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The woman as a problem and solution – analysis of a gender equality initiative within the Swedish Rescue Services

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Abstract (240 words)

The aim of this article is to study how problem definitions of gender equality affect possible outcomes of gender equality initiatives. The Swedish municipal Rescue Services make up the empirical example based on the fact that the Rescue Services is a workplace where women are greatly underrepresented despite years of gender equality efforts. The article analyses how reasonings around gender equality shape and construct problem formulations around gender and equality. With this article we contribute to a debate on the conditions of gender equality founded on gender equality definitions, and how this relates to the potential for change.

The gender equality efforts within the Rescue Services are problematized based on Bacchi's policy analysis model. We do so by analysing the applications for a call for a gender equality initiative within municipal Rescue Services – *A Fire Station for Everyone*.

The article argues that the problem definitions in this case, to some extent, counteract gender equality initiatives as they place women – whom they wish to recruit to the Rescue Services to make it more gender equal in a numerical sense – in a paradoxical position as both problem and solution. Nor do they problematize power issues. It is stated that the given problem descriptions do not leave a lot of room for the potential for change, but that the method to analyse the problem descriptions can be an important tool to understand why gender equality initiatives may struggle to reach the intended objectives.

Key words: reform, working-life, power, Swedish Rescue Services, policy-analysis

Introduction

Research on gender equality discourses shows that definitions of gender equality, and how they relate to reform efforts in an organisation, are important to the result of gender equality initiatives. The way in which a problem is defined always includes a power perspective, and it is important to emphasise this for further efforts and for the result of a certain initiative (see e.g. Wahl, Holgersson, Höök & Linghag, 2011). Who is describing the problem, and how they do so, also affects the results and what measures are seen as possible in the reform efforts. As has been pointed out by, for example, Nentwich (2006), these issues are important to highlight since it is not until we notice the underlying notions that produce inequality in organisations that they can become the object of reform efforts.

In this article we look at gender equality initiatives in working life in a part of the Swedish labour market where there still exists a clear gender structure and gender coding, i.e. the Swedish Rescue Services. The aim is to look into how problem definitions of gender equality affect the possibilities of carrying out successful gender equality initiatives.

The Swedish municipal Rescue Services have had the commission to increase the number of women and to promote gender equality within the organisation as a goal since the late 1990s (Ericson, 2011, see also Krekula, Karlsson, Grip & Engström, 2015, for a presentation of the Government's letter of regulation to the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency regarding gender equality within the Rescue Services). Despite this, clear gender segregation still exists. The number of female firefighters has seen a slow development and in 2014 the number of full-time female firefighters amounted to a mere 3.3% (MSB, 2015). Gender studies of the Swedish Rescue Services have shown that despite a number of gender equality initiatives, the firefighter profession is still to a great extent based on constructions of masculinity that exclude women (see e.g. Engström, Jakobsen & Krekula, 2012; Ericson, 2011; Glans &

Rother, 2007; Häyrén Weinestål, Bondestam & Berg, 2011), which can be seen as one of the explanations for the slow increase of women within the organisation.

Previous research highlighting gender equality and gender issues in rescue and emergency services in, for example, the US (see e.g. Chetkovich, 1997/2004; Yoder & Aniakudo, 1995/1996; Yoder & Berendsen, 2001), Australia (Maleta, 2009) and the US, Ireland and England (Archer, 1999), also shows that there are many similarities in terms of inequality patterns and expressions regardless of the country in which the study has been conducted. This international research also identifies harassment due to gender as part of the rescue and emergency services culture or organisation climate, expressed through exclusion, pestering and discrimination.

This previous research, both in Sweden and internationally, has often focused on expressions of gender inequality. In both the debate and research on gender equality within the rescue and emergency services, definitions of gender equality and the way they relate to reform efforts have been relatively absent. Thus despite a recurring debate and different gender equality projects, there is a lack of visibility of how the municipal Rescue Services define the gender equality issue and the objective of the gender equality initiatives. In this article, we shed light on this knowledge gap by unveiling how gender equality is defined by the organisation as well as discussing the consequences that these problem definitions have for the organisation's gender equality initiatives. By analysing how gender equality challenges are described by local Rescue Services, the article contributes to a debate on the conditions of gender equality based on gender equality definitions, and how this relates to the potential for change.

