

Why Opposites Attract – on the Problems of Dichotomisation in Research

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Abstract: This article explores the problems of dichotomisation in research. Dichotomies dominate all forms of theory building and are also the foundation of our way of thinking. In this article we adopt a gender perspective (on similarity and difference) to problematise the opposing categories of the dichotomies concerned. Gender, as other dichotomies, functions by both segregating and by forming hierarchies and we argue that such a problematisation of dichotomies must be taken seriously both in gender research and other research. Drawing on our previous studies of female entrepreneurs, we argue that it is difficult to say that something is 'similar' or 'different' in situations when features of both opposites within the dichotomy are present. In order to see that phenomena are simultaneously 'either/both', we need to cease using dichotomies such as 'similar' and 'different' as binary opposites. We propose an alternative to dichotomous thinking that is based on a holistic view of different phenomena where the narrative method may be used to the advantage of the researcher.

1. The problems of dichotomisation

In research – and in social science research specifically – the usage of dichotomies is widespread. There are countless incidences of dichotomies regardless of the research issue in question and irrespective of the theoretical school being drawn upon. Dichotomous thinking is also predominant in social science methods, for example the clear cuts between qualitative and quantitative method.

Our purpose with this article is to discuss the usage of dichotomies and the consequences of this usage. We will also suggest an outline on how to proceed to handle the problems of dichotomies in research. Specifically we will deal with the problem of gender dichotomies, or gender categories.

We are both members of a research team studying female entrepreneurship, combining gender theory and entrepreneurship theory. Our reflections upon gender research are that differences between men and women are overemphasised and there are also common that we overemphasise similarities within respective group. From our experiences of empirical studies we found it problematic to solely stress similarities among women in different studies, but on the other hand it is also problematic to highlighting differences among women. In other words, it is a danger to fall into a dichotomous way of analyzing, because we loose our feelings for critical reflections on contradictions in empirical stories (jfr Alvesson & Sköldberg, 1999).

Moreover, there is another interesting phenomenon concerning the definition of, for example, entrepreneurship. This concept is also most often described in a dichotomistic way, leading to a notion that entrepreneurship as a way of life implies a total devotion to their business idea and the organization, where the family come in second hand. Our empirical studies suggest,

however, the opposite to this notion and show that entrepreneurship can be pursued with both commitment to the idea/activities *and* the family. Women in our studies were carriers of both traditional male values (for example work takes up a great deal of time and effort) as well as female values (carers of children). The dichotomy between male and female is a social construction and if we solely describe and aggregate by biological sex we will lose in understanding about similarity and difference within this group of women. This, moreover, has consequences for our preconceptions of men and women or male and female. Similarity and difference depend on which dichotomisation that is being used.

Our studies also show that when women and men were divided into groups using other categorisations than sex, similarities between women and men as entrepreneurs were considerable – women and men in the same sector exhibited major similarities in how they saw and ran their businesses. At the same time, these groups of women and men showed major differences in their attitudes to gender roles and views of women as leaders. The women, in other words, displayed tendencies of both similarity and difference from the men and between each other: similarities on an overarching level above all in the view of what constituted female-male and differences in how they actually lived and worked. The dichotomy female-male, it seems, can be analysed, roughly like a kaleidoscopic pattern that appears differently depending on how one shakes anew its inner contents.

These examples illustrate that the dichotomies do not necessarily give a real image of what we wish to study. How we select the foundations of our dichotomy is central. If we choose gender as such a basis and work with the dichotomy male-female then our thinking will focus EITHER on differences or similarities within the groups we create with our dichotomies. In particular, the discourse that is created by a dichotomous conceptualisation of gender, where

the privileging of the male over the female is central runs the risk that the research is not capable of bringing out other interpretations or emancipatory possibilities than that of choosing one of the poles in the dichotomy – specifically, that of seeking to escape from the subordinated pole (the female). The prevailing gender order is reconstructed through encouraging that or those associated with the subordinate pole (female/women) to move to the privileged pole (the male) through becoming ‘better’ and more closely resembling the latter.

