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Springer
2017

Hearn , J , Jyrkinen , M , Karjalainen , M , Niemistö , C & Piekkari , R 2017 , Top Men in Transnational Companies : The Construction of Men, Masculinities, and Work-Family
pö Intersections Within Gender-Neutral Contexts . in H Peterson (ed.) , Transnational Knowledge Work . Crossroads of Knowledge , no. 5 , Springer , Cham , pp. 99-118 . https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-43307-3_6

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/285675>
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-43307-3_6

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Top Men in Transnational Companies: The Construction of Men, Masculinities and Work-Family Intersections within “Gender-neutral” Contexts

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Abstract

In light of the so-called globalization of business life and the expansion of transnational organizations, the concept of “transnational business masculinity” has been developed to describe a new form of masculinity among globally mobile managers. This chapter engages with this debate by focusing on gender and masculinities in the context of transnational corporate labor markets, and specifically large transnational companies that are involved primarily or very substantially in knowledge work. The chapter examines the intersections of gender relations, local/national context, and transnational processes within knowledge work and management. It interrogates the complex interrelations of gender, specifically constructions of men and masculinities, with national-transnational intersections – in and between both professional knowledge work and its management, and everyday lives and work-life boundaries.

Introduction

This chapter examines how top men managers and professionals construct gender and masculinities, especially in relation to national-transnational and work-family relations. We emphasize here how the gendering of men is reproduced within what may appear as several linked and supposedly gender-neutral contexts: first, the corporate; second, the national; and, third, the transnational. Our analysis draws on two data sets from large transnational companies, most of which are in Finland – a national context that, somewhat paradoxically, brings together elements of relatively less gender inequality in law and outcome, with a widespread ideology of “gender-neutral” citizenship. Some of the companies are located in the knowledge sector and are particularly intent on projecting a competent, success-laden, “(post)modern,” and progressive gender-neutral image. Our primary focus in this chapter is on men and masculinities. We have written extensively elsewhere on gender relations more generally, both in relation to the studies reviewed here (for example, Hearn et al. 2008; Hearn, Piekkari and Jyrkinen 2009), and in relation to other organizational settings (for

example, Hearn and Parkin 1995; 2001; Hearn, Kovalainen and Tallberg 2002; Karjalainen 2007; Hearn, Metcalfe and Piekkari 2012; Jyrkinen 2014).

Moreover, while there is a considerable, and growing, research literature on men managers, professional men and associated managerial and professional masculinities, much of that concerns rather different groups of men in different kinds of organizations.¹ We wish to make clear that in focusing on such high-level men, we do not make an assumption that their “masculinity,” their practices, and their talk necessarily or simply result from the gender composition in the companies, and the proportions of men and women in top leadership. Rather, we seek to contribute to analysis of shifting historical forms of gendered management and managers in national (Kerfoot and Knights 1993; Roper 1994) and transnational arenas, and in relation to both work and family.

Studying transnational men and masculinities

In the light of the so-called globalization of business life and the expansion of transnational organizations, the *concept* of “transnational business masculinity” has become influential in academic circles to describe masculinity among contemporary globally mobile managers.

Superseding “bourgeois-rational masculinity,” this form of masculinity has been suggested to be increasingly hegemonic and directly connected to patterns of world trade and communication dominated by the West and the global “North” (Connell and Wood 2005). Raewyn Connell (2000, 52) sees this form of masculinity as marked by “increasing egocentrism, very conditional loyalties (even to the corporation), and a declining sense of responsibility for others (except for purposes of image-making).” This conditionality emphasizes how managers in transnational companies need to be understood in more individualistic terms than as lifelong “corporate men.” Transnational business masculinity also differs from “[t]raditional bourgeois masculinity by its increasingly libertarian sexuality, with a growing tendency to commodify relations with women” (Connell 2000, 52).

This pattern of “transnational business masculinity,” however, represents only one of several versions of the practices of senior managerial men. It is premature to see “transnational business masculinity” as a general, universal form. Indeed, detailed empirical work has shown considerable variation in different national and transnational locations in regard to how corporate leaders live

¹ For example, Linda McDowell in *Capital Culture* (1997) looked at British men bankers on trading floors (cf. Ho 2009; Longlands 2014); Jesper Blomberg (2009) showed how two different “categories” of men in the Swedish Stock Exchange, analysts and brokers, view and treat each other, and retreat from “femininity”; Michael Roper (1994) and Deborah Kerfoot and David Knights (1993) examined changing patterns amongst British managers from more “paternalist” to more “modern” and “technocratic” corporate strategy; Frank Barrett (1996) compared aviators, surface combatants, and supply corps in the US Navy; Patricia Yancey Martin (2001) examined managerial decision-making in US universities; and James Messerschmidt (1995) researched engineers and managers in the space industry.

their lives, with the pattern of their lives varying between different national contexts (Reis 2004) and with complex intersections of local place, space and locality (Gorman-Murray and Hopkins 2014, Part 8), even for those in transnational finance industry (Longlands 2014). Moreover, leaders of transnational organizations can still remain intensely national in their self-identification (Tienari, Vaara and Meriläinen 2010), creating possibilities for hybrid forms of local/transnational leadership (Hearn 2014).

