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The Practical Men of Action
The Construction of Masculinity and Model Leaders in Business
Magazines

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Introduction

Women and men are supposedly born equal in our society, and as citizens both sexes are assumed to have the same rights and opportunities. “In laws, agreements and regulations the Swedish society has in a high degree created the conditions for an equal society.” (Grinups, 1992, p. 3). Still, empirically this is hardly the case. Women are still subordinated, and they are systematically kept outside of important positions in the public life. Although many of the formal and visible barriers to entry are gone several informal and invisible mechanisms serve the same function: that of excluding women from public arenas. There is a widely spread gender blindness in our society, which constantly, and often silently, transforms potential gender issues into non-issues. As a consequence, the ‘logic’ reproducing the inequalities are usually harder to detect. Furthermore, given that men and women as citizens are officially equal, the empirical patterns that suggest otherwise can always be explained by a reality that is lagging behind (Hirdman, 1987), thereby defining the problem as a historical residue, and not a contemporary problem.

If we look at the labor market the pattern is the same. Although the proportion of women employed in organizations are almost equal to that of men, few of them are to be found in top managing positions (Statistiska Centralbyrån 1992; SOU, 1998:6). One reason for this “...is an entrenched and exclusive executive culture which defines managerial ability in masculine terms.” (Sinclair, 1995, p. 312). A similar culture exist in the MBA programs as well, where many of the managers are trained, thereby ensuring its reproduction (Sinclair, 1995). This masculine definition of ability is effective because it is usually dressed in a cloak of objectivity and neutrality. Consequently, the problem of women’s low representation in higher management positions, in those cases it is defined as a problem, is not usually considered to be a gender problem. In this, organization and management theories, by generally being gender blind (Calás and Smircich, 1991; Wahl, 1996; Wilson, 1996), help to obscure and hide the gendered processes in organizations. In other words, there is a complex and strong set of defense mechanisms hindering women’s attempt to gain power in different public arenas.

“Women’s attempts to gain a share of power have revealed a defence in depth operated by the men behind the barricades: from legal exclusion, through formal recruitment rules that

require experience, qualifications or 'merit' that are harder for women to gain, to a rich variety of informal biases and assumptions that work in favour of men." (Connell, 1995)

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the literature aiming at breaking the "strange silence which ... reflects an embedded and taken-for-granted association, even conflation, of men with organizational power, authority and prestige." (Collinson & Hearn, 1996, p. 1). The paper aims at studying some of these informal biases and assumptions that work in favor of men, analyzing how leadership is described, and constructed, in the Swedish management magazine, *Ledarskap* (Leadership). This magazine is written for managers in general, and perhaps in particular for managers to be. The magazine is filled with portraits of different leaders. Since 1984 the magazine has appointed *The Leader of The Year*. The portraits of these awarded leaders are the focus of this paper, the guiding question being: Are there any recurrent themes in these texts which fill ideological functions in sustaining the asymmetrical gender relations in working life?

Background of the Study

Since 1984 the business magazine *Ledarskap* (Leadership) has appointed the leader of the year (see table 1 for a list of the leaders). The award winner is presented in an article in the business magazine, in which an interview with the manager is included. The article also includes a written statement in which the members of the jury justify their choice. The analysis is based on this presentation of the award winners in the Swedish business magazine *Ledarskap* (Leadership). Originally the award was initiated by the business magazine, *Ledarskap*, and the management consulting firm, EF. Today the award is administered by the business magazine *Affärsvärlden* (The World of Business) and PA Consulting Group.

The purpose of the award "...is to celebrate leaders that can serve as models of leadership for Swedish business life." (*Ledarskap*, 1984, 6-7, p. 16). There are six people in the jury that select the award-winners. The jury has been chaired by the same chairman since the start in 1984, a Managing Director in a bank. The two founding organizations have had one person each in the jury. There is also a representative from the manufacturing industry, and one from the public sector in the jury. During the period 1984 to 1992 the holders of these four seats have changed. The sixth person in the group is a university professor in management.

In 1992 the business magazine *Affärsvärlden* (*the World of Business*) took over the administration of the award. This changed the form of the presentation of the leaders. The relatively extensive portraits of the leaders (5-8 pages) were replaced by a much shorter presentation (1-2 pages). Consequently, the presentation of Berthold Lindqvist, the awarded leader in 1992, and the presentations of the appointed leaders after him, are very short and difficult to analyze. As a consequence those leaders awarded in 1993 and onward are not included in the analysis. Although the text presenting Lindqvist as the award winner in 1992 is relatively short, that issue of the magazine is included for one reason. Next to the portrait of Lindqvist in that issue there is a two page discussion in which the magazine (*Affärsvärlden*) looks back on the previously awarded leaders and discusses the overall purpose of the prize. This is a discussion of interest to this study, and is therefore included in the analysis.

Model of Interpretation

I am inspired by the model of interpretation presented by Asplund (1979; 1991), which has been proven fruitful in discourse analysis within the field of management and organization studies (Alvesson, 1994). In my view this model of interpretation allows for analyses where the *relation* between ‘texts’ and social practices are in focus. Thereby ‘the reality’ of struggles and discriminating practices is brought back into the analysis, something which is often more or less neglected in many ‘postmodern’ and text focusing analyses, which starts and ends with ‘the Text’.

Asplund’s model of interpretation is “a heuristic model for idea-critical research” (Asplund, 1979, p. 146). The model consists of three levels - discourse, conceptual figure, and base (praxis). In his recent writings Asplund prefers the concept of *praxis* rather than *base*. The advantage of the term *praxis* is according to the author that the concept “...refers to human activity, not to a static scene.” (Asplund, 1991, p. 39). According to Asplund, discourses (i.e. written texts or speech) are always related to human practices (praxis). This relation to a reality is always mediated through the conceptual figures. In Marx’ dialectic model with exchange between superstructure and base, one more level is added - that of conceptual figures. This level mediates between the other two. Asplund emphasize that the dialectic between the levels are of vital importance. It is not a reductionistic model.

The level of discourse corresponds to the superstructure of a society. These are the texts that are produced in the wide sense of the term. Although the author defines discourse as

the opposite of intuition, as a systematic process of thought, Asplund does not want to exclude more non-systematic processes of thought from the level of discourse. Furthermore, the term discourse is not used to characterize a line of thought *per se*. The term is used to “...characterize the relation between a process of thought and its prerequisites on the nearest lower level.”(Asplund, 1979, p. 149). In other words, the discourses are always discourses over conceptual figures. Whether different discourses are similar to each other or not, whether they belong to the same universe or not, cannot be decided on the level of discourse. Two apparently widely different discourses could be related to the same conceptual figure, and vice versa. The (deeper) meaning of the discourse becomes clear on the level of conceptual figures.

According to Asplund the dialectic exchange between the discourse and the base (praxis) is mediated through the conceptual figures.