2. Dichotomization as deeply embedded in thoughts

Dichotomy may be defined as a variable or quality that is divided into two mutually exclusive categories. ¹We have, therefore chosen to use the concept dichotomy despite the fact that it, almost by definition, excludes a transgression of the categories, as it is generally a way of categorising binary opposites. But on the other hand dichotomy as a concept focus on the problem with opposite categories, for instance male and female. It should be noted, however, that the concept of dichotomy is often used even if transgression of the categories is being discussed (there are nevertheless exceptions to this such as Dugger & Waller (1992), Johansson (1998) and Wood (1998)).

Our tendency to dichotomise is deeply embedded in our way of thinking. We use dichotomies to understand the world: through separating and comparing we construct meaning in our observations. In our research activities we take on board these acts of separation and comparison that facilitate segregation and hierarchy for want of better alternatives. However, it should be mentioned that hierarchisation often is an unintended effect of dichotomisation

¹ Dualism is a closely related concept that, however, is most often defined from different ontological points of departure, which both reduce and focus on the use of the concept (Anderson, 1986). A dualistic philosophical approach builds on two separate basic principles: for example, materialism and spirituality. This concept is also used in philosophy where it refers to two components that either complement or oppose each other, for example “yin” and “yang”. When we use dualistic thinking there is commonly one side that is privileged over the other (Knights, 1997, Bordo, 1990).

which also has been emphasized in earlier deconstruction research (Cooper 1998, Derrida, 1978, Knights, 1997 and Kilduff, 1993).

In order to proceed with our discussion, we need to reflect on our basic choices in foregrounding one term over another and how such thinking logically links together with our view of reality and the nature of human beings from such a view: what causes a researcher to lean towards a particular theoretical framework? What is it that makes people prefer to see matters in terms of difference and, similarly, what is it that makes people highlight similarities in research?

Dichotomisation dominates all forms of management and organizational theorising. For example, institutional theory highlights similarities between organizations and individuals (cf. DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) whereas aspects of cultural theory stress the differences. There are, naturally, interesting exceptions such as Martin's (1993) classification of different types of culture, but no synthesis appears to have been attempted between such types. Similar reasoning is also relied on by those drawing a distinction between qualitative and quantitative methods where the former is said to be suited to certain types of knowledge and the latter to other types. By conducting research in such a manner, we construct theories (and methods) that provide a simplified view of the world, that is, we reduce reality for the sake of 'elegant' theories.

Dichotomies commonly characterise conceptual development within theoretical fields, schools of methodology and empirical analyses (Jenks, 1998). We need go no further than give examples such as institution-actor, quantitative-qualitative, male-female and so on. This is axiomatic to such an extent that it is rarely problematised. One example is that an anthology

on commonly used dichotomies (Jenks, 1998) takes the phenomenon for granted and even uses it to describe sociology as a discipline through the various dichotomies it uses.

Evidently, many of these conceptual pairings are also highly familiar to organisation researchers. We use, moreover, additional dichotomies such as organic-mechanistic, integration-differentiation, individual-organization, formal-informal etc. Naturally, problems arise in such a context, but these generally concern the relations between the two outer points of a given dichotomy rather than the dichotomy as such. One example is the dichotomy male-female where there is a wide-ranging and ongoing discussion on the relations between these two positions but where the dichotomisation itself is more or less taken for granted. It is necessary, however, that we as researchers critically reflect on such taken for granted basic foundations of research (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992, Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 1999, Calas & Smircich, 1999, Fournier & Grey, 2000).

