



**Ph.D. Program in
Sociology**

**DIFFERENCES IN FEMALE AND MALE SOCIAL NETWORKS
IN A WORK SETTING**

Theses of PhD Dissertation

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THESES

to the PhD thesis entitled

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Table of Contents

<i>I. A justification of the topic</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>II. Objective and theoretical basis of research</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>III. Structure of the thesis</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>IV. The methods applied</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>V. Major findings of the thesis</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>VI. Major references</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>VII. Author's related publications and conference presentations</i>	<i>17</i>

I. A justification of the topic

Although the social and economic situation of women has improved in a number of ways in advanced countries (especially since WW II), it is still true that their access to high power positions is more limited than that of their male counterparts with similar capabilities. Today, the professional competence, the education, and the economic activity, i.e. involvement in the labour market of the representatives of the two sexes do not differ considerably. What is more, the proportion of women and men on lower managerial levels is becoming more balanced, but men are still in overwhelming majority in higher positions of economic, political, scientific or even cultural life.

An increasing number of studies have been conducted on the differences in the labour market position of men and women, especially since the 1960s. At the same time, the development of possible theoretical explanations was begun. But far less research has been done into how, in what form and through what processes a work organization – which in the beginning was supposed to be gender neutral – reproduces gender inequalities (Halford et al. 1997). It seems that these structures do not only reflect the “external” experiences, behaviours and expectations of the people at work in the organization, but also the gender relations are embedded in the organization’s practices, thus gender inequalities outside the work organization are reproduced within. A work organization’s gendered substructure may, among other things, take the form of division of labour, the arrangement of work processes in time and space, or of explicit and implicit rules of behaviour at the workplace.

Organizations, however, changed a lot, especially in the last decades of the 20th century. Postmodern organizations are trying to meet economic challenges with a different – a leaner and flatter – structure, a new system of production and service, enriched jobs and by adopting atypical forms of employment. These changes inevitably affect the employees within the organization: women and men alike. But it is unclear whether or not these changes impact on gendered substructures. If yes, the question is if they strengthen or weaken them. In my view, an examination of social networks within a work organization by genders can add new aspects to the study of differences found in the organizational position of men and women.

II. Objective and theoretical basis of research

The objective of my thesis is twofold: on the one hand, to link the areas concerned with – and describing and explaining – gender aspects of work organizations with the characteristics of post-modern organizations by giving some sort of theoretical overview. And on the other, to integrate the relationship aspect as a possible explanatory factor in this system and, possibly, to support this empirically with regard to the domestic situation.

It seems that in postmodern organizations the possibility for both a weakening and a strengthening of gendered subcultures exists (Acker 1998). Sceptics claim that the decrease of existing differences in women and men's labour market and organizational positions seems to have come to a standstill and that, at the beginning of the new millennium, we can expect new forms of gender inequalities to appear. One such area – affecting the survival of inequalities – that is worth investigating is the intraorganizational network.

While exploring the organizational implications of networks, researchers applied the network approach to a number of issues related to organizational behaviour: they studied the role of relationships in the absence from work and in leaving the organization; they dealt with the questions of attitude similarity, e.g. job satisfaction and researched the issues of influence, power, leadership and promotion or employee performance as well as to what extent these are determined by the network structure (Brass et al. 2004; Krackhardt – Brass 1994).

In intraorganizational network research, 'antecedents', i.e. the factors influencing the structure and functioning of networks are just as important as the implications of the network structure. These may include certain psychological characteristics of the individual and his or her personality (Mehra et al. 2001); values and attitudes (Klein et al 2004) as well as demographics including gender. Several studies have been conducted into how much gender influences the changes in intraorganizational networks.

Many people hold the opinion that men are better at taking advantage of informal interactions for the sake of organizational advancement. Women, on the other hand, consider informal relationships less significant and rely more on formal structures. Others claim that not only do women mobilize their informal contacts less to attain their organizational goals but men, being the majority group of management in a business organiza-

tion, exclude women from these networks in order to maintain their dominance as well (Albrecht 1983). Kanter (1977), however, claims that a separation of male and female interaction networks is simply a consequence of the great uncertainty about the organizational environment. This causes organizational actors to establish like-me relationships to solve tasks more effectively: thus men prefer informal contacts with their male and women with their female colleagues. Ibarra (1992) pointed out that men and women establish their organizational contacts differently. Men tend to choose men for both their expressive and instrumental contacts, but women – maybe in order to maximize emotional and instrumental resources – prefer to choose men for their instrumental relationships and women for expressive contacts.

