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The Gendered Organization and its Effect on Women's Identity Construction

A Study of Women's Experiences Working in a Male-dominated Company

by

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Abstract

- Title:** The Gendered Organization and its Effect on Women's Identity Construction - *A Study of Women's Experiences Working in a Male-dominated Company*
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- Key Words:** Organizational culture, gendered organizational culture, masculinity, femininity, identity work, identity regulations.
- Purpose:** The main purpose of the thesis is to examine female employees' experiences working in a male-dominated (in terms of body-counting) company.
- Methodology:** The study is based on a qualitative research approach with an interpretative perspective. This has been done with semi-structured interviews and observations.
- Theoretical Perspectives:** Our theoretical foundation is grounded on literature and research regarding: organizational culture, gendering in organizations and identity.
- Conclusions:** The results of the study indicate that female employees change and adapt in order to fit in the organization and the masculine characteristics. Female employees seem to balance between two gendered identities, the negligent and the unfaltering.

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1. Introduction

In the first chapter of this thesis, we present an overview and background to our main theoretical themes: organizational culture, gendered organizations and identity. We then introduce our research aim and research questions. Thereafter, an account of the knowledge contributions follows, and we then move on to discuss the limitations of the study. Lastly, the outline of the thesis is presented to guide the reader through the structure.

1.1. Background

People are in contact with organizations on a daily basis, either as employees or as customers. The construction of organizations derives from, and is dependent on, different cultural and social processes (Aaltio, 2002). As researchers, we are interested in understanding our environment and the reality around us, and in this study we will hence focus on how organizations function, and in particular – their organizational culture. Organizational culture is a widely researched subject, and it is often emphasized as an important part of understanding organizations (Alvesson, 2002). A common understanding is that organizational culture is shared meanings, values, norms, beliefs and basic assumptions (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015). Furthermore, culture can be conveyed by the language and stories at a company (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015). By understanding how the organizational culture functions, it is possible to get a deeper understanding of the entire organization (Alvesson, 2002; Crutchfield & Roughton, 2014).

Furthermore, as will be shown in this study, the concept of culture is closely intertwined with gender (Aaltio, 2002), and organizational cultures can be seen as gendered in different aspects (Hearn, 2002). In fact, a common presumption is that most cultures are men's cultures (Hearn, 2002). Likewise, Meyerson and Kolb (2000) emphasize that most organizations are created for and by men, which entails that the organizational culture often is seen as strongly connected to masculine characteristics. Given that gender equality has improved in many industries around the world (Wu & Cheng, 2016), it is interesting that there are still many industries in Sweden where the workforce is gender biased (Statistiska Centralbyrån, 2016). For instance, occupations related to the automobile industry have a high rate of male employees (Statistiska Centralbyrån, 2016), an industry that our case company has strong ties to, and works closely with.

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An important question is thus how a company with a male-dominated workforce actually is gendered. Is the culture dependent on how many men or women who work at the company, and will a company with mostly male workers in effect also have a masculine organizational culture? The case company in this study, MECA, is a male-dominated (in terms of workforce) company operating in a traditionally male-dominated industry. Throughout this thesis, when referring to the company as male-dominated, we infer that the company has a workforce foremost consisting of male workers. However, this does not automatically entail that the organization is also gendered in a masculine way. Therefore, we will use the theoretical concepts femininity and masculinity, which are not connected to the sex of the workforce (Alvesson & Billing, 2009), throughout this thesis. Given these circumstances, we are interested in looking closer at MECA's organizational culture, to see if their organizational culture is impacted by the male-dominated workforce, and hence if the organizational culture is influenced by feminine or masculine characteristics.

Moreover, Alvesson and Willmott (2002) underline the increasing number of women occupying traditionally male or masculine occupations within organizations. As a result, there is a disruption in, among others, identity-intensive issues (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Especially since the masculinity of these occupations is challenged. With these developments, identity construction and processes are increasingly interesting (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Addressing this, another important issue then emerges: how individuals in gendered organizational cultures construct their identity based on the gendering of the organization and its culture. Based on this, we will bring in the concepts of identity in relation to the gendering and culture of organizations. We hence propose that there is a need to further investigate how the continuously unstable identity questions in organizations (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Giddens, 1991) are affected by a gendered organizational environment, i.e. the culture.

We wish to create a deeper understanding of how women work with their identity when working at a male-dominated company. Even though the research and literature on identity is vast, there is still a knowledge gap that needs to be addressed to create a further understanding of how identity work functions in diverse cultures (Brown, 2015). We aim to research this by creating a deeper understanding of how identity work is dependent on cultural aspects such as gender, which Brown (2015) also underlines as interesting and needed. We reason that it is important to raise the question of how an organization can and might influence female employees' identities, as there may exist cultural dynamics that produce unnecessary

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obstacles for women. Securing a deeper knowledge around the implications that may arise following a masculine or feminine culture, can contribute with practical knowledge for organizations. For instance, this thesis shows that women create subcultures in order to get space to retain a female identity. Organizations could benefit from this knowledge in order to be more attentive to fragmentations and other issues within their culture. Furthermore, this thesis will result in a presentation of new concepts surrounding identity, where we explain and reason around women's identity work in gendered cultures.

1.2. Research Aim and Research Questions

The aim of the thesis is to examine women's experiences working in a male-dominated company, and how these experiences affect their identity and identity construction. To fulfill this purpose, we have the following research questions:

- How is the organizational culture expressed and gendered in the male-dominated company MECA?
- How does the gendering of the organizational culture affect the identity construction of women working in the male-dominated company MECA?

1.3. Knowledge Contribution

There is no lack of research surrounding the topic of organizational culture, as seen in the literature review. Furthermore, the theoretical areas of identity and gender have also been thoroughly researched and written about. Nevertheless, our interest lies in combining the areas. This has to some extent been done before, but this thesis aims at finding new ways in which women in gendered organizational cultures work with their identity construction and their perception of themselves in that specific context. Are there for instance cultural dynamics that produce obstacles for women within gendered organizations? This thesis will result in a contribution consisting of if, and if so how, a male-dominated workforce impacts the organizational culture of a company, and if it entails a masculine gendered organization. Furthermore, we will propose two new identity concepts, and a third state of limbo between the two, which indicate different ways in which the identity construction by women in a gendered organization takes form.

We recognize that our research and findings can be of importance for three major groups. First, organizations existing in a similar context as our case company. We hold that such

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organizations and companies will benefit from a deeper understanding of the complexities that a gendered organizational culture can entail. Second, organizations existing in other contexts might benefit from a greater knowledge of how gendering in organizations occurs, and the effects this could have on employee identity construction and the organization. Third, we see that employees within all kinds of organizations need to have a deeper perception and awareness of the interplay between culture, gender and identity.

1.4. Limitations

There are some limitations to the conducted research, which must be addressed. First, it is important to note the limited scope of the research. Due to limitations regarding time and space, the research is only carried out at one company, and furthermore only at some of the company's departments and offices. Second, the study has a relatively small number of respondents, the research is based on ten interviews and two observations. A more thorough data collection would have led to a more in-depth understanding of female employees' experiences working at a male-dominated company. It is also probable that it would have led to more insight into possible differences between companies, offices and departments. Third, we limited the study by only studying female employees' experiences, and hence only interviewed women. This then affects the generalizability of the study as we cannot draw any conclusion around all employees' experiences. However, it is probable that the knowledge claims made in this thesis to some extent can be applied to similar companies existing in the same industry. Nevertheless, this is not entirely uncontested, as every organization has its own culture and dynamics. Lastly, it is necessary to note the limitations that the complexities of the concepts organizational culture, gendered organizations and identity entail. The complexities of these concepts combined with the limited scope of this thesis, entails that the study does not include several interesting theories, such as an in-depth review of the previous research on subcultures, which might have led to a more nuanced thesis.

1.5. Outline of the Thesis

Chapter 2 Literature Review - In this chapter, we present a review of the existing literature and previous research relevant to our study. This chapter gives the reader a broad overview of the existing research within three theoretical areas; organizational culture, gendered organizations and identity. The literature review will function as a bridge to the data analysis later on in the thesis.

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Chapter 3 Methodology - In this chapter, we present the methodology used in our study. An in-depth account of our methodological approach and data collection is presented. Having a good knowledge of how the empirical material was collected and analyzed will enable a deeper understanding for the reader of the following data analysis.

Chapter 4 Empirical Material and Analysis - In this chapter, we present the different themes found when studying our case company. Furthermore, we evaluate how the organization and its culture are gendered. To do this, we apply different theoretical concepts presented in the literature review. We hold that it is necessary for us to use these theoretical concepts as tools in order to correctly and legitimately establish the gendering of the organization.

Chapter 5 Discussion - In this chapter, the empirical material and data analysis from the previous chapter is further discussed and analyzed with an outset in our research questions, as a foundation for reaching our aim in the conclusion chapter.

Chapter 6 Conclusion - In this chapter, we present our conclusion and reach our aim by answering our research questions. Moreover, contributions to academia and practical implications are discussed. Lastly, we present ideas for further research.

2. Literature Review

In this chapter, we present and explore the existing research and literature regarding three main concepts: organizational culture, gendered organizations, and identity. The chapter starts with an introduction to the concept of organizational culture. Thereafter, our interest in gendered organizations is introduced. Finally, a section about the concept of identity follows. The research presented in this chapter will function as a foundation for the analysis of our empirical material in chapters four and five.

2.1. Organizational Culture

Hofstede (1980) emphasizes how culture is what can distinguish a group of people from another. He states that culture can be defined as the collective thinking that ties some people together, and therefore also alienates others. Keyton (2011) underlines that a culture might be values of a group, and that it must not be connected to a specific nationality. The overall theme among the different definitions of culture is the understanding of culture as the way people interact in their different groups and constellations of people (Keyton, 2011).

Having briefly introduced and discussed the concept of *culture* above, it is important to further explain the concept of *organizational* culture. Furthermore, it is important to note the distinction that Denison (1996) makes between organizational climate and organizational culture. He highlights that climate is more linked to employees' feelings, thoughts and behavior, while culture is a more developed context (Denison, 1996). Morgan (1997, p. 129) argues that "organizations are mini-societies that have their own distinctive patterns of culture and subcultures". The literature on organizational culture is vast and describes many different approaches to the subject (Hofstede et al., 1990; Crutchfield & Roughton, 2014; Bate, 1996; Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015; Keyton, 2011). Alvesson and Sveningsson (2015) highlight how organizational culture derives from the language, rituals and stories at a company. For instance, it might be slogans, actions or behavior by the employees at the workplace. All these aspects can express different values and beliefs existing in a company. Hence, the organizational culture often provides "coherence of meanings among a group of individuals" (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015, p. 44). However, Weick (1995) underlines that such a definition of culture (as coherence of meanings) is blurry and indistinct, since shared meanings can be hard to reach. Nevertheless, he emphasizes that even though people do not always share meanings, people still might share experiences. Still, this is often problematic as

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well, since individuals view experiences in different ways (Weick, 1995). In addition, Keyton (2011) emphasizes the problem with defining organizational culture, as the boundaries of what organizational culture is often are blurred. In order to reduce these blurred lines and uncertainties that surrounds the concept, we will define organizational culture as a phenomenon giving a coherence of meanings within an organization, i.e. the language, rituals and stories at a company (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015). Hence, we argue that, even with regards to Weick (1995), organizational culture is all of that which gives some shared meanings within a company.

Schein (2010) argues that it is hard to describe a culture as a wholeness and therefore focuses on different elements of the culture. Schein (2010) sets forth three levels of culture in his discussion around organizational culture. The different levels are *artifacts*, *espoused beliefs and values*, and *basic underlying assumptions*. In line with previous research (e.g. Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015; Keyton, 2011), the framework emphasizes that assumptions are shared throughout a group or a company, and that this is the foundation of culture. However, Schein (2010) highlights that to understand these assumptions, researchers need to go through all three levels of culture. Artifacts are often easy to see, however often hard to truly understand, as it is not always clear how they have come into existence (Keyton, 2011). Furthermore, Schein (2010) underlines the espoused beliefs and values of the organization. These are the ideals, values and goals of a group or organization (Schein, 2010). Schein (2010) further explains the concept of *social validation* and that if someone does not accept the beliefs and values of a group or organization, they risk being *excommunicated*, which means thrown out of the group. These three levels worked as a base in sampling our empirical material.

