GETTING OUT OF THE CORNER - Challenging the patriarchal Articulations of Professional Identity in Academia

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Gender, Management and Organization Stream
Introduction: ‘Lacking Women’

There is no escape - the term FEMINIST is written across our foreheads - probably for the rest of our academic careers. We must admit, though, that we did something to deserve it. We are members of a rather easy going academic organization, namely the department of management and organization in the Helsinki School of Economics. The department is male dominated like the rest of the school. We have been doing research at the department for seven and nine years respectively. During the years we felt that we were treated differently than our male counterparts. Our occasional claims of discrimination produced mainly angry and frustrated reactions and demands to prove any such claims in the department. The attempts to bypass our complaints made us angry and frustrated. It operated as a catalyst for us to write a paper about the gendered social and discursive practices taking place in our own work organization (Katila and Meriläinen 1999).

The study indicated that after years of hearing how women are lacking in one respect or another, many women start to believe in it as an objective fact while men get support for their often unconscious assumptions of women as the other sex, the inferior one. The image of incompetent women is further strengthened by the behaviour of all organizational members. Men are displaying masculinity by being public, visible, and aggressive whereas women tend to adopt a feminine position by being more private, invisible, and submissive. According to the academic standards of professionality women’s behaviour is regarded as unprofessional. When women, however, become visible either by being explicitly competent or when they become large in numbers they constitute a threat to the prevailing system. Men start to feel unease, which becomes evident in different slips of tongue expressing that the situation is not 'normal' or 'natural'. These kinds of unconscious slips of tongue seem to happen constantly, even to those who perceive themselves as the most emancipated men. The stories show that men fear ambiguity and contradiction and are unable to see thought and feeling as two sides of the same coin which makes their interpretations of organizational life one-sided and impoverished. It appears to be difficult for men to see their female colleagues simultaneously as competent researchers and as competent women. However, this combination seems to be difficult to handle also for women as Wager (1994) has pointed out.

The paper at hand is a continuation to our first paper with which we first came public in
In describing our resistance (coping) strategies we want to emphasize the contexts, dynamics of contradictory tensions and ambivalence. The advantage of such an approach is that we need not presuppose an already formed coherent agent of struggle nor demand solidarities around unified identities in order to assert the possibility of resistance (Sotirin and Gottfried 1999, p. 63). In addition to individual action we include social structures, customs and norms in the analysis to help to give meaning to our resistance and to link it to larger sociohistorical gender oppression and emancipatory possibilities. As much as this is an academic endeavor this is a personal journey - our attempt to find our place in the academic scene, not as nice girls (Katila and Meriläinen 1999) but as respected researchers.

Strategies of Resistance

The starting point of our analysis of gendered social and discursive practices is that society is a field of competing discourses where language is not just a conveyor of social life but an essential constructive feature of it. Individual experience is complicated by the multiplicity of interpretations available in the form of competing social discourses. Some discourses are, however, privileged over others. These discourses have more opportunities to present themselves; they monopolize communications and they make use of strategies of control to ensure their eminence. Patriarchy as a system of discourse that participates in the articulation of social relations is one such discourse. Understood from this perspective, patriarchy organizes material and linguistic practices around a primary signifier that might be expressed as `male authority´ (Holmer-Nadesan 1996, pp. 51-53). The research results of our study on
gendered social and discursive practices (Katila and Meriläinen 1999) give support to this idea, i.e. to the dominance of patriarchy in an academic context. The study demonstrates how women in our department, and in academia in general, are discursively characterized as 'lacking' in relation to the characteristics required for the professional identity. The study furthermore indicates that the characteristics required for the professional identity are perceived to be tied to a system of values in which identities defined as masculine are prioritized. The only site where women and the feminine are unproblematically seen to belong is within the family, a position that is simultaneously devalued. As a consequence, women are forced to struggle to handle the tension between personal and professional identities at odds with one another. The main task being how to successfully handle the “dual presence”, i.e. the cross-gender experiences and the simultaneous presence of the public and the private, of home and work, of personal and political (Balbo 1979; Zanuso 1987 ref. in Gherardi 1994).