In addition, the complexity and multistrandedness of men's relations to transnational processes and change are being increasingly recognized and theorized (Donaldson et al. 2009; Hearn et al. 2013). Transnational processes entail both the reaffirmation and subversion of dominant groups of men and dominant forms of masculinities. More precisely, transnational change is not only about movements and communications across given national borders, but also concerns the blurring of nations and national borders, and the formation of new social configurations (Hearn and Blagojević 2013; Hearn 2015). Thus, the impact of increased transnational influences upon managerial and professional men and masculinities cannot be reduced to one single "transnational business masculinity."

In this chapter we engage with these debates by focusing on men and masculinities in the context of men's transnational corporate work and careers, specifically in large transnational companies that are involved primarily or substantially in knowledge work. We draw on detailed empirical data from two studies and data sets which are focused on knowledge companies and knowledge work in rather different and complementary ways, as explained below. The first study, the "Large Companies Gender Equality Study," conducted between 2000 and 2005, included an initial documentary study, a questionnaire survey of the gender equalities and gender policies in the 100 largest companies in Finland, and an interview study with forty middle and senior managers in seven selected transnational companies, all of which in some way involve knowledge work and its management, though not necessarily as their prime product or business.² In this chapter, we primarily draw on the personal interviews, whilst using the other data for contextual purposes.

The second study, the "Knowledge Sector Top Managers' Work-Life Balance Study," conducted between 2012 and 2014, involved more detailed qualitative research with over 100 interviews with knowledge professionals and managers in large international professional services firms. It employed the Collaborative Interactive Action Research (CIAR) method (Bailyn and Fletcher 2007), along with a variety of documentary, observation, time-diary, and visual data, to study

² The first qualitative data set was gathered in the "Men, Gender Relations and Transnational Organising, Organisations and Management." This involved Jeff Hearn, Marjut Jyrkinen, and Rebecca Piekkari, who conducted the interviews.

everyday experiences of work-life balance and boundaries, of living and working in high intensity knowledge work and management.³ Both studies were conducted at Hanken School of Economics, Helsinki, Finland, and were funded by the Finnish national research council, the Academy of Finland. Research on these topics continues in the new research Project WeAll, (Social and Economic Sustainability of Future Working Life, number 292883) funded by the Strategic Research Council at the Academy of Finland.

The Finnish context

Large transnational corporations need to be understood in terms of their national location, the transnational character of their operations, and the interrelations between their national and transnational contexts. Transnational gender issues take on special interest in examining large corporations in the Finnish context, a country with a relatively well-developed ideology and politics of gender equality, and a high level development in information and communication technology, and knowledge work. Since almost all the data presented relates to managers working in Finland, we now provide a short outline of some relevant aspects of this national context.

World Economic Forum Reports have generally ranked the five Nordic countries as leading in woman's empowerment by economic, political, educational, and health and well-being measures. The *Global Gender Gap Report 2014* (World Economic Forum 2014) placed Finland second, after Iceland, in "closing the gender gap between men and women." Finland has among the lowest national figures for income inequality, difference between male and female earned income, and difference between male and female economic activity rates. The Finnish state, like other Nordic states, has been relatively active in promoting gender equality. The Act on Equality between Men and Women came into force in 1987 (amendments have been made in 1992, 1995, 1997, 2005, and 2014) (Bruun and Koskinen 1997; Laki naisten ja miesten välisestä tasa-arvosta 2014). From the very beginning a key explicit aspect of the gender equality law has been to improve the position of women in the labor market. The 1987 Act stated that employers with a regular payroll of at least thirty staff members must incorporate effective equality-promoting measures into their annual personnel and training plan or labor protection action programs, i.e., some form of gender equality plan or planning. The Ombudsman for Equality has the right to conduct inspections in workplaces. As such, the Equality Act obliges workplaces systematically to promote gender equality.

³ The second data set for "Knowledge Sector Top Managers' Work-Life Balance Study" was gathered as part of the research project "Age, Generation, and Changing Work-Life Balance and Boundaries." This involved Jeff Hearn, Mira Karjalainen and Charlotta Niemistö, of whom the last two listed conducted the fieldwork.

In 2005, the gender equality law was strengthened. Employers with thirty or more employees that do not produce a gender equality plan may now face a fine, whereas previously there were no such sanctions. The Equality Act was further amended in 2014. The most important changes include the broadening of equality planning obligations to schools, and the inclusion of a prohibition on discrimination based on sexual identity and the expression of one's sexuality. There is also an obligation on employers to monitor the wages of women and men in their organization, as part of the governmental policy to eradicate the wage gap, as codified in the amended Act (Laki naisten ja miesten tasa-arvosta 2014). In order to gain the necessary comparative information for complaints on gender wage discrimination, however, one needs to go via the Ombudsman for Equality, which is likely to slow their processing.

The 2004 Non-Discrimination (sometimes called Equity) Act translated relevant European Union directives on equal treatment into Finnish national law. This covers such grounds as disability, health, religion, belief, ethnic and national origin, nationality, age, and sexual orientation, with the list of possible discrimination grounds being open-ended (Nousiainen 2012).