Crutchfield and Roughton (2014) emphasize the importance for a company to understand its organizational culture. Organizational culture can influence many different aspects of a company, for instance motivation, competitive advantage and organizational change (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015). Furthermore, Alvesson (2002) underlines how understanding organizational culture can be seen as a way to understand organizational life. He goes on to argue that by evolving a deeper understanding of organizational culture, managers can better understand their employees. However, Keyton (2011) highlights that it can be problematic to identify people as part of a culture simply because they are employees at a specific company. Just by being part of an organization, does not automatically entail that a person is a part of the organizational culture (Keyton, 2011). She further emphasizes that

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organizational culture is perceived differently by different people, and that individuals experience the culture differently depending on the intensity of their cultural connection (Keyton, 2011). In addition, Martin (2002) underlines the fact that subgroups may arise since people interpret the culture differently. Moreover, the subgroups can create subcultures, which can then lead to a fragmented culture (Martin, 2002). Furthermore, the culture in a group will influence new members of the group by passing on different elements (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Lave and Wenger (1991) underline situated learning and propose *Legitimate peripheral participation* as a socialization process to understand the relations between novices and expert employees in an informal work group or community of practice. Further, the process involves knowledge, activities and identities, everything needed for a new employee to become a part of an organization. A fragmented culture can also emerge when there is a misalignment between the intended behavior of a group's members and their actual actions (Morgan, 1997). Nonetheless, Keyton (2011) underlines the importance of employees' perception of the organizational culture, and emphasizes that people are more inclined to work at a place where they feel their values and ideas are shared. For us, this thesis is a way to try to understand how the organizational culture is expressed and gendered in a male-dominated company, and how this might affect the female employees' identity construction.

To summarize, the previous section has given an overview to the concept of organizational culture. The section presented organizational culture as what gives a coherence of meanings within an organization, and moreover described Schein's (2010) three levels of culture. Lastly, section 2.1 was concluded with a discussion around how the culture affects employees, and how employees can affect the culture. In the coming section of the literature review, we will move on to discuss gendered organizations, where we present how gendering occurs in organizations, and the theoretical distinctions between femininity and masculinity.

2.2. Gendered Organizations

Gherardi and Poggio (2001) underline how gender influences organizational cultures. A gender perspective can provide significant knowledge of how organizations function, for instance through organizational culture, leadership and communication (Alvesson & Billing, 2009). Furthermore, Hofstede (1991) discusses cultures and how different cultures can be gendered either as masculine or feminine. In this thesis, we will apply Hofstede's discussion on masculine and feminine cultures to the organization of our case company, MECA. Even

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though Hofstede (1991) mainly discusses culture in terms of national culture, and not specifically organizational culture, we propose that the discussion and characteristics can be transferred to organizations and their culture, as organizational cultures can be seen as mini-societies (Morgan, 1997). We will account for the distinctions between feminine and masculine cultures later on in the literature review. Moreover, Alvesson and Billing (2002) highlight that some researchers emphasize that gender has to do with the biological sex while some researchers argue that gender is socially constructed. To discuss gender in organizations, without linking it to closely to the biological sex of individuals, they propose *femininity* and *masculinity* as useful concepts (Alvesson & Billing, 2002), which will be presented further down.

In addition, according to Gherardi and Poggio (2001), gender can be seen as a set of social practices, and these can be helpful when examining the relationship between male and female. Gherardi and Poggio (2001) also argue that studying gender in cultures allows for a deeper understanding of how distinguished attitudes and behaviors are structured in an organization. Moreover, when studying gender in organization, focus is on the employees, and examination of their behavior and how they are producing and reproducing symbols, for instance through underlying language and values (Gherardi & Poggio, 2001). However, talking about and discussing gender relations incorporate and maintain the symbolic order of gender in society. Therefore, Gherardi and Poggio (2001) suggest that it is evident to make the discourse around gender relations more visible and learn new ways of how to communicate it. In the next paragraph we will discuss how gendering occurs in organizations.

2.2.1. How Gendering Occurs in Organizations

Acker (1990) brings forth five different mechanisms which can be used to describe and analyze how gendering occurs in organizations. These different processes occur in different variation throughout organizations, and by analyzing them, we can evaluate how a specific organization is gendered (Acker, 1990). Hence, gendering in organizations occurs in the following five processes, starting with the *construction of divisions along gender lines*. For instance, Acker (1990) emphasizes that labor in organizations is divided along gender lines, that it is a questions of divisions along gender lines regarding accepted behavior at the workplace and the division of power. Second, gendering in organizations occurs through *the construction of symbols and images that explain, express, reinforce, or sometimes oppose those divisions* (Acker, 1990). Furthermore, she argues that gendering occurs through

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glorifying gender relations and in that way the power relations become normalized (Acker, 1999). This can for example be that the image of a manager is the same as of a successful and masculine person. Third, Acker (1990) brings forth that gendering in organizations occur through *interactions between women and men, women and women, men and men, including all those patterns that enact dominance and submission*. Acker (1999, p. 183-184) further explain it as the daily interactions of how employees “experience and create dominance and submission, create alliances and exclusions, put together and implement policies that divide and differentiate between women and men, and produce and confirm gender images”. She highlights how gender inequality might be strengthened by differences in conversation between women and men, for instance differences in interruptions and who sets the topic of discussion (Acker, 1990).

Fourth, all of the above can further produce *gendered components of individual identity* (Acker, 1990). Acker (1999) emphasizes how sexual harassments and jokes about women force them to work with their identity to manage the misalignment between how they are treated at work and their view of themselves, whether they should actually tolerate the jokes or complain (Acker, 1999). Lastly, Acker (1990) brings forth *organizational logic*. Organizational logic constructs a gendered substructure of companies and organizations (Price, 2008). This can for instance be different rules that enable gendered processes and reinforce gendering (Price, 2008). These rules and beliefs are important parts of what creates and frames the underlying assumptions within organizations about what organizations actually are and should be (Acker, 1990; Parsons et al., 2012). In our analysis in chapter four, we use these five processes to analyze the organizational culture at our case company and determine how gendering occurs in the organization. Next, a description of gendered organizational cultures will be presented.

2.2.2. Gendered Organizational Cultures

There are some themes that Hofstede (1991) highlights as differentiating masculine and feminine cultures. For instance, Hofstede (1991) underlines that research shows how masculine cultures tend to create divisions between men and women in a way not applicable to feminine cultures. In addition, in feminine cultures, focus often centers around the quality of work life, while masculine cultures focus on harder values such as performance and results (Hofstede, 1991). In connection to the focus on performance and results within masculine cultures, men in masculine cultures are expected to have high career aspirations, while

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women in masculine cultures do not experience this compulsory or common (Hofstede, 1991). Masculine cultures furthermore often favor leaders and people with skills traditionally connected to masculinity, such as assertiveness and decisiveness (Hofstede, 1991). In feminine cultures on the other hand, managers should be looking for consensus in decisions, and both men and women are expected to be modest and tender (Hofstede, 1991). Lastly, a distinction between masculine and feminine cultures can be made with regards to hierarchy, masculine cultures are often more hierarchical while feminine cultures often are more flat and open (Cliff, Langton & Aldrich, 2005; Hofstede, 1991). Nevertheless, Alvesson and Billing (2009) argue that the concept of organizational culture often is seen as masculine, which can be expressed in terms of language, values and stereotypes. Next, the theoretical concepts femininity and masculinity will be discussed.

2.2.3 Femininity and Masculinity

Many jobs are defined as feminine or masculine, *sex-typed*, and Alvesson and Billing (2009, p. 70) describe these as jobs that are natural for women and men to have. Using femininities and masculinities as concepts allows a deeper understanding of the employee's thoughts, feelings and self-understanding, and moreover, the organizational culture (Alvesson & Billing 2009). What is seen as natural for women and men, in terms of *acting, thinking and valuing* is represented in the two concepts, and described as cultural notions shared by different groups (Alvesson & Billing, 2002). Alvesson and Billing (2009) further argue that the social constructivist use of the concepts femininity and masculinity can be used as an interpretative framework when studying organizations.

Hofstede (1991) argues that organizational goals often are associated with career possibilities, masculine goals tend to promote men and vice versa. Moreover, the fact that people tend to recruit, mentor and guide people that are similar to themselves forces others to identify with that if they want to develop further in the organization (Grant, 1988). Meyerson and Kolb (2000) state that organizations have been created by and for men, therefore, what is seen as normal in organizations is based on masculinity. The concept masculinity is ambiguous, and according to Alvesson and Billing (2009, p. 72) "it can be defined as values, experiences and meanings that are culturally interpreted as masculine and typically feel 'natural' to or are ascribed to men more than women in the particular context". Likewise, femininity is defined similarly.

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Masculinity is characterized as hard, action-focused, straight, competitive and dominant (Hines, 1992; Grant 1988). Femininity is characterized as soft, tender, sensitive, collaborative and including (Hines, 1992; Grant 1988), and furthermore, by openness and acceptance (Marshall, 1993 cited in Alvesson & Billing, 2009). The concepts are ambiguous and it can be used in various ways, and therefore they have been criticized (Alvesson & Billing, 2009). However, Alvesson and Billing (2009) argue that it is still possible and essential to use the concepts when examining and describing cultural views. For instance, masculinity can be seen in language and acts, and this can be useful when examining cultural views (Alvesson & Billing, 2009). In addition, Alvesson and Billing (2009) underline that it is important not to link the concepts too closely to male and female, as it is not the same thing. In order to analyze the organizational culture, we will use the concepts of femininity and masculinity.

In conclusion, the above section functions as a basis for the reader in order to understand the role of gender in organizations. The section started with an introduction to gendered organizations. We then presented how gendering occurs in organizations, and lastly introduced the concepts femininity and masculinity. The processes presented by Acker (1990) in combination with the distinctions between femininity and masculinity will function as tools when analyzing how our case company is gendered in chapters four and five. In the coming section, we will move on to discuss the concept of identity, presenting three general areas within the research; social identity theory, identity construction and identity regulation.

2.3. Identity

Identity can be defined in many different ways. Sveningssson and Alvesson (2016) talk about identity as how you view yourself in a certain context. Furthermore, Sveningssson and Larsson (2006) underline identities as merely temporary, and emphasize that identities are constantly reproduced and changed throughout different contexts. We argue in the same way as Sveningssson and Larsson (2006), and highlight that our position on the concept of identity is that it can take different forms, and is constantly changing. In addition, to discuss the question of identity can be seen as an attempt to answer the questions *who am I* and *how should I act?* (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Brown, 2015; Weick, 1995).

Hogg and Terry (2000) underline how people identify with organizations, and can transcribe different aspects from organizations or work groups onto their own identity. This identification can in some cases be so strong that individuals perceive it as more fundamental

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than other identities derived from aspects such as age, ethnicity or gender (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Nevertheless, Alvesson and Sveningsson (2015) emphasize that, in the case of a complex organizational identity and culture, employees tend to seek other ways to experience the unity that would have come from a strong common organizational identity. For instance, identifying within a specific department, project, or a hierarchical status, which will result in a subcultures developing and in effect - a more segregated company (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015). Alvesson and Sveningsson (2015) highlight the close connection between organizational culture and organizational identity and the effect the two concepts might have on each other. In accordance with this, we will focus on how the organizational culture and the concept of identity affect each other in a male-dominated company. Looking at the organizational culture at MECA, we wish to gain a deeper understanding of how the women working at the company work with their identity in a gender-bias organization.

Discussing identity and identity research, three broad theoretical perspectives can be brought forward; social identity theory, identity construction, and identity regulation (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008). All of these contribute in different ways to the understanding of identity, how it is created, how identity is worked on, and how the different organizational aspects can affect and control the identity of the organizational members (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008). In the coming sections, the different perspectives will be discussed, starting with social identity theory.