There are different strategies that women can adopt while trying to manage the uncertainty, ambivalence and contradictions inherent in situations of dual presence. The question is how women position themselves with respect to the dominant discourse. Some women have found fitting in the dominant discourse and culture so difficult that they have left the mainstream. Others silence their complaints and surrender their identities. Consequently, defining self and their relations with others in terms of the dominant discourse. Adopting the language of the dominant discourse to gain legitimacy might, however, also involve the risk of losing the language and identity of the outsider (Holmer-Nadesan 1996, p. 58).

There are also other routes to survival than separatism and surrender. Some successfully manage the dual presence by forcing, shifting and redeeming the boundaries between male and female in both social practices and in systems of thought (Gherardi 1994, p. 608). While frustration may be inevitable, individuals can effect change and have fulfilling and productive academic careers. It seems that at one end of the continuum is acceptance of the organizational status quo and at the other is rejection or challenging of this status quo. There are multiple ways women can resist such as using silence, reclaiming ‘trivial’ discourse, responding to verbal harassment, telling the truth, utilizing creative code-switching in language, and developing women’s presses (Huston and Kramarae 1991 ref. in DeFrancisco 1997, p. 50). There are, however, also more strategic routes out of this situation like "counter-identification" and "dis-identification". Whereas counter-identification signifies rejection of formal designations of organizational identity, dis-identification does not involve a conscious
rejection so much as it entails the replacement of the dominant discourse. To the extent that conflict between discourses remains unthematized, peaceful co-existence is possible. Counter-identification may prove more productive than dis-identification in challenging the dominant discourse, because an individual locked into a single subject position has fewer choices for action than an individual who lacks identification with a single, stable role (Holmer-Nadesan 1996, pp. 59-60).

Holmer-Nadesan’s (1996) skillful work illustrates different strategies women have chosen in coping with the dominant discourse. From the point of view of our own experience the strategies described are perhaps too static, coherent, deliberate and conscious in nature. In describing our resistance strategies we want to emphasize the ambivalence of communicative struggles over identity construction. Sotirin and Gottfried’s study (1999) on secretarial bitching is a good illustration of an ambivalent communicative practice. The study shows how secretarial bitching enacts accommodative impulses by reproducing the dominant meanings and practices constructing secretarial identities around an ideal of white, heterosexual, middle-class, feminine gentility. However, it also enacts emancipatory impulses by unsettling the stereotypical attributes and introducing alternative identities drawn on emotionality. The example of the two uses of ‘being nice’ among a group of corporate secretaries reveals the dynamic tensions between these two opposing impulses. While being spoken of as a sign of professionalism ‘being nice’ refers to the emotional neutrality of professional and social protocols. But when involving the responsibility of taking care and being careful about other’s feelings in everyday organizational interaction the meaning of ‘being nice’ engages an alternative logic drawn on emotionality – a sphere of life that should be reserved for private interactions. It is the unresolved tension between the dominant bureaucratic rationality of the contemporary office and organizational identities constructed on the basis of emotional connections and resources that renders secretarial bitching dynamically ambivalent (ibid., 66-67). The advantage of perceiving ambivalence as, both a side-effect of, and a counter-force to the control of cultural-discursive categorization (see Bauman 1991) is that it keeps the discursive possibilities open by refusing to fix identities in stable opposing positions (Sotirin and Gottfried 1999, p. 63).

Furthermore, Holmer-Nadesan’s study (1996) disregards sexuality as an important feature of organizational discourse. According to Foucault (1978) discourse of and on sexuality is like other discourses, maintained through the order of the discourse and the mutually reinforcing
interconnections of power, knowledge and pleasure. Thus, in this paper sexuality and gender are perceived as specifically communicative practices and discourses of power manifested in the routine discursive practices of everyday organizational life. Describing discourse as social practice implies a “dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation, institution and social structure that frame it: the discursive event is shaped by them, but also shapes them. That is, discourse is socially constituted, as well as socially conditioned – it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it” (Wodak 1996, p. 17 ref. in Wodak 1997, p. 6). The different discursive strategies can, therefore, be seen as resources for the ongoing construction of gender identity in a particular organizational setting. Rather than being fixed, the strategies adopted can be seen to be shifting from one situation to the next (Cameron 1997).