The dichotomy concept is also used as a point of departure in other studies. Some researchers consider the overarching divisions such as Weintraub and Kumar (1997) who explore what they call a 'grand dichotomy', namely that between private and public. Others see less comprehensive dichotomies. Morf (1989) argues that the work-life dichotomy is a fundamental feature of our times and attempts to bridge the gap between the two. He asserts that this can only be done through excluding one or the other of the pair (for example by allowing work to take over completely) or through attempting to integrate the two dichotomous phenomena. In his efforts to integrate these Morf uses other dichotomies (such as material-cultural points of departure) and also places different schools of thought in an oppositional relationship (such as structural versus humanistic organization theory). In this way dichotomies function as a working tool for sorting concepts such that the 'key' to

integration of the original dichotomy is found. This key turns out to be a simultaneous redefinition of both dichotomous concepts. Warren and Walters (1998) discussed the dichotomy between part-time (observe, not no-time!) and full-time work and argue that we should go beyond the dichotomy to understand the variation between women's employment experiences over the life-course. Frith (1994) is interested in another dichotomy, that of individual-society that he critically investigates from the view of human nature upon which the dichotomy builds through using critical theory (on power and feminism, for example) as tools for deconstructing the polarity. Fletcher (1998) also takes the dichotomies associated with male-female and public-private as points of departure for her analysis and relates these dichotomies to each other. She shows that the relating of the private and the female and the public and the male have major effects on organizational discourse and how knowledge can be constructed. Chen et al (1998) devote their attention to individualism-collectivism and study the bases of co-operation given such a dichotomy. In the work of Sandelands and Drazin (1989) the dichotomy exogenous-endogenous (as bases for organizational change) is deemed of interest even if they, by analogy with Bateson (1972), advance the view that 'The problem with both these perspectives is that they describe a world that does not bear close scrutiny. They speak of entities and organising processes that can neither be observed nor even specified' (Sandelands & Drazin, 1989: 459).

Even if there are exceptions, the rule, however, is that dichotomies are something that we as researchers use to a considerable extent both to position ourselves and to present our results. Supposed binary opposites both clarify and cultivate our reasoned discourse. At the same time, we are continually struck, as researchers, by the issue of the forms that reductionism images take when they are modelled to argue that women are different from men (the problem of gender categorisations is discussed, for example, by Calás & Smircich, 1996, Alvesson &

Billing, 1997, Billing, 1997, Johansson, 1998, Billing & Alvesson, 2000). We can also find dichotomisation in social sciences propensity to construct 2x2 matrices building on the combination of two dichotomised phenomenon or perspectives (We have done this ourselves several times).

Another factor of significance in the attempt at familiarisation with research in the field is how the researcher sees herself or himself as an individual. An individual with strong faith in rules and order may find greater appeal in a structural perspective on how to pursue knowledge about the phenomenon under study than an individual preferring to break down boundaries who may find an actor perspective of greater appeal. In such a way it could be advanced that the researcher herself constitutes a perspective, rather than chooses one. That means that we as researcher tend to see what our assumptions will lead us to.

There are also of course career researchers who eagerly seek to map out the main trends and/or where the principal researchers are currently located in the field. For these individuals it is perhaps of less importance what they really do since the career ideology is the motivational force. Using dichotomies to position oneself in relation to existing research might then be a fruitful strategy to create a research niche. At times, however, societal trends guide research approaches: for example, postmodernist thinking has prompted a focus on differences between people, groups and a pluralistic disposition has been adopted in research influenced by such thinking.

Research in itself implies categorisation and analysis; therefore it is relatively axiomatic that dichotomies and meaning-bearing differences are equally important, here as in general

discourse. Perhaps they are of even more importance in research given its task of making the world understandable.

Why are dichotomies so common? The answer cannot be given here, but a partial explanation can perhaps be located in the human need to understand the world by categorising it through observation. As expressed by Bateson (1972), people construct meaning through observing what distinguishes categories from one another: it is the difference and not the similarities between these that carry meaning. Bateson (1972) terms this as the difference that has a significance. It is also the sense of distance in one or more aspects that enables us to separate objects from one another – an example being the sorting of fruit into apples or oranges. The fruit are somewhat similar in terms of form and size, but what is significant in an ocular assessment is their respective colours. By drawing on differences, we organise our descriptions of the world in terms of categories.

