Doing Machismo: Legitimating Speech Acts as a Selection Discourse

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This article explores the relationship between machismo and implicit power processes at a conceptual and empirical level. Implicit power processes are the taken-for-granted ways in which organizational members reproduce sexual divisions in their organizations. The empirical data are derived from the Argentine auto components industry. This is a male-dominated industry and machismo was used to explain and justify selection decisions that favoured men. Machismo is intrinsically linked to masculinity and power and should be defined as a set of hegemonic masculinities. Machismo represents four images of the dominant ideal of manhood in the Argentine society. These images are the authoritarian image, the breadwinner image, the virility image and the chivalry image. Machismo can then be studied as a discourse on masculinity that, when translated into particular selection discourses, implicitly leads to the exclusion of women from this industry. Machismo and implicit power processes are thus intertwined; both sexes routinely reproduce the male standard. In order to show how discourses on masculinity implicitly shape selection processes, this article presents a typology. The typology consists of four types, the power of natural differences, the power of denial, pastoral or caring power, and the power of the male standard. The typology serves as an analytical tool to reveal the intertwining of machismo and implicit power processes at the shop floors of Argentine auto components firms.

Keywords: machismo, typology of implicit power processes, hegemonic masculinities, sexual division of labour

> I think it is the Latin nature or our Italian and Spanish origins. These are two highly *machista* cultures, and they have marked us with that attitude. I think it is our ancestry, our cultural heritage.

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This quote comes from an Argentine human resource manager working in an auto components company.[1] Argentines referred time and again to machismo, of which *machista* is the adjective, to explain and justify the sexual division of labour in this industry. This is a good example of how they saw machismo, namely, as naturally determined sexual differences. Even though machismo is cultural in the sense that it is learned behaviour and perception, by labelling machismo as natural, people perceive it as inescapable, a fact of life. Machismo is therefore a very powerful discourse that maintains the *status quo* in this male dominated industry.

In this article, I will explore the relationship between machismo and implicit power processes at a conceptual and an empirical level. Implicit power processes are the taken-for-granted ways in which organizational members reproduce sexual divisions in their organizations. Nowadays most studies on gender in organizations assert that all organizational members actively shape sexual divisions, but while doing so they routinely reproduce gender inequality at their workplaces (Acker, 1990; Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998; Bradley, 1999; Collinson *et al.*, 1990; Knights, 1990). In the Argentine auto components industry most respondents had never asked themselves why their firm did or did not employ women workers; recruitment and selection decisions were largely based on tacit assumptions about who would best fit the job, a man or a woman. In this industry human resource managers, who were almost all men, were likely to select male workers, but women were not likely to look for a job in this sector either. In other words, both sexes took the existing sexual division of labour for granted and hence tacitly reproduced it.

In this article, I want to show how men and women implicitly structure sexual divisions at the workplaces of Argentine auto components companies. I therefore examine the auto components companies through a structuration lens, which means that the reproduction of the sexual division of labour must be understood as an active process founded in the duality of agency and structure (Giddens, 1984). Women and men do gender, but

> doing gender also renders the social arrangements based on sex category accountable as normal and natural, that is, legitimate ways of organizing social life. . . . the resultant social order, which supposedly reflects 'natural differences', is a powerful reinforcer and legitimator of hierarchical arrangements (West and Zimmerman, 1987, p. 146).

In Argentina, machismo represents part of 'the resultant social order', because it represents images of the dominant ideal of manhood in the Argentine society. Therefore, machismo helps us to understand how Argentines do gender; it enables us to make sense of the way they actively yet routinely make selection decisions and hence reproduce sexual divisions in their organizations.

My analysis will consist of four steps. I will begin by defining implicit power processes and presenting a typology to study them in organizations. I then go on to analyse the concept of machismo and the relationship between machismo and implicit power processes. In the third section, I present the machismo discourse as a set of dominant images of manhood in Argentina. Finally, I show how machismo manifests itself in and through the day-to-day selection discourses enacted on the shop floor of Argentine auto components companies. I will use the typology to reveal how these discourses implicitly structure the sexual division of labour. In the concluding section, I will highlight the implications of the analysis for future research.