2.3.1. Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory emphasizes the fact that people identify as a part of a group, and furthermore that people tend to divide themselves as well as others into different social categories, for instance age, gender, organizational membership (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Brown, 2015). This division of people into different categories has many different effects on the surrounding world. For example, it enables people to classify others and assign stereotypes typical to his or her social segment. It further lets people label themselves in their social surroundings. In relation to this, social identity theory underlines the personal identity as the self-concept where one identifies by claiming uniqueness in relation to other people. In contrast, the social identity is where a person identifies as a part of a group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This social identity can develop in different environments, for example an organization, a specific work group or a department (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Alvesson, Ashcraft and Thomas (2008) emphasize that it is often a question of a presence of both social

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and personal identity. This thesis will discuss the presence of both personal and social identity with our respondents.

It is also possible to make a distinction between different types of organizations based on how individuals identify within them. Albert and Whetten (1985 cited in Ashforth & Mael, 1989) make this distinction by accentuating two different organizations. First, holographic organizations, in which members have a shared identity across the entire organization and are not dependent on subunits or departments. Second, ideographic organizations, where organizational members identify within different subgroups. It is important to note that a consequence of this social identification can be a de-personalization of the self, and hence that individual members of a group tend to increasingly conform to the norms of the group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Different groups create a strong identification mainly with the existence of outside groups to identify against (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008; Hogg & Terry, 2000). We argue that it is important to take both of these organizational structures in consideration when evaluating identity processes in relation to organizational culture, as we aim to do in this thesis. In the coming paragraph, we will move on to the theory of identity work.

2.3.2. Identity Work

Moving on from how people identify, e.g. within groups, identity construction analyzes and researches the process of working with one's identity and self. The goal is to understand more about how people construct their identities based on experiences, for instance within an organization (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008). Identity work, as a key concept within identity construction, emphasizes the ongoing work with the self that individuals embark on in their ambition to create a coherent self, which is in line with their values and view of themselves (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008; Brown, 2015). Alvesson and Willmott (2002) underline that almost everything people do, in some way, involves identity work, since everything we do in some way affect our sense of self and identity. Within identity work, Alvesson and Willmott (2002) furthermore emphasize the connection with the concept of self-identity, i.e. a person's view of himself or herself. Self-identity is hence the result of identity work (Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006). Sveningsson and Larsson (2006) emphasize that the concept of self-identity might actually not be true to how the situation and self actually is, but more connected to fantasies around the self-identity.

We have stated that our position in this thesis is that identity is continuously changing. Brown (2015) brings out that as identity changes, and is continuously reconstructed, we reach a state where a big part of our identity work results in a state where we balance between different identities, transitioning between our desired self and less desired self, as these also change. Furthermore, this can lead to tensions as identity work often is more frequent and clear when in strong feelings or a sense of surprise or strains on the identity appear (Brown, 2015). We will now move on to the question of identity regulation.

2.3.3. Identity Regulation

In identity regulation, the focus changes from the construction of identity individuals perform themselves, to focus on how power relations and other organizational aspects affect and regulate the members' identity construction and reconstruction (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Wieland (2010, p. 506) argues that Alvesson and Willmott (2002) "provide one of the most comprehensive discussions of how identity construction occurs in organizations". Alvesson and Willmott (2002) set forth nine different modes of regulation, which they mean provide an overview of how identity is "influenced, changed and regulated" within organizations (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 629).

1. *Defining the person directly*, which focus on specific characteristics, for instance work title or gender.
2. *Defining a person by defining others*. It is sometimes easier to define a person by stating characteristics of others.
3. *Providing a specific vocabulary of motives*, for instance managerial tools such as frameworks, which guide employees through the meaning of their work.
4. *Explicating morals and values*. For example, the use of moral stories to guide identity.
5. *Knowledge and skills*. By regulating employees' knowledge and what they are capable of, the identity is regulated, as what one can do is equivalent to whom one is.
6. *Group categorization and affiliation*. Creating groups that a member can identify in.
7. *Hierarchical location*, the focus on who am I in relation to hierarchical structures.
8. *Establishing and clarifying a distinct set of rules of the game*. Guiding employees' identity construction by clear rules about how things are in the organization.
9. *Defining the context*. Management can define the context so that whoever exists in it will inevitably become a part of it.

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To summarize the identity section, identity can be defined and viewed in various ways. Three broad theoretical perspectives were presented: social identity theory, identity construction and identity regulations. The perspectives will be used in order to understand and analyze the empirical material since it allows different ways of understanding identity. In the coming paragraph, a short summary of the literature review is given.

2.4. Chapter Summary

In this chapter, we have presented the existing literature that is connected and relevant to our research. The literature review started with a section on organizational culture, which we started by stating our definition of the concept organizational culture as “a phenomenon giving a coherence of meaning within an organization, i.e. the language, rituals and stories at a company”. We then discussed how and why organizational culture is important for organizations. Next, the literature review highlighted gendering in organizations and presented various research and theories, such as how gendering occurs in organizations, gendered organizational cultures and lastly femininity and masculinity. Finally, a section on identity followed where three theoretical perspectives were presented: social identity theory, identity work and identity regulations. This chapter will function as basis for our analysis in chapter four and five, in order to get an in-depth analysis of the empirical material. In the coming chapter, we will present the methodology for this thesis and how our empirical material was collected and analyzed.

3. Methodology

In the following chapter, our choice of methodology and data collection is described. First, our research approach is presented. Thereafter, an account of our data collection is put forth, followed by a presentation of our data analysis. Lastly, we reflect on the reflexivity, credibility and ethics of our research and methodology. The aim with this chapter is to give the reader a thorough account of the conducted study.

3.1. Research Approach

We use a qualitative research approach since we are interested in examining women's experiences working in the male-dominated company MECA. Using a qualitative approach lets us interpret and analyze our empirical material in-depth (Bryman, 2011). In contrast, a quantitative approach would instead limit us to an objective attitude towards our environment (Bryman, 2011). Instead, qualitative method is highly connected to an interpretive understanding of reality (Bryman, 2011). Since qualitative studies are highly interpretative (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), and we are interested in interpreting the reality of women working in a male-dominated company, qualitative approach is applied in the thesis.

Furthermore, we apply a hermeneutical approach to the thesis. A hermeneutical approach enables the researcher to interpret texts (Prasad, 2005), for instance transcription from interviews and notes from observations (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Prasad (2005) highlights how human interpretation is the foundation for further knowledge of the world, and how the world functions. A hermeneutical approach allows us to interpret the women's working experiences, and the organizational culture at the case company. Using a qualitative research method in combination with a hermeneutical approach allows us to do an in-depth interpretation of our empirical material. We transcribed the interviews during the time we collected our empirical material, this allowed us to continuously review which literature to use in the thesis. Further, analyzing data during the data collection phase, allowed us to revise our interview questions, which in addition led to more focus around themes we found in our data analyzing. It was an ongoing circle, reviewing theory and collecting data continuously. Next, we will present the method of data collection.

3.2. Data Collection Method

We gained access to our case company, MECA, through a contact who is newly employed at

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the company. We had one meeting with him, and through him we got in contact with the HR-manager. After meeting with the HR-manager, we approached some of the women at the company that she suggested as respondents for our thesis. Hence, we used snowball-sampling technique when finding our respondents. Sadler et al. (2010) underline that using snowball sampling is a time efficient sampling technique, which was beneficial for us in this thesis. Likewise, we wanted respondents from different levels in the company and Sadler et al. (2010) highlight that snowball sampling can simplify this. Our empirical material consists of semi-structured in-depth interviews and observations. In the coming section, a more in-depth presentation of our data collection methods will follow.

3.2.1 Semi-structured Interviews

The interviews were semi-structured to enable an open dialogue and follow-up questions, to get a deeper insight into the mind of the respondent (Bryman, 2011). Kvale (1996) emphasizes that semi-structured interviews enable an organized, focused and purposeful conversation. We conducted ten semi-structured interviews with women at different levels of the company. The interviews were held by both of the researchers, one had the role of asking questions, while the other one took notes and observed the respondent. To reach a broad spectrum in our empirical material, the respondents came from different levels and departments at the company. This way, we learnt more about how the culture is perceived by different employees in different contexts. To fulfill our aim and purpose, we decided to interview only women, since our aim is to investigate women's experiences working in a male-dominated organization. In preparation, we developed a set of questions as a guideline, however we left room for the respondent to share her own stories and examples. The interview questions were evaluated after each interview, and were revised throughout the interviewing process. The questions mainly focused on three different themes: personal background, the case company, and work environment. Nine interviews were held face to face, and one was held via telephone. The interviews that were conducted in person were held at the respondent's workplace. Moreover, we were flexible with the time and place, and let the respondent decide when we should meet. We did this in order to get the respondent comfortable and more willing to share her experiences with us. The interviews varied in time, between 20-55 minutes each. All of our interviews were conducted in Swedish. Thus, the quotations were translated to English after transliteration. It is important to note this, as the quotations used in chapters four and five are not the exact wording of the respondent, even though we have translated them as accurately as possible.

When visiting the different divisions and departments to conduct the interviews, we took the opportunity to observe the workplaces and environments. By visiting different parts of the divisions and departments, we had the chance to see many different aspects of the company, even though the visits and observations were quite short. In that way, we got to meet several employees, and we were able to observe smaller things, for instance, who said hi, whose doors were open and how people interacted with each other. These smaller observations will not play a major part in our study, nonetheless they allowed us to get a fair understanding of how the organizational culture is expressed at the company. As this cannot substitute in-depth observations, we further conducted participant observations, which will be presented in the coming paragraph.

3.2.2. Observations

To get a deeper understanding of the culture we also conducted two participant observations at one department at the company. Doing participant observations, in addition to our interviews, helped us answer our first research question regarding how the organizational culture is expressed and gendered in a male-dominated company. The observations were done after the majority of our interviews were conducted and transcribed. Having done most of our interviews in beforehand, we had a perception of what the company was like, which might have influenced our observation studies, but also made us aware of what to look for. We used participant observation, which Stake (2010) describes as good in qualitative research since it allows the researchers to try the experience they are writing about. However, he further mentions the risk that the observed experiences might vary because of the presence of the researchers (Stake, 2010). Moreover, Prasad (2005) argues that participant observation can be overwhelming and therefore it is important to have a focus or a framework to work with. When doing the observations, we focused on the language, behavior and rituals (in accordance with e.g. Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015) and furthermore Schein's (2010) three levels of culture. Using these gave us a clear direction and a focus when doing the observations. During the observations, we were able to observe both how the employees conducted at the office, but also how they behaved and were encountered by customers outside of the office, for instance when delivering to customers. The observations gave us a clearer picture of the conducted work at the departments at MECA, and moreover functioned as a complement to our interviews. In the next section we will discuss the limitations of our data collection methods.

3.2.3. Limitations

We are aware of the difficulty to get the respondents to open up and to be honest. To enable more trust between the respondent and us, we offered anonymity. To ensure the anonymity of our respondents, we gave everyone pseudonyms. Hence, the names given in the analysis are not their real names. Furthermore, Dutton and Dukerich (2006) highlight other problems when gaining knowledge from respondents in research, such as limited knowledge between the respondent and researcher, and a possible language barrier. By not using vague terms, for instance organizational culture, and instead talking about the environment and climate at the workplace, we tried to reduce these issues. However, we are aware that researchers do not always use the same language as the respondent (Dutton & Dukerich, 2006), and that this can impact our interpretation of our respondents' answers. Therefore, we complemented our interviews with observations at the company. However, due to time and access limitations, we only conducted observations at one department, which can be criticized as it is not sure that the observations at the one department can be applied to the other departments or the headquarter, where most of our respondents' work. Nevertheless, doing participative observations, even though quite limited, gave us a chance to experience what we write about. In addition, it gave us a deeper understanding of the company, as a foundation for our analysis of the interviews. Likewise, it allowed us to better understand the respondents and their experiences working in a male-dominated organization. In the coming section of the methodology chapter, we will introduce the methods used when analyzing the collected data further.