Examining gender differences of networks, research was carried out into whether it is women or men who occupy central positions more frequently in a network: Who are the most prominent and important people and is there a difference in this respect between the two sexes? A possible answer is that desirable targets of relationships are people, occupying a central role in a network (mainly in instrumental networks), who have better education, more experience and organizational knowledge, and greater expertise; in short, who have more human capital. Since women may accumulate less human capital, they are less desirable for network relationships; therefore they are more likely to hold a marginal position. Studies by Brass (1985), however, seem to partly contradict the above and suggest that women occupy a central role in interaction networks just as men do, especially if their proportion compared to men within the organization is more even. But Brass added that women do not hold central positions in the right networks (the ones including the dominant coalition), thus they are considered to be less influential.

There were studies looking into the structure of networks, but no differences were found in the characteristics of male and female networks. But for example Burt's (1998) study, conducted with managers, did not confirm the previous hypothesis that women prefer to participate in constrained, dense, strictly controlled networks, whereas men prefer flat or non-hierarchical structures: men and women had networks with sparse and constrained structures of fewer or more levels of hierarchy in equal proportions. However, differences were found in the success of relationship strategies: female and male managers performed better in different kinds of networks. Women performed better in smaller, dense (clique-like) networks, whereas for male managers a low-constraint, non-

hierarchical, low density network full of structural holes resulted in promotion. Continuing the research, Burt (1998) found that women with contacts resulting in promotion had links to sponsors who maintained a low-constraint network themselves, i.e. women borrowed the sponsor's social capital. However, the structural difference was actually not between the network of successful men and women: beginner male managers achieved success with the same type of networks as women. As Burt (1998) pointed out, the key is in fact not gender, but legitimacy and its absence.

The aim of my empirical research was to study differences in female and male social networks in a work setting. My thesis looked for an answer to the following questions:

1. **What relationship attitudes do employees have?** How do employees perceive the relationship between contacts and career in general? What are their own relational experiences? What do they think of their organizational contacts? Are there any gender-specific differences in this respect? Can any groups be identified based on attitudes?
2. **Do women and men use their contacts within this work organization differently?** How high is women and men's relationship activity in the particular networks? How do women and men choose contacts in different instrumental and expressive networks, especially with respect to homophily and multiplexity? Is there a difference in this respect between female and male leaders?
3. **Where do women and men fit into the structure of social networks?** Who hold a central position in the organization and with what relationship contents? Does gender influence the position occupied within the network structure? If yes, to what extent? Or are these principally influenced by other demographic/organizational characteristics? Is there a difference in the social network of female and male managers?
4. **Is there a connection between relationship attitudes and the actual relationship pattern?**

It was not only through the novelty of my hypotheses that my study wished to present something new. My assumption was that – owing to their situation-specific nature – the findings of foreign, but above all US and British empiric research cannot or only with limitations be adapted to a Hungarian setting. This is partly explained by the fact that in Hungary the labour-market situation of women is different, which can fundamentally affect their social contacts at work. Second, foreign literature basically relies on results

from studies conducted in the business sector, whereas the research presented in my thesis was performed in the offices of a municipality. Such research, however, is probably not sector-neutral. Third, this study was done in an organization where women were in overwhelming majority among both employees and leaders. US and British studies on this subject were undertaken in an organization with balanced gender proportions or a male majority, which obviously affects the results obtained.

The findings of studies in an entire network cannot be generalized, since the features of social networks may vary from organization to organization depending on the typical gender proportions in the given structure, the size of the organization, the number of organizational levels in the hierarchy, the degree of horizontal division and the location of offices (e.g. how many buildings the employees work in). In addition to the organizational context, the broader social environment may also determine the characteristics of the organization's internal functioning, and impact informal structures within. In spite of this, such studies are useful, because the findings can help us to understand the social world of women and men in an organization better.

III. Structure of the thesis

The subject is discussed in four chapters followed by a short conclusion with a summary and a broader outlook. The *logical structure of this thesis is as follows*: the *first chapter* gives an overview of literature about organizational theory that takes the human side of these structures into account. Above all, I discuss the texts that focus on the situation of women and men within an organization. We cannot leave the sociological, socio-psychological texts on filling managerial positions in work organizations out of consideration. At the end of this chapter, I investigate whether gendered substructures in new, post-modern work organizations, established based on the economic and organizational changes taking place at the end of the 20th century, can be expected to strengthen or weaken.