3. Questioning gender categories

If we look at ourselves and others around us we can say that we are all categorised by sex, race, age, form etc. Many researchers also argue that gender research should take a more encompassing stance, and include race, class and other dimensions (Scott, 1991, Nicholson, 1995, Calás & Smircich, 1996). Depending on context, various categories are foregrounded – being overweight is currently a more important dimension of difference in Swedish beauty competitions than being, for example, of Asian origins. This means, as been mentioned earlier in the text, that at the same time as we see differences between categories, we overemphasise the similarities within categories.

Moreover, this leads to problems in practice when the image of a model is applied to individual cases. Even if it should be interpreted, for example, that all women are emotional, it can also be analyzed that most women also are rational. Then we can say that there are oppositions within one and the same person. The aggregation process therefore results in a number of dimensions being lost in each process. Silverman (1998) makes the following warning about the problems of dichotomisation: 'I argue that most dichotomies or polarities in social science are highly dangerous. At best, they are pedagogic devices for students to obtain a first grip on a difficult field: they help us to learn the jargon. At worst, they are excuses for not thinking...'

In gender research, we can see other dichotomies in ways of thinking in terms of difference and ways of thinking in terms of similarity. For example, certain gender researchers represent the latter view, that women and men are basically alike and the explanation for them being treated differently is that expectations of men and women differ at different workplaces. Other gender researchers, however, represent the view that men and women have different experiences but that they should be considered to be of equal worth (different categorisations of gender research are outlined in Wahl, 1992, Calás & Smircich, 1996, Alvesson & Billing, 1997 amongst others). What is clear to us as women with a gender perspective, however, is that the debate first and foremost concerns the basic view one has or rather chooses to have on gender: what is the most navigable way of reaching a society of gender equality and how can research results be utilised (cf. for example Scott, 1991).

When we talk about a gender perspective, two interrelated principles are involved. Gender acts partly as a principle of segregation: 'male' and 'female' are seen as quite distinct. Moreover, gender acts as a principle of hierarchisation: 'male' is always superordinate over

'female'. These two principles, we would argue, apply to dichotomies in general – they both segregate and form hierarchies (cf. Derrida, 1981). Hierarchies are often contested, including that between male and female, but at a given point in time one of the two binary opposites will be dominant over the other. It is usual that dichotomies are constructed by one “normal” pole and one deviating (i.e. full-time work and part-time work), which means that there is an hierarchisation from the beginning and that the researcher is indifferent to the two alternatives. If it is believed that women and men are biologically different (for example that women are relational and men are logical and rational), there is a considerable risk that this can also be used as an apology for allowing women to assume greater responsibility for human resource matters whilst men assume greater responsibility for technical matters. The degree of freedom that both women and men have to be the authors of their own destinies thereby becomes strictly limited. On the other hand, the opposite view is more appealing, namely, that women and men are constructed socially and culturally and thereby may change their prescribed roles. At the same time, certain structures are undeniably robust in relation to people. It is, therefore, naive to believe that the actor or individual completely controls his or her future and can choose which type of life to live.

So far we have discussed our perspective on a more complex description of either/both phenomena. This has been described in a discussion of the dichotomy from a gender perspective in terms of similarity-difference as either/both phenomena on different dimensions, pointing out the complexity of the so-called reality (compare also with Hearn, 1998, discussion about differences within groups). We have also exemplified dichotomous thinking by experience from our own research on women as entrepreneurs. In the remainder of this article we will form a tentative suggestion for ways to handle the problem of dichotomisation.

