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Discourses of Equality and Difference in Bank Managers' Talk

ABSTRACT

Women's experiences of combining family life with employment – and a 'career' – are complicated by the multiplicity of interpretations available. These interpretations draw on social discourses that articulate gender relations in contemporary societies. This article describes how women who have themselves reached a managerial position in the world of business talk about combining a 'career' with family life. Special attention is given to the discursive possibilities that are available for career women and how they successfully position themselves in ways that others find legitimate.

The study suggests that the career women draw mainly on two competing and complementary discourses, namely the equality and difference discourses, when talking about the combination of work, family and childrearing. The study further suggests that the use of these two discourses depends considerably on the position from which they talk: i.e. whether they talk about themselves as wage earners, parents, mothers or managers. When talking about their careers from the position of a wage earner, the women draw mainly on equality discourses, whereas when taking the position of a parent and/or a manager, they strongly identify with difference discourses. The study further suggests that rather than drawing a strong negative contrast between these different versions of the self, career women imaginatively integrate identities that seem to deny each other and construct a many-sided gender identity.

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INTRODUCTION

Along with the other Nordic countries, Finland is very often taken as a model country in terms of gender equity. The large-scale participation of women in the labour force is perceived as an indication of gender equity. According to this view, a 'just' society is one that allows individuals to exercise autonomy and to fulfil themselves in life regardless of sex. Different forms of family support, such as parental leave programmes and day-care systems, have been developed to implement this model (cf. Julkunen 1992, Nordic Council of Ministers 1994). In Finland, the Act on Equality between women and men was adopted as late as 1987, but the Council for Equality was already established in 1972. The Act on equality was amended in 1995, and now it includes a 40–60 per cent quota for female/male representation in all bodies established by the government and counties (Veikkola and Palmu 1995). The laws and policies aim at balancing employment and family life for both sexes. For example, the maternity and parental leave and allowance laws enable families to decide whether it is the mother or the father who stays at home to take care of a new born baby after a three-month mandatory maternity leave (Melkas and Anker 1998). Thus, in Finland political discourses rank equal opportunities high.

Discourses that stress equal opportunities and acknowledge the similarity of men and women in regard to the qualities needed in professional life gain a lot of space in Finnish society, especially in times of strong economic growth when women form an indispensable resource on the labour market. In times of high unemployment, however, discourses that stress the differences between men and women and highlight the blessings of full-time motherhood for children, men and the society as a whole start to dominate social and cultural discourses (Anttonen 1997, 166). Somewhat different, yet complementary discourses view women as most suitable for part-time work or occupations where feminine qualities such as caring and empathy are needed. In such discourses women are perceived primarily as caretakers of the organization of domestic life and social reproduction and only secondarily as serious and committed labour force participants. Such discourses treat women's different character traits as advantages rather than deficiencies for an effective division of labour in the society at large and in the world of organizations in particular (cf. Grant 1986, Helgesen 1990, Jelinek and Adler 1988, Loden 1985, Rosener 1995; 1990 ref. in Calas and Smircich 1996).

As an academic and a mother of two small children, I have become more and more interested in the ways women themselves participate in (re)producing social discourses articulating gender relations in Finnish society (cf. Katila and Meriläinen 1999). In her study on female lawyers, Silius (1995), for example, found that many of her interviewees took distance from 'career thinking' by linking motherhood to their career talk. By stressing the importance of their roles as mothers, the female lawyers constructed themselves first and foremost as mothers

and only secondarily as professionals (ibid., 56). I have noticed, however, that the way I myself talk about combining work with family life depends highly on to whom I am talking, whether it is my neighbour, who is a full-time mother, or my career-oriented friend. Also, the sex of the person to whom I am talking is of great importance at least in my own experience, especially when discussing such a delicate matter as family life (and motherhood as part of it).

Thus, in this article my focus is on describing how women who have reached a managerial position in the world of business talk about combining work and a 'career' with family life to a male academic whose main interest is organizational restructuring processes. In the study, I search for regularities in the broad discursive resources career women draw on as they try to answer the interviewer's questions and construct a story about themselves and their careers in ways that others, in this case the male researcher and an anonymous academic audience, find legitimate.

