21. The gender dimension - Part 2

Operationalising gender theory in research design

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This text is written from a gender perspective but it is also relevant to stress that the intersection with other powerful social dimension should be made visible in our case studies as well, particularly class (position), ethnicity and age dimensions.

There are some common elements upon which the different orientations within gender research can agree are. One of these is that the theoretical frame incorporates a theory about the gender order in society. Often, but not by definition, relations of power in the gender order are expressed through a male superordination and a female subordination at a structural level. The relations of power between the sexes are central for understanding gender at all analytical levels. Gender is created in a continuous social and cultural construction process in which the individual, organisational and societal levels interact with each other. Science is also permeated by the gender order and therefore a critical perspective on gender-blindness in theories is developed. The actual gender order is often automatically reproduced due to the fact that the gap between discourses and practices is not problematised.

Gender and work

The gender contract provides a conceptual frame for both quantitative and qualitative work on a structural and individual level.

For more than three decades gender research has stressed the necessity to enlarge the work concept to also include unpaid reproductive work, and particularly to investigate the link between these forms of work and the gendered face of work. This is also very relevant in relation to both the sectors and business functions chosen in the organisational case studies in the WORKS project and the occupational studies. Particularly important is its implication for the changes in value chains. Another important focus is to make visible gender aspects in relation to the more or less explicit link between organisational flexibility and stability and gender aspects in relation to changes in organisational flexibility and stability. Research shows that the more 'grounded' occupational categories in the knowledge society are female dominated and the more flexible categories are male dominated (Gunnarsson, 2003).

For our research in WORKS it is necessary to find a broad conceptualisation of gender that can be useful both on a structural level for the quantitative work (*i.e.* studying the vertical, horizontal and time dimensions of sex segregation) and for the qualitative work we will do. Another important part of the conceptual framework around gender is that it has to incorporate elements that make visible the relation between paid and unpaid work in society.

A third important part is that the conceptualisation should be able to allow for the great variations in 'local contexts' that we most probably have within the project.

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Another question that we have to make a common decision on for the case studies is the minimum level of ambition in relation to the gender dimension. Ganetz (2005: 12ff), in a recent compilation over research applications to the Swedish research council, distinguished three levels. All three levels comprise gender as an analytical category:

- the first level of ambition is called 'gender research'. This means that gender research is the central focus of the project. This level means that researchers are familiar with gender theory, its research traditions, have a good overview over the field, methods used *etc.*;
- the second level of ambition is 'gender perspective' which refers to projects where gender is not very prominent in the analysis, but the gender dimension is included;
- the third level of ambition is 'gender aspects', meaning that gender is not very prominent in the analysis; however the gender dimension is included. This level also presupposes a rudimentary understanding of earlier research, not least on how gender is to be theorised and including methodological considerations.

Reflexive gender reminders

Three concepts that incorporate a more holistic view in incorporating the relation between the productive and the reproductive sphere *i.e.* incorporating the work-life relation will be presented. The concepts can be used as 'reflexive gender reminders' in general and as methodological tools in a reflexive research process to increase gender robustness in research.

A useful concept is the 'gender contract' that has been coined by Nordic researchers (see for example Åström & Hirdman, 1992) to describe the sex-segregated division of labour (paid as well as unpaid). Here, aspects of power and negotiation are important elements. The idea of the concept is to highlight different structural and normative frames that restrict women' s (and men's) space of action. Gender contracts are expressed at different levels: at an overall structural level in society in the relation between paid and unpaid work; at the work-place, in the vertical, horizontal and time dimensions of sex segregation; and in the allocation of work tasks within the family (Haavind, 1985; Gunnarsson & Friberg, 1995). Using indicators of sex segregation in the labour market, as well as the degree to which care for children and elderly persons is solved within the enlarged family, Gunnel Forsberg (1998) makes visible regional variations in gender contracts in Sweden - regional variations that provide informative 'locally situated' frames for understanding gendered meanings and local variations of spaces of action for women and men. These regional gender contracts could be used as frames to understand gender aspects in relation to work-life balance, and changes related to flexibility-stability aspects of work organisation and changes in value chains. Recent work on changes in the social construction of masculinities such as Robert Connell's article 'Masculinities and globalization' (1998) could here be interesting in relation to gendered changes in value chains. In the final chapter of the WORKS literature review, conclusions, hypotheses and research questions (Huws, 2006) there is a discussion on how to measure the role and importance of 'trust regulations' as a special mechanism in the use and mobilisation of both coded and non coded knowledge. This must be discussed in relation to the contextual construction of masculinity and femininity in relation to skills and competences made visible.