4. Towards a transgression of gender dichotomies in research

From a feminist perspective, it is clear that a dichotomous conceptualisation of gender is problematic (Devor, 1989, Butler, 1990, Scott, 1991, Walkerdine, 1996, Alvesson & Billing, 2000). It limits our understanding through frequently leading us to either-or reasoning or, alternately, to a search for bridging the dichotomy through integrating the poles. Since we always privilege one concept over another at a given point in time, we also construct, through dichotomies, a view of the world in hierarchical terms. On the other hand, it could be said that these power aspects are often made invisible through preconceptions of the dichotomy as a continuum where the categories are located at each end. The critical power aspects are neglected when one, for example, designates male and female as being equally noteworthy (see also Knights, 1997). In the same way, other concepts such as large and small as well as short and tall hide preconceptions on the values of these at a given moment in time (cf Linstead, 1992). For example, the concept tall is often described in connection with notions of grandeur whereas short is related to being fat or stocky. In other words, there is both a positive and a negative charge in different concepts that are dichotomised where one concept has power over another, and, by extension, this concerns people. We are not arguing here that it is an end in itself to analyse concepts, but, rather, we wish to draw attention to the limitations of dichotomies in creating possibilities for the understanding of different phenomena.

To perceive oneself as positioned simultaneously at both ends of a dichotomy (for example male and female) is perhaps developmental rather than dangerous. We do not need to think for particularly long to realise that we are sometimes careful and sometimes sloppy. The

world is not black and white even if everything from stories to research tends to describe it as such. Women and men are at the same time both like and unlike each other just as men between themselves and women between themselves are simultaneously like and unlike each other (the suitability of keeping these concepts analytically separate can thus be called into question).

Dichotomies consist of terminal points of a variable. These terminal points are partly defined by each other: without 'female' there is no 'male'. The dichotomy accordingly implicates a relation between the two dichotomous concepts. It is common that dichotomous thinking obscures one of the two extremes, for example, actors are made invisible in institutional theory whereas actor based theories tend to render institutions invisible. What is made invisible is frequently the non-privileged terminal point in the hierarchy created by the dichotomisation, as in the case of 'female' that is often defined as missing from the term 'male' (Devor, 1989, Alvesson & Billing, 2000). These tendencies make it difficult to see both sides of a dichotomy at the same time. Moreover, they are usually seen as being mutually exclusive.

The problematic aspect of dichotomies is not, however, the concepts as such but, rather, that they categorise in uniform terms and are seen from the outside as being mutually exclusive. One concept belongs to one category alongside other concepts; for example, male is associated with logical, rational, paternalistic, competitive and so on. This is what we do with 'women' and 'female', namely, from the basic dichotomy male/female associate an interminable number of variables denoting characteristics connected with women and the female that are in fact subordinated. This creates a complex where 'the subordinate' and 'the female' is integrated to form a closed discourse (Devor, 1989). This tendency is abundantly

clear in this particular dichotomy and its consequential discourse but is also apparent on a more general level. We can see that dichotomies are packaged so that the more ‘self-evident’ patterns or aggregates of these become apparent (Law, 1998). One example is that the dichotomies structure/process, stable/dynamic, organization/individual, simple/complex, safe/unsafe, closed/open, harmony/conflict and internal/external are coupled together in two packages, namely integration/differentiation. One package, integration, belongs to the first node in the dichotomous pair (structure, stable, organization, simple etc), whereas the second package, differentiation, belongs to the other node. Such connections, or aggregates, of dichotomies are countless – even if we wish to argue that they are most clear on issues of sex and gender where the connection between the subordinate and the female is abundantly clear through many complicated connections being simplified through a discourse where power relations are maintained rather than called into question (Wood, 1998). Many researchers point out the significance of the search for opposites in empirical material rather than attempting to avoid these (e.g. Alvesson & Sköldberg, 1999).

It is not our intention to arrive at a final solution to the problem of how dichotomous concepts and thinking should be dealt with, but we will proceed by reasoning on some ideas about a more holistic perspective.

