a hell of a shock to his system as well and his friends were also quite shocked because I was very different from the typical Afrikaans girl he had dated before.

Andy: Richard and I met and at first started living together ... there was no, I mean I didn't even have to negotiate with him. Whoever came first, started rocking and rolling. If you are first, you put on the pot, you get the dishes, you get, you know. You put the washing in the washer, you know, you just start. And when I come in, you know, I help. But I know that if I had married any South African man ... I think I would really have a struggle.

Andy: I have always wondered whether it is my husband in particular, or because he comes from Ireland. So I have always wondered about that, but then you know, we have travelled amongst his social circle in the UK and I mean, the men and women help each other out. You know, we were just there on holiday, and it was interesting going to a five-year-old's birthday party and to see the mom and the dad *completely* engaged in everything.

Here, the reference is often in terms of 'traditional' men (from whichever culture) but also to men who do not adhere to traditional values anymore. As such, culture and 'traditional' culture are constructed as a determinant of attitudes and values that impact on women in the workplace. Culture is therefore a pre-determinant and also difficult to change. The way it is talked about implies that it is problematic in terms of equality. Culture is constructed as a form of embeddedness that determines certain attitudes and values that can be restrictive for women in the workplace. One is embedded in culture, a deep structure of meaning and predetermination. A distinction also emerges between home and work where the culture and its implications are retained at the home front but the same cultural ideas are problematic and difficult to

work with in the work context, creating different sets of meaning to adhere to. At home, more traditional cultural values are constructed as valued where these same constructions are problematic at work:

There are quite a lot of contradictions in the culture. Where you are saying ... women are equal and then there is that traditional thing where, hey, I expect that my mate has to make supper and all of that stuff. So there was a contradiction (Fatima).

South African men are generally constructed as embedded in traditional cultures that have strong implications for gendered behaviour where non-South African men are constructed as essentially different from South African men of all cultures with a culture that is less deterministic of gendered behaviour and roles. It is interesting to note here that race sometimes intersects with culture and that reference to culture generally involves a reference to race as well. Men are then referred to as 'Black', 'Indian' and 'White'. White men are typically described as Afrikaans-speaking white men and there is no mention anywhere of English-speaking white men, thus the norm becomes invisible again. Despite references to differences in terms of culture and traditions, men from all these groups can be 'traditional', thus having restrictive ideas about equality and women.

This is a fascinating merger of race and culture here as race and culture function within one discursive category. What emerges from this is that when a focus on gender becomes primary, culture and race becomes secondary, and culture and race are unified into the same category. This is particularly in terms of constructions of masculinity (not necessarily femininity). Being male, despite one's culture and race, forms a primary position in terms of gender as most traditional cultures are constructed as having particular and restrictive ideas on gender. Men are not so much distinguished in terms of their culture or race but rather in terms of the age and their adherence to traditional values where younger men can be more progressive.

Culture also featured in women's talk about themselves, here also in the form of something that women are embedded in and that they need to become disentangled from in order to develop the qualities they perceive as necessary in the workplace.

Fatima describes this as such: “ ... think my culture. I still haven’t come to terms with it. If I was given ... if I didn’t have the cultural issues I think I would have been further right now” and “so I come from a very strange background and to overcome that kind of obstacle was quite a journey in itself”. Culture thus creates and determines certain expectations and ways of being but one needs to ‘overcome’ these in order to adapt to the working environment.

Resistance

The discussion so far illustrates how the different discourses and the contradictions between them can support the status quo. At the same time it has to be said that these contradictions also provide an important space for resistance as power always implies resistance (Powers, 2007). The contradictions allow some manoeuvring space as it is possible to speak and act from different discursive positions and one is free to invoke a particular discourse that can be useful when one needs it. Different interpretations of the world are available. The discursive contradictions therefore make it easier for participants to seemingly accept the dominant discourses discussed so far. They generally do not confront the regime directly and their talk is not littered with many overt statements of resistance (with a few exceptions). Mumby (2005) points out how resistance happens in the ambiguousness of meaning, as “the struggle over meaning is always open-ended” (p. 33). By accepting the discourses and not challenging them overtly, participants gain the opportunity to do what they wish to do without any challenges from the environment and their seeming collusion with dominant notions of femininity, the family and the organisation is a form of resistance. The invisible contradictions between discourses create the opportunity for them to strategise and use these contradictions. In this way, participants participate in their public and private worlds and they create careers without having to sacrifice a feminine identity. By distancing and disidentifying themselves from ‘unacceptable’ forms of femininity, they are able to engage in a complex process of managing their gendered identity. This form of resistance is similar to how Mumby (2005) describes resistance as identity work. The process of collusion and resistance is often recursive and here it is clear how collusion with the dominant discourse is a form of resistance but this form of resistance that allows for gendered identity work is at the same time colluding with the status quo. An example of managing one’s gender identity is Andy who describes herself as “a mom who works”. Here, she intersects the discourse of motherhood and

