

GENDER STRUCTURE IN FACTORY SHIP FISHING: Women's Strategies in the Search for Equality.¹

Abstract

This article explores individual and collective strategies unfolded by women to change their subordination on board Norwegian factory vessels. In the 1980's a preference for mixed instead of all-male crews has developed in factory ship fishing. Female labour is admitted for the reason of gender difference, not for the reason of gender equality. The assumed gender dichotomy in work abilities is effectively used in order to secure men's privileges in the distribution of tasks.

By which means and under which circumstances is it possible for women to achieve equality? Both individual opportunities of initiating changes, and the impact of the organizational structure on the stability of the gender structure, are discussed.

Introduction

Norway is a state with a formulated goal of equality between the sexes. A law on this subject was passed in 1979. While the participation of women in politics is high (39,4% in National parliament 1993-97), among the highest in the world, Norway still has a labour market divided according to gender.

Today, male dominance and female subordination is not a legitimate ideology. Few will claim they consider hierarchical gender relations a proper order in organizing life. Women's independence and equal possibilities for women and men have become "drawing room" ideology both in public and private. Nevertheless in practice hierarchical gender relations reproduces in less overt manners in everyday life (Haavind 1985).

Fishing is an important industry both on a national and a global scale, as Norway has a long coast line which gives rise to a large economic zone, according to international sea law.

During the 1970's and 1980's, a fleet of factory ships has been created. This fleet partly consists of ships which process fish fillet at sea, and partly of ships which process scallops. Scallop scraping became a short-lasting adventure because of the depletion of resources, but this innovation also became a breakthrough for women in the fishing fleet (Munk-Madsen 1990).

Gradually, factory ships became the place of work of both men and women. Former all-male vessels were turned into arenas with both sexes. What started as a rarity soon became the general rule: women on factory ships.

ACCINO: 1804

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This breach of the gender barrier in fishing was not a result of any intervention from public authorities which promoted equality politics. Women's recruitment to the fishing fleet was never formulated as a goal in fisheries policy, though anxiety about a sufficient recruitment for the fleet is often on the agenda. Nor had regional development authorities, which are concerned about women's poor possibilities of wage labour in the small fishing communities along the coast, taken any steps to promote openings for women in the gender barrier in the fishing fleet.

This innovation lay with the women and the shipping companies, the fishing industry itself. By the use of close family relations, the first young women obtained admission to ships. The pioneers were daughters of skippers or shipowners, who put pressure on their fathers to get jobs on board. They were slipped on board under doubt, but as they succeeded, the way was prepared for more women, also women with a looser connection to the company or vessel (Munk-Madsen 1990).

Fishing is a strongly male dominated area. As a matter of course, a fisher has been considered a fisherman (Andersen and Wadel 1972). The appearance of women, not as rarities, but as a standard element on board some kinds of fishing vessels, seems to be a breakthrough in the gender divided labour market in fisheries communities.

Nevertheless, the intake of women on board is not the end of the gender division in fishing. Gender barriers are demarcated on board. The struggle around those barriers in relation to the work on board is the subject of this paper.

First, the theoretical background for the study of gender on board factory ships will be outlined. Second, the work organization and the gendered labour division on board will be presented. Next, the ideological background which supports the labour division will be discussed. Women's strategies to promote change are derived from their attitudes and behavior towards the prevailing gender structure on board. These strategies will be systematized. Finally the impact of the organizational structure on the possible success in the creation of sexual equality in the work organization, will be discussed.

The data for this analysis were collected from 1987-1989 by participant observation on a scallop scraper and by in-depth interviews with women from several different vessels. Supplementary talks and interviews were carried out with captains, shipowners and male and female crew members from factory ships. Quantitative data on the subject were collected by a survey among shipping companies and a survey of the 590 Norwegian fisherwomen who were registered as fishers in 1988.

Gendered work organizations

Organizational theory has been criticized for its incapacity to explain gender segregation and male dominance in the labour market and work organizations.

There is ample evidence of the persistency of the patterns of gender segregation and their recreation in new forms when technological or organizational processes break up the old forms. Gender is not an addition to ongoing processes in organizations but an integral part (Acker 1990, 1993, Walby 1988). The early feminist analysis by Kanter (1977) of women's and men's positions in a large firm explained women's subordinated positions in terms of organizational structure alone. Neither women nor men left in dead end positions developed ambitions of promotion. Later feminist work has criticized the gender neutrality of this theorizing for its lack of recognition of organizational positions as part of a patriarchal order. The obstacles women face as a minority in a male dominated area is quite different from the progress men make as a minority in female dominated areas (Acker 1990, Zimmer 1988).