A typology of implicit power processes

A growing number of studies use implicit power processes or comparable notions to analyse the reproduction of gender inequality in society and in organizations. These studies draw on the ideas of different power theorists like, for example, the third face of power of Lukes (Komter, 1985), Gramsci's notion of ideological hegemony (Connell, 1995; Doorewaard *et al.*, 1997; Komter, 1985; Risseeuw, 1988), the notion of 'doxa' of Bourdieu (Risseeuw, 1988), Foucault's ideas on discourse, subjectivity and resistance, and more specifically his notions of disciplinary power and pastoral power (Collinson, 1992; Collinson *et al.*, 1990; Doorewaard, 1989; Doorewaard *et al.*, 1997; Van Drenth, 1991; Hearn and Parkin, 1995; Knights, 1990; Thretewey, 1999). I use the notion of implicit power processes heuristically, in order to combine various theories of power that refer to the implicit, as opposed to explicit, dimension of power.

What implicit power processes are is very well defined by Doorewaard *et al.* (1997). They describe these processes as

> . . . changing processes of signification . . . often expressed in concealed ways in . . . verbal and non-verbal expressions, such as common sense statements, expressions of identification and consensus and legitimizing rationalities. These implicit power processes contribute to a consensus about what constitutes the dominant representation of things and, as such, the acceptance of organizational practices, in spite of the possible disadvantages these practices might have for some of them. (Author's translation, p. 351)

Implicit power processes are located in everyday discourses and practices, which are linked to ' . . . the process of commonsense categorization in everyday life' (West and Zimmerman, 1987, p. 132). This conceptualization of power corresponds with the image of a fish: 'A fish in the water is unaware of the water and the forces that make its life possible; a fish accepts the water as a given' (Brouns, 1993, p. 148, author's translation).

Doorewaard *et al.* (1997) correctly point at the methodological problems that arise when investigating implicit power processes. In order to make sense of the tacit ways in which organizational members reproduce sexual divisions in their organizations, I composed a typology of implicit power processes. I used the overview of Brouns (1993) to identify four types of implicit power processes: the power of natural differences, the power of denial, pastoral or caring power, and the power of the male standard. I will employ these four types as analytical tools to identify implicit power processes in my empirical data.

The first type of implicit power process is based on a study by Komter (1985) concerning power in marital relationships. Komter elaborates on Lukes' third dimension of power and Gramsci's concept of ideological hegemony. She introduces the concept of 'taken-for-grantedness' as the core of power relations in marital relationships. She uses this notion to highlight the 'natural' character of the processes of stereotyping. Komter describes this as follows:

> The effect of stereotyping in terms of power lies in its emphasis on hierarchical differences between the sexes and the suggestion of 'inevitability'. What we see is supposed to be an accurate reflection of 'natural differences'; 'natural differences' imply necessity and inescapability. (Author's translation, p. 304)

In her description, Komter emphasizes the natural differences between men and women. In light of this, I term this type of implicit power processes the power of natural differences.

The second type is derived from Risseeuw (1988), who draws on Bourdieu's work in her study of historical developments in the positions of power held by women in Sri Lanka. Her conceptualization of implicit power processes is best expressed by one of the propositions presented in her thesis. This proposition reads:

> One of the most significant characteristics of power seems to be the ability of the powerful to negate the reality of the weaker party; in its most effective form it appears as *sincere ignorance* on the part of the powerful. [Italics added]

This type of implicit power process is manifested in claims of objectivity and neutrality, such as claims to offer equal opportunities (Acker, 1990, 1992; Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998; Brouns, 1993; Doorewaard *et al.*, 1997). I call this type of implicit power the power of denial.

The third type of implicit power process was taken from Doorewaard (1989) and Van Drenth (1991) and inspired by Foucault. It is called pastoral or caring power. Pastoral power has a creative and liberating ideology and it operates 'by means of watching over and chaperoning people' (Van Drenth, 1991, pp. 216–17, author's translation). Guardians determine what is good for

the people in their care and remain in control as long as their benevolence is credible or supported by the use of other types of power. The focus in this type of implicit power process, when viewed through an emancipatory lens, is on care for, and the welfare of, women workers. Implicitly, pastoral or caring power 'passes on a certain individuality and sociability' to the women, who, in turn, 'provides social security and (emotional) stability' (p. 49, author's translation). At the same time, this kind of care usually entails the tacit understanding that the employer or human resource manager can discern what is good for women workers.

The fourth type is also based on Foucault's work and was elaborated upon by Doorewaard (1989). According to Doorewaard, this type of power process works through norms and normalization. Hegemonic regulation serves to ensure that organizational standards, such as working hours, are perceived as normal. The work of Acker (1990) can be used to develop a more gender-sensitive approach to this type of power. The objective norm is, as Acker argues, the (non-objective/subjective) male norm: what is male is normal. In other words, the supposed gender-neutral standard is, in fact, a male standard.

> The concept of a universal worker excludes and marginalizes women who cannot, almost by definition, achieve the qualities of a real worker as that would involve becoming like a man. (1990, p. 151)

Male workers never get pregnant or need to worry about childcare. They are available full-time. I term this type of implicit power processes, the power of the male standard.

Taken together, these four types seem to offer an exhaustive typology to study implicit power processes. Using this typology, section four will demonstrate how internalized representations of machismo manifest themselves in selection discourses that lead to the reproduction of a particular sexual division of labour in the Argentine auto components industry.

Machismo and implicit power processes: a conceptual analysis

The choice of machismo as a concept was determined by my respondents. They frequently used 'machismo' to explain and justify unequal access to jobs, training and promotions between men and women. Machismo is widely used in gender studies in Latin-American contexts (Gutmann, 1996; MacEwen Scott, 1994; Melhuus, 1996; Melhuus and Stolen, 1996; Nencel, 1996; Steenbeek, 1995; Stevens, 1973; Velasques, 1986). It has, however, never gained any status as a 'gatekeeping concept'; instead, its has been used as a self-evident term requiring no explanation (Melhuus and Stolen, 1996, p. 14). Generally speaking, the term 'machismo' is strongly related to male virility

and dominance. 'It is a cult around masculinity and is intrinsically related to power: the will and capacity to dominate others, men as well as women' (Steenbeek, 1995, p. 220, author's translation). The husband of one of the women workers I interviewed expressed it as follows: 'it is submission, not only of women, but also of other men'. Melhuus (1996) argues that the man who is *bien macho* (truly macho) shows who is in command.

The centrality of masculinity and power in most definitions of machismo leads us to the literature on men and masculinities and more specifically the potential usefulness of the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' for studies on machismo (Carrigan *et al.*, 1985; Connell, 1995). Over the past decade, a growing number of studies have been published on men and masculinities (Barret, 1996; Brod and Kaufman, 1994; Collinson and Hearn, 1996; Connell 1995, 2001; Miller, 2004; Morgan 1992), including Latin American cultures (Archetti, 1999; Gutmann, 1996). These authors place power at the core of their theories and analyses of men and masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity is a notion mainly associated with the work of Connell. Connell explains that hegemonic masculinity elucidates that 'at any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted' (1995, p. 77). The concept of hegemonic masculinity has been widely accepted yet it is used critically by researchers in the field of men's studies (Brod and Kaufman, 1994; Collinson and Hearn, 1996). They highlight the diversity of masculinities and argue that the singular use of masculinity suggests homogeneity, unity and stability. Several authors therefore prefer to speak of 'hegemonic masculinities' (such as Hearn and Collinson, 1994; Kaufman, 1994), while others continue to use it in a singular way (Kimmel, 1994, in the same volume). There is a risk in using hegemonic masculinity in a singular way. For instance, when Kimmel (1994) elaborates on hegemonic masculinity he does not seem to recognize that what is hegemonic differs across cultural contexts. He presents the American culture as the one and only hegemonic masculinity and he does not specify to what extent it can be generalized to other cultural systems. Hegemonic masculinities (plural) should be located in 'structured yet changing relations of power' (Hearn and Collinson, 1994, p. 112). I concur that it is an empirically more correct and potentially fruitful way to show that a diversity of masculinities are hierarchically linked to each other within and across societies (see also Morgan, 1992).

Machismo is a hegemonic force in the Latin American cultural context. At the same time machismo is socially constructed and dynamic. How machismo expresses itself and is used in daily interactions in the workplace is context-bound; differing from country to country, from sector to sector. Machismo is used and understood in many and contradictory ways (Gutmann, 1996). At the level of perception, machismo consists of shifting images of a dominant ideal of manhood and gives shape to the power relations between and among men and women. The discourse on machismo present in Argentine society is therefore an important yet tacit source of

power. In other words, machismo and implicit power processes are inter-twined. The machismo discourse comprises a dynamic complex of images of masculinity that trigger (speech) acts. Both men and women routinely draw upon these images and speech acts when they reproduce sexual divisions at their workplace. The speech acts and the outcomes of this interaction serve, in their turn, to reinforce or weaken certain images. Shaping a sexual division of labour is an active process, but most actions are characterized by a routine way of doing things. Doing machismo is like doing gender. Machismo is very much internalized and therefore structures power processes quite implicitly. Men and women interpret, internalize, and use machismo each in their own ways and thus reproduce and reshape machismo actively, yet, more often than not, they do this routinely. So change is possible but bounded, because the consensus between men and women on the dominant ideal of manhood (machismo) implies rather stable power relations between the sexes. The next section shows what machismo meant to my respondents.

Machismo as a discourse in Argentina

When asking my respondents what machismo was, they most frequently referred to four images of manhood. These images are based on my inter-views, but authors who have done research on machismo in other contexts support them (Gutmann, 1996; Melhuus, 1996; Velasquez, 1986). The first image was that men were supposed to be in charge (the authoritarian image); they were the ones that gave orders and always had the first and the last word. Moreover, they did so by taking financial care of their wives and chil-dren. This was so important that providing an income to sustain a household was one of the most persistent images of being a man (the breadwinner image). Additionally, another very persistent image was that a real man was virile (the virility image). Virility was shown in two ways; firstly, by promis-cuity. It was commonly accepted that men committed adultery. In discourse, the myth was propagated that there were six women to every man in Argentina, which implicitly legitimated such behaviour. Secondly, virility was shown through gallant behaviour and a sensually joking discourse (the chivalry image). The Argentines have their own word for this particular aspect of the machismo discourse, namely *piropos*. *Piropos* range from very sexist remarks to very flattering and poetic ones.

The 'price' men pay for control and dominance is that they have to be vir-ile, gallant and financially responsible. This could be seen, and was expressed as, the burden of protection. By expressing it as a burden, respondents actu-ally reinforced the hegemonic character of machismo. The ways these images were translated into particular selection discourses that led to the reproduc-tion of the existing sexual division of labour will be shown in the next section. Moreover, the typology presented in the first section serves as an analytical

tool to show the intertwining of machismo and implicit power processes at the shop floors of Argentine auto components firms.

Machismo and implicit power processes in the Argentine auto components industry

The automobile branch is a male sector. According to the official figures from the 1994 National Economic Census, (INDEC) female employees (including administrative staff) represented less than 1 per cent of the total number of employees in car manufacturing firms, and less than 10 per cent in component-producing companies (INDEC, 1995). My own two question-naires show that women account for 10–12 per cent of the workforce on the shop floor.[2] Three-quarters of the companies interviewed employed no women workers whatsoever. This indicates that the companies that did employ women had relatively large numbers of female workers on their shop floors (an average of almost 40 per cent). In the two firms in the case study, women accounted for 30 and 70 per cent of the workers, respectively. My data also show that between 1992 and 1997 the number of female employees and workers had fallen relatively more than the number of male employees and workers, from 27 and 29 per cent to 21 and 18 per cent, respectively. Data gathered during the summer of 2002 confirm this trend.

Although every respondent was very aware of these figures. The men and women I interviewed stated, almost without exception, that recruitment and selection were based on objective criteria, and that men and women had equal opportunities for employment and promotion. During the telephone survey, I even encountered some respondents who reacted rather indignantly when asked about the sexual division of labour in their company. They clearly told me that there was no discrimination based on sex. The objectivity and neutrality of the human resource managers were also indisputable to most respondents. The consensus was that they used the same objective criteria in both recruitment and promotion.

These are clear examples of the power of denial. Most respondents stated that their companies did not discriminate and that men and women had the same chances of being selected. If that was true, why are there so few women working on the shop floor and so few female supervisors and managers? The data show that exclusion was related to three discourses about women workers. One discourse was that women were not suitable for work in this industry (the type-of-work discourse). Another was that women were less available (the availability discourse). And finally, women were presumed to be problematic workers (the working-relations discourse). In the remainder of this section, I will relate these three selection discourses to machismo and demonstrate how machismo manifests itself on the shop floor. In doing so, I will draw on the other three types of implicit power: the power of natural

differences, pastoral power and the power of the male standard, to show how these discourses implicitly structure the sexual division of labour in this industry. Speech acts from respondents will illustrate the analysis.[3]

Type-of-work discourse

The first discourse was that women were not suitable for work in this industry, because it is heavy, dirty and technical. It was stated that women needed protection from heavy, dirty work and men were claimed to be better suited to supervisory and managerial functions. The type-of-work discourse was congruent with the machismo discourse that men have to be in charge (*el hombre manda*) and that women need protection.

> I have an all-male place. We discussed this in the interviews. We always consider women the weaker sex intellectually. But they're physically weaker. Take the injection machines, for example. Conditions can be quite dangerous. I did see women in Italy working with machines. But since this is a heavier job, or dirtier, because of the moulds, it requires more strength. So we have an unwritten rule to take men. (Line manager during a group discussion with male managers)

The 'unwritten rule' referred to by this manager, reveals the self-evident nature of how machismo was translated into hiring decisions. Moreover, this manager alludes to the (innate) physical differences between men and women. According to most respondents, the reasons for the clear gender segregation in the auto components industry were biological (the power of natural differences). Women were considered unable to do the heavy, dirty work that characterized this industry. In companies with many female workers, their innate 'nimble fingers' was offered as the most important argument for hiring them.

The exclusion of women because of the technical nature of the job and their limited access to managerial positions, such as supervisors or team leaders, was also partially based on biological arguments. Men were considered to be technical by nature and better leaders than women. This 'natural' link between technical ability, leadership and men was reinforced by the notion that technical skills were an important condition for good leadership. The second condition was 'character'. Men were attributed with natural authority; it simply stood to reason that they would command respect.

The more general aspects of chivalry related to machismo, such as opening the door for women, were also manifest on the shop floor: most employers preferred not to let women do heavy work. In this regard, they took on the role of protector (pastoral power):

> I was really struck by something I saw in the United States once, though it wasn't recently. It was years ago. There were some women working at the

tumblers. What they were lifting were things I'd never dare ask a woman to lift. I would have called a man to help them. There they [the women] had leather gloves, making rings for coils in an impressive tumbler. I don't know whether this is part of our machismo, the concern we have here for women. . . . We let them go first; we open the door for them. I don't know whether that's good or bad, part of the machismo or our upbringing, but many of us still act that way. (General plant manager)

It would seem that Argentine employers protect women more than employers in other countries do. Statements made by several people, comparing their own company to companies in other countries, exemplified this. According to the women, it was logical and convenient to ask a male colleague to lift the boxes and men were always willing to help them.

Most respondents considered the work in the auto components industry to be typical male work, and that perception functioned as a standard (the power of the male standard). Most (male) human resource managers did not even consider women as potential workers for their company Women, in their turn, did not apply for what they considered men's jobs. The notion that only men could be good leaders also functioned as a standard.

I think this factory has been here for 20 years now and the employees have always been men. We became used to it unawares. That's what they call setting the standard, something you can't change. They [women] make the tiniest mistake and everyone starts thinking about how things were better in the old days. . . . I think it's just convention that makes people feel they should always depend on a man. It comes from society, from the family. It's always the man who gives orders. That's what convention dictates. But men and women are both capable of leadership. A woman, who treats all her co-workers equally, deserves the confidence of all of them, and the respect. (Female team leader)

Efforts to tear down the standards led to conflicts and confrontations. Not only did men doubt the leadership capacities of women, the women themselves did not want to become team leaders. These women felt that they lacked the 'character' for that role and preferred to avoid conflicts with their (female) co-workers. These efforts had been made possible by two European managers (one of whom was the director) and the female human resource manager. They introduced new ideas on female leadership and went against the dominant type-of-work discourse.

In general, however, turning the standard upside down proved to be very difficult, as both men and women considered the standard normal and based their behaviour on it. It was normal for things to proceed as they always had done. Several companies said that not hiring women had actually become a tradition. In light of that, it stands to reason that differences between the employment of men and women were initially denied. The difference was

simply self-evident, because men were considered better (strong and competent) workers and managers in this industry.

Availability discourse

The second discourse was that women were less available for work and training, because they have children. It was considered a woman's primary purpose to be a wife and mother, and only after that a worker. The opposite applied to men. In other words, women were supposed to be at home and men were supposed to work. This discourse is congruent with the breadwinner image of machismo discourse.

Natural differences were, of course, an important foundation for the discourse on the availability of men and women. Women have children and possess the natural ability to look after them, while men are supposed to work to support their families. This view was not only shared by most men but also by many women who said they would stop working if they could afford to. Some women were able to break down this stereotypical image by, for example, continuing their studies and postponing plans for children until later. The latter group of women had more access to training and new jobs than the former. They were considered more available and better equipped (because of their higher education levels) than the other group. This brings about differences between women and highlights possibilities for change.

Pastoral power is present in the attempts of a female human resource manager to reduce the number of pregnancies among young unmarried women. This group of women was considered a special problem. They had higher absentee levels than married women because of the stress related to their pregnancies and the prospects they faced as single mothers. They were more vulnerable to dismissal than other women workers, especially since most were working on temporary contracts. The human resource manager proposed, therefore, to organize informal meetings with these women to make them aware that pregnancy could lead to their dismissal and also hindered their chances of promotion. Although her intentions in this initiative were good, she wanted to pass a certain identity on to these women, one that would provide them with more social security and emotional stability.

By analysing the discourse regarding availability, we can also see that a male standard was applied. Women, especially those with children, were considered less available for overtime work and training. Men were presumed to be more flexible; they could come early and work late.

> You can tell a man to stay until 2:00 a.m. or show up to work at 6:00 a.m. You can't do that with women, especially if they're married. I try to conduct myself in a way they can respect. I try to respect the formal working hours. (Male line manager)

And men were, in fact, more flexible; as most women stated that they wanted to go home as soon as possible to be with their children. Consequently, participation in training activities outside normal working hours was not an option for most.

> It's more difficult for me. It's no big deal if a married man has to leave for, say, three days. But I couldn't leave if they wanted to send me to a course for a whole week. I wouldn't be able to go home in the evening. I just can't do that. I simply wouldn't have anyone to take care of my son, so I couldn't. On the other hand, if it was my husband, yes, because I would stay at home. (Secretary of the general plant manager)

Moreover, the general perception was that men worked because they had families to support, whereas women worked for extra money. Although most respondents knew that women had to work because one salary was insufficient, or because their husbands were unemployed, men were still supposed to be the breadwinners and that image affected the companies' recruitment and dismissal policies. The perception was that, when dismissed, women could always return to housekeeping, while men would be less manly (in experience and perception). The following quote from a group discussion with male managers illustrates this point:

> Sánchez: I would dismiss her if there were equal qualifications in terms of education.

> Goldstein: Because of equal opportunities.

> Sánchez: Because of equal opportunities, I think a woman is more useful at home than a man is.

> Goldstein: I have personally seen cases of dismissed men with working wives and the man suffers much more than a woman does, really much more. If you dismiss a woman, you know that she has her housekeeping work at home. But things aren't the same for a man who's out of work.

> González: He dies. [Noises of affirmation]

The use of 'equal opportunities' is confusing, because the term is not used in the sense to which we are accustomed. These managers place equal opportunities in a broader societal picture, a picture in which equality in the workplace (for people with the same education) is linked to differences outside the workplace. They emphasize the fact that for men work is essential to their (masculine) identity and self-respect.

   Although we see differences between women in terms of access to training and new jobs, in the auto components industry the self-evident notions about the availability of men and women led primarily to the exclusion of women. In companies with (many) women employees, exclusion manifested itself in decisions concerning promotions and dismissals. The discourse that women

care and men work was so taken for granted that it influenced selection deci-
sions without being noticed.

