LEADERS FOR EQUALITY

Ambivalent alternatives: Male managers struggling with their support for gender equality

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Research Questions

1. In what ways are men «struggling for position» when getting involved in gender equality?
2. What are the subject positions they are creating for themselves, for women and for gender equality?
3. How invested are they in these subject positions?

Methodology: Social psychological discourse analysis

→Providing insights into the **complex manoeuvring** of men
when struggling with the **competing demands** of hegemonic and alternative masculinities in the context of gender equality
and how they become both **engaged** and **disengaged** with the topic.

- Discourse as performative practice (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell, 2007)
- Subject positioning (Davis & Harré, 1990)
- Investment in subject positions (Hall, 1996; Wetherell, 2007; Scharff, 2011; Chowdhury, 2019)

Sample

Company	Discussions and participants
Transport	2 discussions (8 and 6 men)
Retail	1 discussion (7 men)
Medical engineering	2 discussions (9 and 8 men)
Insurance	2 discussions (6 and 6 men)
Electrical engineering	3 discussions (13, 5 and 4 men)
Total	10 discussions (72 men)

Results: Four Maneuvering Patterns

1. Hegemonic masculinity: Gender equality as an annoyance
   → invested in opposition
2. Benevolent Sexism: Gender Equality as helping women
   → disengaged from gender equality
3. Veiled hegemony: Gender equality as important but nothing one can do something about it
   → invested in meritocracy and disengaged from inequality
4. Challenging hegemony: Men developing a critical position
   → invested in critique

Hegemonic masculinity: Gender equality as an annoyance

M6: (...) You have the young women who come in, work for two years and then they are gone. Then they come in again, (…) and then comes the next child, then comes this child and that again. So even there, as a leader, you are of course ***challenged enormously****. Then you have so many women and then you have to start counting off: "You may now. It's not time for you yet. You have to wait. You may now." [several men laugh] So I am now relatively - Moderator [simultaneously with M6]:* ***You're not allowed to do that explicitly. You're not allowed to do that explicitly, but exactly, yes yes, absolutely!*** *(Electrical Engineering)*

Men are invested in opposition

*So I've also had to deal with recruitment lately. And I just find it **problematic**. It just goes along with the **quota constraint** that you say the position is approved, but it has to be a woman, she can't be older than 31, and otherwise the position is not approved. (unintelligible, mess of different voices talking) (...)." (Electrical Engineering)*

Pattern	Masculine subject position	Relation to women	gender equality as..	Who is responsible ?	Invested in
Hegemonic masculinity	Hegemonic	Hierarchical, subject-object	an annoyance	not discussed	opposition

Benevolent Sexism: Gender Equality as helping women

*M1: It is something a little deeper. (…) And I think we can actually really help, because I mean I have had leaders I've had a lot of women in my groups and I just think about, just before here coming to this meeting, the women in my group always spend a lot more time just coming in my office asking questions, usually they knew the answer. They just need a little more assurance. And a lot of them once they got that self-confidence, they became **fantastic** leaders and a lot of them **really developed** that. (…) I agree I think we can really do something to **help them out** because a lot of people start and then they kind of stay there. (medical engineering)*

Men disengage from gender equality

*(...) and simply **had the best feeling with the lady** I finally hired. That was one and a half years ago. I have had **super good experiences** with her so far. I think she is not only very accepted in my team, but also across departments in that sense. She does a **great job**. (...) So with us, **the topic actually plays (no role).** (Electrical Engineering)*

*We have (flexible work arrangements) at our company. The general conditions are **really good** here. (Electrical Engineering)*

Pattern	Masculine subject position	Relation to women	gender equality as..	Who is responsible ?	Invested in…
Hegemonic masculinity	Hegemonic	Hierarchical, subject-object	an annoyance	not discussed	opposition
Benevolent sexism	Hegemonic	Hierarchical, subject-object	helping or fixing women	supervisors	Disengaged from gender equality

Veiled hegemony: Gender equality as important but nothing one can do something about it

M12: I also think that, I mean it's basically a social issue. (…) And then one might ***have the suspicion*** *that the Swiss world view is still somehow the* ***3K****: children, church and kitchen for women. (…)*

M8: (…) ***Well, I don't agree.*** *The world view of the Swiss has become more* ***open or different****. (…)*