Homosociality could here be an inefficient implicit norm that is hindering more 'rational' changes in value chains than those occurring.

The Finish researchers Minna Salmi and Johanna Lammi-Taskula (2005) present an interesting model for understanding what they call the work-family interface. Here they see three fields that are brought together and intersect with each other both as fields of everyday life and as fields of policy. The three fields are working life and work policy, family life and social policy and, intertwined with both of these, the construction of gender and equality policy. Maybe their model could be part of the conceptual frame in the WORKS case studies (see also Crompton, 2002; Rosilli, 2000).

For the WORKS project the impacts on research questions in the field of quality of work and quality of life this conceptualisation of gender-contract may be a useful tool.

The main questions to be answered are: 'what is the impact of the local or regional gender contract in relation to workforce flexibility/stability and mobility and its implications for changes in value chains?', and 'what is the implication of the gender contract for quality of work and quality of life questions?'. Examples here might be working hours for women and men, different gendered work contracts and their implications for the 'normative' and ideal work-life balance in a given context.

One of the most radical theoretical contributions during the 1980s that had a strong influence on the development of contemporary Nordic research was the coining of the concept of 'responsible' or 'care' rationality by the Norwegian researchers Björg Aase Sörensen (1982), Hildur Ve (1989 & 1990) and Kari Waerness (1980 & 1984). This development of Weber's concept of rationality made women's paid work with children, elderly and sick people visible in a new way as well as unpaid care work. The focus on care work also made visible important forms of emotional work and paved the way for an expansion of the traditional work concept. The embedded aspect of power in the concept gave a basis for understanding gendered meanings in relation to different forms of rationality in society. Using the concept of rationality, women were seen as rational beings with agency, defining rational goals both in paid and unpaid work, in contrast to the earlier more passive sex-role theory. Today, rationality has been contextualised in different ways incorporating both positions and professional differences (Gunnarsson, 1998).

For the WORKS project the concept of responsible or care rationality can be related to skills, qualifications and competences and research questions in relation to it can be discussed in the scope of the occupational case studies.

Finally we will mention a concept coined by Hanne Haavind (1985) the so called 'relative subordination of women'. This is a concept that highlights a generally accepted normative and structural difference between women and men in society, commonly illustrated by the example of giving an 'accepted smaller' but significantly lower salary for women doing the same work as men or work of equal worth. The concept of relative subordination of women could serve as a reflexive reminder along the research process for making sometimes self-evident power relations between women and men more visible.

The concepts described here are examples of, 'reflexive gender reminders' that on different levels and in different ways illustrate gender structures in society, in the labour market and in organisations and as such could be useful in our project.

Gender and organisation

Gender and organisation is today an important and internationally well developed field of research with many orientations. For an overview of the history of the field see for example work by Joan Acker (1992 and 1999).

