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The gender order in action: consistent evidence from two distinct workplace settings

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we elaborate an integrative framework of the gender order that considers gender as something simultaneously structurally outside of individual action and as constantly done through interaction. Combining a structural perspective with micro-interactionist accounts makes it possible to show how these mechanisms manifest themselves and how individuals engage with and concretely 'do gender' *in situ*. We focus on three mechanisms through which the gender order emphasizes difference and creates inequality: androcentrism, agentic masculinity, and female devaluation. We illustrate our elaboration of the gender order with empirical evidence from two dramatically different male-dominated employment settings, meat-processing and higher education, in Switzerland and Germany, respectively.

Introduction

Gender is a pervasive system, embedded in social relations, that defines what it means to be a woman or a man – creating difference in expectations, values, and behaviours. Those differences, when successfully accomplished, appear 'natural' because the routine process of labelling others by gender is deeply rooted and creates a readily identifiable, and thus a meaning-filled frame, for everyday interactions.[1] The differences become a source of, and justification for, inequalities within organizations, the workplace, the public sphere, and individual lives.

How these differences are accomplished is a matter of debate. Scholars using structural perspectives claim that gender takes the form of a 'social structure' (Risman, 2004), an 'institution' (Lorber, 1994; Martin, 2004) or a 'primary cultural frame' (Ridgeway, 2009), seen as both external to the individuals and as a constraint imposed on them (Fuchs Epstein, 1988; Corcuff, 2008; Gonos, 1977; Kanter, 1977). Interactional scholars and those who take an ethnomethodological approach emphasize that gender is done *in situ* and continually actualized through interactions and everyday routine (Garfinkel, 1967, 2002; Kessler & Wendy, 1978; West & Fenstermaker, 1995; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

The primary goal of this paper is to combine a more structural view with micro-interactional accounts to argue that when gender is done in specific situations at the workplace, individuals – by doing what they do – do not invent the social world each time, but tend to fit into a standard format of activity and reasoning that informs their actions (Goffman, 1981). We therefore situate gender as something that is (already) there, part of invisible 'background expectancies' (Garfinkel, 1967), *and* which individuals then consciously and strategically (or assumptions about which there is little

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awareness or reflection), employ in their interactions. Our phenomenological[2] reading uses a concept called the gender order to illustrate the complex interplay between 'structural forces' and 'interaction'.

We aim to illustrate the gender order using three distinct but interrelated mechanisms. We underline the deeply embedded and pervasive character of the gender order as it manifests in everyday interactions and assumptions. By applying the concepts to two vastly differing occupational contexts, even crossing boundaries of class, nation, and language, we thereby demonstrate how normative gender arrangements are repeated, act in the background, and can be actively engaged and bring meaning to a variety of contexts and social settings. We stress the pervasive character of the gender order and its strong impact on the social world: even though there is potential for change, we could identify no meaningful resistance to the normative patterns in our studies.

Our structure is as follows: we first explain the concept of the gender order. Next, we describe the data sources we will use. Then we elucidate three key components, or mechanisms, of the gender order: Androcentrism, agentic masculinity, and female devaluation and illustrate each of these mechanisms within our integrative framework, as well as their interrelatedness, with empirical qualitative examples from two dramatically different male-dominated work settings: butcher shops and higher education. We conclude with a discussion.

The gender order: framing gender as invisible background expectancies

We define the concept of the gender order as invisible background expectancies about gender that underlie visible interactions. Similar to Goffman's interaction order (Goffman, 1983), and drawing from Matthews (1984) conceptualization, a 'gender order' transcends the situations under study, without taking the form of structural determinants, that expresses itself based on time and place and context (Connell, 1987; Frances, 1993; Maharaj, 1995; Matthews, 1984; Messner & Sabo, 1990). The gender order is a set of shared practical knowledge about gender relations that is locally accomplished, but which goes well beyond its presence here and now (Schütz, 1970; Schütz & Luckmann, 1973). In this sense, the gender order is both a set of actions and practices and a system that is in action (Connell, 1987; Martin, 2003, 2006). Goffman and his interactional order are here helpful to conceptualize the gender order:

> (...) the individuals I know don't invent the world of chess when they sit down to play, or the stock market when they buy some shares, or the pedestrian traffic system when they maneuver through the streets. Whatever the idiosyncrasies of their own motives and interpretations, they must gear their participation into what is available by way of standard doings and standard reasons for doing these doings. (Goffman, 1981, p. 63)

We draw from multiple bodies of scholarship to frame our concept. In Connell's (1987) work we appreciate the definition of gender as the product of individual action which simultaneously constrains individual agency (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004). Connell (1987) defines the gender order of a society as a historically constructed pattern of power relations between men and women, impacting the definitions of masculinity and femininity, to speak of a structural inventory that generates gendered experience on the macro level (Connell, 1987, p. 98). Martin (2006) uses the idea of a 'repertoire of actions' that society makes culturally available to individuals for performing gender. Such a repertoire determines which spheres of influence are considered appropriate for men and women in a given society (De Simone & Scano, 2018) and in particular contexts. Workplace cultures are therefore not genderless (Gherardi & Poggio, 2001), but define specific expectations towards women and men, regulate gender relations and (re-)produce asymmetry and inequality by validating gendered cultural and symbolic practices. We embed our definition of the gender order in Connell's conceptualization and add the lived experience to it, inspired by Ridgeway (2009). She describes 'the interface of the micro-interactional and the institutional and structural levels of analysis' (p.146) and sheds light on how such multilevel processes affect one another. Ridgeway

defines gender as a primary cultural frame which acts as a background identity that impacts social behaviour. When speaking of 'frame', we see consistency with Goffman's (1981, 1983) and in Ridgeway's 'background identity' we see what Garfinkel (1967) had coined background expectancies. The idea is that through practical experience, individuals build up a 'stock of knowledge' (Schütz, 1970). The background expectancies are standardized and standardizing (Garfinkel, 1967) and are often 'seen-but-unnoticed' as they organize an order to the point of appearing 'natural'. The background expectancies enable us to consider gender as an order that is simultaneously done in interaction and as something that is (already) there. The gender order must always be contextualized because it is fashioned by individuals (Matthews, 1984) and shaped by economic conditions, social and legal achievements, and policies. It then incorporates those material conditions of which people are more or less aware. It therefore has a historicity (Le Feuvre, 2003) and is transformed over time (Zinn, 2019), thanks to innovations on the interactional scene and the integration of new patterns of experience, or as Goffman has stated: 'occasionally one individual has some effect on a particular frame' (Goffman, 1981, p. 63).[3] Although a gender order is omnipresent, it might reveal itself in different ways according to the context under study.

We take up and extend these bodies of work by demonstrating the very specific social and sociological mechanisms behind how concretely gender both endures across workplace settings and is lived and experienced at a micro level. We are looking for patterns in the existence of background expectancies using research from two field sites.

Data

This paper draws on empirical data to develop and illustrate the components of the gender order. The three mechanisms we will present beneath have inductively emerged from our data and are built from the patterns in the empirical examples. Our data are drawn from two research projects, one ethnography on French-speaking Swiss butchers[4] and one qualitative interview-based project of German-speaking German university professors. Both projects were conducted in male-dominated employment contexts within west-central European countries, Switzerland and Germany, that are typologized as conservative welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990). This context potentially accentuates differences in gender relations in the labour market and household arrangements in the following way. The conservative welfare regime tends to place the heterosexual two-parent-with-child(ren) family at the core of responsibility for the care of the vulnerable and expects household self-sufficiency (Esping-Andersen, 2015; Valarino, 2020). Social policies historically have encouraged the financial dependence of mothers and children on a primary (male) earner. State provision of care outside the home is available primarily in emergency situations instead of as a general norm (though this is slowly changing). As a result, the division of unpaid care-work and paid work tends to be more strongly gendered in these countries than in some neighbouring countries, and many industries and occupations are more gender-segregated than they are in other parts of the world (Crofts & Coffey, 2017; Esping-Andersen, 2009). The experiences of butchers and of university professors represent two contexts at different points in respect of the social class and job prestige spectrum, which is why we find these examples especially useful to illustrate the mechanisms of the gender order.

For the Swiss, French-speaking, working-class context, we use ethnographic vignettes taken from Zinn's ethnographic observations and interviews with butchers in Switzerland between 2012 and 2016 in various occupational settings (vocational training schools, butcher shops, slaughterhouses, etc.) with the aim of understanding how gender is made relevant in the workplace and how it impacts the organization of workplace activities. The butcher occupation in Switzerland has been dominated by men who make up 90% of workers (BFS, Bundesamt für Statistik, 2011) and still in 2020, a large majority of apprentices are men (Schweizer Fleisch-Fachverband, 2020). Her role in the field can be described as both an ethnographic researcher and butcher trainee as she became an intern in order to conduct participant observation in the field. The data used for this piece also feature auto-ethnographical accounts because the lived experience of

the researcher made it possible to better phenomenologically grasp the experience of the participants.

The observations took place over several months, starting with one week on the premises, followed by shorter periods once a month. Only overt observations (Fine, 1993; Gold, 1958) were carried out, insofar as all butchers within the workplace settings knew who the researcher was and why she was there (i.e. as 'a student doing a sociological study of butchers and who is interested in questions related to gender').

The second set of data draws on Hofmeister's qualitative research project describing the gendered experiences reported by women professors at a university in Germany where men made up 95% of the professors at the time (2008) (described in Hofmeister, 2015). Recent research shows that gender and race discrepancies are still present in academia and that women continue to experience workplace hostilities and discrimination (Blithe & Elliott, 2020). All 23 women professors at the university at the time were invited to participate and two-thirds agreed to do so, for a total of 14 interviews each lasting about two hours. The women spoke about their contexts, the unspoken rules of the institution, and how inclusion and exclusion were experienced. The women are, in a way, acting as ethnographers in their own lives by managing the profession as exotics within it, and the interviews allowed them to share their observations also as vignettes. Because of the small pool of women professors, their confidentiality can be guarded only when we offer no further information about age, parenthood status, faculty or field. We can say that their ages ranged from late 30s to early 60s and their departments ranged across the entire university from humanities to natural sciences. For both research settings, confidentiality of the research data has been guaranteed, participants were informed of the aims and methods of the study, and informed consent was acquired from each. All interviews were recorded and transcribed, using pseudonyms to preserve anonymity. The list of open-ended questions used, where applicable, can be provided upon request.

With the gender order concept in mind, we examined our data anew to see the extent to which there were ways to empirically understand how gender manifests in these contexts and how the individual dimension is shaped by the broader social context. We read all data again and coded cases where someone actively engaged, named, or highlighted some implicit knowledge or assumption about gender arrangements in their setting, bringing the gender order into stark relief. Each of the authors re-analysed their data independently. We then translated the relevant passages from German and French into English to examine common patterns among the incidences of the gender order. We collectively analysed both sets of data to assess whether the implicit background expectancies that were being highlighted (the rules of the chess game, to use Goffman's metaphor) fell into identifiable patterns in both contexts that cut across both occupational categories, countries, and language contexts. The quotes and vignettes featured in this article emphasize some key elements of the empirical data and have been selected for their ideal-typical characteristics (Sumerau, Padavic, & Schrock, 2015). The three mechanisms we will present beneath have inductively emerged from our data and are built from the patterns in the empirical examples. The three mechanisms are not meant to cover all aspects of gendered experience at work, but help to better understand how the micro-level interactions we observed are shaped by the gender context and can provide a useful frame for future research on the gender order and its potential for change.

Bringing together data that originates in distinct settings helps indicate how surprisingly consistent the gender order is. The material basis of the butchers' work and the non-material nature of the academics' work are strengths that help underline both the pervasive character of the gender order as manifest in these settings and its strong impact on the social world, even as the social world crosses various boundaries of class, nation, and language. We were therefore able to show how normative gender arrangements act in the background and the same gender arrangements can be actively engaged and bring meaning to a variety of contexts and social settings.
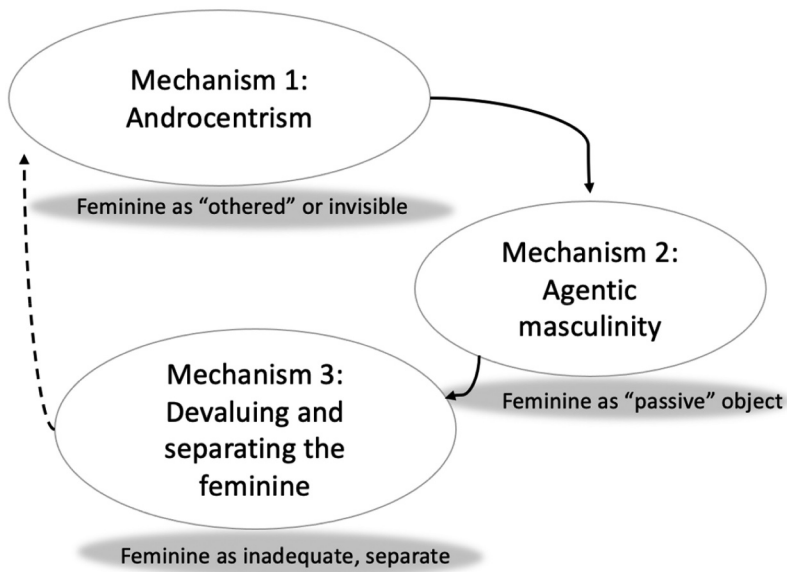
Figure 1. Three mechanisms of the gender order illustrating their shadow sides and feedback loop.

The gender order as manifested in two contexts

In this section, we show how concretely the gender order is invoked in these contexts. We identify three mechanisms that form and fuel this order, supported by vignettes taken from our research at the two sites, spanning social class, national and language boundaries. Androcentrism forms the first and foundational mechanism of the manifestation of the gender order. The second mechanism consistent through both settings is agentic masculinity. The third mechanism in both settings describes women's work as separate and devalued. In each case, we offer examples from the two studies. All three mechanisms are related and work in a cycle and contribute therefore to the reproduction of the order (see Figure 1). Androcentrism describes how the systems, activities, and time and place structures are designed for male lives and bodies, with male entitlement to those systems and structures (Mechanism 1) (see Bem, 1993). Once the male is the standard, mechanisms 2 and 3 come to the foreground: the male, being central and visible, also dominates the frame, is granted the right to act first and loudest, and the position of the female is juxtaposed accordingly as passive and as objectified. Finally, with the male actor as the agentic subject and the most visible, active, and dominant, mechanism 3 articulates the 'othering' that happens to the female category by recognizing the devaluation of the female that is taking place, based on mechanisms 1 and 2. In other words, men, as a group or individually are consciously or unconsciously using their granted agency to devalue and 'other' women as a group or individually, keeping therefore the flow of the gender order alive by reaffirming androcentrism. This cycle has its expression in, for example, attributing the work that women do as separate and less worthy, contaminated by being feminized, ranking below men's work. This devaluation in turn further supports androcentrism reproducing the symbolic order of gender, and the cycle continues, keeping women 'to their place' (Gherardi & Poggio, 2001). We now describe each mechanism with examples.

First Mechanism of the Gender Order: Androcentrism

The androcentric bias is an orienting frame for the gender order (Bem, 1993; Gilman, 2012). It describes the biased view that the male body and male life course are the standard, without

admitting or acknowledging the bias, and excludes or makes invisible bodies and life courses who do not fit into these standards.

Assuming men's bodies and life courses impedes a gender-neutral organizational structure of workplace settings (Acker, 1990). Androcentric work structures are created for, and therefore privilege, the 'ideal' type of worker (Acker, 2006) who is constantly available for the work, where there are no assumptions of pregnancy, breastfeeding, menstruation or obligations as a primary caregiver, nothing to disrupt the gendered workplace design (Crofts & Coffey, 2017). The structural dimensions of androcentrism are both temporal and material.

Temporally, our work settings are organized according to standards that serve the overall supply chain and do not serve natural biorhythms or care responsibilities. In the case of butcher shops, this means extremely early-morning work so that fresh deliveries can be made to shops before their opening times, and in the case of universities, faculty meetings and correspondence occur late into the evenings, after the courses are taught during more comfortable daytime schedules. This time structure assumes that someone else is at home in the mornings to organize children to go off to school or in the evenings to feed them and get them to bed. In both cases, the workplaces defy social and circadian rhythms with very early or very late hours (Zerubavel, 1981). The assumption built into the temporal structure is that someone else takes up responsibility for any caregiving or household organization in these margins: an invisible marginalized caregiver (Williams, 2000).

Material structures of these workplaces are androcentric in the burden placed on the physical body and the demonstrative endurance expected from the body. Equipment, infrastructure, and scheduling are designed for an uninterrupted male (or even super-male) body that can power through hardship: a workplace 'Ironman race', so to speak. Although accommodations could be made, they are not: everyone participating in the workplace environment is expected to conform to these conditions. To express discomfort would be to signal a lack of belonging to the setting.

We illustrate with two examples, first in the butcher shop and then in the university setting, to show how androcentrism is manifested and contributes to the replication of gender inequalities. Our examples indicate how assumptions about men's bodies determine the temporal and spatial structure of the workplace, in particular the expectations towards behaviour, endurance, and relationship to work time (see Dinh, Strazdins, & Welsh, 2017). From the butcher shop ethnographic data, the first author notes[5]:

> I arrive at 5.30 AM at the butcher shop, which gives me just enough time to put on my work clothes, a second pair of trousers and three sweaters, before we start. [. . .] It's below zero outside and barely warmer inside as there is no heating, and the windows are open. [. . .] The meat is almost frozen and hard to penetrate. My hands, my legs and feet are freezing. [. . .] After barely 45 minutes, the chainmail apron begins to weigh heavily on my body. My shoulders go down and my nose is running. I feel nothing in my hands due to the cold and force I had to use. I finish my first piece when the others start their fourth or fifth. [. . .] It is now 7.15 AM and I am exhausted. I should definitely say something, but I am embarrassed and continue my work.

The temperature, the weight of the chainmail, the early start time, the endurance required, as well as the speed of the work, are all uncomfortable. The ethnographer's embarrassment comes from the sense of being singularly put off by the conditions, because the other four butchers were getting along silently with the conditions. On the material dimension, butcher's protective gear is heavy and assumes a body frame that can handle the weight from the shoulders, a centre of gravity located in the chest. The weight and size of the tools assume large hands and high upper body strength. Also, the height of the worktable is designed around average heights for male bodies. No technologically feasible adjustments are made, like providing warmers in boots or gloves or adjustable work-benches. These components are associated with gender-unequal social structures (Alesina, Giuliano, & Nunn, 2013) and indicate gender-blindness in this workplace culture that produces a 'one-size-fits-men' approach (Criado Perez, 2019).

The physical challenges are not constrained to a blue-collar work environment. The university setting contains time assumptions and endurance demands that can be attributed to androcentrism as well. Women professors described their workdays as including meetings lasting four hours and

more, regularly going to seven and eight hours, with no breaks, and scheduled at the end of standard working hours, so beginning in the late afternoon and going until 10 or 11 at night. The women describe themselves 'holding out': 'I always take something with me to drink, because I can't hold out that long without water', says Professor 1. From a different faculty, professor 2 admits 'We're sitting there since 2 PM until 7 PM and there's still nothing to drink, I find that pretty hard to take. No [breaks either], we hold out'. Both mention that they could imagine and wish for a more humane experience with breaks and drinks, 'but no': 'I think it would be good for the culture if we had a 15-minute break between the meetings somehow and there would be something to drink and an open-faced sandwich or something. I think we could all afford that financially. But no'. (Professor 1). Revealing the thoughts of colleagues, Professor 2 reports 'but "no, there's nothing to drink, this is just business"'. The 'But no' comes across as a final word, the answer from an ultimate authority, the androcentric frame that denies accommodation of human bodily needs. Many of the women professors state that the long and late meetings are a requirement of the job. Their acceptance of the situation is evidence of the presence of the 'ideal worker' model that intertwines masculinity with availability at work (Brumley, 2014; Crofts & Coffey, 2017; Williams, 2000). Recall that these women are a five percent minority in their workplace among their status group and thus often the only woman in the room at their level.

Among professors, a lack of material resources, particularly the lack of drink and food, creates physical discomfort and reinforces the assumption of mind-body dualism: that people in these jobs should be beyond materiality, fully in their intellects and not of, or even acknowledging, the body. Stoical suffering is required from the good worker who accepts conditions as they are, however inhospitable. Bodily needs like hunger, thirst, and the need for restroom breaks are completely unaccounted for; the women professors explain that leaving for such reasons would show 'weakness'.

The existing gender order about who does what kind of work is embedded in the androcentric design – in one case of the killing and cutting floor and in the other case at the university with the professorial responsibilities oriented towards extended time and exclusive devotion (Blair-Loy, 2005). We note that along the butcher industry chain from killing to selling and along the chain of processing from large carcasses to small parts and packaging, the gender proportion changes from all male to almost all female. Similarly, along the educational workplace administrative structure from professors to secretaries, and within the educational system from professors to students, the gender proportion also changes from heavily male to more heavily female (European Commission, 2019).

Along the enactment dimension, we see acts of complicity with the gender order from men and women. The enactment of workday starting times and meeting times is performing and demonstrating availability. This is especially clear with the choice of times and the extended length of university meetings. The timing demonstrates and ensures that the attendees have no other priorities or responsibilities and can be seen as a gatekeeping ritual or selection strategy to keep only the type of people in professorships who can devote all their time to paid work. The women professors' explanations indicate that meetings are not seen as part of the normal workday but rather something extra that must wait until their tasks within their own research environments are completed, even though the meetings are required by law. Evening hours therefore become the 'new normal', and anyone who says anything against it automatically signals their exclusion from that elite class. A woman professor reported that the staff and students once requested a change to the meeting time, to be during the day, because they had family responsibilities to attend to, but the male professors outvoted them and kept the meetings in the evening. Many women also reported at the university that they were addressed as 'Herr Prof. Dr'., that the first assumption from administration was that they must be male. This is another indicator of androcentrism in the system, that women are invisible and even those who are there are assumed in formal address to be male.

Apprehension about appearing weak keeps women silent in both settings. In the butcher setting, the first author felt strong pressure not to show discomfort while no one else

complained. The first author as a female researcher in the butcher workplace did not say anything out of reluctance to conform to the stereotype that she often heard on all the fieldsites where she was doing observations: women are considered weak and inadequate for deboning carcasses and not a good fit to become 'real butchers'. This apprehension led her to adapt her behaviour and thus conform to the codes of the field (Golde, 1970). The women professors reported the same reluctance in the university setting. Because of the expectation on men to keep silent about discomfort, and their power positions, others feel compelled to comply or risk outing themselves as not belonging. Through this mechanism, the environments remain uncomfortable for everyone. The women in our settings reacted to the associations about women's inability to do the work. They therefore enacted the gender order by participating the way the ideal (male) worker is expected to, that is, being stoic and holding out through the discomfort. One professor reflected, 'on some workdays, it's difficult for me to even go to the toilet. Isn't it terrible? But we ourselves are to blame. We have to sometimes say, excuse me, I need 3 minutes. That is something that we women have to learn. To take the time'. (Professor 11: 20). The individual sense of blame and responsibility that this professor articulates hides the structural aspects at play and removes the opportunity to recognize the structure and to change it.

Second Mechanism of the gender order: agentic masculinity

A second aspect of the gender order is agentic masculinity and the female as the passive object: the male is framed as the initiator, actor, subject, and the female as the passive object, the one who is acted upon. Here we place the phenomenon of the male gaze, male as sexual, and the male as the one in power (Ponterotto, 2016; Wright, 2016). Agentic masculinity mobilizes an old stereotype that divides individuals into two separate groups, male and female, and associates them with different intentions and sensitivities and exoticism. The gender order is maintained in that men are portrayed as the actors and subjects, not the objects.

In the first example from the butcher occupation, sexual desire is framed as masculine and, moreover, unilateral. Andreas, a butcher and managing director at a slaughterhouse, feeds into the idea that men are the initiators of sex while women would be devoid of sexual appetite and simply accept or suffer the desires of their spouses. From the field notes:

> During a break, I discuss with Andreas the impact of his work on his private life. He tells me that every Monday he must get up at 3 AM and therefore goes to bed at around 7 PM on Sundays: "Monday evening I am exhausted, on Mondays I don't touch my wife and leave her alone!" He has a good laugh. I do not know what to say and remain silent.

Andreas enacts a shared practical knowledge, that of male as initiators. His comments make sense in light of such a conception of male and female sexuality and appears therefore 'natural'. By saying 'I' don't touch 'my' wife, Andreas decides whether anything happens and enacts in the meantime the definition of sexual desire as unilateral. Another example from the butcher fieldsites indicates a similar objectivation of the female while portraying the male as the active part: during a training session with apprentices the instructor explained how to prepare a piece of beef shank. While giving technical instructions, he was kneading the meat and pressed it down on the table several times, and then said: 'by the time you will have your first girlfriend, you will realize how much flesh enjoys being touched!'

Another example from the university setting of agentic masculinity is the frequently-described vocal dominance of men in the meetings: Professor 1 reported, 'I notice really often, they speak over each other. I would never do that. When there's a tremendously agitated jumbled-up discussion, I am quiet and raise my hand and wait until the man running the meeting brings the group into line. Whoever is loudest and jumps into a pause first gets the floor'. Another professor noticed that 'a man, who bangs on the table with his fist, is assertive. A woman who does that is considered hysterical' (Professor 8).

A professor from a natural science department reports the difficulty of being taken seriously as a colleague:

'alone in the way we show up, we wear jewelry, we make ourselves look nice, the men are happy to see us in the first instance. They look at us, not only what does she have in her head, but how is she decorated. One cannot avoid it, they are going to look, that is the nature of the situation. The game between man and woman is very old' (Professor 11).

In another example from the university, a professor describes how she feels about the way the university portrays women as objects of the male gaze. The technical university makes a folder highlighting the women professors, one page per woman professor featuring professional photographs of the woman, her educational and work biography, and quotes of her life philosophy. The intention is to frame women as 'role models' or to counter the impression that, with 95% male professors, perhaps no women work here, but the consequence of presenting the women professors in a folder together is othering the women and normalizing the men professors, who number in the hundreds rather than, as is the case with women, fewer than two dozen. One woman professor describes her sense of the folder:

It's nice to read something about my women colleagues, so I wanted to read this from the beginning. But I found it still a zoo. A big zoo. 'There you can see the zebras. There aren't many here, and they have this special status as rarities.' . . . . There you can read what kind of nutcases there are. . . . It's really like a zoo. Like rare diseases. It's somehow pornographic, and voyeuristic, and it disturbs me that only the *women* tell where they were born and what they studied. (Professor 5)

A colleague from another department asks rhetorically, 'why do they do a folder for the women? And not for the men? Who is interested in looking at such a folder? We women? Yeah, right' (Professor 11). This university example highlights the structural element that considers the group of men as 'neutral' or 'universal' (Mechanism 1, Androcentrism) and entitled to peruse the 'zoo' (Mechanism 2, agentic masculinity). The folder is distributed to the department heads and university leadership, overwhelmingly men. Men are the 'normal' case, the actors, the entitled. For the women in this workplace, the dominant defining feature is their femaleness and therefore their 'otherness'. The gender equality commission who publishes the book frames women as objects, thereby contributing to the excluded status of women, women as 'pretty pictures', exposing them and making them vulnerable to interpretations and critique by the unseen observer. The creation and distribution of such a book by the equal opportunities office is a sign of the gender order enacted concretely. It only makes sense to single out women for a featured folder, and a folder rather than a book to account for the high turnover of women at this organization, where the gender order is active as a structural background exigency, and in doing the folder, it is actively re-enacting the gender order.

Third Mechanism of the gender order: Women's work as separate and devalued

While the second mechanism identifies a strong power differential between men and women, the third mechanism focuses on the translation of this differential into a devaluation of the feminine. The female is boundaried out of male territory because she, or her work, is contaminating or devalued. Participation in the male sphere is protected and patrolled, and the female sphere is disregarded and demeaned (Avril, 2008; Benelli, 2011; Galerand & Kergoat, 2014). The patrolling and demeaning can be done through humour, belittling conversations, or exclusion.

From the field notes of the butcher occupation, an example of belittling or degrading the work of women in the form of humour:

We are cleaning the machines. Raphael mentions the Winter Olympics that are about to start and says: 'I will be watching ski jumping, but certainly no women's curling, I am really not interested in this, I already see my wife sweeping all the time at home!'

Raphael's remark makes sense against the statistical fact that women perform most of the household chores and reproductive work in the contemporary Swiss context (BFS, Bundesamt für Statistik, 2019).

The unequal distribution of domestic work here becomes an institutional arrangement (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and gives meaning to what Raphael says, forming a joke. Gender is here a source of meaning-making which is used by Raphael to amend his work. By doing so, he enacts the gender order and thereby actualizes it. Gender stereotypes seem to have a latent function that makes it possible to 'have a good laugh' or 'decompress' at the end of the day. It is particularly striking that Raphael considers curling to be the same as doing housework and therefore associates professional curling sports women with domestic labour which he dismissively is not interested in.

More generally speaking, the activities associated with, and more often carried out by, male butchers (deboning of carcasses, slaughtering) are those most valorized and praised within the butcher occupation (Zinn, 2017). Female butchers therefore have a hard time being accepted as 'real professionals' and are relegated to less prestigious activities (preparing and selling meat products). This logic of male professionalism and female devaluation is so strongly anchored within the workplace culture that the figure of the 'good butcher' is strongly masculine gendered (Zinn, 2019).

The devaluing of work along domestic, secretarial types of tasks or work 'typically' associated with women extends to professors at the university setting. Women professors also reported verbal put-downs, such as the time 'a colleague said to me in a conversation, "oh, little treasure, you don't understand". I said, "I am not your little treasure, I am a colleague and I would ask that we work together as equals". He said, "Oh, little one, yeah, whatever"'.[6] (Professor 12). Another professor reported her sense of disapproval and the diminishment of her work because of it being done by a woman: 'I am often ridiculed, because they don't think what I do is scientific enough. What I do is popular and that means I am carrying the science out into the community. But that is not reputable. When it's done by a woman, that is then doubly unreputable' (Professor 10). She gives a concrete example of her work being devalued and unsupported, even though it is more scientific than a 'game of golf': 'My rector says to me that the university has no money for the reception for an international congress that I am bringing here, with 200 people from 15 nations. But there is money for the Rector's cup golf game. That's not my world and not my value system' (Professor 10).

One of the women professors reported what happened when she was new to the university:

'I was at a reception. There was [Mr. University President]. I tried to talk to him, but he didn't notice me. Instead, I got an invitation to a coffee klatch with his wife. I am employed! I don't sit around in the afternoons having coffee and pastry!' (Professor 9).

The university president's mental categories feature women as passive and not deserving of contact with him, despite the job status of the woman professor. Rather than seeing himself as a peer of the woman professor, he sees his wife as the peer and relegates the woman colleague to the status of passive female. The woman professor is criticizing the rejection from the male president in her relaying of the situation and therefore showing resistance. But the words she chooses, 'I don't sit around', also imply her own devaluation of women's activities which complies with the current gender order and participates in its reinforcement.

Several women professors observe that women are expected to perform devalued tasks such as writing the minutes, clearing the dishes, and providing something to drink:

It's interesting, if you're in a group, who writes the minutes? It's always a woman. Why should I write the minutes? These are the typical cases of discrimination, that the women themselves contribute to.[7] What I've also noticed is that when women are in a meeting where there is coffee, women always collect the dishes at the end. The women colleagues, the women professors. Men simply leave the room. (Professor 5)

Another woman professor reported, 'I have not ever seen a male soul set the table. Yeah' (Professor 6). Women professors noticed clear gender-driven divisions of labour where, for instance, women take care of the dishes while men leave the room. It is taken for granted by women and men alike in the workplace that the women do domestic and secretarial/clerical tasks such as writing the minutes and cleaning dishes after a meeting. The relegation of wives, but not husbands, to

a separate grouping to which even women professors are considered to be more appropriately placed shows further evidence of the placement women according to their gender role and position in relation to men, rather than professional category groupings. This silent enactment and a division of labour without consultation show the pervasive character of the gender order and its impact on the social world, the reference to a pre-existing structural framework and the micro-level (re) enactment of that frame in interaction.

Discussion and conclusion

In this paper, we indicate that the gender order is an organizing principle permeating and transcending social class, temporalities and national contexts while manifesting itself in context-specific ways with evidence from two research projects, carried out by two scholars in different national and occupational contexts. We also reveal the extent to which gender differences are deeply embedded in the organizational structures of the occupational contexts studied and that gender is therefore a part of the organizational relations and experience at work. According to Martin (2001, 2006), gender dynamics at work make women workers feel incompetent, exhausted or devalued. These consequences are related to the three mechanisms that pervade both research settings[8]: androcentrism, agentic masculinity, and female devaluation. Each of the mechanisms shows the gender order's pervasive character and its impact on how people think and act and the ways in which the mechanism is re-created in individual interaction and interpretation.

The first mechanism makes it clear that in both workplaces, androcentric assumptions about the work have become accepted as standard and complaining would mean weakness or failing the expected standard. Work design reifies gendered expectations that are accepted and unquestioned. For men, complaining might mark demotion, requesting hand-warmers at the cutting floor, requesting water at meetings, or accepting the proposal to change the meeting time from evenings, violate the symbolic language generated by the working conditions that creates an ascetic type of masculinity transcending bodily or social needs (Hofmeister, 2015). In the second mechanism, it is assumed that sex-segregation of tasks and roles is the norm and that men are the active part and act as initiators, while women become objects for the male gaze. By granting men agency and activity and relegating women at work and at home to the passive object, in the form of a sexual, secretarial or catering service provider to create the time and space for men to do their 'important' work, the gender order is highlighted and reinforced. In mechanism three, this separation is evaluated on a hierarchy and this mechanism highlights how women's work is lower on the hierarchy; treated as separate and devalued. The division of labour is enacted and the unequal distribution of domestic work even in the workplace becomes an institutional arrangement. Figure 1 illustrates the simultaneous and sequential way the three mechanisms relate and reproduce the symbolic order of gender.

In all the examples presented, gender is put into practice, which then contributes to form a gender order. It is in this sense that gendered assumptions both impact the interactional scene and reinforce the gender order. In the meantime, such 'micro acts' are necessarily already informed by a larger set of rules (Martin, 2004, p. 1264) that serve as background expectancies. Regarding workplace cultures, this means that gendered practices both reflect the overall gender order and actively help to (re-)create and shape it. A thread in the observations is that humour can be used as a tool to keep the gender order secure: some of the examples show how gendered (and sexualized) stereotypes seem to have a latent function that makes it possible to 'have a good laugh' at the end of the day. Such stereotypes serve thereby as background expectancies against which a joke 'makes sense'. A justification in gendered terms therefore appears both satisfactory and convincing. Examples of gender-stereotype-complicit jokes were also witnessed in the university setting and point to an area for further research.