As with other Nordic societies, Finland is characterized by relatively high gender equality and high levels of women's participation in politics, public life, and the labor market. Even so, various gender inequalities persist, emerging from both within and outside these formally equal structures and processes. For example, gender segregation remains in employment, and gender inequalities as well as gendered management structures thrive in business. The main focus of gender politics, debates and interventions in Finland has been on the analysis and policy development of the gender equality agenda at the intersections of state, welfare, labor markets, education, family, community, civil society, and to some extent broad employment policy. The law requires a minimum of 40% representation for both women and men on all state committees, commissions, and appointed municipal bodies. While there has been a considerable expansion of Finnish research on gender, management and leadership in recent years (Lämsä et al. 2007), the whole question of gender equality has received less attention in business leadership and management.

Finland has a historical tradition of women working full-time, rather than a "housewife" culture, as, for example, in Germany, Norway or the UK. It also lacks a tradition of au pairs or nannies.

However, while state-sponsored childcare is available, if requested, it is common for women to take up maternal/parental leave when children are young. Men use less than 7% of parental leave days in Finland (Haataja 2009). A home care allowance system enables parents to stay at home, sometimes part-time, until their children are three years old. This possibility is, also, mainly used by mothers. The home care allowance system is currently in the process of amendment, and the main political parties have discussed if the time should be shared by both parents equally. In Finland, there is also

legislative support and services for parents to return to their previous employment or education full-time. In spite of omissions in policies and practices, Finland has among the highest figures for women's full-time labor market participation.

While there is a strong culture in Finland of women working, there is also strong gender segregation in the labor market, with in effect two labor markets: one for women, another for men. This combination of high full-time employment of women, together with gendered labor market segregation may partly explain, along with the history of Finnish citizenship, the particular Finnish ethos of gender-neutrality. This tends to pervade the gendered practices of citizenship, caring and working, and gender segregation in labor markets. It involves widespread assumptions in public debate and amongst policymakers and business leaders that inequalities between women and men have been overcome and gender equality has been achieved; thus, relative gender equality can be combined with a particular form of gender-neutrality that does not strongly recognize gender and gender power relations (Parvikko 1990; Rantalaiho 1997; Ronkainen 2001), in contrast to, say, public ideologies in Sweden.

Finland has high levels of higher education, international competitiveness,⁴ labor flexibility, and social and economic performance. Finnish women's high educational level, combined with the welfare state system, has led to the presence of relatively large numbers of women in top managerial positions. In 2013, Finland had the highest figures in the EU for women on boards of listed companies (29.1%), women as non-executive directors (30%), and women in its national central bank (41.7%), though the figure for senior executives was only 12%, just above the EU average of 11% (*Women and Men in Leadership Positions in the European Union 2013* 2013).⁵ Notwithstanding this, the gender pay gap between women and men in Finland persists at about 17%, higher than the EU average.

In sum, Finland is a complex case in terms of societal and social gender relations. An ideology of gender-neutrality has been coupled with a relatively wide acceptance of the principle, if not the practice, of gender equality across the political spectrum that operates at least at the rhetorical level, and to some extent through policies on work, education and welfare.

In the following sections our two studies are discussed in more detail. Both studies cover a cross-section of companies and include knowledge management and knowledge professionals. In

⁴ Finland's competitiveness, or the lack of it, has been under intense public debate since the economic downturn of 2008. The ideology of high competitiveness, coupled with a neoliberal ethos, also impacts on gender equality (Julkunen 2009). In the light of current political and policy discussions, it is possible, for instance, that the right of daycare for children will be limited in future.

⁵ With such figures, much depends on the exact definitions used. For example, the 2013 Grant Thornton International Business Report survey (*Women in Senior Management* 2013) listed Finland as having women in 24% of senior management positions, the same as the global average.

particular, the second study takes a close look at specialist knowledge companies in the mid-2010s. They explore transnational corporations where men are more “transnationally experienced” than women, working as expatriates on foreign assignments. However, these men are still very much nationally located, as in the study by Cristina Reis (2004). Many of these firms have international brands but in fact much of the work that is undertaken is national by nature. As will be discussed later, the findings point to forms of national and corporate gender-neutrality. The accounts of the men managers reveal an apparently democratic ethos in relation to their families, women colleagues, and wives/partners but only at the level of rhetoric.

The Large Companies’ Gender Equality Study

Introducing the study

This first study focused on the 100 largest companies in Finland. It began with a review of published annual reports, and a survey of the gendered structures, hierarchies, and policies of the participating companies, with a response rate of 61%. The participating companies had men at all levels of the organizations (as employees, middle and top managers, and as members of the board); 58% did not have any women on their board; 20% did not have any women on the board or in the top management; only one company had as many women as men on the board; in 95% there were at least twice as many men as women on the board (Hearn, Kovalainen and Tallberg 2002). One third did not have a Gender Equality Plan, although this obligation is codified in Finnish legislation. The number of women on the board, correlated significantly with the existence of a GEP.