Data and analytical approach

In this article we investigate how gender equality is constructed in the project “A Fire Station for Everyone”, a project where the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) aimed to create a “model station” from a gender perspective. In MSB’s funding announcement for the project in 2011, “workplace free from discrimination”, “equal gender distribution”, and “visible diversity” were key concepts (MSB, 2011). The analysed material consists of nine applications for funding. Various documents are attached to a number of the applications, e.g. municipal gender equality plans. These have also been included in the analysis, but our focus has been on the text of the applications. Altogether the material investigated consists of approximately 250 pages of text.

Our analysis has been inspired by Carol Bacchi’s approach “What’s the Problem Represented to Be?” (WPA) (Bacchi, 1999/ 2009), a policy analysis model that primarily aims to analyse the problematisations that are assumed by the solutions suggested by a policy. The model departs from the theoretical notion that solutions do not sprout naturally and rationally out of an objective problem. Rather, policy suggestions are said to construct social relations as problematic and selected articulations of the problem simultaneously exclude other descriptions and perspectives (Bacchi, 1999/2009). The focus is, in other words, transferred from the “problem” to “problematisations”. The approach assumes that policies and agencies do not react to problems, but rather are actors who are proactive in focusing on some aspects and toning down others (Bacchi, 2009). This is also true for the Swedish authorities which develop policies related to gender equality within the Rescue Services. They shape and construct problem definitions around gender and equality. It is this process that we wish to problematise in this article.

Methodologically, the WPA model involves a constructionist perspective. However, we do not argue that the problems are empty creations made by people with more or less bad intentions. These problems can be quite real and tangible. Our point of departure is, rather, that there always exists an element of construction in the descriptions and proposed solutions to the problems. The analytic model is therefore closely linked to other constructionist perspectives within the social sciences, e.g. discourse analysis (see e.g. Titscher & Bryan, 2000). In line with several other approaches to discourse analysis, we understand discourse as *more* than language, it has material effects (see also Foucault, 1977). Individuals are influenced by problem definitions, partly with respect to how they view society and what are regarded as problematic relations within it, and partly through being influenced by those decisions that are based on the problem definitions. In our analysis we assume that the work that is carried out within the Rescue Services on gender equality can and should be understood in relation to how the problem is constructed in key documents. We have therefore analysed the concepts and lines of argumentation that emerge in the applications. The analysis has been conducted through a close reading of the documents, trying to find answers to two overriding questions; *What is gender equality represented to be?* and *Why gender equality?* From the answers to these questions we have continued the analyses with departure in Bacchi's six questions in the WPA-analysis; problems, presuppositions, representations, the unproblematised/silences, effects and dissemination (Bacchi, 2009). Variations in the material are in our analysis described as different problem descriptions. This means that variations between or within different applications are not discussed. We can however mention that no large differences between the applications exist when it comes to how gender equality and the problem is described (in a first step the applications were analysed one by one). In line with Fraser (1989) we understand *groups as constituted in*

policy discourse and have therefore also focused on how the absent group of women is represented.

Objectives and arguments for gender equality initiatives

Previous research on problem representation in gender equality initiatives stress the importance of making the implicit explicit and clarifying the consequences of the problem representations (Bacchi, 2009). The way in which gender equality issues are represented is about what is seen as the objective of the gender equality initiatives. The promotion of gender equality and diversity means, by definition, that you believe that there are problems to be solved (Bacchi, 2009) and the way in which the problem is represented depends on what you include in the concept of gender equality. Rönnblom (2001) argues that despite the awareness of different ways to talk about and understand gender equality, it is often seen as an obvious and common political objective with normative notions about what is good or bad for gender equality. In addition, the actual concept has become problematic since most people are said to be positively inclined to gender equality, without really defining what this means (see also Magnusson, 2000). This is said to create a spirit of understanding and downplay the conflicting interests that women and men may have. Further, Rönnblom argues that this is a trap you can end up in if you consider gender equality as something that “is” rather than something that is “done”.

