Abstract
This paper explores how homosociality is done in the context of top management recruitment. The empirical data draws on interviews with nine chairmen of the board in Sweden and the study of three recruitments of managing directors. The analysis highlights two key practices, (re)defining competence and doing hierarchy, that contribute to the perpetuation of male dominance within the business elite. The discussion suggests that these practices can be seen as highly embodied, unreflexive, gendered practices contributing both to the discrimination of women and to the preferential treatment of certain men.

Key words: gender, management, homosociality, recruitment

Introduction
This paper examines homosocial practices in the recruitment of managing directors, practices that contribute to the perpetuation of a homogeneous business elite. The persistence of male dominance on top management positions is particularly interesting considering that Sweden is often portrayed as an egalitarian country where women are well represented in politics (Niklasson, 2006) and on the labour market (Statistics Sweden, 2006). Swedish women have almost the same employment rate as men and are equally represented within private and public sector whilst most men work within the private sector. However, women in the Swedish labour force have higher educational levels than men. Women and men in Sweden do not have to choose between paid work and having children, they can have both (Statistics Sweden, 2006).
Despite a long tradition of working for gender equality in organizations (Baude, 1992; Blomqvist, 1994; Hagberg et al, 1995; Bergqvist, 1999), including top management layers (Höök, 1995; Regnö, 2003), 76 per cent of all managers in Sweden are men (Statistics Sweden, 2006). Women represent 22 per cent of managers in private business and 56 per cent in the public sector. Within private sector, the proportion of men in management positions is 78 per cent, whilst the proportion of men in the Swedish labour force is 59 per cent (Statistics Sweden, 2006). Moreover, 87 per cent of boards and 84 per cent of management teams in private business are men (Regnö, 2003). Out of the 294 companies listed on the Stockholm Stock Exchange, 288 have managing directors that are men and only 6 that are women (Fristedt and Sundqvist, 2008).

Furthermore, top management in Sweden is not only homogenous in terms of gender it is also homogeneous in terms of ethnicity, age, social background, and education (Collin, 1994; Petersson et al, 1996; Göransson, 2003). According to a large survey of the elites in Sweden (Göransson, 2006), the economic field is very male dominated compared to other fields such as politics, public sector, academia and culture. The average top manager in business is a Swedish born, middle-aged man with higher social class background. The majority of top managers in business have a higher education, although some of the older men are not equally as educated as the younger generation. In many ways, men in the Swedish business elite have a more traditional lifestyle than men in other Swedish elites. The vast majority are married and have children. Only 40 per cent live in double breadwinner relationships. In general, they take less responsibility for household and children than their partners. One can say that managing directors in Swedish private sector today represent the intersection of dominant groups within different social relations such as gender, class, race/ethnicity and sexuality (cf. Hearn, 1996).

The homogeneity at management levels has become a highly debated issue in Sweden. A Government commissioned inquiry (SOU 2003:16) showed that half of the privately owned Swedish companies had an official ambition of increasing the number of women managers, which was a change compared to an earlier inquiry from 1994 in which two-thirds of companies had no official goal of increasing the number of women on top management
levels. Also, the actual number of women on management and board positions has increased, although gender bias is still notable.

In light of the gender distribution on management levels and the Swedish gender equality ideology, it is interesting to explore homosociality in the context of management recruitment. This paper will discuss how homosociality is done, drawing on the study of three recruitments of managing directors and interviews with nine chairmen of the board in Sweden. In a first section, the theoretical background of the paper and the key notion of homosociality will be presented followed by a section on the empirical data and methodology. Thereafter, (re)defining competence and doing hierarchy are discussed as key homosocial practices. The concluding section suggests that these practices can be seen as highly embodied, unreflexive, gendered practices contributing both to the discrimination of women and to the preferential treatment of certain men.