Among the participating companies, seven were selected for a more detailed investigation of the development of gender equality policy, as well as the lives of the middle and top managers (Hearn, Piekkari and Jyrkinen 2009). These seven represented a cross-section of companies, with two of the companies relatively active in terms of gender equality (with a Gender Equality Plan, at least two other gender policies and at least one woman on both the board and in top management), two moderately active (Gender Equality Plan, one gender policy or no Gender Equality Plan and two or more gender policies, at least one women on the board), and three not active (no Gender Equality Plan or other gender policies, and no women on the board). Of the forty interviewed top and middle managers, half were women and half men.

Out of the women interviewees, eight had a top managerial position and twelve were in middle management, in contrast to twelve men top managers and eight men in middle management. The interviewed women were younger than the men informants: women’s average age was approximately forty-three, while that of men was approximately forty-nine. These reflect the gendered patterns in management and leadership more generally: older men are “in power”, and

middle management is taken care of (increasingly) by women managers. Women and men managers also differed in their family relationships, with women managers tending to have more career-oriented partners and fewer children (women 1.05; men 2.50 children), and men managers generally in more conventional marriage-type social relations and lifestyles, with wives fulfilling housewife roles and not pursuing comparable careers (Hearn et al. 2008). Men managers are often in effect “father managers” (Hearn and Niemistö 2012).

Introducing the men managers

The top and middle men managers interviewed generally already had relatively well-structured career plans during their higher education studies, and a strong career orientation was a common factor among the men interviewed. Career building took place in different forms, but in particular so that the men had multiple work experiences and tasks within the same company, with, for example, more experience working as expatriates on foreign assignments compared to the women interviewed in this first data.

The men’s education and university degrees were often in highly male-dominated areas of studies and research, especially engineering and technology, as well as to a lesser extent business studies and law. In that sense, engineering and related masculinities could be said to be one major influence on the men and their occupational culture. Many interviewees characterized their organizations as having an “engineering culture” (McIlwee and Robinson 1992; Faulkner 2006; Holth and Mellström 2011) coupled with male bonding, and in their talk the traditional stereotypes of women and men as professionals and managers with different capabilities were strong. This included covert but even open chauvinism. For instance, a top manager with a technical background unapologetically argued for how the male-dominated engineering culture impacts on his leadership:

Since I’m an engineer these non-engineers have been challenging as subordinates. Typically, they are women and I have had communication problems with them [...]. Women tend to be more social and people oriented while *men are more likely to focus on facts and the substance matter. They take things as they are* while women focus on feelings and emotions. (Top manager, man, our emphasis)

Strong stereotyping of women in contrast to men was present in many interviews. Masculine corporate culture was not seen as a problem as such, but was mentioned as a hindrance for some women who were expected to adjust to its rules and practices. One top manager put it succinctly, “I gained a better understanding of front line operations after the time with the *boys at headquarters!*”

(Top manager, man, our emphasis) The interviewees did not present homosociality as a problem as regards to recruitment or career development, but rather they cherished it.

Gender (in)equality within national “gender-neutrality”

Interestingly, most interviewed men tended to deny that there were any gender equality problems in their corporations, or at least any serious ones, although some did at the same time admit that there were few or even no women in top managerial positions or on the company board. This was explained by the men managers themselves mostly with reference to women’s and men’s segregated educational background, rather than in terms of the gendered structures of organizations, a topic that many sought to deny. An assumption and ideology of gender-neutrality was strongly present in the data, echoing some of the features noted in our discussion of the Finnish context. For example, one interviewee insisted that promotion is a “neutral” process in his company, although in his comments it was obvious that there were many hindrances, for example, around women’s childbearing and motherhood. Also other kinds of prejudices and discriminations, and even open racism, were present as the following quotation illustrates:

Regarding promotion, gender does not have an effect. It is a neutral issue [...]. Of course, one or two women may find themselves in the situation where the salary is not at the right level. For example, salary is seldom raised before a woman goes on maternity leave and when she returns the salary is adjusted to some acceptable level. Often, the new position is worse than the one she had before [...]. Men have a break during the military service, but this often takes place before they start their career [...]. For example, if you have ten top positions and you have one woman, the human resource management system starts getting alarmed! It means that more women or niggers [*sic.*] should be recruited! [Laughing] (Top manager, man)

Some interviewees were clearly uncomfortable discussing gendered patterns in their organizations. Gender inequality was always somewhere else, not in their own organization (see Korvajärvi 1998), in keeping with the supposed “gender-neutrality” noted. One manager (middle manager, man) was astonished that gender equality issues are studied at all. He wondered whether “equality [is] a problem to some companies? I cannot see how ...” Interestingly, he explained how he belongs to a club of young men in the company, the purpose of which is to “socialize and have fun.” The club’s exclusionary nature did not occur to him as an example of a corporate culture where gender equality might be compromised. Another interviewee emphasized, “in our culture, everyone is equal and there is not a need for such [gender equality] policies” (top manager, man). A third explained how

he meets his customers also during leisure time: "[S]ometimes there is an ice hockey game on a Friday or Saturday night, but otherwise I try to devote my free time to the family" (top manager, man). Different forms of male bonding activities, both during working time and more informally, emerged from the data. A preference for men, for example, in recruitment and promotion was justified by customers' perceived needs and wishes, as the following quotations illustrate:

