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GENDER AND POWER IN THE RESEARCH PROCESS

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Synopsis — This article explores the gender dynamics in a multidisciplinary research team, focussing particularly on the way gendered power struggles affect the production of knowledge. Gender-based conflicts over the relevance of gender to the research process threatened to silence all the women involved in the research: the researchers, the participants and the woman on the management team. As the research was exploring the under-representation of women in senior positions in organisations and their experiences of gendered processes at work, this silencing would have had particularly serious implications for the outcome of the project. During this conflict, power resources were mobilised by both women and men. The eventual resolution of the conflict ensured that women's voices were heard and their experiences made visible. This had a crucial effect on both the research process and the outcome of the research project and demonstrates the critical effect of gender on the knowledge that can be produced by research. © 2002 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

It has been claimed that feminist sociology has "come of age" and that the "demonisation" of political correctness is indicative of a "power struggle over the production of knowledge" and a measure of the "success of feminism within the academy" (Roseneil, 1995, pp. 197–198). During this maturation process, there has been considerable debate about what constitutes feminist research, whether distinctively feminist research methods exist, the relation of feminist ethics to feminist politics and how gender shapes the research process. Underpinning all this is a profound awareness of the impact gender relations and gender identities have on our daily lives and the way social processes are coloured by gender. Apart from coming up against deeply gendered processes within the "liberal" environment of universities (see, e.g., Morissey, 1999; The Guardian Newspaper, 1999), it is easy for feminist academics to forget how much of their taken-for-granted knowledge and experience of the working of gender is seen as part of an alien subculture, even within their own institutions, and how little such knowledge impinges on research in disciplines other than their own and other areas within their own disciplines. The well-developed feminist critique of objectivity, feminist ethics and the copious literature on gender and research methods are, apparently, totally new and unfamiliar, even to some who are engaged in research into gender and gender-based inequalities and are entirely well intentioned in undertaking such research. This was brought home to us when we agreed to participate in a study exploring gender relations in the workplace and, in particular, the barriers to women's progress within organisations. The story of how we came to be involved and the way the project developed is an object lesson in the way gendered power relations operate to silence and exclude women, even when that very silencing and exclusion is the object of study, and illustrates the material form taken by power struggles over the production of knowledge.

In what follows we describe the process of setting up the project and the conflicts over gender that emerged. We go on to analyse these conflicts in terms of differential access to power resources before discussing some of our findings; these illuminate the parallels between our own experiences and those of the women who participated in our research. Finally, we draw out the implications of the dynamics of gender and power in the research process for the production of knowledge. For purposes of analysis we use a concept of power which relates it to access to and control over resources. There are various types of resources associ-

ated with power, the most familiar being economic power derived from things such as wealth, ownership of the means of production and income. Particularly relevant to our argument are: positional power which derives from the position occupied in the workplace or household, positions (such as manager, employer or head of household) associated with authority and more usually held by men than women; symbolic power which refers to the power to "impose one's own definitions, meaning, values and rules on a situation" (Bradley, 1999, p. 34); sexual power which may be evident in sexual harassment of women by men in the workplace (Cockburn, 1991); and collective power which "involves the mobilisation of collective resources" and may also include "mobilising smaller groups or networks . . . to promote more specific interests or help individuals to gain access to other power resources" (Bradley, 1999, p. 35). Much research documents the way that collective power in the form of social networks are critical in securing access to jobs and facilitating upward mobility within organisations (Brooks & Singh, 1979; Edwards et al., 1996; Kanter, 1977). Formally constituted male networks—in the form of membership organisations such as the Masons, for instance, or golf clubs—have come under attack for being antithetical to the implementation of equal opportunities policies which rely on an adherence to written rules and procedures. However, informal networks within and between organisations remain an important means of furthering the interests of their members and can result in preferential treatment in recruitment and promotion (Charlesworth, 1997; Parker & Fagenson, 1994). Such networks are usually gendered and, within organisations, act as loci of power (Cockburn, 1991; Wajcman, 1998). Indeed, many feminists have suggested that one of the ways in which women can provide support for each other and counteract the effect of men's networks is to form their own networks. In what follows it becomes clear that power resources such as these and the ability to mobilise them had a significant impact on the research process.

SETTING UP THE RESEARCH PROJECT

It was late in 1997 when a letter arrived calling for tenders to undertake a piece of commissioned research. The call came from a body which is concerned with issues of equality and set out a fairly detailed specification of the research questions and methodologies. The research was to establish the extent of women's under-representation at senior levels of employment and to explore the factors contributing to the existence of a glass ceiling in a range of large organisations. This was to be done by analysing large-scale data sets, reviewing existing research and carrying out new research using in-depth interviews and focus groups with women and men in middle and senior management positions. The focus groups would be women only while the interviews would be with individual women and men in the most senior positions in their organisations.