STUDY DESIGN

Female bank managers' accounts of their careers provide an interesting sample for a discourse analysis. The sample is a part of an intensive case study material collected by Janne Tienari (Tienari 2000; 1999a, Tienari et al. 1999; 1998). He studied two of the largest Finnish commercial banks, which were merged in 1995. Tienari gathered the data through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with managers at several hierarchical levels of the case banks. Interviews were tape-recorded with the consent of interviewees and were transcribed into text[1]. Tienari interviewed altogether twelve female bank managers in two rounds and two of them for a third time. He asked the interviewees to tell their version of the organizational restructuring processes to reconstruct events in a manner that makes sense to them (Bryman 1989). The advantage of such an approach is that it creates accounts for the unfolding of personal biographies, including employment career and family life.

I have become very familiar with Tienari's data as I have participated closely in his research process. I have read numerous versions of his article drafts and also commented on his ideas on the feminization of middle management in the banking sector. Whereas Tienari (1999b) uses the interviewees' commentaries upon their career, work experiences and family life as evidence of phenomena, my special interest is in the discourses that female bank managers use in talking about career, family and childrearing. I ask what discursive possibilities are available to the female bank managers when they talk about combining work and a 'career' with family life, and how their accounts are put together to portray their actions and beliefs in con-

1 The author of this article is responsible for the translations of the interview extracts from Finnish into English.

textually appropriate ways. I concentrate, in particular, on analyzing the way in which these discourses shape, and are shaped by, the female bank managers' self-presentations.

A DISCOURSIVE READING OF THE DATA

Discourse analysis is the guiding methodological and theoretical model for this study (e.g. Potter and Wetherell 1987, Jokinen et al. 1999; 1993, Wodak 1997). Taking this perspective means that language is not seen as a mere conveyor of social life, but as an essential constructive feature of it. Thus, in contrast to treating language as an indicator or marker of processes taking place elsewhere, discourse analysis makes language a site in itself. The events that happen at this site include, for example, the creation of participants as certain types of being or identities and the production of social realities (Marshall and Wetherell 1989, 109). To quote Wodak (1996, 17 ref. in Wodak 1997), describing discourse as a form of 'social practice' implies "a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation, institution and social structure that frame it: the discursive event is shaped by them, but also shapes them." In this sense the female bank managers' interviews can be seen as one of many interactive events in which they accomplish a sense of being particular types of persons. To put it in another way, the interviews can be seen as special sites where the bank managers accomplish versions of themselves. We can assume that on this site they speak as 'career woman'. Tienari chose precisely them for the informant's role due to the nature of their careers.

In the analysis, I also try to take into account the presupposition that individuals can represent themselves in diverse and varying ways. They may construct multiple versions of the self, and these versions may be inconsistent and even contradictory (Potter and Wetherell 1987). The outcome of my analysis is an interpretation of these versions and of their relationships. In this sense it could be said that I follow the Potter and Wetherell (1987) type of discourse analysis that is particularly interested in the close analysis of concrete, contextualized uses of language, which in this case means the career talk of female bank managers. While on the one hand I treat individuals in my analysis as the subjects of a discursive struggle for their identity, on the other hand I also believe that discourses are "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault 1972, 49 ref. in Nikander 1995, 8). Thus, in this sense I also treat individuals as sites of discursive struggle and follow the Foucauldian type of discourse analysis, which is also interested in examining the power implications of various transindividual discourses (for a more detailed description of the scope and diversity of 'discursive research' see for example Nikander 1995). In this line of thought some discourses seem to have more opportunities to present themselves; they monopolize communications and they make use of strategies of control to ensure their eminence (Holmer-Nadesan 1996). Some con-

structions of the discourses even become so powerful that they start to appear as common sense, as what is natural and taken for granted. The Foucauldian type of discourse analysis is concerned with denaturalizing the text and asking why this particular construction has appeared in this context and what ends it achieves. Furthermore, it is interested in the ways people's subjectivities are affected or limited in and by surrounding discourses (Nikander 1995). Thus, another guiding principle of my analysis is to question the 'taken for granted' and to make clear how certain discourses have filtered into the female bank managers' notions of common sense and appear in their self-presentations.

Introducing Leena and Tiina

Leena and Tiina have both been working in the banking sector for a long time. Leena started her banking career in the beginning of the 1970s and Tiina in the middle of the 1980s when she got her first summer job in the bank. Leena is now in her early fifties and Tiina in her early forties. Both of them have reached a managerial position in the banking business. Leena gained her first management position about ten years ago and she now works as a manager for the private customers sector in a large branch. Tiina's first managerial appointment was 'branch manager' in the summer of 1995, but she was transfered to a specialist managerial position in asset management in the spring of 1997 at her own request.