In order to put focus on what is done, we argue that it is central to study different arguments for gender equality initiatives. We base this on the fact that the argument for gender equality shows how you view the problem and why you wish to promote gender equality in the organisation, as well as how much room for reform the different definitions create for the organisation and for the individuals. These descriptions also create the gender equality perspective that the organisation then uses as a basis for their work.

Hernes' research from the 1980s has set the tone for Nordic research on the promotion of gender equality (Hernes, 1982/1987). The arguments she has discerned bring up the democratic right to participate, that women have something important to contribute, and the argument that women and men have different interests, which is why women cannot be represented by men (Hernes, 1987). Other research also shows that definitions of gender equality to a great extent are based on these arguments of fairness, resources and representation. *The fairness argument* builds on the idea that women should be represented and have access to positions in relation to their number, i.e. based on the fact that they make up half of the population (Philips, 1998). *The resource argument* builds on the assumption that women have resources and experiences that differ from those of men, which is why women are needed to provide different perspectives (Magnusson, 2000; Skjeie & Teigen, 2005). *The representation argument* emphasises that women and men have different and conflicting experiences and interests, which is why women cannot be represented by men (Philips, 1998). These arguments are often discussed in relation to representation in politically elected assemblies (see e.g. Philips, 1998), but it can also be about the right to not be excluded from certain sectors of working life, for example. Research also shows that argumentation for gender equality initiatives often mix different definitions and arguments (Skjeie & Teigen, 2005) and they are not always as easy to separate as it might seem from the account above. Critique also exists against these types of arguments that focus on women as a group. Borchorst and Siim (2002) show that the arguments, which are built on the notion that women as a collective have common interests that differ from the interests of men as a group, to a certain extent have been outdated. They argue that there is no longer a theoretical or political consensus on who can represent women or what is best for women's interests. Essed (2004), too, argues that this type of argument does not sufficiently problematise group divisions defined by false images of homogeneity, that sameness is based on stereotypical notions of

e.g. women and men as groups. This also includes a critique of the idea that arguments for gender equality initiatives (and the promotion of diversity), through their focus on the insertion of underrepresented groups, hide the actual problems which are rather about *selective insertion* than exclusion (Essed, 2004).

Skjeie and Teigen (2005) suggest that another argument has been added to the debate, or that the argument above that deals with women's rights has been transformed into a profitability argument, focusing on what women can contribute with. This argument claims that a more even gender representation is both healthy and profitable since it contributes towards a better utilisation of the competence of the female population (Teigen, 2010). However, Skjeie and Teigen (2005) see a big risk with this as the argument builds on upholding differences between women and men. Nentwich (2006) shows that sameness and difference discourses are highly present in arguments for gender equality initiatives, connected to arguments of fairness, resources and representation. Discourses of sameness gather arguments that are based on the idea that women and men should have the same tasks, roles and responsibilities in the workplace, similar to the fairness argument. This often results in the idea of providing women with an education that will give them the tools they need to become equal to men, and the focus of the practical aspects of gender equality initiatives is then placed on e.g. policy reforms, implementing mentor programmes and creating alternative career paths to overcome discriminating structures (Nentwich, 2006). One danger which Nentwich (2006) describes of using these gender equality representations within the sameness discourse, is that the differences which may exist between men and women (biological and social) are ignored, which may have counteracting effects on gender equality when it comes to e.g. being able to carry out one's work sufficiently. Borchorst and Siim (2002) argue, however, that the fairness argument facilitates gender equality, while the resource and representation arguments instead promote differences between the sexes. These discourses of

