

## Metaphorically speaking: Constructions of gender and career in the Danish financial sector

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### Abstract

*The Danish financial sector is one in which the male occupation of managerial positions still predominates, with women tending to occupy lower-ranking jobs. Previous studies in this field have pointed to biological and cultural forces as determining factors in men's and women's unequal positions. However, this position has been partly rejected by recent research within social constructivism which holds that in interaction men and women are positioned in certain ways due to dominant gendered discourses that can either be upheld or negotiated through the adoption of gendered subject positions. The article takes its starting point in this discussion, presenting an analysis of how in the pursuit of careers, men and women in the financial sector may metaphorically and discursively construct career possibilities and constraints, and with that the concepts of sex and gender. Furthermore, the article assesses the extent to which this construction may influence their chances of obtaining managerial positions. The data for the analysis consist of three focus group interviews conducted in a large Danish bank.*

KEYWORDS: METAPHOR, DISCOURSE, CAREER, GENDERED LANGUAGE

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## Introduction

In recent years, a much debated issue in Danish media has been, on the one hand, the difficulty in attracting women to top-managerial positions in business and, on the other, the difficulty in providing the opportunity for women to move up the career ladder. Studies suggest that, to a large extent, both problems emerge from a traditional business perspective in which masculine norms and values play a salient role in determining the constraints within which people think about making a career (Wirth 2002). In this respect, the Danish financial sector is a case in point. This sector is defined by a long-lasting tradition for male occupation of managerial positions and for female occupation of lower-ranking jobs, making it extremely difficult for women to be promoted and move beyond the infamous 'glass-ceiling'. A recent study of sex and gender in the Danish financial sector confirms this premise (Ellehave and Søndergaard 2006), indicating that a predominant factor in upholding the segregation between male and female employees is the combination of biological and cultural forces which act as constraints on the way that the relation between women/men and female/male is perceived. This means that although most people in present-day Western society acknowledge that men may actually act in feminine ways and women in masculine, there is a huge web of underlying assumptions about the connections between sex and behaviour, guiding and sustaining more traditional interpretations of what may be considered 'normal' and expected behaviour for men and women.

Informed by the above, this article sets out to examine how these stereotypical interpretations can be both maintained and challenged in language and discourse. Such an examination supports the claim that discourse is action, ancillary in upholding power structures in social groups such as organisations (Fairclough 1992; Van Dijk 1997a; Wodak and Meyer 2002). However, the focus here is not on all features of discourse, but limited to embedded metaphorical constructions, which, as will be detailed below, are receiving increased scholarly attention as significant markers of ideology.

In this article, this focus on metaphor will form the basis of an analysis of interview data collected in a large Danish bank, offering in-house management training programmes to existing and future managers. In the interviews, male and female middle managers discuss among other things the pros and cons of making a career in the bank, including the different roles implicitly and explicitly assigned to men and women. The outcome of the analysis will demonstrate the significant influence exerted by metaphorical constructions on the way we understand and communicate about sex and gender, pointing to gender issues being cultural in origin but also highly determined by the immediate context.

## Theoretical background

Within a discursive framework, the role of metaphor in sustaining and challenging power relations has received increased attention by scholars in recent years (e.g. Charteris-Black 2004; Chilton 1996; Goatly 2007). This is first and foremost due to the role of metaphor as one of providing a framework for understanding and explaining concepts, but also increasingly due to the acknowledgement of its persuasive and argumentative power in various contexts. Thus, with the recognition that metaphors may serve several functions in discourse, based equally on cognitive, linguistic and pragmatic resources, comes a wider scope for assessing metaphors' persuasive and ideological potential and hence, their ability to maintain or challenge power structures. In this perspective, metaphor may become the conceptual means through which established (cultural) constructions of sex and gender can be perpetuated, limiting the scope of action for both men and women, but it may also be a contextual and discursive tool for challenging these constructions, leading to new understandings of the roles of men and women.

In gender and language research, the *analysis of metaphor* as a means of sustaining and maintaining women's inferior position in society is not a new phenomenon (see e.g. Hines 1999; Koller 2004). The focal point of these studies has been on constructions in natural language (English) and 'global' discourses (media), and this way, they take a more generic approach to gender and language. Other studies have analysed the metaphorical constructions in on-going, localised discourse, demonstrating that the construction of gender in small, company internal groups, or communities of practice, may impact equally much on the perception of gender roles within the larger organisation and companies (e.g. Wilson 1992). It is in this respect that the present study is highly relevant, contributing insight to the way metaphors may help promote and sustain (stereotypical) constructions of gender, potentially making it difficult for women to pursue a career in certain fields.

Over the years, research on sex, gender and language has come up with different explanations as to why men and women are positioned differently in society, with women tending to take up the inferior position. Starting with the Danish linguist Otto Jespersen in the early 1900s, women's language and hence, position in society was explained by reference to so-called deficit models, which saw female language as an inferior version of male language (Litosseliti 2006). In later research, primarily in the 1970s and 1980s, models of dominance (e.g. Spender 1980) and models of difference (e.g. Tannen 1990) prevailed, explaining the difference between female and male language as one of a social-order deficiency in which men exercise dominance over women in interaction, or

as one of acculturation and socialisation differences between boys and girls, leading to different linguistic and conversational characteristics.

Common to these approaches is the assumption that a binary structure exists between the sexes, upholding and reinforcing the female-male dichotomy. In recent decades, however, studies have demonstrated that this is a somewhat simplistic view, and that differences in gender and language cannot be explained *solely* through dominance, culture and socialisation but must be studied *together with* intersecting social variables such as race, class, age, ethnicity, etc., i.e. gender and language must be contextualised (Wodak 1997; Sunderland 2004; Litosseliti 2006; Mullany 2007). An important contribution in this turn away from essentialism is that of Judith Butler (2006 [1990]) and her concept of performativity. In Butler's view, gender is not a given social category but a social construct achieved in (inter)action, i.e. gender is an identity individuals achieve by repeating the performance of particular acts over time, allowing them to display feminine or masculine traits unconstrained by predetermined categories. In her account of performativity, Butler also argues in favour of sex being considered a social construct and not a biological category. However, most scholars in later social constructivist approaches to sex and gender are hesitant to adopt this radical position and prefer to see sex as a label that is assigned to children at birth, forming the basis for the gender identity they achieve later in the socialisation process (Mullany 2007). Thus, a number of recent publications in the social-constructivist vein (e.g. Wodak 1997; Litosseliti and Sunderland 2002; Sunderland 2004), argue that in interaction men and women are positioned in certain ways due to dominant gendered discourses, while at the same time they adopt particular gendered subject positions, which reflect access to a range of masculinities and femininities. This position, known as the 'discursive accomplishment' of gender, allows men and women the possibility of producing both similar and different gendered discourses, confirming or challenging dominant discourses, and thus, to a certain extent excluding the aforementioned *a priori* binary difference between female and male language (Litosseliti 2006). This said, there is recognition that in everyday life gender continues to play a salient role in people's ways of handling and understanding social interaction (Holmes and Marra 2004), and that '... many people really do find it essential to be able to pigeonhole others into the normative, binary set of female-male, and they find linguistic or social behaviors that threaten the apparent stability of this 'essential' distinction extremely disturbing' (Holmes and Meyerhoff 2003: 9). As will become apparent in the analyses below, this inclination to frame men and women along a predefined dichotomy of male and female is also to be found in the interviews. However, the analyses will also demonstrate that when talking about their own abilities, the male and female respondents take on a more nuanced position on the gender identities men and women can subscribe to.