Gender structures, patterns, processes and practices

How is it possible to make gender visible in different arenas and levels in the case studies of work restructuring? A methodological dilemma is that a traditional structural-agency approach on organisations will only partly be able to catch important features about gendering processes and practices in changes in work organisation in the knowledge society. In increasingly flexible and network-oriented organisations with continuously changing boundaries a more processual view of organisations has to be added to catch more of the movements and changes. Or as Acker (1998: p. 4) argues: 'gender and organisations joins other critical perspective in other ways, for example by seeing organising as processes rather than organisations as relatively stable, rational, bounded structures. Gender inequalities, gender images, and gendered interactions arise in the course of the ongoing flow of activities that constitute "an organisation". A processual view is the only way to capture these emerging and changing realities. '

To handle this, a multiple tool analysis model (Gunnarsson, 2003) is needed. This is a model that captures both a more traditional structural analysis, making vertical, horizontal and time sex segregation visible in the organisation, as well as outside the organisation and analyses this in relation to the local gender-contract. The model should also capture the processes by which the processes and practices form masculinities and femininities *i.e.* it should include the different organisational arenas where 'doing gender' is occurring.

In an ongoing research project we are using a multiple model approach, based on Joan Acker's work on gendered processes in organisations (Acker, 1999). The multiple model approach could be used differently depending on the level of ambition in relation to the gender dimension. The model was used to meet the requirements of making gender visible and explicit in different organisational processes as well as linking different organisational levels such as structures, processes and practices (individual). The model was developed, and in practice linked to various interactive methods in gender and action research and took as a starting point models developed by Päivi Korvajärvi (1998) and Kvande (1998) where they argue that change cannot only be read through vertical or horizontal sex-segregation in an organisation. Other important arenas to be studied – where gender processes and practices are active in local, suitable and changeable ways are: in images and symbols, self-definitions, and interactions. A change in gender processes and practices in an organisation can be visible on these four dimensions but not necessarily on all of them at the same time. Changes in gender processes and practices could then be interpreted as asymmetric processes where the four mentioned dimensions continuously interact with each other and where the outcomes show a wide range of local variations.

We will give some examples of how the project used the model in practice in relation to different activities, methods and the involvement of researchers and practitioners.

Vertical and horizontal sex-segregation

Here the methods are a quantitative inquiry into the organisation's vertical and horizontal sex segregation combined with qualitative semi-structured interviews with gender equity actors and other key informants such as managers at different levels. These were used to get an in-depth understanding of the segregation of work in the organisation. The inquiry and the interviews were carried out and analysed in the first phase by two of the researchers and their work report served as a platform to formulate a common image of the organisation as well as a starting point to initiate different change and learning processes.

The dimensions of time and space in relation to sex segregation should also be added and investigated in relation to gender in particular business functions activities and sectors in our case studies (when and how many hours the employees work, how flexible the working hours are, mobility *etc.*).

Images and pictures were also used, as were discourse analyses and interviews. We also interviewed people around what we called 'the ideal employee' to make visible the space of action in relation to flexibility-stability. In the organisation we studied we saw that flexibility and mobility was a very strong discourse interpreted on an individual level as being a flexible, mobile and entrepreneurial person. This ideal was closely linked to masculinity in this organisation. Stability was a very important element as well but a hidden agenda that was in the shadow of flexibility. The need for stability was not revealed when we were doing the interviews. It became apparent when we analysed and discussed the written report more thoroughly together with the participants. In relation to change The couple flexibility-stability should be investigated as relational and gender is here an important aspect to be sensitive around.

The organisation's external journal was analysed in relation to gendered images and pictures (including the text). Different analyses were done by the researchers as well as by some of the gender equity actors. The gender equity actors initiated a process with the editorial board of the journal. This has in turn led to a very significant change of the journal towards becoming more balanced in its portrayals of men and women.

Interaction and participatory observation offer other methods. The researchers and the practitioners developed together a participatory observation method for analysing communication patterns in meetings with reference to gender and position; who talked (and who did not), for how long, who interrupted who, who supported who, who was given privilege of interpretation *etc.* Different meetings (small staff meetings and bigger unit meetings) were analysed by researchers and practitioners. This is still an ongoing activity that researchers and practitioners co-analyse and will try to find a way to co-write for the final project report.