**Walking on a Tightrope**

The paper at hand is action oriented, political and participatory in nature. Doing participatory research in your own work organization can, however, be tricky. As you are socially and emotionally embedded in the community you are researching and trying to change, you lose the position of remote objectivity. This makes both actions and interpretations highly complex. Some might claim that such research is always more or less biased. We, however, claim that remote and ‘objective’ accounts do not do justice to the complexity of our everyday lives. People are emotionally vested in their work organizations and disregarding that gives an anorectic picture of our organizational lives (e.g. Fineman 1993).

In our first paper (Katila and Meriläinen 1999) we described and analyzed the gendered social and discursive practices taking place in our own work organization. Women were mainly perceived as victims and co-producers of the discriminatory practices. The starting point of this paper is somewhat different. Rather than victims, women are seen as agents of change willing to take full responsibility for intervening in the gendered social and discursive practices. The focus of the paper is on describing the rather random resistance strategies that we have adopted in managing the tension between personal and professional identities at odds with one another. Special emphasis is given both to our resistance and to the materialization of the opportunities that has opened up for us since the discussion was put forth in the
department. Because our behaviour has not been coherent, we want to highlight the ambivalent dynamics in the construction of gendered identities and power relations in organizations (see Mayerson and Scully 1995). A careful description of the context enables us to show, firstly, how people act in response to a given situation rather than simply exhibiting a socialized behaviour and, secondly, how we ‘do gender’ in the social and emotional texture of our everyday lives. Gender is perceived as something a person ‘does’ rather than as a pool of attributes a person ‘possesses’. In this sense, membership of a gender constitutes a performative act and not a fact (West and Zimmerman 1991 ref. in Wodak 1997, p. 13; see also Gherardi 1994). This means that social identities and power relations are perceived above all else as products of our collaborative accomplishments (see Cameron 1997).

All the processes and discourses described in this paper have taken place after we came public with our first paper in spring 1996. The data is based on naturally-occurring conversations some of which have been noted down on site and some of which have been recorded from memory as soon as possible afterwards. Part of the material is based on e-mail conversations and published documents. Our interpretations highlight the contradictions and contexts that link the discourses to larger sociohistorical gender oppression and emancipatory possibilities. In the first part of the paper we discuss the more joyful consequences of becoming public with the first paper, i.e. the possibilities that has opened up for us. The second part of the paper focuses on the sexuality discourse produced by our open resistance. During this continuous process of accommodation and emancipation we have confronted pain but joy as well.

**Shifting Positions: From Victims to Change Agents**

Our consciously chosen strategy to intervene in the gendered social and discursive practices taking place in our own work community has had a number of positive effects. The most visible expression of which is the changing status of gender studies in the department. During the fall semester of 1997 we started to plan a course on feminist approaches to organizational studies. Our enthusiasm to plan a new course on this subject was mainly due to the positive feedback and encouragement we received both inside and outside our own work community for writing the paper and presenting it in seminars. After a while we were courageous enough to present our well-planned idea to the head of our department who did not, for our amazement, oppose it, but on the contrary, encouraged us to make it happen. In order to carry out our plan we had to make few compromises though. The first precondition was that we had to work almost without any
financial compensation. The other one was related to the status of the course in the curriculum. Instead of planning a course for the beginners, we were obliged to develop a doctoral course for the more advanced students for financial reasons. It was in this connection that we were compelled to consider what the effects of having a separate course on gender issues in the curriculum would be. We thought that by relegating gender studies into the margins of a curriculum we in a way prevented this work from entering the mainstream organizational debates. Thus, making gender studies a separate, and inferior, kind of knowledge (Martin 1994). This did not quite correspond to what we had in mind in the first place. We felt that it is exactly in the beginning of the university studies that teaching of gender issues is needed and not as an optional choice but rather as a compulsory subject.