difference emphasise that the differences between men and women are something positive for an organisation. The objective is to upgrade what are categorised as traditional female qualities and tasks (Nentwich 2006), but focus on gender differences is often upheld based on the fact that women are given other roles in the organisation. Here, the women's role is to complement what the men are expected to contribute with in the organisation. If women are not given room in the organisation, one could argue that all of society's resources are not utilised in an effective way (Skjeie & Teigen, 2005). Gender equality initiatives founded on discourses of difference can entail offering e.g. diversity training that focuses on and highlights the benefits of a gender mixed workplace where co-workers contribute with different skills (Nentwich, 2006). One effect of the discourses of difference is that they risk upholding gender stereotypes and that women and men are pushed into roles that they are not comfortable with (Nentwich, 2006, see also Magnusson, 2000; the same argumentation is used when men are the unrepresented group). Connected to the profitability argument, Skjeie and Teigen (2005) see a danger in that the gender equality argument on equal rights is reduced to an idea of "supplementary good" (2005, p.188) and ask what happens with the gender equality initiatives if they do not lead to increased productivity.

The account above shows that, regardless of which argument is being used, the woman is a central figure onto whom a number of expectations are applied through increased numerical gender equality in workplaces. She is supposed to represent (all) other women and contribute with a number of resources and skills, and preferably also contribute to increased profitability. In this context, the woman represents something more than just another co-worker in the workplace, she must also carry a bigger load (see e.g. Eduards, 2007).

Kanter (1993) has shown that in organisations that are characterised by a numerical gender imbalance with a minority of women (like in our example with the Rescue Services),

women are exactly that: tokens and representatives for their gender, rather than representatives for themselves. Based on this, Kanter has observed three main tendencies: visibility, contrast and assimilation.

Visibility means that women are able to figure as symbols for women in general and as representatives for their gender (Kanter, 1993), or in the best of cases, as the exception to the rule and thus different and better than other women (Wahl & Linghag, 2013). There are also parallels here to what Essed (2004) refers to as “insertion of differences/otherness” that points out that the insertion rarely liberates the person from being marginalised – the person remains a symbol rather than being included as an equal.

Minorities in a workplace can, according to Kanter (1993), also contribute to a kind of *contrast effect* where prevailing cultures are activated when people who differ from those cultures enter the workplace. When an outsider enters the workplace, it unveils practices that are taken as a given, and through this unveiling those practices may also be perceived as very important to uphold. This often results in the exclusion of the outsider.

Assimilation is the third tendency that Kanter (1993) describes. Here, differences and stereotypical/traditional notions of femininity are emphasised and used. Instead of adjusting to the culture in the workplace, the women adjust and assimilate themselves to the expectations of how women “should be”. Wahl and Linghag (2013) write that through this, society’s notions also affect the women’s room to manoeuvre, e.g. through notions that women cannot cooperate, that they are caring etc.

The women’s positions can show the power imbalances that Wahl et al. (2011) describe, and the issue of power imbalances could also be said to be something of a core issue when it

comes to successful gender equality initiatives. Power relations exist in every organisation and are manifested in titles, resources, room to manoeuvre, wages, physical work environment, well-being and poor health. Power relations are not just about gender relations, but are important in order to understand the gender structures that exist in an organisation. A long-lasting change requires an understanding of the problem and the power relations that exist in the organisation. This knowledge is important to enable active and conscious initiatives (Wahl et al. 2011).

What kind of problem: problem definitions of gender equality

In our analysis of the applications we have thus looked at the definitions of gender equality based on Bacchi's question "what kind of problem". Our analysis highlights two simultaneous understandings of what problem needs to be solved in order to reach better gender equality in the Rescue Services: *physical obstacles* and *interaction obstacles*. While issues of physical and material obstacles for gender equality apply at an overall organisational level, interactive obstacles are about values and knowledge. The gender equality issue thus applies to two different levels at the same time: an organisational and an individual level.

Material/physical obstacles

The problem description for material/physical obstacles turns gender equality into a question of changing the workplace mainly based on physical and material conditions. These types of material changes place the problems on an organisational level, i.e. that there are problems deriving from, and that can be solved by, the overall organisation. As an example, it is stated that gender equality includes that there should be changing rooms for both men and women, and that equipment should be adjusted to both genders. An example of this theme from the texts is the mention of adjusting "the fire station, vehicles as well as other Rescue Services material in order to facilitate the recruitment of female firefighters" and that a station "where

the facilities are adjusted according to the fact that both men and women work side by side” are presented as a prerequisite for increased gender equality. Other examples are that the lack of separate shower and changing rooms constitute an obstacle in the recruitment of female firefighters.