## Metaphor theory

In its original form, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, as developed by Lakoff and Johnson (2003 [1980]), holds that metaphors are primarily cognitive, not primarily linguistic. Thus, metaphors are considered coherent conceptual systems through which we structure and understand abstract concepts. These systems are tightly structured mappings, by means of which we transfer our understanding from a physical domain of experience onto a less tangible, less well-known domain. This process of transfer is known as embodied meaning. The result is one in which our realisation about abstract concepts is conditioned by our previous experience and interaction with spatial as well as ontological entities (objects and substances) in a cultural as well as a social context. A salient point is the understanding that metaphorical mappings are not just surface-level analogies between two isolated categories, but the intricate matching of similar structures. For instance, the image schema of CONTAINER derives from our experience as physical beings with a bounding surface, the skin, which sets us off from the rest of the world and defines what is inside and outside the body. This schema provides the underlying structure for many of our metaphorical constructions, and hence understandings, of e.g. human life. In actual terms, this may lead to a variety of expressions such as ‘Her life is *full of joy*’, which highlights particular aspects of life while leaving out others (Lakoff and Turner 1989; Lakoff 1993; Lakoff and Johnson 2003 [1980]; Holmgreen and Vestergaard 2009).

In the years that have followed Lakoff and Johnson’s publication of the theory, much research has pointed to metaphors deriving their meaning and function not only from culturally and linguistically embedded cognitive sources, as Lakoff and Johnson initially suggested, but also from the discursive contexts in which they are used. This has led to criticism of the theory for the lack of sufficient focus on the dialectics between the situational, social context and language and thought (see e.g. Chilton 1996; Eubanks 2000; Charteris-Black 2004; Holmgreen 2006, 2008).

There are a number of studies that have a direct bearing on the discussion in this article. These studies (Cameron 2003; Cameron and Deignan 2006) are arguing that instead of viewing metaphors as overarching conceptual systems, uni-directionally realised through language, they must be seen as emerging from an intricate two-way interaction between language, thinking and contextual factors, being in this way both conceptual, linguistic and socio-cultural. This, according to Cameron and Deignan, is known as ‘talking-and-thinking-in-interaction’ or as an emergentist perspective of metaphor where the ‘ideational content of a metaphor is not processed separately from its linguistic form, but the two are learnt together, stored together and produced together in on-line talk’ (Cameron and Deignan 2006: 675). The underlying argument for view-

ing metaphor in this way is that like many other uses of language, metaphor is meant for people to use for certain discourse purposes, expressing affect, attitude and ideational content. This approach allows metaphors to emerge as ‘metaphoremes’, i.e. metaphors in which the language and conceptual content have stabilised, from particular discourse events or as a result of changes in the social environment, developing into short- or even long-term preferred ways of expressing metaphorical ideas within and across discourse communities (Cameron and Deignan 2006).

Returning to the discussion of gender, we see that the combination of cognitive and pragmatic approaches to metaphor can be useful for analysing how gender is conceptualised and articulated in the discourse event. Moreover, this ties in well with Van Dijk’s (1997b, 2002) formulation of a more socio-cognitive CDA which seeks to explain the way people go about communicative situations through the connection of the social to the cognitive. It also accords with the communities of practice approach where people with shared domains of interest develop a shared repertoire of resources, such as experiences, stories, tools and ways of addressing recurring problems (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1998; Wenger 1999). In the present context of a group of middle managers in a Danish bank, we can use these approaches to determine whether in talking about careers and gender, the respondents draw on societally established metaphorical constructions of gender, thus perpetuating dominant constructions and discourses, or whether, in interaction, metaphors evolve and change to form a localised, and hence locally accepted set of stabilities and resources within this community. In either case, it is assumed that with the dialectic relationship between discourse and social action, these constructions will potentially have significant influence on the possibilities for men and women of making a career in the bank, since the respondents form part of a growing group of influential middle managers.

## Data and methods

The data used for the analysis are a number of transcribed focus group interviews conducted in a large Danish bank in 2007, in total 81,637 words. The interviews were undertaken with a group of existing and future bank managers participating in an in-house management training programme. This programme is offered to employees in the bank who have demonstrated an interest in becoming or who are already managers and is meant as preparation for occupying management positions in the bank at a later stage, or as an upgrade of present managers’ knowledge of management principles and development. The interviews were initiated by the bank in its efforts to uncover opportunities

and obstacles to male and female employees' career paths and were, entirely on the bank's initiative, conducted with two all-men and one all-women group, involving six men (male interview I), eleven men (male interview II), and six women (female interview I), respectively. All interviews were supervised by a facilitator who is also employed by the bank, and who handed over the interviews to the researchers for further analysis.<sup>1</sup>

This arrangement presents the analyst with a number of obvious limitations as to the reach of the analyses and their results. First of all, the organisation of the respondents into all-men and all-women groups is likely to accentuate gender differences by offering a setting that may further a discourse considered typical of men and women, respectively, whereas mixed-sex interviews may have provided a less dichotomised picture of discourses and metaphorical constructions in the bank at large. Therefore, to gain full insight into the constructions of gender among middle managers in the bank, interviews of mixed-sex groups would also be needed. However, if we accept the premise that discourses, and thus metaphors, are catalysts for social action, it is reasonable to assume that the way women and men choose to talk about their own and the opposite sex even in 'arranged' settings like the ones detailed here has a bearing on the way they behave and interact with colleagues in their daily working life.

Furthermore, the fact that the analyst was not present at the time of the interviews makes it difficult to ascertain the effect of contextual factors such as the setting of the room as well as posture and facial expressions, etc. on the dialogue between the respondents. Consequently, the analyst will instead have to rely on, among other things, knowledge of the basic cognitive content of the instantiated conceptual metaphors, the larger social or societal context and its influence on metaphor use as well as markers in the text in her analysis of the metaphorical expressions and their meaning content.

The search for metaphorical expressions in the data was carried out manually in order to secure the uncovering and interpretation of expressions in long stretches of text; in this way retrieving enough co-text to be able to make a fair assessment of whether the expression is one derived from constructions within the discourse and the group, or whether the expression is one derived from a more general level of socially and inter-discursively accepted constructions of gender. Moreover, in order to be able to support or reject the interpretations made, the retrieved metaphorical expressions were also searched for in the most extensive databases of the Danish language, Korpus 90 and Korpus 2000, which comprise more than 50 million words from texts written between 1988 and 1992 as well as between 1998 and 2002, respectively.

## Analysis

At the initial sorting of the data, which was based on the focus of the interviews, i.e. the middle managers' perceptions of managerial roles and identities as well as their experience of career-promoting and/or career-restricting factors in the bank, a number of issues emerged, demonstrating significant differences in the perceptions and experience of the male and female respondents – differences confirming that in everyday life people still tend to assign gender roles in terms of a binary set of female-male. Thus, the male respondents, for example, advance personal characteristics stereotypically associated with male behaviour as decisive for their success in getting promoted. These include being self-confident, goal oriented, ambitious and hard working. For the female respondents, however, being a 'natural' leader, honest, open-minded and confidence-inspiring count as important characteristics for making a career, once more confirming gender stereotypes (as defined in e.g. Holmes 2006).