“The reality we write and speak about is never 'raw', it is always already in one way or another a shaped or molded reality. The conceptual figures mediate this temporary shaping or molding. To see is to see something as something. The conceptual figures and their purpose are associated with this 'as'“. (Asplund, 1991, p. 39)

Furthermore, the conceptual figures are seldom expressed explicitly in a text, they are usually implicit - i.e. ‘silent’ and self-evident. Formulated differently, the conceptual figures are to be found *under*, not *in*, the texts. According to Asplund the conceptual figures are often ideological, in that they provide an incomplete or distorted reflection of the base. To analyze conceptual figures, I argue, is a way to analyze the universe of the undiscussed and undisputed (doxa); to analyze the social world in its character of a natural phenomenon (Bourdieu, 1977). In this sense, I argue, Asplund’s model is fruitful in the studies of ideology, in that it enables study of the ways in which, the taken for granted, deeper “...meaning (signification) serves to sustain relations of domination.” (Thompson, 1984, pp. 130-131).

The conceptual figures are characterized by their limitation. In every culture, or historic period, there exists only a limited number of conceptual figures. Another characteristic is that they are somewhat general, and spread across academic disciplines and different areas of society. Examples of conceptual figures are: the individual, mental illness, the idea of progress, and childhood. Clearly the absence of the concept ‘childhood’ is difficult to imagine. It is an self-evident idea on which important aspects of our culture are based. Asplund (1979, p. 150ff) refers to Phillipe Ariès book *Centuries of Childhood* when arguing that the concept as we know it is a relatively recent invention from the

19th century. During the middle-ages the concept of childhood were missing. No clear distinction was made between children and adults, neither in language nor in social practices. Artists painted children as small adults, and no special clothing for children existed. Children participated in almost all aspects of work and play with the (big) adults in the community.

For us a world without the concept of childhood is difficult to imagine. The concept constitutes a central, usually unspoken and self-evident, part of our society - i.e. a conceptual figure. Without the concept, a large amount of today's social practices would not be understandable, or at least their meanings would be different. Sexuality, working-life, psychology, education, to mention only a few. What place would modern development psychology á la Jean Piaget have in a world without the concept of childhood? According to Asplund the modern development psychology would not have been understandable during the middle ages - because the idea of childhood as something different from adulthood (and other differentiations, e.g. teenager, infants etc.) was missing.

The base should be understood in a wide sense of the word. It is not only the site of materialistic production forces and class struggles; but also material objects, buildings, physical distances should be included. The discourses that are reproduced, mediated through the conceptual figures, are always related to a material world of social practices. As Marx argued (referred in Asplund, 1979, p. 153), the dialectic between the base and the superstructure is "...realized in human action."

"Seeking the meaning in a discourse is very much the same as seeking the underlying conceptual figure ... seeking the meaning of a conceptual figure is very much the same as seeking the base; what the conceptual figure stands for" (Asplund, 1979, p. 153)

As argued earlier the conceptual figures have a double, or mediating function - they reflect conditions in the base or praxis (although not in its entirety) and they generate discourses. Consequently, to identify a conceptual figure you have to analyze it from these two different levels - the base and the discourse. Following Asplund (1979) the analysis will start with a short description of some central characteristics of the labor market, followed by the analysis of the texts presenting 'the Leader of the Year'. In this way, by describing and analyzing these two levels (base and discourse), underlying conceptual figures can be identified and analyzed.

Equality and the Swedish Labor Market (Base)

According to the official wage and employment statistics for 1990, the proportion of employed women on the Swedish labor market is almost the same as the proportion of men (Statistiska Centralbyrån, 1992). However, it is a segregated market in two major respects. 1) Most women work in the public sector, and 2) generally at lower hierarchical levels. The majority of women work in the public sector of the economy (60%), while the majority of men work in the private sector (75%). Less than 10% of the managers in the private sector of the economy are women, and in the public sector 30% of the managers are women. The private sector's top management level is not included, consequently the proportion of women in managerial positions in the private sector is even less. In a more recent study (Höök, 1995), based on a survey of 451 companies from different sectors of the economy including both private and public companies, a similar pattern was found. On average the proportion of women in top management groups is 8%. The proportion of female board members were on average 10%. At the level directly below the top management 16% of the managers were women. As showed by the recent studies in the interdisciplinary research program Women and Power, the pattern still prevails (SOU, 1998: 6).

Furthermore, the men dominating in top management positions are quite homogeneous. Based on a survey of 424 CEO's from listed companies the average CEO is a 50 year old male from the upper or middle class with a university degree in business or engineering (Collin, 1995). In another study of top management groups in 65 of the largest Swedish companies, listed and unlisted, a similar pattern was found. The typical top manager was a 53 year old man with a university degree usually in engineering or in business (Affärsvärlden, 19940413).

Given this short description of some central characteristics of the labor market two interesting and interrelated questions arise. If we all are supposedly given equal opportunities, why is the labor market segregated, and why are there so few women in leading positions? This paper argues that one answer could be given on the level of conceptual figures. To identify and analyze this conceptual figure, mediating between discourse and praxis (base), the analysis starts at the discourse level - the texts presenting 'the Leader of the Year'. The argument throughout the paper is that these portraits of model leaders are only an example of the ongoing discourses on leadership and management in which the idea of leadership, while appearing to be gender neutral, is intimately associated with the male gender (Wahl, 1992). Furthermore, this association is

usually silent or self-evident and its 'logic' can be identified and understood most clearly on the level of conceptual figures.

The Men of Action (Discourse)

As stated earlier, the purpose of the 'Leader of the Year' - award "...is to celebrate leaders that can serve as models of leadership for Swedish business life." (Ledarskap, 1984, 6-7, p. 16). If one were to read these portraits as a normative statement telling leaders, or leaders to be, what it takes to become the leader of the year, the recurrent themes could be summarized in the following imperative: *The practical man of action, who has worked his way up the hard way, is eligible for the award 'the Leader of the Year'.*

In other words there is a relatively homogeneous image of leadership reproduced in these texts presenting the 'Leader of the Year'. Furthermore, some work is put in to maintain this overall image. In those cases where the characteristics of the leader in some way threaten the overall image of practical men of action this is usually compensated for in the texts. This recurrent ideal of leadership, the practical man of action, is identifiable already on the level of discourse (Asplund, 1979; 1991). I will analyze this recurrent theme under two sub-headings which emphasize some of the central elements in this image of 'the practical man of action'. These are, firstly that he should appear to be more or less self-made. Secondly, practical experience is deemed far more important than theoretical knowledge. Thirdly, action speaks louder than words, and a man of action usually acts fast rather than dwell upon matters.