Here, the gender equality issue is about the structure of the organisation and how the norms and values that the structure is based on are materialised in buildings and equipment. The descriptions of the lack of changing rooms and equipment that suits both women and men imply that men as a norm has material consequences in the organisation. The norm here implies that there is just one kind of men and that they all fit the material conditions (Hirdman, 2001).

The same belief – that the gender equality issue springs from a material problem – transpires in the applications which emphasise that the organisation have been working with this already in their promotion to increase gender equality, and that they in their initiatives for increased gender equality, for example, have adjusted “everything from changing rooms to station and alarm equipment” to suit both genders and that “there is equipment adjusted to different sizes and cultures”. Thus, this problem description stresses that institutionalised norms can uphold gender inequality, which is often assumed to be about equipment and facilities. Adjusting the material aspects of the organisation in order to suit both men and women is described as a step towards gender equality. This then becomes a form of *fairness argument* where women and men should be able to carry out the same work tasks on equal terms, even though the fairness of being able to carry out the same work tasks is not presented as a clear theme in the applications.

This material problem description unveils with much-needed clarity that when the problem is given a material dimension, it shows that the gender aspect is all-pervading in the Swedish Rescue Services: the male norm is rooted in clothing and facilities.

Interactive obstacles

The second understanding of the gender equality problem which has been identified in the application documents puts emphasis on interactive obstacles. This relates to the individual and interaction between individuals. A recurring theme in the applications is that increased gender equality can be reached through a wish to eliminate discrimination and special treatment. One example of this is the emphasis that gender equality initiatives should focus on having “welcoming staff who see the benefits of including more women in the shift teams”. In other words, strive for “an inclusive workplace”.

This problem description is based on an understanding of the gender equality issue as a matter of attitude, and thus not about structural discrimination that concerns norms, ideologies and overall power structures (SOU, 2005:56). Here, the lack of gender equality is about the individual’s knowledge and understandings, which should be solved through training and information. A need to work with “issues that limit and block a wanted development within the field of gender equality and diversity” is mentioned. Another example is a wish to increase knowledge and understanding of gender equality issues by inviting lecturers as part of training all full-time staff in gender equality and diversity etc. Training and discussions are mentioned as important ways to reach a gender equal organisation. According to Wahl et al. (2011), training is a common method in the context of gender equality. However, in order for these to be effective methods in reform efforts, they argue that the training needs to involve an analysis of their organisation in order to identify, e.g., excluding mechanisms, personal

preferences and reform barriers. From the applications, it is difficult to discern if the training includes that kind of analysis.

Thus, this interaction-focused problem representation places the solutions largely on an individual level, and organisational change is put in the background (cf. Magnusson, 2000). The individual co-worker becomes both the problem and the solution in the process towards a more inclusive workplace. Based on this problem description, the change potential rests on the individual's cognitions and information processing. However, it appears that both the emotional and the behavioural bases of the individual's attitudes are left behind. Attitudes become a question of the individual's education, knowledge and information. The staff is to be made aware, which in itself is believed to bring about change. The co-workers are here seen as rational individuals that can be steered in the right direction with some education and information (cf. Rose, 1999). In the applications, a more aware and informed individual is believed to counteract gender inequality by challenging their own self-image and prejudices. It is also argued that the psycho-social working environment will change in a positive direction through the presence of women in the workplace. Values and attitudes will be affected. This is enforced by statements such as "Thanks to a more welcoming climate in our fire station, diversity is a natural part of our everyday life." The women are to a certain extent described as already having contributed to this through the positive experiences of female firefighters noted in the applications, with examples such as "The positive effects shown after recruiting female firefighters in our workplace during recent years clearly points out this need."