In our view this project needed to be undertaken by sociologists well-versed in the literature on gender and organisations, experienced in qualitative research and able to handle large-scale data sets. The two of us met the first two criteria but we were less confident about our abilities to meet the third. We were also cautious about being able to complete all the phases of the research given the tightly specified timetable and our teaching commitments. However, we were approached by a market-research organisation with expertise in the analysis of large-scale data sets, so we began to draw up a joint bid. After a considerable expenditure of effort, this foundered because of disagreement about overall control of the project and the conduct of the interviews and focus groups; a disagreement that was to re-emerge later. By this time the deadline for submission of tenders was upon us, and the upshot was that we did not submit a tender. We did, however, forward a copy of our part of the bid to a colleague who was peripherally involved with the commissioning agency and who belonged to the same regional network of feminist researchers as us. We had a suspicion that this would not be the last we heard of it, and it was not totally unexpected when one of us was contacted by a male colleague, an economist, about the possibility of our becoming involved in their tender. It transpired that a group of three male economists, with expertise in the analysis of large-scale data sets but with no experience of qualitative social research and no knowledge of the area of literature that was to be reviewed, had tendered for this project. To compensate for their lack of qualitative skills they had detailed a research organ-

isation to conduct the interviews and focus groups. Subsequently, they had been contacted by the commissioning agency, invited to present their tender orally and advised that our inclusion in the tender would increase their chances of success.

This sequence of events suggests that an informal, gender-based network was of crucial importance to our incorporation into the tendering process and that this involved the mobilisation of collective power. This happened even though the commissioning agency was a staunch advocate of equal opportunities and, by definition, critical of the operation of such informal and unaccountable networks.

Our involvement began with the oral presentation of the tender to the commissioning agency where one of the economists (male), one of the sociologists (female) and a woman from the research organisation set out how the research would be carried out. Our bid, for we were now involved as equal partners, was successful, and there began a process of negotiating the contract and the responsibilities of each of the participants. The research team, as we now styled ourselves, consisted of three sociologists, two women and one man, three economists, all men, and the research organisation whose director was a man but which included women. In the original tender the research organisation was to have been responsible for all the interviewing—this was changed so that the two women sociologists with considerable experience in this area of research undertook to do this. Similarly, the four focus groups were to have been organised and run by the research organisation—this was now changed so that there was input in the form of developing areas of discussion from the two women sociologists who would, in addition, facilitate one of the focus grous and take responsibility for analysing and writing up the interview and focus group data. The male sociologist and two of the economists, none of whom were specialists in the area, were to undertake a review of the literature with the sociologist concentrating on the qualitative, sociological literature (with some input from us), while the third economist was to concentrate on the large-scale data sets. The research was to be done in phases so that the analysis of large-scale data sets and the review of literature would be completed before the interviews, and the interviews would be completed before the focus groups were held. In this way the findings from each stage could feed into the next. This all seemed to make sense on paper, albeit the time scale was rather short. However in practice things were a little more complicated.

The project was to be managed by a *steering group* consisting of representatives of the commissioning agency and the other funding bodies. An *advisory group* was also to be established which would provide useful contacts and assist with the generation of "names" for possible inclusion in the study. Prior to the first meeting of the steering group we held a meeting of our research team, and it was here that the first intimations of difficulties arose. There were seven of us present at the meeting, five men and two women; the two women and one of the men were sociologists, the other men were the economists and the director of the research organisation. We had before us a draft contract laying out our duties and responsibilities together with those of the commissioning agency, the composition of the steering group and frequency of meetings, and we wanted to discuss some issues which we felt were important. In particular, there was the question of copyright and intellectual property rights, which we (the sociologists) felt needed clarification, and the question of who would run the all-women focus groups which proved, much to our consternation, to be highly contentious. The first hint of trouble came when we began to discuss the copyright and intellectual property rights issues. Our wish for clarification was assumed (by the economists) to stem from a lack of experience of this sort of research; an assumption which was wide of the mark and which we experienced as patronising. However that was as nothing compared with what was to come. The main problem arose when we came to discuss the organisation and running of the focus groups. The tender document specified that they would be made up of women, and that their aim was to explore women's experiences of gendered processes at work and how these processes operated to impede their progress up the promotion ladder. Given this, we assumed that they would be facilitated by a woman, and in the revised tender document it was specified that we would be involved in developing the agenda of topics for the focus groups and would facilitate one of them. The research organisation was to facilitate the other

three, and we took it for granted that it would be one of the women in the organisation who would be responsible for this; we were wrong.