**Recruitment, managers and homosociality**

Social power relations such as gender are embedded in organisations and reproduced through processes that result from people’s activities and perceptions. Thus, we do gender through our everyday actions. The meaning of gender is always situated and derives from a specific social context and is intertwined with other social relations such as class, race, ethnicity and sexuality (e.g. Connell, 1987; Smith, 1988; Hearn et al, 1989; Acker, 1992; Mills and Tancred, 1992; Halford et al, 1997; Rantalaiho and Heiskanen, 1997; Ely and Meyerson, 2000; Wahl et al, 2001; Kvande, 2003; Yancey Martin, 2003). As Ely and Meyerson (2000) write, gender is enacted across a range of social practices that exist both within and outside of formal organizations. In formal organizations, there exist at least four sets of social practices that constitute gender, i.e. are gendered: 1) formal policies and procedures; 2) informal work practices, norms and patterns of work; 3) symbols; 4) informal patterns of everyday social interaction. These social practices tend to reflect and support men’s experience and life situations, and thus maintain a gender order in which men and particular forms of masculinity predominate (Ely and Meyerson, 2000). Men’s dominance in organizations and society is not monolithic. It has to be continually re-established and can
thus be challenged, subverted and destabilized (Collinson and Hearn, 1996; Hearn and Parkin, 2001).

Recruitment has been identified as a key process in the reproduction of gender inequity on the labour market (Reskin and Roos, 1990). Collinson et al. (1990) have for example highlighted the informality in channels, criteria and procedures when recruiting in different British industrial sectors. Informality and closed procedures facilitated the reproduction of job segregation. The study unveiled informality and closed procedures facilitating job segregation and inconsistent treatment of candidates of either sex. Selection criteria were also informal, consisting mainly of highly implicit and vague criteria of acceptability. Depending on the nature of the job to be filled, assumptions based on taken-for-granted beliefs about men and women, were used to as indicator of a candidate’s ability and future performance, which contributed to the reproduction of gender discrimination.

Research on gender and management shows that male dominance in numbers and male gendered perceptions of management contribute to the reproduction of gender inequity in organisations (e.g. Kanter, 1977; Calás and Smircich, 1991; Collinson and Hearn, 1994; Wahl, 1995; Wajcman, 1995). The term homosociality has been used to capture processes in which men identify and orient themselves towards each other, thus contributing among others to male dominance on power positions in organisations. Kanter (1977) uses the term “homosocial reproduction” to describe how certain managers are selected according to certain social criteria and uses processes “homosexual reproduction” for processes that result in women being excluded from management positions. Kanter claims that discretion and evaluation uncertainty, communication and demand for total loyalty and devotion among managers create pressures for social certainty and conformity. Roper (1994, 1996) has developed the concept homosocial desire in order to capture the attraction that provides the particular intensity of relations between male managers and how homoerotically charged feelings influence decisions regarding successions, which in turn contribute to the reproduction of gender segregation.
Furthermore, Lindgren (1996, 1999) has in several studies explored homosocial interaction in all-male groups and suggests that the exclusion and derogation of women is a rather it is a consequence of the internal struggle for power and position between men in which women are used as currency (cf. Kimmel, 1994) rather than a result of a wish to exercise power over women. This line of reasoning is close to the concept of cultural cloning suggested by Essed (2004) who seeks to re-conceptualize discrimination against women in terms of preference for men in order to understand the persistence of male homogeneity at the top in higher education.

In sum, research shows that homosociality is an important mechanism in the reproduction of male dominance. There is still, however, little empirical work focusing men in the business elite (Donaldson, 1993; Kildruff and Mehra, 1996) and on homosocial relationships within the context of the recruitment of managing directors. A study by Fawcett and Pringle (2000) focusing on the decision-making processes practiced in the selection of CEOs in New Zealand is one exception. The findings demonstrate informality, a lack of objective selection practices, and a reliance on networks for executive search. Moreover, stereotyped male gendered perceptions of CEOs, homosocial reproduction and assessment based on traditional career models. Fawcett and Pringle conclude that this situation contributes to the preference of men over women in the decision-making process. As will be shown below, the observations made by Fawcett and Pringle’s study concord with the observations in the study presented in this paper.

The empirical data and methodology

This paper stems from a research project on the recruitment of managing directors that was reported in a doctoral thesis in Swedish (Holgersson, 2003). The empirical data included interviews with chairmen of the board and the study of the recruitment of three managing directors.

The chairmen In a first step, I carried out interviews with chairmen of the board in order to get a general picture of recruitment practices on top levels in Swedish business. Nine chairmen of the board of large Swedish companies were interviewed on their
understanding of how managing directors are recruited in Swedish business. These were all well-known, highly regarded men in Swedish business with extensive experience of corporate management. The companies, in which they were chairmen, were listed companies and represented a variety of industries and owners. The majority of the industries were male-dominated, and all the boards were male-dominated, with seven of nine being all male. All companies had a male managing director. The chairmen were also members of several other boards in a diverse set of companies. These men were not primarily selected as representatives of a certain company or industry but rather as representatives of Swedish business elite.