M2: What you are describing is actually the same as what Reiner says, right, KKK [(Children, Church and Kitchen)], right. My wife was also at home. I always gave her the freedom. ***I said: "Look, you can work if you want." But she never had the desire to.***

M8: But today it is more the case that the woman who stays at home ***is looked at strangely*** *because she stays at home. That's a* ***negative thing****. (electrical engineering)*

Veiled hegemony: Gender equality as important but nothing one can do something about it

M6: So I made the experience with myself when I hired the team leader a year and a half ago, that's easy - it wasn't a conscious decision ***"I have to hire a woman now" or anything****. I* ***wished it would be nice*** *to have a woman in this position now instead of a man because a man had done that for a long time.* ***But in the end, the better candidate was a woman than a man, right?*** *And that is why we hired her.* ***And we didn't take any special care of her now, or whatever, she's treated like everyone else in that role, without any extras or whatever.*** *And she's doing her job well and she's being promoted now because she's doing her job well, isn't she? And that had no reason now that we now make a special effort now only so we get her now but she has applied like everyone else and was the better man in good German.* ***That's why the question is always how hard do we have to sell this.*** *(retail)*

Pattern	Masculine subject position	Relation to women	gender equality as..	Who is responsible?	Invested in…
Veiled hegemony	Ambivalent: Hegemonic and “modern and pro-equality”	Hierarchical and equal	already there or coming anyway, unnecessary if meritocracy is taken serious	Women, society	meritocracy, disengaged from inequality

Challenging hegemony: Men developing a critical position

Moderator: What would it take for male leaders to make it less difficult, or what could they do? M2: Well, we have also analysed a bit that the classic manager - or management education, that is the all-rounder, the one who is always available around the clock, um, like the marathon runner, so to speak, and who has no weaknesses and is always top fit and makes no mistakes and so on. ***And that is, we have actually known that for a long time, that is a totally false image, isn't it! So, I can still remember... M [interrupting M2]: Yes, actually we still have a false image. M2: Yes, I remember well*** *when there were the famous, um, fireside chats where the top management, top management member comes and then you can chat a bit and so on. And of course, they boast that 4 hours of sleep is enough, that they work half the day every Saturday, that they work every Sunday and so on. And these are things like that.* ***And what we, what we can do. I mean, we can try to correct this image and say: Hey, this is not up to date****. (transport)*

Challenging hegemony: Men developing a critical position

M4: (…) ***And then I discussed it with HR afterwards, what did we do wrong? Why are there so few applications? (….) ZERO women****. And that is actually the most disillusioning thing. And the chance that would be there at the moment, I think, with the revision, or should we say overhaul, sounds so stupid. But with the necessity to rethink leadership models, leadership guidelines, leadership principles anyway, yes?* ***Because we are moving away from this time of rigid hierarchies into other models of cooperation, into other models of leadership, and we would have a great opportunity to shape them in such a way that they become more attractive for women.*** *(insurance)*

Men are highly invested

In criticising the ideal worker and also

getting their colleagues to take responsibility

M2: When I think about it, of course you can blame society and culture and things like that, **but at the end of the day it's actually those of us sitting around the table and our bosses that are responsible for not having more women in leadership positions**. (…) We can change that tomorrow. We can simply hire more women. And they don't all get pregnant right away tomorrow or want to reduce their working time to 60%. (Biomedical)

Courageous and helpless

*I claim you could as (retail company), if you like, do **pioneering** work in here, but that has to do with **attitude** and **courage**. So you really WANT to take the step ahead and set a signal, even if it may be polarized in one direction or the other. Because otherwise I simply believe nothing will change. And if you stay passive here now and have the feeling that you have to look at everyone else first to see what works, we will probably miss the opportunity (...) (retail)*

*But how - I am otherwise also a bit **helpless** what else one could do. (retail)*

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Challenging hegemony	Fondling with alternative masculinity	Partners	changing norms and workplace practices	Male managers	taking responsibility and feeling helpless

Conclusion

- Men are struggling for position as there is no stable subject position available to male allies in support of gender equality in the company
- Creating subject positions for the speaker, also their relationship with gender equality is defined
- Becoming invested (and also disengaging) in gender equality is a routine practice that is done collectively
- Analysing investment in subject positions puts emphasis on the struggles involved in positioning
- Resistance against gender equality initiatives is subtle and comes with many faces