A final methodological tool was the use of self-definitions obtained through the use of qualitative interviews. A central theme in the qualitative interviews was the organisation's expectations about employee's ways of relating to work and how these expectations were individualised. This was presented in the abovementioned work report as the 'ideal or symbolic employee'. Entrepreneurship as a symbol discourse in society was in this organisation transformed to be part of the ideal employee' s way of relating to work. Expressed in another way, the discourse of entrepreneurship was interpreted as a personal tool and legitimation for constructing a masculine identity in the organisation. It could also be part of constructing femininity but not necessarily.

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The model was introduced by the researchers as a starting point for conceptualising gendered processes in organisations and will be evaluated as such together with the practitioners at the end of the project, along with the gender and interactive methods used.

A minimum level for investigating gender aspects in the organisational case studies and occupational case studies is to collect quantitative data on a structural level about (a) the sex segregation in the chosen sectors and business functions as well as the occupations. *i.e.* the vertical, horizontal, and time and space sex segregation, for example in relation to position, areas of work, working hours, mobility, work contracts *etc.* and (b) changes in sex segregation in relation to changes in value chains.

It is also necessary to investigate the intersection between gender, class (position), ethnicity and age.

Occupational case studies

Gender and skills, qualifications and competence

Skills, qualifications and competence are socially constructed categories. They have historically been constructed in an arena where male actors have dominated and have had the privilege of interpretation of what should be defined as valuable skills, qualifications and competence. And a so called 'male norm', more or less explicit, is found in most work evaluation systems. To have a more robust knowledge of what skills, qualifications or competences are needed and used in different work functions and at play in changes in value chains it is necessary to make invisible skills and qualifications visible *i.e.* those skills defined as female properties or natural aspects of femininity in many female dominated occupations and functions must be analysed more appropriately.

The theoretical frame developed by Karin Andreasen and Elin Jorgensen (1987) could be useful here. The usefulness of their theoretical theory and model is twofold: firstly their qualification and skill theory takes as a starting point the individual subject which includes the gendered nature of socialisation and discusses its consequences for visible and invisible skills in a working situation. Visible and invisible does not in this case refer to tacit knowledge but to the fact that skills in female dominated occupations and sectors are not valued and made visible in the same way as in male dominated occupations and sectors. Secondly they distinguish between formal and non-formal qualifications and skills, understood as recognised and unrecognised in society *i.e.* paid and not paid for. These two categories could then be broken down into general and specific skills and qualifications.

The main research questions to be addressed at a minimum level here are:
▪ What are recognised in the occupation as formal skills and qualifications (paid for) and what skills and qualifications are needed but not recognised (not paid for) and involving gender aspects in relation to this?
▪ What are the implications of both recognised and unrecognised skills and qualifications for changes in value chains?

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Gender equality policies

In the WORKS literature review (Huws, 2006) it is concluded that work life and work experience are institutionally shaped. What are the roles of institutions in the determination, implementation and enforcement of gender equity policy? It is at the level of work that the effects of policy initiatives at various levels will become visible. A number of topics are relevant for the WORKS project, in which policy and institutional shifts play an important role, for example the demand for skills and qualifications, work equality and gender, and flexible forms of work organisation. Questions to be asked here are, for example, what effect do policy orientations have on the quality of work life? And how do these impact different groups of workers?

In order to strengthen the position of women in the labour market, Member States aim to reach the Lisbon goals. The Member States are therefore committed to address the gap in employment rates between women and men, the persistence of the gender pay gap and of gender segregation in the labour market. The goals also include ensuring equal opportunities on the labour market for women and men with care responsibilities. This should be done by providing instruments which would allow women and men to work full-time if they wish and also return to full-time jobs after a period of part-time work. Member States should increase care facilities for children and other dependents in order to provide fundamental instruments for allowing women to enter and remain in the labour market.

There are still enormous differences between Member States on gender equality implementation. One example of variations between Member States is that equal opportunity programmes vary in many ways. Programmes have been scarce and/or limited in duration and fragmentary, limited to small segments of workers with strong bargaining power, especially in the public sector (Rossilli, 2000: 6f). These questions on work and gender are something that could be paid attention to in the WORKS project in order to examine whether European guidelines and directives are being enforced and how their implementation is carried out in diverse settings and across diverse institutional contexts (Huws, 2006).