This study will show women left in dead end positions because of their gender. The practical work they are given does not open the same possibilities of development of skills as the work of men. The linkage between the organizational position and the gender structure is the main obstacle to women's opportunity of promotion. The organizational positions are not neutral as regards gender. Yet the gender structure has to be studied as a dynamic system, not a fixed one. Here processes of gendering positions are scrutinized with emphasis on the potential for changes.

The fishing vessel is an archetypical masculine work organisation where the gendering processes have taken new turns with the technological, social and organizational innovation which factory ships represent. "Individual men and particular groups of men do not always win in these processes, but masculinity always seem to symbolize self-respect for men at the bottom and power for men at the top, while confirming for both their gender's superiority", writes Acker (1993: 145). To explain how this actually happens micro-level studies focusing on the relationship between women and men in the workplace are needed (Cockburn 1988). Confirmation of male superiority is part of the processes on board factory ships. Yet the outcome is not stable. There is an ongoing negotiation of male superiority. I will highlight and evaluate the countervailing strategies women unfold to stir the gender hierarchy.

Kvande and Rasmussen (1993) has focused on men's attitudes and countervailing strategies towards female intruders in another former all-male occupation in Norway: graduate engineers. They find positive attitudes to women workmates and gender equality programs among **young** men in organizations characterized by structures of dynamic networking. Women meet more resistance and face poor career opportunities if the organizational structure is a static hierarchical one (Kvande and Rasmussen 1990, 1993). Here I put women's strategies both into the context of the organizational structure of the factory ship as well as into the context of youth socialization to the ideology gender equality. Inequality between the genders is formally an abandoned ideology. This makes the ranking of jobs and

gender difficult to communicate. Male superiority should be informal and preferably unspoken (Haavind 1985).

Hartmann (1981) calls for attention to the interaction of capitalism and patriarchy in gender segregation in work. She has investigated how male-dominated labour unions have fought for male privileges at the expense of female laborers. How women in labour unions for workers in Norwegian fish processing on shore deal with male dominance concerning demands for negotiation has attracted attention. Women's poorer conditions compared to those of their male workmates can partly be explained by the gendered power structure in the union (Gerrard 1986). Both Lie (1975) and Gerrard (1975; 1986) question the disadvantages women experience by the structuring of the work, but none of them questions the gendered labour division itself, or the underlying assumptions of femininity and masculinity connected to it. This is what I contribute to the discussion here.

Combining gender and class dimensions in the study of segregation of work has been crucial for many feminist in the field (Acker 1990, Hartmann 1981, Walby 1988). The framework of class conflict is not well suited for the fishing vessel and will be outside my scope. Fishers do not see themselves in antagonism with their employer, the shipping company, even though the work is industrialized and they have the status of waged workers (Lysgård 1960). In the analysis of "way of life", the attitudes towards work and the meaning of work differ in the perspective of the waged worker and the self-employed. The perception of work in fishing is just as characteristic of the independent self-employed: work is not just a means but an end (Højrup & Christensen 1989).

Organisation of work, working conditions and the gender pattern

Typical factory ships hold a crew of about 30-35 members. The voyages normally last 3 months. The crew is divided into five functional groups: navigation, engine, catering, deck and processing.² The payment is based on a percentage of catch sales, varying according to the position held. There is no gender discrimination in the payment conditions.

There is a high degree of specialization and division of work, as is typical of industrial work, but unusual on fishing vessels. The crew is split up into two shifts with a work schedule of 6 hours on, 6 hours off, round the clock.

Two niches for women have developed. Besides a messroom girl or two, working in catering, it is the processing department which is the main place of work for women. Normally 4 to 8 women work there, which means 2 to 4 on each shift.

In the processing department men and women meet in daily interaction with respect to work and cooperation. Together, they are responsible for the efficient processing

of the catch which is the organizational goal of their cooperation. In the organisation this goal is generally assumed to be achieved best through a division of the work based on sex.

The production lines in scallop scraping and fish processing are different, but the gender patterns show close similarities. The packing of fillets on trawlers, or the labour demanding hand picking of dirty scallop muscles at scrapers are the predominant female tasks. This means that one out of 4 or 5 functions in each processing line is considered feminine. A few jobs are regularly done by both sexes.