Some customers simply preferred to have a male [business-to-business counterpart]. Perhaps it was because of practical reasons, it was easier to book a skiing trip to Lapland with a male counterpart or arrange a sauna evening than with a female [business counterpart]. (Top manager, man)

Previously, if you worked [...] overwhelmingly with male customers and personnel, you would still most probably recruit a man. In the evenings, in social gatherings, with sauna bathing etc., it was a challenging job for a woman. However, I have seen that some women deal with this very well, others less so. The times have changed and not everything takes place anymore in the sauna. (Top manager, man)

Another clearly national feature of the men stemmed from the fact of military conscription for men in Finland. Indeed, it was also common to refer to the army as a background for one's managerial skills and some used army-related terms (for example, speaking of subordinates as "troops") when they spoke about management and leadership. This reflects the common discourse associated with "strategy talk" and strategizing that managers are taught, for example, in executive education and MBA programs. In addition, some interviewees showed aggressiveness toward the (woman) researcher in relation to the sensitivity of the topic of gender equality in corporations.

Gender (in)equality in home-family relations

While the employing organizations in question were large transnational companies, these "transnational" business men managers generally presented themselves as having a strong domestic base – in both national and family senses. It would be difficult to characterize them strictly in terms of the "transnational business masculinity" described by Connell and Julian Wood (2005). Rather, their domesticity involved in most cases both strong national associations and commitments, and strong family locations, perhaps linked to the small country identity (cf. Reis 2014). Their careers and careerism had been much facilitated by the fact that in many cases their wives had given up their studies and/or professional life. Instead, these wives had stayed at home as "managing

directors” of households and families. The men interviewed tended to praise the women in their roles as housewives. Women colleagues, they argued, were particularly capable in, for example, performing service sector (middle) managerial work but were less suited for senior management responsibilities or tasks requiring business-to-business contacts. This is illustrated in the following quotations:

My wife takes care of the household and the children and my role is to bring the money. She is the MD [managing director] at home, while I am in the office! I do help her during the weekend in cooking or to walk the dog. (Top manager, man)

I have consciously started to build teams by following the principle of a good sociological balance [...]. Statistically, certain characteristics are more common among women than men [...]. Then we need somebody *who is good at networking, at finding information and assistance* both from inside and outside. Particularly women tend to be good at this. (Top manager, man, our emphasis)

I think women have better social skills and the results are better. On the other hand, among corporate [business-to-business] managers, the male dominate. (Top manager, man)

As in the last quote, segregation within the organization is reconstructed in terms of gendered stereotypes of women and men. Although women are valued for their social skills those skills are not considered important for corporate management. This kind of framing is also likely to have an impact on the possibilities for promotion as, for example, experience of line management is often demanded in order to be able to proceed to the next level toward leadership positions in senior management and corporate boards.

The interviews with the men managers were also highly heteronormative, in their taken-for-granted and naturalized assumptions of heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships. Also their family structures tended to be conventional. Gender and sexuality were understood from a strong heteronormative perspective, with a “non-gendering” of men throughout. For example, one man noted that sexuality was “less of a problem in our organization as the sector is so male-dominated” (top manager, man). Nearly all emphasized how important the time with their (nuclear) family is, and how they preferred to invest in “quality time” with their children and wife. The caring role, however, is already highly gendered in itself, and even more so in the context of men managers’ families. In the following quotation a man top manager implicitly expresses how the duty to care for

his own elderly mother is more the task of his wife than of himself. Naturalization of care and even the caring instinct as the woman's responsibility obviously affects individual women's careers but also has a more general impact, as gendered care responsibilities can become a barrier to the recruitment and career development of women (McKie et al. 2008; Jyrkinen and McKie 2012).

At some stage, my wife was working part time. When we were jogging one night last spring we got an idea that she should now [when children were 19 and 22 years old] start running a business of her own involving lecturing and consulting. At the same time this would also *give her better flexibility to spend more time with our mothers, who are old [...]*. One needs to reconsider these issues *depending on the stage in one's life and adjust it accordingly*. This *decision that we took* was a very good one. It is also possible that she will later on start to work fulltime again. (Top manager, man, our emphases)

Since the spouses of managers were not interviewed, it is impossible to say that to what extent these decisions were *de facto* made "jointly" by the wife and the husband, or whether they only served as a smokescreen of explanation for the otherwise selfish career aims of the man. For instance, another manager (top manager, man) explained that his wife stayed at home "because of my career opportunities" and that "we have always moved because of my job, not hers." He continued to say that when they "were young, my wife did not have as good a job as I had so we didn't have to choose in that sense." Thus, as regards to home responsibilities, he stated that he compensates his "share" by paying for a professional cleaner twice a month, "so through payment I took care of my share." The monetary compensation of home responsibilities was mentioned by several men managers interviewed.