The director of the market research organisation presented us with details of how he was going to go about contacting women suitable for inclusion in the focus groups. He argued that the participants in each group should be of similar status, and that the more senior women should have their own focus group so as not to mix with others lower down the hierarchy. During this discussion it gradually dawned on us that our assumption that women-only focus groups would, without question, be facilitated by women was not shared by any of the men in the room with one exception—the youngest of the economists. His voice was not really heard, however, as he was the most junior of all of us and was indebted to the more senior men for his continuing employment. What emerged during our discussion of this issue was that the director of the research organisation had agreed to participate in the project on the understanding that he would carry out the interviews as well as organise the focus groups. His opportunity to interview senior business people in the region had, however, been taken away from him by our incorporation into the research. As a result, he was now very unwilling to relinquish control over the focus groups, even to women who were working within his own organisation. We, on the other hand, had assumed that it would be precisely those women who would conduct the focus groups. However, we were disabused of this view as their director told us that they were lacking in the necessary skills and experience to facilitate focus groups. In addition, he claimed that, because they were of a lower status than the focus group participants, they would find facilitating the groups intimidating. We suggested that if there really *were* no suitable women in his own organisation, and because women-only focus groups ought to be facilitated by women, we might be able to facilitate the focus groups. As well as being women, our status was high enough (in his terms) and we had the necessary experience. We made this suggestion because we felt it was vital that all-women focus groups be facilitated by women, although we were in fact reluctant to take on the extra work. It was interpreted, however, as proof positive that we wanted to take the research over lock, stock and barrel.

What was fascinating and horrifying about this exchange was that, initially, there was no acknowledgment that a group of women of similar status are likely to talk far more freely and in different ways from the way they would if there were a man present. This, despite all the research evidence showing that focus groups work better when they are socially homogeneous (Myers, 1998) and that gender differences affect the nature of group interaction (Butler & Wintram, 1991; Coates, 1993; Fishman, 1978; Krueger, 1994; Spender, 1980); research evidence with which our colleagues were plainly unfamiliar. Moreover, focus groups, as opposed to individual interviews, can reduce the power differential between researcher and researched with beneficial effects on the data gathered (Wilkinson, 1998). These advantages would be reduced if the facilitator of an all-women focus group were to be a man. All but one of the men (again the youngest and most junior) argued that a group of such senior women would not be intimidated by one man who was, in any case, sympathetic to their situation. When eventually it was accepted that a mixed gender group is very different from a single-gender group in what its members will talk about and disclose, a different tack was adopted. The argument was now put that as gender *is* such a vital part of the research process a man should interview all the male respondents as they might divulge more to a man than to a woman. This, however, essentialises gender and ignores the power dynamics of gender relations. In response, we pointed out that the interaction in interviews differs from that in focus groups in important respects, with the relative power of participants being a major concern. All the men who were to be interviewed were very senior in their organisation's hierarchy, which meant that they would be vested with more power than the person interviewing them and this would not be undermined by a gender difference with the interviewer. We suggested that in this case there would be no advantage in having a male interviewer and pointed out that, because of existing gendered power relations and the ways in which women are trained to develop their listening skills, women on the whole make better interviewers than men (Saville-Troike, 1989, p. 126; Spradley, 1979). We were further aware of examples of research in which women successfully interviewed men on gender-sensitive topics (e.g.,

Laws, 1990). We were then accused of shifting our argument to suit our case and of attempting to stage a take-over bid. There was clearly going to be no agreement on these issues. The lack of importance attached to the gender of the facilitator of the focus groups, especially when so much play had been made of status, and the lack of understanding of how gendered power differences can influence the dynamics of social situations (such as interviews and focus groups and, of course, meetings) left us almost speechless—especially when our male sociological colleague seemed to side with the other men in the meeting and argued for a compromise. We felt that a compromise would jeopardise the validity and outcome of the research but saw no alternative, if the research team was not to fall apart there and then, to accepting the suggestion that we would facilitate two of the four focus groups and maybe a third if the need arose. We left the meeting feeling extremely unhappy but resolved that, if the issue came up at the meeting of the steering group, we would make our position clear, even though we had been constrained to silence in the interests of maintaining a "united front" to the commissioning agency.