The feminine tasks are the simplest and most manual jobs, while operation and/or control of machinery are defined as male tasks. The more control and complexity a task demands, the more certain it is that it will be considered a masculine job (Cockburn 1988).

Though work is divided according to gender, variations occur and gender barriers are crossed daily. A rigid sexual division of labour is sometimes inconsistent with the required level of flexibility. Thus the gender structure has some slack, which brings variation and development of skill and competence across gender barriers.

Switching between different tasks means widened competence, as this may give the person involved a comprehensive view of the production line. Such a comprehensive view makes an experienced person capable of putting her or his efforts in the right task at the right time. Such competence helps to meet the demands of flexibility both with respect to the irregular flow of resources and the turn-over of the crews.

Technical competence is build up when machinery breaks down. Small repairs must be done immediately by the operators, whereas the mechanic is called upon to help with bigger tasks. In turn, it is a precondition for being promoted to a foreman, that you show technical competence with the processing equipment .

Most of the jobs, whether considered male or female, are routine and require first of all a quick repetitive effort. Although the gender differences in the tasks may seem small, they have important consequences. As the tasks are routine, small variations and challenges become disproportionately inspiring. Both variation and challenge are men's privileges first of all, as men are considered fit for all jobs in the factory, except the one considered feminine. Men may be moved around in the production line, with the purpose of elevating their competence in several tasks. Women, on the other hand, are considered inferior in doing men's jobs, but superior in their own. In addition to being considered qualified for the most monotonous and tedious task, their possibility of gaining variation or competence in their work is limited because of the narrow feminine job specter.

Formally all workers in the processing department are equal, nevertheless, women's jobs are considered simplest and the less prestigious. The simplicity and the subordinated character of women's tasks are reflected in the tradition of placing male newcomers along with the women. Those men rise to other tasks with their seniority, which women are not supposed to do.

The ranking of jobs is known, but seldom outspoken, as the ranking of jobs is implicitly a ranking of gender. Since women are considered unfit for complex tasks, they are implicitly considered less clever than men.

The ranking is concealed behind the explanation that gender differences are based on a distribution of positive human abilities. Women are considered patient, rapid, handy and careful. This makes them suited for their job which is of major importance for the final appearance of the product. Femininity, not inferiority or subordination, is said to determine women for their tasks.

Boarding pass: Femininity

Many myths have secured the sea as a male domain, by linking the presence of women at sea with bad luck (Bratrein 1976, Holtedahl 1986). When women were employed on board, the industry needed legitimization of this violation of cultural rules. The most frequent argument, given by skippers and shipowners for the employment of women, was the assumption of sexually determined work abilities. Evidence of the relevance of gender was given by the fish processing industry ashore. There, work is also divided according to gender, leaving the manual jobs to women and the technical ones to men (Gerrard 1975, 1986; Lie 1976; Larsen and Munk-Madsen 1989, Husmo and Munk-Madsen 1994). The recruitment of women is justified for reasons of gender differences, more than for reasons of gender equality.

Though the use of female labour at sea was an innovation made by the industry, the gender division of human characters was not. The assumption of sexually determined abilities was stressed during a century's construction of gender, where the sciences, especially medicine, was a prime mover in linking both physical and psychological characters with biological sex, as secondary sexual characters. Before the sciences took charge of the field of gender differences, the church had the leading position in defining the basis of these differences (Rosenbeck 1987).

Whether gender differences are a gift from God or a result of Darwinistic evolution; whether they are biologically or socially rooted, is not discussed in the daily life on board. As the differences are recognized culturally, they work in the structuring of life according to gender. Nevertheless, there is a contradiction between the emphasis put on gender difference and the formal ideology of gender equality. This contradiction creates an area of tension around the gender structure on board. It

gives the participants the possibility of picking up arguments from either extremity when suited for a given purpose. The opening scene was set by the male leaders of this industry, who had the power to define the organizational needs of feminine work abilities (Cockburn 1988, Cohn 1985). Besides their patience and rapidity in repetitive work, the feminine influence on the social atmosphere was seen as a positive appendage.

Haavind (1985) discusses the changes in the gender relations which have been brought about by the increased integration of women in the male sphere. Every woman who enters male arenas has to pay a price, she says. When and how to make her gender relevant is out of her control. The relevance of gender may be used both to her advantage and to her disadvantage, but it is controlled by the dominant part in the area.

The use of arguments about gender differences does not mean that the formal ideology of gender equality is irrelevant. All levels in the industry express that this has been a necessary ideological background for the acceptance of women's presence on male dominated ships travelling far at sea. To operate with mixed crews must be considered an acceptable behavior in the surrounding communities, among the women themselves, and among their male workmates. This acceptance is supported by the commonly held ideas of gender equality principles.