At the same time, many men pointed out, sometimes with eagerness and pride, how much they work per day and week, often during evenings, weekends, and sometimes nights. Thus the cultural ethos of long hours was strong in the data, and contradictory to the image of the family man that many wanted to portray. Management as a naturalized men's arena compared to women's care responsibilities emerged also in the context of family leave. One manager (top manager, man) who stated that the corporation was "family friendly" also admitted that they "do not clap hands in favor of fatherhood leave." Thus there were double standards as regards to care and home responsibilities: one for men and another for women.

The knowledge sector top managers' work-life balance study

Introducing the study

The second study was organized slightly differently, focusing more specifically on work-life balance and boundaries, and interviewing sixty knowledge professionals and managers in twelve large international consulting corporations that specialize in business-to-business professional services (mainly legal, accounting, management and information technology work). Thirty-five of the interviewees were women and twenty-five were men, with most being interviewed twice so that there were a total of 109 interviews in the study. The research process was strongly informed by the Collaborative Interactive Action Research (CIAR) method (Bailyn and Fletcher 2007), along with self-reported week time diaries, research discussions, and company documents. The CIAR method requires structured feedback to respondents, meaning in practice going back to the second interview with initial analysis from the first one, to be sure that the interviewer has understood the respondent properly, as well as in order to deepen some areas of the interview, based on both the initial analysis and on questions that the respondent wishes to discuss more.

Within this frame, there are three slightly different sets of data: the vast majority of the data, eighty-two interviews, were gathered in Finland in five knowledge intense organizations at top knowledge management, middle knowledge management, and professional knowledge worker levels; additionally, six of the interviews were conducted in similar organizations in Ireland; and, finally, there were another twenty-seven individual interviews with top level managers and partners in these knowledge-intensive organizations: seventeen in Finland and ten from Australia, Ireland, Sweden, the UK, and the USA. It is these last twenty-seven that are focused on in this current analysis. The interview data was gathered mainly face-to-face, with a few interviews by phone or Skype for those in other parts of the world.

Introducing the men managers

The top managers and partners studied represent multiple privileges, namely being white, heterosexual, able-bodied men with masters' level educations in law, accounting, business and/or technology. Monetary rewards and status are the main drivers for the top managers in this study. Also the nature of the work and work itself are important drivers: the work is done in ever-changing projects, the managers gain fascinating insights to different industries and they get to work with "hot corporations." They also often get "a kick" from the demanding challenges they are facing, as described in the following:

I want new, big, fascinating challenges, things that are mind-shatteringly difficult. Challenges that make you think that I am not going to make it, that I will not survive this. And then when you succeed, it is incredible. (Top manager, man, Finland)

The challenging, “mind-shatteringly difficult,” work is a salient part of their identity – they are the men who have made it and consistently prove that they are able to make it again. The top manager men, in our data, do not position themselves as specifically being at work; rather they are breathing and living the organization – to some extent because some of them partly own the company they work in, and the rest of them are aiming for ownership. Once the managers make it to the top, however, they realize there is no time to rest, for the top is also layered with levels of hierarchy and others are ready to elbow out those who show weakness or stagnation:

You cannot call it a pack of wolves, but still. If you get weak enough you will be abandoned or eaten alive. (Top manager, man, Finland)

Therefore the competition never ends and the top men have to prove over and over again their capability to work hard and successfully, to be “ideal” for the work. The type of “ideal worker” in question here seemed to be highly educated, successful, white, “well-presented,” heterosexual, able-bodied, and athletic, with a clear priority in work, career, and certain forms of embodiment. This ideal is simultaneously embraced yet remains hidden, as men’s “white” bodies are often unconsciously seen as neutral in Western societies (Hearn 2012, 307). The importance of the body and uses of the body was clear in these organizational contexts. Top managers’ work does not require physical strength and muscles, although being fit is seen as important, both as the embodied ideal worker, and for endurance in their harsh competitive working environment. The ethos in these knowledge-intensive organizations values physically embodied capital (Haynes 2012), for example, in extensive references to sport and sport metaphors, even to the extent that the preferential recruitment of former top-level athletes was not uncommon. This emphasis was much less clear in the first study where engineering masculinities were more prominent amongst some of the men managers.

Gender (in)equality within corporate “gender-neutrality”

In these organizations there are fairly equal numbers of men and women at the lower levels of the organization (entry level, and even middle management), but mainly men at the senior-levels, and masculine discourses were pervasive across the organizational hierarchies. Thus, these corporations are not neat, uniform asexual structures, but they are amalgamations of groups of women workers and groups of men workers (Hearn and Parkin 1995). Yet, these large transnational knowledge-intensive business organizations also see themselves and market themselves as being the most equal

organizations in the world. There is a strong rhetoric of “gender-neutrality” throughout. Indeed, on a superficial level they are equal: in line with meritocracy, only numbers matter, for example, as billable hours, sold projects, and staff efficiency measured in utilization percentages. According to Karen Geiger and Cheryl Jordan (2014, 263) meritocracy, or the myth of meritocracy, is one of the assumptions underlying capitalism and proposes that those who succeed are the most qualified, without acknowledging the advantages that come with privileges. On a formal level, there are diversity and equality programs in these corporations; and diversity and equality were strong slogans in these knowledge-intensive companies, as discussed above. These features were hardly visible in practice, however.

The double standards of equality, and especially equality in career promotions, were pinpointed by a young female respondent in the lower level of the organization talking about her male colleagues networking with managers in order to get a promotion, even if meritocracy is the “official” standard of measurement in evaluation and performance appraisal:

A kind of a competition is visible; some people seem to go talk to the managers all the time, on purpose, in order to [...] I don’t know, it’s a bit complicated [uneasy laughter] somehow I feel that maybe I should be there talking to them, too, but that doesn’t feel right, it should be based on the feedback I receive and the results, not on whether or not I’m friendly with someone who makes the decisions. (Junior professional, woman, Finland)

Further, the ambiguous role of “diversity” in the organization was vividly illustrated by a top manager who celebrated diversity in their corporate rhetoric, claiming diversity as one of their “key values”:

Our workers are horribly much from the same mold. If we wouldn’t put “Diversity” up there for everyone to see, the truth of what we are would be revealed (Top manager, man, Finland)

He claimed that those values or characteristics that are non-existent in the organization are elevated to slogans. One way to silence inequalities is to make a lot of noise about the organization being equal, or even obscure homogeneity by giving diversity a very public profile. In many ways, diversity was seen as analogous to having both male and female employees in the organizations – without specifying their level or power in the organizations. Talk about visible social categories, such as skin color, ethnicity, and disability, were largely absent in the data, and less visible categories, such as sexual orientation or religion, were also downplayed.

The organizational tendency to not explicitly voice or portray diversity was explained in a slightly different way by some interviewees, namely by employees' own individuality and individualism, as in: "We are all individuals here." Individuality is strongly present, and talked about explicitly, in the interviews, and the neoliberal ethos of one's "own choice," which was frequently used in the interviews, positions the respondents as privileged individuals with endless possibilities and freedom of choice. Paradoxically, however, the many individual representations of individuality were almost identical to each other. In these knowledge-intensive organizations such similarity – such similar and non-diverse "diversity" and "individuality" – is maintained by actively recruiting employees with similar characteristics.

Moreover, these large professional consultancies conducting confidential management, financial, and legal business-to-business consulting had a very strong international public profile and identity. This involved emphasis on high pressure work and deadlines, and keeping abreast of and even leading rapid modern, or perhaps postmodern, change in organizing, technological innovation, and business methods. Relating to this, personal and corporate successes, of various kinds, were widely discussed, while failure and fears of failure remain silenced at the organizational level. From the outside, their international organizational cultures might appear to be highly international; crossing time zones and places. Yet, interestingly, the international aspect was much less important in the lives of the interviewees, since they worked mainly on the national language, for example, on legal matters and accounting. They were, in fact, rather local and national, for example, in their orientation, and also in bringing together a national and a corporate ideology of "gender-neutrality," whatever the reality of gender structuring of the organizations.

As discussed above, values of dominant neoliberal forms of capitalism, such as meritocracy, ignore structural, cultural, and gendered constraints, and place endless weight on individual choices and possibilities to succeed based on one's own merits. The capitalist logic of the business sector, however, suggests that, in order to build a successful career, extreme flexibility regarding working hours (overtime in the evenings and at weekends, often in an *ad hoc* manner) is needed. As one respondent warned, there are career costs arising out of being inflexible:

Because, it would be like you would be a professional tennis player but when it is time to participate in Wimbledon you don't go because you are mowing your lawn at home. (Top manager, man, Finland)

This suggests that in order to be a "winning player", i.e., a successful professional, one cannot be tied to domestic chores and risk missing out on key events. In practice this often means that if the worker has family, someone has to take care of it while the "winning player" pushes long hours.

Gender (in)equality in home-family relations

These conditions create a demanding atmosphere for workers who would prefer to maintain their boundaries regarding work and non-work. Although there is considerable societal variation in the extent to which the traditional male breadwinner model operates, since our data is global, it seems that women with small children tend to opt out or “opt low,” mainly as a result of neoliberalist individual “choice” (Harvey 2005; Elliot and Lemert 2006); their careers stagnate in an organization that is built on expectations of a traditional model of career advancement (see Hall 2002). Because they are often married to men with similar careers women decide, or are left to, take care of the family while their male spouses work at full steam to succeed in their careers. Thus, the often *ad hoc* micro decisions or micro politics of family life may have long term effects on men’s and women’s careers.

Organizations that formally espouse gender equality, therefore, can provide homes for men and masculinities that can partly be produced and reproduced on a male breadwinner model (Crompton 1999; Lewis 2001; Pfau-Effinger 2004), as illustrated here:

Interviewer: Does your wife work in a similar field, or does she do something totally different?

Top manager: She has a master’s degree in economy and she has worked fulltime during all these years. And ... *she has naturally not had a similar kind of career to me*. When our children were small she did work but did more regular hours without overtime, during office hours. Now when the children are older she is able to work more. But this is how we view it: *my career has been more money-making than hers*. (Top manager, man, Sweden, our emphases)

Even if such an answer would not be anything out of the ordinary in some social and societal contexts, in the seemingly gender equal Sweden this is portraying a traditional view on gender roles and gender contracts within the family in question, and possibly in some ways even in the society in question (Hirdman 1988; Duncan 2000). On the other hand, this top manager wanted to point out that he had always spent a lot of time with his children. A very similar mixed narrative was told by a US top manager whose wife had only lately returned to work as a nurse two days a week. This top manager had been the primary breadwinner for many years, yet regularly spending time with his children, driving them to their hobbies and helping them out with homework. In the Finnish interviews, we also heard various mixed or hybrid narratives. On one hand, there was strong “macho talk” and work-related metaphors of extreme sport challenges and comparisons to how Robert De Niro, in the film *Raging Bull*, was bleeding from his ear in the boxing ring but not falling

down; on the other hand narratives of childcare and devotion to family – often by the same top manager.

Interestingly, the narratives from the top managers from different countries were rather similar. On the surface, a very “traditional” masculinity was narrated to us, yet in the interviews most also introduced some features of apparent caring and devoted fatherhood. The privileges were, as often, not verbalized or even noted, but rather taken for granted (Collinson and Hearn 1994; 1996; Hearn and Collinson 2006; Hearn and Niemistö 2012).

Discussion

Research on work-home balance has tended to neglect global and transnational matters, while research on global management often neglects work-home relations. This chapter has interrogated the complex interrelations of constructions of men and masculinities with national-transnational and the intersections – in and between both senior professional knowledge work and its management, and everyday lives and work-life boundaries. More generally, we locate our analysis in broader discussions of gender, men and masculinities within national-transnational processes and patriarchal relations. The first study considered here (“The Large Companies Gender Equality Study”) was concerned with the largest Finnish companies, and gendered transnational aspects are highlighted in the interview material in terms of the interviewees own work biographies and lives. In contrast, the second study (“The Knowledge Sector Top Managers’ Work-Life Balance Study”) examined high profile international knowledge companies, mainly in Finland, focusing here on the top managers and corporate partners.

The “Large Companies Gender Equality Study” showed connections between three arenas in the gendering processes of transnational management, both within corporations and within managers’ own lives: careers, transnational managerial work, and personal, family and marriage-type relations. Many men managers had a housewife at home, or a wife who worked part-time or had a far less career-oriented work history. Only one of the men managers had a wife or partner with anything like a comparable work career. In contrast, the women managers tended to be single or have a working – sometimes with comparable work career, sometimes less career ambitious – husband or partner who participated more actively in home responsibilities. In contrast, the women managers often did significantly more time management and balancing of home and work requirements than the men managers. While the women managers were often innovative in solving double burden demands, sometimes assisted by supportive bosses and companionate marriages in their careers, the men managers appeared strongly traditional. Some men emphasized that their wives had “volunteered themselves” to give up their careers. Additionally, for men managers, there were

more traditional expatriate assignments than for women managers. Men's extended periods of time abroad appeared advantageous in the development of their varied, core-oriented careers. Expatriate assignments among the men managers also seemed to reinforce traditional gender divisions, as wives tended to stay at home with the children whilst their husbands were abroad.

The transnational consulting companies in the "Knowledge Sector Top Managers' Work-life Balance Study" were formally international, but in practice their work was overwhelmingly business-to-business and largely national, not least in dealing with nationally-based legal and financial matters. These companies celebrated internationality and multinationality, as part of their cosmopolitan branding, but in fact they were locally owned national enterprises. In the Finnish case companies, the owners and the employees were Finns, with command of the Finnish language, due to the language requirements and special expertise areas of national corporate finance, tax, law, and business practice. Their image was dynamic, forward-looking and future-oriented, but actually they were quite traditional and somewhat bureaucratic in their organizational practices. In this sense, they might be contrasted with other knowledge intensive businesses, such as some gaming design companies. Moreover, their main concerns, in terms of both the nature of the work and the work-life balance of the knowledge professionals, managers and companies were strongly gendered and also, in many senses, national in character.

The corporations researched in both studies were still largely traditional in terms of their hierarchical form, even with the (post)modernizing corporate image of the knowledge sector companies. They were characterized by clear gendered structures and homosocial practices founded in and reproducing the "ideal (male) worker" (Acker 1990) and the "ideal (male) manager" (Collinson and Hearn 1996), with few perceived responsibilities and priorities other than their own managerial work. In these organizations men's collective power was preserved partly through hegemonic constructions of men and masculinities – often via the managerial ideal of white, heterosexual, able-bodied men (WHAMs) (Hearn and Collinson 1994). Dominant embodied forms of masculinity were socially and historically sanctioned performances or, more precisely, men's material-discursive practices, widely rewarded with power and popularity (Robinson 2005) and, for some, a means of advancing into and occupying the top positions. This embodied ideal was simultaneously embraced yet remained unnamed, hidden or represented as "neutral" (Hearn 2012), within supposedly "gender-neutral" organizational, national, and transnational contexts. These powerful corporate leaders in and of contemporary capitalism and transnational patriarchies, are in one sense "men of the world" (Hearn 2015), yet they are also located and sustained locally in their workplace, their work-life relations, and their national context.

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