

SAIJA KATILA, ANNE KOVALAINEN, SUSAN MERILÄINEN
& JANNE TIENARI

Editorial: Special Issue on Gender, Organization and Society

The reason why

A special issue on Gender, Organization and Society may be surprising for some devoted readers of The Finnish Journal of Business Economics. This surprise is no surprise as it is evident that research on economy, business, management and organization has traditionally paid little or no attention to gender issues. Gender-blind theoretical frameworks and empirical studies have dominated the debates within business studies. At best, gender has been at the margin of the mainstream. However, alongside the general trends that go on in scientific discussions and debates, also organization and management studies are gradually transforming and changing. Ever more often, researchers take gender seriously as a constituent element of social ordering.

This special issue attempts to provide food for thought for two audiences. It aims to provide a versatile introduction for those readers who are not yet familiar with gender-sensitive organizational and management research but who are willing to broaden their horizons. For those acquainted with the variety of ap-

proaches in gendered analysis, this volume attempts to offer new insights.

The conceptual and theoretical basis

It is evident that gender has been and still is the key factor in the development of social division of labour, whether that is in paid work in general, unpaid work at home or hierarchically located work of managers in organizations. Why do these divisions exist and how are they to be explained? Multidisciplinary analyses have shown that gender is not a variable among others, only to be measured or classified into two categories, women and men, with inbuilt assumptions of difference and hierarchy. Such a categorisation and classification perspective has been largely used in management literature in the so-called women-in-management research which has focused more on questions on equality and difference between women and men in managerial settings than on theoretical questions concerning gender as an analytical concept as such.

Within the mainstream managerial litera-

FOREWORD

ture, women-in-management research has succeeded in building a coherent knowledge base on differences between men and women in their hierarchical positioning within organizations (including glass ceilings for women) and on wage gaps at all hierarchical levels. From one perspective, it has succeeded in opening up the question of gender even to mainstream managerial textbooks. However, this direction in research has typically not been able to provide coherent theoretical answers to the core questions on how are men and women 'constructed' in organizations; why there are gendered divisions, how are those divisions created and reproduced, and in what ways are they to be explained.

Gender is also needed as an explanatory concept in the analysis of societal, cultural and organizational varieties where not only women and men are positioned differently, but where also cultural meanings of gender are attached in each and every detail of our ways of defining society, culture, work and organizations. Over the years, research has shown the fundamental part gender plays in *organizing*, not just allocating, work in our society.

It is first and foremost for these reasons gender is among the crucial elements in the analysis of management and organization theories, methodologies and organizational life. Thus, gender cannot be equated with biological and physiological differences between males and females. The building blocks of gender are socially and culturally constructed statuses, hierarchies, similarities and differences – and the ordering of individuals and institutions according to these constructions. Once gender is attributed, the social order constructs and holds individuals to strongly gendered norms and expectations.

In understanding gender as an analytical concept, one direction that has gained more interest within managerial and organizational analyses than perhaps otherwise in gender analysis in social sciences is a focus on *masculinities* and *femininities*. Differentiated work experience is linked to power relations that differentiate society at large (Wilson 1996). Through examining the production and reproduction of barriers faced by women – and linking these barriers to notions on how gender differences are intentionally and unintentionally produced and constructed, reproduced and reconstructed in the organizations – the focus of research has thus shifted from men and women to masculine and feminine and even further, to *gendered notions of power*. These uneven gender categories in organizational practice and theory are well documented and contested in feminist literature.

On the one hand, gender analyses on managerial and organizational theories have shown that *masculinities* are valued over *femininities*. This "naturally" reflects the general gender ranking in society; gender means difference and hierarchy. In a gender-stratified society, what men do is usually valued more highly than what women do, even if the activities would be very similar (Lorber 1994). This explains to a large extent why a paradox, pointed out by Collinson and Hearn (1994), exists: the category of man and masculinity is central to management analysis yet remains hidden, taken for granted and unexamined (see also e.g. Mills and Tancred 1992).

On the other hand, *femininities* are portrayed silently. The idealized image is passive (Kerfoot and Knights, 1998). Fondas (1997) examines texts representing three recent management fads: reengineering, managing for excel-

FOREWORD

lence and team work. "A common underlying thread in these writings is their representation of managerial work in terms of qualities traditionally defined as feminine", such as surrendering control and sharing responsibility, helping and developing others, and building a connected network of relationships (ibid, 257). Fondas' (1997) analysis demonstrates how the feminine within the fads typically remains unarticulated – even downplayed – when they are packaged and sold to business managers as texts. To recognize and name traits/qualities that are traditionally associated with females "would call into question the entire system of gender relations that underpins most organization and management theory" (ibid, 273).