The meeting of the steering group took place the following week and was even more bizarrely constituted, given the topic of the research, than our research team meeting. The most senior representative of the commissioning agency present was the woman director of the regional office; with her were two officials from the national office and a representative from one of the organisations sponsoring the research all of whom were men. All seven members of the research team were at the meeting, which meant that of the 11 people present, just three were women. The meeting had been arranged at a time when it was impossible for several of us to attend for the whole meeting; this applied to two of the sociologists (one a woman), the director of the regional office of the commissioning agency (a woman), the director of the research organisation and one of the economists (both men). Various uncontentious issues were discussed before we reached the question of the focus groups and the gender of their facilitators. The director of the commissioning agency made the point that she had assumed that the all-women focus groups would be facilitated by women. Having been given this opening we felt able to argue strongly for the need for women facilitators of women-only focus groups (a stance for which we were later upbraided). One of the men from the national office reminded us that the research organisation was responsible for the focus groups but that we (women sociologists) could be involved in one or more of them as facilitators. At this point in the meeting the director of the research organisation had to leave; he told us that he understood our concerns but that his organisation would have problems in delivering what was being asked for, i.e., women facilitators for women-only focus groups. He also suggested that if interviews were being conducted with men then perhaps he could carry out some of those; with that he left.

This issue split the steering group largely though not exclusively along lines of gender. The director of the commissioning agency and the man from one of the sponsoring organisations argued strongly that all the focus groups should be facilitated by women (this was the position we supported). The male officials from the national office—while conceding the principle—argued on pragmatic grounds that the director of the research organisation, because his organisation had been brought in specifically to run the focus groups, could not at this stage be excluded from them (this view was taken by our male colleagues on the research team irrespective of discipline). A compromise was suggested whereby we would facilitate two of the focus groups in exchange for which the director of the research organisation would do some of the interviews: it was left to us—the research team—to work out an acceptable *modus operandi*. This solution was pushed for by the two male officials from the commissioning agency in opposition to the woman director, who was in a senior position to them and reiterated her conviction that the focus groups should be facilitated by women, and in opposition to us, who were the acknowledged experts on research into gender. The theoretical strength of our argument was accepted, but in practice what we were advocating was defined as impossible to achieve, which meant that a compromise was the best possible solution. In retrospect we wonder about the scheduling of this meeting, which had been arranged by one of the senior economists and the two officials of the commissioning agency at a time which made it difficult if not impossible for two of the three women, in-

cluding the most senior person on the commissioning side, to attend for the whole meeting.

During this meeting the setting up of an advisory group was discussed. Its first meeting was to be convened as soon as possible by the director of the commissioning agency so that it could advise on methods of selection of interviewees and focus group participants and on dissemination of the findings. The men from the national office would not be involved in this group. It was also during this meeting that the director of the agency invited one of us to come to a meeting she was organising for women who were aspiring to become members of boards of directors. This we duly did, and it enabled us to make contact with some of the women who were to participate in our research, and to get an idea of the sorts of issues that they saw as important. This was later interpreted by the director of the research organisation as an opportunity for networking, which gave us an unfair advantage over the men in the research team.

This was not the end of the matter. Subsequent to the steering group's meeting one of us received a letter from the director of the research organisation in which he stated categorically that his preferred way forward was to revert to the division of labour which had initially been suggested, which was that his organisation would facilitate three of the focus groups and we (the two women sociologists) would facilitate one; thus going back on the compromise position that had been reached by the steering group. The issue of the focus groups was therefore inevitably raised at the first meeting of the advisory group. As we have already noted, the men from the national office were not at this meeting, and its gender composition differed from that of the steering group and the research team. There were five members of the research team present (two women sociologists and three men—one sociologist, one economist and the director of the research organisation), the woman director of the commissioning agency and representatives from various organisations, two of whom were women and two men. This meant that there was an even balance of women and men (5:5). At this meeting there was overwhelming support for the view (ours and that of the director of the commissioning agency) that women-only focus groups should be facilitated by women. In fact, the only dissenting voices came from two of the men on our research team, neither of whom were sociologists. Never mind that this group was not the steering group and was only advisory, its overwhelming support of women facilitators for the focus groups carried the moral weight and thereby carried the day. This effectively meant that, given its director's views of the status and skills of the women he worked with, the research organisation could not facilitate the focus groups; as a result, it was decided that we would have to take this on as well as doing all the interviewing. This led to a crisis, and it became apparent that the director of the research agency would withdraw from the whole project if his role was reduced simply to organising the focus groups. This would render the project undoable because, given the time constraints, we did not have the resources to organise the focus groups ourselves.

During a break in this lengthy meeting we found ourselves in the women's lavatory at the same time as the director of the commissioning agency. We exchanged some words about the problematic situation and the gendered divisions there seemed to be within the research team, divisions which were threatening the integrity of the research. On our return to the meeting we (the research team) were left alone in order to hammer out our differences, and eventually we agreed that the director of the research organisation should undertake a proportion of the interviews that were to be held with men, that his organisation should set up the focus groups, and that we should carry out the bulk of the interviews and facilitate all the focus groups. In our view this was not ideal but it was better than having some of the women-only focus groups being facilitated by a man. We resisted the temptation, which was placed before us by the director of the research agency, of being able to compare focus groups facilitated by men with those facilitated by women if he were to facilitate half of them! We were still astonished at the lack of understanding shown by our male colleagues of the significance of gendered power relations to the outcome of the research process, although it became clear that one of them at least had a shrewd understanding of the way they could work to his advantage in the practical politics of a research project; this emerged later on.