The interactive problem description is thus based on the idea that the gender equality issue is an inter-human problem, which can be solved by spreading awareness. In the applications, discrimination is mainly turned into something that arises in the meeting

between people in face-to-face situations and that it is in that relation it can and should be dealt with. Describing the gender equality issue as an interaction problem provides another piece of the puzzle in order to understand how the obstacle for gender equality is constructed within the Swedish Rescue Services. It is worth noting that the applications mainly use a negative concept of freedom; it is about avoiding experiencing discrimination in interaction with others. However, there are also elements of a more positive concept of freedom in the idea of creating interactions that are welcoming even for those individuals who hold qualities that differ from the majority.

That gender equality initiatives become a question of individual interaction problems also sheds light on the fact that the role of the senior management is not emphasised in the applications, despite research showing that it is one of the key factors for successful organizational change, including gender equality initiatives (see e.g. Sjöberg, 2012; Wahl et al., 2011; Wahl & Linghag, 2013). The individual co-worker as well as middle managers are given great responsibility through the education initiatives, whereas senior managers and politicians are more or less left out of this process in the applications. A power perspective which highlights the role of management, and structural discriminatory factors that point to general gender power orders, are more or less absent.

What's the problem in the problem definitions of gender equality

In summary and by using Bacchi's terminology, we can conclude that the problems represented in the empirical data are about the fact that women do not fit into the existing material reality and that the staff are lacking in their understanding of gender issues. Through these problem representations, overall power perspectives are left unproblematised. This understanding of the problem contradicts both Swedish and international research on Rescue Services which has argued that the firefighter profession is based on constructions of

masculinity which exclude women (e.g. Archer, 1999; Baigent, 2001; Ericson, 2011; Yoder & Aniakudo, 1996). They argue that it is through the exclusion of women from the organisation that the male ideal is upheld. The need to uphold the current gender order, which can manifest itself through direct discrimination and harassment, should against the backdrop of this research be seen as more than an obstacle relating to interactions. The material obstacles should also be seen from the perspective of overall structures where women are excluded or are not given the chance to carry out the same work tasks as men because of lacking equipment and facilities.

Our analysis shows that the effect of these problem representations transfers the responsibility for the lack of gender equality from the Rescue Services as an organisation to factors which can only be affected by the organisation to a limited extent. The material obstacles described become an economic issue and the interactive obstacles are seen as individual problems. The woman is turned into a problem which the employer needs to deal with in different ways by adjusting the organisation in terms of material and interactions (Essed, 2004).

Representations of the absent group of women

As previous research has shown, the woman is usually a central figure in different gender equality arguments, and this also applies to the promotion of gender equality within the Rescue Services, based on the results of the empirical data. Beyond the problem representations of material and interactive obstacles presented above, the woman is also a problem *because she is absent*. The main objective of the projects to which the applications refer, is to increase the number of women who apply and are recruited as firefighters. Examples of this are statements such as wanting to “...investigate what is needed to attract more women to apply to positions with the Rescue Services”, “have active recruitment in

order to increase the number of an underrepresented gender” and that “...women as a group are offered training during the first year...in order to increase the number of possible recruits”. The statements present, according to our interpretation, gender equality as a *relational phenomenon* where it discursively is turned into an issue about the relation between groups of women and men. Such a construction of the gender equality issue relates to a quantitative view where (the degree of) gender equality is assumed to be detectable in the percentage divide between women and men. According to the problem descriptions, the development towards gender equal Rescue Services is thus based on that more representatives of women as a group should apply to jobs within the Rescue Services. Women who are excluded from the profession today become central figures on whom the gender equality initiatives depend. Thus, these women are ascribed an implicit responsibility for gender inequality (cf. Wahl et al., 2011).