The interviews with the chairmen were semi-structured, conducted by myself, and usually lasted about one to two hours. The interviewees were asked to describe the procedure when a managing director was to be recruited and to illustrate with cases from their own experience. Questions on what was required of a managing director, and the experience and qualities they found important were also posed. Moreover, the chairmen were asked to discuss characteristics or actions that can disqualify a candidate. Finally, as far as time allowed, the chairmen were asked to discuss why few women are recruited to managing director positions. Six out of nine chairmen had this opportunity. The interviews were all taped and transcribed.

The recruitments My ambition was to do participatory observation of recruitment processes but it proved to be very difficult to get access. I managed, however, to access through their chairmen of the board, three companies that had recently recruited a managing director. The studies of the recruitment of Gustaf, Hans and Anders are based on semi-structured interviews conducted by myself. The interviews were between one to two hours long and were all taped and transcribed. The interviewees involved in the recruitments were asked to describe the recruitment process and the profile guiding the search and selection of candidates. They were also asked if a woman was ever considered as candidate for the position. The recruited managing directors were asked to describe the process from their point of view. When analyzing the empirical data, I focused on the following questions: What happens when a managing director is recruited? What does the process look like and
which are the persons involved? What is the norm for a managing director? What are the
perceptions of management and gender? Why are mainly men recruited to top
management positions? I was especially attentive to descriptions of the candidates, the
board members, the relation between the different persons involved, other recruitments
and the job of a managing director. I have below sketched a description of the recruitments
based on the results of the interviews.

Gustaf The first study concerned the recruitment of Gustaf to the position of managing
director in a small, newly started company selling consultancy services. The company
employed a couple of male consultants who were assisted by a few women secretaries.
The board and owners of the company consisted of a number of highly regarded men in
the world of Swedish business, holding board positions in several different companies. The
study builds on interviews with Gustaf, the managing director that was recruited, Håkan,
the chairman of the board, and Göran and Ruben, two members of the board. The majority
of the men in the board had worked with Gustaf during his years as partner in a renowned
international consultancy firm. Gustaf also helped the board as an advisor in the initial
phase of setting up the company. The board had initially discussed a profile but since
Gustaf was already in the mind of several board members, especially the chairman, why
the image of Gustaf also shaped the profile according to the chairman. The board had not
expected Gustaf to accept the offer since he had such an attractive position in the
consultancy firm and was based abroad. It turned out, however, that Gustaf was tired of the
rat race at the firm and wanted to move back to Sweden with his family. Gustaf was also
offered an interesting “package”. The board members framed this as a rare opportunity for
Gustaf to build something himself and to work close together with some renowned
businessmen. Not that Gustaf lacked contacts in Swedish business life – not only was he
friend with a number of prominent businessmen, he was also related to several of them
through family ties. The board members all thought Gustaf was the perfect candidate for
the job although he had not worked with the same type of customers or services in his
previous employment as he would in this new position. This, however, did not present any
problems since the board was going to actively work together with Gustaf. When explaining
why Gustaf was such a good choice, the chairman not only put forward Gustaf’s track
Gustaf's pleasant personality. Gustaf himself was convinced that he was not the only person that fulfilled the requirements but that it was the personal chemistry between them that was decisive.

Hans and Anders The second and third study concerned the recruitment of Anders and Hans, to the position of managing director of two, mid-sized subsidiaries within an industrial group that were subsequently listed on the stock exchange. The group operated in a male-dominated industry and both subsidiaries had male-dominated management teams. The material consists of interviews with Hans and Anders, the two recruited managing directors, and Ragnar and Torsten, the two board members and shareholders responsible for the recruitment process. Torsten was also the chairman of the board. Included is also an interview with Britta, a woman organization consultant, who had previously worked for the two owners. Torsten had a successful career in the industrial sector before he started to build on his own corporate group. He strongly believed in adding financial competence to the management of industrial businesses and was known to recruit persons with an education in business administration. Hans was such a person. They had met early on in Hans’ career when Hans was working with financial management in a company where Torsten was managing director. After having left the company to start his own business, Torsten offered Hans to come and work for him. Hans claims that he has always been in the borderland of line management and staff functions working with financial management. Hans was considered to be one of Torsten’s boys since they had worked closely for many years. He was known for his good financial skills and his rather authoritative managerial skills. According to Britta, Hans had been appointed out of loyalty and that some persons on the board were sceptical to Hans’ appointment as managing director because they thought he lacked necessary managerial skills. Torsten, however, was convinced that Hans was an excellent choice. Anders, on the other hand, was described as Hans’ opposite: a very people-oriented and modern manager but with low self-confidence. This however almost seemed to make him even more sympathetic in the eyes of his superiors who were also certain that he would gain in confidence with time and experience. Like Hans, Anders also had followed a career in financial management in different companies. He was the financial director in a company acquired by Torsten’s group and was identified as a
potential leader, not by Torsten nor Ragnar, but by a woman consultant hired to work with some organisational problems within the group. Torsten and Ragnar had however taken Anders to heart and were very pleased with him.