In the *second chapter*, I discuss the basic concepts that are crucial for the understanding of subsequent chapters. Then, in the *third chapter*, I present the gender differences of social networks and treat the following issues:

1. Are there any differences in girls' and boys' networks already in childhood? If yes, where do they come from?
2. Do these differences continue to exist in adult networks as well? Here, I focus on differences in network size and in the choice of like-me's in the case of friendships and confiding relations, and mention the most relevant findings of Hungarian and US and British research.
3. How can the differences perceived be explained and what are their implications? In this latter case, I primarily concentrate on implications for the labour market, particularly the flow of job information.
4. Are there any characteristic features of networks within a work organization as compared to networks outside the organization? What are the possible consequences of workplace networks and what gender-specific features do intraorganizational contacts have?

The findings of the empirical study are presented in the *fourth chapter*. Here I discuss relationship attitudes and actual relationship patterns.

To sum up, the first chapter of the thesis reviews the explanations for gender differences in work organizations; in the third chapter, the network approach is added to the range of possible explanations discussed in chapter two, by tracing similarities and differences in contacts from childhood until adulthood, stressing possible implications for the labour market and the organizational position. Finally I present the findings of my empirical study.

IV. The methods applied

To attain the research objective, I designed a questionnaire consisting of my own questions and questions taken from other researchers. This questionnaire was made up of four large sections:

(1) The first section (the last set of questions in the interviews) contained 15 statements that were intended to explore relationship attitudes and introduce questions on existing relationships. The statements to be rated on a 5-point scale concerned three areas: the first set of 4 questions included general questions about the connection between relationships and career, the next 6 questions focused on the personal social network of each respondent, whereas the last set of five questions was designed to shed light on their opinion of work relationships.

(2) The second section tried to capture co-worker relationships and, in part, their cognitive pattern. To identify professional networks, I asked seven (in the interviews with managers I asked eight) questions (see Table 1.). Three of the questions related to professional consultancy, informal mentoring (contribution to professional development) and technical competence (respect-based relationships). Two other questions (three in the interviews with managers) tried to identify central or dominant people by asking about their influence and predominance (with managers also about popularity). The third group with two questions was aimed to reveal function-specific choices including, above all, solidarity. I asked six questions to determine expressive relationships (friendship contacts, confiding relations). Three of the questions related to friendship (affection-based) contacts and another three to confiding relations.

The study was performed in one of the capital's mayor's offices. Vertically, the organization was divided in three layers: the top level was made up of 6 people: two belonging to the professional (notary and deputy clerk) and four to the political leadership (the mayor and three deputies); the middle level included heads of unit leading the individual departments; and the third organizational level consisted of employees (subordinates). Even though the organization was vertically not very high, horizontally, it was rather divided in a number of sections: functionally in 24 departments/offices with 3 to 26 members in each. The survey was conducted between July and October 2004.

Table 1: Significant network contents

Instrumental contacts	
Questions on professional competence	<p>If you have to make a decision in an issue pertaining to your field and you need advice, who do you turn to?</p> <p>Who have contributed the most to you professional development in this organization?</p> <p>Who do you respect the most from among your colleagues for their professional competence?</p>
Questions on central role	<p>Who do you consider influential in this organization?</p> <p>Who do you think are popular among your colleagues? (only for managers)</p> <p>Who among your colleagues do you think succeed the most?</p>
Questions on functions	<p>Who of your colleagues do you think could in the case of a minor work dispute settle the conflict in a fair manner?</p> <p>Which colleagues of yours would, if anyone of you suffered some kind of injustice, stand by the injured party and demand legal protection from a superior?</p>
Expressive contacts	
Questions on affection-based contacts	<p>Who do you consider your friend and meet outside work as well?</p> <p>Who would you invite for dinner to your home?</p> <p>Who are those who you can count on for help outside work as well?</p>
Questions on confidence	<p>Who do you tell interesting things that happened to you first?</p> <p>Who can you talk to about your personal problems?</p> <p>Who would you ask to lend you a small amount of money?</p>

The population included the people listed in the organization’s telephone directory. The telephone book contained 256 people. 10 of them were excluded from the population due to their loose connection to the office. From the 246 people I handled the 30 leaders (including heads of department, senior clerks, head officials and the political leadership) separately. To increase the response rate, an interview (with a slightly different structure) was carried out with them. They all responded to my questions. For the 216 employees questionnaire was designed. The questionnaires were handed out and collected in person.

The survey was conducted separately in the various offices and departments. 166 questionnaires were returned, thus altogether 196 people answered my questions.