The basis of the applications is thus that female firefighters are the solution to the problem of gender equality as well as the road towards a reformed Rescue Services in other respects as well. In parallel with these initiatives for increased gender equality, there are also other changes taking place in the Rescue Services. In 2003, a new law was passed, the *Civil Protection Act* (CPA), which emphasises preventative measures to prevent accidents from happening. It is clear in the applications that in order to reach the new reformed Rescue Services, female firefighters become a tool with different expected qualities. The gender equality arguments and the woman's role in the organisation are thus motivated partly in relation to the new mission resulting from the CPA. The qualities that we have found in the applications can be understood based mainly on the meaning of *the woman as a catalyst* for the reform efforts, and *the woman as a confirmation* that the reform efforts are heading in the right direction, and *the woman as a legitimisation* that reform efforts are taking place within the organisation.

The woman as a catalyst

In the applications, the most obvious expectation placed upon female firefighters who are expected to become Rescue Services recruits is that they are assumed to function as a catalyst for continuing reform efforts towards a renewed and improved organisation. For example, she is seen as a catalyst in the material reform process, which means an improvement of the physical working environment through, for example, faster product development, which will also benefit the male employees. Because the material change is sometimes described as a condition for increased gender equality, parts of the reform take place even without women's *actual* presence. Without actually being represented in a workplace, the idea of *possible* women can fuel and contribute to the facilitation/enabling of reform efforts. The idea of women and the changes required in order for them to fit in the organisation become a force for change (cf. Kanter, 1993).

The woman as a legitimisation and confirmation

In the analysed material it also transpires that women confirm as well as legitimise the reform efforts, and that they are representatives for the “new” broadened, proactive Rescue Services. In the applications, it is evident that the gender equality issue is connected to this idea of a more overall reform, which is clearly based on representation arguments. “To build relations and meet the citizen where he or she is requires diverse experience and skills.” This and similar statements appear in several of the applications and can be seen as gender equality, besides being an organisational objective in its own right, also being a subset of a greater reform process.

The arguments above point to the fact that female firefighters within the Rescue Services can be seen as a token (Kanter, 1993) or a marker to show the public and clients that the organisation is, or is in the process of becoming, gender equal. This takes place through

visible gender equality where the objective is to reflect what the society which the Rescue Services face in their work looks like, with examples like “This would send a clear message to the public that women are just as capable to work as firefighters as men.” But it also takes place through a *body count*, i.e. statistical gender equality with the objective to reach 40% women through new recruits.

Our analysis of the empirical material indicates that when gender equality is a central part of the overall objective of a broadened organisation within the Rescue Services, it requires that the organisation is adjusted to that reality. The women then legitimise this adjustment to the organisation where they work, both in terms of material/physical changes and values. This is another example of where women do not actually have to be present; the prospect that women might become a part of the organisation is enough. “With a workplace that takes responsibility for everything from [...] to a sheer operative Rescue Service, there are great possibilities to secure both gender equality and diversity by offering a wide range of work tasks.” This quote opens up for the idea that women and men perhaps do not have to carry out the same tasks within the organisation, but that the workplace offers different work tasks which can suit different types of people.

What’s the problem in the representations of women?

Based on Bacchi (2009), we can conclude this second part of the results section by stating that the problem being represented is that there are not enough women applying for jobs within the Rescue Services. Women are needed in order for change to take place and they are needed as symbols to demonstrate that the Rescue Services are a gender equal organisation. The positions that this creates for the women in the Rescue Services are left unproblematised. The effect of the problem representations is that the women who are recruited are expected to bring new qualities which the men who are already working in the organisation lack. Thus,

they have to contribute something new and different in order to meet the needs of the Rescue Services. Women should also be *visible* and appear to be different from the men, since that is the only way the Rescue Services can signal to the outside that the organisation is gender equal. The women are thus needed here both as a visual symbol, a *confirmation*, and as a qualitative addition. In other words, the woman who is recruited needs to stand out from the crowd, at the same time as research shows that women in similar positions often try to adjust to the workplace culture (Kanter, 1993). Our analysis shows that the women who take part in the recruitment process therefore cannot be too similar to men physically and mentally. The position becomes paradoxical when women are expected to be similar to but not too similar to men, different but not too different, and are expected to work on the same terms as men, at the same time as she is expected to add something new to the organisation which men cannot contribute (cf. Magnusson, 2000). This paradoxical position cannot, however, be said to be unique to the Rescue Services, but appears in other studies on gender equality as well (see e.g. Jansson, 2010). In relation to this, there is also the unproblematised notion of homogeneity which the women should be inserted into (cf. Essed, 2004; Hirdman, 2001), which hides the differences that exist between men as a group. Altogether, the effect is that the gender power order is left unquestioned or unchanged based on these problem definitions.