In terms of defining roles and identities, a number of generalisations also tended to come to the fore, especially when the respondents talked about management and gender in overall terms. Thus, the male respondents, for example, see their own sex as the obvious choice for occupying a management position as they generally believe that men possess all or most of the qualifications traditionally associated with and required for being a manager. Likewise, they claim that women are unlikely to be qualified for management positions, either because they lack the ambition (due to them presumably being mothers first and managers second) or because they are not 'members' of the network required for being promoted.

In general, the female respondents disagree with their male colleagues on the description of women as being unfit for being managers – especially to the extent that this is a result of them being mothers. Instead, although they construct 'the typical bank manager' along the same lines as their male colleagues, using this as a part explanation for why women have difficulty in obtaining management positions, the women also stress that if given the chance, women are better managers than most men. In fact, many of the female respondents argue that the stereotypical male qualities (as listed above) provide a less favourable starting point for being a good manager than feminine characteristics.

These initial findings provide the framework for analysing metaphorical constructions in the interviews. The analysis will show that due to the cognitive and pragmatic grounding of metaphors, the stereotypical notions of gender have an impact on the linguistic instantiation of the metaphors used. This means that in recounting their perceptions of and experience with career opportunities in the bank, the respondents choose metaphorical expressions that underline stereotypes to some extent and with that the binary set of male vs. female.



Over the years, scholars in gender and language research (Sunderland 2004) have identified and named a large number of gendered discourses aiming to provide a systematic account of the ways in which gender is constructed and consequently of how dominant discourses may help sustain and promote existing power structures between men and women. In this context, discourse is understood as ‘broad constitutive systems of meaning’ shaping and being shaped by social practices (Sunderland 2004: 6). In light of the above presentation of findings, some of these gendered discourses and their metaphorical realisations are, not surprisingly, also identifiable in the dataset. They include first and foremost a ‘Gender differences’ discourse which, in terms of metaphor, is articulated in different ways. The most thought provoking of these is a lower-order discourse from the male dataset which can be named a ‘Women are chickens’ discourse (for further details, see below). This discourse, it seems, connects to other, less distinctive, but no less powerful, realisations in the male part of the corpus which indirectly support and sustain the notion that women are unlikely to fill management positions satisfactorily. We also find frequent examples of ‘Maternal’ and ‘Birth’ discourses through which women are constructed as ‘natural’ parents and men as ‘natural’ managers. On the one hand, this gives rise to a number of expressions among the men that construct women as being more or less incapacitated during the years of being parents with small children, and on the other, it results in expressions of challenge and difficulty, but not limitations, among the women. Secondly, a large part of the corpus is centred on a ‘Men’s network’ discourse which positions men and women as either inside or outside a sphere of influence, leading to different prospects of promotion and career opportunities.

### **‘Women are chickens’ discourse**

According to the human resources department of the bank, much has been done in recent years to create a workplace environment that encourages both men and women to pursue a management career. This is in acknowledgement of the fact that traditionally women have experienced adverse career possibilities, but also that the Danish financial sector is experiencing increased difficulty in attracting a sufficient number of candidates for higher-ranking jobs. Therefore, the fact that some male middle managers in the bank conceptualise women in derogative terms must be considered highly disadvantageous and unfortunate to the process that the bank has initiated. However, as we shall see, this is a construction only to be found in one of the male groups; a group which is generally marked by a rather coarse way of talking (male interview I). The other male group (male interview II) is less inclined to stereotypical thinking, although still largely adhering to a ‘Gender differences’ discourse.

The first extract from *male interview I* follows a passage in which the six men talk about networks, their members and their use in terms of addressing daily challenges at work and getting promoted:<sup>2</sup>

### Extract 1

Resp. 4 Nå, ja, ja, men mit netværk hænger også sammen med, hvem jeg sidder med. Jeg kommer ikke ud i de der kvindekonflikter. Jeg sidder ikke i hønsegården til daglig.

Well, yes, yes, but my network also depends on who I share the office with. I don't get involved in those female conflicts. I'm not in the chicken run on a daily basis.

In this extract, the respondent introduces the metaphorical phrase *hønsegård* ('chicken run') into the discussion and uses it for constructing an image of women as unintelligent and incessantly talking. This is not a phrase restricted to this interview, but is a fairly typical way of constructing women as gossipy and less intelligent. However, the phrase is taken up by another respondent a little later in the interview – this time with the subsequent reduction into the term *høns* ('chickens'), which allows this respondent to construct different ways of dealing with women as individuals and employees. The respondent explains the use of these terms as a way for men to interact and create a bond of mutual understanding:

### Extract 2

Resp. 7 Vi kan sgu bedre forstå hinanden, når vi siger, jamen, den hønsegård der, hvad fanden gør vi? Skal vi plukke de høns, eller skal vi hakke hovedet af dem, eller hvad skal vi? Der [i netværket] kan man bedre sige de ting, ikke? ... Men når jeg sidder med NN derhjemme, sidder jeg jo ikke og siger de skaldede høns der [om kvinder], så siger man nok lidt mere, der er sgu en pige i afdelingen, det der med forandringsvillighed, det er hun sgu ikke så god til.

I'm damned if we don't understand each other better when we say, well, that chicken run, what the hell are we going to do? Are we going to pluck those chickens, or are we going chop off their heads, or what are we going to do? There [in the network] it is easier to say those things, isn't it? ... But when I'm at home with NN, I don't say those bald chickens [about women], you know, I go more like, there is this girl in the department, this about being willing to change, this she is honestly not very good at.

The introduction of *høns* ('chickens') allows the respondent to make various constructions with verbs and pre-modifiers that are contingent on the situation he describes. Thus, like real chickens he can metaphorically pluck women or chop off their heads, in effect reducing them to dumb animals. Some of these constructions derive from idioms in the Danish language but are not listed in the above lexico-grammatical form in either the Korpus 90 or 2000 data, suggesting that they have emerged in the discursive event for the respondent to ascribe a role of superiority and inferiority to men and women, respectively. In conceptual terms, the expressions derive their meaning from a PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS metaphor which allows the user to conceptualise women in derogative terms through a slide from an evolutionarily higher order (humans/males) into a lower one (chickens). The PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS metaphor forms part of the more general Great Chain of Being<sup>3</sup> metaphor and is often used to 'capture the negative characteristics of human beings' (Kövecses 2002: 125).

In the passages that follow, this construction is not taken up by the other respondents although the discussion continues to focus on networks and their contribution to solving problems on a daily basis. Respondent 4 is, in fact, the only person to take up this construction again, as in the following:

### Extract 3

Resp. 4 Enten så gør vi [mænd] det godt, eller også gør vi det ikke godt. Der er ikke sådan en blød mellemvej. Hvad med dig? Du sidder nede i en XX afdeling, hvor I har hvad? Du omgiver dig med høns til daglig?

Either we [men] do it well or we don't. There is not really a middle course. What about you? You're in an XX department where you have what? You're surrounded by chickens on a daily basis?

...

Der vil hun passe meget bedre ind i det, fordi de i dag sidder seks kvinder dernede, og det var et af mine spørgsmål til NN, ville der gå for meget hønsegård i det?

She would fit much better in there because now they're six women down there, and this was one of my questions for NN, would it be too much of a chicken run?