Even though we failed to make gender studies part of the mainstream discussions about organizations and organizing in the lower levels of business education, we did not give up the idea. The subject became topical again very soon after we had committed ourselves to the planning and organizing of the doctoral course. We were offered an opportunity to take part in lecturing for the first and second year students on gender aspects in managing. The lecture was only one lecture in a series of lectures dealing with ‘learning organizations’, but since the course was compulsory for everyone, it seemed to be a perfect opportunity to make students acquainted with gender issues. The other areas were ‘systemic thinking and organizational learning’, ‘team work and team analysis’, ‘tools for organizational change’, and ‘a cultural approach to organizational learning’. From our point of view this was a unique situation. It was the first time a male lecturer offered us an opportunity to teach gender issues in the department. The fact that our work was finally taken seriously called forth feelings of success. We felt that we and more importantly, our work and gender studies in general were not invisible anymore.

Another positive effect produced by our consciously chosen strategy to intervene in the gendered social and discursive practices is related to the improved self-esteem of the female academics working in the department. In addition to us, also other female members of our work community have started to challenge the patriarchal articulations of the professional identity in academia. We have not, however, acted as a homogenous group. In creating/recreating our professional "self", we are making use of the available discourses and practices, interpreting and reinterpreting, positioning and repositioning, who we are, who we might be (see e.g. Davies and Harré 1991). Thus, rather than being fixed, the discourses and practices adopted have been shifting from one situation to another. But let us turn from our “victories” to the battlefield.
Sex, Drugs and Rock and Roll

We did not expect to change the world with one paper nor with a dozen papers. We just intended to keep the pressure up when there was a chance for it. In the beginning of the autumn semester in 1996 we organized an open seminar in our Business School on the issue of gender equality in academia. Even though the majority of the participants came from our own department, several people from other departments were present as well. We had invited three guest speakers. One long established female member of our own work community who told the story of her treatment in the department years ago - treatment after which our department was convicted of violating the equal opportunity law. The second speaker came from the University of Helsinki. She is conducting a doctoral thesis on the hidden discrimination processes in the academia. She had previously worked for the equal opportunity office and was more than well aware of the situation in Finland at large. The third speaker who came from the University of Helsinki spoke about the constructions of femininity in academic women. And finally, we told our story for the wider audience. It was a three-hour seminar with about 30 people in the room. The speaker who had worked in the equal opportunity office was astonished by the fact that there were approximately ten men present as well. She told us that when she has been lecturing and participating in meetings in different universities around Finland there were never any men present.

The atmosphere in the seminar was extremely tense. All the female members from the school administration, who had attacked our department during the years, were present. The visitors outside our department gave us credit for the seminar and stated that it was important for the whole school to open up the discussion. Women felt empowered by the papers presented and they spoke out what they had on their hearts. For a change it was the men who gradually started to feel the unpleasant experience of being the ‘other’ sex - the one who says wrong things in a wrong way and who is incompetent on the subject matter just because he is a man. Rather than being hostile, the women in the room were frustrated and inquisitive. They just used their chance to speak out and most of them did so in a very constructive manner. The message conveyed was not a nice one, thus, leaving some of the men feeling a bit threatened and defensive. After the seminar one of the male members of our department told that he felt as if men were on trial there and no matter what they said it would be wrong. For a slight moment malicious feelings entered our minds. See how it feels like to feel inferior, unprofessional, overpowered and threatened. To let people leave the room in such feelings was not, though, what we had intended for. We were
able to vent some of the tension, but not properly. We were not competent enough to handle such a new social situation. For the majority of us there was, however, a place where we could finally get rid of the anxieties caused by the seminar - our traditional Friday beer. In the bar the quest speakers, the professors of our department and other members of our work community discussed the matter at hand as well as other issues. The atmosphere in the restaurant was easy going and constructive.