Concluding remarks: conditions for gender equality

In short, our analysis of the empirical material emphasises on different aspects that are important in order to be able to answer the aim of investigating how the problem definitions of gender equality affect the possible outcomes of gender equality initiatives. It is about what the problem definitions focus on and what they leave unproblematised, and how they shape pre-existing positions for women who are expected to apply for jobs within the organisation.

Our analysis shows that the arguments relating to the number of women and men are based on different problem definitions and arguments for gender equality. The arguments on the woman as a catalyst include *resource arguments* (cf. Hernes, 1982) where women are assumed to be needed because they have a different perspective, different resources, experiences and interests than the men (Skjeie & Teigen, 2005). This problem description constructs gender equality as being about the differences between women and men in terms of their bodies and skills. In this version of problem definition, the central gender equality measure is hence to recruit more women and carry out directed efforts to attract more female applicants, e.g. organising days where possible recruits can get a taste of what it is like to be a firefighter. This can put the women in what Kanter (1993) has described as a token position where they are seen as representatives for the bigger collective of women, by expecting them to represent the notion of female competence rather than the actual skills they hold (cf. Magnusson, 2000). A specific subject position is created for *female* firefighters and the culture of the organisation is not necessarily challenged. This perspective risks upholding gender stereotypes on how women and men *are*, and the women's entry in the Rescue Services could be reduced to an idea of "supplementary good" (Skjeie & Teigen, 2005, p. 188). There is a risk that the position which women are expected to fill is pre-defined, giving the actual women in the workplace limited opportunities to make use of the skills they hold.

The problem definitions are, when it comes to our results on material/physical obstacles, built on *fairness arguments*, which at a first glance could be seen as dealing with the right to work as a firefighter on equal terms to men (Philips, 1998). Here, the arguments are about changing the physical/material obstacles to prevent the differences between women and men's bodies stopping somebody from working within the Rescue Services. Based on the theme of the woman as a *confirmation*, it is highlighted that this is also about sending signals

to society at large that both women and men can and are welcome to work as firefighters, and that the Rescue Services are gender equal and fair organisations.

Another important result of our study is that the Rescue Services as an organisation and the responsibility it has in terms of management and governing have been left more or less unproblematised. By leaving out the management, important power aspects are hidden as it ultimately is the responsibility of the senior management to push the matter, whereas several of the applications place responsibility with the individual co-worker.

However, there are also other power aspects that are left unproblematised. The key issue is a power system based on a gender power order where men as a group benefit from the fact that women are not included in the organisation. Only as long as this gender power order exists can the constructions of masculinity which the firefighter profession is built on be upheld. This also involves the power aspects in the selective insertion of more of the same kind (Essed, 2004) which the recruitment has been founded on so far.

With the combination of the problem presented as material and interactive obstacles and the notions of the woman as a catalyst, legitimisation and confirmation, our analysis shows that the woman is placed in a paradoxical position where she is both the problem and the solution. She is a problem because she is absent and because she is insufficient based on the fact that the organisation needs to be materially and physically adjusted so that she can work for the Rescue Services on equal terms to men. At the same time she is seen as a solution, since she is expected to bring new perspectives and skills to the organisation, and help bring about change within the Rescue Services and improve the working environment physically and mentally. The woman is also needed in the organisation so that it can claim to be gender equal and a great focus on body count and numerical gender equality permeates the material.

This also emphasises that problem definitions de facto affect the conditions for successful gender equality initiatives, as the problems presented put focus on the woman as insufficient, as someone who has to be provided with different tools and aids in order to be equal. At the same time, sameness and difference arguments are mixed in the desire for more women in the organisation, which makes the woman's position even more paradoxical at the same time as it hides the differences that exist between men as a group.

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