Most members of the crew, in the processing department in particular, are young and still not settled. Gender roles and differences according to childcare thus has little to do with the gendered labour division and the struggle around it, which is in focus here. Furthermore, when shipped, the members of the crew, all face the same conditions of separation from their families, no matter what responsibilities they have on shore (Munk-Madsen 1994). Thus women's role and position in family and unpaid work cannot account for their bottom position on board, like conventional theory on labour market segregation tend to explain the subordination of women (Walby 1988).

The interchange of gender abilities, work and prestige

As women are given the manual jobs which require patience, rapidity and dexterity, their daily work performance pays evidence to its ideological basis: those abilities are female. A similar relation exists among the male abilities and tasks. Working with machinery, one gains technical insight and training with mechanics and tools. This competence will be built up and shared in the male group, through the work division. This in turn pays evidence to the recognition of technical sense as a male ability. The gender dichotomy forms the ideological basis of the labour division, and the daily work performance in turn pays evidence to the reality of the gender dichotomy (Larsen & Munk-Madsen 1989, Husmo and Munk-Madsen 1994).

The hierarchy of gender, embedded in the gender dichotomy, is seen in the different attitudes of men and women towards each others' skills and tasks. As a foreman put it, when watching a group of women working at the assembly belt at high speed:

"I just have to say how impressed I am that you can really make yourselves stand there."

The patience required may be admired by men, but it is a quality they refuse for themselves. As long as patience is defined as feminine, men are not met by expectations confining them to the assembly belt. Men do not want to be put on women's task's.

Running the fillet machine, a male task, certainly requires rapidity and patience in repetitive work, too; but the classification of this work as male work is based on an ascribed masculine ability of a higher value: the technical sense. A technical sense is not just a practical ability, it also implies an intellectual capacity. In the technologically developed production of factory ships, the importance of male superiority in intellectual capacity, demonstrated in their control of complex equipment, exceeds male superiority in physical ability, in the struggle around gender barriers (Larsen & Munk-Madsen 1989).

Women who show strength or competence in technical matters, gain appreciation. Women, on the contrary to men, desire their share of masculine properties. They would profit in their job opportunities and prestige if there was a disintegration of the gender dichotomy in abilities.

The ideology of gender determined abilities, the hierarchy of functions corresponding the valuation of abilities required to do them, and the labour division itself, constitute an interlinked system: the gender system.

Hirdmann (1988) explains the gender system as a structure of order of sex/gender. She sees the gender system as based on a logic of two dimensions. 1. the gender dichotomy: the taboo of mixing masculinity and femininity; 2. the gender hierarchy: male is normal and of universal validity. The hierarchy draws legitimacy from the dichotomy. In her analysis the gender system is reproduced at three levels. The cultural superstructure is considered the highest level of reproduction. I find that this corresponds with the ideology of gender determined abilities, which I have discussed. Social integration is the second level of reproduction of the gender system. It corresponds to the gendered labour division. The third level of reproduction is socialization. Here is a slack in the gender system of my study as it is the ideology of equality among the sexes which is internalized by the young women through socialization.

The three levels of reproduction interact. For example: the internalization of the gender equality ideology becomes a competing element at the level of cultural superstructure.

Most of the women who are admitted on board are from the generation of the late 1960's and early 1970's and so brought up in a public atmosphere which considers equality between the sexes as a proper goal. Kanter (1977) criticizes previous literature on differences in men and women's career patterns, for focusing on their different socialization which in turn should lead to less ambitions among women. Speaking of young Scandinavian women of the 1990's, it is my assertion that their socialization, on the contrary, should lead to ambitions in work, as a consequence of the gender equality ideology which has been publicly adopted. Empirically this goes for the young women I have met in fishing. When they embark the vessel they face a subordinating gender structure. What do they do about it?

Strategies for change

Looking at professional projects as gendered Witz (1990) has systematized the strategies of both dominant and subordinate groups concerning occupational closure. She distinguishes between exclusion and demarcation strategies unfolded by dominant groups and inclusion and dual closure strategies as responses from subordinate groups. The dual closure strategy covers the manner in which women may contest demarcation. It involves a two way exercise of power, upwards as a form of usurpation and downwards as a form of exclusion.

The gender segregation in processing work on board factory ships do not place women and men in distinct occupational groups with competing professional projects, which is the case for the development of Witz's theory. Furthermore credentialist tactics cannot secure the vessel as a professional male domain as no accreditation is needed in the form of education, training or examination which can separate female and male processing workers (Witz 1990). The work in question is considered manual routine work. The gender negotiations in question is not a matter of professional projects, yet it concerns occupational closure in the wake of the breach in a male monopoly.

Men on board are engaged in encircling women in a specific female area of work, which can be considered a demarcation strategy. Women's responses are not uniform. They may aim at inclusion in male fields on board or they may accept the demarcation of male and female work spheres under certain circumstances.

In the systematizing of women's responses to the demarcation strategies I have also drawn on the theory of Exit, Voice and Loyalty, developed by Hirschmann (1970). His theory deals with individual expressions of discontent, which can lead to changes in organizations, firms or states. Exit stems from the field of economics.

The jobs in fish processing on factory ships is part of the labour market. According to economic theory Exit could be seen as a proper method of signalling discontent. In this case women's exit from factory ships has not meant that the alternatives:

ships without gendered labour division, have won in the competition. Indirect pressure through women's exit from factory ships because of discrimination, has not lead to better profit for ships which gives equal conditions to both genders. Such ships have not appeared at all. The effect of exit in this field is a totally theoretical phenomenon, although turnover among women is high. The mean duration of career is 1.6 years (Munk-Madsen 1990). Women do use exit to express discontent, but it does not provoke changes.

Voice belongs to the realm of politics and organizations, and refers to the direct expression of discontent. Hirschmann (1970) claims that voice is preferred by persons in possession of influence. Individuals, who can expect to manage to change the direction of the organization, would prefer voice to exit. Women are not in such positions in the gender structure on board. Yet protest has brought about changes in some cases (see below).

Exit does not work, voice is poor, yet changes do occur. I have had to introduce a supplementary strategy which I call women's wiles to cover the means for changes. Discretely this brings about small changes in the gender structure.

The theory of Exit, Voice and Loyalty (Hirschmann 1970) does not considerate that actors are gendered. It fails to elucidate the importance of the interaction between men and women as genders; an interaction constrained by the gender structure which is informally linked with the organizational structure.

Witz's (1990) theory on professional projects is integrating gender as a basic structuring factor. She is preoccupied with the responsive strategies of discontented women facing male dominance in the field of occupations. My work is elaborating the differences in subordinated women's strategies further than the two responses suggested by Witz.

The strategies available to women in their struggle for equality in the work situation are arranged below according to whether they reject or accept the gender system and whether they oppose it directly or indirectly.

Acceptance of the gender structure

Some women express it as their firm conviction that dexterity and rapidity in women's jobs are due to ascribed feminine abilities. There is no way men can do those jobs as well as women.

This conviction may rest on experience on board, where women develop skills in their jobs, which in turn prove the gendered character of the skills. The function, rather than the basis of this conviction, is of major interest here. Women's ascribed superiority in some abilities can be seen as a counterbalance of their inferiority in

respect to other abilities, and thereby create an equal complementarity in the gender dichotomy.

Another effect of the postulate of women's superiority in female jobs is the defence of these positions towards male expansion, which could lead to exclusion of women from the vessel. Few jobs are available to young women in the small and gender divided labour market in fisheries communities, and none with as good a wage potential as fishing. If a crisis because of fish stock depletions leads to a reduction of the crews, female superiority, even in the least estimated jobs on board, is a way to secure the women's positions as crew members. In this light the acceptance of the gender system is a demarcation strategy of women towards men, protecting them from losing what they recently gained (Witz 1990).

The work division may also be an advantage for women when they try to create a female community on the male dominated ship. Being a minority, they often stick together on board, which makes some prefer to stay in a women's group while working.

Acceptance of the gender structure rests furthermore on women's care for the gender identity of their male workmates. An experienced young woman, who had been promoted to a relief leader of a shift, said that they felt pity for a boy who was placed together with the women. Therefore she, as the boss, encouraged him to take pauses and go watch the men operating the machinery. She was well aware that the women would also like a break and a chance to perform other tasks, but she considered it worse for the boy than for the others to be engaged in hand-picking, as he was the only man there. Men who are permanently placed along with women are slightly degraded in relation to other men on board.

Not only the gender identity of men is cared for. As men are not expected to be as patient as women, it is often considered more fatiguing for them, among the women too, to endure the monotony which is characteristic in women's tasks (Cockburn 1988).

Nevertheless, in this question the unanimity of women ceases. Most women would prefer greater variation, and to share tasks across gender barriers.

Protests against the labour division

Being a minority in subordinated positions, women have no easy task in gaining influence through protests (Hirschmann 1970). In spite of this, women sometimes do oppose the gender structure openly.

On most scallop scraping factory ships, changes in the gendered labour division have taken place at the expense of male privileges. A young woman who embarked

a new vessel explained how it happened there: The women were confined to one task, as a matter of course. As the fishing grew successful, the speed and unintermission became unbearable. They started to fall ill one by one, next they complained to the foreman and asked for rotation in tasks. The foreman, who watched the quality of the work decreasing as the exhaustion increased, introduced rotation among the young men in packing and storage and the young women in hand picking. Later on, sorting was also included in the rotation, to increase the variation further.

This change met with strong protests from the men in the processing department. In their opinion, women should not have been admitted on board at all, as they were immediately trying to command the whole vessel. Men's active resistance against equal opportunities is a very concrete barrier (Aga 1980).

Variation in the work situation was not the only benefit women gained from rotation. One woman put it like this:

"It became much more fun when we got the boys along with us in hand-picking. We no longer felt oppressed by having to do the worst job just because the boys did not want to do it."

Rotation felt like liberation. Rotation means that some men have to do women's jobs regularly. As they do not want to be considered inferior to women in their job, or to be considered inferior to their male workmates, they may work actively for the disintegration of the gendered ranking of tasks. The integration of men in women's spheres thus seems to be most promising in respect to the deconstruction of the gender hierarchy.

Protests regarding working conditions are rendered difficult by attitude to the work on board. To work hard is an important cultural value in fishing. It is considered honorable, and everybody is expected to do so. All necessary work must be finished, no matter how many hours the watch endures. Such a working climate makes it necessary for the women to agree to demands collectively, in order not to be classified as individual weaklings. Even when standing together, protests regarding working conditions may be used as evidence of the assumption that women are the weaker sex, not appropriate for work on fishing vessels.

Changes in the gendered labour division do not necessarily change the underlying assumptions of gender abilities. Nevertheless, such an ideology is weakened the times the gender barriers are crossed. When changes take place as a result of protests, at least the rationality behind the gendered labour division is put on the agenda and is challenged. Nevertheless, most changes take place without any discussions that reveal the contradiction between the ideology of equality and the ideology of difference between the sexes.

Women's wiles in crossing gender barriers

Women have a broad variety of indirect tactics at their disposal, the so-called "women's wiles". This expression refers to other means than protests, by which changes in the gendered labour division for oneself or for all may be obtained. Women's wiles put an indirect pressure on the gender structure, and these tactics prove successful.

A way of gaining access to the male working sphere, without any tension or conflict, is to offer help voluntarily. If fishing is not too good, one may be able to do one's own tasks quickly, and then lend one's mates a hand. As diligence is the expected behavior, this is not considered out of place. An offer to the operator of the fillet machinery to take a coffee break, while you take over his duties, is seldom refused. By imposing an extra load on themselves, women may gain insight and competence in tasks they are not expected to perform. They also get some variation.

Such small interruptions in the common gendered labour division does not change the gender structure, but the competence women build up through them is a precondition for further progress. It is a secure way to try one's own abilities in other tasks. It may prove fatal for a woman to be put on duty in a male task she does not master, not only for herself but for her female workmates as well. A failure is often considered to be a piece of evidence of a general female disability in this field; it confirms the expectation that women are inferior in male jobs (Aga 1980). Women's attacks on the labour division are therefore governed by caution.

More permanent movements of tasks from men to women also occur in the wake of women's helpfulness. An initial help from the women in preparing the brine used in the cleaning process, in an extraordinary busy situation, was felt very convenient for the men who controlled the steaming and cleaning process. As a result, women were asked to keep this task, even though it was considered to be skilled, responsible and prestigious.

A high degree of responsibility, diligence, conscientiousness in all tasks, and efforts put into learning, are all means which are necessary for women in proving their ability outside their own restricted area. To prove one's ability is necessary in order to achieve short time as well as permanent changes in the labour division and in order to move towards a decreasing relevance of gender in male tasks. This burden of proof makes women dependent on each other. Never to fail is one of the women's wiles.

Conflicts do not usually characterize the interaction between men and women on board. They are friendly to each other, and socially, women are welcome company. The friendships, and especially the partnerships, which now and then develop between men and women, may also help in the equalizing process. The female

relief leader, whom I mentioned above, was the girl-friend of a former processing worker. Whenever she got a chance, she spent the time with him, and he taught her to run all the machinery and the steaming and cleaning process. Her competence in this field was later the precondition for her promotion to a relief leader on the summer trip.

The entrance to male privileges in work and prestige is not formally possible through friendships and love-affairs, but a man's solidarity may shift, if the woman who is discontent is his loved one. A male entity in a defensive position may suffer cracks because of such love-affairs; and as most members of the crews are young and unsettled, many fall in love and find partners on board.

Jonasdottir (1988) is preoccupied with the generation of male power through the realm of eroticism. In her view male exploitation of women's care and love is a core in understanding the power relation of the genders in today's patriarchy. What I point to here is how mutual love and care may serve as women's opportunity of gaining influence.

Some organizational structural features favour the success of changes by means of women's wiles. Above, individuals actions have been scrutinized to elucidate the potentials of changes in the gender structure in the work organization. Structural features in the organization need attention too.

Organizational features promoting equality

Above an example showed how women sought alliance with the foreman to have their demands fulfilled at the expense of male privileges. The foreman is part of the gender structure, too, but his responsibility in creating the most efficient production may be greater than his solidarity with his male comrades. The rotation introduced by the foreman is the triumph of formal power over informal power.

The organizational goal of the factory ship is to perform the most efficient catching and processing of fish. This technical and economical rationality is not necessarily in accordance with the rationality of the gender structure, in respect to assumptions regarding sexual abilities and sexual labour division (Walby 1988). The level of flexibility required favours crossings of gender barriers, although the efficiency of the production was/is in the first place, the argument for a gendered labour division.

Factory ships have to adapt to their surroundings, which are characterized by turbulence and insecurity. The catch is never known in advance. Sometimes the processing goes on minimum level for weeks; sometimes the catch is formidable and requires a cut-down in the watch below for days. Complex surroundings should, theoretically, promote an organic organization with a structure characterized by flexibility and little specialization. The ship is hierarchically organized and runs a

line production which gives the impression of a mechanical organization (MacDonald 1988). Nevertheless, the organization has to handle an unstable resource flow as well as high turnover in the work force. All of this demands flexibility. The rationale of efficiency through gender division is challenged by the rationale of efficiency through flexibility. The latter rationale is supported by the breaks and changes in the gender pattern on board which proves to be successful concerning efficiency.

Both the top and the bottom levels of the production involves breaking of routines to which the gendered labour division is linked. The dead periods in the production are preconditions for women's attempts to gain competence by voluntarily offering their help to men. The busy periods in the production, when one and a half shifts have the watch at a time, may cause that there are too many women at a time in packing, and too few men somewhere else.

Changes which occur for practical reasons do not necessarily question the rationality of the gender structure. Women and men, respectively, may help in each other's tasks when this is considered the most practical, without being considered equally capable or suited. What counteracts a disregard of the successful flexibility of the gendered labour division, is that all tasks are rather simple and can be learned quickly. Men's and women's working performances in each other's tasks thus easily become alike.

The turn-over in crew sometimes leaves the leadership in a situation where they have to choose whether an experienced woman or a male newcomer is going to handle the tasks considered most responsible. Female shift leaders turn up in such situations, and women have also been aloud on deck or have been the controllers of machinery in the automatized processing on a relief basis. Here the contradiction is between principles of seniority or gender. Once a self-made, competent woman steps into a position on the basis of seniority, in spite of her gender, it becomes difficult to refuse her this position later on the basis of gender, as it would now resemble discrimination, which is not legitimate. Seniority is already established as a principle for the distribution of tasks among men.

Organizational structure on board is hierarchical, but the demand of flexibility prevails. Thus a lack of proper adaptation of the organization structure to the turbulent surroundings gives women opportunities, but they are at an informal level. Some of the women's wiles are dependent on the possibilities which arise during the flexible production.

Conclusion

The women's strategies which have been dealt with above are all aimed at the liberation from subordination in the work organization. In this struggle two

opposing views prevail among the women. One position is to change the valuation of gender and tasks, without eliminating the gendered labour division, but by attaching importance to the tasks performed by women, and by underlining women's indispensability on board. Some skippers, foremen and women alike argue for the importance of a proper execution of women's tasks. In this way they try to counteract the informal and illegitimate ranking of gender through the ranking of tasks. Only the normative hierarchy of the gender structure is questioned, not the gender dichotomy. This does not lead to better working conditions or career opportunities for women; their area on board will still be very limited. On the other hand it may defend previously obtained opportunities from being lost in a reversal process, thus acting as a gendered demarcation strategy protecting women.

The opposing position aims at neutralization, not only of the ranking of tasks and gender: the gender hierarchy, but of gender relevance in respect to work: the gender dichotomy. This position is favoured by the better working conditions women may gain. The ideological contradiction in the gender structure of today: gender equality versus gender hierarchy, supports the neutralization position too. Male dominance and female subordination are not formally legitimate, even though the functional work division legitimizes the informal ranking of gender.

The young age of the crew favours the ideology of gender equality as opposed to the ideology of a gender dichotomy, as a result of socialization. They have grown up with public acknowledgement of gender equality as the legitimate relationship between the genders. This goes for both the young men and the young women on board. Even though young men approve theoretically of gender equality, they do not give up privileges voluntarily. But for the women this position proves most successful in the struggle for equality.

The growing body of literature on sexuality in the work organisation has mainly been focused on male dominance and power expressed as harassment (Acker 1993). Acker (1993) suggest the integration of sexuality in a gendered theory of organisation. For my purpose of elucidating women's strategies for change, the positive effects of sexuality and eroticism is of important. I find it to be a perspective that may deserve more attention in feminist studies.

In the analysis of the factory ship as a work organization, the integration of the organizational hierarchy and the gender hierarchy is promoted by the gender dichotomy, which divides the work and positions according to femininity and masculinity. The gender dichotomy in work, is thus indispensable to the gender hierarchy. Acceptance of the gender dichotomy, which is a basic part of the gender structure on board, will thus have a hard time fighting the gender hierarchy. Direct strategies, such as protests and demands from women, create conflicts; but they are also most promising in respect to obtaining changes beyond the practical level, as the ideological basis comes to the surface in such conflicts.

The development of various indirect tactics has been favoured due to women's position as a subordinated minority. Women's wiles are attuned to the power relation in the gender system on board. I have limited the discussion to the processing department and the formal and informal hierarchy there. But all officers' positions are occupied by men. Some women were fascinated by the tasks in the wheel house, but considered it as a utopia for the moment, for a woman to reach the position of captain or mate. Deckwork is hardly challenged either. The deck is somehow the last fort of proper manhood for uneducated men in relation to women. The rigorous verbal defence of this male bastion protects it from women's attacks at present.

Women's wiles are also attuned to the organizational goal of efficiency, which they try to turn to account in the process of reaching equality. Changes invented as a result of women's wiles may have a cumulative effect and thus reach deeper than to being small practical reliefs. It may slowly disorganize the gender segregation on board.

Kvande & Rasmussen (1990) argue for an understanding of the organizational structure as determinative for women's opportunities. They find that dynamic organizations based on networks offer possibilities for all, regardless of sex, whereas static hierarchical organizations offer less possibilities for women. The dynamic organization prevails when flexibility and teamwork are needed to reach organizational goals. The organisation in focus is neither classifiable as a static hierarchy or as a dynamic network. It is rather a dynamic hierarchy. It is more the gendering of the ranking of positions than the hierarchy itself which is a matter of negotiation with the entrance of women.

I have mainly been occupied with the actors strategies for change. It is a close empirical look at the dynamics of gender negotiations on board that reveal not only the direct but also the indirect strategies of women, in their attempts to neutralize the organizational positions concerning gender. Gender neutralization means that the organizational hierarchy is released from the gender hierarchy. This, in turn, undermines the material basis and cultural evidence of the latter.

I suggest a closer empirical look at women's strategies in other work organizations to answer how women are actively maintaining or deconstructing the intimate relationship between the gender structure and the organizational structure.

Notes:

1. This research has been financed by the former Norwegian Council of Fisheries Research (now The Norwegian Research Council). An earlier version of this article was presented at the First European Feminist Research Conference at the University of Ålborg, August 18-22, 1991.

2. The captain and the mate constitute the navigation group. Each of them head a shift each, and run the navigation and fish finding during their watch. The engine occupies a group of three persons: 2 engineers and a greaser. Catering is taken care of by three: 2 cooks and a messroom girl/boy. The catering group does not work shift, but follows its own schedule. On deck is a group of 6 persons, but split up in two shifts, each headed by a boatswain. The processing department occupies the largest group. Here are two shifts of 8-10 persons each. Each shift is headed by a foreman. A mechanic belongs to the factory as well. He is in charge of major repairs of the processing equipment.

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