From the 196 respondents, 19 per cent were male and 81 per cent female. These proportions truly represent the composition of the population (20-80%). Neither of the sexes was overrepresented in the sample. With respect to other demographic characteristics (age, education, family status), the sample was virtually representative of the composition of the population. 15% of our respondents were leaders, while 85% worked in non-leader positions. Each leader answered the interview questions, thus they were somewhat overrepresented in the sample of respondents. Their rate in the population was 13%.

V. Major findings of the thesis

Relationship attitudes, experiences

1. The opinion of female leaders on the connection between career and contacts as well as work relationships was in many cases "more positive" within the organization than the opinion of male and female employees or male leaders.

They think that the role of personal contacts in success, both at work and outside work, is less significant. They do not feel being left out of important events at their workplace. They are most satisfied with their organizational contacts and deem communication within the organization good.

2. Regardless of their position, women tend to attach less importance to larger relationship circles and think it less ethical to turn relationships to their advantage for the sake of promotion than men.

The results are in line with the previous assumption that women attach less importance to informal relationships (and rely more on formal structures), and they are less likely to mobilize such contacts to attain their career goals. They are the ones who are more prevented by work- and family-related tasks from maintaining specifically professional relationships as well.

3. Whereas male leaders seem to be the most contact-oriented group, the opinion of male employees shows some frustration over their relationships.

Both groups consider it important to keep contact with people and think of themselves as sociable. But while male leaders tend to keep contacts with their colleagues outside work and lead a social life, male employees are the least satisfied with their work relationships and feel that they are left out of important events at the workplace.

Based on the opinions about contacts, I identified five clusters which I studied by position and gender. Due to the low number of subjects, the results are in most of the cases not significant, yet we find that, compared to their proportion in the sample, male employees are represented in higher numbers in the “frustrated and have bad working relationships” cluster, whereas we find half of female leaders in the “balanced” and another quarter of them in the group of “socialites”.

Actual relationships

4. Men’s relationship activity is more intense in instrumental networks, but that of women is more intense in expressive networks.

My original assumption was that men are “more susceptible” to professional relationships, i.e. think highly of the people who are important for finding their way within an organizational setting, and that – in line with the stereotypes – women place more importance on contacts ensuring emotional resources. This hypothesis was proved only in part. In instrumental networks, there are more men who named at least one person (except for the advice network), but we found more women who did so in expressive networks (except for the friendship network).

Although in instrumental networks, men named more people on average, but the differences in the sexes were significant in a single case only: men respect more people for their professional competence within the organization than women do. In expressive networks, there was fundamentally no difference between men and women as to how many people they named on average, but in confiding relations – sharing problems, asking for money – women named slightly more people. Men, on the other hand, name more people for affection-based relationships (friendships, assistance).

5. Taking the organization's gender composition also into account, we find homophile choices in men's every network. However, women prefer to choose men for their professional relationships and women for their friendship and confiding contacts.

As far as like-me choices are concerned, US and British studies showed ambiguous results: some studies indicated homophily with both sexes, whereas others suggested that women and men choose differently in instrumental and in expressive networks. But in an organization with substantial female majority and where the leadership is also dominated by women, I assumed that besides expressive relationships, women show homophily in instrumental networks as well. The results for men were far less predictable.

Taking relationships as a starting point, I found that women tend to strongly prefer female colleagues in almost every instrumental network; more than two thirds of their ties are to women, except for the question of influence where women and men were named in fifty-fifty percent. Men showed heterophily in each network: the choice of men remained below 50 per cent. In expressive networks, both sexes demonstrated a stronger preference for same-sex relationships than in instrumental networks, but for men this still meant heterophily. Taking also limitations stemming from the organization's gender composition into consideration, I found that men tend to have both instrumental and expressive relationships with men and prefer them for their relationship choices. But women choose rather men in their professional contacts and maintain friendship and confiding relations at work rather with women.

6. As regards influence and professional assistance, men have a higher prestige, but there is no difference between the two sexes in expressive networks.

Based on an organization predominated by women and on the proportion of female leaders, I had assumed that the prestige of women and female leaders would be higher than that of men and male leaders, i.e. they are preferred in instrumental networks.

Yet the findings indicate that in instrumental networks men tend to have higher prestige – except in the advisory and one of the functional networks. If we consider only leaders, especially professional leaders, we find the same: women play a role in advising and in standing by others. But whereas in the latter case, differences were in none of the instances notable, in the analysis of all respondents they proved to be significant in two cases: men have a more central role in influence networks and in networks supporting

professional development than women. In expressive networks, the situation is more balanced. There are no substantial differences between the genders regarding prestige, although co-workers would rather invite men for dinner, but they share their personal problems with women and would rather ask women for money.