Gender gaps in the EU

In 2004 the employment rates for women in the EU were much lower for women than men, 55.7 *per cent* for women, compared to 70.9 *per cent* for men, representing a gap of 15.2 *per cent* (Employment and Social affairs European Commission, 2005: 16) The Lisbon targets of 2000 state that with regard to full employment the overall employment rate in the EU should be raised to 70 *per cent* by 2010, and the percentage of women in employment to 60 *per cent* by 2010. The gap between women's and men's employment rates remains significant, but varies between countries. Spain, Greece and Italy are countries that are at the bottom on this ranking. The Nordic countries show less of a gap (less than 10 percentage points) compared to Luxembourg, Italy and Spain where the gap is more than 20 percentage points (Report on equality 2006, Reconciliation of work and private life 2005).

Of the new jobs created in the last five years, three quarters have been filled by women. The main areas of growth for female employment are mainly concentrated in activities and occupations already predominantly feminine. This reinforces the gender segregation

in the labour market (Report on equality 2006). There is a tendency for increased sex/gender inequalities in terms of occupational segregation, social benefits and wage differential. The bulk of new jobs created in the EU in the 1990s are part-time and precarious jobs based on temporary or fixed-term contracts (Rossilli, 2000: 9). Part-time and temporary work has been described as the modern version of female underemployment, which reinforces the economic dependence of these women and the sexual division of labour. These groups also have a weak bargaining position on the labour market (Rossilli, 2000: 9).

An additional problem is that women continue to earn less than men. The gender pay gap in the EU has remained very high over the last few years; there is a greater inequality in the private sector than in the public sector. One among many factors to explain the gender pay gap is that women tend to work part-time to a much greater extent than men. Part-time work is more prevalent among women than among men in the EU: 32.6 *per cent* of women work part-time, compared with only 7.4 *per cent* of men. The New Member States have a lower proportion of part-time jobs, which can be explained by greater labour market rigidity and lower wage levels. Data on the variations between countries shows that less than one-tenth of women worked part-time in Slovakia, Hungary and Greece whilst in Belgium, Luxembourg, the UK and Germany the share of part-time work among women reached 40 *per cent*. In the Netherlands this was as high as three quarters (Report on equality 2006).

Balancing work and private life

The high gender gap in part-time work is also evidence of differences in time use patterns between men and women. Participation in the labour market and the number of hours worked are linked to parenthood. However, the effect is more often negative for women whilst it is more often positive for men. Women aged 20-49 with children have lower employment rates than those without children; this is the case in almost all European countries. For men it is the other way around: employment rates for men with children are higher (91.2 *per cent*) than among men without children (85.6 *per cent*) (Reconciliation of work and private life 2005).

The tension between combining family and professional live is also related to problems resulting from lack of childcare and insufficiently flexible working conditions. Member States that have comprehensive policies to reconcile work and family life for both women and men show higher labour market participation of women as well as higher fertility rates (Report on equality between women and men 2005). EU policies aim to open up access to paid employment and to reconcile work and private life. These policies also include encouraging men to take on more responsibilities at home. The provision of child-care is described as one of the most fundamental issues for achieving the goal of allowing women to take up jobs. This also has to do with caring for other dependents; women care for sick or elderly to a higher extent than men do. This is particularly the case among older women. EU have recommended Member States to take action to guarantee a suit-able level of care provision for dependents other than children - to avoid the withdrawal of women from the labour market (Reconciliation of work and private life 2005).

Some questions

- What influence have issues on working life and work-life balance raised at the EU level had in the context of the case study?
- What is the impact of the local or regional gender contract on workforce flexibility/stability and mobility and what are its implications for changes in value chains?
- Are there any national gender equity policies that have been particularly influential in relation to the social dialogue and new practices in relation to work-life balance issues?

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