the discourse of the workingwoman in a complex way to create a gendered identity that allows her to operate in her life in a manner that works for her. As power and resistance always go hand-in-hand, this identity that allows her to function in a certain way has the effect of supporting the dominant discourse of motherhood.

Conclusion

In this discussion so far, it is evident that gender discourses and constructions of femininity and masculinity are and remain filled with contradiction and complexity. When participants talk about themselves, their gender and their work, they are confronted with a number of different available discourses.

What emerges from the analysis of the texts is that the identity positions of woman and career do not have a comfortable discursive fit. The category 'woman' has so many discursive contradictions and women who work need to do a lot of identity footwork to reconcile different positions within this discursive web. Femininity is constructed in contradictory ways with women being constructed as soft and cooperative on the one hand while at the same time also aggressive and dangerous toward each other. A lot of effort is needed for women to identify with some form of femininity and to distance themselves from other forms of femininity seen as being contrary to a constructed norm and ideal of femininity. The normative femininity is constructed as a woman who remains feminine, who retains the so-called female attributes of softness and cooperation but only to a certain extent. Femininity can be taken too far, women can either be too soft or too sexually feminine or too dependent, attributes that do not reflect well on a woman who strives for a place in the discursive ideal. Thus one of the core contradictions is the contradiction of the natural differences discourse (women and men are different and should act differently) with a discourse of equality (women and men are equal and women should have equal treatment and independence). The interplay between these two discourses is seen in a number of different ways particularly in the construction of the female body.

In terms of constructions of femininity and work, women are constructed to have a number of attributes that make them ideally suited to the workplace. They are primarily hard workers, they are reasonable, they are competent and they are willing to prove themselves. One of the central constructed flaws of femininity is seen in the

lack of self-confidence and assertiveness and this flaw results in a constructed male social dominance. The capacities that women have by nature are not enough to result in a social equity as the lack of some other qualities results in social inequity. This flaw is constructed as an internal and individual matter, something that can and needs to be addressed and rectified.

The individualist discourse is present in the text in a number of ways with a strong value of the individual overcoming the social constraints and restrictions. Participants generally construct a social system in the process of change toward equality but that is far from reaching this goal. The social inequities are accepted as a given and the individualist discourse serves as a solution for this, a way of addressing the problem. The social system then remains largely unchallenged with an acceptance of the status quo. Resistance happens on the level of the individual.

One's culture further forms another complex structure. Culture is constructed as a deep structure with strong influence in terms of thought, ideas and behaviour and therefore can serve as an obstacle in terms of one's functioning as a woman but also in terms of how one is treated by men. The relationship to this deep structure is ambiguous and rarely openly rejected but women and men manoeuvre within this structure, almost choosing when to adopt the values of it or not.

The status quo of the organisation remains untouched with very little overt resistance to organisation structures and expectations. The nature and structures of organisations are constructed as given and women are constructed as having to fit in with this and to do what is required, generally to work hard. Again the focus falls on the woman and if she manages to fit in with expectation, she can expect to be successful, she can expect that there will be justice, despite another discourse of inequality also being present. The onus is on the woman to manage the requirements of the organisation while retaining the highly valued capacity to balance work and private life.

The status quo of the family also remains largely unchallenged where motherhood and wifehood are filled with basic requirements and expectations and although some of these are open to change and challenge, female and male nature determine that the

essence of the structure remains fixed as the construction of motherhood requires that women remain responsible and involved on a fundamental level.