5. Deconstruction process as a way of dealing with dichotomies thinking

Research should mirror this complex ensemble to show a reflexive disposition where researchers dare to question their own perspectives and present a complex reality where pure dichotomies conserve and provide an obsolete picture of so called reality. One proposed way of doing this may be through deconstruction. Derridas work (focus on philosophical texts) has

inspire many management researcher during the last decades (see for example Calás & Smircich 1991, 1992, Culler, 1983, Knights, 1997, Martin, 1990, Mumby & Putnam, 1992, Cooper, 1989).

Derrida focus on the text production and state that there is nothing outside the text (Derrida, 1976). The text produces hierarchically structures as binary oppositions (like male and female) and there is a hidden political meaning behind this. Deconstructions of different sorts of texts from a gender perspective are viable given certain purposes, such as open our eyes to patterns taken-for-granted or to hidden assumptions behind theories. This is especially important when it comes to thoughts or theories that are seen as elegant and compelling and therefore widely accepted. What's in common with this kind of research is that there are focus on the text itself and the power of writing. Or to put it as Kilduff (1993, p 10) "writing is never neutral; it always requires interpretation". For example, Kilduff (1993) has deconstructed March & Simon's "Organizations" and interpretate the text as machine oriented and an ideology of programming. Other powerful management texts like have been deconstructed by Calás & Smircich (1991) from a power/gender perspective.

Linstead (1992) argue that research of organizational culture should be done from a deconstruction perspective that highlights culture as a paradox, as otherness, as seduction and as discourse. Cooper (1989), drawing on Derrida, means that dichotomies consist of binary opposites that in themselves imply that one concept is privileged over the other (he provides two examples: good-bad, male-female). Moreover, it is also the case that concepts to which we ascribe various meanings originate from one and the same concept, for example the Latin *altus* that means both high and deep. Cooper also highlights the fact that in early historical eras, opposites such as strong-weak and large-small were expressed through the same

concept. He also gradually develops a perspective where he suggests dichotomous concepts as being complementary to each other rather than opposites.

Derrida (1973) uses the term 'différance' instead of 'difference' where the first stresses the processual and non-static nature of the concepts and where time and space are of significance. Différance is the combination of differing and deferring and Derrida argues that 'différance' should of course involve the notion of absence, beyond our possibility of understanding and thus never really present. 'Différance' thereby attacks the idea of identities resting on simple forms of localisation and logic. This also implies that our focus can be lifted from the concepts as such and, instead, interaction processes become central, that is, connections and co-creation are stressed. Interaction processes are also emphasised by Janssens and Steyaert (1999) where their so-called third way is marked by pluralistic multivoice thinking.

To see pluralistic simultaneously we need to move to a new plane and examine what the dichotomy is a dichotomy OF. To put it simply: what variable or what phenomenon do the extreme points of the dichotomy comprise? For public-private we can perhaps describe the dichotomy as a dichotomisation of the phenomenon 'organizational form', for male-female the dichotomy is one of 'gender', for man-woman it is one of 'sex' etc. This elevation of the perspective to seeing what the dichotomy is a dichotomy OF also clarifies the relationship between the terminal points.

Another way of illuminating the limitations of dichotomous thinking is when we reflect on the fact that a dichotomy is always an expression of *A* variable or *A* phenomenon. Being a woman is only 'variable value' in what it implies to be a person and a subject. Through describing and/or understanding individuals (or others) with the help of dichotomous concepts we limit

ourselves to certain aspects. At the same time, an individual can be described and/or understood through an unending number of variables or phenomena. In other words, each subject can be said to consist of an unending number of variables or phenomena and for that reason ascription of only one extreme value of a variable (or phenomenon) limits our understanding of the subject – and even the subject's understanding of the self (Devor, 1989).

But the question is whether we can understand the world without the support of dichotomies? We would answer this question by saying both yes and no, i.e. by focusing on the root concept of the dichotomy (i.e. on that which it is a dichotomy OF) . It is difficult to entirely escape our socialised dichotomies and still harder to escape our way of understanding reality in the form of dichotomies. On the other hand, we can of course construct, based on our dichotomies new concepts that describe phenomena such as either/both. But this is probably insufficient for dichotomistic thinking to disappear: we presumably need to be more radical. We may compare this with how actors in organizations act at times of reorganization when it is common that people are removed from key positions and new recruits are selected for these. At the same time it should also be stressed that the organizational culture is often strong. But if a more radical stance is needed, how do we find other descriptions that yield more developed concepts in our research?