3.4. Data Analysis

We use abductive approach in our research. The abductive method allows the researchers to alternate theory and empirical material (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). Using abductive approach deepened our understanding and interpretations of our empirical material. The abductive research approach allowed us to develop our empirical research during the research process at the same time as it allowed us to develop our literature review throughout our writing process (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). Moreover, it allowed us to interpret our empirical material, and later on strengthen it with new interviews and observations. Using this approach, we developed our theoretical background based on our empirical material, as well as framed our empirical material based on previous research. Using qualitative, hermeneutical approach in combination with an abductive method offered a solid foundation for our data

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analysis. We started gathering data at the same time as we gathered literature and knowledge around previous research. The data analysis primarily consisted of two steps. The first step was transcribing the interviews, to prepare our empirical material before analyzing (Kvale, 1996). During transcription, we identified themes we found interesting and highlighted interesting quotes. The second step was to analyze our observations and set these in relation to the answers from the interviews. Our focus was foremost to evaluate if the organizational culture, as experienced by us during the observations, is the same as described by the respondents in interviews. As we were able to conduct observations before ending the interviewing phase of the data collection, we were able to revise our interview questions after evaluating our observation notes. This helped us focus our interviews, and furthermore made the analyzing phase easier when searching for themes.

After transcribing the interviews and the observations, the data was coded and categorized to be able to find repetitive themes (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). These were used to evaluate how the organization is gendered and whether the culture at the company is masculine, feminine or a little bit of both. We furthermore recognized that many of our respondents discussed questions and aspects related to their view of themselves and their identity. For instance, many of the respondents described that they had changed since starting at MECA. This led us to conduct a thorough literature search for previous research on identity. We use theory on social identity, identity work and identity regulations in order to analyze and understand the relation of the concept to the organizational culture to see if we can find any correlations between them. The hermeneutical approach allowed us to interpret the respondents' answers, and then later on re-interpret (Kvale, 1996). It was an ongoing process, a circle, where we were gathering literature, empirical material, adding more literature and complementing with more interviews and reviewing more literature in order to be able to answer our research questions. In the next section, the reflexivity, credibility and ethics of this thesis and our study will be discussed.

3.5 Reflexivity, Credibility and Ethics

In this section we will discuss different limitations with our research design. The section will start with a broad discussion around qualitative studies and our own reflexivity. Next, the chapter will move into a section on four different criteria's from with which the credibility of our research can be discussed. Lastly, a discussion on possible ethical problems will be given.

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As qualitative studies focus around interpreting reality, and its meanings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013), there are many limitations to be addressed when doing qualitative research. Interpreting data in qualitative research will always be subjective (Stake, 2010). Qualitative research is furthermore personality-oriented and dependent on the researcher's own understanding of a phenomenon and the environment, which can affect the credibility of the study (Stake, 2010). We are aware of these limitations with qualitative research and that our understanding of reality might have impacted our interpretations of our empirical material. It is important to understand that our pre-understandings and assumptions both affect the study and hence our interpretations, empirical material and analysis. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) highlight that it is important for researchers to reflect upon their own reflexivity in order to counter such issues. Being two authors for this thesis turned out to help us become more reflecting upon our preconceptions, as we entered this project. For example, when entering the organization and later on analyzing our collected data, one of us found the data convincing in one way, and one of us interpreted it in another way. Hence, assumptions about the reality became evident. Nevertheless, as we moved back and forward through discussions, pre-understandings and understandings, we became more reflexive and more aware of our own pre-understandings.

During the data collection and the data analyzing process, we have tried to minimize the subjectivity by always keeping these risks in mind as well as questioning our own reasoning. Likewise, we use theoretical frameworks to reduce subjectivity, the frameworks functioned as a template when developing interview questions, doing the interviews and conducting observations. In the coming paragraphs, we will discuss the credibility issue within qualitative research more in relation to this thesis.

As a common issue within qualitative research is the credibility of the study (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Stake, 2010), we will now evaluate the credibility of this study in-depth based on arguments made by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009). As a means to achieve credibility in both the collection and analyzing phase of a study's empirical material, they highlight the use of source criticism. Source criticism is about minimizing the distortion of information, since, given that the researchers conduct interviews or in other ways view reality through someone else's eyes, there is always a risk that reality and information is twisted between reality and researcher (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) hence propose that source criticism could be used to minimize such limitations, and

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furthermore to increase the researcher's awareness of their sources and implications with the empirical material. They set forth four different aspects of source criticism:

1. Criticism of authenticity.
2. Criticism of bias.
3. Criticism of distance.
4. Criticism of dependence.

The first aspect is about if the source used actually should be considered a source (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Relating to our empirical material, we collected our empirical foremost through interviews, hence narrating sources. Regarding narrating sources, there is a risk that the information has been distorted, as it has gone through a person, which is not a completely objective subject (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Therefore, we also did observations, which in contrast is a remnant source (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Remnant sources are not subject to distortion of information, and are sources where the researchers themselves can see what happens (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009), which was the case with our observations. Hence, from a source critical standpoint, the data from the interviews is not as highly valued as our observations. About authenticity, we focused on finding themes and coding our transcripts, as stated above, and looking for common statements. This was done with both interviews and observations, hence we tried to minimize the risk of inauthentic material coming through this filtering. Also, as most of our sources are narrating, this could be a reason to question credibility, nevertheless we put a lot of our focus on the empirical material that our remnants entailed when interpreting the collected material and the transcripts from our interviews.

Second, criticism of bias is concerned with the problem of bias sources, whose statements possibly are twisted in some way (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). In this study, we made sure to interview women working within different parts of the company, and at different levels and different parts of the country. By doing this, the goal was to ensure that possibly skewed information would be eliminated when looking for major themes and experiences from the women. Moreover, we counter the risks with distance from a specific event as we are interested in the respondents' entire experiences working at the company, and not a specific event. Lastly, the criticism of dependence is concerned with how far the information has travelled, hence if the information is influenced by other stories or perceptions (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). As this study focuses on experiences and perceptions of working within a

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specific organization, it is probable that some of the experiences have been contaminated by other information. Nevertheless, to counter this, we have collected experiences from different levels and departments in the organization, in order to get a broad spectrum of the company.

Lastly, it is important to raise possible ethical problems with our chosen research method. Confidentiality is one important factor to secure for the respondents (Kvale, 1996). It is also essential to consider the consequences of the respondent being a part of the study, for instance stress caused during interviews. To counter this, we gave the respondents anonymity. We also told the respondents that they could ask us to explain a question if they did not understand, and we never forced the respondent to answer in a specific way. Furthermore, another ethical problem to consider is how far the respondent's answers are interpreted (Kvale, 1996). To avoid and minimize misinterpretations we transcribed all of the interviews, and in that way we can easily see when and how the respondent expressed a statement. By doing this we made sure that we did not misinterpret a statement or put the statement in a different context.

3.6. Chapter Summary

In the previous chapter, our methodology has been presented. By using a qualitative research method in combination with a hermeneutical approach, we were able to interpret interviews and observations. The data for the thesis was collected using semi-structured interviews and participant observations. The data was analyzed through an abductive method, using coding of interview and observation transliterations. Finally, we reflected upon the reflexivity, credibility and ethics of our research, where we focused upon our own pre-understandings, source criticism and confidentiality. In the following chapter, we will present our findings in the empirical material and discuss these.

4. Empirical Material and Analysis

In this chapter, our case company MECA is presented to give the reader a background of the company. Furthermore, we present our findings based on the conducted interviews and observations. When presenting our empirical material, we start by shortly presenting different themes found connected to the organizational climate and what happens at the organization. Thereafter, a discussion around how the organization is gendered, using Acker's (1990) framework, and whether it is masculine, feminine or a bit of both, follows. The findings presented below will be an outset to our discussion in chapter five, in which we will answer our research questions, and moreover present new identity concepts.

4.1. The Case Company

MECA group is a leading actor for spare car parts, tools and workshop equipment (MECA, 2017). MECA's business is based on distribution of spare parts and tools through their departments to professional garages (MECA, 2017). MECA is male-dominated, at MECA Sweden only 13 percent of the workforce are women (J. Åström, personal communication, 14 February 2017). MECA's headquarter is located in Malmö, where divisions such as finance, human resources and management are positioned. In the departments (offices/stores) throughout Sweden, the car parts, tools and workshop equipment are distributed, mostly B2B but also in some cases directly to consumers, B2C. When referring to the company's headquarter and the different areas (i.e. finance, human resources...) we will use the term division, and when we refer to the different offices and stores around Sweden, we will use the term department.

During the collection and analyzing of our empirical material, we could deduce some different themes in the overall climate at the company. Foremost, we found that the climate is perceived as "good" by our respondents. For instance, most of the respondents describe it as "warm-hearted", with "open" communication, nice colleagues and "well-functioning" collaborations throughout the company. Second, the communication and interactions within the company are described as direct and sometimes perceived as harsh. In addition, some of our respondents argue that they have adapted to the direct and harsh communication in order to fit in with the organization. Third, there seems to be some groupings within the organization, and it can be seen as divided. This leads to different perceptions of the organizational culture among our respondents, dependent on which grouping they belong to,

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or if they belong to a grouping. In the following paragraph, we present our respondents shortly, using pseudonyms. Thereafter, we will analyze how the organizational culture at our case company is gendered. In doing this, we will foremost use Acker's (1990) five mechanisms that produce gender in organizations, and the theoretical concepts femininity and masculinity. We use these theoretical concepts in order to correctly analyze the gendering of the organization.

4.1.1. Participating Respondents

The ten interviews were made with:

- Four people from the departments: Sandra, Martina, Magda and Stina
- Six people from the divisions and management: Nathalie, Maria, Malin, Frida, Kristina and Klara

The respondents have been at the company for six months up to 14 years. Some of them hold positions with added responsibility. No more information about the respondents will be stated here, with respect to their anonymity.

4.2. Gendered Organization at MECA

In the following section, we analyze the organizational culture at our case company, MECA. The culture is analyzed from a gender perspective, with a foundation in the five mechanisms that Acker (1990) underlines as gendering in organizations. We also use the different theories on organizational culture presented in the literature review, the concepts femininity and masculinity (Alvesson & Billing, 2009) and the distinctions made around masculine and feminine cultures, to create a broad discussion around the gendering of the organizational culture. The aim with this part of the analysis is to lay a foundation from which we will be able to answer our first research question in the coming discussion chapter: *How is the organizational culture expressed and gendered in the male-dominated company MECA?*

4.2.1 Gendered Organization via Divisions Along Gender Lines - Women Work in Finance, Men Work in Management.

Gendered Hierarchy

When interviewing the respondents, it was accentuated several times that the managers are mostly men. For instance, one respondent stated: "A lot of the work within finance is work that women do, and it feels like the higher positions often are occupied by men". Furthermore,

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it is highlighted that women work within specific departments. Two respondents reflect upon this:

It's mostly men here, that's the case in management. Like, we have a female CEO for our Norwegian sales company, but the rest are men, and that's what the structure is ... with sales managers and other central functions, it's a bit more mixed, because there you have communications managers and marketing managers and such. More feminine occupations.

Klara

The funny thing is that all the women work in finance. So it's not really equal in that way. ... But it's funny how everyone [women] end up in finance, in the administrative positions. ... And then, in managing positions it's mostly men I would imagine.

Maria

Given that female employees are concentrated to mostly administrative positions within the organization, and that higher management positions are occupied by men, this probably strengthens and reinforces the gender lines within the company.

Granted that top positions at our case company are occupied by foremost men, it is probable that career advancement is central to many men in the organization. This strong concentration of men within top management could indicate that more men than women are interested in management. This is a common phenomenon within masculine cultures (Hofstede, 1991). Many of the women within the company emphasize several times that they are not interested in career advancement. As stated by one respondent: "I don't feel like I want to climb some career ladder right now, so for me it's perfect". Research shows that in masculine cultures, feminine career aspirations are not as common and compulsory as the expectations on men (Hofstede, 1991), as described above. Hence, the respondents' experiences of the organization indicate some masculine characteristics. In addition, Meyerson and Kolb (2000) argue that organizations often are created in favor of men, and Grant (1998) argues that people tend to mentor and encourage people that are similar to them. Therefore, it is likely that an organization, as in this case MECA, where most managing positions are held by men, is also more advantageous for men. Given this, it is not surprising that most of top management at MECA are men. Nevertheless, the lack of women in managing positions could be a

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contributing factor as to why some of the respondents do not seek career advancement, since it is possible that they are not coached or encouraged enough by anyone from management. Moreover, the fact that people tend to coach and promote people that are similar to themselves, as in this case men, could be a reason as to why the culture is somewhat divided in terms of gender. We argue that the organization has a partly gendered hierarchy.