Analyzing the data The empirical data has been previously reported in Swedish in Holgersson (2003). All quotes are verbatim and have been approved by the interviewees. In the case of the recruitments studied, the interviews were reported in great detail. All names are pseudonyms and detailed information on the organizations has been avoided in order to protect the anonymity of the persons and organizations involved. The interviews with the chairmen were analysed thematically, both recurrent themes and issues that were not recurrent, but interesting in relation to the study’s underlying theoretical framework. When analyzing the data from the chairmen I focused on the process, the profile and the person involved in the process. I continued to focus on these three dimensions when I analyzed the data from the recruitments in order to sketch a picture of the events and relationships involved in each case as well as the perceptions of management and gender of the actors involved. The data of the recruitments was however also analyzed thematically. This allowed a comparison between cases and a comparison between the data from the chairmen and the data from the recruitments. The different sets of data were thus analyzed iteratively, also in relation to the literature. I examined and re-examined the data and literature in the light of each other. For this paper, I have chosen to report the results that I find relevant for our understanding for how homosociality is done.

The presentation of the empirical data should be seen as my interpretations of the interviewees’ interpretations of the process and not representations of reality as such. The empirical data consists of the interviewees’ accounts of themselves and others in interaction and negotiation of meaning with me in the interview situation (cf. Gabriel, 2000). The semi-structured interviews allowed the interviewees to reflect and discuss their experiences. This is obviously not a method for the collection of objective data (Czarniawska, 2002), but it allows me to capture how a number of persons make sense of organizational events, including their interpretations of organizational processes and practices (Söderberg, 2003; Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991). These accounts are produced in
a specific organizational and societal context, which I have tried to take into account in my analysis. I understand reality as socially and culturally constructed, thus I see knowledge as positioned and every claim to knowledge as local (cf. Smith, 1990; Haraway, 1991). These claims cannot be evaluated in relation to reality in absolute terms but rather if they appear probable, reasonable or credible. My ambition is therefore to have a reflexive and problematizing approach (cf. Harding, 1987). An extensive discussion of my methodological considerations has been published in Swedish in Holgersson (2003).

(Re)defining competence

The study reveals that the recruitment of managing directors involves a small number of men consisting of the chairman and a couple of board members, often together with an executive search consultant. The recurring reference to the candidates as “he” in the interviews with the chairmen implies that most candidates are also men (cf. Fawcett and Pringle, 2000). As a first step in the process, a profile is drafted including the criteria that the candidates are expected to match. Candidates are then searched for among managing directors or in management teams, in circles close to the company since knowledge and experience of the industry was said to be of great importance. Most of the interviewees preferred candidates that they knew since it then was easier to assess their strengths and weaknesses.

When assessing candidates, factors such as previous functions and track record, especially measurable achievements such as profits, seemed to be important. Many stressed the importance of having held positions with profit and loss responsibility due to the difficulty in evaluating the candidates’ skills. Consequently, a strong preference for line management positions was expressed. The importance of having shown results was often put forward as an explanation to why there are so few women on top management positions. According to several chairmen interviewed, there are too few women that have positions in which they show that they can deliver results. As one chairman explained, “You have to do your job well, but if you have a job that you can’t measure, well, then this person has an enormous drawback, irrespective if it is a woman or a man.” Another chairman claimed that women tend to shy away from line management positions and therefore
demanded more commitment from women, “One has to have the will to do what you have to do, understand that you has to stand in line and wait and that the line management road is a rough road to travel to the top.” It is indeed not surprising that men on board positions find that there are no competent women to recruit for top positions since the most common positions for women in management teams are personnel/human resources, financial management and information (Regnö, 2003). It is interesting to note that these positions are not constructed as steppingstones leading to the top by the men interviewed in the study but rather as dead-end managerial jobs (cf. Kanter, 1977), positions that are of course very privileged and powerful compared to most positions women hold in organisations, but relatively subordinated men in the management team (cf. Wahl, 1992).

