ARGUMENTATION AND INHIBITION:
SEXISM IN THE DISCOURSE OF SPANISH EXECUTIVES[1]

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1. Introduction

As Robin Lakoff claims, "the marginality and powerlessness of women is reflected in both the ways women are expected to speak, and the ways in which women are spoken of" (Lakoff 1982: 45). Both are, in fact, main issues within sociolinguistic research (see McConnell-Ginet 1988, for a general overview). Our paper will deal with a particular instance of the second kind of situation: How Spanish managers speak about women, and how they implicitly favour discrimination in recruitment and promotion. The managers' discourse, our paper shows, is sexist, even if sexism is inhibited.

Our working hypothesis will be that, in ordinary language and everyday speech, there are a number of linguistic resources and strategies that contribute to maintaining male domination, while minimizing women's participation in society, and imposing a stereotyped image which is a source of discredit and isolation.[2] In this sense, we will try to show how certain procedures used by men in spoken language allow us to distinguish overt or blatant sexism from inhibited sexism, which might be similar to 'elite' racism, as studied by van Dijk (van Dijk 1991). In particular, this paper focuses on inhibited sexism in discourse, and studies its mechanisms and social implications through both sociological and linguistic analysis. Our aim is, therefore, interdisciplinary in nature.

Inhibition is an instance of rationalization (see section 6), which is carried out through different discursive strategies: Ignorance and evasion tactics, denials, mitigations, the toning down of negative actions, justifications, and so on. It involves the *intention* of avoiding non-legitimate overt sexist expressions and so turns into a type of *imperfect censorship*, since the subject does not completely internalise the legitimate modes of perception and expression and acts as his own censor (Bourdieu

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[2] Within this research area, and with particular reference to Spanish, we would like to draw attention to, the work of authors such as Bodine (1975), Mañeru (1991), Fernández Lagunilla (1991), Fuertes (1989), Calero (1990), Ervin (1962), García Messeguer (1988); as well as the collaboration and activities against sexism of the Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia (1988) and the Instituto de la Mujer (1989).

1985: 110). It is precisely that imperfect censorship which gives rise to different degrees of inhibition, depending on the context of interaction.

From the *analysis of our data*, we will draw a distinction among three types of sexism:

1) *inhibited androcentrism* (see section 4.1), which is present in more formal situations of linguistic interaction. This is a radical type of exclusion, which entails 'suppression' (see van Leeuwen 1995).

2) *argument-based sexism* (see section 4.2), which is typical of situations in which the speaker is urged to take a stand concerning discrimination against women. It entails the use of a different kind of exclusion procedures that are articulated on two axes: *DIVIDING*, and *REJECTING* (Foucault 1971).

3) *blatant or overt sexism* (see section 6), which contrasts with both forms of inhibited sexism, and is openly stated as soon as the interlocutors discover shared viewpoints underlying their inhibitions at the end of the group meetings. This overt form of sexism discredits and completely excludes the subject who is being discriminated. All these three forms of sexism seem complementary, yet also opposed. Inhibition subtly represents an underlying, absolute rejection of equality, while recognizing its value at the same time. It simultaneously denies and maintains both the act of rejecting and that which is rejected, so that, as Bourdieu (1985: 115) points out, "it allows the monopolization of all the advantagess, the advantage of saying and the advantage of refuting what is said by the way it is said" (see section 6).

The *dialogic organization* of discourse allows for the interpenetration of multiple voices and for the settlement of 'interdiscoursive' relations as well. In the case under study, legitimate and normative discourse is invoked, and the ways in which both inhibited sexism and overt sexism are expressed may show the degree of adherence to accepted norms (such as the equality between genders). A commonly accepted norm is neither true nor false; what is at stake here is the degree in which individuals adhere to that norm. In this respect, the processes being generated within group meetings can be a rich source of data in order to observe both the degree of adherence to a norm, and how the process of manufacturing consensus takes place (see section 2.1).

Our research is part of a broader study on the representation of women in competitive working environments, with particular reference to positions of responsibility.[3] Very few women occupy positions like those in Spain, despite the fact that many of them have the required level of qualification. This clearly points to a degree of discrimination. The resulting discourse is significantly sexist, in that it is directed towards generating or sustaining a situation of inequality between genders, rather than contributing to its amelioration. As will be seen below, it is precisely this lack of coherence between the legitimate discourse of equality and discriminatory social practices which produces and explains inhibition.

Both social practices are relevant for the definition of identity: First, as Foucault

(1971) says, discourse creates subjects and self-knowledge by means of defining what is usual and what constitutes a deviation; and, second, as our research shows, male self-identity seems to be strongly rooted in the workplace (see Gómez Esteban et al. 1995). In this case, full acceptance of the discourse of equality clashes with the maintenance of men's prominent role in the workplace, which entails inequality. However, the fact that such verbal sexism on the part of male businessmen tends to be inhibited points to ongoing changes in the relations between genders.

2. Methods

2.1. *Sociological approach*

The discourses that form our sample were produced during three meetings held in Madrid by groups of men aged between 28 and 45. Two of the groups were made up of, on the one hand middle-level employees and, on the other hand upper-level managers, all of whom work either for the public administration or for large national or multinational corporations. The third was made up of professionals (lawyers, doctors, etc.).[4]

Group discussion is a qualitative social research technique with a noteworthy tradition in Spain (see for instance Ibáñez 1979, 1990, 1994; Ortí 1986 and Alonso 1994). It consists essentially of a situation of group communication in which ideological discourses and social representations of shared knowledge are analyzed.

The main features of group discussion are the following: a) it is made up of seven, eight or nine individuals; b) the participants belong to the same social sector, that is, there is group homogeneity; c) except under some circumstances (in small villages, for instance), participants do not know each other; d) it lasts two hours or so; e) topics are not introduced in a direct way and closed questions are avoided. Once the topic of the meeting is suggested, the participants produce the discourse. They themselves control both its sequencing and its content. In contrast with the role it plays in clinical psychology, group discussion does not have any therapeutic aim within sociology. The point here is quite different. We want to know how the members of a particular social sector build their identity as they develop the suggested topic. And, at the same time, we try to discover how the social phenomenon under study is built up from the identity of that social sector.

Group discussion is a potentially powerful tool to isolate the ideological values of the social sectors represented within the group during the process of the manufacture of consensus. The participants construct the social object of discussion in such a way that, though experimental, it is close to a typical everyday social interaction: a) at the information level, they talk about a world that they know and there is an intention to be truthful (what they say of that world matches the world

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[4] We will use the following abbreviations:

RG, Prof.: Men. Between 35 and 45. Professionals.

RG, Dir.: Men. Between 35 and 45. Executives and upper-level managers of the Public Administration or of large multinational enterprises.

RG, Adm.: Men. Between 28 and 35. Middle-level employees with people under their responsibility.

they know); b) at the communication level, they talk to people who belong to their 'world of life' (Habermas 1985, 1987, 1989). This allows the reinforcement of truthfulness[5], that is, the matching between what is said and what is really felt about what is said, because, in principle, nobody is likely to deceive those who are one's macrosocial equals (belonging to the same 'world of life') and one's microsocial equals (having identical turn-taking rights within the group context).

Having stressed the methodological potential of the group meeting, it is necessary to mention the problems and constraints this research method has in a specific situation. When talking about women, the way they are represented may be very subordinate to the dominant prevailing discourse, that which is most readily accepted within the group this research method focuses on. It is easier to get to a consensus on what is considered legitimate than on what is considered non-legitimate. Things being so, the process of rationalization may yield to the dominant stereotypes and conceal the degree of emotional involvement with the social representations being expressed. The truthfulness of the statements remains questionable. This happens whenever fields in which there is a highly dominant discourse model are studied (for example, to consider oneself 'democratic' in the field of politics, 'non-racist' in the field of social relations, or, in the case under study, to consider oneself 'non-sexist').

The participants tend to rationalize the discourse and try to present their own behaviour as 'democratic', 'non-racist' or 'non-sexist', hiding their 'non-democratic', 'racist' or 'sexist' attitudes. This is why, after an initial stage of group consolidation, the meetings move into a second stage in which the moderator plays a more active role, introducing or reinforcing particular topics, for instance, promotions within the labour world or working attitudes and values in contemporary society. The idea is that the group should not only reproduce the acceptable, conventional responses of formal discourse.

It was noticed from the outset that the discussion on women within the working environment was restricted and non spontaneous. This inhibition could be seen in two kinds of situations:
1. Whenever the participants are not urged to take a stand on the source of conflict (the business woman), the main mechanism of exclusion is evasion: They just do not speak about the social object which is excluded. The lack of coherence between experience at the working place and the discourse of equality between genders is precisely what remains hidden here. As the discussion goes on, the pressure of experience eventually leads to putting aside concealment (Freud 1985: 188).

These avoidance strategies eventually disappear as group dynamics in the meeting lead towards the creation of a 'basic group' (Bion 1974), which is ruled by the *pleasure principle* (the fulfilment of desires). From this point on, we begin to find

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[5] Habermas defines truthfulness as: "a claim of validity linked to representative speech acts, a claim which says that, with the intentions I show, I mean exactly what I say. A speaker is truthful when he/she neither deceives him/herself nor others [...] in self-expressive speech acts I state nothing about my own internal episodes, I do not make any claim, I just express something which is subjective" (Habermas 1989: 100). As can be guessed, the degree of truthfulness is not only related to how the research is carried out, but also to the participants' degree of involvement with the social object of study: The greater the personal involvement, the more meaningful will be the problems concerning truthfulness, since the subject will be more cautious in his/her statements.

that meanings that were hidden by legitimate and legitimising rationalisation -for example, the discourse that relies on such arguments like the incompetence of women for responsibility, particularly for leadership, in terms of their physical or psychological make up. When the group becomes aware of its identity as a group, as a part of society rather than as society as a whole, this process is based on a kind of sexism that sometimes goes back to its most traditional forms. It is precisely here that other features of group meeting as a social research method begin to play a role: Given their distinct characteristics, the participants have to partly rebuild their '*world of life*' in order to become a group; that is, they project their experiences so that become themselves legitimized within the group, whose members share this type of experiences. They use the group as a mirror of their own experiences (the 'looking-glass self', Goffman 1986b). This has meaningful effects in the case of groups made up by professionals and executives -those who have the power to select and promote personnel-, since in this way, they indirectly show themselves and others as agents of discriminatory practice.

2. When either the group dynamics and/or the moderator's participation question the initial surface rationalisations, the discourse becomes a parody of women in the workplace which is generally shared within the group. This consensus is more substantial when speaking of women than when speaking of work issues. The subjects' experiences in the workplace make them different, since their jobs and responsibilities are also different; however, their experiences with women bring them together. Their identity as men seems to overcome their identity as businessmen and as individuals who acknowledge the value of equality.

2.2. *Discourse analysis*

Our paper follows a critical approach to Discourse Analysis (see van Dijk 1988 and 1993; Wodak 1995), in the sense that it tries to reveal: First, how power relationships are established and work throughout discourses; and second, how, by means of the appropriation of these discourses, power produces knowledge about states of affairs and about subjects themselves (see Foucault 1971; and Martín Rojo 1995a).

One of our main concerns is to find out the argumentative strategies and linguistic procedures used by speakers which would reveal both their views on the labour world and their attitudes regarding women's incorporation into it. Images of women and gender prejudices are explicitly or implicitly present in discourse. They are transmitted in discourse in a persuasive and convincing way, and being shared knowledge, they form the cognitive basis on which discourse is built. In this particular case, prejudices are the cognitive ground on which discrimination against women both at the workplace and home is established. Discourse is an interpretation -and not a reflection- of a state of affairs and of the role played by speakers within it[6]. It is an elaboration, and sometimes a justification, of actions and

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[6] 'This simply means that there is nothing to be interpreted. There is nothing to interpret from the outset, because, essentially, everything is already an interpretation. Each sign is in itself not the object offered to be interpreted but the interpretation of other signs' (Foucault, 1967: 35-36)

behaviours which contribute to creating such discriminatory situations.

Within discourse, we try to find out not only what speakers claim to feel and do, but also what they really feel and do. This analysis aims to study a series of different discourse activities, such as justification, rationalization, categorization, attribution, making sense, exclusion and identification (see Wetherell and Potter 1992: 2). As will be seen in the following sections, these strategies and linguistic resources point to the existence of different kinds of sexism in the present case.

As will become clear in this paper, our analysis does not merely consist of a description of linguistics resources, but entails two interpretative processes. As Fairclouh suggests, interpretation is first necessary "to make sense of the features of texts by seeing them as elements in discourse practice", and it is also necessary in order to explain how these features are produced and understood, by seeing them as embedded within a wider, social practice. Discourse analysis is, therefore, a mode of social practice, similar to discourse production itself (Fairclough 1992: 198-199). Given the aims and the nature of this research, our analysis will be directed towards the study of how discourses create, reproduce, reaffirm, or modify, social realities. It will focus on the interrelation between changes within the 'order' and construction of discourse and social and cultural changes (see van Dijk 1991: ch.4, for a similar analysis on corporate discourse and racism).

To achieve these aims, we will put together different perspectives of analysis, which could be viewed as complementary trends within critical discourse analysis (see Wodak 1995). They are the following: Face-to-face interaction analysis (2.2.1.); the Foucaultian perspective (2.2.2.); the cognitive basis (2.2.3.).

2.2.1. Face-to-face interaction analysis

Through the analysis of interaction, we focus on how speakers build social relationships in discourse, and on the speakers' self-presentation both as individuals and as members of a group, in this case, as members of a male group. Through their collaborative work within interaction, the interlocutors achieve "understanding and, as a part of this process, display to each other their understanding of the events in progress at a particular moment" (Duranti and Goodwin 1991: 22). It is this collaborative organization of a changing topic within group interaction (from competitiveness to discrimination against women in recruitment and promotion), and its implications in self-presentation as well, which will be our main focus of attention. In this respect, we make use of some of the main ideas developed by Goffman (1967) in the study of face-to-face interaction, especially those of self-presentation and face-keeping, which are linked with the choice of argumentative strategies and linguistic resources.[7] Following Verschueren's pragmatic perspective (see Verschueren 1987), we consider language use as a permanent making of

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(Our translation).

[7] For a detailed analysis see Gómez Esteban et al. 1995. In different parts of this more general ongoing research, we are close to the etnography of speaking, specially as regards the role played by interaction in social organization (creation, delimitation, and maintenance of social groups), and in the consolidation of values and beliefs.

linguistic choices (phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactic, and discursive). This notion of variability entails the choices made by the speakers being correlated with context, interlocutors, aims, and communicative needs. In this way, all linguistic choices are relevant, even though they do not have fixed functions within different contexts. As a consequence, interactional analysis becomes an interpretative process, which aims to find out both the motivations and the results of the range of choices.

All the issues approached from this perspective ultimately refer to the study of social identity and to the construction of knowledge through discourse. Both phenomena are central topics within the Foucaultian framework, as will now be seen.

2.2.2. The Foucaultian perspective: The study of power and the production of knowledge through discourse[8]

According to Michel Foucault, the 'new rituals of power' are exercised through discourse. These include the definition of what is usual and expected, as opposed to what constitutes a deviation, an exception and, consequently, creates subjects and self-knowledge. Power is not necessarily repressive, but, as Foucault shows, it works partly by defining what it means to be a proper human being. One of its effects is, then, subjectivation: The constitution of subjects and specific knowledge about aspects of the self (Foucault 1994a & 1994b). Thus, power can be detected not only in prohibitions, but also whenever the subject assumes a particular way of acting, or whenever the subject considers this way of acting as a particular expression of his/her true identity. Self-regulation and normalization result from 'external' forces turning into 'interior' self-discipline.[9]

Amongst the different discursive practices approached from this perspective, there are: First, the study of exclusion procedures (see Foucault 1971), by means of which women are excluded from the workplace; and second, intertextuality (see Foucault 1969; Voloshinov 1973), by means of which legitimate discourses are invoked and identity processes are carried out. The constitution and reproduction of social knowledge is involved in the fulfilment of both practices. We now focus on the cognitive basis of this involvement.

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[8] Foucault's influence seems to be more and more relevant in current developments of Discourse Analysis (see, for example, Wetherell & Potter 1992; Fairclough 1992; and Wodak 1995).

[9] In other areas of our ongoing research (see footnote 7), we have focused on the constitution of subjectivity through men's and women's discourse in relation with power structures. We have studied, in particular, how subjectivation takes place and how the social world is organized and categorized. In this sense, male discourse seems to be mainly controlling and normative, using the persuasive and rhetorical power of discourse, since it reproduces and legitimizes traditional patterns of subjectivity. On the other hand, within female discourse, we have found an emergent pattern of subjectivity, which questions traditional models, placing it against normative discourse. The main argumentative strategy of female discourse is manifest intertextuality (Martín Rojo 1995b).

2.2.3. The cognitive basis

In different moments of our analysis, we focus on social categorization and stereotypes, following as a reference framework research by Lakoff (1987), Tajfel (1981), Turner (1985; and Turner *et al.* 1987), van Dijk (1987), and Wetherell and Potter (1992). In particular we try to find out: a) the cognitive strategies by which participants give coherence to the social processes they face during interaction (such as women's incorporation in the labour market); b) how they organize their experiences; c) which changes are considered to be relevant, and which constraints they establish to further changes; d) which social phenomena are considered to be either the source or the effects of these changes; e) how they build and justify their discourse about both genders.

By looking at some pieces of the analyzed conversations, we will see how different features are assigned to each gender. This process results from a cognitive process of association and also derives from a metonymic process, by means of which a subcategory ('non-working mothers') or a particular feature ('not to be devoted to work'), stands for the whole category (women) (Lakoff 1987). This procedure, which is reinforced by discursive strategies, such as exclusion tactics and 'overdetermination'[10], allows for quick and biased judgements about individuals and social groups, and plays a crucial role both in argumentative moves and in the construction of discourse.

3. Main topics and argumentative progression: Competitiveness as a framework

In the group meetings we have analyzed, after a preliminary presentation, most of the rest of the discussion deals with competitiveness in the workplace and related issues. This topic seemed to be a 'safe topic' (its development was dominated by androcentrism) and was maintained until issues such as the women's status within the labour world and their being discriminated in promotion were indirectly brought up by the moderator (in section 4.1. we will focus on this transition from a safe topic to a more dangerous one for men's self-presentation).

Competitiveness was initially talked about by the participants as typical of situations which offer general possibilities of promotion within the hierarchy of the business organization. In this respect, it should be pointed out that more emphasis was placed on power than on the economic benefits derived from promotions, which seems to be related to the fact that men's self-identity is strongly rooted in the workplace -in addition to the typical reluctance to talk about money. Personal success seems to be based almost exclusively on development in professional life in highly professional working positions. The interlocutors consider promotion as a way of social recognition. In this sense, not mentioning women in this part of the discussion might mean that women's promotion is seen, within the groups of professionals and executives being analyzed, as a threat to their identity.   When

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[10] A form of symbolic representation of social actors, in which social actors are represented as participating, at the same time, in more than one social practice" (van Leeuwen 1995b: 21-23; see also van Leeuwen 1995a: 101).

the moderator first suggests the topic of women's promotion, a change within the groups' dynamics is observed in the development of a particular subtopic the participants had already addressed: The criteria used for promotion. The argumentation on this issue goes from *subjective criteria* (as regards men) to *objective criteria* (as regards women). At the beginning, when talking about men's promotion, there arise differences amongst and within the different groups with respect to the degree of subjectivity of the criteria used in the selection process. However, such differences vanish when the topic of women's promotion to management or responsability positions is raised. In fact, the mention of the subjectivity of the criteria employed entirely disappears. What in the beginning is perceived as subjective is later on seen as objective, by means of references to 'culture' or 'tradition'. This is a typical instance of rationalization (see section 6), in that it hides the emotional origins of their beliefs behind arguments which are supposed to be objective (Boudon 1992: 29).

The argumentative progression (from subjectivity to objectivity) runs as follows:

1. In the promotion procedures everyone must be treated equally. The groups criticise the transgression of this principle:

(1)   *..entonces, quiero decir que la empresa no te valora tus conocimientos técnicos o tu capacidad de trabajo...* (RG. Dir:17)

'...Then, what I want to say is that the company doesn't value your technical knowledge or your capacity for work...' (R. Dir:17)

(2)   *... Entonces, ¿donde está la verdadera promoción? (R. Dir:6)*

'...Then, where is true promotion?' (R. Dir:6)

2. Since in those contexts in which trust is necessary subjective criteria have to be used, it is impossible to treat everyone alike:

(3)   *...tienes que trabajar con una persona que tenga aproximadamente las mismas opiniones que tú, una persona que tenga las mismas ideas, poque si no... (R. Dir.10)*

'You have to work with a person with more or less the same opinions as yours, a person with the same ideas, because if not...' (R. Dir:10)

Then, the criticisms are softened:

(4)   *Claro, entonces ya no es amiguismo en el sentido estricto de la palabra. Yo creo que hemos hablado de amiguismo demasiado pronto y de una forma muy superficial... (R. Dir:13)*

'Of course, then this isn't *'string-pulling'* in the true sense of the word. I think we started to talk about *'pulling-strings'* too soon and in a very

superficial way' (R. Dir:13)

3. However, there are subjective elements that are so generally accepted that they effectively move from being considered subjective to being accepted as objective, such as, for example, those with respect to the difficulties that women have in taking responsibilities and doing tasks requiring substantial commitment. In this way, the widespread so-called 'double duty' (a double or even triple shift) of the working woman -who is assumed to be the person who takes on the duties of the housewife is created. This becomes a reason for discrimination against women with respect to men; a reason which is accepted and normalized in promotion processes.

   (5)   *...si Ramón te dice todos los días que tiene que ir a buscar a los niños al colegio, pues, dices, macho, un día es un día, pero que no me lo cuentes todos los días, en cambio, con Margarita se ve, y al final se hace costumbre... (R. Prof:18)*

          '...if Ramon says to you every day that he has to fetch the kids from school, you say: 'just this once, but don't ask me every day. But, Margarita goes every day and, at in the end it becomes a habit...' (R. Prof:18)

   What we find in this case is a tactic of self-defense (if the criteria are not objective, the accusation of discrimination against women can be formulated on the basis of this key argument). The consequence of this defensive tactic is a self-exculpatory discourse on the part of men (see section 6): "We select our personnel on the basis of quality and the degree of commitment to work" (see, van Dijk 1991: ch.4, for very similar remarks). After the justification of the promotion criterion of 'good personal relationships' (which could be understood as also referring to the male-female relations in the workplace), the introduction into the discussion of female references by the moderator produced many changes.

1. The elimination of certain elements from the discussion: Criticisms against the system disappear and biased criteria are not referred to again, so that it may be inferred that, even if decisions taken with regard to the promotion of men seem to be debatable, this is not the case for decisions concerning women: Not promoting them, in this case. The failure of women to be promoted, as we shall see in 4.2, must be for objective reasons: "They don't deserve it", "they disqualify themselves", "they aren't committed to the firm", and so on. In this way, there is a movement from avoidance of the subject in discourse to exclusion within the discourse, based on the argument that it is women who exclude themselves.

2. On the other hand, subjective criteria are maintained: What is important is to get on well with a colleague. All reference to the existence of bias, that is, promoting friends or politicking, disappear. The criteria are not questioned: They are fair. In contrast, cultural differences are highlighted: "I can't relate to her" (R, Dir). "They have a different value system" (R, Dir). The consequence of such statements is clear: I can't accept within my working context and *'world of life'* someone who was very far from it in the first place. Exclusion is mainly established by means of

emphasizing differences.

3. The taboo of discrimination: There is 'wire-pulling' and politicking, but there is no discrimination. Even the expression itself is avoided: 'Whatever you call it', and so on.

4. Innocence and the way to build a positive social image: Ignoring women is not a 'conscious habit'. "You don't even think about choosing a woman", although there is also a certain wariness: "Your chances of getting it wrong are smaller". In this way, the speaker reinforces his image as "acting in a responsible way in the face of reality": Potential opportunities for making mistakes are avoided. As in the next example, the 'objectivity' of the decision against the promotion of women can be emphasized using a play on words involving homosexuality:

> (6)   *Yo desde luego siempre me he tirado por los hombres, y me gustan las mujeres, ¿eh? (risas). (R.Dir:41)*
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> 'Of course, I have always gone for men, and I like women, don't I?' (laughters). (R. Dir:41)

This play on words appears because the speaker expects to get the consensus of male group easily. He does not expect any reticence from men because every man is *with men* when he is against women. This is their logic.

5. These differences can turn into an argument about the process of promotion: Not to discriminate women is to discriminate men, as in the next fragment of the group discussion:

> (7)   *Hay muchos hombres y yo por lo menos no me meto ahí, de esas reuniones que te juntas veinticinco, te empiezas a pelear y empiezas a soltar tacos, hay mucha gente que se queda cortado si hay una mujer delante (...) pero de otro presidente y tal a lo mejor no le gusta, y es otra forma de discriminación no poderse expresar como el... coño y todo este tipo de tacos nos salen por todos los lados en cualquier momento, sobre todo en un momento de enfrentamiento. (R. Dir:38)*
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> 'There are a lot of men -but I don't include myself-, in those meetings with about twenty five men, and everybody begins to fight and swear, so there are a lot of *people* who can't open the mouth once there is a *woman* present (...) but the president [of the company] may not like it, and this is another way of discrimination: He cannot express himself as he wants...' (R. Dir:38)

The presence of a woman breaks the domain of men, their logic of communication, their 'freedom' of communication. This is an 'objective' obstacle to the promotion of women at work. Furthermore, in the last sentence, we can see how a generic term (*gente*/'people') is used as a male term, contrasting with 'a woman'.

The fact that they change their judgements and attitudes regarding the criteria for promotion when the topic of women is introduced is possibly because, in principle, the referent of general discussions on the workplace is exclusively male. These argument strategies cannot be disconnected from the image the speaker projects (Goffman 1986a; 1986b): They are an attempt at self-exoneration.

4. The linguistic organisation of masculine discourse: Inhibited sexism

In the following section we analyze the strategies and discourse procedures that reveal the presence of different kinds of sexism: The first section (4.1) focuses on androcentrism and the disappearence of women, and will allow us to consider both aspects in relation to personal experiences. The second section (4.2), corresponding to the process of objectivisation of what has previously been subjective, allows us to concentrate on rationalised sexism. In both there is inhibition.

4.1. *Inhibited androcentrism: A radical exclusion procedure*

The different groups coincide in opening the discussion by focusing on the workplace and avoiding explicit references to women, and not showing any features which would explicitly make the discourse applicable to them. These tactics of ignoring the existence of women are a consequence of traditional androcentrism, and they continue to be used until the moderator introduces the issue of gender in the conversation.

The Spanish language has an overt system of grammatical gender, in which a gender opposition is established (in pronouns, nouns, adjectives and determiners) between female, defined as the marked term or intensive, and male, the unmarked or extensive term. When the specification of gender is not desired or the gender of the personal referent is unknown, the male term has to be used. This organization of gender has been considered discriminatory by many authors (see, for example, Violi 1987; Perissinotto 1982; Nissen 1991; Fernández Lagunilla 1991). It allows the participation of women to be hidden, and in fact it does produce this social effect, since, as some empirical research shows, there is a significant tendency to interpret male terms as intensive (male) and not as extensive terms (both female and male) (see Perissinoto 1982). Nevertheless, even if the linguistic system offers this choice of the extensive male terms, it is quite relevant that our speakers never spontaneously make specific references to women, or mention explicitly the gender of the workers they are talking about, by using phrases such as: 'When I hire a man or a woman' or 'men and women directors we have' (los directores y directoras que tenemos). The use of this type of expression is not very common in Spain -in spite of the policy carried by The Ministerio de Educación (1988) and by the Instituto de la Mujer (1989). However, it is interesting to point out that Spanish is now showing a clear tendency towards the formation of femenine forms for the names of profesions (Nissen 1991).

However, from the absence of specific references and the use of exclusively masculine terms it cannot be deduced that the references being made in the discussion are exclusively to men: Some of the terms employed *tío* (guy); *señor* (men); *pepito* or *fulanito* (Mr So-and-so) could be thought of, although with some

difficulty, as terms which refer to both women and men. Such terms can be considered as 'low' generics, if compared with other possible choices like *individuo*, given that they suggest a specific interpretation.[11] As a consequence, discourse is ambiguous, with regards to the gender of the people who make up this labour world. Such ambiguity is allowed and supported by grammatical gender. This fact becomes even more confusing by the use of *feminine extensive terms*, such as *(una) persona* ('person'); or *(la) gente* ('people'), which can be considered as 'high generics'[12]. However, once the moderator includes the issue of gender in the discussion (the true object of investigation, which is unknown to the participants), a number of phenomena appear which make it clear that the referents of the discussion have been predominantly masculine, up to that point. These phenomena show the interpretation assigned and, at the same time, play a role in what speakers want to achieve by means of the use of male and generic forms. In a parallel way, they change not only the contents of the discussion, but also the strategies for arguing. The use of these generic terms, which hide their specific reference, can be considered as the consequence of the inhibition of androcentrism.

Among the resources that reveal underlying androcentrism, which entails that referents of discourse about work are preferably men, there are the following:

1. Alternating terms: Generic female terms such as *persona* ('person') or *gente* ('people') (epicene terms) seem interchangeable in the discussion *only* for masculine terms like: *Tío* ('guy'); *señor* ('man'); *Pepito* ('Mr So-and-so'), etc.

2. Gender agreement: *Gente* ('people') and *personas* ('people') are typically combined with masculine pronouns, which restricts the inclusive value of the antecedents, and indicates that the referents from which the discourse is constructed about the workplace are conceptualized as men. Gender agreement depends on the sex of a non given referent rather than on the gender class of the antecedent.

(8)   *gente profesional, te llevas bien o mal con ellos. (RG, Dir)*

'professional people (*gente*, femenine term), you feel good or bad with them' (*ellos*, masculine). (RG, Dir)

3. Modifiers: Some semantic gaps occur in the discourse, particularly when the moderator focuses the discussion on women. From this point on, terms like *persona* ('person') and *gente* ('people)', which are *feminine extensive terms* appear accompanied by modifiers that restrict their meaning and stress the female gender:

personas femeninas ('female people') (RG, Dir)
personas mujeres ('female people') (RG, Dir)

The examples in (9) and (10) indicate how, before the question of women

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[11] Perissinotto studies how male terms are usually inderstood as intensive (excluding women). This author outlined a scale of generics, in which *hombre (man)* gets a 10% of generic interpretation, while *individuo* reaches an 80% (see Perissinotto 1982: 31).

[12] They obtain a 90% of generic interpretations, in Perissinotto's scale.

arises, the referent of *persona* ('person'), and of the discourse in general, has been predominantly male. Forms like *personas femeninas* are extremely unusual in Spanish, and clearly stress how the tendency to make a specific or intensive interpretation of male terms is extended to female generics. Both male and female generic terms offer different interpretative possibilities, which allow speakers to express their common conception of the world of work places (McConnell-Ginet 1988: 95):

(9)   *entonces cuando tú vas a elegir ves que no, que no tienes a ninguna persona femenina para elegir y es que no la hay, en cambio en otras ramas. (RG, Dir)*

'So when you are going to choose you see that you don't, you don't have any "female person" to choose from, and its because there aren't any, unlike in other branches' (RG, Dir)

(10)   *son niveles de auxiliares o de administrativos donde hay una serie de personas mujeres que viven de ello que tienen que ganarse la vida, y otras que bien están casadas, en general están casadas o sobre todo acaban de tener un crío o así... (RG, Dir)*

'At the auxiliary or administrative levels there are these "female persons" that live for their job, and others that are either married, in general they are married or usually have just had a kid or something ...' (RG, Dir)

From the indetermination in the linguistic presentation of workers who can be employed and promoted, the speakers move to a new stage, in which they use many strategies of determination of women as people who are neither valued nor employed (for the study of linguistic resources of both determination and indetermination, see van Leeuwen 1995: 16). These examples could be seen as paradigmatic instances of a theory that "people are male unless proven otherwise, that femaleness is contrasted with maleness in being a special and distinctive form of humanness, a marginal condition" (McConell-Ginett 1988: 93-94). At any moment, such interpretation, by which participants make explicit the connection between typicality and maleness in work places, seems to be controversial, but shared by participants, and socially situated.

Underlying androcentrism allows us to speak of inhibition, and can be considered as a tactic of ignorance and evasion, equivalent to other practices studied by van Dijk in corporate discourse about ethnic minorities (see van Dijk 1991: ch.4). At first, apparently, the two strategies of exclusion established by Foucault (1971), 'division' and 'rejection', are not explicitly employed: That is, a dividing line between men and women in the workplace is not established, neither is there a conflict between both groups later on. Following van Leeuwen in his study of "The representation of social actors", we consider this to be a kind of exclusion which leaves no traces in the representation, making both the social actors and their activities disappear (see van Leeuwen 1995b): Generic and all-inclusive terms, whose referents may be both men and women, are used. However, such 'radical

exclusion' shows up once women appear on the scene, and the phenomena indicated above show that, up to that moment, the referents of the discourse were exclusively male, and women had in fact been excluded. Once women appear on the scene, the strategies of exclusion do not depend on simple omission; they stop being implicit. The strategies of sexism can now be seen as being based on arguments.

4.2. *The exclusion of women from the labour world: The argumentation of sexism*

Argument-based sexism entails the use of a different kind of exclusion procedure, which is articulated on two axes (Foucault 1971): DIVIDING, that is, establishing the categories which will be opposed (categorization and conceptualization of processes); and REJECTING, that is, segregating, marginalising, creating a negative image (argumentation: Use of anecdotes, overdetermination). Both moves, division and rejection, cannot be dissociated -they take place simultaneously.

4.2.1. Dividing: Dissociation and categorization

Dividing entails a process of categorization of individuals into groups (specially by means of lexicalization) and a conceptualization of processes (syntactic and semantic structures of sentences). The categorization of individuals into groups produces a particular organization of perceptions and judgements. The meaning of these categories, their functions, and their social and psychological meaning is established through discourse, and they change when this context changes, which means that they are "part of the collective domain of negotiation, debate, argumentative and ideological struggle" (see Wetherell and Potter 1992: 77).

The following examples show how the terms used to refer to women produce a clasification into two groups:

> (11)   *-a estos puestos de más responsabilidad, la mayoría están divorciadas o solteras...*
> *- No, han llegado a esos puestos porque, se han divorciado y se han dedicado a la empresa totalmente o estas soltera y te dedicas a la empresa y que su ambición es alcanzar un puesto importante en la empresa... (RG, Dir:23-24).*
>
> 'at these management positions and positions of responsibility, most of them are divorced or single...
> -No, they have reached these positions, because they are divorced and they become completely devoted to the company, or because they are single and they are devoted to the company, and their ambition is to get an important position in it'
>
> (12)   *dos tipos de mujer trabajadora, la que concilia hogar y trabajo, y la que lucha" (RG, Dir:15).*
>
> 'two kinds of working women, those who make home and work

compatible, and those who fight'

As can be seen in examples like these, speakers activate two axes of division:

1.   A first axis of division, which separates men and women, producing
      a contrast which, however, remains implicit.
2.   A second axis of division, within the group of women, which
      distinguishes between:

      a) 'women who can be promoted' (*las promocionables* or *que llegan*),
      whose prototype is the 'non-mother woman' (*mujer no madre*),
      spinsters, divorcees, widows and unattractive women (*las solteras,
      divorciadas, viudas, las feas*) (RG, Dir:22). The process of association,
      realized by parataxis (see, van Leeuwen 1995b: 14) entails an
      identification of these 'women who can be promoted'
      (*promocionables*) in terms of their emotional and personal failure.
      This presentation is clearly evaluative. To this group belong also, in
      some cases, women (*las que hacen oposiciones*), who take competitive
      examination to the civil service.
      b) 'women who are not material for promotion' (*las no
      promocionables*), 'women who discriminate against themselves' (*las
      que se autoexcluyen*), 'those who are not capable' (*las que no llegan*):
      working mothers who work to make a little pin money.

At the heart of this opposition there lies the non-working mother, who acts
as a referent, even if her presence is not explicitly formulated (following our
analysis, they embodied the prototype of women). The presentation we make here
of this taxonomy is not exhaustive, but the examples we include show that it plays
a relevant role in the development of the argumentation.

There are number of different kinds of attributes and actions of both types
of women, which cannot be analyzed in detail in this paper. Nevertheless both will
be referred to in the examination of anecdotes below, (see Gómez *et al.* 1995: ch.2,
for a detailed analysis of the images of women in competitive work contexts).
Related to this point, what is more relevant is the role played by this taxonomy in
argumentation: Both kind of women are clear agents of their own discrimation:

      (13)   E. *Yo no creo que haya discriminación en absoluto...*
             D. *¿no?*
             (...)
             E. *Quiero decir que no creo que haya discriminación...*
             F. *Es que la mujeres se autoeliminan mutuamente ...* (RG, Dir:18).

             E- 'I don't think that discrimination exists, not at all..'
             D- 'don't you?'
             E- 'I mean that I don't think that discrimination exists'
             F- 'What happens is that women discriminate themselves'

In contrast with section 4.1., in this case we see a tendency towards the determination of agents and actions, by giving a lot of negative data. This favours the participants' self-exoneration.

4.2.2. Anecdotes as mechanisms of rejection

Rejection affects both kinds of women, and the procedures used are the same. Anecdotes play an essential role in carrying out exclusion procedures. Among their functions the following stand out: a) the presentation of examples of behaviours, which persuasively transmit and confirm the stereotypes; b) through them the mechanisms of generalization which are oriented towards the exclusion of women are put into practice; c) they produce an overdetermination of women; d) they permit the presentation of a negative image of women, who appear as the agents of their own exclusion. This negative presentation of women has its corolary in a positive self-presentation of men.

4.2.2.1. Patterns and schemata of anecdotes

A)   Participants: *Mujeres-madres* ('mother-women'), *mujeres-trabajadoras* ('working women'), *mujeres trabajadoras madres* ('working mothers').

B)   Actions:
. *mujeres trabajadoras madres* ('working mothers'): *Ir a por los niños al colegio* ('to fetch the children from school') (RG, Dir:20, 43), *cuidar a los niños cuando están enfermos* ('to look after the children when they are ill') (RG, Dir:44), *hacer la cena* ('to prepare the dinner') (RG, Dir:21, 22, 50), and so on.
. *mujeres trabajadoras* (working women): *Pasar cosas a máquina* ('to type documents') (RG, Dir:22), *tomar café en horas de trabajo* ('to have coffee in work time') (RG, Dir: 22), *cotillear* ('to gossip'), *negarse a quedarse trabajando fuera del horario de oficina* ('to refuse to work outside the timetable') (RG, Dir:20), *abandonar carreras prometedoras, sin razón aparente* ('to give up promising careers, without any apparent reason') (RG, Dir:17-18, 25, etc.); . Specific actions of working women: *Ser trepas* ('to be social-climbers') (RG, Dir:28-29), *cepillarse a los tíos* ('to go to bed with men'), *utilizar los atractivos físicos* ('to make use of their physical atributes') (RG, Dir:29), *ser mandonas o tiranas* ('to be bossy or tyrannical') (RG, