

GENDER EQUALITY, PROFITABILITY AND HEALTH



# Facing Resistance

– managing gender mainstreaming  
in organisations

Syvonne Nordström · Camilla Simonsson · Dan Humble

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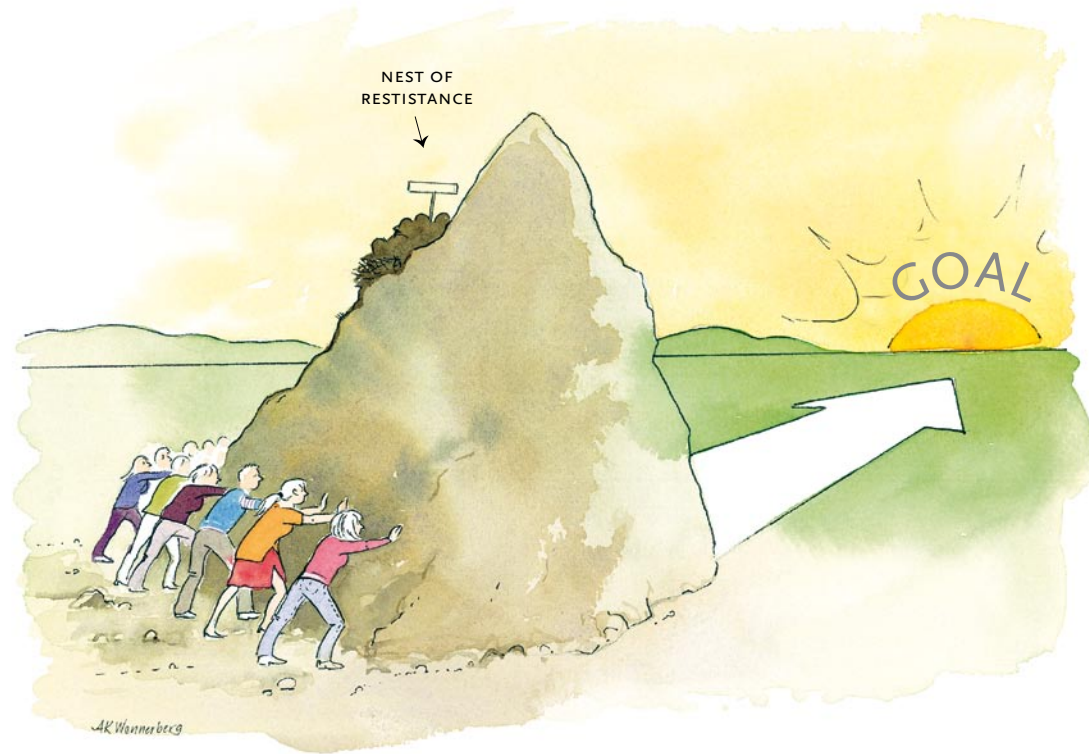
**– managing gender mainstreaming in organisations**

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*Together we can move mountains.*

<b>Contents</b>	<b>page</b>
Be prepared to meet resistance.....	5
You and others .....	6
Prejudices.....	12
Domination techniques .....	20
Different types of glass .....	31
Male and female strategies.....	34
Sources and links.....	36

## Be prepared to meet resistance...

This book is aimed at those of you who are working for change. You have seen the pattern and the injustice, and you are ready to do something about it. You will meet resistance... be sure of that.

People who are normally sensible suddenly say ridiculous things or refuse to listen to your arguments. People look at you sideways and talk about you behind your back. They might say they support change, but in practice they behave just as they always have.

This is when doubts come creeping: perhaps it's only you that's at fault, perhaps it's not worth it, and perhaps things can't be changed.

This book is here to show you that all of this is normal.

All changes arouse resistance. The bigger the changes the greater the resistance. Uneven distribution of power, responsibility and resources run through all areas of life, which is why issues of equality arouse such strong feelings. It is a big issue. After all, you are actually working to change the system, to cause a revolution.

This book will provide you with the tools to manage resistance, to understand it and to face it in a constructive manner. It is based on Swedish and Nordic experience and knowledge, but we believe that it can also help those of you working in other countries to find strategies to facilitate your work.

***Gender equality doesn't mean that the sexes should do the same things. It means equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities for women and men.***

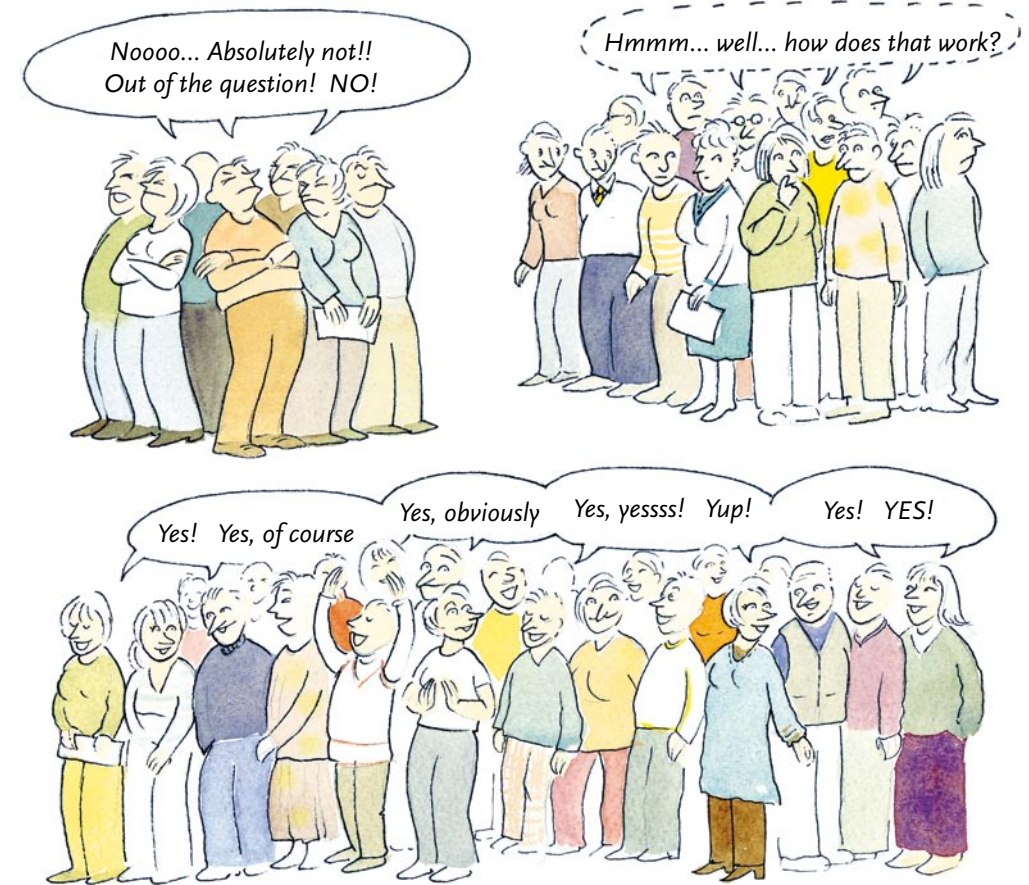
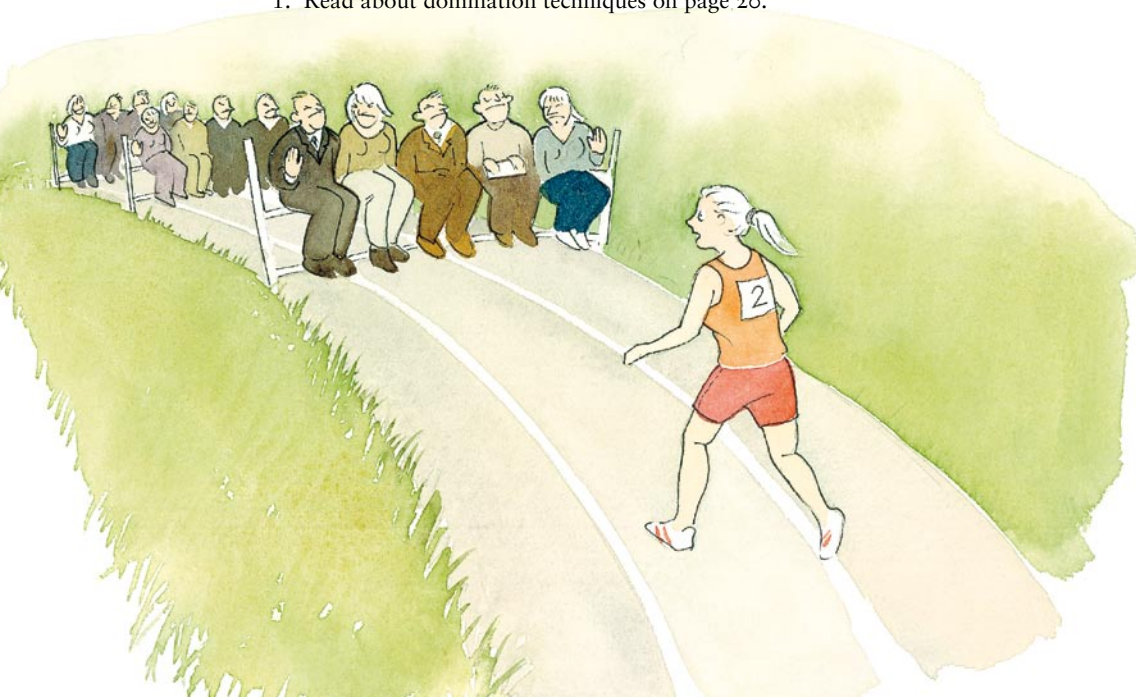
## You and others

There are times in life when you have strong feelings about particular things. What these things are varies with age, experience and interest. Many women, but unfortunately all too few men, have realised the benefits of gender equality. Therefore those who want to work for equality in the workplace will face a real obstacle course...

During the process of change you will face prejudice, domination techniques<sup>1</sup> and members of the resistance. That is why it is good to spread knowledge about these phenomena. Be prepared for the resistance expressing itself in different ways at different stages of the process. Strengthen yourself by looking for support among those who want the same things as you do. It is best if you can get both men and women to be part of the work for change. Also try to create awareness among the management early on.

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1. Read about domination techniques on page 20.



### THE CONVINCED

The enthusiasts are those who push for equality based on their own interest. They can find support for the process among their supporters. These supporters possess knowledge and insight about work for equality. It is important to have support for this as it may well be necessary. Employers can find co-workers who are motivated and inspired in this group.

## THE CURIOUS

People with open minds often enrich the debate and make a positive contribution to pushing for dialogue. They have no conviction in any particular direction, but take an interest in airing opinions and discussing things together. They can both give and take objective arguments and, afterwards, participate in the changes.