Focus on masculinities and femininities has often led the analysis to the level of individuals. It has been argued that theorizing gender only at the level of individual allows us to see and analyze gender as primarily located in individuals. Gender is, however, not only a concept that can be related to individuals. It also relates to social ordering. It is, thereby, a relational concept. According to Seyla Benhabib (1987, 80), it is "the grid through which the self develops an embodied identity, a certain mode of being in one's body and of living the body; it is the grid through which societies and cultures reproduce embodied individuals". Gender never exhibits itself in pure form but always in the context of lives that are shaped by a variety of influences which cannot be separated from each other.

However, this does not mean that generalizations about gender would be methodologically illicit or harmfully homogenizing of difference (Grimshaw 1986). Thus, to give just one example, the analysis of trends, structural changes or historical constructions of manage-

rial work in organizations would require a different methodology and methods than the analysis of gendered identity formation in managerial work.

The development of gender research in organizational and management studies has to a large extent followed the general development in management theorising. However, it might be an adequate conclusion to say that, being at the margins, it has been more open and ready to adopt new discussions into its theoretical frameworks. The influence of postmodern/post-structuralist analysis to gender theorising is one example of this. This influence has brought up – again, just giving one example – deconstructions of those fixed meanings we attach so easily to management, business, economy and organizations. Generalizations about gender can obscure and exclude. This is undoubtedly true, but as Susan Bordo (1990) has commented, such determinations cannot be made by methodological fiat but must be decided context by context.

The articles

This special issue on Gender, Organizations and Society does not cover the whole field of gender analyses in organizational and/or managerial settings. Instead, the articles cut across the present research within management and business studies, and are thus able to give an overview of the existing variety of gender/feminist approaches and debates. Thus we are not 'closing the books' nor 'ending the story' with this special issue, but welcome further work on gender issues to be published in LTA / The Finnish Journal of Business Economics in the future.

The following articles that have passed an anonymous referee review procedure present

FOREWORD

both theoretical reviews and empirical analyses of gender in organizational settings. They do so, however, with somewhat differing emphasis. Each article provides a specific analysis to look at men and women, masculinities and femininities, and gender in organizations and in organizing.

The first three articles provide more theoretically oriented reviews on gendered analysis in organization and management theories. The articles by David Wicks and Albert J. Mills, Jeff Hearn, and Regine Bendl demonstrate the richness in the theoretical underpinnings of gender-sensitive/feminist organization and management research.

David Wicks and Albert J. Mills are concerned by the growth of conflicting ideas and unresolved contradictions within feminist organizational analysis. In their article *"Deconstructing Harry: A Critical Review of Men, Masculinity and Organization"*, Wicks and Mills present a comprehensive review of what they term the Nature/Nurture Debate¹. They argue that research on the roots of discriminatory practices at work are hindered by the need to confront and debate these conflicts and contradictions.

Jeff Hearn takes a somewhat different perspective to discussion concerning gender and organizational analysis, and focuses on men's relations to feminism(s). In *"Men, (Pro-)Feminism, Organizing and Organizations"*, Hearn introduces different kinds of political and practical arenas in which men may act in relation

to feminism(s): 1. men's mainstream organizing in mainstream, especially business, organizations, 2. men's explicit responses to feminism, often outside of business, and 3. men's responses to feminism in mainstream, especially business, organizations.

"Gendering Organization Studies: A Guide for Reading Gender Subtexts in Organizational Theories", by Regine Bendl, provides an analytical framework for revealing the gender subtext of organizational theories. As a basis, Bendl outlines various feminist epistemologies, and goes on to discuss discourses that these epistemologies have produced within organizational theorizing. The analytical framework suggested is based on the postmodernist/poststructuralist notion of 'deconstruction'.

The three following articles in this special issue are more empirically oriented. They reflect the aforementioned theoretical richness in gender-sensitive / feminist research. Each article adopts gender in a specific way, but all focus on organization and the experience of managers.

Elisabeth Sundin presents a Swedish organization where women have for a long time made up a clear majority in first-line managerial positions. In *"Women and Men as Managers in a Female Dominated Sector and Company"*, Sundin demonstrates the persistence of the male label of management through survey and interview data. Organizational practice and numerical female majority, she claims, has not changed this label.

In *"Discourses of Equality and Difference in Bank Managers' Talk"*, Susan Meriläinen focuses on a recently feminized managerial position. Drawing on secondary interview data, she carries out a discourse analysis of Finnish female bank managers' talk. She addresses the

¹ Wicks and Mills assert that "the most fundamental debate within gender studies and social science remains the issue of whether a gendered sense of self is ascribed by essential, in-born characteristics (nature) or is achieved through processes of social construction and socialization (nurture)".

FOREWORD

discursive possibilities available for female 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 contextually appropriate ways. Meriläinen concentrates especially on analyzing the way in which discourses of equality and difference shape, and are shaped by, the female managers' self-presentations.