Nevertheless, there are some discrepancies in the answers given by our respondents regarding the hierarchy at the company. Despite the fact that the organization is seen by many respondents as somewhat hierarchical, some do not experience the organization as hierarchical at all. Hence, it is also possible to argue that the organizational culture has elements of femininity, since a flat hierarchy is connected to femininity (Alvesson & Billing, 2009). However, this can also indicate that the gendered hierarchy has been normalized by the respondents. Based on the discussion above, we hold that the hierarchical structure within the company points towards a foremost masculine culture. In the next section, we will move on to discuss the segregations in the organization.

Divided Organization

Given the answers from our respondents, MECA is a divided organization in more ways than just the hierarchical structure. It is evident that it is segregated and divided into groups, which is common within masculine cultures (Hofstede, 1991). This is in line with Acker's (1990) claim that gendering in organizations occurs through different processes, and thus creates divisions in organizations along gender lines. Some of our respondents state that the company is segregated (divided into groups), however this is not always dependent on gender. Nevertheless, this is something we can see at different levels in the organization. Many respondents also emphasize the "good" climate as an important part of the organization. However, when reviewing the respondents' answers, it becomes clear that the "good" climate is connected to different groupings, which we argue create subgroups within the company. Granted that the climate and what goes on within a company is an important part of the organizational culture, it is clear that there is a misalignment between how the different organizational members experience the organization and its culture.

The different consequences of the existence of subgroups are highlighted by Martin (2002), and subgroups are emphasized as a cause for a fragmented organizational culture. The different subgroups can create subcultures, something that is shown at MECA. It is apparent

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that organizational members who are left outside of these subgroups experience a different, and less positive, climate than those within the subgroups. As described by one of our respondents:

Here it's a lot like, you sit and eat at your floor, you have your own seats in the cafeteria. You have your parking spots, so it's more traditional.

Maria

Because I remember the first day here. I was like, how do you do this? So I just went downstairs and sat at a table with some guys from IT. And they didn't say anything, I tried to ask some questions, like what do you do and such things. I haven't been there since then. Because, it's like, this is not where I should sit. They have their gang and they take their lunch walks.

Maria

The statements above verify that the organization is divided and that some respondents feel excluded, as they do not belong to a certain subgroup. Likewise, as Maria mentions in the above statement, the different subgroups are experienced as excluding, which further indicates a more masculine culture as it is strongly contradictory to the feminine characteristic inclusion.

However, it is also necessary to note that members of the subgroups do not themselves reflect upon this exclusion, and seem somewhat unaware of the groupings at the company, or at least do not experience that they could be a problem. It could be that the groupings are embedded in their daily work, it is taken for granted, as "this is how we work" and therefore it has become an underlying assumption (e.g. Schein, 2010). For instance, when we asked one respondent if she participates in any activities with her co-workers, she emphasized an organized breakfast every Friday. Still, when asking if everyone is invited to this Friday breakfast, it became clear that it is different groups organizing it themselves. It is evident that the respondents do not see this as an issue.

It is my group together with another division, so we are 13 people. There are many divided groups like that, that have different breakfasts.

Frida

Given this, it is probable that the groupings are spread out throughout the company and that they arrange different private activities. The activities might be an attempt to incorporate more feminine characteristics in the culture, for instance inclusion. Those of our respondents who are a part of these different subgroups often emphasize their work environment as “open” and “good”. Furthermore, they highlight soft values such as how including the company is, and the collaborative nature of their colleagues. These descriptions are in line with the features that Alvesson and Billing (2009) stress as feminine. As one respondent accentuates:

I think it's fun to go to work ... its always someone who comes in first and makes coffee ... I like it, I think the communication is very open and straightforward. And of course, you hear a lot of laughing, a lot of bickering, loving bickering, you fool around with each other, you joke a lot, you hear people singing in the corridor. All of these small things.

Nathalie

In addition, Hofstede (1991) highlight that feminine cultures are cultures where focus is on the quality of work life and solidarity, which can be seen in the respondents' answers, and for instance the statement above. Furthermore, many of the respondents underline that their colleagues always “have their backs”, and that there is a lot of solidarity at the company, which is also in line with the characteristics of feminine cultures (Hofstede, 1991). When talking about colleagues one respondent states:

Helping each other out if needed, both businesslike but also in private, like if someone needs to run to the dentist with their child ... we can be open with each other ... we are involved in each other's lives and health, when someone's child is sick we know this, and understand if they need to go away and talk on the phone.

Martina

Nonetheless, it is evident that not all respondents are included in these subgroups and hence excluded from these more feminine subcultures. To summarize this part about how gendering occurs through divisions, the organizational culture is largely masculine with regards to the structure of the company, in terms of hierarchy, segregations and career opportunities. Nevertheless, there are characters of femininity visible in the “good” climate, in terms of

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teamwork and team spirit. However, it is evident that not all respondents share the same thoughts about the “good” climate. Continuing on that, the masculinity seems to permeate the organization more than the femininity. Instead, the femininity is strongly connected to the different subgroups found. In the next section, we will discuss how gendering organization through symbols and images.

4.2.2. Gendered Organization via Symbols and Images - Men like Cars, and Women do not

Acker (1999) argues that gender divisions, like the ones described in 4.2.1. often are glorified by the employees with the use of symbols and images. As a result, power relations are normalized (Acker, 1999). Examining the organizational culture at MECA we note that many of the respondents do not reflect upon the male-domination within the company’s workforce. For instance, one respondent states:

I think it has to do with men being more interested in cars, while I mean, when I go into Åhléns in their beauty department, how many men work there?

Nathalie

Reflecting upon this statement we can argue that the respondents have created an image of what is natural. Most of the respondents argue that it is natural with more men in the company, since men often are more interested in cars. It is evident that they have created an image of the men working in the company as car interested, and that they then use this image to justify that there are mostly men within the company. At the same time, most respondents emphasize that they themselves are not interested in cars, and feel no obligation to be it either even though working in the industry.

Hence, there are shared assumptions regarding *men like cars, and women do not*. These underlying assumptions might be an attempt to explain and justify why women are underrepresented in the workforce. We argue that the employees share beliefs about what is natural for women and men to like and not, and therefore, a normalized image has been created. As this normalized image is shared by the employees, it is probable that the organizational culture (i.e. their underlying assumptions) influences their perception of MECA as male-dominated, and their understanding of why it is so. In addition, it seems like the gendered hierarchy described in 4.2.1. is justified by our respondents with the normalized image that it is men who are interested in the product.

Moreover, many of the respondents emphasize an image of men as being more decisive and assertive. These characteristics are connected to masculinity, and they are also in line with what Hofstede (1991) emphasizes as manager characteristics in masculine cultures. Hence, it is possible that the women actually see men as more capable managers and that this image then further genders the organization. Furthermore, several respondents state that their experiences of working with women are that women are more nagging and want to be more consistent in decisions, while men are more direct in their communication and have easier making decisions. One of our respondents at a department states:

I mean, I think that as long as you stand your ground. They [men] can probably run you over a bit if you don't. Men are often direct in their communication and if he has an idea we might just go with it and then if you would have to be a bit tougher and if you want to stand up against him. Women are more, what do you think and how would you have done and they want to involve everyone in the decision.

Martina

The respondent's statement indicates that there are no disadvantages working with men as long as you can stand your ground. Nevertheless, it is important to note that even though she feels it is no problem as she stands her ground, it is probable that not everyone would feel comfortable in such a situation, especially when new within a company or organization. Several respondents argue that they changed their behavior due to the tough and direct communication, but they further state that it is not a problem. Tough communication and environment was expressed by some of the respondents as men being more judging. This then results in that the women feel they have to prove and defend themselves. However, it seems like they have glorified the communications style and adapted to it, and therefore it has become normalized. Furthermore, some of the respondents mention that they thought the communication was tougher in the beginning of their employment, which indicates that they thought it was a problem back then. We argue that their thoughts have become integrated and thus become underlying assumptions, and therefore, the respondents do not reflect upon it as a problem since they have adapted to it. The normalized image of the tough and direct communication implies that the culture is masculine (e.g. Grant, 1988; Hines, 1992).

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Concluding this part about how gendering occurs through symbols and images, it seems like there are some underlying assumptions, in terms of glorified images and symbols about gender, and that the organizational culture is bias towards masculinity. Furthermore, some assumptions are based on prejudices about men and women, for instance what is “normal” for men and women to like and not. In addition, we argue that the normalized image of the tough and direct communication is another evidence that the culture at MECA is partly masculine. We will continue the discussion around the communication in the coming part about gendering through interactions.

4.2.3. Gendered Organization via Interactions - Tough Communication and Informal Alliances
Acker’s (1990) third mechanism emphasizes the daily interactions where employees form and experience dominance, submission, alliances and exclusions (Acker, 1999). It is evident that some of the respondents were exposed to dominant behavior in the beginning of their employment at MECA, both from managers, colleagues and customers. Dominance is also a phenomenon related to masculinity (Grant, 1988). One respondent states:

No but I think that it is more dependent on personality. Sure it was at some time in the beginning where one knew that then you have to show what you can do. Then it was some man, a male senior manager who was going to tell, “this is how we do it here”, a little bit of mansplaining. But, then I felt that he was wrong, and of course then I will hold my ground.

Malin

Even though Malin states that personality is the important aspect, she still refers to some gender issues. Still, she does not see these problems as evident within the company anymore. It might be that she got used to the direct communication and the tough environment and changed her own behavior and in that way it has become a normalized image (as discussed previously in section 4.2.2.). When asking one respondent how she is handling the toughness and the direct communications she states: “I try to be the same, actually”. It seems like her experiences and the toughness she was exposed to, forced her to respond with the same communication style. Likewise, some respondents reflect upon the male-domination:

It’s a little harsher here, when it’s male-dominated. Like, when you work with guys, it’s, more rough words, and tougher and so on. But you learn after a while, and I

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mean, I am myself and I can't...should I just go and become the same like the rest?
Then I wouldn't be myself either.

Magda

But they [men] can be very judging, especially older men, they have a hard time accepting us women when we are trying to help them. And that's something that I have noticed clearly, they want to be better than you, explain and they love explaining to you, then they get very happy.

Stina

It is made clear by most of the respondents that the organization is characterized by a direct communication and tough environment, and furthermore there are several aspects and interactions promoting and confirming these characteristics within the company. Hence, the organization has several masculine characteristics.

In addition, we found that the different subgroups in the organization have informal activities. According to Acker (1999) subgroups can create alliances and exclusions, which hence is a risk at MECA. One respondent states: "It's not official, it's just something that we do on Friday mornings, it's Friday breakfast". In this way they create alliances and exclusions in the organization. It is apparent that they themselves do not reflect upon this, but that they create exclusions unconsciously. Again, there might exist underlying assumptions that prevent this reflection. Nonetheless, the groups do create exclusion towards other employees within the organization. As one respondent says:

It's very group divided. The climate in the different groups is great, and there you have support for each other. But between groups, I feel like, I feel nothing. Because there's not much activity in between I think ... There's no natural communication between the groups [divisions], maybe if the finance department needs an invoice from the product department ... It's not like we have a common coffee maker where everyone gathers. There are no natural [paths], you never pass anyone's offices if you don't have to.

Maria

These groupings, which we emphasize result in subgroups, can lead to a fragmented

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organizational culture. We propose that the subgroups have created subcultures within their groups. Even though this entails a more fragmented overall culture, they create an including climate within the subcultures. Connecting this to the concepts of femininity, in which inclusion is a main characteristic (Grant 1988), it might be that the subgroups are created as the women are searching for a more feminine culture. It is possible that this is one incentive for their many activities, in order to feel more like a team. Perhaps the subgroups and their subcultures can be seen as a way for the women to retain a more feminine culture. It could be the overall masculine organizational culture, in the organization as a whole, that forces and/or encourages them to do so. As Keyton (2011) argues, if employees share the same values, they are more inclined to appreciate their work situation. It might be that the creation of smaller subgroups within the organization is an attempt to create coherence with people with the same values in smaller groups. Nevertheless, it is probable that new values are created and therefore, a fragmented culture develops.