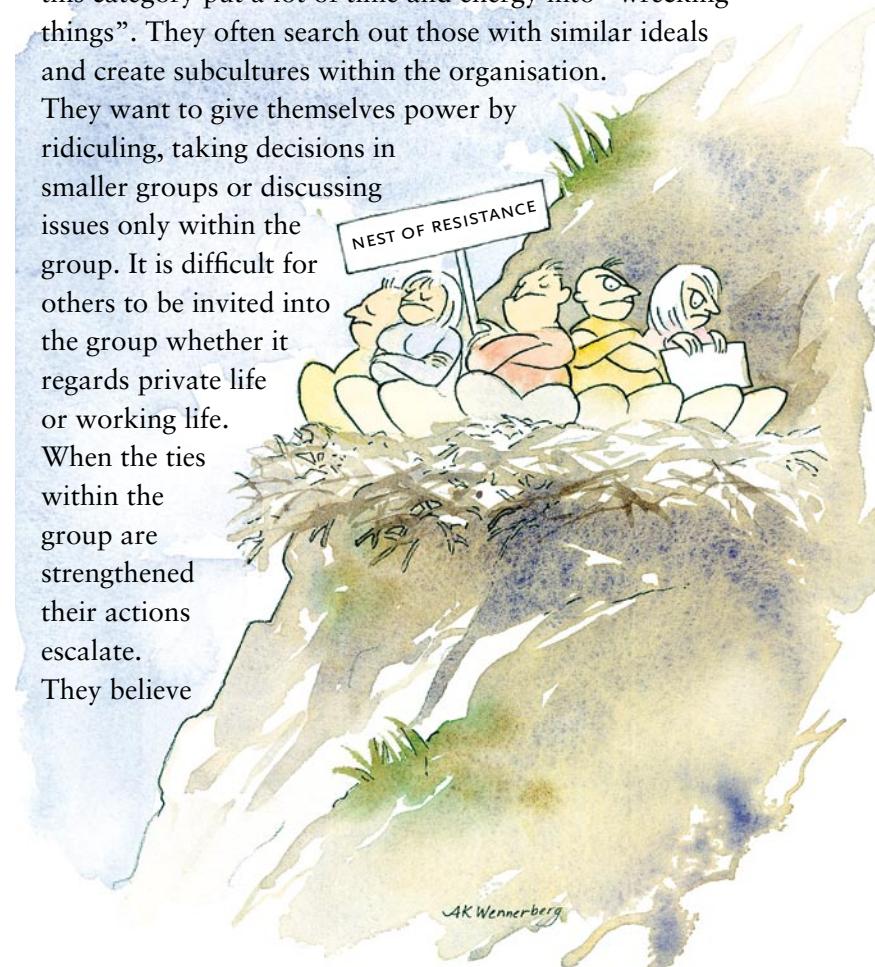
## THE RESISTANCE

The forces of darkness dominate here; there is no room for dialogue or the desire to air opinions. Energy goes to pointing out faults and problems. Representatives of this category put a lot of time and energy into “wrecking things”. They often search out those with similar ideals and create subcultures within the organisation.

They want to give themselves power by ridiculing, taking decisions in smaller groups or discussing issues only within the group. It is difficult for others to be invited into the group whether it regards private life or working life.

When the ties within the group are strengthened their actions escalate.

They believe



that they are right and take the liberty of acting contrary to decisions made within the company and they don't hesitate to try to halt changes by using external pressure.

Everyone has heard of black holes in space in which energy is absorbed, disappears, and ceases to exist. This is also what happens here if you allow it and don't remain observant. As an enthusiast it is better to put your time and energy into other people and things. The nest of resistance is the management's responsibility and will remain so.

Those of you reading this book are probably part of the “convinced” group. There are also other groups that affect work for equality in one direction or the other. If the initiative for the work for change does not come from the management and the trade unions it is important to create awareness there as well, so that everyone is moving in the same direction.

## EMPLOYERS, MANAGEMENT

Carrying out change will be difficult if you don't analyse the available resources: who are aware, motivated and can enrich the company's development? Education and information for co-workers is required, but it is just as important making the issue clear in the management group. Decisions and ambitions must be made visible so that those involved feel that they are supported and know that support exists. It is the management's responsibility to break up subcultures that counteract decisions that have been made.

Both sexes should participate in order to achieve a good result. In regards to setting aside resources for change, this has more to do with planning and prioritising than with money.

## TRADE UNIONS

The trade union organisations have an important job in monitoring and driving issues of gender equality. Both sexes are certainly represented among their members, which is an important argument for making equality a prioritised area of activity. Gender equality can put the focus on both the members' and the company's best, as well as demonstrate the trade union's importance. Single-gendered environments are less creative, which is a fact that should be obvious to everybody.

## EXTERNAL PARTIES – CUSTOMERS, JÄMO<sup>2</sup>, THE MEDIA

External pressure on equality issues can take place in different ways. An equality plan can be requested by customers during procurement procedures or be decisive when comparisons between companies and sectors are published.

The Swedish Equal Opportunities Act<sup>3</sup> demands all employers to carry out active, goal oriented work for promoting equality between women and men. JämO ensures compliance with the Act and are able to impose directions of conditional fines, i.e. threats of penalties, on employers that break the law.