Work relations discourse

The third discourse was that women workers were problematic, because they
were competitive while men were 'mates':

> We men are more *compañeros* (mates). With women you have to make sure
> they get along well and try to understand them a little. It's much more
> difficult. I've had lines with five people, and the guys in all-male lines
> get along well and always help each other. I think women compete more
> with each other than men do. (Male team leader)

The presence of women on the shop floor was perceived as problematic for
two reasons. One was that it led to romantic encounters between male and
female employees. The other was the quarrels and rivalry between female
employees. These reasons were related to the 'inevitable' heterosexual attrac-
tion between men and women and the competition between women over
men. The work relations discourse is congruent with the virility image from
the machismo discourse. Hence, one of the two most important 'natural' jus-
tifications related to this discourse was that men were expected and allowed
to commit adultery because they had more sexual need than women. The
other was that women were more competitive and more emotional by nature.
Consequently, the social interaction between men and women on the shop
floor was 'strained in various ways. As illustrated in the example below, men
believed that women would start to cry immediately when reprimanded,
which left them at a loss as to how to respond:

> As a supervisor, I've been in charge of women. Whenever I reprimand
> women, they start crying. You can call a guy a *voludo* (asshole). But you
> can't tell a woman she's a *conchuta* (cunt). And you know what else women
> do when they're reprimanded? They tell you 'you're confused'. [And he
> pretends to cry]. They come up with all these weird things. They'll say stuff
> like, 'the girl behind me made the mistake' and make other stupid excuses.
> So you have to treat her with more. . . . You can bullshit with a guy. You
> relate more easily. It's easier to talk to a man about things than it is to a
> woman. It's not that it has to be like that. It just seems like something
> makes things work that way. . . . (Male team leader)

The last few words of this quote 'just seems like something makes things
work that way', followed by silence, is significant, as it reveals some inexpli-
cable, almost mystifying aspects of men and women working together.

Women cited numerous examples of how 'this one or that one' was
favoured because she was the girlfriend (often mistress) of the supervisor or

manager. And indeed, these women were less at risk of losing their jobs. I heard many comments about conflicts between women or groups of women. They played nasty tricks on women who had relationships with their superiors, like scrawling filthy remarks on their lockers or sending them notes. Women also used these images. They saw a relationship with a supervisor or manager as a means of ducking out of factory work, and they cried to get their way from their supervisors or managers.

The story of one female human resource manager working at a company with only men on the shop floor reveals that a certain sexual identity is passed on to women (pastoral power). She told me about a pilot project with women supervisors at the storage and expedition department. The women, however, did not last. One reason was that they were required to work different shifts, which they found difficult to combine with their family obligations. Another important reason, however, was that these women had to wear uniforms, which transformed them into sexless beings. The human resource manager explained that the women lost their femininity in those uniforms and made it clear that that was 'not done'. She decided to stop the pilot project. Women cannot be desexualized. At the same time, however, they should not look too sexy. Several women drew my attention to the unofficial dress code at work. No one wore tight jeans, even though the workcoats hid whatever there was to admire.

Judgements about male and female group behaviour make the power of the male standard visible. Male group behaviour was taken as the norm. A female team leader told me that it took her time to get used to the sexually charged jokes of her male co-workers during daily team meetings (she was the only woman). In the beginning, she blushed, but eventually she had become just as vulgar as they were. She had adjusted to the male group code.

At the same time, female group behaviour was considered as negative. The image of rivalry between women made it especially hard for women to meet the standard. A male human resource manager explained to me that it was more a question of good selection: '*hay que ser vivo para no selecionar víroras*'. The expression *ser vivo* refers to a person, usually a man, who knows what he wants. *Víboras* are snakes, vipers to be more exact, which refers to the idea that women have slanderous tongues. The man illustrated his statement by saying that one should never select a woman who is more beautiful than the others, although she might be a very good worker or employee.

Virility, heterosexuality and homosociability played a crucial role in maintaining these group images. Men's desire to entertain multiple sexual relationships was considered normal ('whatever a man does will always be okay'), as well as their preference for male company. Women, in this context, were portrayed as jealous wives and girlfriends. Women recognized and acknowledged this. The following quote is from a group discussion with women workers. I asked them to comment on the assumption that women are competitors, while men are mates.

Dora: Yes. I don't know why, but yes.

Carolina: Men never mind if one person wears a suit and another a filthy pair of trousers. Men never say, buy yourself a new pair of trousers, but women do. And what's more, they never try to help you. If they can trample you down, they will.

Sonia: That's something women do.

Graciela: But why? Maybe when we women do anything we're very uncertain about it. And if we make a mistake, that's bad. Maybe it's okay for men to make mistakes. We look at our mistakes and defects. We're used to always having defects.