Requirements such as profit and loss responsibility and management experience can be labelled as suitability criteria (cf. Salaman and Thompson, 1978; Jenkins, 1986), criteria that have to be met in order to candidate for the position. Once a candidate has matched the suitability criteria, focus seems to shift towards what can be labelled as acceptability criteria. These are criteria such as appearance, attitude, and personality, that are less well defined and that are more implicit (cf. Salaman and Thompson, 1978; Jenkins, 1986). Most interviewees stressed the importance of a good rapport and a sense of mutual trust between the board and the candidate. For example, a board member involved in the recruitment of Gustaf explained, ”/.../ it has to be a guy that can create a relationship, [one has to be able to] trust that this guy will say that ‘I think these old men would be fun to have as a partners, because they are professional’/.../” A chairman explained that “You can’t be regarded as an unreliable person if you want to be part of this gang /.../ you must be seen as trustworthy /.../ one should be able to trust you, at least in business. You won’t be blamed if you have trouble in your marriage or something like that, but when it comes to business one has to be sure that if we have said something, then we stand by it.” A majority of chairmen were also concerned with the candidate’s appearance, behaviour and image. As a chairman said, “/.../ one must have a person that /.../ is socially acceptable.” A candidate was for example not to be conspicuous but reflect seriousness and sobriety. Clothes and hair should never be loud. Moreover, the candidate should be able to behave well and to socialize with people in different settings.
Several chairmen claimed that they preferred a candidate to have a stable and happy family, since this was regarded as important in order to enable for the managing director to do a good job. Some also pointed out that even though the family was important, the managing director position demands a high degree of commitment to work, requiring long hours and a family life adjusted to these. A chairman concluded, “/…/ and he must prioritize work before family /…/ of course he has to take care of his family, but the family must also he highly tolerant.” The ideal candidate for the managing director position can thus be seen as a construction that largely follows male bourgeois virtues of temperance and diligence and a traditional heterosexual male lifestyle.

However, it seems as if once suitability criteria have been met, even acceptability criteria can be modified. When for example preferred candidates such as Anders and Hans hold positions as financial directors, a position that could be described as a staff position, the position is not considered a dead-end position. Furthermore, the data reveals that once board members have found a candidate that they felt was right, the candidate did not necessarily have to match the profile perfectly. For example, the board members all thought Gustaf was the perfect candidate for the job although he had not worked with the same type of customers or services in his previous employment as he would in this new position. According to the board members, this did not present any problems since the board was going to actively work with Gustaf. As one concluded, “... he’s a young, well-equipped person, he’ll learn from those that have more experience /…/ it’s not like you have to /…/ be an expert on everything”. The conviction that the weaknesses of the preferred candidate can be compensated for or will disappear with time and further experience is also present in the case of Hans and Anders. One of Anders’ flaws according to himself, the consultant, and the board members interviews, was that he had low self-confidence. Anders thought he was not aggressive enough, “… it’s my big drawback as a person, /…/ that one is not sufficiently aggressive /…/ you have to believe in yourself …”. This, however, almost seemed to make him even more sympathetic in the eyes of his superiors. Also, the board members and the consultant were convinced that he would gain
in confidence with time, experience and support. Hans, on the other hand, was described as too authoritarian but this was forgiven because he was so hardworking and trustworthy.

Judging from the interviews with the chairmen, women appear to be flawed both in relation to suitability and acceptability criteria. When asked about why there are so few women on top management positions, the chairmen stated that one of the main reasons was the shortage of women competent enough for top management positions (cf. Fawcett and Pringle, 2000). Women choose the wrong education, the wrong industries, the wrong jobs and they lack contacts. Another reason was that women do not have as much work experience as men mainly due to their bearing and rearing of children which set them back a number of years in relation to their male peers (cf. Fawcett and Pringle, 2000). Several chairmen and board members commented that it was difficult to combine a management career and responsibility for children and the home, since being a manager requires a high degree of commitment to work with long working hours. Women are thus by default, and as a group, assumed to have the responsibility for home and children, something that is seldom expected from men (cf. Andersson, 1997; Bekkengen, 2002). Some chairmen interviewed also held normative views suggesting that women ought to have children and also look after them since they were more suited than men to the task and that not having children was negative for women. It is as if a different set of criteria are applied to women, since issues of work load and children never come up as criteria that concern “regular” candidates, that is men.