When we returned to the university we were accused, by the male director of the re-

search organisation, of hatching deals in the women's lavatories and behaving in exactly the way that feminists criticised men for behaving. He accused us of contacting the director of the commissioning agency behind the men's backs and persuading her that he was unsuited to carrying out the focus groups. In other words, he thought that he was the victim of a feminist conspiracy, and threatened to withdraw completely from the project. Eventually, after many phone calls and endless meetings, agreement was reached and tempers cooled: whilst at one stage it had seemed that the whole project was in jeopardy it was now clear that it would go ahead, but at a price—both literally and in terms of the research methodology.

GENDERED PROCESSES AT WORK

This whole experience was educational. It showed that to have researchers with no understanding of the impact of gender on social processes investigating the ways in which gendered processes at work hinder women's progress up the managerial hierarchy could have serious implications for the conduct of the research and its outcomes. However well-intentioned and in favour of gender equality they were, most of the men on our research team did not seem to understand the gendered processes with which we were all too familiar; processes whereby women's views are silenced because of expediency (never mind that expediency has gendered implications), and gender is defined as something that has no bearing for women who are successful in their jobs. This lack of understanding may have arisen from disciplinary differences between economics and sociology rather than, or as well as, gender differences. It may also be linked to the absence of a feminist analysis of gender and power, thereby indicating a significant epistemological gulf between us and our colleagues. This lack of understanding was shared by many of the high-ranking men we interviewed. Thus, we were told many times during the course of our interviews that gender was irrelevant in deciding between job applicants and that candidates were judged on the basis of merit. We have no reason to doubt that this is what the men thought, but the things they said to illustrate their points belied them. Thus one chief executive told us that women often let themselves down at interview by not appearing confident; this was not a problem for men. Perhaps what is read (negatively) as lack of confidence is (positively) a willingness to admit that you do not have all the answers, a readiness to learn; perhaps confidence (like merit) is gendered (Wajcman, 1998). And perhaps this reveals not that gender is not important, but that the qualities deemed essential for senior jobs are stereotypically masculine and more likely to be displayed by men than by women (notwithstanding the fact that women who succeed have learned to behave like men) (Wajcman, 1998, p. 56).

In contrast all the women felt that gender was important, and that gendered assumptions and processes affected their chances of "success." They spoke of how they felt excluded from the masculine culture at work and how they were invisible when it came to promotion. They said they would not put themselves forward for promotion or apply for a job unless they were confident that they could do that job 100%; they felt that this was in marked contrast to men, who are much more ready to bluff their way into senior positions (there is a parallel here with our own assessment of our ability to carry out the research when considering whether or not to tender for it). Women told us how their views at meetings were not heard until they were put forward by a man, that they were silenced and that men failed (or refused) to recognise women's authority. This was our experience of the steering group meetings. The most senior person at these meetings was a woman. Her authority was not recognised by our male colleagues, who insisted on regarding the men from the national office as in charge. And her relaxed style of running meetings was interpreted as lacking in authority and decisiveness. This is a common problem faced by women in senior positions, and underlines the incompatibility of power and authority with cultural stereotypes of femininity (Cockburn, 1991; Savage, 1992). It also betrays a serious misjudgment of her power which became apparent in the way the decision of the male-dominated steering group was overturned by the more evenly balanced (in terms of gender) and politically sensitive advisory group that she was responsible for convening. Quite clearly gender does matter, however much well-intentioned men would like it not to.

Gender also mattered for us, and the gendered lines of power governing us as a research team demonstrate that men are not always the victors and that gendered power relations can be contested (Bradley, 1999). Such contestation, we suggest, depends on the ability of women to mobilise power resources. The research was controlled by the commissioning agency, and it was a woman and a feminist who was in overall charge of running the project and who occupied the most senior position in the agency; she thereby held what Bradley calls positional power (Bradley, 1999). The project was managed by a steering group on which men predominated. There was also an advisory group on which women and men were equally represented, as were men who had a feminist understanding of the way gendered social processes worked. All the members of this group knew each other and had worked together, and at least one of them was a feminist who had been active in feminist and more mainstream politics for many years. On the governing body of the commissioning agency there was another woman who was a feminist and strongly supported this research and our involvement in it. And in the research team there were two feminist sociologists, part of the same loose feminist network as the women in the agency. These people—women and men who were part of a particular social and political network—shared the view that gender mattered in the focus groups. In these two fora, and within the research team, there were struggles involving symbolic power and collective power. In the meetings of the research team and the steering group these forms of power worked to men's advantage. However, the collective power of the women's network was mobilised in the meeting of the advisory group and affected the outcome of these gendered power struggles.

Taking the other view were the two male officials from the agency's national office, the economists and the director of the research organisation—all men. One of the economists was the contact person for our research team, and he dealt exclusively with the two men from the national office; they were the ones who liaised about meetings, who would attend them, when they would be and so on. We, in contrast, spoke to the director of the commissioning agency. It appeared that there was some conflict within the commissioning agency which blurred the lines of authority and considerable disagreement about the running of the project between regional and national offices. This was also a difference between a senior woman and two less senior men. It seemed to us that her authority was recognised neither by her two colleagues nor by the men in our research team. This conflict over the focus groups could therefore be interpreted as gender based, but it could also be a conflict over national control of a regional office which was trying to assert its autonomy. And this could explain why the advisory group, which was entirely regionally based, adopted a feminist position in opposition to what might have been interpreted as illegitimate national control. The gender dynamic was, however, very strong within the research team. In this way two opposed and at the same time cooperating gendered networks were in evidence and, as one of our (male) colleagues pointed out, the women (eventually) were the ones who held the power. This had been achieved through the women drawing on their power resources (positional, symbolic and collective) to ensure that women's experiences of gender relations at work would be articulated within the focus groups and that the findings of the research—and the knowledge it produced—would take as its starting point the different standpoints of the women in the focus groups (Smith, 1988). The struggle over the focus groups was, therefore, a real struggle which reflected the gendered dynamics of the project and which (in our view) threatened its integrity. Importantly, the men on the advisory group supported the women over the issue of the facilitation of women-only focus groups, and this was decisive in shifting the balance in our favour. Also, the advisory group had been mobilised by the senior woman in the commissioning agency. The cost of insisting on women facilitators for the focus groups, however, was that we relinquished some of the interviews to an interviewer who was less than satisfactory and that the number of participants in focus groups was only half what it should have been. This latter might, of course, have been coincidental, but it appeared to us that even though the director of the research organisation was carrying out some of the interviewing, his exclusion from facilitating the focus groups had the effect of reducing his commitment to their organisation for which he continued to be responsible.

The research suffered from these lines of demarcation and the unwillingness of our male academic colleagues to recognise the significance of gender to processes of social interaction. It also suffered from a gendered and disciplinary split between sociology and economics which left our male sociological colleague in a rather uncomfortable position. Qualitative research is something that most economists are not familiar with, especially if they are engaged in labour market analysis. Neither were they familiar with the research into gender and organisations carried out by feminist sociologists in recent years. In order to try and get over this, the research and writing of the report had been divided so that the economists and the male sociologist would between them write the literature review while we (the two women sociologists) wrote up the findings from the interviews and focus groups. There were problems with this: the first draft of the literature review paid only scant attention to qualitative, feminist research and focussed mainly on economic theories and questions of supply and demand. Our findings, however, were qualitative, and assumed a familiarity with the issues raised in the feminist literature. There was therefore a disjunction between the two parts of the report. This led the commissioning agency to ask us to have an input into the literature review, an input which led to disagreement between us and the economists and to two versions of the literature review being presented to the commissioning agency. By this time the nominal research team leader was resigned to losing the gender battle, and put this down to the fact that we were in close contact with the director of the commissioning agency. He, on the other hand, liaised with one of the men in the national office who had at last realised that he had to communicate directly with us as well as with our economist colleague. This change was a result of the last meeting of the steering group which had been organised at a time when neither of the women on the research team was able to be present. We spoke to the director of the commissioning agency about this, who was insistent that one of us be linked up to the meeting by telephone. It was this meeting that decided on the structure of the final report and that we should have an input into the literature review as well as the findings. The men from the national office consistently thought that the presence of one representative of the research team, a senior economist, was sufficient at meetings; the director appreciated that this would guarantee neither that our views nor the views of other feminist researchers and the women who were the subjects of our research were heard.

The story of this research project illustrates, in microcosm, the processes which were the subject of our investigations, processes which lead to women's being disadvantaged in the world of paid employment and experiencing a glass ceiling which blocks their progress. We provide here a cameo of our findings, illustrating how our respondents talked about power being vested in gendered networks, how gender and sexuality matter in social interaction, how women's different ways of doing things are seen as signs of weakness and how women's authority is not recognised.[2] We draw on women's and men's experiences of gendered social processes to demonstrate the way in which gender and power in our experience of the research process is mirrored in the world of the women and men who participated in our research, and the ways in which men mobilise power resources to silence and exclude women.

COLLECTIVE POWER

Many of our respondents felt that men create workplaces in their own image.

> Men create a workplace . . . in which they feel comfortable. And, you know, surprise, surprise, it isn't necessarily one in which a woman feels comfortable.

One of the ways this is achieved is through topics of conversation that exclude women. One of the men put it as follows:

> I think . . . we have a code, if you like, about the things you immediately start talking about. It's a fact, if I go into a meeting outside the company with some people I don't know, it's surprising how many male-dominated conversations there are before you get down to the business. Male-orientated rather than male-dominated, like sport.

Such practices create a masculinist and heterosexist culture within organisations which

women experience as excluding. This "clubbiness" takes the form of conversations, male-only social outings, going to the pub or playing golf, and being invited to go to "girlie bars" on foreign trips and has been conceptualised as the mobilisation of collective power (Bradley, 1999). It is not necessarily that men are consciously excluding women (although they might be) but that the forms of sociality adopted by men are different from those adopted by women; this of itself makes women feel excluded from the group. Indeed, women may not want to be included in men's conversations—or, as one woman put it, "the corporate club"—and, by virtue of their gender, are excluded from forms of sociality and a corporate identity which are masculine. The unfortunate thing is that exclusion from this "corporate club" renders women invisible when it comes to being considered for promotion (Wajcman, 1998) and denies them access to the resources which are essential for organisational "success."

Sexuality was also an issue. Several women told us that they were reluctant to participate in informal activities which might facilitate their career progression because of how this could be misinterpreted.

> You know, if a guy goes to lunch with his boss, he's networking, he's trying to make career progression, if a woman goes to lunch with the boss he's trying to get his leg over.

One woman explained the difficulties in the following way.

> People say, "the problem with you is you are just doing your job really well, but you don't publicise it. You get on with it and you don't play these games, you don't position yourself against others." And that's partly because, as a female, you can't position yourself the same way as men do. Because, someone spoke to me about hanging on coat tails, and getting closer to a man. Now if a man goes up to another man, that works OK. But as a woman, you can't get close to a man . . . we can't play a lot of the games that the men play.

This severely disadvantages women who recognise that working through informal organisational networks is important for career advancement; it gets you known and makes those in positions of power and authority notice you. It can also provide the support and encouragement that is often needed and, as we have seen, it is a power resource. Indeed, our ability to mobilise the collective power vested in networks was crucial in ensuring both our inclusion in the research project and the outcome of the conflict over the research methodology.

SYMBOLIC POWER

Women often experience themselves as invisible in meetings and as being silenced by men's ways of working. This has been conceptualised as men mobilising symbolic power to marginalise women and invalidate their experiences (Bradley, 1999). Thus one woman who worked entirely with men told us that:

> They act differently, they . . . use different language, they are not, they don't even deal with agendas in the same way, and it's very subtle, but there's something very oppressive about it. And where normally I would talk a lot in groups anyway, I just find myself in silence, strange, you know, quite oppressive.

At meetings women also found that they became invisible.

> We'd have discussions on policy or whatever and you'd say something and there was no response . . . And an hour later one of the men will ramble on for four to five minutes and I'll think, hang on a minute, that's what I said half an hour ago . . . So that's more subtle, but that erodes your confidence and the next time you think, well shall I speak because they obviously don't think I'm worth listening to.

This type of behaviour can clearly have the effect of silencing women as can the ability to define a situation or a problem in terms which result in women's views being diregarded. This happened to us in the initial meetings of the research team and the steering group; the outcome of the research team meeting was that we were enjoined to silence in the interest of presenting a united front to the commissioning agency and, in the steering group meeting, while the theoretical validity of our position was accepted, it was ignored in practice on pragmatic grounds. Our definitions were

thereby contested and silenced. However, although our male colleagues were initially successful in exercising symbolic power and defining the situation as one requiring compromise and "reason" rather than the implementation of a theoretically coherent and gender-sensitive research methodology, in the advisory group meeting our voices were heard and, through the mobilisation of collective and positional power, our definition of the importance of gender to the research process was accepted and acted upon.

POSITIONAL POWER

Women are damned if they do and damned if they don't. If they behave according to dominant cultural expectations of appropriate female behaviour they remain invisible and their authority is not recognised. However, if they behave like men they are accused of being "shrews" and unfeminine. One senior woman, for instance, said that:

> People think I'm a bit of a dragon. I'm not really but it's just they don't like people going to a meeting and telling them like it is really, if a bloke did it no one would think twice about it . . . but a woman . . . [it's seen] as aggressive.

Men's views of women in powerful positions are often that they try too hard to behave like men—this attracts criticism—but, on the other hand, if their difference from men becomes too obvious, if they become pregnant for instance or wear clothes which emphasise their sexual attractiveness, they also come under attack and their suitability for the job is questioned (Cockburn, 1991; Halford, Savage, & Witz, 1997; Wajcman, 1998). Thus one of the men we spoke to was hostile to women who were in his eyes "too assertive."

> Often I've wondered whether they have gone too much the other way, and that is because they feel they are in a man's world and that they've got to act like a man, and I don't think that that is necessary. I have come across it . . . they've gone too far. I don't work with them . . . There is nothing worse in my view than a female that is just trying to be domineering . . . for the sake of it . . . I think they are trying to prove something but to whom I am not sure.

Women were all too aware of this problem. One, who was in a position of authority in her place of work, said that she thought she had to be "harder, stronger, better than any men were in order to show that I could do things. But that comes over as aggressive and threatening and challenging rather than as confident and capable." On the other hand, women who did not behave in this way were likely to be patronised and told that they had only been appointed because they were attractive. As we have already seen, the positional power of the director of the commissioning agency, although effective in the context of the advisory group, was not enough in the steering group meeting to assert her authority, and her ways of behaving were not those which are normally associated with persons in positions of power who are, more often than not, men.

It is not only men who have difficulty in recognising women's authority or find it problematic. A woman engineer talked to us about her difficulties with secretaries:

> They won't accept me, no, no. I can see through them. And they will do everything they can to cut your feet out from underneath you, because you're a threat to them.

These comments underline Rosemary Pringle's analysis of the boss–secretary relationship and how it is constructed within heterosexual relations with the male being in the powerful position (Pringle, 1988). It is also an example of how heterosexual power can be used by men to their advantage within the workplace. The sexualisation of women within this work relationship (as in many others; see, e.g., Adkins, 1995) suggests that women who are secretaries may find it difficult to relate to women bosses. If their role is a sexualised one and they behave accordingly, then they may have to learn new ways of behaving if their boss is a woman; ways of behaving that possibly threaten their own sexual and gender identity at work (Collinson, Knights, & Collinson, 1990). In this case the secretaries' response seems to have been a refusal to recognise their female boss's authority. This demonstrates how power relations at work are gendered (and sexualised) and highlights the difficulties

women have in assuming positional power and the authority associated with it; interestingly this particular woman had overcome the problem by appointing a young man as her secretary, thus counfounding two gender stereotypes in one fell swoop. It also demonstrates that there are differences between women, and that there is no automatic alliance between them on the basis of gender.

CONCLUSIONS

The experiences of the women we talked to in the course of our research and the views expressed by many of the men reflected our own experiences of working with men and the difficulties we faced in insisting that women's voices had to be heard. It is all too clear that women face gendered processes at work which not only mean that they encounter obstacles in advancing their careers, but that their voices and experiences are often neither recognised nor heard by their male colleagues. This is because women do not always behave in the way that men do (although some do), and women's ways of behaving are interpreted as betraying weakness and therefore unsuitability for appointment or promotion; women do not belong to male groups and networks and therefore do not have access to the resources needed for success at work; and anyway, women do not always want to participate in the games men play. By virtue of their gender their authority is not recognised and their voices are not heard. This means that their experiences and the standpoints from which they speak are not incorporated into knowledge. On the other hand, women's access to the resources of power is increasing. This is reflected in our own experiences and in those of the women and men we talked to. In the research context this enabled us to ensure that our own and other women's voices *were* heard.

Our struggle in the research team and steering group were struggles over the production of knowledge and, in the course of the struggle, power resources were mobilised and gendered power relations challenged. If we had lost, women's voices would have been silenced or, at best, their experiences would have been refracted through the prism of masculine ways of seeing. As it was, we were alert to the silencing and marginalisation experienced by women at work and attempted to ensure that this awareness informed the research process and facilitiated their and our own voices being heard. In the process we were accused of all sorts of things, one of which was political correctness, but we are satisfied that the outcome is one which is a more accurate representation of women's experiences, in what is still a male world, than it would have been had we not taken a stand over the gendering of the research process and challenged what was presented to us as an entirely gender-neutral compromise on grounds of expediency and practicality. This is how power operates at the level of daily interaction—it is normalised—and it is at this level that it has to be named and challenged.

ENDNOTES

1. Pseudonyms are being used by the authors of this paper in order to preserve the anonymity of all those who participated in the research project.
2. We do not present details of our sample in order to preserve the anonymity of the organisations and individuals who were involved in the project.

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