It was considered 'normal' for women to always be lacking and thus to be incapable of meeting the male 'we-are-mates' standard.[4]

By and large, the men were really quite satisfied with this *status quo*. The presence of women, and hence sexuality, caused a 'hot' atmosphere that was not conducive to productivity. The idea that 'since things had always worked well with men, why hire women' was, therefore, one of the self-evident assumptions in the hiring decisions of most auto components companies. It was, in fact, so self-evident that it did not seem to be an issue at all and could, therefore, easily be denied.

In short, the analysis above demonstrates how machismo was translated into three particular selection discourses that excluded women workers from the Argentine auto components industry. Moreover, three of the four types of implicit power processes helped us to understand that these discourses were taken for granted by men and women and routinely led to the reproduction of an industry dominated by men. The power of denial appears to be a type of implicit power that forms the starting point for a more complex analysis of how implicit power functions in a particular context. As such, this type of implicit power is able to unveil the ideology of equality of human resource management and managers in a more general analysis.

Conclusion

Throughout this article, I have explored the relationship between machismo and implicit power processes in order to show that machismo plays an important, but often concealed, role in the reproduction of the sexual division of labour. I argued that machismo is a set of hegemonic masculinities that can be studied as a discourse on the dominant ideal of manhood in Latin America. In Argentina, four images of ideal manhood were present, the authoritarian image, the breadwinner image, the virility image and the chivalry image. Men as well as women internalized these images. They were drawn upon routinely in day-to-day interactions at the workplace and translated into particular selection discourses that maintained the *status quo*. The

machismo discourse and, more specifically, the selection discourses to exclude women workers were a source of power. The type-of-work discourse, the availability discourse and the work relations discourse implicitly shaped the selection decisions in auto components firms. This was done by men and women alike and led in general to the exclusion of women, reproducing the numerical supremacy of men and the masculine image of the industry. The powerful group (men) and the less powerful group (women) morally and reflexively agreed on the images stemming from machismo. This consensus between men and women on certain values, symbols and judgements implied rather stable power relations between the sexes.

The exclusion of women in this study is extreme: not only do they live in a highly masculine culture; they also work in male-dominated sector. What lessons can we learn from this case? This extreme case study enables us to go beyond the Latin-American context. The exploration of the relationship between machismo and implicit power processes opens up interesting possibilities for future studies that want to answer the (how and why) questions concerning the creation and persistence of sexual divisions of labour. Machismo, characterized as a set of hegemonic masculinities, implicitly structures sexual divisions in organizations through people's perceptions and speech-acts. In other words, hegemonic masculinities are intertwined with a particular type of power, namely implicit power processes. The set of hegemonic masculinities present in a particular context consists of tacit and internalized images, which are relatively stable and inert and are routinely used to reproduce male domination in many different forms. The interaction and the possibilities for change become apparent when discourse is linked with what people actually do. Moreover, we have to realize that in another Latin American country or sector, machismo may activate other discourses and, as such, have different outcomes for both men and women.

The typology of implicit power processes proved to be a useful analytical tool. The power of denial seems to be the starting point for a more general analysis of implicit power processes. The other types, (the power of natural differences, pastoral power and the power of the male standard), enabled me to demonstrate how machismo was routinely implicated in the reproduction of the existing division of labour. The typology is potentially very useful in other contexts (sectors and countries). It could provide us with comparative data that would enhance our understanding of how implicit power processes function in and across different cultures.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. The data presented here were taken from a longitudinal case study into the restructuring of the Argentine auto components industry in the 1990s (Stobbe, 2000).
2. Much of the data here come from human resource managers (two questionnaires — one by telephone and one personal — and in-depth interviews), and two companies, which, unlike the rest of the sector, employed relatively many women (documents, (group) interviews with employees of different levels and participant observations). The fieldwork for this research took place during the following periods: August 1995–March 1996 and August–December 1997. In August 2002, additional data were gathered. Moreover, contacts with key informants have been maintained over the past nine years.
3. The author translated all quotations.
4. During a group discussion with female shop stewards of the Metal Workers Union, one woman went as far as claiming that men actually 'force' women to compete with each other (this was going too far, according to the other participants). This group discussion took place after a presentation of the preliminary findings of the study.

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