Both Leena and Tiina live in a dual-career family and have two children. Tiina's husband has a managerial position in a private company. The career of Leena's husband, who has a high-ranking position in the Finnish government bureaucracy, has followed a classic bureaucratic career model that is best characterized by upward mobility. Leena and her husband are living by themselves, since their two grown-up children have already left home. The situation in Tiina's family is somewhat different, because their children are younger and need someone to look after them.

(In)equality between husbands and wives

Equality between a husband and a wife is an essential part of Leena's and Tiina's talk as career women. They say that they have always been and still are equal with their husbands. Both women refer to independence as an important element in their lives.

Leena associates equality between the spouses especially with her opportunities to make independent career decisions. In the following quotation, Leena comments on the interviewer's interpretation of her family's career arrangements. Leena's comment is a reply to the interviewer's claim that it has been the career of Leena's husband that has set the pace also for Leena's career decisions.

"Well, it was not so. It was only a comment made by my mother-in-law, who was a

> very dominating personality anyhow. She has tried to control me all of her life, but without success [laughing]. But a reason for her suggestion [that Leena should choose a banking career] (.) it was, as a matter of fact, her sincere suggestion. It did not occur to me personally at any time. Neither did it occur to me that I would live up to my husband's career, absolutely not. So that when he has to move, I have to choose an occupation that fits in. No, I am a quite an independent and a stubborn person in the sense that my own career goes first. So in regard to the future, we have made a decision that I am not going to follow him if he has to move to another locality because of his work." (Leena)

With reference to her independence in relation to her own career choices and the decision that she is not going to follow her husband if he is transferred somewhere else, Leena constructs an image of an autonomous individual who also manages on her own. Leena's interview statement is not surprising in relation to the history of gender discourses in Finland. The textbooks used in courses on women's studies and also the literature on the history of Finland give accounts of the foundations of women's independence and active labour force participation and describe how in Finland these originated in the agrarian tradition where both women and men were compelled to work to ensure sustenance. The descriptions of the long traditions for women's full-time employment among working class and educated class women are an essential part of such discourses.

Nowadays, women's active labour force participation is constructed as an 'economic fact' in Finland. Giving priority to empirical data is characteristic to such a 'factual' gender discourse. Statistics Finland (1999), for example, reports that in 1998 women accounted for as much as 47 per cent of the total labour force in Finland. Research results also show that the percentage of women working full-time is relatively high in Finland compared with other European countries, since only 19 per cent of all of the working women were part-timers in 1998. Women's active and relatively long labour force participation can be considered an economic fact in Finland, but it can also be seen as a cultural phenomenon influencing women's perceptions of their gender position in Finnish society today.

In Tiina's talk, the naturalness of women's full-time employment and the equality between the spouses appears in the way Tiina talks about her shared breadwinner role within the family. The next extract is a part of a larger conversation concerning how Tiina's pregnancies have influenced her career development. Tiina gives reasons for her decision not to stay at home after the statutory eight-month maternity leave. It is important to note that the discussion about Tiina's pregnancies and maternity leaves began with the interviewer commenting on the length of Tiina's maternity leaves. By stating that "you stayed at home **only** for the statutory [eight

months] maternity leave" the interviewer insinuates that Tiina's decision is exceptional and therefore gives cause for further justifications.

> "After our second child was born there was some discussion about me staying at home a couple of months [in addition to the statutory maternity leave] (.) until the end of that year. Then we thought that is there any point in doing it after all. It is a financial issue too (.) of course taking into account our big home loans." (Tiina)

In the above text, Tiina suggests that the earnings of both spouses are of equal importance in their family, especially because of the big home loans that have to be paid back in due time. Hence, Tiina and her husband are represented in Tiina's talk as equals in the sense that both have to earn money to support the family. With reference to the financial importance of her full-time employment for the family, Tiina represents her return to working life as a 'necessity', thereby naturalizing her active labour force participation. Although Tiina gives the impression that there has been some discussion about her staying at home somewhat longer than the statutory maternity leave, the question is not so much about a continuing arrangement but about a few months. Thus, by representing her full-time employment as the only viable alternative, Tiina simultaneously 'silences' other possible ways of organizing life, such as full-time or part-time parenthood.