Although introduced as a means of mutual understanding between men, the use of the derogative metaphorical phrases *hønsegård* ('chicken run') and *høns* ('chickens') to describe women is apparently taking it too far for most of the respondents in the interview. At least, it seems that they disagree with respondent 7 and find it inappropriate in this context to construct women along

these lines. Hence, the phrase *høns* ('chickens') including collocates must be considered a short-term construction which arises in interaction that does not enter the conceptual or linguistic repertoire of the rest of the group to form a metaphoreme or a stable and accepted construction of women.

However, this is not to say that the male respondents are hesitant to assign inferior characteristics to women, only that they seem aware of the implicit codes of good behaviour. Thus, instead of taking up the construction of women as chickens, other and perhaps less controversial metonymic phrases such as *pige* ('girl'), *lillemor* ('mother') and *fruen* ('the missus') are adopted to describe women. As opposed to *høns* ('chickens'), the term *pige* ('girl') is quite frequent across all three interviews as well as the two national corpora, which suggests that although assigning inferior qualities to women, just like *høns* ('chickens') does, this is a generally accepted term among men and women for describing women.

#### 'Men's and women's career' discourse

In *Gendered Talk at Work* (2006), Janet Holmes identifies two sets of variables commonly considered to be a reflection of female and male behaviour, respectively. These variables presume the existence of a binary structure within which men are direct, competitive, autonomous, task/outcome-oriented, referentially oriented, dominate (public) talking time and interrupt aggressively, whereas women are indirect, facilitative, conciliatory, supportive, collaborative, person/process-oriented, affectively oriented, and make minor contributions (in public).

In talking about their career paths, many of the men articulate these variables, sustaining a stereotypical view of men's and women's behaviour and roles in working and family life. The women, however, are less inclined to accept these variables and argue against the constraints on their career possibilities set by expected behaviour and family life.

Across the male interviews, the conceptualisation and articulation of the male variables is visible through the use of various metaphorical expressions. For instance, in the beginning of the interviews the male respondents are asked to give lengthy accounts of who they are and what their position and responsibilities are. In these accounts, they are also encouraged to point to the factors that have provided them with the incentive to pursue a management career. In pointing to these factors, thirteen of the seventeen respondents resort among other things to metaphorical expressions of motion and goal orientation such as the following:

## Extract 4

### Male Intv. I

Resp. 4 Jeg er enormt fremadfokuserende, og jeg vil hellere køre i fjerde gear, end jeg vil køre i tredje gear, og det er ikke altid mine omgivelser, de gerne vil, det kan også godt være, at de gerne vil køre i andet gear.

I'm extremely focused on moving forward, and I'd rather go in third gear than in second gear, and people around me may not always want to do so, it may well be that they'd rather go in second gear.

Resp. 2 Jeg vil gerne videre hele tiden.

I like to move on all the time.

### Male Intv. II

Resp. 3 Og mit eget mål med, at jeg gerne vil have en ledelseskariere, har også betydet noget.

And my own goal of wanting a management career has also meant something.

Resp. 6 Tre ting, der har fremmet mine karriereønsker, det er først og fremmest optagelse på det her XX; det er jeg sikker på, at det virker accelererende.

Three things that have furthered my career wishes, they are first and foremost the admission to this XX; I'm sure it has an accelerating effect.

These expressions would conceptually derive their meaning from VEHICLE and PATH metaphors, or a CAREER IS A JOURNEY metaphor, which involve core conceptual features such as starting locations, end points and forward physical movement (Johnson 1987; Kövecses 2002). Through its association with motion, the CAREER IS A JOURNEY metaphor is closely linked to the need and quest for speed, which is considered to be a fundamental male value (Goatly 2007). Pragmatically, then, they serve the purpose of communicating the adherence to a stereotypical male style of self-assertion, competitiveness and goal orientation that fits well with the general understanding of what men stand for (Goatly 2007) as well as with the personal qualities a prospective manager in the bank is assumed to represent. In this way, the respondents confirm each other in being well qualified for the job and establish a common set of values within their community of practice. And, in fact, a job advertisement inserted by the bank in the local newspapers around the time of the interviews seems to

confirm that in hiring managers, the bank stresses goal orientation and drive as key personal qualities. Thus, the ad is divided into sections with headlines such as *Din udfordring!* ('Your challenge!'), *Dit mål!* ('Your goal!') and *Du får* ('You get').

Contrary to this, some of the female respondents (four out of seven) use metaphorical expressions to construct themselves as driven by an (inner) urge, need or desire, others (two) see themselves as 'natural leaders' and yet others see education and support from others as contributing factors, also reflecting the above dichotomy:

### Extract 5

Resp. 3 ... evner og færdigheder, dem kan man tilegne sig, men du skal altså have en vilje, der kommer indefra, en personlig styrke, der gør, at man gerne vil det her.

... abilities and skills, these are something you can acquire, but you really must have a will that comes from within, a personal strength which makes you want to do this.

Resp. 5 Den støtte jeg får fra ledelsen af er også enorm vigtig for mig.

The support I get from management is also extremely important to me.

Resp. 7 Altså, det skal være glæde, der driver det ...

Well, gratification must be the driving force ...

With the stereotypical qualities of a bank manager being those of goal orientation and momentum, it is interesting to note that in the interview in general, the female respondents do not consider the personal qualities they emphasise to be an element which hold them back in their careers. Rather, they believe that in some cases these qualities may actually make them better managers than men and make it possible for them to successfully combine a management career with family life. This may have to do with the fact that when the women focus on a desire or urge for making a career, they take their starting point in the CONTAINER metaphor, this way stressing the positive aspects of their choice, i.e. as something coming from within, rather than being driven by outside factors.

### *Male constructions of women as mothers and men as managers*

The female respondents' construction of women and careers is, it seems, in contrast to the male perception of women, the personal qualities they are assumed to possess, and what they are capable of doing in terms of having a career – a perception which is closely linked to the role of women as child

bearers and mothers. Thus, in *male interview I*, a respondent opens the discussion about women, careers and children with the following question: *Har kvinder i grunden lyst til at være den bestemmende part?* ('Well, do women actually feel like being the ones in charge?'). This question triggers a long range of arguments for and against women's abilities as well as desires to pursue a career. In metaphorical terms, much of the discussion unfolds along the VEHICLE/PATH metaphor involving many of the same expressions as in the rest of the two male interviews. However, in the context of pregnancy and motherhood, metaphors of motion are used together with other metaphorical constructions to emphasise the pace and goal orientation of men in contrast to women's lack of momentum and their near surrender to the forces of nature. Thus, a key part of male interview I develops along the following lines (extracts 6 through 8):

### Extract 6

Resp. 5 Hvis vi skal have nogle flere kvinder ind, så skal vi have skabt nogle bedre rammer, så mændene også begynder at tænke sig hjem til kødgryderne, hvis man kan sige det sådan i den der fødealder. Så skal det nemlig ikke betragtes som en sygdom, hvis man kan sige det, at du bliver gravid.

If we are to admit more women, then we must provide a better framework for men to begin thinking about staying at home, if you can put it that way during the childbearing period. Then it won't be considered a disease, if you can put it that way when you get pregnant.