After the seminar Susan felt all right, but I felt like a fat lady was sitting on my chest. I had a couple of beers but the nasty feeling did not go away. Maybe after three hours it started to fade away. Susan went home and a group of us continued. A male doctoral student who did not participate in the seminar joined us later in the evening. Everybody discussed the seminar intensely. The group consisted of two men and two women. As the night proceeded a male colleague from the University of Helsinki joined us. By ten o’clock we were all more or less drunk. After an argumentative discussion one of the male doctoral students lost his temper and made a hostile attack against me and all the female members of our work community. I argued with him for a while and then mainly listened to him. The male colleague from the University of Helsinki could not believe his ears and suggested that I should make notes. I said that I do not have any paper nor pencil. He went to his bag and gave me his pencil and notebook, and so I noted down the jolly story of us - the square roots.

**The Square Roots**

“Satija, you are no good as a researcher, or maybe you are. Susan is no good, and the other two women in the department are square roots of her.” I tried to ask him how he had come into this conclusion. Had he perhaps read our work. He said that he had not, but he relied on his best friend’s (a member of our work community sitting in the table) judgement on the issue. The conversation was intense for a while but it became obvious that it was completely useless. I shut up like the rest of the persons in the table and he continued with his drunken monologue were all the women were categorised as shit. As the climax of the evening he advised me to lay on the table and spread my legs.

There are several observations to be made here. The outburst did not only reflect the views of one drunken individual but referred to more general discussions in the department and to masculine culture at large. The discussion revealed that some members of our work community who had behaved politically correctly towards the women in the department had actually actively constructed the image of their incompetence (the friend in the story who was the main source of information for the fellow that made the attack). The story further tells us that it was not only one individual woman who was constructed as a lousy researcher but the whole gender class of
women. The third observation to be made is related to the use of sexuality discourse when nothing else seems to work.

We could not avoid feeling disappointed after the incident. We had written a paper and organized a seminar on the subject matter. In other words we had put ourselves on the line. Everything had gone all too well by then. We were expecting something to happen but not quite like this. Even though you are prepared for a blow, it hurts when it comes from a direction you least expected. The words were insulting as such, but it was not the only thing that hurt. The ‘informant’ was a fellow that I, at that point of time, regarded as my friend. I knew about his family, I had got to know some of his friends etc. The fact that he was not just anybody made the blow even harder. His drunken friend gave him away by accident. The informant’s attempt to prepare the damage by saying “You are an exception in the group” did not help much. If you are doing discourse analysis in a more abstract level, it might be indifferent who the producer of the discourse is. But when you are yourself embedded as a person in the social and emotional texture of the organization you are studying, the discourses have the power to disturb the social and emotional scene, thus, making everyday interaction more difficult or easier depending on what emotions they trigger.

Organizations have formal contracts, rules and rites, but they are emotional arenas as well – arenas were friends are made. Friendships have no formal contracts. On the contrary, they are based on equality and adhere to ethics or reciprocity (Coates 1997). Friendships are, however, gendered. In general, “women’s friendships are characterized by intimacy, mutual self-disclosure and a focus on talk, while men’s friendships are characterized by sociability, a lack of self-disclosure, and focus on activity” (Coates 1997, p. 245). In our department friendships tend to be a mixture of these two general types, thus, representing various degrees of intimacy. Friendships may, however, turn out to be difficult especially in academic context. This is because of the asymmetrical relations in academia: teachers – students, professors – younger researchers, young doctorates – Phd students, men – women etc. The continuous struggle over the power of categorization - what is the most valid paradigm, who knows best etc – does not make things any easier. Therefore, organizational members tend to end up in ambiguous situations where it is hard to decide which rules apply – the rules of friendship or the rules of academic competition. Yet another question is in what manner these rules are played out.