Out of the nine awarded leaders the majority are men, and managers of companies in the private sector of the economy (see table 1). Two of the leaders do not fall into both of these categories - *men* from the *private sector*. These are Christina Jutterström, the only woman among the awarded leaders; and Allan Larsson, the only representative from the public sector. These two 'different' cases are especially interesting, and will be analyzed separately. The underlying conceptual figure in the descriptions becomes clearer when the majority of leaders is contrasted with the two 'odd' cases. In the contrast normality shows its face. To begin with only the 'normal' cases will be analyzed - the majority of seven men from companies in the private sector.

<i>Name/Year</i>	<i>Company</i>	<i>Educational Background</i>	<i>Family Background</i>
Marcus Storch (1984)	Managing Director of <i>Aga</i> , producer of gases and gas applications	Master of Science in Engineering	Father entrepreneur, started a wallpaper factory
Bengt Eskilson (1985)	Managing Director of <i>Esab</i> , producer of welding and cutting products	Master of Science in Engineering	Father commercial traveler
Anders Lindström (1986)	Managing Director of <i>Bacho</i> , tools' manufacturer	Not mentioned	Father entrepreneur, started the family firm: <i>Automobile and Tractor</i>
Ingvar Eriksson (1987)	Managing Director of <i>Scania</i> , truck manufacturer	Master of Science in Engineering	Not mentioned
Stefan Persson (1988)	Managing Director and owner of <i>Hennes & Mauritz</i> , chain stores for ready-made clothing	Not mentioned	Father started H&M
Allan Larsson (1989)	Director-General of the <i>Labor Market Board</i>	Not mentioned	Not mentioned
Bernt Magnusson (1990)	Managing Director of <i>Nordstjernan</i> , a conglomerate of businesses	Not mentioned. Considered an academic career in business administration or economics	Mother's family owned a painting firm. Aunt and Uncle owned a hotel
Christina Jutterström (1991)	Editor-in-Chief at the Newspaper, <i>Dagens Nyheter</i>	Not mentioned	Not mentioned
Berthold Lindqvist (1992)	Managing Director of <i>Gambro</i> , producer of medical-technology	Master of Science in Engineering	Father carpenter

Table 1: The awarded leaders

Family Background - Merit vs. Privilege

In those cases where the family backgrounds of the leaders are mentioned, some of the leaders come from families that are upwardly mobile, in which one of the family members is some kind of entrepreneur owning a small family firm.

[Marcus Storch (1984)] "His flair for business is something he acquired from home. His father, an immigrant from Latvia, ... started a wallpaper factory in Stockholm which Marcus helped his father to manage." (Ledarskap, 1984, 6-7, p. 17)

[Anders Lindström (1985)] "He learned to do business early in the family firm, Automobile and Tractor, in Luleå, which his father has built up. Still, his father, Henrik, is his greatest idol and foremost teacher." (Ledarskap, 1985, 6-7).

[Bernt Magnusson (1990)] "My mother's family owned a painting firm. My father was a civil servant. He passed away when I was young, and during my childhood I spent a lot of time with my aunt and uncle, who owned a hotel in a ski resort in Sälen, where a lot of prominent guests from the business community stayed." (Ledarskap, 1990, 6-7, p. 17)

These leaders' enterprising spirit is explained by their experiences from family firms, either explicitly or more implicitly. Although the families described are lower middle class, or middle class, they are described as entrepreneurs and upwardly mobile, rather than belonging to an established bourgeoisie. The awarded leaders continue their families' movement upward. Furthermore, the sons do not take over the family firm - instead they make their own success, based on own merits rather than privilege.

In the descriptions of Bengt Eskilson and Berthold Lindqvist the theme of merit becomes even more clearly underlined.

[Bengt Eskilson (1986)] "He describes himself as a person who would like to sell used cars because he loves businesses and selling. Bengt Eskilson financed his studies in upper secondary school by some businesses of his own. He comes of good stock, his father, uncle, and grandfather were commercial travelers." (Ledarskap, 1986, 6-7, p. 17)

[Berthold Lindqvist (1992)] "It is sometimes said that the base for recruiting leaders in Swedish business life is broader than in other European countries. Because more people have the opportunity, there is more competition here for top positions. Berthold Lindqvist, being a carpenter's son from Vännäs, is in that case a good example of this." (Affärsvärlden, 1992, 39, p. 26)

Being the son of a commercial traveler, or a carpenter's son did not stop either of these leaders from making their own successes. The message is clearly underlined. Given that "... more people have the opportunity..." (Affärsvärlden, 1992, 39, p. 26), here in Sweden, merit prevails over privilege, thereby allowing for the interpretation that almost everyone is eligible for the award.

There is one clear exception to this overall image of men working their way up - Stefan Persson. He inherited the company Hennes & Mauritz from his father. Consequently it is more difficult to describe him as a more or less self-made man. However, I argue that this is compensated for in the text, and that the overall image remains intact. In Stefan Persson's case it is clearly emphasized that his position in the company has more to do with his own abilities and hard work, than the fact that his father founded the company. Merit rather than privilege is still the proposed explanation for his success as well. As stated in the jury's justification for choosing Persson:

“He is also the son of a founding father who is not just a symbolic leader for efforts made by others. Showing abilities of his own he has continued in the fine tradition of business founded by his father. He continued the relay race, showing that he could run even faster and better.” (Ledarskap, 1988, 6-7, p. 21).

This compensation in the portrait describing Stefan Persson is a recurrent pattern in top managers' autobiographies as well (Lindqvist, 1996). When the author comes from a less fortunate home, the hardship of the childhood is usually described in a positive tone; the message being that through hard work and an optimistic outlook on life one can overcome problems and obstacles. In contrast, privileged authors, already born into an economic elite, usually choose not to describe their childhood and their parents at any length. Instead, in order to avoid the interpretation that the positions acquired in (working) life were given rather than achieved, events are described where the author's individual abilities, dedication, and sacrifices paved the way to personal success.

Experience and Action Orientation

The manufacturing industries are clearly over-represented in these seven portraits. Five of the leaders are managers of manufacturing firms, and four of these leaders are presented as Masters of Science in Engineering (nothing is mentioned about Anders Lindström's educational background). Consequently, these leaders are technical experts. But as we shall see most of their important lessons took place in the companies. As a consequence, their expertise is described as being mostly based on 'hands on' experience. The most obvious examples are: Marcus Storch; his technical know-how being described as so vast that he is capable to perform almost any task in the company (Ledarskap, 1984, 6-7);

and Ingvar Eriksson, who started his career in Scania in 1958, and has been working in the same company ever since, learning everything the hard way^{*}. (Ledarskap, 1987, 6-7).

In several of these descriptions practical knowledge is highly valued, as opposed to theoretical knowledge:

[Anders Lindström (1985)] “Anders Lindström is interested in theories, but he argues that experience has been his foremost teacher. ‘I am really a practitioner who has discovered that there are theories explaining what I do.’” (Ledarskap, 1985, 6-7).