Competence is thus defined and redefined in such a way that acceptability and suitability criteria match the preferred candidates, excluding women from the definition of competence. By defining line management as important and the positions that women hold as less important, women are not included in the pool of candidates. Women are also excluded from the definition of competence since the men recruiting seem to have many perceptions of women as deficient as managers. Nevertheless, the recruitment of Anders, Hans and Gustaf show that flaws displayed by the preferred male candidates may be redefined as not aggravating, temporary or even as an advantage. Homosociality, the preference for men, is thus partly done by defining and redefining competence to certain
men’s advantage. Abrahamsson (2003) and Peterson (2007) have made similar observations of how competence is redefined in order to maintain or restore the gender order. Just as the present data, they show that competence associated with men and masculinity is valued as important and competence that becomes valuable also becomes associated with men and masculinity (cf. Abrahamsson, 2003).

It is not only women who are excluded from the definition of competence. As statistics show, there are few managing directors in Sweden of colour, few with immigrant background, few with a working-class background and few that are openly homosexual (Göransson 2006). Moreover, the present empirical data contains jokes about homosexual men that can be interpreted as signs of an underlying heterosexual culture in Swedish business life. The dominant construction of competence thus excludes men who do not conform to bourgeois virtues, a traditional male lifestyle and who do not have a Swedish ethic background. In many ways, this relates to what Knights and Kerfoot (1993, p. 659) refer to as masculinism, a discourse that “reflects and produces management practices and reconstitutes individuals in accordance with masculinist priorities”, which has the effect of privileging men vis-à-vis women, ranking some men above others and maintaining certain forms and practices of masculinity as dominant.

**Doing hierarchy**

The previous section highlighted how the (re)definition of competence is an important ingredient in doing homosociality. In the following, the practices involved in maintaining the hierarchy will be discussed as another important aspect of doing homosociality.

The data reveals that the boards want to handpick their candidates and that top positions such as managing director are seldom advertised (cf. Fawcett and Pringle, 2000). Many boards want the process to be as discreet as possible in order to avoid rumours and insecurity about who is in charge in the organization. According the survey among the business elite (Göransson, 2006), a vast majority have been offered their positions, often mediated by an executive search consultant. Interestingly, interviews with both women and men managing directors (Franzén, 1995), reveal that the women managing directors had
applied to many more positions during their careers compared to their male counterparts and that they were recruited from outside to their positions implying that it is more difficult for women to ascend the top in one company.

When asked if it is legitimate to submit one’s application for a position, a couple of chairmen explained that such behaviour was not well regarded. A chairman claimed, “Well, it happens sometimes and then one becomes very skeptical /…/ then I think, ‘what’s wrong with him? Doesn’t he trust us enough to know that we’ll choose him if we really want him?’” Some were convinced that career planning was to be handled by one’s superiors. As one chairman said, “There is only one type of career planning that works. Do your job as well as you can. You should never do your own career planning. But when you become manager you can do it for others/…/.” Another chairman explains, “/…/ the way [to the top] is by building the recruitment from below over several years, by building a hierarchy.”

Several chairmen said however that there are some more or less sophisticated ways of making superiors aware of their aspirations, for example through alliances, contacts and exposure in certain contexts. A certain degree of visibility was thus deemed necessary in order to be included in the pool of candidates. A couple of chairmen mentioned that, managing directors in certain corporate spheres are chosen from a pools of up and coming younger managers that are groomed for future senior management positions. The chairmen also described how they often searched in their own network and also kept a list of people they found interesting. These lists would typically be composed of persons they had met in different, more or less professional settings, ranging from business meetings to conferences or dinners. Several interviews reveal that being known to the members of the board is in many ways decisive. For example, the chairman who appointed Gustaf explained that the board members happened to know Gustaf and therefore did not go out on a large search, especially not to find a woman, “Well, yes, I know at least one woman /…/ a clever girl who I’m sure knows these things quite well, so it could have worked but since I didn’t know her and I knew Gustaf better, there could be somebody else, but it wasn’t as if we started to look for one systematically…” It is interesting to note that according some chairmen, these networks are not only created and maintained at work but
also during leisure time, for example through the practice of sports such as hunting, tennis and sailing (cf. Fawcett and Pringle, 2000). According to one chairman, an explanation to why women have difficulties in being part of men’s networks was that women were not interested in the same activities as men. He claimed that, “Guys are guys and guys like to socialize with guys!”