What makes the gender order so pervasive is that this order is often not questioned, but taken as independent of the individuals involved: 'Gender structure at the interactional and institutional levels so thoroughly organizes our work, family, and community lives that even

those who reject gender inequality in principle sometimes end up being compelled by the "logic" of gendered situations (...)' (Risman, 2004, pp. 34–35). Background expectancies are often seen-but-unnoticed, thereby reified and accepted, which creates persistent exclusion and inequality. Individualization of inequalities (Crofts & Coffey, 2017) and self-blaming is a core component of enacting the gender order, precisely because the structure is not seen or questioned. Both women and men are impacted by the social normativity of the gender order which allocates different roles to them. In fact, the gender order reinforces the separation and the gender ascription of life spheres. Even though there is potential for change in the gender order, we did not identify any crisis tendencies in our fieldsites. When several women professors did speak up by questioning some of the working conditions, these initiatives remained at the individual level, often with self-blame attached and therefore hiding the structural problems. No sustained modes of resistance were identified. We suggest that both genders reinforce gendered assumptions because of the background expectancies that are translated as individualized pressure to conform to the broader gender order, that in turn produce the material structures of these workplaces as androcentric. Men are expected to keep silent about discomfort and others feel compelled to comply or risk signalling a lack of belonging to the setting. The lack of comfort in the work design in this sense contributes to the persistence of toxic masculinity (Harrington, 2020): power over others and discomfort are pieces of the enactment of the gender order. This is also why the social pressure for men not to show 'weakness' – like feeling the cold or solving hunger or thirst – appears to be stronger than the will to change the context in the first place. As the dichotomous structure of the gender binary is in the process of being questioned by feminist, queer, and trans movements, future research will show if the gender order can be sufficiently challenged to lose some of its relevance and power in shaping the social world.

By combining a phenomenological and a structural perspective, our integrative framework enables us to consider gender as both done *in situ* and as shared practical knowledge that impacts how individuals think and act. We argue that while gender is being done in and through interaction, doing tends to fit into a standard format of activity and reasoning that informs our actions (Goffman, 1981). If the gender order is locally accomplished, it goes beyond its presence here and now (Schütz, 1970; Schütz & Luckmann, 1973), and if gender is actualized on an individual level, it acts to constrain this individual agency at the structural level (Connell, 1987). Articulating a structural and phenomenological conception of gender also shows that structural forces can be visible through qualitative examples: Gender framed as an order shows gender's big-picture impact on the situation under study. As structural forces reveal themselves in the situation itself, the constructed boundary often separating micro and macro sociological approaches is less convincing. Our integrative approach articulating the mechanisms and the way they may interplay with the concrete examples in workplaces contributes to social theory more generally and to a better understanding how gender inequalities are perpetuated and a path to alternatives at workplaces and in the broader society.

Notes

1. We deliberately speak here of only two gender categories: The gender order, as historically inherited, does not include the idea of gender being fluid. A strict bi-categorization is still the organizing principle and impacts how people identify as women or men and how they are expected to behave. See Josephson, Einarsdóttir, and Sigurðardóttir (2016) for a critique of the dichotomous structure of the gender binary and how feminist, queer, and trans movements challenge the existing gender order, a challenge still in process.
2. By this we mean bringing the lived experience of the people studied into the foreground and describing, as accurately as possible, the phenomenon under study, by refraining from pre-ordained analytical categories (Groenewald, 2004; Gubrium & Holstein, 2000).

3. This means the participants in a given situation, while being constrained by the framing of the situation, can still impact that same frame though their actions. This is an important point and highlights that the gender order does not impose a total constraint, nor does it produce any mechanical conformity with it.

4. We recognize that while meat processing is a large industry and work setting that deserves sociological study as would any other, it is also an industry increasingly under scrutiny and critique as concerns about animal rights, worker safety, and environmental damage. These concerns are important but lie outside the scope of this paper.

5. The vignettes from the butcher fieldsites are directly taken from Zinn's fieldnotes, translated by the author from French into English. Quotes from the women professors are translated from the German into English by Hofmeister. In order to preserve our respondents' identity, all names have been changed.

6. The original German: "'Ah, Schätzchen das verstehst du nicht.' Dann hab ich gesagt, ich bin nicht dein Schätzchen, ich bin eine Kollegin und möchte gerne, dass wir auf Augenhöhe arbeiten. 'Ach, Kleines, das ist doch jajaja.'"

7. Self-blame of women for their circumstances is evident from this statement. This individualization of inequalities (Crofts & Coffey, 2017) is a core component of enacting the gender order.

8. We do not imply that the gender order is necessarily the same whatever the cultural and national context, but we find it interesting to see where there are consistencies even across socio-cultural categories (see also p. 5).

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Contribution of each author

Zinn has outlined a first draft of the paper, featuring her set of data and the basis of the theoretical framework. Hofmeister added both her data and development on the theoretical part. Both authors helped analyze each other's data cases. Shaping the analysis and writing was equally shared. Ongoing discussions enabled the authors to make this paper a real 'joint venture'.

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