6. Holistic thinking instead of dichotomizations

In conclusion, we wish to develop an idea about how an alternative to dichotomous thinking might look. Our suggestion is rudimentary and is in need of development but we nevertheless wish to launch the thought of a different way of relating to the world being studied. Dichotomous thinking builds on linearity and on the possibility that (preferably measurable) variables can be assigned to the phenomenon. The expressive forms of the phenomena have

an in-built relationship where different aspects of the terminal points construct the phenomenon as such (female/male are constructed from gender). If we lift our sights from the phenomenon as such, for example gender, we can instead get closer to the world we are studying through seeing each part of such a world as a holographic image, that is, each part contains within it information on the totality. Concretely, each 'woman' contains information on gender as a phenomenon – each aspect of a gender system bears its characteristics, that is, all women bear that which is signified in the traditional dichotomy as being typically 'woman' but also – by inference – what is being typically 'man'. Similarly, each 'man' contains enough information on gender as a phenomenon. Quite simply, this implies that non-dichotomised theories should be given preference, as should methods that stress complexity and depth rather than categorisations. For us researchers of women as business leaders this implies, for example, that our search should be directed to understand the make-up of the constructions that women as entrepreneurs create on gender and entrepreneurship. By way of a cautionary note we wish to insert that it is how such social constructions are built up that is of most interest in the understanding of phenomena as such – the narrative studies comprise here a basis for searching for such understanding, that is they are a means and not an end in themselves (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2002).

The narrative method is being increasingly used in research and also provides opportunities to acknowledging people's stories and life histories from a holistic perspective (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994, Deetz, 1996, Hatch, 1996, Steyaert & Bouwen, 1997). The narrative perspective highlights both contradictions and reflections in people's lives that prevalent interview methods or quantitative methods often fail to capture. Through describing people's 'either/both existence', such a method can also overcome our habitual tendency to dichotomise. Further examples of people having a 'either/both' nature are contained in a study

undertaken by female entrepreneurs where women were required to reply to a draft questionnaire aimed at obtaining a questionnaire of usable quality. This was followed up with interviews with the women where problems and reflections on the issues were discussed. The draft questionnaire included questions on matters such as attitudes and questions were constructed in conventional fashion, that is, they were scaled. One question concerned how respondents saw their relationship to their spouse or partner 'right now' and could be answered through putting a cross on a line with seven steps ranging from 'very good' to 'very poor'. During the interviews, we took up the fact that women had inserted crosses extending along the entire line: as many crosses were entered, as there was space for them. On enquiring into this, a typical reply was that 'it's like this right now – both very good, very poor and in between – and these AT THE SAME TIME'. When conducting the interviews, we understood intuitively what the women meant and struck such questions off the questionnaire. In its simplicity, this example clearly shows that it is we as researchers who divide the world into categories and steps on scales; those researched have neither reason nor desire to divide the world in such artificial fashion.

Through developing holistic thinking a deeper understanding is obtained of the phenomena that are multifaceted and complicated, but that research unfortunately simplifies and preserves as a result of dichotomous thinking. Since we have an insocialised tendency to think in dichotomies it is essential to explicitly and continuously stress the necessity to avoid this. We hope that through this article we have contributed to an increased awareness on dichotomisations and that in the future in research we can discuss and reflect on fundamental issues such as this. This is especially important in for gender research, since gender is one of the most obviously dichotomised concepts in our society – if not the most. The dichotomisation of gender permeates society as well as research to a degree that hampers a

true understanding of the root phenomena. By focusing on gender as a holistic concept rather than as a dichotomy we may unveil the multifaceted nature of gender.

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