Despite the many masculine characters in MECA's organizational culture we can also see elements of femininity. The open communication and the attempts of promoting a flat organization in terms of decisions and ideas is distinctive when the respondents describe the organization. New ideas are welcome and there are possibilities to implement them, and the ability to impact aspects within the company further point towards a more feminine culture (Hofstede, 1991). As Cliff, Langton and Aldrich (2005) state, feminine cultures are often more flat than masculine cultures. One of the respondent's states:

There is always someone you can call and discuss ideas with ... And that usually gives answers and feedback depending on what it is ... You never have to be ashamed for having an idea no matter how stupid it is ... Actually I think it's so much fun. Then it feels worthwhile to sit and think. Hell yeah, let's try this.

Sandra

As stated, our respondents also express that they experience an open communication within the company. Being able to come up with ideas, and furthermore having the possibility to implement them, and try them out points towards a more open and including culture. This feeling of having the possibility to influence things within the company can engage the employees, which can make them feel more important. It creates alliances among the whole

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company. Instead of excluding with dominance, the employees are invited and included (Acker, 1999).

To sum up this section about gendering through interactions, there are masculine characters visible in the organizational culture, for instance the tough environment and direct communication. Nevertheless, we can also see a more open communication, which indicate a more feminine culture. This can foremost be noted in the teamwork and team spirit throughout the company, and is strongly centered within different subcultures. We propose that it is probable that these subcultures are an attempt by the women to retain feminine characteristics in a largely masculine culture. Next, a short discussion around identity follows.

4.2.4. Gendered Organization and Identity - the Importance of Female Employees' Appearance

Acker's (1990) fourth component is about the employees' ability to understand expectations and behaviors (Acker, 1999). For instance, sexual harassments or jokes about women force women to argue whether they should actually tolerate the jokes or complain (Acker, 1999). We note that some of the respondents experience this. One respondent comments: "I think it's annoying when they judge you, or comment on your looks". She further states:

I was wandering around with some male colleagues in different showcases, and then they presented me to their industry colleagues like I was their trophy. Or like, yeah you see why we employed her. You see how cute she is or how hot she is. And I was just like, Oh my god, what should I do. And that happened several times during that fair, and that can also happen here when someone passes my office. Here she is, she's good looking. or something like that. Oh god, that is awkward.

Maria

It feels like they have to compensate it with something to show that I'm a strong individual. They can't just present me for who I am and which position I have [in the company]. ... You're just like "yeah sure, start naming other attributes" [instead of work].

Maria

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Looking at the above statements it is evident that the respondent is fighting with herself about how much she should tolerate regarding the things being said about her. Furthermore, another respondent states:

“Was that really ok?” [a female colleague asked] and then I think about it and, no no, he [male colleague] should never had said that. And I’ve told her that, that I have adapted and stopped thinking about it. Because you kind of have to. Otherwise I would walk around day in and day out and be irritated.

Klara

It is clear that some of our respondents consider these comments about women as problematic, however they say that they just have to ignore it most of the time. Moreover, it shows that there is a misalignment between what the women think of themselves and how they are being treated in the company. Nonetheless, there are some discrepancies in the answers from our respondents, as some do not experience anything like this. We argue that it is as important to mention, since it does not seem to permeate the whole organization. In addition, we want to point out that the problems described above are foremost something that is experienced by women who work mostly with men. As Acker (1999) argues, women can have a hard time drawing the line between how much they should accept and when should they complain. When we ask a respondent how she deals with uncomfortable situations, as described above, she states:

I wouldn’t tolerate it and I would speak up. In the beginning, I didn’t [speak up], because I was very reserved at that time, you know, you don’t wanna make any enemies and so. I don’t make any enemies [today], but now I speak up.

Stina

It is clear that she did not dare to speak up in the beginning when she was new at the company and the position. As discussed in a previous section, she changed her behavior after several interactions with the men.

To conclude this section on gendered organizations and identity, some of the women experience special treatment, sexual comments and uncomfortable situations with and from men. This seems to be more common with women who work mainly with men, than those

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who only have sporadic contact with men. Next, a discussion around gendered organization and gendered logic will continue.

4.2.5. Gendered Organization and Organizational Logic - Customer Orientation and Result-focus

At MECA, an important part of the respondents' view of what the organization is, is that they exist for the customer. Keyton (2011) emphasizes that employees in different divisions or departments can have different views of the organization and the organizational culture. However, when studying MECA and interviewing the respondents, we found two strong orientations which permeate all department and divisions; customer orientation and result-focus. These two both seem to be taken for granted by most employees, that this is what they do at MECA and what the organization is about. We will discuss these in the coming paragraphs, starting with the customer orientation.

The customer orientation within MECA seems to permeate all divisions and departments at the company. It is clear that the employees all work towards the same goal, to ensure customer needs. One respondent emphasized that "it's in the backbone, the customer first". Having a customer orientation and service focus is connected to more feminine cultures and could hence promote women in the company as feminine goals tend to promote women (Hofstede, 1991). Furthermore, it seems this customer focus might have emerged from some rules or direction statements earlier in the company history, but now employees state that it is such a clear part of the organization that it does not matter if values or rules are changed, as one respondent accentuates: "Sometimes there are new words, new directions, but as a basis it's always the same I think. It's always the customer first." Nevertheless, as they sell products that are traditionally related to men, the customer orientation, which is strongly connected to feminine cultures (Hofstede, 1991), might actually backfire as some customers think that women lack the necessary knowledge and skills needed in the area. Hence, it is possible that the female employees are put in exposed situations at times, and that this in effect reinforces gender issues.

There are many customers you talk to on the phone who say, "no you don't know this, give the phone to someone else" ... They barely say hi and are not very nice. You know it can be very tough. Sometimes I can feel bad and then I can question them, "what can I help you with" and they answer, "no you can't", you know, you get

judged right away.

Stina

Furthermore, we also notice that the respondents are very focused on the work and the result of the work. Many of them emphasize the importance of getting the job done, and in the right way. In addition to the customer focus, a strong result-orientation seems to permeate the entire organization. Action-focus and result-orientation are moreover characters of masculinity (Grant, 1988; Hines, 1992) and common attributes in masculine cultures (Hofstede, 1991). Many of the respondents discuss hard values, such as strategies, when asked about the organization. These are characteristics connected to a traditionally masculine culture (Hofstede, 1991) and masculinity (Alvesson & Billing, 2009).

To sum up this part around gendered organization and organizational logic, a customer orientation permeates the organization, which is common within feminine cultures (Hofstede, 1991), but it is also possible that this orientation reinforces gender in the organization as female employees continuously meet stereotypes when in contact with new customers. In addition, the respondents are very goal-oriented, which points towards a more masculine culture (Hofstede, 1991). Next, a chapter summary follows.

4.2.6. Chapter Summary

To sum up part 4.2 altogether, we can see that gendering occurs within different levels and aspects at MECA. By using the concepts of femininity and masculinity we argue that MECA's organizational culture is masculine, in terms of the *hierarchical structure, segregations, tough environment, direct communication, goal-orientation and action-focus*. Despite that, we noticed that there are normalized images around the hierarchical structure, segregations, the tough environment and direct communication. However, the organization has some elements of femininity, which we can see in the subgroups in terms of *teamwork and team spirit* in the divisions and departments. Hence, the subgroups create their own subcultures with femininity. We argue that the female employees create these subcultures as an attempt to retain more feminine characteristics in the masculine organizational culture. In the coming chapter, a further discussion based on our findings will follow. We will start by answering our first research question and thus establishing how the organization is gendered. After that, we will move on to discuss how women's identity is influenced by the gendering of the organization and its culture. Lastly, two new identity concepts and a new state of identity work will be presented.

5. Discussion

In this chapter, we discuss our findings and further analyze our empirical material. This chapter intends to answer our research questions. We do this by further connecting it to existing literature and research, and discuss how our findings contribute to existing research. This chapter consists of three main parts: first, we answer our first research question and thus establish how the organizational culture is gendered at MECA. Second, we discuss how this gendering affects women's identity construction, and hence answer our second research question. Third, we contribute to academia by introducing new identity concepts. The discussion chapter will function as a base for the conclusion, which follows as the last chapter in the thesis.

5.1. How is the Organizational Culture Expressed and Gendered in the Male-dominated Company MECA?

It is evident that the organizational culture at MECA has both characteristics of femininity and masculinity. We found that there are structures and segregations in the organization that indicate a more masculine culture (e.g. Hofstede, 1991). These segregations are in line with the discussion that Weick (1995) brings forth, about how shared meanings are hard to reach in culture. Furthermore, these masculine characteristics can to some extent confirm the argument made by Meyerson and Kolb (2000) that organizations often are created for men. In addition, Grant (1988) emphasizes that people tend to promote and support others who are similar to them, and in that way organizations are more advantageous to men, given that men often occupy most manager positions. Our findings appear to support this argument, since it is probable that this is the case at MECA where a normalized image, and underlying assumption, is that it is men who work in management. Moreover, the direct and sometimes tough communication is another evident character of masculinity in the organizational culture (e.g. Grant, 1988; Hines, 1992).

However, we also found characteristics connected to femininity in the organizational culture (e.g. Hofstede, 1991), both in the departments and the divisions. These are characteristics such as inclusion, openness and collaboration. However, our findings show that these feminine characteristics foremost exist within different subcultures that exist in the organization. We argue that it is probable that female employees create these subgroups and their own subcultures in order to retain more femininity in an otherwise largely masculine culture. Furthermore, we hold that our findings give support to the existing literature on

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gendered organizational cultures, and femininity and masculinity. Nevertheless, we also reason that it is hard to completely separate the two concepts femininity and masculinity from each other. For instance, the subgroups, that in some ways exclude employees left outside of the groups, might be an attempt by the group members to create a feeling of belonging with a group and share the same values with others. Hence, our findings in some ways confirm both the discussion by Martin (2002) about how subgroups fragment cultures, and Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) argument that subcultures will influence new group members. As mentioned, we can see that there are characteristics of femininity within the different subgroups, but relating it to the whole organization, they create alliances and exclusion (in line with Acker, 1999). The study also found that the subgroups are experienced as excluding for those who are not a part of a specific group. Hence, the subgroups lead to excommunication (in accordance with Schein, 2010) and a more fragmented organization.

Moreover, we found that there are glorified images of why women and men have different positions in the company. This implies that there is little dispute surrounding the somewhat gendered hierarchy found in the organization. Additionally, we found that they seem to be very customer-orientated, which is a characteristic connected to feminine cultures, and result-focused, which is connected to masculinity. Given this, we argue that the organizational culture at MECA is masculine, but that it has some elements of femininity. We hold that the organizational culture is gendered, and propose that this impacts the female employees' identity construction in different ways, which will be discussed in the coming section, in which we will answer our second research question.

5.2. How Does the Gendered Organizational Culture Affect the Identity Construction of Women Working in the Male-dominated Company MECA?

In the following section, we discuss how the gendering of the organization, as described in the above section, affects the female employees' identity construction. This discussion focuses around three different themes: first how the women adapt to the organization. Second, how they belong within different groups in the company. Third, how they identify in social categories. Lastly, a discussion follows in which we will answer our second research question: *How does the gendered organizational culture affect the identity construction of women working in the male-dominated company MECA?*

5.2.1. Identity – Adapting with Time

It is clear that some respondents at the headquarter and one respondent at the departments do not have an interest in cars. Despite the lack of interest in MECA's products, the employees still seem to thrive and identify with the company. The climate could be a contributing factor to the willingness to identify with the company. It is further probable that the open communication and the ability to propose ideas influences the employees in such a way that they feel more included. The feminine character openness (Marshall, 1993 cited in Alvesson & Billing, 2009) was detected in our empirical material, which encourages the employees' to engage and involve with the company and the work tasks, even though some of them do not have an interest in cars. This involvement can lead to that the employees identify more easily with the company, and in order to do that they adapt since they feel that their role is important for the company. This results in employees who are more integrated with the company. Moreover, the view of MECA as a quite flat organization, where all opinions are valued, can further be seen as a tool to regulate employee identity as it implies that all organizational members are valuable and have the possibility to change (e.g. Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

A common view amongst the respondents is that many employees have worked at MECA for many years. The organizational culture in terms of empowerment and flat internal hierarchy seems to influence the employees' identity construction in several positive ways. Moreover, these positive effects on employees' identity work, can be a contributing factor as to why they do not seek to advance within the company, as their position as employees is expressed as coherent with their self-identity as valuable players in the organizational structure (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008). This can be a strong reason as to why employees stay with the company.