In this extract, the respondent constructs women as the (unwilling?) losers in the race for reaching career goals through a metaphor that conceptualises pregnancy as a disease. The respondent argues that the present system in the bank allows for pregnancy to be constructed in this way and that this is a significant obstacle for women in their pursuit of a career. This way, women fall victim to a physical condition which is unpleasant, obstructing and outside their immediate control, to a certain degree exempting them from responsibility. In the subsequent discussion, another respondent takes up this construction; however, only to reject it and then offer a new, but no less disadvantageous construction of women:

### Extract 7

Resp. 1 Man skal ikke betragte det som en sygdom, nej, men der er altså bare en overhængende risiko for, at når en kvinde bliver gravid, så går der tre uger, og så skal hun sådan set ligge på langs, indtil hun skal føde.

It shouldn't be considered a disease, no, but as it is, then there is an immediate risk that when a woman gets pregnant, then it takes three weeks, and she will actually be lying down flat until she gives birth.

The expression *ligge på langs* ('lie down flat') may, of course, be understood literally; however, in this context it may also refer to the perceived fact that when pregnant, women become immobile and inactive, and in consequence, a financial liability to the bank. This, it seems, allows the men in the interview to construct themselves as forward moving and proactive, but not, as might be expected, because they insist on these qualities being typically male, but rather because to them this is an obvious consequence of women being child bearers and mothers, i.e. the men are 'forced' into securing the livelihood of their families. This opens up to a number of metaphorical constructions which emphasise male presence and achievement, and with that, female absence:

### Extract 8

Resp. 2 Du, fra det du siger, og det er der mange, der siger, jamen, tit så bliver det sådan, at så kigger man på lønchecken, og så kører manden, og så klarer konen det andet.

Well, you know, from what you're saying, and many people say that, well, then you look at your pay check, and then the husband moves ahead, and the wife takes care of the rest.

Resp. 4 De fleste vil gerne have børn, men at du vælger det, det giver nogle fravalg. Hvis du så vil have flere børn, jamen, så har du en lang periode, hvor hun er væk, hvor jeg fortsætter min kontinuitet. For det er den måde, jeg kan bidrage til, at barnet har nogle gode opvækstbetingelser.

Most people want to have children, but choosing this also means doing without other things. If you then want to have more children, well, then you have a long period where she's gone, and I continue without interruption. Because this is the way I can contribute to the child's upbringing .

Resp. 1 Lige præcis i den periode, hvor der kommer børn til, og hun er væk, to år måske, jamen, det er den periode, hvor du rykker igennem.

Precisely in the period when the kids are born, she's gone, two years perhaps, well, this is the period when you make huge advancements.



Resp. 7 Det er faktisk det, vi har brugt mest tid på, det her med børnene. Og det er lige præcis det, du siger, NN, jamen, hvis nu i og med du skal have et barn. Det, hun siger, det er, at så overhaler du, og det vil hun have det dårligt med.

This is actually what we've spent most of our time on, this about the kids. And it's exactly like you say, NN, well, if you're going to have a baby. What she says is that then you overtake her, and this she would feel bad about.

In this way, stereotypical male qualities become matters of truth among the male respondents, confirming their status in the bank as well as society at large.

In *male interview II*, similar constructions can be found, both in terms of seeing pregnancy and motherhood as obstacles for women on a career path and in terms of conceptualising men as being goal oriented and setting a high pace towards making a career. Central to these constructions is the presumption that being the natural bearers of children, women are unlikely to want to pursue a career (cf. *gå ned i tid* ('reduce working hours')), and this gives men the prerogative to do so.

#### Extract 9

Resp. 12 ... i langt de fleste tilfælde, jamen, så er det ligesom sådan konen, kæresten eller samleveren, der klarer den der med ungerne, og der i hvert fald går ned i tid. Og det er sandsynligvis hende, der tjener mindst, og det passer fint, for så kan manden køre karrieren videre.

... in most cases by far, well, then it's the wife, girlfriend or partner who takes care of the kids, and who reduces working hours, at any rate. And most likely, she has the lowest wage, and this is okay because then the husband can move on with his career.

– and this prerogative to pursue a career even entitles the men to deselect, or go around, a female candidate for a particular job if she is young and likely to have children.

#### Extract 10

Resp. 2 Jamen, er det sådan, at man som chef siger, at hvis jeg skal have en rådgiver, så skal jeg helst udenom sådan en kvinde i den fødedygtige alder, for så ender det nok med, at når hun får jobbet, så skal hun føde tre unger i røven af hinanden, og så er den portefølje åben?

Well, is it like this that as a boss you say that if I want to hire an advisor, then I'd better go around a woman of childbearing age because then, when she gets the job, it ends up with her having three children in a row, and then that portfolio is open?

The extensive use of expressions that have their conceptual grounding in VEHICLE and PATH metaphors is not unusual when talking about the pursuit of careers. Consequently, many of the expressions are not limited to these interviews but are also found in both Korpus 90 and Korpus 2000 in the same lexico-grammatical forms. Thus, as metaphoremes, the expressions have stabilised within the larger social context and have not emerged in this community of practice. The focus on goals and paths in this context is, however, likely to be anchored in the stereotypical view of men's and women's behaviour as outlined by Holmes above; a view gaining its strength from the perception that biology and upbringing influence the (linguistic) behaviour of the sexes. This means that although admitting that women may not want to be assigned the role of mothers first and career women second, the respondents clearly find that this is an almost natural state of affairs, in this way confirming dominant gendered discourses. Pragmatically, the expressions are, as previously mentioned, a way for the male respondents to signal drive and self-confidence – qualities which ring more true when contrasted with the negative constructions of female qualities and capabilities, and which are assumed to be crucial for becoming managers in the bank.

### *Female constructions of women as mothers and careerists*

Compared to the men, the female respondents talk very little about pregnancy and motherhood as obstacles to pursuing a career. Instead, they focus on the fact that being both a mother/wife and a manager is a huge challenge. Thus, in *female interview I* there is hardly any use of VEHICLE and PATH metaphors to express the lack of opportunity and capability related to these issues, except for the expression *skillevej* ('crossroads') that is introduced and repeated numerous times by the facilitator to trigger a discussion among the women of the choices they may have to make between family life and a career:

#### **Extract 11**

Facilit NN, hvis så bare man skulle lave nogle ændringer, der skulle støtte kvinder, der står i din situation, netop ved den der skillevej. Hvad kunne du så have fået fra banken som støtte?

NN, if you are to make some changes to support women in your situation, exactly at that crossroads. What could the bank have done to support you, then?

The addressee of this question takes up the term *skillevej* ('crossroads'); however, only to turn the discussion into one of inherent personal qualities and expectations – and a matter of no-choice in the sense that she opts for both possibilities. Like most of her colleagues in *female interview I*, this respondent, then, ignores the prompt given by the facilitator and chooses other metaphorical phrases to express her attitude to the mother-manager challenge:

### Extract 12

Resp. 6 Lige på min skillevej der, der tror jeg ikke, banken kunne hjælpe, fordi det ligger i mig, det er noget med mine værdikæder, og det er noget, jeg gør op med mig selv, hvad kan jeg holde styr på, og hvad kan jeg ikke.

Right on my crossroads, I don't think the bank could help because it lies within me, it is something to do with my value chains and it's something I make up my mind about, what I can control and what I can't.