Finally, Hugo Letiche asks "Where Have All the Bodies Gone?". His point of departure is that organizational research has largely ignored physical existence. Letiche studies the "managing" of prostitution in the Netherlands to examine, first, what such work means for the managerial practitioner and, second, what such studies reveal about management thought. Letiche focuses more on commenting the debate on 'New Managerialism' versus 'Anti-New Managerialism' rather than the discussion on the gendered body – even though his interest is in embodiment, one key issue in feminist philosophy. Letiche's article exemplifies research that combines discussions within management discourse, and attempts to bring in new themes in management literature.

About the editorial team: SAIJA KATILA (saija.katila@hkkk.fi) is currently working as researcher in the Academy of Finland, ANNE KOVALAINEN (anne.kovalainen@shh.fi) is professor at the Swedish School of Economics and Business Administration in Helsinki, SUSAN MERILÄINEN (merilain@hkkk.fi) is researcher at the Helsinki School of Economics and Business Administration, and JANNE TIENARI (janne.tienari@lut.fi) is acting professor of management and organizations at Lappeenranta University of Technology in Finland. ■

References

- BENHABIB, S. (1990) Epistemologies of Postmodernism: A Rejoinder to Jean-Francois Lyotard. In *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. L. Nicholson. London: Routledge.
- BORDO, S. (1990) Feminism, Postmodernism and Gender-Scepticism. In *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. L. Nicholson. London: Routledge.
- CALAS, M.B. and SMIRCICH, L. (1996) From 'The Woman's' Point of View: Feminist Approaches to Organization Studies. In *Handbook of Organization Studies*, eds. S. Clegg, C. Hardy and W. Nord. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- COLLINSON, D. and HEARN, J. (1994) Naming Men as Men: Implications for Work, Organization and Management. *Gender, Work and Organization* 1, 2–22.
- FONDAS, N. (1997) Feminization Unveiled: Management Qualities in Contemporary Writings. *Academy of Management Review* 22, 257–282.
- GRIMSHAW, J. (1986) *Philosophy and Feminist Thinking*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press.
- KERFOOT, D. and KNIGHTS, D. (1993) Management, Masculinity and Manipulation: From Paternalism to Corporate Strategy in Financial Services in Britain. *Journal of Management Studies* 30, 659–677.
- LORBER, J. (1994) *Paradoxes of Gender*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- MARSHALL, B. L. (1994) *Engendering Modernity*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- MILLS, A.J. and TANCRED, P. (eds) (1992) *Gendering Organizational Analysis*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- WILLIAMS, R. (1981) *Culture*. Glasgow: Fontana.
- WILSON, F. (1996): Research Note: Organizational Theory: Blind and Deaf to Gender? *Organization Studies* 17, 825–842.

We gratefully acknowledge the referee work of the following persons:

- IIRIS AALTIO-MARJOSOLA, Professor of Management and Organizations, Lappeenranta University of Technology, Finland.
- ROSEMARY CROMPTON, Professor of Sociology, City University, Department of Sociology, United Kingdom.
- PÄIVI ERIKSSON, Ph.D., Research Chief, National Consumer Research Center (Docent at the Helsinki School of Economics and Business Administration, Department of Management, Finland).
- VALERIE FOURNIER, Ph.D., Senior Lecturer in Organization Studies, Keele University, Department of Management, United Kingdom.

FOREWORD

SIRPA KOLEHMAINEN, Ph.D., Researcher, Work Research Centre, University of Tampere, Finland.

PÄIVI KORVAJÄRVI, Ph.D., Docent, Researcher, Work Research Centre, University of Tampere, Finland.

RIITTA LAVIKKA, Ph.D., Researcher, Work Research Centre, University of Tampere, Finland.

JEAN H. MILLS, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, Mount Allison University, Canada.

PIRJO NIKANDER, Ph.D., Researcher, Department of Sociology and Social Psychology, University of Tampere, Finland.

ELINA OINAS, Lic.Sc. (Pol.), Researcher, Assistant, Department of Sociology and Women's Studies Institute, Åbo Akademi University, Finland.

TUOMO PELTONEN, Ph.D., Acting Professor, Department of Management, Turku School of Economics and Business Administration, Finland.

DIANE PERRONS, Professor, Department of Geography, London School of Economics and Political Science, United Kingdom.

HARRIET SILIUS, Professor, Åbo Akademi University, Women's Studies Institute, Finland.

SINIKA VANHALA, Ph.D., Senior Lecturer, Department of Organization and Management, Helsinki School of Economics and Business Administration, Finland.

ELISABETH WILSON, Professor, Manchester Metropolitan University, Department of Management, United Kingdom.