After the incident we felt hurt and, thus, chose to tell to some of our colleagues about it. We
focused on the role of the ‘informant’ and paid far less attention to the sexualized part of the story. By telling about the incident we, however, broke an unspoken rule of the Finnish society according to which you are not supposed to tell anyone about the blunders of drunken people. Those colleagues of us who heard the story did not approve of such behaviour nor did they share the views concerning the capabilities of the female researchers in the department. The ‘informant’ suffered some social sanctions for his behaviour and, thus, produced later on a competing discourse indicating our improper behaviour of breaking the tacit rule. As situations are open for multiplicity of interpretations we could nothing else but accept it. But let us now turn to the sexualized part of the discourse.

Here we have two competing sets of rules/moral orders in motion – the rules of organizational behaviour and the rules of public places. In this particular case the rules of public places took over. There is no doubt about the insulting and improper nature of the male researcher’s behaviour. It was a clear case of sexual harassment. The case illustrates how the male researcher attempts to secure his dominant role by emphasizing the sexuality of his female colleague who is not behaving according to the ‘correct’ gender role. She does not adopt the subordinate position that is against the general etiquette of public places. Women are supposed to demonstrate their gender role in public places in ways that imply frailty, incompetence, and subordination (Gardner 1995). Defining women in 'sexual' rather than in 'organizational' terms is one way of showing women their ‘proper’ role as subordinate (DiTomaso 1989).

It is no coincidence that such aggressive form of sexual harassment took place in a bar, which is one of the many overtly sexual social contexts that form part of organizational life (Sheppard, 1989; Collinson & Collinson; 1989). Finland is openly a “drinking society” which makes the sexuality discourse even more intense in bar situations. There is no limitation in the Finnish society for women’s participation in activities traditionally considered inappropriate or unacceptable for women, like going to bars on your own, drinking and having ‘flings’. This does not, however, mean that the norms and values that dictate the relations between the sexes in such social contexts are gender neutral.

We want to underline that using this incident as an illustration of sexual harassment does not mean that we feel that this behaviour is typical of the person in question. Regardless of the fact that certain behaviours can be more typical of some people than of others, they still manifest cultural behaviour. The problem is how to understand different incidents as cultural products
rather than just individual patterns of behaviour. This might be a problem for us as interpreters of the case material, but even more so it seems to be a problem for the other members of our work community. There is a tendency to think that I would never say a thing like that, or because I cannot identify with that behaviour it is not part of a masculine (feminine) culture and, thus, a biased interpretation. We, however, claim that all men have heard and been present in similar, if not quite that explicit, situations and that most women have been victims of such behaviour in public places such as restaurants and busses. For example travelling on your own in a city bus makes you a perfect target for sexual harassment of drunken people who sit beside you and start to talk to you demanding a reply and a smile. If you choose to ignore them you have a good chance of hearing the two pretty words “fucking whore”. According to Kissling (1991 ref. in DiFransico 1997, p. 44) men who make street remarks do so because they have the power of the public place.

A common way to deal with such behaviour is to disregard it because the person was drunk, depressed, lately divorced or for some other reason not in his/her right mind. As one male colleague of ours advised us “he was drunk, just ignore it”. In our society there seems to be no limits to this type of incidents. They tend to happen more or less regularly. We are not faultless and are for forgiveness, but there is a difference between forgiving and ignoring. In this particular case the person who made the attack send an apology through e-mail and has been forgiven for long ago. Ignoring the incident would have been, though, as good as legitimazing these types of practices in general.

The case described above is not the only one of its kind. If the previous case can be described as an example of an emotional and highly explicit case of sexual harassment, the next case is a much more ambivalent one. The following extract is taken from an account of a workshop ‘diary’ written by two male colleagues of us. The account was published in autumn 1998 in a school wide bulletin issued twice a month.