Whereas the men would imply that being qualified for management positions is something beyond a woman's influence when she is a young mother, this respondent emphasises that this is not at all so; thus, challenging the dominant gendered discourse advanced by the male respondents. In her view, choosing between a career and family life has to do with who you are and the values you hold. The expressions of *ligge i* ('lie within') and *værdikæder* ('value chains')<sup>4</sup> signal on the one hand that values are embedded in the mind (as objects in a box) and make up an integral part of your personality, and on the other, that these are complex but interconnected structures, providing the mental resources for making the proper choice. Conceptually, these expressions are fixed in the MIND IS A CONTAINER metaphor as well as a VALUES ARE OBJECTS metaphor (closely associated with the IDEAS ARE OBJECTS metaphor), which, due to their ontological grounding, account for the immediacy with which we understand the expressions (Kövecses 2002; Reddy 1993).

A little later in the interview, another respondent confirms the view that opting both for a family and a career is closely connected to personal values and feelings:

## Extract 13

Resp. 3 ... altså for mig betyder det meget, at jeg er glad for mit arbejde, ikke? Altså, det giver mig det der overskud, også når jeg er kommet hjem, ikke? Hvis jeg nu havde sådan et job, ja, hvor jeg ikke følte, at jeg blev udfordret og sådan noget, så tror jeg ikke, jeg ville være den glade klovn, der så kom hjem og kunne give det samme til familien, vel?

... well, for me it means a lot that I'm pleased with my job, right? Well, it gives me this surplus, even when I'm home, right? If I had a job, say, where I didn't feel that I was challenged and so on, then I don't think I would be the happy clown [the happy bunny] who came home and could give the same to my family, right?

The expressions *overskud* ('surplus') and *udfordret* ('challenged') are both metaphorical expressions that all hold an evaluative slant, frequent in both Korpus 90 and Korpus 2000, as well. However, *udfordret* ('challenged') derives its conceptual meaning from a BATTLE metaphor, within which it may either acquire negative or positive connotations. Pragmatically, therefore, the immediate discourse context determines the positive slant with which this expression is understood, underlining that the respondent is up to the challenges a management job provides – a personal quality that would otherwise be associated with and advanced by men. The metaphorical expression *den glade klovn* ('the happy clown' [the happy bunny]) supports the positive evaluation of combining motherhood and a management career by adding a personal and an emotional angle.

In the male interviews, the men display a great deal of self-confidence and determination through the articulation of appropriate VEHICLE and PATH terms, expressing a no-nonsense approach to forging a career-path, it could be argued. For the women, the choice of other metaphorical expressions signals a more contemplative and emotional approach to career choices and family, to some extent confirming Holmes' stereotypical variables above of women being person-process and affectively oriented. This approach is at odds with the general view in the bank of what it takes to be a manager, and as such it may significantly hamper female employees' possibilities of having a career.

What the analyses demonstrate is that the assumption that women are unqualified for being mothers and managers simultaneously is almost entirely a construction to be found in the male interviews. In contrast, the women do not see the performance of both 'jobs' as an insurmountable task; rather, some of the respondents consider having the two 'jobs' essential for their general well being. This suggests that the male view of women expressed in the interviews is marked by a certain amount of prejudice concerning the roles of men and

women. Thus, by already being in managerial positions, these men may make it difficult for (young) women in the bank to be promoted and accepted as equals.

### 'Men's network' discourse

In all three interviews, the respondents discuss the importance of men's networks in providing access to managerial jobs. For the women, the existence of these networks is considered a major obstacle both in terms of gaining influence in the bank and being promoted, and judging from the comments made by the men on the function of their networks, women are not likely to be admitted to these in the near future. This has to do with the fact that besides fulfilling the function of career cultivation, networks also provide the men with a forum for exchanging views and not least for finding support in times of challenge and uncertainty. The latter point is particularly important in determining whether women are allowed into the networks or not. As mentioned above, the men are eager to appear determined and self-confident, in this way confirming a predominant and stereotypical image of male capacities, and it seems that allowing a woman into their network may jeopardise this image by letting them see other and less confident qualities of their male colleagues.

In the interviews, the men choose various metaphorical strategies for conceptualising and articulating networks. These strategies tie in to create an image of networks as a means of getting support in periods when the respondents experience a lack of control in their working lives and hence, seek the possibility of adopting face-saving measures. Thus, in *male interview I* the discussion about the benefits of a network derives from a more general discussion about men and the expectations about their behaviour. In this, one respondent points to what seems to be a common understanding among men and about men:

#### Extract 14

Resp. 1 ... men jeg kan også godt blive i tvivl, ja, men det kan jeg også, det kan jeg også. Det er ikke det, vi normalt er gode til som mænd. ... Nej, som mænd, der er vi nogle fandens karle, der kan vi bare det der pis.

... but I have my doubts, you know, I do, I do. Having doubts is not something we're normally very good at as men ... No, as a man, you're a hell of a guy, you can handle that shit.

To be *en fandens karl* ('a hell of a guy') is a common metaphorical expression in Danish for being slightly boastful, ambitious and self-confident. By using this phrase, and making implicit co-textual remarks about the shallow truth it holds for him, the respondent triggers a number of constructions in the subsequent

discussion through which the men provide a more nuanced image of who they are and what they stand for than has been presented above. In this, it is striking how, on the one hand, they strive to uphold a self-confident image in public while acknowledging that in many ways they are as uncertain about their own skills and abilities as they think women are. Thus, another respondent takes up the prompt given by respondent 1 and says:

### Extract 15

Resp. 5 Jeg tror i hvert fald som leder, at det er vigtigt, at man har sit netværk, om man finder det her i banken, eller hvad man gør. Jeg plejer at kalde det tudekluden, eller hvad man gør. For man ved, når man har et eller andet, hvor det kører skævt, så har jeg to eller tre, jeg kan ringe til og sige 'jeg er på skideren'.

At any rate, I think it is important that as a manager you have your network, whether you find it in the bank, or wherever. I usually call it my security blanket, or something like that. Because you know when things goes wrong, then I have two or three people I can call and say 'I'm in the shit'.

The construction of the respondent's network as a *tudeklud* ('security blanket') suggests lack of emotional control when things go wrong or become difficult, and hence, this construction is unlike the constructions we saw in the previous sections. The other respondents do not take up this expression, but use other phrases that express similar feelings; however, with a slightly different angle to them:

### Extract 16

Resp. 4 Er der noget forkert i at sige, det her har jeg simpelthen ikke styr på, men er det i orden jeg lige ringer?

Is it wrong to say that this is something I simply can't handle, but is it okay that I call you?

Resp. 1 Fordi man opdager bagefter, at hvis man har været igennem noget rigtig træls, så opdager man bagefter, at man havde egentlig et netværk, et sikkerhedsnet, som man kunne have spændt ud tidligere.

Because then you discover afterwards that if you've been through something really bad, then you discover afterwards that you actually had a network, a safety net you could have stretched out earlier.

Due to their somewhat emotional content, the terms *tudeklud* ('security blanket'), *ikke styr på* ('cannot handle') and *sikkerhedsnet* ('safety net') would from the point of view of a male-female dichotomy be associated with the linguistic behaviour of women, cf. Holmes' variables. However, in the context of the interview it seems the men feel less constraint on their behaviour and feelings and therefore adopt terms and phrases perhaps more true to who they really are, i.e. they adopt a gendered or feminine discourse that they feel is acceptable in the situation. This also means that although based on the ENTITY/OBJECT metaphor, which gives the reader/listener a conceptual foundation to build their understanding on (i.e. emotions become tangible objects), the expressions have wider associations and meanings that are determined by the discourse context in which they are used.