Constructions of gender, of work and of society therefore contain a number of contradictions and these intersect in terms of how femininity and masculinity are constructed and how the individual relates to the broader social structures within these contradictions. This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter where the discourses discussed in this chapter will be explored in terms of the available literature. The institutions supported by these discourses and their intersections will also be discussed in more detail.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The discussion of the data in the previous chapter introduced different discourses as they emerged in the text and also reflected on the effects and impacts of these and how they interact and relate with each other. In this chapter I wish to summarise some of this and explore in more depth how certain institutions and organisations are maintained or challenged by these.

Different discursive worlds

Working with the discourses in middle management women's talk reminded me of the seven-volume science fiction series "The Dark Tower" by Stephen King (1982). The main character, Roland, is in search of a dark tower, a place of magic where he will find a remedy for his decaying and defragmenting Midworld. He is confronted with different worlds and different characters from these different worlds. These characters come to help him on his quest towards the dark tower by stepping through magical doorframes that allow them to pass from one world to the next. Later in the story, the separation between the worlds become less and characters pass through "thinies" which takes them from one world and time into another, sometimes without them realising that it is happening. When the main characters realise that there are different worlds, their initial response is to try to protect their own world as they are fundamentally rooted there with a life-story and loved ones. As the story progresses, they realise that these worlds are all inextricably linked and then their attachment to their own world becomes less. One of the characters in the story, a young boy called Jake, dies early in the story when the hero, Roland, faces the choice of saving him or continuing with his quest. In a horrifying moment where Roland is holding Jake's hand as he is hanging from a cliff and as Roland decides to let go, Jake says: "Go then, there are other worlds than these" (King, 1982, p. 191). He can say this because he reappears later in another world. His death in one world did not mean that he died in all the worlds and the presence of the other worlds makes it possible for him to be almost detached from the world he is dying in.

The discursive space on gender and gender equity is similar to this story. There are different discursive worlds present at the same time and we often pass through

discursive thinnies, moving from one discursive world to another without noticing that we have moved from one to the other. Our connection to each different discursive world has an almost Buddhist-like detachment from the discursive space, as there “are other worlds than these” and we move between these worlds with seeming ease.

In “The Dark Tower” each world has its own time and its own characters. Some of the worlds are completely different from each other with different languages while other worlds are remarkably similar. The characters in the story sometimes have to really scrutinise a world to realise where they are. At one stage they arrive in a world that seems very similar to Jake’s world and time. They only realise that it is a different world when they notice a bumper sticker that refers to a sports team with a similar but different name from the one in Jake’s world. So they need to pay close attention to the signs and symbols of the world to realise that they are not where they thought they were. The discursive gender worlds are similar and discursive thinnies cause slipping from one world to the other without one recognising the signs and symbols of the world immediately. Sometimes the new discursive world becomes visible only when the language structure and symbols are scrutinised and discourse analysis is a useful tool in this regard. Thinnies take the shape of contradictions and contradictory commonsense notions of reality.

Characters, discursive positions and identities

So what are the discursive worlds that the participants in this study pass through and inhabit? Who are the relevant characters and from which ‘when’ are they talking? In terms of female characters, different female characters from different worlds are constructed.

There is the bitch. She lives in a highly competitive world and she is very ambitious. She is aggressive, she is manly and she is not in touch with her feminine side anymore. She is not trusted by women and despised by men for the fact that she is not true to her feminine nature. She has decided that her success and her career are more important than staying true to her feminine nature. The world of the bitch is constructed as a corporate, high-powered world of the present day and perhaps even the future, an apocalyptic figure of how things can go wrong.

Then there is the hardworking woman, who does what she needs to, and more, who enjoys what she is doing but who does not have an ambitious career plan. She does not employ conscious career strategies, she is not aggressive, and she realises that it is important to remain true to her female nature. She is sometimes very successful but she does not need to sacrifice her femininity to become successful. She has a tremendous workload but she soldiers on with this with acceptance of the nature of things. Her world is a world where the corporate and workplace take secondary importance to other aspects relating to her femininity.

There is also the modern-day mother. She realises or accepts the duties and responsibilities that come with being a mother and she also wishes and desires to fulfil this role as well as she can. She knows that her very physical and emotional attributes are what make her a mother and she knows that these qualities ordain her to be primarily responsible for her children although various others such as the father, friends and family members can help her out. Her world is a combination of an older world of the past where she finds fulfilment in her mothering but also a newer world that describes mothering as not quite enough. The mother is also often the wife, the one who automatically picks up the children from school, the one who makes it possible for the husband to do what he needs to do. Both the mother and the wife are well-liked and admired characters. They do what needs to be done, they remain true to who they really are, but they have also now developed a modern-day requirement of independence, autonomy and intellectual development.

The housewife on the other hand, is not a character to admire as she inhabits only an antiquated world before the development of female autonomy and independence. She is like a relic from the past and although she was a character to aspire to she is now looked at with sympathy and sometimes disgust for her inability to have progressed to a newer, more developed and advanced version of the wife and mother.

Lastly, there is the feminist. She is a warrior character from an earlier time, a time where women did not have the rights they have in the contemporary world. In order for her to have achieved her goals, she needed to be radical, unreasonable and aggressive. She is no longer needed in the contemporary world and has outlived her

purpose. If she is still present she is seen as radical and unreasonable and she takes things too far and is always reminded to calm down.

Given all these possible characters, what is a young heroine to do? In terms of the available options, the hardworking mother and wife who does what she needs to and does not complain too much is a character that does not evoke criticism or dislike and being this character allows her a position in the social structure as a legitimate, adult woman and worthy individual. She does not overtly resist the situation but realises that her seeming acceptance of what is gives her the most scope to manoeuvre and structure her life without the judgment of others or herself.

In terms of male characters, there is the malevolent man who actively tries to undermine women. He is the kind of man who will make it clear that he does not respect women in the workplace and that he will not take orders from a woman. There are not many of these characters around as this is a breed that seems to have disappeared with time.

The malevolent man has been replaced by a few different modern-day versions of men. The first modern-day version is one who is an old-fashioned man from an earlier era. He is not necessarily malevolent but his culture and upbringing gave him certain values he cannot escape from. Although women cannot expect him to act according to ideas of equality, they can understand where he comes from, and, given knowledge about him and his upbringing, they can work with him (and on him) and act towards him in ways that allow them to function and progress in the workplace.

In contrast to him is the younger man who is more progressive than the old-fashioned version. We know very little of him at this stage, apart from the mere mention of him here and there. There is also another kind of male character here, one who is not necessarily old-fashioned or progressive but who still has dominance and achieves this through assertiveness, networking with other men and challenging women more than other men.

In terms of these characters, if the male character wants to be a liked and respected hero in this story his choice is to become the young, progressive man. It is unfortunate

for our hero that this character is not well developed at this stage in the story and he will have to use his imagination or search in other stories such as men's studies to find ways to portray this character realistically.

The metaphor of different characters in different worlds used so far in this discussion is another way of exploring the different subject positions that are available in terms of gender and work. These subject positions are cultural repertoires of available discourses that allow individuals to manage themselves in terms of moral location and social interaction (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008). A subject position is a location with different rights and duties for those who occupy it (Willig, 2008) and participants in this study negotiate the various subject positions with a process of distancing by identifying and describing subject positions they did not wish to occupy, distancing themselves from it and in this way constructing a subject position that is seen as socially and morally acceptable. Their positioning of themselves as hardworking, reasonable and feminine allows them to find a moral location (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008). This location has certain duties, as described above, but also implies certain rights, here the right to proceed with one's life without having to explain one's actions and motives, without the judgement and disapproval of others but mostly the right to keep her feminine identity. What is seen here is what I call identity-footwork, a careful positioning of the self to maintain what is considered to be a vital aspect of an identity (femininity) despite engaging in contexts and behaviours that seem to be in opposition to this aspect of the identity. This brings me back to the question asked in chapter 6: can it be that being a woman and being a career woman are still opposing identities? It seems that the answer is that these different positions are still in contrast in the societal discursive space, prompting such fine footwork.

The Rules of the Game

In "The Dark Tower", each different world has its own dialect or language, its own history, its own system of metaphysics and its own set of rules and procedures that provide a way of understanding the world. For example, Roland, the main character from the Midworld, lives according to Ka, the principle that drives the outcome of all things. Ka is like fate, it determines what will happen and Roland uses Ka to understand the world and to guide his actions. Ka forms the rules of the game and

determines the procedures to follow. As the participants in this study move from one discursive world to another they sometimes encounter a number of different rules of the game that inform different subject positions and different choices. Discourse is described earlier in chapter 2 as a set of rules and procedures (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008) and the following discourses emerged.

The Natural Differences Discourse

The natural differences discourse (Dick & Nadin, 2006) as referred to in chapter 4, forms a basic rule in terms of understanding gender and the functioning thereof. This discourse views women and men as fundamentally different due to their biology, psychology and upbringing and sees difference as part of the natural order of things. It assumes that the differences are basic and unchangeable. This difference becomes a practical consideration to consider (Whetherall, Stiven & Potter, 1987) in terms of equality and makes complete equality impossible. It is therefore in contradiction to a discourse of equality but these two differences often co-exist and intersect in participants' talk. Given that the differences are constructed as natural and given, they are accepted into commonsense notions of femininity, masculinity and particularly parenthood. This discourse justifies structural inequalities and requires subjects to submit to its descriptive and prescriptive capacities. The effect of this discourse is an unequal distribution of domestic labour and the maintenance of structural inequalities in social systems such as organisations. Both the resistance and the maintenance of the status quo lie in the acceptance of it. Quietly doing your own thing, getting where you want to be, and using knowledge of men and systems to survive is a way to make space for yourself.

The Discourse of the Family

The discourse of natural differences supports a traditional patriarchal family structure where commonsense notions of motherhood and fatherhood determine the structure of the family and the duties and rights of those in the family. Although reference is made to some changes in the traditional family structure, with women being more independent and men being more involved in the household and childrearing chores, the natural difference discourse ensures that the basic aspects of the traditional patriarchal family remain in place. The discourse of the family as constructed by the participants, structures the modern-day family as a structure where men and women

both have some independence and autonomy and where there is some distribution of domestic and childcare duties within the limits of the constructed natural aspects of motherhood and fatherhood. The mother remains primarily responsible for the children due to her nature and this cannot be changed due to fundamental biological and psychological differences between men and women. The discourse of natural differences and the discourse of the family are related in their manner of constructing and being constructed by social structures into a subset of ideas that are considered to be so logical and commonsense that they become invisible. In terms of the metaphor of the thinny, these discourses are invisible thinnies and a speaker can be in a world of equality one moment and stumble through an invisible thinny where other rules apply, where the rule of the mother and wife demands other behaviours. Passing from one discourse to another happens smoothly and it is generally unnoticed.

In chapter 3 I stated that many studies show that few couples develop egalitarian relationships in terms of domestic and childcare duties and the double day of women was described where women perform paid and also unpaid work. The discourse of the family as present in the participants' talk is the discursive structure that contributes to or informs the practice of this double day.

The Discourse of Individual Psychology

The discourse of natural differences and the discourse of the family smooth over structural inequalities and invite individuals to turn to themselves as the point of investigation when they experience distress or discomfort in their lives. This turn towards the self is supported and informed by a strong individualist discourse. The individualist discourse was seen in chapter 3 with the discussion of studies that focus on the individual and individual processes. Here we saw a focus on internal aspects of the individual such as career attitude, career choice, career knowledge and self-esteem. These studies introduce a psychological discourse where the point of intervention is the individual. In this study, the participants use the discourse of individual psychology with which to regulate themselves. The discourse of individual psychology provides a form of technology of the self (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008) that participants can use in terms of self-management. Lack of career success and a heavy workload are ascribed to lack of assertiveness and a struggle to negotiate private and work life is constructed as a lack of work/life balance. The discourse of

individual psychology here has the effect of providing a diagnosis of the problem (such as being a workaholic or not being assertive enough) a source of the problem (the individual) and also suggests that these problems or pathologies can be and should be addressed. The psy-complex (Rose, 1985) emerges here as participants describe themselves in terms of psychological deficit with regard to aspects such as self-esteem, assertiveness and balance. The psychological technology of self-improvement is introduced in this way and “moral management of the self ensures that material contradictions of political economy, community and employability are transposed into personal difficulties” (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008, p. 105). The technologies of self-actualisation operate as such that when change is difficult, it brings further intensification of moral management (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008). The participants’ responses to distress arising from the intersection of the natural differences discourse and the discourse of equality becomes a facet for self-regulation and self-blame. This form of self-regulation maintains the status quo of the organisation and the family and leaves the discourse of the organisation as a primary unquestionable.

The Discourse of the Organisation

In chapter 4 I referred to the company-based discourse (Kugelberg, 2006) that focuses on the requirements of companies to grow, using concepts such as productivity, competition and financial gain. This discourse was noted to be in contrast to an experience-based discourse that focuses on own experience. The company-based discourse here featured in participants’ talk with an acceptance of the needs and requirements of companies; participants were willing to do what the organisation needed. Self-improvement is the means toward eliminating distress, and the structure, function and requirements of the organisation are rarely challenged. The self-regulating techniques become ways of creating docile workers (Powers, 2007) who comply with the demands of the organisation. In this way, there is more than a company-based discourse at work here as the organisation is constructed as unquestionable, unchangeable and fixed. It also retains a masculine character, a hierarchy and it has the power to make demands whether they are reasonable or not. Success in the organisation is defined by climbing the organisational ladder without rocking the boat. The company-based discourse takes shape in talk and text when there is a reference to the requirements of organisations but a broader discourse of the

organisation functions as a backdrop to much that is said in participants' talk about gender and work. This discourse can therefore be defined as a discourse that constructs the organisation as a fixed, masculine and hierarchical structure with demands and requirements that have to be met if one chooses to be part of its world. So the discourse of the organisation creates a world with an unwavering acceptance of the demands of the organisation.

This intersects with the discourse of the family that also demands acceptance of the status quo and where self-regulation is used in the face of distress or when in need of advancement. I wonder at this point if this discourse has more impact on women than men, given that women are still in a process of achieving equality in terms of seniority in work environments. The position of outsider trying to gain access to this world perhaps has the impact of creating greater acceptance of the discourse. When one passes through a thinny into the organisational discourse, the rules are clear: adapt or die. As such the organisation as institution remains supported with a total silence on the taken-for-granted nature of it that illustrates some of its power.

The discourse of the organisation supports the general economic status quo and capitalist economies depend on the maintenance of this discourse. Its impact is far reaching and possibly one of the discursive cornerstones of our society today. It requires that workers remain willing, able and docile and it ensures that this docile workforce is reproduced (Powers, 2007). It is interesting and unfortunate that the introduction of women into the workforce did not do much in terms of undermining the status quo. Women were initially clustered together (as nurses, teachers, etc.) and systems were developed in these contexts to allow women to continue fulfilling their other responsibilities without changing the broader structures of organisations in general. The developments discussed in chapter 3 such as work/life balance programmes, diversity management and flexible working hours do not feature in the participants' talk. The following questions then arise: does this mean that these developments do relatively little to nothing in terms of changing women's lives or discourses? Or are these developments not yet significant in South Africa but more prominent in other countries? What emerges, however, is that the developments to address the issues and difficulties of being a woman in the workplace are not reflected in the discursive, suggesting that they have very little impact or prominence.

The discourse of the organisation requires a docile workforce with compliant bodies that are managed and structured to fit with the requirements and demands of the organisation. Female bodies here require particular attention due to their tendency to be unruly, to overflow and to attract attention. Female bodies need particular care and attention in terms of how the femininity of the body is managed and structured into a docile body.

My Journey: Personal Reflections

I set out on this journey with a mission, similar to the hero of *The Dark Tower*, admittedly of much smaller and less grandiose scale, but my search was for some exploration that would lead to a better understanding of the gender stratification of the workplace that could lead to possible remedies. This project took me from a place of curiosity about how women construct themselves in the workplace within a complicated and contradictory discursive domain to a place of new curiosities. My initial intention was geared toward finding ways of improving the lives of women and using discourse analysis as a tool that might elucidate the meanings, rules and procedures that keep the structures in place.

Along the way I learnt a great deal about how women construct and make sense of themselves in a world of work and I was astounded by the fine footwork sometimes required in this process. I was also surprised at the different kinds of positions available to women and the desirability of some and the offensiveness of others. This made it clear to me that to be a woman and to have a career requires identity manoeuvring amidst dominant discourses that sometimes support and sometimes oppose each other.

A discourse of prominence for me from the outset was the discourse of equality from my position as a woman and a feminist and therefore my position within this discourse is clear. Although I recognise equality as a discursive product of liberal ideology, my approach to it is pragmatic as it contains the possibility to create societies and structures that allow women and men to have more say in the structure and nature of their lives. It became clear to me during this study that a discourse of equality is by no means a holy grail and should also not be left unexamined or

unexplored. It should also be said that the position of the women in this study (middle management women) is a particular position within the social economic structure. Women in other positions in organisations or women outside the organisation are possibly subject to different experiences and different discourses. This probably applies to women in executive management positions but also to women in lower and more marginalised positions in the organisation and the economy and this is an avenue for future research. At this stage I am curious to know what happens in the discursive field of women in executive management. I am also wondering about the marginalised and disempowered women in organisations. I suspect that similar discursive processes are at play at different points in organisational hierarchies but imagine that these processes are embedded in different bodily and material effects. Future research could address this issue and also overcome some of the managerial bias of general research on women in the workplace.

This journey has now taken me to a realisation that it is difficult to think about women in organisations without becoming part of the discourse of the organisation. Wondering about the gender stratification of the organisation immediately assumes and accepts some of its basic structures, its hierarchy and its relevance. When we study the organisation from the inside, is it ever possible not to reproduce the discourse of the organisation in some way or another? The criticism of Hook (2001) as discussed in chapter 2 is relevant here. He notes how important it is for discourse analysis to move in and out of the text, to incorporate the extra discursive and to acknowledge the materiality, history and conditions of possibility of the text. I attempted to reflect on some of this in this chapter but think that this exploration could be dealt with in more depth and detail in future research. In this regard future research on women in the workplace could provide more of a genealogy of the discourse of the organisation to enrich the understanding of women's place within this discourse.

Having said this, this study has brought me to a point of greater awareness of some of the discursive activity and provides me with some structure to think with and approach this issue. An understanding of how different discourses such as the natural differences discourse, the family discourse and the organisational discourse support the status quo presents a frame or perspective that, for me, seems useful in thinking

about women in organisations. The awareness of discursive thinnies as it emerges in this study provides an interesting framework for interventions in organisations. Conversations on the different thinnies and how we pass from one discursive world to another could be very useful in terms of making the effects of the invisible discourses visible and provide other ways of thinking about gender and work. The awareness of discursive thinnies and discursive worlds makes a difference to the way the worlds are inhabited. They can be inhabited with less attachment and their effects can therefore be less prominent. Interventions where women and men can wander together through the different worlds available to them and explore the effects of these on their lives can therefore be useful. As such, organisational interventions and conversations with this awareness in mind can perhaps do more than trying to develop strategies to break the glass ceiling.

Finding the Dark Tower?

In the fictional work *The Dark Tower*, Roland, our hero, follows the path of a magical beam that leads him to a tower that he hopes will rescue the decay and the fragmentation of his and other worlds. The discursive worlds of gender and gender equality are similar to Roland's in that they remain fragmented, different, contradictory but in close proximity to each other. In terms of gender, our hope does not lie in a miracle remedy for the fragmentation but rather in awareness of the discursive thinnies that take us from one discourse to another without warning. The heroes (if such characters exist) in our story are practitioners of awareness that have become both detached from but also fully present in the world of discourse.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. I am conducting research on women and their experiences in the workplace.
Can you tell me about your experience as a woman in the workplace?

2. Possible follow-up questions:
Career path: How did you get to where you are today?
Gender: Do you think your career path would have been different if you were a man?
Ask about appointments, promotions and opportunities.
Did you have mentors?
Do you think things have changed since 1994?
Task divisions: Do you think there are any gender-specific task divisions in your workplace?
For example: Who normally takes the minutes/organises catering/organises equipment/takes executive positions on committees/speaks/represents the organisation or departments?
Do you think women and men get the same pay for the same work in your organisation?
Policy: Are there policies in your organisation (AA or sexual harassment) that have made things easier for women to obtain promotions or appointments that would not have been the case in the past?

3. Work/private life: How has your private life influenced your career life and vice versa? Are there any gender-specific task divisions in your relationships at home?

4. What is your opinion of the status of gender equality at this stage and in the future?

5. What advice would you give to young women?



6. Contradictions: Earlier in the interview you said ... but it also seems that ...
How do you make sense of this?

APPENDIX B

EXAMPLE OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

The following serves as an illustration of the actual data analysis procedure and illustrates how I came to the discourses discussed in Chapter 6. This is a step-by-step example of the work with the interview with Gillian.

Initial reading notes and free associations

After reading the transcribed data of the interview with Gillian, I first made notes of free associations and ideas as I read the data. The following cryptic notes emerged and certain quotes caught my eye during this process:

- I have never been a career woman.
- I like challenges.
- I can work hard.
- I interact well with others.
- I don't want to achieve to make progress but I am good at what I do.
- I think there is more to life than this and this idea is framed as an obstacle.
- Marriage was an obstacle.
- I had equal opportunities but I had to work harder. This is a contradictory statement.
- Children would have been an obstacle but I started working late when my children were not so small.
- Women in general are not power conscious.
- It is your own fault if you don't have the guts to complain.
- Self-esteem is an important issue.
- My body is both an advantage and a disadvantage.
- Other women use their sexuality in an unethical way.
- Being ethical is important to me.
- Younger women are militant.
- Women who are harassed ask for it.
- I was scared of men when I was younger.
- Most organisations are fair.

Objects constructed

After the initial reading with notes and comments I read the data again, this time with particular questions in mind. The first question was “which objects are spoken about and how are they constructed?” I then came up with the following objects and constructions of these objects:

- Career women: are driven.
- Marriage: can suffer because of work.
- Men: are lazy, they do not share information and they were experienced as scary when Gillian was younger.
- The old dispensation: things are different now from what they used to be.
- Myself: I take on too much work.
- Corporate life: requires very hard work, requires guts, drives you, appreciates one’s work but drives one hard, expects you to fit in or go.
- Women: are not power-conscious, take on too much work, are a bit submissive, have poor self-esteem.
- My body: has advantages as it made me feel good about myself when I was younger but it also has disadvantages as men don’t listen to you even though they compliment you.
- Ageing: has advantages and disadvantages as ageing makes you less attractive, less female but also more equal due to this. Ageing also makes you less scared and more honest in interactions.
- Ethics: this is an important guiding principle.
- Younger women: make too much of gender and do not have to face the same issues that women of previous generations had to face.
- Sexual harassment: is something one takes part in or partly responsible for.

Subjects

The subjects or different subject positions that emerged from the text here were based on the following questions: “what kind of subject positions are available in the text? and “who must one be to understand this text?” The following subjects were identified:

- The career woman who is driven and ambitious.
- The workingwoman who works hard and does what she needs to do.
- In order to understand this interview one must be reasonable and female.

Purpose and mechanisms of the text

In answer to the question “what does the text want me to do?” it emerged that the text wants the interviewer to understand that we no longer need a focus on gender and also wants the interviewer not to make such a big fuss about gender issues. The text wants the interviewer to be reasonable, to smooth over gender issues and contradictions and to accept things as they are. This is established by appealing to reason and commonsense and by using knowledge and wisdom that comes from age. The text also tends to understate many aspects and it uses little emphasis or repetition.

Contradictions

The following contradictions were evident in the text:

- Gender had no impact on my career development yet I had to work harder.
- My body is an advantage and my body is a disadvantage.
- I am not a career woman or ambitious but I work very hard and I want to be good at what I do.

Institutions supported by the text

The institutions that seemed to be supported by the text were:

- The organisation and the corporate world
- The current social status quo
- Existing dominant forms of masculinity and femininity

Preliminary discourses

After the above questions and reflections, the following discourses emerged as possibilities to work with or reflect on:

- A discourse of the career woman as hardworking and ambitious as opposed to a workingwoman, someone who merely does her work as best she can and works as hard as she can.
- An internalising discourse constructs problems and difficulties as due to the individual's internal problems.
- A discourse of masculinity where men are constructed as lazy, as sticking together and as fear-inducing.
- The psy-complex in the form of self-esteem.
- A discourse of other women that constructs other women in the workplace as too ambitious and/or unethical. The participant distances herself from these women.
- A discourse of the 'bad old days' before gender issues changed.