7. There is no difference between the relationship multiplexity of men and women. This applies to same sex ties as well.

Multiplexity of relationships shows to what extent an individual chooses the same people in social networks of different types. It is possible that s/he chooses the same two or three people for every question, which means that s/he has several ties to the same person. A high degree of multiplexity can indicate that the person involved lives in a confined circle of relationships.

Some suggest that women prefer confined relationship circles, whereas men like choosing different people depending on different relationship contents. Multiplexity, however, can also depend on headcount and homophily. If an individual basically has a preference for like-me relationships, but is in minority within the organization, then this will narrow down his or her options. Therefore, s/he is more likely to name the same people. Consequently, I had expected a higher degree of multiplexity among men, particularly in their ties to men.

In instrumental networks, male multiplexity was slightly higher than that of women, i.e. men tend to choose the same people for their various relationships. But in expressive networks, female multiplexity was higher, because they maintain approximately two kinds of relationships with their contacts. The differences between the two genders, however, were not significant in any of the cases. When I examined men's ties to men and women's contacts with women, I found that men's multiplexity in instrumental networks was somewhat higher, i.e. men's ties to men were more varied than women's to their female colleagues. In expressive networks, multiplexity of women's ties to the same sex was higher, but the differences were not significant in any of the cases.

8. The organization's groups, identified based on sent and received ties, differed according to position, with gender playing only a secondary role.

The groups formed based on differences in sent and received ties show that relationship patterns follow formal positions. A political leadership with minimal or no professional background can be clearly distinguished. Within the professional leadership team, we can

identify a smaller elite group and a larger group which is considered to be professionally competent. This organizational elite – also including political leaders – is comprised of 12 women out of 21 female leaders and 6 men out of 9 male leaders. The organizational majority is relatively homogeneous and from a relationship point of view it seems passive: their social network extends to only a few people. The gap between the passive (employees only) and the elite (leaders only) is filled by three groups – comprised of both leaders and employees – which are all characterized by a search for relationships.

9. Received ties in instrumental networks are mainly influenced by formal organizational position, but in certain cases gender has an effect as well.

In advisory, respect and influence networks, we could identify gender, position and their interactional effect: female leaders are respected by more people and asked by more people for advice, but male leaders are considered influential. However, men's higher value of influence can be explained with another attribute – namely, belonging to political leadership. If we exclude political leadership from leaders, then although on average, men are chosen more often for a relationship, their “advantage” decreases considerably and only the effect of position remains identifiable. Age had in none of the cases an identifiable role.

10. Gender-specific predictors of received ties do not differ significantly, as organizational position is decisive for both women and men. With women, however, individual and situation-specific features have an effect as well.

In the instrumental networks that we analyzed, principally formal position influences relationship choices with both men and women, but with women, education and office size also play a certain (though very minimal) role. In three out of five examined networks, a managerial position leads to more relationship choices with women than with men, but in influence and predominance networks holding a managerial position is “more profitable” for men. Thus our findings do not confirm the assumptions that for men it is work-related, for women it is individual and situation-specific resources that determine a central role; or that men are more able to turn their resources into a network advantage than women. Yet these findings might also have resulted from the low number of subjects.

11. Received ties in expressive networks are influenced by formal organizational position.

Personal aspects and position can only very slightly influence relationship choices in expressive networks, if an effect can be detected at all. From among the examined explanatory variables, only the effect of position could be identified. Leaders in affection-based networks received more ties than employees. This indicates that confiding and affection-based relations within an organization are also the means for pushing self-interests (as pointed out in the research conducted by Lincoln and Miller (1979)). The interactional effect of gender and position was noticeable in a single case only: more people tend to tell male leaders about recent events than female leaders. However this difference cannot be found in the case of non-leaders.

12. The relationship choices are influenced by formal organizational position in both instrumental and expressive networks.

The relationship choices (i.e. how many people a respondent has chosen for each type of relations) in both instrumental and expressive networks can be explained by individual features (such as gender) to a small extent only. Moreover, in some cases no effect could be established. In expressive networks, only position has a role: leaders choose more people for their relations than employees. Also in instrumental networks, position is most important: here too, leaders have more ties to other people. Gender has an effect in two cases only: men respect more people for their professional competence and, all in all, they have more instrumental ties than women.

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