From the above, we see that in this process no single metaphorem or stable linguistic construction emerges when the men talk about networks; however, this does not mean that 'talking-and-thinking-in-interaction' does not occur, only that this does not develop into one single term or form. When discussing networks, the men choose phrases that reflect the way they think they are expected to behave as men (often constructed in stereotypical forms), and what they themselves consider to be acceptable individual behaviour. In this process, the metaphorical expressions form chains of meaning, highly reflective of the process and direction of the discussion.

In *male interview II*, the focus is primarily on the composition of networks and on female membership of these. Thus, the respondents talk about whether women should be allowed into a network:

### Extract 17

Resp. 5 Jamen, hvis jeg skal være grov, så skal hun jo, ja, nu skal det ikke lyde forkert, men hun skal jo også kunne give et eller andet. Du inviterer jo ikke en eller anden ind i et netværk bare for at være socialhjælper. Der sidder hele tiden den der lille sorte bog, hvor du så noterer, at fint, så har jeg gjort dig en tjeneste, men du skal også bare vide, at du skylder en. ... Derfor tror jeg, at det er svært for kvinder uden indflydelse at komme ind i sådant et netværk.

Well, if I'm to be rude, then she must, well, I don't want it to sound wrong, but she must also to be able to give something, you know. You don't invite someone into a network just to be a social worker. There is always this small black book where you note down that, fine, now I've done you a favour, but just remember you owe me one. ... This is why I think it's difficult for women without influence to get into such a network.

Conceptually, many of the metaphorical expressions used in this context are based on the CONTAINER metaphor, which makes us understand networks as entities with an inside and an outside, and whose surface may or may not be penetrated (Lakoff and Johnson 2003 [1980]). Thus, women can be *invited* or *enter into* a network, but they can also be *left* or *kept outside* one:

### Extract 18

Resp. 5 ... så det er jo et spørgsmål om, altså holder vi hende udenfor,  
 eller tager vi hende med?  
 ... then it's a matter of, well, you know, whether we shut her  
out, or do we take her in?

In this discussion, the respondents also identify various factors that determine whether women can be members of networks or not. These factors are not explicitly identified as being gendered, but the analysis reveals that they are, in fact, exactly that. Thus, in Extract 17 the respondent points out that when inviting someone to become a member of a network, you do not do this to be considerate and helpful (cf. *socialhjælper* ('social worker')), but only because you will remember this act and expect it to be to your own advantage later on (cf. *notere i en lille sort bog og skylde tjeneste* ('make notes in a small black book' and 'owe favours')). The catch is that in this context, returning favours is closely connected to having influence with the right people (i.e. higher-ranking managers in the bank) – something women are not likely to have in a system of male dominance in key managerial positions. Therefore, without influence women can never become members, and when unable to become members they can never gain influence. This is, indeed, a very challenging situation for the female employees of the bank, and one that demands a new approach to the allocation of management positions and the way this is constructed metaphorically and discursively.

As if to make up for this state of affairs, some of the men subsequently present themselves as being in favour of admitting women to their networks, despite them not having influence. Hence, two of the respondents talk about it being necessary for men to *være lidt mere modige* ('be a little more brave') and admit women into their groups or networks. One of these men also talk about women being those who *krydrer den stemning [i mandenetværk]* ('spice up the atmosphere [in male networks]'), *er katalysator* ('are catalysts') and *repræsenterer andre værdier* ('represent other values'). These constructions are rather vague in defining what it is women can contribute, focusing on sensations and processes rather than facts. This may bear witness to the men being to some extent uncertain about the actual qualifications of their female colleagues, but it



also shows that when uncertain, men adopt expressions that would otherwise be considered typically female (focusing on sensations and processes), i.e. they adopt a gendered discourse, neglecting the dominant 'maleness-for-men' discourse in the bank.

In *male interview I*, the exclusion of women from networks is also a subject of discussion, and in particular, the understanding that women contribute 'other perspectives' to networks and that they are 'extremely competent' is frequently advanced. Interestingly, in this part of the interview four of the six respondents refer to their wives as their most important confidantes or 'security blankets', but nonetheless they refrain from considering women as possible contenders within work-related networks. As in many of the above cases, some of these respondents take the discussion about women a little more to the extreme than the male-interview-II respondents. Thus, when discussing whether women should be allowed into male networks, they extend the discussion about influence and different ways of doing things into being one of differences between the sexes. Thus, one respondent says:

#### Extract 19

Resp. 5 Det netværk, man har, er jo også noget man får noget ud af, for ellers har man jo ikke det netværk. Hvis jeg giver noget, skal jeg også have noget den anden vej. Noget for noget.

The network you have is, as you know, also something that you benefit from because, if not, you wouldn't have that network. If I give something, then I want something in return. It's about giving and taking.

This comment is taken up by another respondent, who argues:

#### Extract 20

Resp. 4 Der er jo heller ikke noget ved at spille fodbold på blandede hold. Jeg tror, der er et eller andet med, at lige børn leger bedst, fordi jeg tror, lige meget hvor godt eller hvor lidt vi kender hinanden, så tror jeg da godt, at to mænd ved, hvordan hinanden tænker. Det er lidt den der med hank på kruset og så ud og se noget fodbold.

It's no fun either to play football on mixed teams. I think it's something about sticking to one's own class because I think no matter how well we know each other, then I do think two men know how the other thinks. It's a little bit like this about the handle on the mug and then we go and watch some football.

Although limited to a few men (two) in the interview, these remarks demonstrate that prejudice about the negative influence of women on working relations with men is still alive and well. In arguing his case, this respondent takes his cue in a common Danish proverb, *lige børn leger bedst* ('one should stick to one's own class'). The argument and logic inherent in this proverb is then strengthened through the construction of two new, and idiom-like, phrases that stress the perceived common sense of excluding women, i.e. *spille fodbold på blandede hold* ('play football on mixed teams') and *hank på kruset* ('handle on the mug')<sup>5</sup>. By using these phrases, the respondent is able to present an almost incontestable argument in favour of leaving women outside the networks. This is due to the meaning of such constructions being fixed in our conceptual and linguistic repertoire, and consequently they have a degree of truth whose validity we do not generally question. However, as with the 'women are chickens' examples above, in this context the constructions do not gain acceptance with the other respondents, who choose to completely ignore the prompts given and take an entirely different and more positive approach to the subject. Hence, it can be argued that in the situation, the wholesale rejection of women overrules the incontestability of the argument inherent in the idioms. In other words, leaving out women because they are considered biologically and culturally different is taking the argument too far for most of the respondents.

### *Female constructions of men's networks*

In *female interview I*, the discussion of men's networks takes up significantly less space than in the male interviews. However, when discussed, the networks are seen as a way of keeping women outside influence and as a serious obstacle for women in achieving results. Thus, one female respondent says:

#### **Extract 21**

Resp. 4 Så hvis vi ikke blander os i de mandlige netværk, men laver vores egne, så bliver det aldrig nogensinde lavet om [at mænd ansætter mænd]. ... Hvis vi holder os for os selv, så kommer vi ikke ind i det der.