Furthermore, this feeling of empowerment can strengthen the feeling of belonging and commonness, which can enhance their organizational identity. Additionally, many of the respondents describe their work climate as "good", and describe that there is a lot of security connected to working at MECA. This security can hence be another contributing factor as to why employees typically stay with the company for a long time. However, many respondents further state that they feel differently now compared to when they started working at MECA. One respondent compared her current experience working at MECA with her experience approximately 15 years ago:

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It's much better now. It was tougher before, it was a tougher attitude earlier. And if it would have started a sensitive person back then, I think you would have had it pretty rough.

Kristina

It is possible to question whether the organization has changed, or if the respondents themselves have changed since they started working at MECA. Since it is common to stay within the organization for such a long time, this may lead to a more homogenous workforce, and that employees with time conform to different group norms. The respondents in general demonstrate that they have changed during their time at MECA. Some respondents themselves reflect upon this:

I'm used to it, working with many men. So it's nothing I think about in that way. ... I don't know if I would have handled it differently if, if it's only women. I don't know. Or if you're just so accustomed to it by now, that you adapted from the beginning in some way.

Malin

I think I'm damaged by this profession, in this, as I have worked as I have done, so maybe I don't think about it. I might be too direct sometimes.

Kristina

Furthermore, some of the respondents do not reflect upon the change in their behavior while others are very aware of it. Hence, it is probable that some of the women conform to the ways of the organization. In fact, some of the respondents argue that they have long experiences working with men or that they have been long in the industry and therefore they do not reflect upon their possible change of behavior. We argue that they have identified with the company, their position and the industry, and it is also possible that they more easily have adapted to the industry and company, since they have experience of it. It seems they have created a strong social identity throughout their years in the industry (e.g. Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008).

Furthermore, it seems they also change their own behavior to fit the behavior at the workplace. For instance, one respondent describes herself as sometimes too direct in her

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communication. When evaluating in which ways the respondents might have worked with their identity since starting at MECA, the discussion centers around the communication style and approach. Several of the respondents' highlight that the communication within the company is direct, and moreover that it is a tough environment and industry. Moreover, the direct communication and the toughness has forced them to change their behavior and their communication style in order to fit in. Therefore, it seems like the communication impacts the employees' identity construction, the direct communication forces them to adapt to it in many cases. Many of the respondents view themselves as tougher today, than they were before. When we asked one of the respondents how she handles the direct, and sometimes tough, communication style she states:

I try to be the same, actually. In the beginning it was really hard. But that is also how you learn and I think that can be a determining factor, if it works out or not, if you can handle that.

Martina

We argue that the female employees have learnt to become masculine in order to fit in. Through situated learning and the process *legitimate peripheral participation* (Lave & Wenger, 1991), the female employees have experienced and gained knowledge of the organization and the activities and identities involved. As a result, they have become an integrated part of the organization, a part of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Moreover, the identity construction and reconstruction is somewhat regulated in the company by power relations (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). The power relations are visible in the organizational culture, and in this case in the communication and behavior in the organization. Furthermore, almost all of the respondents mentioned that they have adjusted and changed their behavior in some ways, for instance one respondent states:

No, I think that as long as you stand up for yourself. They [men] probably tend to run over you a little bit if you're not.. men are often straightforward in the communication, and if a man has an idea he might just go with it, then you would have to be a bit tougher if you want to stand up against him.

Martina

As noted by Martina, the need to toughen up might be connected to the masculine culture at

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MECA. Her statement shows that she thinks that women are the ones who have to be a bit tougher so the men do not run over them. Moreover, the female employees have learnt to become masculine. Likewise, this indicates that the female employees are regulated by the power relations in the organization (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Despite that, one of the respondent's states:

It's a little harsher here, when it's male-dominated. Like, when you work with guys, it's, more rough words, and tougher and so on. But you learn after a while, and I mean, I am myself and I can't, should I just go and become the same as the rest? Then I wouldn't be myself either.

Magda

Magda emphasizes that she has to be herself, even though the work environment is harsher and tougher. This is also in line with the discussion above around situated learning, which it seems Magda carries out. The need to work with your own identity to ensure that you stay true to yourself seems important for Magda, and to not conform to the group. The respondent's answer shows that she is aware of the identity regulation and that she does not want to be the same as the rest. However, she mentions that you learn after a while, which indicates that she has adapted. Therefore, we argue that the direct and sometimes tough communication becomes a way of regulating the employees' identity construction.

However, some of the other respondent's state that the male-domination within the industry and the company was a bigger problem in the beginning, and that they feel that the harsh work environment has become more open. Nevertheless, we argue that this might also be a factor of conforming to the organization's norms and rules (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) without thinking about it.

"Was that really ok?" and then I think about it and, no no, he [male colleague] should never had said that. And I've told her that to, that I have adapted and stopped thinking about it. Cause you kind of have to. Otherwise I would walk around day in and day out and be irritated.

Klara

The organizational culture seems to impact the employees and their social identity. According

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to Ashforth and Mael (1989) people tend to identify as a part of a group. Relating this to what we found in our empirical material, we can see that the open communication and the inclusion impact the employees' identities and make them feel like a part of a group, a part of the company. In that way the company might be able to control the employee's identity construction by inviting the employees to influence their work and work tasks. In the next part, we move on to discuss how parts of the organizational culture actually is connected to different subcultures within the company, and how these subcultures affect identity.

5.2.2. Identity – The Feeling of Belonging

Subgroups may also impact the employees' identities since people identify as a part of a group. For instance, it seems many activities at the offices are only for some groupings, for example the Friday breakfast mentioned earlier. Ashforth and Mael (1989) emphasize that social identity can develop in different environments such as lunch groups. Furthermore, Hogg and Terry (2000) underline that people tend to derive parts of their identities from different organizations and work groups, which seems to be the case with some employees at MECA, both within subgroups and other aspects of the organizational culture. In addition, it is probable that the subgroups develop subcultures, since they have their own activities and values. As stated before some of the subgroups can be an attempt to reinforce more feminine characteristics as a result of the masculine organizational culture. Instead of conforming to the masculine culture, the women create feminine subcultures where they can thrive separate from the norms and values of the large organization. Hence, it seems the subgroups result in that people conform within these, instead of adapting to the entire company. In effect, there is a risk of a fragmented culture (Martin, 2002). Nevertheless, it is quite clear that the employees within the subgroups do not reflect upon this as an issue, instead they thrive in it.

Further, the company seems to be both holographic and ideographic, which means that they both have a shared identity across the whole organization but also shared identities within the subgroups (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). In addition, it is important to note that this social identification might lead to a de-personalization of the self (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), which we can note with some of the employees who conform heavily to group norms within the company. Moreover, Keyton (2011) argues that the organizational culture can be experienced differently depending on where in the company you work. However, in spite of the dividing's, we have noticed that there is a common shared goal throughout the whole organization: *the customer first*.

It is very friendly, when I talk to my colleagues, when they call, hey what's up ... everyone is social and nice, and you help each other out, they do their job, and I do my job, and altogether the customer gets satisfied, and that permeates [the entire company], it does, I think that.

Nathalie

It is clear that the employees have a common goal and a common understanding of what the most important part of MECA is. Most of the respondents emphasize the customers, and that all they do are for the customers as fundamental for the operations at MECA. Creating a common goal for the employees can be a way for companies to regulate their employees' identity construction (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Hence, this common orientation throughout the company might function as an identity regulatory tool. However, we can also see that some of the employees identify more in the subgroups as well, for instance the Friday breakfast mentioned earlier. It is evident that they feel an affinity for the groups, which means that they identify with the group. For instance, some of the respondents highlight their group's cohesion and team spirit.

However, there is a risk with identity work in the organization that the employees' might not accept the values and beliefs shared in the organization or group. Schein (2010) emphasizes social validation as experiences with values and beliefs that are shared in a group. When such values and beliefs are not accepted by all members of a group, there is a risk of excommunication. Being excommunicated means that they are excluded from the group (Schein, 2010). Relating this to the company and its culture, if an employee does not agree with the values conveyed in the company, it could result in the employee leaving the company. Nonetheless, relating this to the subgroups in the company implies that there may exist subgroups that do not sympathize with the overall values and beliefs of the rest of the organization. Furthermore, groups might constitute their own values and beliefs, which can contribute to a subcultures arising. In addition, if a new employee starts working at the company and ends up in a division or department where a subculture has developed it might be a contradictory view of the company, compared to when he or she met the HR manager during the interview. The organizational culture affects the identity work and in the end the identity work might affect the culture, as an ongoing circle. Next, we will discuss how the female employees' gender forces them to constantly prove themselves.

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5.2.3. Identity – Identifying in Social Categories

Most respondents emphasize that it is more common for men to work in managing positions, and that women work in administrative positions. This seems to be a common view with our respondents. This gendered hierarchy and structure of the company seems to affect the women's identity construction in different ways. Furthermore, few of our respondents mentioned the fact that they have a higher education and a different career desire than some of the employees at MECA. We argue that some of the employees identify in social categories rather than the company, which is in line with social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This means that they differentiate themselves, and in that way contribute to a more segregated culture. However, Hogg and Terry (2000) emphasize that a strong organizational culture or group culture can influence employees in such a strong way so that they identify more with the organization or group than their background or other aspects such as gender or social status. Hence, if MECA would have a strong organizational culture throughout the entire organization, and hence counter the fragmentations existing today, it is probable that they would also counter the tendency to identify within social categories.

In addition, many of our respondents emphasize that they do not want to “climb a career ladder”, and it is possible that this is an effect of the structure of the company. While men coach each other and have role models in top management positions within the company, women continuously meet and fight stereotypes. For instance, some respondents highlight that they continuously have to prove that they are capable when entering new organizational aspects, for instance when interacting with new customers, they constantly need to prove themselves, because they are women.

You have to prove yourself all the time. It doesn't matter how long you've been in the business. I can just think at my mom in this, because she also works in this industry. She has been in this industry for 20-22 years. She has to prove herself all the time. It's tough, but it's a fun profession as well. That you know that you can.

Magda

Magda states that it is important to know that you can, even though you have to prove yourself. It might be an important aspect of her identity work to know that when challenged by others, she knows that she has the necessary knowledge and skills to succeed. It is

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probable that she still has to fight to keep up her self-identity (e.g. Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) when it is challenged continuously.

It is evident that much of the identity work by our respondents is regulated by external forces, but also from different structures within the company. Many of our respondents highlight their position in the company's hierarchy and, talk a lot about where men work, and where women work. This is in line with Alvesson and Willmott (2002) that describe that identity work can be regulated by focusing on who you are in relation to structures within an organization, for instance hierarchical location.

This focus on their differences and need to prove themselves can be seen as an expression of their personal identity (e.g. Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008), as they focus on their uniqueness and the struggles related to some of their attributes, in this case their gender. However, it is evident that their struggle is a path to find a social identity, where they would then be able to clearly identify as part of the group (e.g. Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas., 2008; Ashforth & Mael, 1989). As described above, most respondents identify as part of the group, despite that, it is probable that they have a hard time with their identity work as they continuously meet and fight stereotypes. These different interactions probably affect their identity in different ways. That they always have to prove to new customers that they know what they are doing might actually reinforce their identity as not belonging, even though they try to adapt to group norms. This also seems to happen occasionally within the company, and not just through external forces such as customers. One respondent highlights that the focus often is on her appearance, how cute she is, and almost never on her knowledge and skills. Another respondent also underlines that the talk around the office and in the lunchroom is a lot of sexual jokes about women. These interactions and jokes possibly forces more identity work onto the respondents, as they need to manage the misalignment between their view of themselves and how they are treated at work.

In conclusion, different interactions and images affects the respondents' identity in different ways, foremost they seem to work a lot with their identity based on interactions both inside and outside of the office. In this interaction, the women are exposed to a lot of stereotypes and prejudice. In this context, the need to have knowledge and skills is emphasized. In fact, they need to adapt and reconstruct their identity in order to fit in. We hold that you have to adapt and conform to the company's culture in order to thrive. We can see that there are identity

regulations which control the employees' identities and daily work, and that the respondents have worked with their identity since entering the organization. In the next part of the discussion, we will answer our second research question based on the discussion above.

