

Editor's Preface

In the preface to this issue of the *Journal of Gender and Power*, I would like to adduce two important theoretical approaches which form the basis for the analyses presented here. The first one is called the gender hierarchy theory and is based around the belief of male dominance in the society and the discrimination of women. The basic categories which are associated with this theory are those of gender (in)equality. It is assumed that male domination and the resulting forms of inequality are of structural nature. Inherent for this approach is the conviction that women and men constitute “competing groups with different chances in the market” (and, I should add, in the overall social life). Within this tradition, categories of masculinity and femininity are of static character, which is internally integrated (at times, differing natures of men and women are adduced, as if referencing biological determinism) (Gullvåg Holter, 2005, p. 17).

In turn, from the perspective of the theory of structural inequality, one traces “overall discrimination or inequality in society and their causes, rather than direct gender hierarchy as such”. Within this paradigm, issues of gender inequality in the context of broader social stratification are pursued (very often drawing on class theory). Critics of this approach, however, point out the fact that, as Øystein Gullvåg contends, “structures of structural inequality are often comparatively hidden and difficult to recognise, especially as they often appear to be gender neutral”. Also, it seems that within this approach “action-related figure [...] disappear[s]” (Gullvåg Holter, 2005, p. 18–19).

I believe there is rationale for both of these approaches and that their applicability depends on the problem under analysis. In some contexts, as will be shown in this issue, there is a visible opposition between the two social groups that we call women and men. Divisions related to accessibility to various forms of socialisations and identities, as well as education and market are correlated with gender. In turn, at other times

it seems that it is the social background that determines this accessibility. These approaches, then, should not be seen as contradictory but rather as complementary.

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REFERENCE

GULLVÅG HOLTER, Ø. (2005) Social Theories for Researching Men and Masculinities. Direct Gender Hierarchy and Structural Inequality. In: M. S. Kimmel, J. Hearn, R. W. Connell (eds) *Handbook of Studies on Men & Masculinities*. London: Sage Publishing.