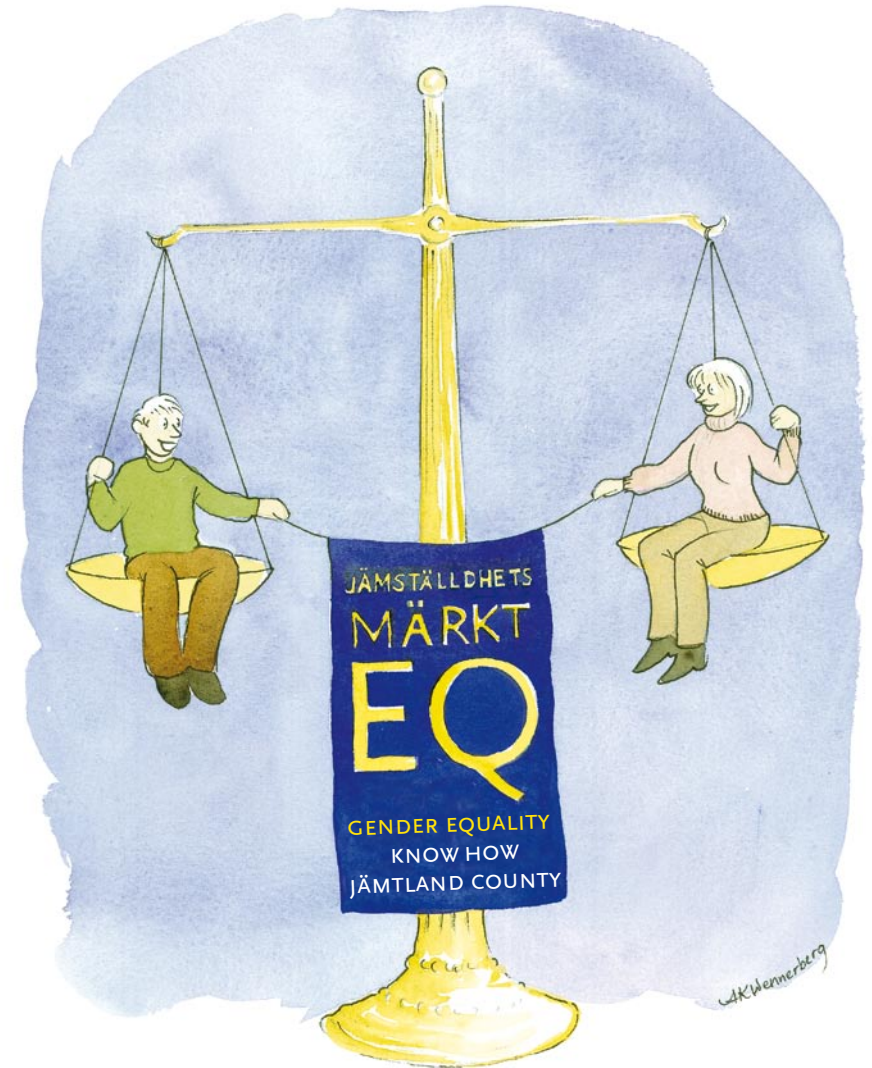
In the autumn of 2004 Sifo<sup>4</sup> presented the results of a survey about attitudes of employees and consumers regarding gender equality issues in various contexts. The

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2. The Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsman in Sweden, which is an authority appointed by the government, the purpose of which is to uphold the Equal Opportunities Act.

3. The Equal Opportunities Act was introduced in Sweden in 1980 and is a labour law which decrees that women and men shall have equal rights and opportunities in working life.

4. The Swedish Business Development Agency.



*EQ marked*

results clearly show that employers who are active in these issues have an advantage and that consumers tend to choose products based on these criteria if they have the opportunity to do so.

## Prejudices that create resistance

### Definition of prejudice

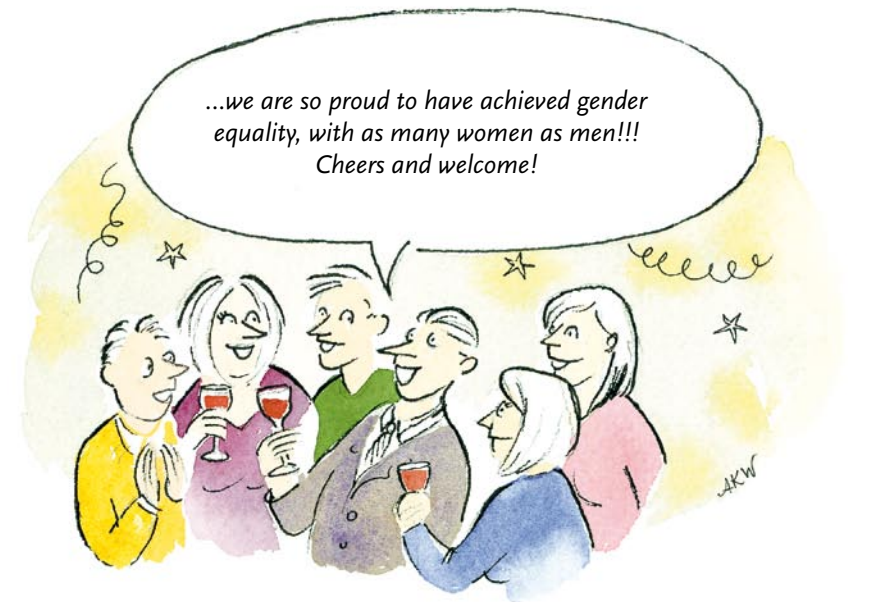
- Preconceived opinion, bias or partiality [Oxford English Dictionary]
- An opinion formed beforehand, especially an unfavourable one based on inadequate facts. The act or condition of holding such opinions. Intolerance of or dislike for people of a specific race, religion etc. [Collins English Dictionary]

### **“Gender equality makes the sexes the same”**

You can often hear people say that equality means the sexes should be the “same”. Instead it is about everyone having equal rights and opportunities in life regardless of gender. This also means we should be seen as individuals; our gender does not determine our value, what we are allowed to do or the position we will have in life.

### **“Fifty-fifty that’s equality”**

There is an illusion that there is enough equality if there are as many women as men at a workplace or in other groupings. Even gender distribution is certainly a good start, but equality is determined by many other factors. For example, review the decision-making process from a gender perspective, the status of different jobs at the workplace, the salary policy and how competence development is distributed. Don’t be surprised if it turns out that the women have a pleasant theme day about health, while the men go on management or specialist skills courses which further their careers. These are important issues for highlighting any inequality. If you shy away from this, the consequences will be continuing inequality.



***“We are genetically created to have different interests”***

There are many prejudices about our biological gender. Some people believe that because our bodies look different there is something in our genes that determines what we are suitable for. They maintain that biological differences determine which subjects girls and boys will be interested in school, which education or career they choose and what they do in their free time. This resistance prevents boys and girls from developing as individuals. Research does not support these prejudices, instead it rather shows that the differences within the sexes are greater than those between them.



***“Feminists put the blame on men”***

Some people complain bitterly that those working for a society based on gender equality put the blame on others (i.e. men). Some feel that they are being accused when we talk about women being subordinate in society and that men have the power. This is also a prejudice that creates resistance. Inequality is no-one's fault. It is the responsibility of both men and women to deal with inequality by daring to see it, daring to highlight the problem and daring to do something about it.

***“Don't people have the right to choose for themselves?!”***

Often when gender equality is discussed, you may hear comments such as; “Yes but it's not that bad, because at our house...” or “I do all the housework, because I'm the one who thinks it's important – not because I'm a woman”. Instead of seeing the demands and limits of the social structure, you choose to explain away the differences at an individual level – as if everything is a personal choice and belongs to private life.

***“There's not a hint of discrimination against Paul/Lisa at my work”***

A single woman in a male dominated environment may become a mascot to be shown off in many contexts, however, without any particularly great influence. This also applies to men in the same situation. A condition for fitting in is often to adjust, to become “one of the boys/girls”. A woman in the workshop or a man taking parental leave is no problem, practical issues can be solved – but if there are more of them the existing structures are threatened. This is why resistance can be greatest when work for equality begins to demonstrate clear results.

***“Gender equality is only a women’s issue”***

Both yes and no. Yes, because there are more women than men pushing the work forward, and no, because men also have a responsibility to ensure that work for equality progresses in society.

Another aspect is that inequality also entails negative limitations for men. Men have, just like women, expectations placed upon them. These expectations are tied to gender. Men are often expected to choose their work and their career ahead of the family, children, interests and other things in life. For example, they often face negative attitudes from managers and colleagues if they want to take parental leave or can’t work 60 hours a week.

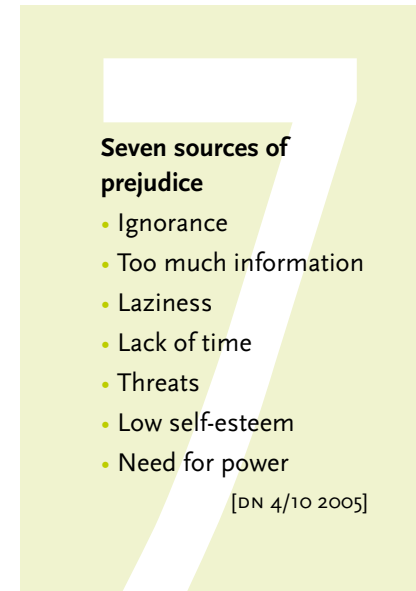
Perceptions of traditional gender roles also mean that it can be difficult for men to choose what they really want to do with their lives. They may feel forced into choosing what is expected of them based on an established framework, instead of making their own individual choices. This problem turns gender equality into an issue for men as well.

***“Things are fine as they are” or “Society is already equal”***

Ignorance is a source of reluctance to change. You don’t know what you can gain from equality; instead you think that things are fine as they are, so you don’t worry about doing anything about it. Once again, it is about closing your eyes to the problems, perhaps due to laziness or from fear of losing certain privileges if the situation were to change.

***“That gender equality stuff is out of date”***

“Equality was something that was modern in like the 70s, it’s not relevant today” or “Yes, but that equality thing, that’s something natural nowadays”. If you hear those arguments you can quote the Swedish researcher Gertrud Åström: Nothing is more unnatural than gender equality, because it has never existed...!



***“What you know you believe, controls you less than what you believe you know.”***

BERTIL MARTINSSON

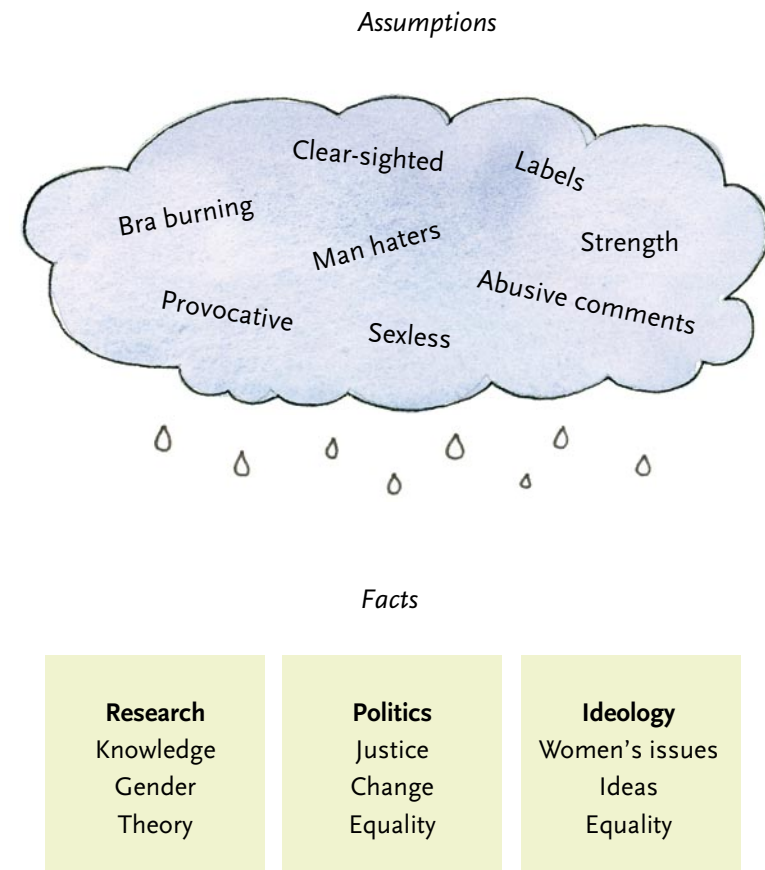
## THE FEMINIST CLOUD

One of the most frequent ways of facing discussions about gender equality is to pull the issue down from a general level to an individual one. “That doesn’t apply to me! It’s not like that for me! It doesn’t apply to my generation! It doesn’t apply to my family! It’s all over-exaggerated!”

This shows how personal the gender issue is. Genus theories describe a gender and power related super and sub order. No-one wants to experience themselves as oppressed or as the oppressor and this can create reactions. Resistance to the gender issue can express itself verbally through antagonistic questions and projection, but also non-verbally; for example as silence, body language, gestures and facial expressions.

If you wish to hold a discussion about the issue, it may be worthwhile beginning with the Swedish researcher Anna Wahl’s method, “the feminist cloud”.

*Instructions:* Allow the group to make free associations around the word feminism. Sort the resulting words under the following headings: politics, ideology and research. Draw a cloud in which perceptions and prejudices are placed. This makes it obvious that feminism can be a designation for politics and ideology, as well as for research. Meanwhile, the feminist cloud contains all the prejudices and illusions found in the room about feminism and feminists. They are highlighted, named – and then positioned outside of the discussion. This is a way of facing the giggling and jokes about bra burning which easily arise when gender issues are discussed. The level of the discussion can now be set by saying that it is not to be about prejudices and assumptions, it is to be about facts.



*Sometimes it can rain from the cloud, in other words – prejudices can find their way into the discussion. When it happens, you have to put up an umbrella and get the discussion back on the right level.*

## Domination techniques

When the Norwegian professor Berit Åhs became politically active she discovered that she wasn't taken seriously. She began to study what happened at the meetings and found five ways in which men used to subordinate her, and also other women and men. She called these methods "domination techniques", and her definition of them has become widespread.

These five domination techniques are used to gain power over others, both in working life and social life, and they are used by both men and women. This often takes place subconsciously. The techniques are: ignoring, ridiculing, withholding information, double-edged punishment and shame and guilt.

If you are aware of the techniques you can avoid ending up at a disadvantage and being personally offended. There are also several ways of dealing with them. It is important to make what is happening visible and this may be easier if there are more of you, for example by talking about it before the meeting and agreeing to support each other. Berit Åhs and her female colleagues showed each other which domination technique was being used by raising the number of fingers equivalent to the technique.

The Empowerment Network at Stockholm University, ENSU, was created to spread defensive strategies and confirmation techniques which can change the social climate. The first step is to create awareness, for which there are Berit Åhs' definitions and examples. The second step is to highlight and meet these techniques with defensive strategies. The third step is to set a good example through ENSU's confirmation techniques.

To change the world around us we must change ourselves, which isn't easy, but the reward is an environment in which people are happy.

### 5 domination techniques

- Making invisible
- Ridiculing
- Withholding information
- Double-edged punishment
- Shame and guilt

### 5 defensive strategies

- Take up space
- Ask questions
- Demand that all the cards are on the table
- Break the pattern
- Intellectualise

### 5 confirmation techniques

- Foregrounding
- Respect
- Inform
- Double rewards
- Confirm good norms

## MAKING INVISIBLE

Is there no reaction to what you say or do? Does everyone go quiet when you have said what you think? It could be that no-one reacts when Louise says something but that Nick gets a response when he repeats the same thing. Or that the men pretend not to hear what Maria says. Or that someone in the meetings rustles papers or whispers to their neighbour when you are talking.

To silently look past someone, not to bother saying hello in the corridor, to “forget” names or to ride roughshod over someone is an exercise of power that makes someone invisible.

A common way of reacting when you are a victim of this is to become nervous, talk faster and be more uncertain. The defensive strategy is to take more space. React immediately and calmly assert your right to be seen and heard.



## What you can do:

- Request attention, wait until every one is quiet.
- Train your voice: a clear, determined voice is rarely ignored.
- Think about your body language, don't reduce yourself, take up space instead!

It is possible to be ignored because both women and men are so accustomed to men and male culture being obvious, normal and important. Ignoring others is a powerful domination technique. The person who is never seen and met with interest feels insignificant.

In order to create a culture of mutual respect, it is important to take other people seriously, to listen and provide constructive feedback. Then you are using the confirmation technique of foregrounding.

## RIDICULING

“Don't you have a sense of humour?” is a question that critical girls and women may well hear. It could be that you are ridiculed for something you say, which becomes the subject of jokes. A common way of devaluing a person is to tell jokes at the other person's expense. Continually commenting on girls' appearance is to diminish them. Whatever the person being ridiculed says or does, will have less value in others' eyes. The use of disparaging epithets like cow, bitch, bird, sissy and so on also belongs here, as does infantilisation: “the little woman...”.

The defensive strategy is to ask questions: “What do you mean by that? I would like you to define precisely what you just said.”



**What you can do:**

- Stand up for yourself, don't allow the "joke" to pass without comment.
- Never join in the laughter, even when laughing at someone else.
- Question.

Ridiculing occurs so commonly that often we don't even notice it. The defensive strategy is to ask questions and the confirmation technique is to give respect. Give space to others by asking for their opinions and points of view, support them by confirming that you take their contributions seriously.

**WITHHOLDING INFORMATION**

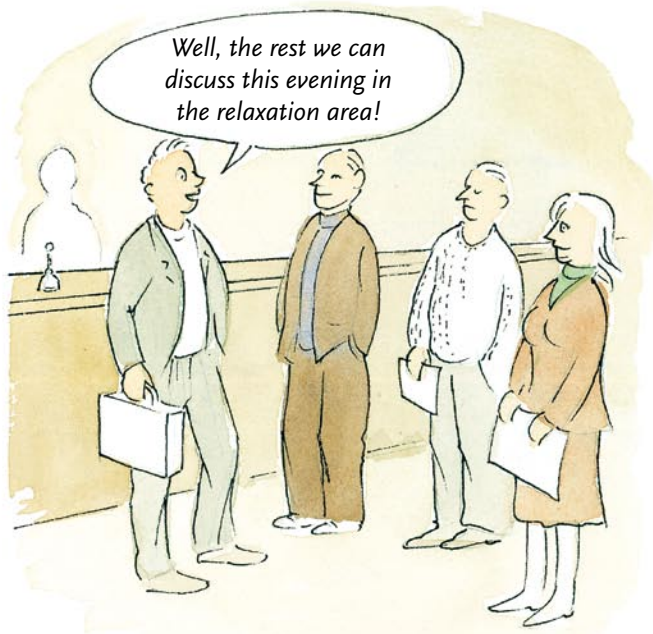
Withholding information means that someone is kept unaware of certain things. Not allowing others to have access to information is a demonstration of power. Withholding information could be that meetings are held, but you are not invited. The lack of development of research around women's health, is also a sign of disinterest or a withholding of information.

If you don't receive information it is more difficult to act. You can also start having doubts about how you perceive things. The defensive strategy is to demand that all the cards are on the table.

**What you can do:**

- Demand to get extensive information in good time so that you are prepared when decisions are to be made.
- Request background information if you have a question sprung on you.





Withholding information means that you, sometimes unintentionally, ensure that another person is kept uninformed about certain things; thereby preventing this person from acting as he/she would have done if he/she had had more information.

Be aware of the fact that you could be the person who withholds information from others, for example, if you discuss a project outside of working hours and arrive at important conclusions, simply out of enthusiasm. In this case the confirmation technique, the good example, is to always be meticulous about informing and including all of those involved in the decision-making process. Account for how you have reached your conclusions. Collect opinions from those who are quiet, perhaps out of shyness, or who are otherwise unable to make their voices heard.



### **DOUBLE-EDGED PUNISHMENT**

Double-edged punishment means that whatever you do, it is wrong. Women are often encouraged to stand up for themselves; it's their own fault that their voices can't be heard. However, when they do stand up for themselves they are told instead that they are troublemakers, unfeminine, have PMT or other derogatory comments.

Being punished whatever you do can result you putting all your time and energy into trying to do "the right thing". This means that you allow other people decide what you should do and how you should behave. You become powerless.

A female manager is accused of weakness when she tries to listen and act democratically – and of being unfeminine when she shows determination and gets what she wants. A woman who is a politician can be accused

of partisanship when she raises women's issues and of being a traitor when she doesn't.

The defensive strategy is to break the pattern. Think about your own priorities and find out what happens if, for example, you miss a deadline or cancel a family dinner. Discuss the consequences with those involved, decide what is most important and explain what you have prioritised.

**What you can do:**

- Confront the person and question what he/she says.
- Request constructive suggestions about what you should do.

The confirmation technique is that of double rewards, and is based upon trying to remember that people do as best they can and make the right choices based on their own circumstances. You can affect the rules of the game



for your own situation. If you have to leave a meeting early, explain this beforehand or ask if it's okay. Ensure to ask for a short review at the next meeting. If your colleagues, manager or family oppose this, a discussion is necessary. A discussion in which your circumstances and priorities, and those of your surroundings, are made clear. Double reward: whatever you choose is the right thing.

**SHAME AND GUILT**

The final domination technique is an ingredient of the previous four. A person who is exposed to domination techniques often reacts with feelings of shame and guilt.

Women who are beaten or raped often hear insinuations that they "have themselves to blame". They didn't fight back enough, their clothing was provocative, they were drunk or in the wrong place. This is called



“blaming the victim” and means that responsibility for the action is wrongly placed on the victim and not the perpetrator.

If you are shamed, it means that you feel that you are not good enough as you are. When you feel guilt, it means that you are ashamed of what you do (or don't do). Making people feel shame and guilt is a diffuse technique and is difficult to identify. The first step is to make yourself aware of your feelings, to give them words. Try to analyse and intellectualise the situations in which you have felt guilt and shame. Raise your eyes and try to see the situation against the background of old traditions and norms.

#### What you can do:

- Analyse the situation and encourage your friends to defend you.
- Talk about what has happened with someone you trust.

The opposite of making someone feel guilt or shame is any type of behaviour that provides confirmation, back-up and support. Confirm yourself and others. Let go of your guilt feelings because you can't change them. In situations where the norms for women working outside the home clash with patriarchal patterns it is of extra importance to get confirmation from other women in the same situation.

## Different types of glass

Many people have heard of the “glass ceiling”, the invisible barrier that means that women don't advance in their professional lives – particularly in traditionally male areas. Research has now shown that men in professions that are dominated by women can step into a “glass lift”.

Women entering traditionally male areas often have to fight to break into the male fellowship and to find a place in male territory. A man in a typically female area, usually doesn't meet resistance; he is encouraged, both by colleagues and managers, to move up the career ladder.



“Equality is about power and resources. When it comes to women entering male-dominated professions, we can see that power and resources need to be redistributed in order to achieve a balance between the sexes. This does not apply when a man enters a female-dominated workplace”, says Lena Gonäs, professor of work science and editor of the book “På gränsen till genombrott? Om det könsuppdelade arbetslivet” (On the edge of a breakthrough? On gender-divided working life).

The researchers’ conclusion is that there is no gender segregation as regards men. They do not need to fight to enter female areas. When men enter a female profession it is regarded as raising the profession’s status, whereas the arrival of women in traditionally male professions - such as medicine, teaching and journalism – is regarded as having lowered their status. It is always the man who is the norm.

#### **WHEN PROFESSIONAL AND GENDER IDENTITIES CLASH**

Professional identities and gender identities preserve traditional patterns of gender roles in a mutual process; you could say that professions are given gender markings. Those who break gender patterns form a professional identity which conflicts with given assumptions of gender.

A female doctor’s position can be lessened because her gender – instead of her professional status – is given priority. She might hit the “glass ceiling” in her career, at the same time as she is perceived as “unfeminine” and “career driven”. A male nurse can take advantage of male superiority and travel in a “glass lift” in his career, at the same time as his masculinity may be

questioned, primarily by other men, because he works in a traditionally female profession.

“Men who work in female-dominated professions or for equality go against the norms and threaten established patterns. That’s why they are restricted and held back. This may explain the slow pace of change in traditional gender roles and men’s disinterest in gender equality. Equality projects must be of joint concern for both women and men at different levels and positions,” says Hans Robertsson who has written the book “Maskulinitetskonstruktion, yrkesidentitet, könssegregering och jämställdhet” (Construction of masculinity, professional identity, gender segregation and equality).

#### **GLASS WALLS AROUND REHABILITATION**

In 2004’s Socialförsäkringsboken (Social Insurance Book 2004) published by the Swedish Social Insurance Board, it is apparent that men and women are treated differently even by the Swedish Social Insurance Administration.

- Greater emphasis is placed on finding rehabilitation programmes for men than for women.
- The variety of rehabilitation programmes is greater for men than for women.
- Women and men provide their own suggestions for rehabilitation to the same degree, but women’s suggestions receive less attention.
- Women who make demands risk being seen as difficult and troublesome, while men’s demands are seen as justified and should be met.

## Male and female strategies

In her thesis “Stridspiloter i vida kjolar” (War pilots in big skirts-about development of leadership and equality) the researcher Pia Höök describes how men have five attitudes towards equality:

### Male strategies

- The open opponent points out, willingly and frequently, that men and women are different and that this is something good that should be maintained and highlighted. The differences also mean that women and men should remain in their gender roles, and that the gender based power structure in which women are inferior to men is natural.
- The hidden opponent does not take his position openly. He gives men the advantage, but not in an obvious way.
- The man who is neutral places the burden of evidence on women. Until something is proven he is not prepared to do anything, but if they can prove that they are disadvantaged it should be corrected.
- The cautious activist believes that equality is a women’s issue and that it doesn’t mean anything to men. He can see that equality is necessary, but not at his workplace.
- The gender equality activist has an overall perspective on the issue and highlights it in all contexts.

Women have different strategies for dealing with equality, or rather the lack of equality. These are described by Eva Ethelberg in the article “Självkänsla kontra realitet – ett dilemma för psykologin och för kvinnorna” (Self-esteem versus reality – a dilemma for psychology and for women). The female dilemma is being an individual and at the same time part of a subordinate group.

### Women’s strategies

- The first strategy is to choose not to see the subordination. Reality is interpreted so the inequalities become invisible such as; women have overall responsibility for the home and children because they want to. Men earn more than women because women haven’t become managers yet. This strategy is appreciated by society, and it works for a while – until the woman starts to understand this subordination, which often coincides with the birth of the first child. Then she changes to strategy two or three.
- The second strategy is to decide that this subordination is correct. Women are worse than men at some things, and don’t put as much effort into their jobs to the same extent. Therefore lower wages and not making a career is justified. A woman who adopts this strategy is passive and has low self-esteem.
- The third strategy is to realise that this subordination is wrong. Wage differences are because women are less valued than men, and the greater proportion of male managers is not because they are more competent than women, but because they are overvalued simply because they are men. This strategy is most difficult for her surroundings to cope with. The woman is often regarded as a troublemaker.

It is important to understand that women’s attitudes to the issue of equality are strategies for survival or for progress in the male-dominated world.



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### LINKS

- Jämtland's County Administrative Board, [www.z.lst.se/en](http://www.z.lst.se/en)
- The Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsman in Sweden, JämO, [www.jamombud.se](http://www.jamombud.se)
- The Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research, [www.genus.se](http://www.genus.se)
- Official Statistics of Sweden, [www.scb.se](http://www.scb.se)

If you are prepared to work for increased gender equality in working life, you will meet resistance. This book provides you with the tools to deal with this resistance, to understand it and to face it in a constructive fashion.



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