5.2.4. Concluding Remarks – The Impact of a Gendered Organizational Culture on Female Employees' Identity Construction

The earlier presented glorified and normalized images we found, for instance, men like cars, impact the female employees' identity construction and reconstruction. By normalizing such things, employees will not question the structure of the organization. Likewise, new employees might not challenge this normalized phenomenon, instead simply accept and share the same values as the existing employees. Moreover, the masculinity that we found, in terms of the tough and direct communication, is another example of how the gendered organizational culture impacts and influences the female employees' identity construction. We argue that the employees are impacted by power relations, in terms of direct communication and toughness in the company and industry. They have learnt to become masculine through situated learning, and thus has become a part of a community of practice. Acker (1999) emphasizes that dominance is one way of how gendering occurs in organizations, and we reason that these issues reinforce gender stereotypes in the male-dominated industry and company. Our study shows that women adapt to the existing communication style in order to survive. Another factor that is evident is how some of the women describe how they are introduced by some of their colleagues and treated by some of their clients. Again, this image and traditional view of men like cars more than women is evident. Some of our respondents emphasize that they constantly have to prove that they are capable of the job even though they are women. As Acker (1999) argues, it forces women to either tolerate or complain about sexual harassments or jokes, and they are constantly fighting about what to do. Nevertheless, there exist some discrepancies in the answers from our study, as some of our respondents do not reflect upon the adapting and proving themselves, while some of them do. One respondent even argues that she cannot change, but later on she mentions that she adapts her communication style.

Furthermore, it is probable that the subgroups presented also impact the female employees' identity construction, as they contribute to a social identity by sharing the same values within the groups, but also exclude employees who do not become a part of such groups. We hold that the subgroups and the subcultures we found could be an attempt for the female

employees to reinforce feminine characteristics in a masculine organization in order to feel more belongingness. Hence, we propose that this gendered organizational culture impacts female employees' identity construction in several ways, foremost through glorified images, interactions and subgroups. In the next section, we will introduce two new identities and the state of limbo between them.

5.3. Introducing New Identity Concepts: The Negligent, the Unfaltering, and the Unsettled State of Identity Work In-between.

Findings in the empirical material indicate that our respondents struggle with their identity work as they want to be a part of the group and organization and find a strong social identity (e.g. Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008; Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This struggle seems to contribute to a state of limbo between if they should simply conform to group norms, in accordance with social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) or if they should continue to prove themselves and keep up their fight for a self-identity (e.g. Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) coherent with their view of themselves. Given the empirical material, we would now like to propose two concepts of identities and identity work which we decipher from the respondents' answers and experiences within the organization, *the negligent*, and *the unfaltering* (see table 5.1). We argue that these two are both visible in the respondents' identity construction as they work with their identity to create a coherent self in line with their view of themselves.

	The Negligent	The Unfaltering
Cultural experience at company	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experiences a common culture Part of subcultures Emphasizes femininity: inclusion & teamwork 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experiences fragmented culture Excluded from subcultures Emphasizes masculinity: harsh communication
Attitude towards gender stereotypes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accepts & reinforces stereotypes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fights & meets stereotypes
Identity construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong social identity Conforms to group norms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong personal identity Rejects group norms

Table 5.1 The Negligent and the Unfaltering.

The Negligent

The negligent identity experiences a common culture and feels like a part of different subcultures. Moreover, the negligent emphasizes feminine characteristics as inclusion and teamwork. Further, the negligent is an identity construction where the female employees have conformed to group norms and the values and beliefs of the organization. As the negligent, the respondents have created an identity where the image of, for instance, men as more decisive and hence better leaders is generally accepted, and that different prejudices about what is normal for men and women are accepted. This negligent has constructed an identity that fits with the organization, and seeks to create a strong social identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), where they accept and reinforce stereotypes.

The Unfaltering

In contrast, the unfaltering identity experiences a more fragmented culture where the subcultures are perceived as excluding. The unfaltering emphasizes the masculinity in the organizational culture, in terms of the harsh communication. Furthermore, it focuses on the importance of the skills and knowledge of the respondents, and does not as easily conform to the organization's norms, or seek a social identity in the same way as the negligent. Respondents that indicated an identity construction as the unfaltering emphasize their differences to the others, and how they continuously have to meet and fight stereotypes, and the struggle this entails. The unfaltering has a strong personal identity.

Nevertheless, given that identity is continuously changed and reworked (Brown, 2015), individuals do not stay permanently within these two differing concepts. We suggest that there is a third state between these two where most respondents actually exist. It is clear that many respondents try to balance between the two identities. We can see that some respondents emphasize that they have to prove themselves, in accordance with the unfaltering, but later still state that they do not argue for their case all the time. It is evident that they transition between their desired self, which often seems to be the unfaltering, and the less-desired self, which often seems to be the negligent. That they transition between the two, we argue, is a result of the need to change in behavior and communication style to thrive in this industry, but also a result of their feeling of self-identity that they want to be coherent with their self-view. This state of limbo we label as *the unsettled state* of identity work (see Figure 5.1).



Figure 5.1 The Unsettled State of Identity Work.

5.4. Chapter Summary

To conclude, in this chapter we have discussed our research questions and presented the identity concepts we found. The organizational culture at MECA is gendered, mostly masculine, however we can also see elements of feminine characteristics. The gendered organizational culture impacts the women's identity work, in terms of adapting to and accepting the communication style and the tough environment. In addition, we presented two identities, that we call the negligent and the unfaltering. We also suggest a third state, the unsettled state, where most of the employees actually exist, as they continuously do identity work and try to balance between the negligent and the unfaltering. In the coming conclusion, our research findings are presented and we present ideas for further research.

6. Conclusion

In the final chapter we present our conclusions and reach our aim. The chapter starts with a presentation of our findings and theoretical contributions. Thereafter, we discuss different practical implications, and lastly we reflect upon future research.

6.1 Findings and Theoretical Contributions

The aim of the thesis was to examine women's experiences working in a male-dominated company, and how these experiences affect their identity and identity construction. Two research questions worked as a ground in this thesis:

- How is the organizational culture expressed and gendered in the male-dominated company, MECA?
- How does the gendering of the organizational culture affect the identity construction of women working in the male-dominated company MECA?

The study is based on a qualitative research approach. Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with female employees in order to get a deep understanding of how they experience working there and to explore their identity work. As a complement to the interviews, we also did observations at one department. The research has resulted in some findings and theoretical contributions, which we wish to account for here.

Firstly, we found that the organizational culture is gendered, it is masculine to some extent but there also exist elements of femininity (e.g. Alvesson & Billing, 2009; Grant, 1988; Hines, 1992; Hofstede, 1991). The masculinity was foremost visible in the *structure*, *segregations*, *tough environment*, *direct communication* and *goal-orientation*. Despite these masculine characteristics, we found femininity throughout the company in terms of *teamwork* and *team spirit*. Hence, the results are in some ways in line with existing research around gendering in organizations. The theoretical contribution at this stage is primarily acknowledging that even though a workforce is male-dominated, feminine characteristics can still appear as quite strong in the organizational culture. The biological sex of the workforce hence affects organizational culture to some extent, but not solely. Furthermore, the femininity appears mostly in the different subcultures, and we argue that it might be a way for the female workers to retain and reinforce some feminine characteristics in an organization

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that is largely masculine.

Moreover, the research shows that most of the respondents have worked with their identity and adapted to the organization since they started their employment at MECA. The identity work done by the women mostly centered on creating a self-identity coherent with the values of the gendered company, and the masculine characteristics tough environment and direct communication. It is probable that this needs to be done in order to thrive within the industry, even though the generalizability of our study can be questioned, in accordance with our discussion about limitations in chapters one and three. We also found that women who are part of a subculture have a stronger social identity, than those who simply exist as part of the overall organizational culture.

Lastly, we contribute by proposing two new concepts of identity and a third concept of identity work; the negligent identity, the unfaltering identity, and lastly the unsettled state of identity work. The two first concepts are two identities that are constructed as a result of their experience of the organizational culture, two extremes where they either conform to organizational values and norms, or reject them. The unsettled state of identity work emphasizes how the continuously changing nature of identity work entails that most women actually exist in a state of limbo between the two identities described, trying to balance both negligent and unfaltering. In the coming paragraph, we will account for different implications our study might have for practice.

6.2. Practical Implications

This study provides knowledge for theoretical contribution, as mentioned before. It also has some implications for practice. We hold that our study foremost holds implications and contributes to organizations with a workforce that is gender bias in some way, but that it also presents some implications that may be beneficial for other organizations to note as well. We mainly identify four major practical implications, which we accentuate below. First, our findings indicate that the biological sex to some extent affects the organizational culture within a company, but not solely. This should be acknowledged by organizations in order to understand possible issues and implications within their own culture. Second, with a clearer perception of how women create subcultures to retain their feminine characteristics and create inclusion and openness, organizations could be more attentive to fragmentations within their culture. Third, by acknowledging the new identity concepts and how employees work with

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their identity continuously trying to balance the two, thus ending up in a state of limbo, organizations' perception of the identity construction of their employees might be deepened. Fourth, these concepts could also benefit in practice for employees, as they might deepen their awareness of their own identity work.

Nonetheless, as mentioned in our methods chapter, there are several limitations to our study, and the generalizability of qualitative research of a limited scope affects the practical implications as well as the theoretical contributions. Next, we present different ideas for future research.

6.3. Future Research

We propose that it would be interesting to further examine other diversity challenges in organizations, such as race, age and ethnicity. We also think it would be interesting to explore men's experiences working with a male-dominated workforce, as our findings indicate that the terms masculinity and femininity and the gendering of cultures are not exclusively dependent on the sex of the workforce. This also indicates that it is probable that not all men are tough and direct in the communication, and therefore, it would be interesting to review how they experience working in a male-dominated organization.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to construct similar research throughout other organizations in order to reach a more generalizable result, for instance about how a male-dominated workforce affects the gendering of the organization. Additionally, a similar study but with focus on how female-dominated workforces affect the gendering of organizations would be interesting. Such a study could show if there are any differences between how male-dominated and female-dominated workforces affect organizations.

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Appendix 1

Frågeformulär

Bakgrund / Berätta om dig själv

- Akademisk bakgrund?
- Hur länge har du arbetat och vad har du för position/yrkesroll?
- Vad fick dig att välja den här yrkeskarriären? Hur känner du för ditt val?
- Hur kommer det sig att du sökte jobb på MECA?
- Vad har du gjort tidigare?
- Vilka är dina kollegor - män/kvinnor?
- Hur ser en typisk arbetsdag ut?
- Vad innebär din position?
- Vad är dina uppgifter? Skiljer de sig från andras?

Om MECA / Kulturen?

- Berätta om Meca som företag (internt & externt om möjligt?)
- Om du skulle beskriva MECA med tre ord, vilka skulle du använda?
- Har MECA förändrats under din tid? Hur då? Varför?
- Hur är din personliga uppfattning av att arbeta på MECA?
- Vad tycker du kännetecknar ett bra arbetsklimat vs. ett dåligt?
- Vad är bäst med att arbeta på MECA som jag inte kommer se om jag bara går runt på företaget?
- Hur känner du att dina eller kollegors tankar och idéer förs vidare i företaget? Hur fungerar kommunikationen? Hur tas besluten?
- Hur hanteras konflikter?

Stämningen på arbetsplatsen

- Vad tänker du om att det är få kvinnor som arbetar i organisationen? Varför?
- Hur viktigt är det för dig att arbeta på ett företag där könsfördelningen är jämn?
- Från din synvinkel, ser du några fördelar med att arbeta i ett mansdominerat företag
- Från din synvinkel, ser du några nackdelar med att arbeta i ett mansdominerat företag.
- Hur upplever du stämningen mellan kollegorna på jobbet (båda könen)?
- Upplever du att jargongen skiljer sig åt mellan olika grupper? Hur?
- Umgås du med dina kollegor efter jobbet?
- Hur skulle du beskriva dina kollegor?
- Hur skulle du beskriva din chef (om finnes)?