Veminism

…We could start thinking what it means to be committed to Gilles Deleuze or any other person be it Gilles, Eero’s [the chancelor of the school] quality, veminism or something else…. It is no wonder that economic research is narrow-mindedly focused on value and veminism on paternalistic adaptation. No. A clarification with an example is needed here. On Sunday 10th of October there was a discussion about gender in Kake’s Laundry [a Finnish TV programme]. One of the guests had written a book about homosexual relationships, another one told how s(he) changes her/his sex whenever s(he) feels like it
and a third one did something else. There they were wagging their tongues. Trendy discussion about the diversity of meanings and identities. Why then it made one feel bored? It ended before even getting properly started, because that would have required something else. For example taking veminism form behind (binding with handcuffs to a radiator etc.). Not until as a consequence of such a merging a bastard could be born, something which has enough strength to live (Viikkotiedote, 8/1998, p. 15).

What surprised us was the weight the authors of this account gave to feminism taking into consideration the fact that not a single feminist paper was presented in this particular workshop. This made us wonder the purpose of pointing a finger at feminism in general not to mention the purpose of using a fantasy of erotic domination in particular. Regardless of the metaphorical expression it is rather difficult to avoid seeing a feminist, or women in general, in the place of ‘veminism’. The story is a reproduction of male erotic fantasies found in common pornographic materials where women are the ones handcuffed and men the ones taking them from the behind. The ‘spirit’ of the discourse indicates ugliness, roughness and force - in short, sexual violence. The discourse could be interpreted as resistance to the forces of feminism in the department and, hence, as an engagement in a power play between competing discourses. According to DiTomaso (1989) it is very often the younger women who compete most directly for the same jobs with the males that are considered most threatening and, thus, most suitable targets for sexual harassment. Pringle (1989, pp. 175-176) claims that through the exercise of power over the other the man confirms his identity in the fantasies of erotic domination. Violence, whether actual, ritualized or fantasized, forms an essential part of maintaining the boundaries and denying the need for the other. Men in other words gain their autonomy at the price of denying recognition of the other.

Pringle’s (1989) point is interesting in regard to academic cultures in general. It seems that academic organizations are structurally violent. Gaining autonomy in academia demands denying the ‘other’ which is the main message of the discourses under analysis. In this account this is expressed by belittling the contributions of feminism through the usage of the derogatory expression veminism instead of feminism. The term ‘veminism’ is patronizing having the connotations of being silly, stupid and not serious. This is one way of indicating that this field of study is inferior – of lower rank. Another place in the account where the seriousness of feminist work is called into question is the insinuation to its’ trendy – ‘passing’ - nature.

People working in our department reacted in different ways to this piece of writing. Some thought that it was just one of the funny stories these chaps tend to write, nothing so serious. The
majority of the staff, however, considered the text irrelevant and childish and as an indication of lack of manners. The discussion was intense for days and one of the professors approached the other professors in the department to figure out what to do. They thought that the time for such writings had passed, but they were sadly mistaken. There had been similar texts earlier that were ignored in the hope that the “young radicals” would grow up. A couple of the professors discussed the matter with the authors, but we are not aware of the contents of these discussions. There is, however, a tendency of management to be blind to, tolerate or even accept traditional forms of men’s sexuality as Collinson and Collinson (1989) have pointed out. It seems that there is a strong social pressure to confirm, to be part of the gender class of men. From our point of view ignoring such behaviour is as good as accepting it. However, the difficult question of how to deal with each case remains. There is no general rule to apply here.

According to Kramarae (1992) and Kissling (1991) all forms and degrees of sexual harassment should be seen on a violence continuum. At first glance this is quite a radical view. However, as they suggest, this helps lay persons and researchers alike see the linkage between theory and practice. Behaviours commonly portrayed as innocent and harmless, such as street remarks and so-called compliments on women’s bodies, serve to harass in reality. When considered from an organizational point of view it does not make a difference whether you are called a bitch, beautiful, feminine or unfeminine for that matter, since you are still perceived in sexual terms. Let us take one more example outside of our own organization to make clear how common these discourses are in our society. Helsingin Sanomat, the leading newspaper in Finland, published a character article of a Female Member of the Parliament in its’ monthly special issue. In the article an anonymous male MP compared his female colleague to a famous Finnish female banker, a member of the board of directors in the Central Bank of Europe, the following way: “Both have advanced to their current positions without appealing to their femininity, but simultaneously their femininity has faded away. Who would like to run around a cold iron stove that has lost its glow”. In another part of the article an industrialist ‘praises’ the Member of the Parliament for her ‘positive’ influence on the Finnish energy policy by stating “Her presence freezes an elk even without electricity”. The example shows how being a member of a male-dominated culture necessarily implies learning how to redefine and manage ‘femaleness’. We have found managing it hard work, especially because it takes place within a context of a male-dominated set of norms and expectations. We have experienced a profound ambivalence in handling the dual experience of being ‘feminine’ and ‘professional’ at the same time.
Together these two cases illustrate men’s insistence on their power over women as well as maintaining their dominant position. One of the professors has noted that if the incidents described above had taken place in the United States, there would have been a lawsuit and the head of the department would have been forced to take responsibility for it. Well, we are glad that this is not United States and that we still have other means to tackle these issues. Perhaps we even have a chance to make our colleagues understand how deeply rooted such behaviours and the underlying assumptions are, thus, making us all potential producers of gendered discourses and practices.

**Conclusions: There is No Fast Lane to Moon**

The paper at hand is a story about our action oriented attempts to intervene in the gendered social and discursive practices taking place in our own work organization and an analysis of the reactions and outcomes of such behaviour. By a careful description of the context and the social and emotional texture of our everyday organizational life the study shows the ambivalent nature of resisting. On the one hand we have been able to enter one teaching module and one full course on gender issues in the curriculum as well as make gendered discourses and practices a relevant topic of discussions in the department. On the other hand by making the gendered discourses and practices visible we have reproduced and, consequently, strengthened the gender division based on differences of sex. Our resistance has brought about discourses that define women in sexual rather than in organizational terms. These sexualized discourses reproduce fantasies of erotic domination that can be perceived as attempts to exclude women from men’s territory (see Hearn 1985, ref. in Collinson and Collinson 1989, p. 94). They are produced in the academic context of ‘structural violence’. Thus, they can be interpreted as extreme attempts to gain power over categorization in academic forums by the denial of the other.

We feel ‘trapped’. By resisting and bringing forth feminist thinking we have actively been taking part in a power play between competing discourses. At times this has been done in a truly ‘masculine’ way by refusing to give recognition to the other. In this sense, we feel guilty of reproducing ‘structural violence’ in academia. In the level of our daily organizational lives the most difficult task in making gender visible is to make the members of our work community see how deeply rooted gendered discourses and practices are in our society.
Another aspect which makes doing participatory research in your own work community difficult is that ‘touching’ gender seems to call forth loads of emotions that have to be dealt with within your own organizational scene. Even though our gendered behavior is cultural in nature, making it visible in organizational level involves always individuals, which makes the job difficult. Unfortunately, hurting and being hurt are inevitable parts of this journey.

Our experience is that mixing and shifting identities depending on the context, i.e. simultaneously identifying, counter- and dis-identifying with the patriarchal articulations of professional identity, provides female academics with more space for self-determined action than locking it into a single subject position would do. This means simultaneous acceptance and rejection of the formal designations of professional identity. A fruitful starting point to end the unequal treatment of women in academia is to take women seriously as social agents willing to take full responsibility for their own lives and, hence, disposed to fight against their discrimination. Improving female academics social status and self-esteem do not, however, necessarily alter the status quo. The norm against which they are evaluated is still ‘the male’. It has been argued that real confrontation between the subordinate and the dominant group only arises when the subordinate group, in other words we, can conceive of a radical alternative ideology/ideologies (see e.g., Hogg and Abrams 1988). Unfortunately, we have so far not been able to meet this challenge. Furthermore, we feel that it is not the duty of the subordinate groups alone to formulate an alternative ideology. Instead we suggest that it should be done in collaboration with the male members of our work community. This is at least what we are striving for. It is difficult, yet possible because of the mutual caring and respect.

References