Several of the men interviewed both among chairmen and the recruitments studied, mention the importance for one’s career of having a sponsor or mentor. This is illustrated by the careers of Anders and Hans, where the chairman Torsten seems to have been committed to provide them with good opportunities and had become a friend and mentor for them both. Furthermore, the chairman involved in the recruitment of Gustaf reflected over his own career and concluded that, “/…/ I have always had a boss who has pulled me ahead, who has always arranged so that I have come forward, supported me in my development. You have to have someone if you are to succeed /…/ it is not necessarily so that the most competent succeeds, it is shared, you have to be competent and you have to have the right boss, a mentor that pulls you ahead /…/”. The senior men are thus active in identifying younger prospects, grooming them by providing opportunities to gain and display competence and finally selecting them for management positions. The younger men are active in a different way. Their activity consists in being visible in the right way, that is, by conforming to the existing management culture and being available. Long working hours can, as Kanter (1977) points out, be seen as a substitute measure of trust, loyalty and performance.

The tradition of handpicking and the system of patronage in which junior prospects are groomed for future positions could be interpreted as a way for the dominant group, in this case the board, of securing their privilege of selecting a new member. In this way, the senior members can control which members are included in the group. They can secure that the status of the group is not lowered through the inclusion of members that are not considered suitable. In many ways, the recruitment of managing directors can be understood in terms of co-option, i.e. the appointment to a membership by invitation, often with the recommendation from a number of persons that are already members.
Recruitment based on co-option not only designates formal criteria, such as the acceptability criteria mentioned above, but also certain informal criteria that have to be met in order for a presumptive member to be selected (cf. Bourdieu, 1984; Lindgren, 1992, 1994). These informal criteria can include age, gender, and social or ethnic background and influence more or less overtly decisions when co-opting. Therefore, the members of groups based on co-option have more and additional common characteristics than those explicitly required (Bourdieu, 1984; Lindgren, 1992). In her studies of homosociality and systems of co-option, Lindgren (1996, 1999) observed that co-option often appears to follow two principles: the dominant group has the privilege to select a new member, which has been identified above, and the new member should in some way contribute to the status of the group.

The second principle identified by Lindgren (1996, 1999) concerns the requirement that the new member should add to the status of the group. This can also be identified in the empirical data. All the board members interviewed described for example the appointed managing directors as bearers of new competence. Gustaf is for example constructed as the young, “educated manager” with a glamorous career in the relatively new industry of consultancy, in relation to the men on the board who frame themselves as industrialists, who have managed industrial and manufacturing companies as well as built their own companies. Hans and Anders were also described as “educated managers”, in this case with a business education and financial skills. The chairman was known to favour financial management among managers in the industrial group. In both cases, the “educated managers” with a business education and a career in consultancy or financial management are constructed in relation to the “career manager”, the technically-oriented manager who knows the business and the products, much like the managers in post-war Britain described by Roper (1994). The younger managers are thus not identical in terms of experience and competence compared to the senior men who have recruited them but they all have the ideal manager as a common point of reference. They are thus all variation of the same dominant form of managerial masculinity discussed above. They are what Essed (2004) defines as cultural clones, look-alikes representing more of the same images and values, that are not necessarily replicas but similar enough not to stand out.
In sum, hierarchy is done by senior men identifying, grooming and selecting younger men that in return make themselves available and visible, conform by the management norm and at the same time contribute with something new and valuable. The senior men’s prerogative of defining competence and selecting new members can be interpreted as a way of maintaining the hierarchy not only between women and men, but also between men. It has been suggested that homosocial reproduction among managers is a result of the uncertainty that characterizes the world of managers (Kanter, 1977). The sense of uncertainty experienced by managers may however also stem from uncertainty of the managers’ positions and power that result from competitiveness and careerism in management cultures (Kerfoot and Knights, 1993). Homosociality can thus be seen as a way of ensuring that everyone respects the rules of the game in order to preserve a stable and predictable hierarchy and guaranteeing one’s own power position.