So if we don't mix with the male networks, but make our own, then it never changes [that men hire men] ... If we keep to ourselves, then we don't get into that.

Like some of the men, this respondent conceptualises the membership of men's networks as a mixing of substances (cf. *blander os i* ('mix with')) in a container (cf. *komme ind i* ('get into')). The image that this provides is one in which women and men are seen as separate and different, but when mixed, this

difference disappears, and they become part of what is perceived as a better and united whole with equal rights and opportunities. This construction is in stark contrast to the constructions made by the men above, and it suggests that women have more to gain from joining male networks than men have from admitting women.

However, in the interview this construction does not trigger a discussion of membership or not, but leads to one respondent's use of the metaphorical expression *løbe panden mod muren* ('bang one's head against a brick wall') to describe the way it feels to be outside the men's network:

### Extract 22

Resp. 2 Jeg synes jo ikke, det ene udelukker det andet [både at have et kvinde- og et mandenetværk], fordi altså ... i mine situationer, der føler jeg sgu indimellem, jeg løber panden imod en mur, og jeg er ikke engang leder endnu, vel!? ... Det er eddermame en opgave af den anden verden at trænge igennem. Jeg kan ikke trænge igennem til vores direktør, og jeg kan ikke trænge igennem til vores privatkundechef ...

I don't think one thing excludes the other [i.e. having both a female and a male network] because ... in my situation I sometimes feel that I bang my head against a brick wall, and I'm not even a manager yet, see!? ...It's a fucking challenge to get through. I can't get through to our manager, and I can't get through to our private-customer manager.

To 'bang one's head against a brick wall' is a well-known and frequently used idiom in Danish, which is confirmed by its frequent use in both Korpus 90 and Korpus 2000. It is a phrase that illustrates the difficulty a person may have in achieving something, and it is often used when the lack of achievement is associated with a high degree of frustration. Clearly, this is what the respondent feels when she talks about her relationship to men in her department – a state of mind which is further emphasised through *trænge igennem* ('get through'). Both these expressions are conceptually connected to both the PATH and the CONTAINER metaphor, signalling (lack of) motion and exclusion, but pragmatically they function as ways of expressing affect and obtaining sympathy with colleagues – a typical female reaction, it could be claimed. The repetition of *trænge igennem* ('penetrate') serves to stress this point.

Although not focusing extensively on men's networks, the way the female respondents discuss these issues confirms the impression of men's networks constituting an important obstacle to women wanting to move up the career ladder in the bank. The metaphorical constructions used both by the male and female respondents indicate that this obstacle is defined by a number of 'rules'

and conditions of conduct conceptualised and articulated within unofficial communities of practice that make it extremely difficult for the women to achieve influence and hence, be promoted.

## Conclusion

The analysis of the interview data reveals a disheartening picture of the career possibilities for women in the bank. Despite the efforts of the human resources department to make the pursuit of a management career an attractive and feasible option for both men and women in the bank, the successful accomplishment of this seems remote. This seems to be the result of at least two factors. One is the fact that the majority of managerial positions in the financial sector continue to be occupied by men. The other has to do with how this state of affairs is being perpetuated in the organisation through dominant metaphorical and discursive constructions, exemplified by the analysis of the interviews and by the job advertisement mentioned above, leaving very little room for women to be recognised as competent managers on a par with their male colleagues. In this process, metaphorical constructions are one of the powerful means of achieving power 'through the backdoor' as they can be used for constructing specific worldviews as a matter of course in subtle and almost unnoticed ways.

Although based on a relatively limited data-set, the interviews analysed in this article reveal that to a large degree both men and women construct their own as well as the opposite sex along a predefined dichotomy of male vs. female, confirming Holmes and Meyerhoff's (2003) claim. This is first and foremost accentuated in the derogative and stereotypical male constructions of women as 'chickens' and 'incapacitated mothers,' undoubtedly placing women at the lower end of the hierarchy in the bank. For the most part, the conceptualisation of this dichotomy takes place through metaphorical expressions that are generally understood and accepted constructions in Danish society at large, making the dichotomy one that is not foregrounded. Consequently, the roles and characteristics assigned to men and women in discourse are likely to remain largely unquestioned and accepted as the natural state of affairs, emphasising and sustaining the traditional organisational structure of men in managerial positions and women in subordinate positions. In metaphor terms, this also means that, strictly speaking, the discourse events do not result in the emergence of metaphores, i.e. new stabilities of content or form; nonetheless, talking and thinking in interaction takes place to the extent that the contextually appropriate realisations of conceptual metaphors is continuously negotiated, securing that pragmatically the choices reflect participants' communicative goals.

However, there are also indications in the interview data that the male and female respondents move beyond dichotomous constructions, most notably so when they discuss their own qualities and capabilities in relation to having a family, a job, and a career. Here the respondents accomplish gender in discourse, demonstrating a more nuanced and perhaps more truthful image of who they are. In the endeavours to make the official and unofficial structures defining promotional possibilities in the bank more accessible to both men and women, such nuanced qualities, and hence their discursive and metaphorical constructions, would be valuable to consider and stress in future strategies. Thus, if, as indicated in the interviews, the predominant discourse in the bank is masculine, stressing among other things metaphorical constructions of goal orientation and momentum, then this must be challenged, or at least modified, not only in official documents and discourses, but also to the extent that it proliferates here, in the various communities of practice existing within the bank. Here it is important to note that not only must they be challenged in terms of introducing alternative constructions, but they must also be extended to reflect both male and female behavioural styles. At present, the results of the analyses point to metaphorical constructions that emphasise personal characteristics such as sensitivity and contemplation being downplayed or even ignored as prerequisites for having a career. Further analyses of discursive constructions in the bank will show how extensive this state of affairs is and whether it is significantly hampering the possibilities for women of getting promoted.

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### Notes

- 1 The initial sorting and categorisation of the interview data was carried out in collaboration with the research group 'Communication and Culture in Professional Settings', the Department of Language and Culture, Aalborg University.
- 2 In the translation of the extracts from Danish into English, a semantic approach has been adopted to ensure that the meaning and structure of the translation are as loyal to the original as possible. Thus, in some cases the translation may appear to be non-idiomatic and erroneous.
- 3 The Great Chain of Being metaphor derives from the ancient organisation of things in the universe into a hierarchy in which God ranks the highest,

followed by humans, animals, plants and inorganic things. According to Lakoff and Turner (1989), the categories of this hierarchy can be used to understand one domain in terms of another. Thus, the Great Chain of Being metaphor 'allows us to comprehend general human character traits in terms of well-understood, non-human attributes; conversely, it allows us to comprehend less well-understood aspects of the nature of animals and objects in terms of better-understood human characteristics' (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 172).

- 4 In business English, 'value chain' refers to the way each department in a company adds to the value of the goods produced. This, in itself, is a metaphor, in part derived from our experience with objects in the world such as chains. However, in this context, the concept of 'value chain' is used to conceptualise the respondent's attitude to the challenges of being both a mother and a manager. In this, she constructs each choice as being dependent on the previous one, just like links on a chain, suggesting that only the choices that guide her life in a positive direction will be chosen.
- 5 'Handle on the mug' is not a standard phrase in Danish, but one that the respondent apparently creates for the occasion. Its meaning corresponds to the meaning of the English idiom 'fit like a glove' and thus functions as a means of substantiating his position on exclusive male networks.

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