[Ingvar Eriksson (1987)] “Ingvar Eriksson - an industrialist without a lot of fuss ... ‘the self-made man, who has done the hard way’. ... For those tired of modern management terminology meeting Ingvar Eriksson is a liberating experience. As knowledgeable as most guru's of management, Eriksson has learned about leadership the hard way by experiencing the problems and finding the solutions by himself.” (Ledarskap, 1987, 6-7, p. 15). “Being an engineer his professional life has also turned him into a sound businessman without academic manners.” (Ledarskap, 1987, 6-7, p. 17).

[Stefan Persson (1988)] “... no theoretical mumbo-jumbo, either in words or in the way in which the organization works: a clear and simple business idea...” (Ledarskap, 1988, 6-7, p. 21).

These descriptions suggest that leadership is something that is acquired through experience and hard work, rather than through reading books. The leaders' competence is not so much based on their expert knowledge acquired through an extensive education and professional training in general management skills. If mentioned at all, the educational background of these leaders is only mentioned in passing. Furthermore, when mentioned, the leaders are engineers, and their knowledge is technical, and a complement, never a substitute, to practical experience.

Another characteristic of the man of action is the speed with which he acts. A man of action, acts quickly, often on the basis of a ‘gut feeling’ rather than on the basis of a formal analysis.

^{*} The expression ‘the hard way’, is not a translation from Swedish. The expression is recurrent throughout the article and always in English. Eriksson is described as the “...’self made man who has done it the hard way’” (Ledarskap 6-7, 1987: 15). Thereby Eriksson is the most explicit example of this recurrent theme in these texts of hard working men, making their own success. Still, Eriksson, like all the other leaders, is not a self-made man or entrepreneur in the sense that he himself started a company. They are all professional managers (except for Stefan Persson, H&M), but this fact is not something that is emphasized in these portraits.

[Anders Lindström (1985)] “He admits that success is explained by a number of concurrent factors. You take chances, you must be able to make decisions in critical situations. In times of crisis speed is more important than precision.” (Ledarskap, 1985, 6-7).

[Bengt Eskilson (1986)] “Eskilson is hot-tempered and a typical man of action, and sometimes he rush into things rather too quickly.” (Ledarskap, 1986, 6-7, p. 15).

[Bernt Magnusson (1990)] “In crisis and war everything is allowed. It is more important to be fast than precise.” ... “When there are thousands of decisions to make ... [t]here is no time for lengthy and thorough analyses.” (Ledarskap, 1990, 8-9, p. 13).

There is an exception to this overall image of practical men. At a first glance, Bernt Magnusson does not entirely fit into the ideal of a man of action. In his youth he considered an academic career, either in business administration or economics. However in the texts, theoretical knowledge is more or less devalued and assumed to be in opposition to practical knowledge. Action is considered more important than ‘theoretical’, and lengthy, analysis. In Magnusson’s case, I argue, this is again compensated for. The fact that it is mentioned in the text that he in his youth considered an academic career poses no problem for the overall theme (i.e. the image of the leaders as non-academic men of action making their own success). Magnusson's image is sufficiently strong to cope with that fact, and his success, it is described in the text, has more to do with his track-record than his educational background. If the other leaders are depicted as men of action, Magnusson is clearly the He-man of action, willingly accepting ‘impossible missions’. When he took over the management of *Nordstjernan*, described as yet another impossible mission, he saved a company that was presumed to be dead. There is a flagrant display of masculinity throughout the text describing Magnusson, out of which his own description of crisis management is only one example. The preferred metaphors to describe Magnusson’s leadership in times of crisis are the leader as a general or as a surgeon. Both male occupations with heroic connotations.

“He speaks of himself as the surgeon who operates on the dying, or the general who sacrifices the rearguard in order to save the army. ... A surgeon which receives a patient who is bleeding to death. ... If he works fast when cutting the patient it does not mean that he is especially brutal. On the contrary. He may be human, wanting to end the suffering.” (Ledarskap, 1990, 8-9, pp. 13-14).

There is a striking resemblance between the descriptions of these seven leaders and those of the post-war managers, ‘the organization men’, in Britain (Roper, 1994). A similar type of ideal of masculinity is put forward. According to Roper (1994), the organization

men made their careers in between two epochs of capitalism - family and corporate capitalism. On the one hand they represented "...the nascent generation of professional managers. ... On the other hand, they upheld many of the traditions of family capitalism, particularly its twin cult of the benevolent 'gentleman amateur' and the technically trained 'practical man'." (Roper, 1994, pp. 48-49). In other words there is a mixture between ideals of managerialism and paternalism, a mixture not without tensions. Another characteristic of these organization men is the product fetishism and the cult of the producer. Technical competence is valued, rather than analytical skills; production is considered more important than planning.

There are several similarities with the masculine ideal stressed by the 'organization men' and how the seven leaders are described in the texts. On the one hand, the awarded leaders are portrayed as practical men of action, learning things the hard way. In other words, they are men of merit rather than privilege. Furthermore, academic or theoretical knowledge is devalued; echoing how the ideal of the prototypical man of action was described in America in the nineteenth century.

"Those who wrote about the ideal of true manhood agreed that the speculative person was impractical, usually inefficient, and seldom active. Cultivated men were said to be effeminate and too sentimental to get along in the real man's world." (Dubbert, 1979, p. 30)

Given this ideal, "[t]he best education, then, was self-education, 'natural wisdom', based on experience." (Dubbert, 1979, p. 31). This more or less 'rugged' individualism with its clear focus on *doing* things is an espoused theme in many conventional entrepreneurial theories, and are also central in more working-class ideologies (Mullholland, 1996). Although the ideal of the 'practical man of action' presented in the portraits of the seven leaders is a more 'soft' version - e.g. they are all educated, professional managers, and not entrepreneurs - the themes that are underlined and emphasized tries to be as consistent with the entrepreneurial ideal as possible.

On the other hand, the seven leaders are professional managers. They are managing directors in, from a Swedish point of view, relatively large, international, companies. Five of the companies are manufacturing companies. The educational background is not mentioned in all cases. When mentioned they are all engineers (four leaders). Still, I argue, the educational background remain a background in these descriptions. As a consequence the professional ideal is not emphasized or celebrated. Instead, although most of the awarded leaders have the technical expertise and university degrees, the

expertise that is celebrated in the texts is the one based on ‘hands on’ experience, rather than education.

Why this Ideal of Masculinity?

The masculinity displayed in the portraits of these leaders, of practical men of action, is a hegemonic type of masculinity (Connell, 1995), with “... some correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power...” (Connell, 1995, p. 77). The descriptions of these leaders as men of action are based on an *ethic of capability* (Gustafsson, 1992). The theme is central in the modern, bourgeois, ideology (Lindqvist, 1996), in which every individual is expected to do her best, and to realize her full potential. This ideal can be traced back to the eighteenth century, where a growing middle class generated discourses about merit, with the message: you are what you make of yourself. One of the first heroes of this mythology is Robinson Crusoe (Ambjörnsson, 1990). Today this idea of merit, that you are what you make of yourself, is highly institutionalized. Failing to take control over one’s life, and not trying to realize one’s potential, is considered blameworthy (Lindqvist, 1996). But the ethic of capability, which underpins capitalism, has different forms of expression, and there is an ongoing struggle between different definitions of masculinity.

A common struggle between hegemonic definitions of masculinity in business and politics is between those emphasizing command and those emphasizing expertise (Connell, 1995). Both are expressions of the ethic of capability, but they differ in the way in which capability is judged and practiced. This struggle is apparent in Roper’s study of post-war managers in Britain (1994), where the organization men’s ideal of masculinity, based on command, was challenged by a new generation of professional managers, many of them graduated from business schools, whose expertise and general management skills, rather than ‘hands on’ experience from a certain industry, were valued and celebrated. With this challenge, the emphasis on production was abandoned in favor of an emphasis on finance and marketing. Analytical skills were more valued than ‘hands on’ experience; the strategist, and the financial whiz-kid, were two types that challenged the production man.

Still, even if we have seen similar challenges in Sweden, and that management fashions change constantly, I argue that this relatively old ideal of the ‘practical man of action’ emphasizing command (Connell, 1995), is strong, recurrent and seldom completely out of fashion. A somewhat similar conclusion is drawn by the business magazine presenting

the award. Under the headline: "Time has caught up with an unfashionable 'Leader of the Year award'." (Affärsvärlden, 1992, 39, p. 30), we are told that the prize was introduced as a reaction to the *Zeitgeist* of the 1980s, during which leaders created profit through "...quick and adventurous acquisitions ... To know your homework and uphold the organization's efficiency were less important than to move fast." (Affärsvärlden, 1992, 39, p. 31). The article also concludes that the magazine, through the kind of leader they have celebrated since 1984, have anticipated the leadership ideal of the 1990s. They have been right all along, the 'practical man of action' is an ideal that seldom completely goes out of fashion.

A recent example of how this ideal is upheld by leaders in dominant positions is when Peter Wallenberg spoke to the students at the *School of Economics and Commercial Law, Göteborg University*, urging them to "...show more guts'. ... The business climate today demands an understanding of the basics of business. There is too much emphasis on economic theories in business education today." (Dagens Industri, 971106).

The students answered Wallenberg's critique in *Dagens Industri* (a leading Swedish business daily) with the article: 'Hello Wallenberg, you bet we have guts'. In their answer they emphasized several of the themes in this ideal of 'practical men of action'. Afraid of being associated too much with academia and the impractical and abstract knowledge assumed to be produced there, the students emphasize that have experienced the hard reality, and that the knowledge they have is based on reality and therefore relevant for action. "For us integrity and creative thinking are central in our education ... The reality is central, not American economic theories. ...Our projects in companies are based on the hard reality .. Here we meet all the complications not taken into account in the simplified calculations in the school." (Dagens Industri, 971119).

Why, then is the older ideal of men of action, of industrialists with 'hands on' experience and technical skills, celebrated in these portraits of awarded leaders? Why is one hegemonic ideal - *command* - celebrated rather than *expertise* (Connell, 1995)? This is particularly interesting given that the average person in top management positions is a middle age man, with a university degree in business or engineering (Affärsvärlden, 19940413; Collin, 1995). Although I am unable to provide an exhaustive answer to the question why the older ideal of masculinity is reproduced in these texts, I will point out two ideological functions which may be served by adhering to the older ideal of men of action.

First, one of the ways ideology operates is through dissimulation, whereby the relations of domination are concealed by "... presenting themselves as something other than what they are." (Thompson, 1984, p. 131). In these texts corporate capitalism, is presented as being something other and more 'innocent' - family capitalism. Although the awarded leaders are managing directors for, from a Swedish point of view, relatively large, international, companies; there are at the same time elements of family capitalism and entrepreneurship present in these texts. The leaders' status of self-made man is emphasized rather than the fact that they are professional managers. Furthermore, in several portraits the family firm has provided an important training ground for the leaders. In this sense the leadership portraits are attuned to the more popular view, as reflected in popular culture - the innocence of family capitalism.

Family capitalism is a recurrent theme in popular culture (Ross, 1994). The entrepreneur is a common character in TV-series (twenty per cent of all characters in Swedish TV-series are entrepreneurs (Ross, 1994)). In contrast to large corporations, which are usually depicted negatively, the entrepreneur or the family firm is usually romanticized and held up as an ideal. In several TV-series for example one can follow different family firms in their struggle for survival, as they are threatened by the ruthless professional managers of corporate capitalism.

Second, by emphasizing 'hands on' experience rather than extensive education, the meritocratic society we live in becomes even more accessible in these texts. Seemingly, the educational system does not function as a system of stratification in these texts. The educational background of the leaders, if mentioned, is not important in explaining their success; hard work and 'hands on' experience seem to be more important. The individual is in focus, and there seem to be very few structural barriers hindering a man of action. The efficacy of this liberal ideology lies in its individualistic focus. Failure can always be rationalized as an individual problem, rather than a structural or ideological one.

To sum up, the ideal of leadership proposed by these texts is masculine. It is an ideal of masculinity rooted in the 'hard', clearly male dominated sector of the economy - the manufacturing industries. By clinging to an older ideal of men of action, I argue, these portraits of the awarded leaders underline that leadership equals masculinity, although not admitting explicitly that this is the case. The individual (regardless of sex), and merit is in focus. This resonates well with much of the public discourse on equality which is gender neutral and based on a liberal perspective, in which equal rights and opportunities for all regardless of sex is assumed (Grinups, 1992). Consequently, these texts presenting

the leaders allow for the interpretation that everyone regardless of sex, through hard work and commitment, could be awarded 'the Leader of the Year'. Being thoroughly institutionalized, the masculine hegemonic order most of the time does not need to be defended, being the case that masculinity successfully pretends to be "... *the human, the normal, the social.*" (Easthope, 1990), the order usually appears self evident and natural.

"Most of the time masculinity need not be thematized at all. What is brought to attention is national security, or corporate profit, or family values, or true religion, or individual freedom, or international competitiveness, or economic efficiency, or the advance of science. Through the everyday working of institutions defended in such terms, the dominance of a particular kind of masculinity is achieved." (Connell, 1995)

In other words, the portraits drawn of these seven leaders display a leadership ideal based on a hegemonic type of masculinity, whose masculinity is not thematized. The masculine bias remain hidden. When analyzing the two remaining leaders' portraits - that of Christina Jutterström and Allan Larsson - the underlying masculine bias and its attempt to be *the normal* becomes more visible. When contrasting the 'normal' cases with the 'marginal' ones, normality (hegemonic masculinity), and its claim to universality, reveals itself more clearly. This paper argues that in order to be awarded these two leaders must be transformed, i.e. made more masculine. Consequently, what on the surface appears to be an attempt to award different kinds of leaders, not just men from the manufacturing industry, but in this case one woman representing the newspaper business and one representative from the public sector, is a surface phenomenon. In spite of this variation, the ideal rooted in the manufacturing industries prevails and these texts present these 'different' leaders in ways which defend the status quo.

Universalizing Masculinity – the Transformation of the Marginal

This paper argues that all these texts are examples of reproduction of masculinity, but it is only when the majority of seven leaders are contrasted with the two remaining portraits that the masculine claim to normality and universality becomes more obvious. Christina Jutterström, the only woman among the awarded leaders, is clearly given masculine attributes. She is reconstructed as a 'man', and perhaps even more masculine than many of the other leaders. Allan Larsson is not presented as especially interesting as a person. He is not awarded for his attributes, instead he is awarded for what he has started - a transformation of an organization in the public sector (something private, and feminine) to a market-oriented organization (something public, and masculine).

Looking more closely at the two 'different' cases of the awarded leaders, the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity becomes more clear. In Christina Jutterström's case the construction of masculinity is more obvious. In the description of her and her leadership, she is given typically male attributes. As editor-in-chief of the leading Swedish newspaper, Dagens Nyheter, she accomplished the task of changing the existing corporate culture. This change is described as having been extremely difficult, but Jutterström weathered the storm on several occasions. Her firm and tough style of leadership was necessary to be able to control and manage a newspaper organization filled with creative people going in different directions. She describes her leadership in the following way:

“I do not want to be the compromising kind of manager. I want to implement my ideas. I believe there is a point when you realize that you cannot agree, then as a manager, you have to play the traditional authoritative role.” (Ledarskap, 1991, 5, p. 7).

Like most of the awarded leaders, it is stated, Jutterström has had difficulties in delegating. She is described by people around her as an 'iron-lady', with an authoritative style of leadership. Furthermore, she is described as a tough and enduring person, mentally and physically strong, dedicated to the Protestant work ethic. These attributes are usually considered to be masculine. Worth noticing is that none of the other leaders have been described as physically strong or tough, probably because these attributes are intimately associated with the male gender. Consequently, these attributes are assumed to be 'normal' for men and usually in no need to be explicitly referred to. In Jutterström's case, being a woman, these attributes need to be underlined. In my view, to avoid any misconceptions, the recurrent themes which permeate the other texts surface in the description of Jutterström. It is explicitly stated in the text describing Jutterström's work that she is dedicated to the Protestant work ethic, thereby ensuring that the overall image of the capable, and hard working men remains more or less intact.

The description of Allan Larsson, Director-general of the Swedish Labor Market Board, is somewhat different from the descriptions of other leaders. The image of men of action that is apparent in the other portraits of leaders is lacking. Allan Larsson is described as a good teacher with “...a strong intellect, and a good stylistic ability.” (Ledarskap 8-9, 1989: 19). He is a person who avoids conflicts, and a good listener who would rather listen to others than speak himself. The portrait of Allan Larsson is hardly a portrait of a man of action; it is not an especially masculine portrait at all. Conflict avoidance, for example, is not what one would expect from a man of action. Furthermore, women are,

according to the stereotypes, usually considered to be better listeners than men. Consequently, in the description of Allan Larsson he is not given clearly masculine attributes. I argue that it is almost as if Allan Larsson as a person is quite uninteresting, that he as a person is not especially important. Rather it is the changes he has started that are of interest. It is the transformation of the Swedish Labor Market Board (SLMB) from a public organization to a more market oriented organization, that is important. The key words are *market oriented*. The norm is given - the (masculine) market.

The SLMB had earlier been inefficient, inflexible, and ill adapted to customers needs. According to the article, "...in those cases where they actually turned up for the interview" (Ledarskap, 1989, 8-9, p. 17), the persons mediated through the employment offices were seldom the type of person the companies were looking for.

"...it was with remarkable frequency that the employment offices had sent immigrants, handicapped, or persons who where difficult to find a place for, to employment interviews." (Ledarskap, 1989, 8-9, p. 17).

In other words, the transformation of the SLMB can be seen as a move towards giving the customers what they want. What they want seem to be, not dominated persons (i.e. immigrants, handicapped), but Swedish ...men?

The transformation of SLMB is clearly thought of as good *per se*, something which becomes apparent already when reading the jury's justification for appointing Allan Larsson the 'Leader of the Year', 1989.

"During the past decade the public debate has been characterized by an increasing aggression towards the so called public sector. This is not unique for Sweden. The development has been the same in the whole Western-world, and also lately in the East-European countries. The aggression is rooted in a continuous increase in the spending of the public sector at a time when the quality of its services have been declining. ... [Allan Larsson] has initiated changes which have passed the point of no return, showing that change and improvement of quality together with reductions of costs is possible to accomplish in a large public authority. ... We [the jury] congratulate Allan Larsson, director-general of the Swedish Labor Market Board, to the award Leader of the Year 1989, and we hope that he will have many followers in the Swedish public sector ." (Ledarskap, 1989, 8-9, p. 17).

The most striking feature of the article is its character of a political manifesto. The article could be seen as a contribution to the ongoing debate about the public sector, where usually a rather one-sided case is made against it. This description is no exception. The

'so called' public sector is depicted as inflexible, inefficient, and bureaucratic. The glorifying and somewhat uncritical tone in which the other leaders are described is not as evident in this portrait. In the article, the journalist is actively taking a stand, and on at least two occasions he is more or less lecturing Allan Larsson. In connection to a discussion in the text regarding some of the older civil servants who were more critical towards the changes, the journalist comments: "Maybe Allan Larsson should have applied the ax more forcefully here?" (Ledarskap, 1989, 8-9, p. 21). On another occasion the journalist is not entirely satisfied with the speed of the changes, reflected by the following comment: "Allan Larsson's leadership style of conflict avoidance has probably held up the speed in the change process." (Ledarskap, 1989, 8-9, p. 21). In no other description of the awarded leaders is the normative tone this obvious.

The public sector is a feminine domain, both symbolically and literally (Czarniawska, 1997). In several respects it is an extension of the private, domestic domain, which according to the sexual division of labor is where the women do most of the (unpaid) work. When the women are employed outside the home they usually work (in low positions) in certain sectors of the economy, where they perform more or less traditional (domestic) tasks. "They nurse, teach and work in different service occupations, usually in the public sector." (SOU, 1990, p. 226). I argue that the transformation of the SLMB, could be seen as dealing with the supposedly general problem of feminine organizations, by transforming something feminine into something more masculine. The universality of the problem is clearly stated in the quotation above. It is not only a problem in the Western societies, but a problem in the East-European countries as well. Furthermore, feminine organizations, as we all supposedly know, are too costly and inefficient in a modern (masculine) society. The cure seem to be market-orientation, preferably privatization, and although Larsson's changes are too slow in the eyes of the journalist, taken altogether, it is clear that Larsson has taken several steps in the right direction on the 'necessary' road to market-orientation and masculine organization.

"Although the transformation of a huge red-tape bureaucracy, to a customer oriented and flexible service organization is not yet completed, it could to a large extent be seen as a role model of how change processes in the public sector ought to be handled." (Ledarskap 8-9, 1989: 16).

To conclude, in light of the second part of the analysis, the imperative of excellent leadership can be rephrased and made more precise: *To be appointed the Leader of the Year you have to be masculine, or if your not, see to it that your actions promote masculinity.*

The Underlying Conceptual Figure

If we return to the question raised when discussing some central characteristics of the Swedish labor market (base) - why is the labor market segregated, and why are there so few women in leading positions, given that we supposedly have equal opportunities - we are now able to discuss it in relation to the level of discourse. I argue, following Asplund's model (1979; 1991), that some light can be shed on the discrepancy between the public discourse on equality and the praxis of society, on the level of conceptual figures. The public discourse on equality is mediated through an underlying conceptual figure - the dichotomy between 'Masculine and Feminine', and its many ramifications (rational - irrational, public - private, production - reproduction; to mention only a few.). This 'Masculine - Feminine' dichotomy systematizes and shapes many of our social practices. It is a gender system (Hirdman, 1987; 1988), (composed of a complex of opposing ideas based on the conceptual figure 'masculine - feminine' and its many ramifications), which reproduces certain conceptions and social practices. It is, according to Hirdman (1987; 1988), both a *dichotomy* and a *hierarchy*. Male and Female are separated, and conceptions and practices related to the former are treated as superior to the latter. The male, or masculinity, is the norm.

The presentations of the awarded leaders are discourses over this conceptual figure. In the texts, a masculine ideal of leadership is proposed as the norm - as the normal. The majority of the leaders are presented as men of action, reproducing a hegemonic ideal of masculinity attuned to the modern individualistic ideal of capability and merit. This ideal - that you are what you make of yourself - by suggesting that every individual (regardless of sex) has equal rights and opportunities, tries to hide its masculine bias. The workings of the conceptual figure is more silent, and self evident, in the descriptions of the majority of seven leaders from the private sector. In contrast, in the descriptions of the two 'marginal' or 'different' leaders - the portrait of Christina Jutterström, the only awarded woman, and the portrait of Allan Larsson, the only representative from the public sector - the underlying masculine norm reveals itself more clearly. Christina Jutterström is portrayed with clear masculine traits, dedicated to the Protestant work ethic. She is constructed as a 'man'. Allan Larsson, on the other hand, is presented as having more or less feminine attributes. As a consequence he is the only leader that is openly criticized in the article for not being sufficiently forceful, or active, in the change process. Not being a man of action, and lacking clear masculine traits, Allan Larsson is, in my view, awarded for starting a change process, supposedly long overdue, in which

something feminine, belonging to the private, is transformed into something masculine and public - the market orientation of a public authority.

This conceptual figure has a relatively long history. Its current form as a dichotomy and a hierarchy which assumes men and women to be incommensurably different however can be traced back to the eighteenth century. According to Laquer (1990) our view of the relation between the sexes emerged during the eighteenth century, when a one-sex model was replaced by a two-sex model. Women went from being regarded as lesser men (still on the same scale), to being regarded as incommensurably different. This new biological difference was transformed into a cultural one, and women were declared essentially different from men in all relevant aspects. With these differences between male - female, masculine - feminine, different roles were identified and prescribed for the sexes, and different, and opposite qualities were attached to these roles (Ambjörnsson, 1990). Consequently, the 'Masculine - Feminine' conceptual figure has many ramifications. Attached to this dichotomy are a long row of other dichotomies: rational - irrational, public - private, strong - weak, universal - particular; to mention only a few.

In other words, the biological, more 'natural', 'objective', and 'obvious' differences between the sexes often legitimate the culturally constructed differences. Nature is transformed into culture without the transformation being fully recognized. To this transformation the sciences (both natural and social) often lend their hand, either openly by actively taking part in the creation of differences, or silently, by neglecting to include gender into the analysis, thereby taking a gender blind or gender neutral stance. Consequently, sometimes the conceptual figure - the dichotomy between 'Masculine - Feminine' - is more explicitly discussed, and discourses are generated over it where differences (and similarities) between men and women, masculine and feminine, are discussed. At other times the conceptual figure is more silently at work, as an underlying theme mediating between discourses and social practices. This is usually the case concerning discourses on leadership and management, in which gender is not perceived to be a problem explaining women's low representation in higher positions. Competence, not gender is the real issue, in the eyes of the companies (Wahl, 1995).

As argued earlier, the conceptual figures originate from the base, although they are never exact copies or reflections of these base conditions (Asplund, 1979). In line with Asplund's (1979) argument the conceptual figure 'Masculine - Feminine' is firmly anchored in the base, or praxis, of society. In the base or praxis of society (Asplund, 1979; 1991), the dichotomy between masculine and feminine is constantly reproduced.

For example, gender is clearly a fundamental category, one that is constantly enacted in everyday life. Early in life, children are taught to act in accordance to their gender. According to Davies (1989), “[p]art of being a competent member in society as it is currently organized derives from our capacity to attribute to others, and to aid others in attributing to us, the ‘correct’ gender. Everyone ‘knows’ that the world is divided into males and females.” (Davies, 1989, p. x). Consequently, we are constantly ‘doing gender’, where boys early on learn to act and position themselves as boys, and vice versa, thereby reproducing the constructed differences between male and female, between masculine and feminine. According to Hirdman (1987; 1988) society is thoroughly organized on this principle of separation and hierarchization. As argued earlier, this is clearly observable on the labor market, with its horizontal and vertical segregation.

This conceptual figure both reflects the praxis of society and influences that praxis through the discourses of society. I argue that the ‘Masculine - Feminine’ - dichotomy often is silently at work under the public discourses on equality. When discussing the labor market and access to higher positions; individual citizens (regardless of sex), and objective merits, are usually in focus. The descriptions of the awarded leaders are a good example. They allow for the interpretation that it all boils down to the individual. The masculine bias underlying these seemingly neutral concepts of the individual and merits, is often misrecognised (Bourdieu, 1991). In other discourses in which differences between the sexes are thematized, most of the workings of the ‘Masculine - Feminine’ - dichotomy are still silent. The differences *per se* are usually treated as self-evident and ‘natural’ and are seldom problematized.

These discourses on ‘the Leader of the Year’, guided by the underlying conceptual figure of ‘Masculine - Feminine’, is not an isolated example. On the contrary, this type of discourse is quite typical. Although there exist several variations of this kind of discourse, in which different types of masculinities are celebrated, these variations remain on the level of discourse and within the same universe. The conceptual figure is relatively intact - it is still a dichotomy and a hierarchy. For example, in interviews with established top managers and their wives about marriage and family life (Lindqvist, 1994), the dichotomy and its ramifications is clearly at work, as a reproductive ‘logic’ underlying the generated discourses. Regardless of whether the author spoke with men or women, events, projects and problems, were always related to the husband, and his wishes or his work. “It seemed as if the possibilities and the constraints for the whole family were dictated by his career...” (Lindqvist, 1994, p. 316). The public life takes precedence over the private life. Furthermore, it was clear that the top managers felt more at home

speaking of the public life, of decisions made and actions taken in their corporations. The questions about their private life were given short, and sometimes uninterested, answers (Lindqvist, 1994). According to Lindqvist there is a strict separation between the public and the private sphere, between the world of men and the world of women, which explains the unwillingness of men to speak of their private life, since their important deeds take place in the public sphere.

The conceptual figure is not only mediating between discourses and social practices among the older generation of already established leaders, its workings are clear when looking at the younger generation as well. Asking both female and male students (20-25 years old) at a university to write short essays on their plans concerning careers and family life, Forsberg found that they obviously had a "...genderized perception of their future role in the society." (Forsberg, 1992, p. 143). The economic responsibility is supposed to belong to the men, and the responsibility for the family is supposed to belong to the women. This was a recurrent pattern in the essays, clearly indicating a clear separation between the private and feminine sphere, and the public and masculine sphere.

Concluding Remarks - Why is the Dichotomy Intact?

Equality is a much debated topic in our society. It has become a politically correct topic to include on the corporate agenda; and although the majority of companies have not yet started to practice what they preach, if asked, many of them at least have the *explicit will* to change and to recruit more women to higher positions (Höök, 1995; Månadens Affärer, 1995, 9). Still, the changes come slowly, and one reason for this is that the low representation of women in higher positions is usually not viewed as a gender problem.

Why is it then, that this underlying conceptual figure remains relatively intact, transforming gender issues into non-issues? One answer, which is argued for throughout this paper based on Asplund (1979), is that: 'talk is cheap'. Although changes can be observed on the level of discourse - e.g. that companies express a will to change and recruit more women, that this topic is more often discussed and debated publicly - these changes stay on the level of discourse. According to Asplund (1979) a conceptual figure is persistent and relatively stable. The reason for this is that it originates from the base, and time moves very slowly on this level compared to the level of discourse. This conceptual figure - the dichotomy of 'Masculine - Feminine' - is firmly anchored in the base, and as a consequence the discourses generated are still discourses over this

conceptual figure. The variations are still within the same universe and most of the conditions of the base are left unchanged.

This answer is still on a relatively abstract level. To conclude, the ambition is to be a bit more specific and discuss in some detail why these changes come slowly. Although the list is not exhaustive, it is argued that there are at least three central ways in which the dichotomy between 'Masculine - Feminine' operates to sustain the status quo.

First, the dichotomy is effective because it is usually silently at work, because it is, in everyday practice, usually not seen as a dichotomy, and even less as a hierarchical one. This is obvious in the work life. Competence, not gender, explains the distribution of, and access to, higher positions in the public arena. The fact that 'individuals' usually means 'men', and that 'managerial competence' usually means 'masculinity', is seldom problematized in everyday discourse. Those dominated (and those dominating as well) often recognize the discourses on leadership as valid, while misrecognizing the arbitrary character of the 'self-evident', and 'natural'. That masculinity is well integrated with the concept of leadership, and that "...[t]he context of leadership are expectations and norms defined in masculine terms" (Wahl, 1992), is rarely fully recognized. As argued by Bourdieu "...the language of authority never governs without the collaboration of those it governs, without the help of the social mechanisms capable of producing this complicity, based on misrecognition, which is the basis of all authority." (Bourdieu, 1991a, p. 113). In those cases when arguments about merit and competence fail or end, biology or medicine usually lends a helping hand. Then the dichotomy surfaces in the discourses and the differences thus acknowledged are usually considered to be natural, and consequently non-negotiable ('This is the way of nature'). In this way Nature usually obscures the hierarchical ordering between the sexes, explaining that which is practices of power as something natural.

Second, one of the institutionalized defenses supporting the efficacy of the hegemonic masculinity is that gender is replaced by the more inclusive concepts of the individual and competence. This modern ideology is firmly based on the idea that the individuals, regardless of sex, are what they make of themselves. Officially we are all individuals with universal rights and possibilities, free to make our own choices, and, as a consequence, responsible for our own failures. That which is a structural problem, in the sense that certain practices are reproduced at the expense of others, sustained by a hegemonic masculine ideology, is seldom identified as such. When observed and discussed, the problem of the low representation of women in top management positions can always be

rationalized on the individual level either as a choice (women choose not to have a career), or as an individual problem (women usually lack what it takes to become a successful leader).

In light of this it is understandable why the proposition on affirmative action when appointing professors, made in 1995 by the Swedish Minister of Education, Carl Tham, evoked such heavy criticism. Tham's proposition of affirmative action challenged the doxa, the taken for granted assumption, that all citizens are equal and that positions held in society are firmly based on objective merits (Björk, 1996). Instead, the proposition suggested that we live in a patriarchy, in which men as a group have certain advantages over women as a group, thereby challenging our view of a just democracy, based on merit.

Third, when the dichotomy between 'Masculine - Feminine' is explicitly contested and criticized, that is, when the doxa is questioned (Bourdieu, 1977), there is always the risk of reproducing the dichotomy, in a male-dominated culture, rather than transcending it. The dominant culture, being based on a male preferential right of interpretation, has the advantage of challenging the critique in ways that it:

“...can be deflected, changed, and reconstructed to support the status quo. Work based in differences will be used to devalue the feminine and to keep women out of positions of power. Work based in similarities will be used to reduce women and the world to a male-dominated view. If women are just like men and can operate just as well in a male-dominated system, then the system will not be questioned.” (Kimball, 1995)

Furthermore, the critique only goes so far. Being a part of the heterodoxy, which tries to push back the limits of doxa and reveal the arbitrariness of the taken for granted universe (Bourdieu, 1977), one is still 'playing the game' and thereby neglecting, or being unable, to criticize the grounds, the fundamental axioms, on which it is based. (Bourdieu, 1991b). Given that one cannot stand outside of the gender system (Hirdman, 1987; 1988) and criticize it - that the gender system, being deeply entrenched in our culture, always is a system inside of which a position is held - the subversive strategies of the dominated will always contribute to the reproduction of the field, leaving at least part of the doxa unquestioned. Otherwise the critics would be expelled, and unable to influence the outcomes of the struggles to an even lesser extent. Consequently, the most radical critique, avoiding the dominant system of classifications in order to transcend the status quo, always runs the risk of not being heard, and being marginalized. It is usually written off as too radical. This is similar to the faith of the Frankfurt school of critical theory, as argued by Therborn (1976), whose critique, by refusing to speak the language of the

bourgeois sciences, ended in an ideological radicalism and a philosophical condemnation of contemporary society, without much connection with the political praxis of their time.

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