**Homosociality as embodied, unreflexive, gendered practice**

The point of departure of this paper has been that understanding homosociality is necessary in order to understand how the male dominance in business elite is maintained, even in a society such as Sweden that in many ways is perceived as egalitarian. The analysis of the empirical data has identified two practices, (re)defining competence and doing hierarchy, as central for the understanding of how homosociality is done. (Re)defining competence comprises defining acceptability criteria so that what preferred male candidates do appears important and what women do as less important, redefining flaws displayed by preferred male candidates as either not disqualifying or aggravating or even as competence, defining suitability criteria according to a traditional bourgeois male norm and applying a different set of criteria for women as a group. Doing hierarchy entails senior men having the prerogative of defining competence as well as identifying, grooming and selecting younger prospects. It also involves younger men making themselves available and visible, not challenging the hierarchy but conforming by the management norm and contributing with competence that is considered new and valuable. Through these practices, certain men are defined as competent whilst women are constructed as deficient and excluded from homosocial circuits. The practices contribute to the
reproduction both of a specific type of male manager and the perpetuation of a specific masculine managerial culture. These are highly embodied, gendered practices. The analysis shows that criteria are defined and redefined to fit men and that the practices involve close relations between men. These practices presuppose actions performed by men in relation to other men. The same practices performed by senior men and junior women would most probably play out very differently and have different consequences. Moreover, not all men are included in the homosocial circuits, since social power relations such as class, race/ethnicity and sexuality mark these practices.

Previous research has documented how the glass ceiling in business is maintained through the widespread discrimination against women. By focusing on homosocial practices when studying the recruitment of managing directors, light is shed on how the glass ceiling is maintained through the active preference for certain men. The exclusion of women could be seen as a result of an active preference for men rather than active and conscious discrimination of women (cf. Lindgren, 1996, 1999; Essed, 2004; Hamrén, 2007). Homosociality and gender discrimination are thus two sides of the same coin. For example, the direct and indirect discrimination experienced by women in male dominated work contexts can partly be interpreted as a result of homosociality. Support for this interpretation comes for example from a study by Wahl (1992) in which women managers and specialists claimed that they felt that they were treated differently and worked under different conditions compared to their male colleagues. These experiences of indirect gender discrimination can be interpreted as partly due to perceptions of women as deficient and to career structures designed according to a traditional male lifestyle. The women in Wahl’s study also state that they have experienced direct gender discrimination both in formal situations such as promotions, issues of salary, appointments and in more informal contexts, where they have experienced that they were made invisible and were kept outside of certain circles and information was withheld from them. Discrimination in more informal contexts could be understood as a result of homosocial practices among male managers and direct discrimination as a result of co-option more specifically. Homosociality could be seen as the glass elevator that some men ascend in, while discrimination is the glass ceiling that holds down women (cf. Williams, 1993; Kvande, 2002).
The question remains how it is possible for homosocial practices to prevail within a societal context with a gender egalitarian ideology and in which a vast majority of men in the business elite claim to be pro-equality (Wägnerud and Niklasson, 2006)? In both the interviews with the chairmen and the recruitments studied show that men also express a realization that they fail to see women due to culture and traditions, that it is tough for women in business because they are excluded from male networks and that men prefer to work with men. A majority also express a wish to see more women on top positions. Some even claim to be active in promoting women in business. The responsibility for the discrimination of women in business life is however placed somewhere beyond themselves, for example on society or other men. This indicates that the active preference for men need not be conscious or deliberate. Homosociality may therefore be understood as unreflexive gendered practice (cf. Yancey Martin, 2006), enabling men to simultaneously portray themselves as pro-equality and at the same time reproduce male dominance in management. Being positive towards gender equality but not acting accordingly could be interpreted as a sign of active resistance. Nevertheless, according to Wahl (2003), one can also argue that talking about gender equality is necessary to take a first step towards a more reflexive approach and to changing practices.

The present analysis has of course its limitations that open for new studies. For example, further aspects of homosociality could be captured through other methods, such as ethnographic studies, and in other societal and organizational contexts, for example in organizations where women have a more dominant role and/or are being hired on top management positions or in organizations that could be assumed have other logics and other selection methods. Moreover, homosociality is one of many gendered practices that contribute to the perpetuation of male dominance on management positions in organizations and that deserve further exploration.
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