The use of the necessity discourse (cf. Koivunen 1998) to explain her active participation in the paid labour force is, however, somewhat confusing, taking into account the high position of Tiina's husband in business and the many forms of family support that Finnish society provides for parents who stay at home with small children. Thus, another potential interpretation for Tiina's use of the necessity discourse in this connection might be the need to defend her choice to continue working while having small children. I will return to this issue in the next section, where the discourses of motherhood are discussed more thoroughly.

Although the equality discourse is used by both Tiina and Leena quite frequently when they talk about combining work and a 'career' with family life, the way they present themselves in the private sphere of home depends considerably on whether they talk about themselves as wage earners or as parents. As wage earners, both women represent themselves as equals to their husbands, but as parents they locate themselves in a fairly traditional gender role. One of the themes that comes up quite often in their talk is the child care arrangements and how they are organized within the family. In Tiina's case this theme appears when the discussion between her and the interviewer concerns Tiina's principle of doing all her work during normal business hours. In practice, observance of this principle means that Tiina organizes her work so that she can leave the office everyday by half past four. The interviewer wonders whether Tiina has been able to follow this principle while being a bank manager.

> "Yes, I have. I had the car, you could almost say that without exception I had the car, which meant that I had to pick up the children at five o'clock or half past ( ). In principle, I had time [to work] until five o'clock, a very important half an hour. So yes, I can say that I have managed quite far with this format. It didn't mean (.) although I said that you have to be able to take care of your work [during the working hours] (.) of course there was a lot of brain-work to do in the evenings and at the weekends and so on. You can't leave that out, can you? [ ] Indeed I thought many times back then at work that now I'll leave. And then I'd drive like 'mad' one hundred and twenty (.) thirty kilometres per hour on the motorway the whole winter through to be able to pick up the children one minute before closing time. Many times I had pain in my stomach because the driving was such a strain. It was a stressful thing (.) both in the mornings and in the evenings (.) and regardless of the weather." (Tiina)

In Leena's career account, the discussion about the child care arrangements arises when Leena describes the times when she was in the beginning of her career and the children were still small.

> "But as such the bank (.) the career development or working in general when the children are small and then the daycare issues which are extremely difficult (.) well, it was truly troublesome. The fact that I can take my children to the daycare and go to work normally (.) but then the fact that my husband was away an awfully lot, so collecting the children and all that. The bank closed at half past four and I had to be at the daycare centre that was one and a half kilometres away at five o'clock sharp. And that caused me sort of (.) that I didn't even myself have any desire to advance while the children were small, because it was very important to take care of the children anyhow." (Leena)

The above extracts suggest that as parents both Leena and Tiina construct themselves as the primary caretakers of children within their families. This is expressed in the texts with reference to Tiina's and Leena's main responsibility for organizing the child care arrangements within their families. In this regard both women take the position of an attending parent, who in addition to her full-time employment in the labour market predominantly takes care of the unpaid work in the home. But rather than complaining for the unequal state of affairs, Leena and Tiina represent their 'two-shift' work arrangement as a matter of practical reasons. In Leena's talk, the justification for such an arrangement is linked to her husband's numerous days away from home, whereas in Tiina's case the justification is linked to her right to use the family car to go to work.

Although Tiina and Leena represent their responsibility for taking the children to the day-

care and then collecting as a practical matter, both women use words such as ”stressful”, ”troublesome” and ”difficult” to express the hardness of their lives when they were at the beginning of their careers and their children were still small. In so doing, they participate in (re)producing the idea that it is mainly the mothers (and not the fathers) of small children who face hardship and pain in combining work and a ’career’ with family life. In this regard, special attention should also be paid to Leena’s statement according to which she herself didn’t even have any desire to advance in the banking business while her children were small. To whom else does she refer, to her husband, her employer, her superiors or perhaps to social and cultural expectations more generally, according to which women are perceived primarily as caretakers of the organization of domestic life and social reproduction and only secondarily as serious and committed employees (cf. Duncan 1998, Ostner 1994, Pfau-Effinger 1996)?

Discourses of motherhood

The way in which Tiina and Leena construct themselves as mothers is somewhat surprising, considering how they draw on the position of an attending parent described above. Leena, for example, says that she was anxious to get back to work after her maternity leaves and adds that she is ”not a mother type”. Tiina also tells how staying at home from day to day was not her cup of tea.

By the use of the expression ’not a mother type’, Tiina and Leena participate in (re)producing the cultural meanings of a ’mother type’ in our society. In the following excerpt Tiina, for example, describes herself as lacking in relation to the qualities needed for such motherhood.

I: On both occasions you stayed at home only the statutory [eight months] maternity leave. Didn’t it occur to you at any time that you could have taken advantage of some kind of an extra arrangement, to apply for leave if nothing else (.) like there is nowadays I suppose childcare

T: [childcare
[childcare leave of absence. Yes, there was some discussion about it. With the first one it didn’t in fact even occur to me.

I: Why not?

T: Well, I was in a great hurry to get back to work.

I: This is how I have it [in his notes based on an earlier discussion with Tiina]. That’s what you said, yes.

T: Yes. It was just that I felt that back to work, and there was not that much to do either [at home] on the one hand (.) but then again I am not the type of person either that would perhaps have stayed [at home].

I: What kind of a person do you mean?

T: A person who is patient enough to sit in the sandbox and play games. So in that respect I am quite bad (.) that I would play a lot. We do discuss things a lot, however, more than (.) we discuss a lot and spend a lot of time together. We do a lot of things with the children, we do almost everything together with them. We [Tiina and her husband] spent one night away from home, we went on a cruise this spring. I counted that it was the forth time since we have had the kids. One is already eight years old, and it was our night away from home.

With reference to her own inadequacies as a mother, Tiina contructs an image of a 'mother type' that possesses qualities that she herself is lacking, such as the patience to sit by the sandbox and play games with the children. Tiina's construction of a 'mother type' as a 'playing' mother is interesting in many ways. It raises questions such as what are the other possible ways of enacting motherhood in Finnish society.

In Tiina's talk the contrary type to the 'playing' mother is a 'companionable' mother who does not play games with the children, but who still spends a lot of time with them doing all kinds of other things together. Tiina takes conversation as an example. Tiina expresses the close and reciprocal nature of their family circumstances by alluding to the ample amounts of time she and her husband spend doing things together with their children and talking with them and the few nights they have spent away from home without the children. In such a discourse of motherhood children are portrayed more as friends than as dependents who first and foremost need care and nurture. Thus, rather than presenting herself as a mother who possesses characteristics traditionally linked with motherhood, Tiina presents herself as a mother who is more like a friend to her children.

Tiina's construction of a 'mother type' also raises the question of the difference between a mother who prefers to stay at home and one who prefers to return to work. By associating 'patience to sit in the sandbox and play games with the kids' with one's inclination to stay at home, Tiina constructs an image of full-time mothers as more motherly than their working counterparts. Tiina further strengthens this image by alluding to her own experiences of being a full-time mother during the statutory maternity leaves. Her phrase "there was not that much to do either" might be interpreted as an expression of the negative value she places on her being 'just a homemother'. Thus, Tiina uses this obviously feminine-defined role or expectation as a standard of comparison against which her professional self emerges as the winner (cf. Marshall and Wetherell 1989).

We can not, however, bypass the interviewer's influence on Tiina's way of presenting herself as not a 'mother type'. By using statements such as "only eight months" and "apply for

leave if nothing else", the interviewer constructs Tiina's decision not to stay at home longer than the eight months maternity leave as a deviation from the norm, which gives cause for Tiina to further justify her choice. Thus, one possible interpretation for Tiina's construction of herself as not a 'mother type' in this connection might be her need to defend her choice to continue working while having small children and hence to position herself in a way that others find legitimate.

Another possible interpretation for Tiina's construction of herself as a 'companionable' rather than a 'playing' mother is that it is a way of resisting the stereotypical view of motherhood presented by the interviewer and, thus, a way of reflecting the multiple ways of enacting good motherhood while being a career woman.

The empathizing and attending female manager

Although Tiina and Leena do not represent themselves as motherly in a culturally specific stereotypical sense in the private sphere of home when they talk about their strengths as managers, the qualities they list are those traditionally linked with motherliness in the public sphere of work. Both Tiina and Leena accept and appreciate these qualities in their talk as part of their professional self.

> "[ ] I regard my ability to handle customers as one of my best characteristics. It is I think that I (.) it is quite strong. Or taking care (.) not handling [Tiina laughs] it could sound negative or sort of like manipulation, but taking care of the customers, meaning that I get along well with very different kinds of customers. Like especially in our (.) here it seems that we are given (.) very easily they sent us customers who are so to say perceived difficult in the branch [ ] So this [the ability to take care of the customers] and another thing which is of course related to the same issue in another way is my ability to be with my fellow workers and to work together with them. And that is of course in principle linked to human resource management. I feel that is also one of my strengths. [ ] but like my strengths, I would say that I'm pretty analytical too in many ways." (Tiina)

> "Well, if I think of myself as a leader, which is of course one of the most important things (.) a leader specifically (.) so (.) certainly openness is one of my one of (.) in my opinion one of my strengths as a leader, fairness and the fact that I have never taken up such a position that managers traditionally take. They are my fellow workers, not subordinates. I do in fact never talk about subordinates, I talk about fellow workers, because then there is all this pulling together and the supporting and encouraging. Of course you have had to learn to delegate things better and to do less yourself (.) to do

> nothing but in principle (.) the less you are the more you have to concentrate only on leading (.) and leave out all the routine, because otherwise this won't work. Well, I have been most of the time a 'do-it-yourself'-person, especially with certain things of which I know I personally can perform with lightning speed. I feel that if I start explaining to one of my fellow workers that do it this or that way it takes "hundred years". So most of the time I am a very selfish 'achiever' so that I might and sometimes do make very fast moves with, for example, loan approvals (.) a thing which I am not supposed to do at all. [ ] What other characteristics could I list? (.) I am quite empathazing too, but not too much. I am considered (.) in fact I have always been very amazed when I have received feedback where I have been characterized as very firm (.) and even analytical which I do not very easily believe that I am, but maybe in certain things, like in supervising and monitoring that require [such characteristics]" (Leena)

With reference to qualities traditionally linked with motherliness in the public sphere of work, such as empathizing, caring, cooperative, supportive, encouraging and open, both Tiina and Leena participate in (re)producing a gender relationship in the workplace that was previously confined to the private sphere of life. In such discourses women are ideologically addressed as possessing the same 'intrinsic' qualities in the workplace that have previously been located in the domestic sphere. One of the best known examples of such a gender relationship in the workplace is the boss-secretary relation. Wendy Hollway (1984 ref. in Pringle 1989, 170–1), for example, identifies three discourses on bosses and secretaries which construct different subject positions. One of these discourses is the 'mother-son' discourse, which places the secretary in the subject position of a mother, dragon or dominating wife, whereas the boss is the object. The other two models for boss-secretary relations that Hollway (ibid.) presents in her study are the 'master-slave' and the 'reciprocity-equality' discourses. In the former, the secretary may take a number of forms including subordinate wife, devoted spinster and attractive mistress. Whereas the master-slave discourse sets up the boss as subject and the secretary as object, the reciprocity-equality discourse is supposedly gender neutral with no fixed subject and object positions. For an example, in the reciprocity-equality discourse, the secretary may work with the boss rather than for him.

According to Mumby and Stohl (1991, 325–9), the workplace discourse about and by women both reflects and structures women's professional identity, placing women in situations that demand both 'professional' and 'feminine' behaviour. It is not enough for women to be highly competent at work. They have to match the norm of femininity as well. In this sense, women often place themselves and they are placed in the contradictory situation of being simultaneously present and absent. The category of 'dual presence' (Balbo 1979 and Zanuso

1987 ref. in Gherardi 1994) describes this situation. It indicates cross-gender experiences and the simultaneous presence of the public and the private, of home and work, of personal and political.

The way in which Tiina and Leena construct themselves as managers illustrates the simultaneous presence of the public and the private, and of home and work. On the other hand, both women represent themselves as possessing the same 'intrinsic' qualities in the workplace that have previously been located in the domestic sphere of life, such as empathy and caring, but in the same breath they bring out the opposite set of qualities – qualities traditionally linked with professionality, such as analytic, firm and selfish. Thus, they simultaneously take both the position of an 'attending mother' who cares for her personnel and customers and a 'tough professional' who fulfils the norm of masculinity by being a "selfish achiever", to quote Leena.

There are at least three possible interpretations to the double self-construction in this connection. Firstly, it can be interpreted as a positioning that matches other's expectations and experiences, that is a positioning governed by a feminized ideal of what being a female professional means. The way in which Tiina describes her strengths as a leader is an example of this. First she says that she regards her ability to handle customers as one of her best characteristics as a leader, but qualifies her expression immediately to avoid any misunderstandings. Thus, in the next minute she replaces the verb 'handle' with the verb 'take care', which better corresponds to the feminized ideal of a female professional. Secondly, Tiina's and Leena's construction of themselves both as gentle caretakers and tough professionals can, however, be interpreted in this connection as a counter-identification to the category 'masculine'. In this cultural-discursive gender categorization the category 'feminine', and all values in a contiguous relationship to the feminine, are perceived as subordinate to the masculine, and all values in contiguous relationship to it (cf. Acker 1994, Braidotti et al. 1994, Evans 1995, Keller 1985, Wodak 1997). And thirdly, Tiina's and Leena's presentation of themselves as managers can be interpreted as an expression of the ambivalence women face while trying to handle the tension between the 'professional' and 'feminine' identities. These identities are at odds with one another, and Leena's and Tiina's talk may just recapitulate these inherent contradictions.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has focused on describing the discursive possibilities that are available for female bank managers while they talk about combining work and a 'career' with family life. I have described how they skilfully draw on different discursive practices and how their accounts are put together to portray their actions and beliefs in contextually appropriate ways. The study suggests that the use of different social discourses depend considerably on the position from

which the female bank managers talk: i.e. whether they talk about themselves as wage earners, parents, mothers or managers. The study further suggests that rather than drawing a strong negative contrast between these different versions of the self, the female bank managers imaginatively integrate identities that seem to be mutually exclusive, and construct a many-sided gender identity.

The study illustrates how the female bank managers in the study strongly identify with equality discourses and specifies how these discourses are drawn on, especially when the female bank managers talk from the position of a wage earner. By highlighting the naturalness of women's full-time employment and a shared breadwinner role with men, the female bank managers (re)produce an image of an independent and equal individual who can fulfil herself in life regardless of sex. In this regard, the career talk of the female bank managers complies with the 'politically correct' gender discourses in Finland that rank equal opportunities high. The equality discourses are, however, not the only discourses that the female bank managers draw on. The difference discourses seem to sneak in, especially when the female bank managers talk about the combination of work, family and childrearing from the position of a parent and/or a manager. As parents, they locate themselves in a fairly traditional gender role by taking the position of an attending parent who takes the main responsibility for child-care arrangements within the family. Yet, the female bank managers do not locate the difference only in the realm of the private, domestic world, but rather incorporate parts of the difference discourses in the realm of the public world of work as well. By representing qualities traditionally linked with femininity such as empathizing, caring, cooperative, supportive, encouraging and open as part of their professional self, the female bank managers participate in (re)producing a gender relationship in the workplace that was previously confined to the private sphere of life.

However, contrary to Silius' (1995) findings according to which her interviewees, the female lawyers, took distance from 'career thinking', for example, by linking motherhood to their career talk, the female bank managers under study constructed themselves first and foremost as professionals and only secondarily as mothers with small children. This becomes evident, for example, in the ways the female bank managers talk about themselves as mothers. Their construction of themselves as 'not a mother type' is a counter representation to the stereotypical cultural representation of 'a one-hundred-per-cent devoted mother type' from which the female bank managers take distance. Rather than perceiving motherhood and full-time employment as a both/and issue, such stereotypical representations of motherhood view these aspects of life as an either/or issue. Consequently, they (re)produce a conception of womanhood according to which you are either a good mother or a good manager, but not both simultaneously. The female bank managers' (counter)representation of motherhood (as 'companionable') can be interpreted as a way of resisting the stereotypical view of motherhood preva-

lent in Finnish society, which leaves no room for a satisfactory combination of a 'career' and family life. It can, however, also be interpreted as a way of reflecting multiple ways of being a good mother and, thus, the possibility of enacting good motherhood while being a career women.

Appendix: transcription notation

The form of notation used throughout this article adapts the one used by Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell in the book "Discourse and Social Psychology – Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour". The initial developer of this form of notation is Gail Jefferson.

Extended square brackets mark overlap between utterances, e.g.:

A: Well, [what about
B: [I don't know if

A full stop in brackets indicates a pause which is noticeable but too short to measure, e.g.:

A: He came home later (.) than I intended

Round brackets indicate that material in the brackets is either inaudible or there is doubt about its accuracy, e.g.:

A: We (told the children) that

Square brackets indicate that some transcript has been deliberately omitted. Material in square brackets is clarificatory information, e.g.:

A: We [Leena and his husband] decided [ ] couldn't tell whether ■

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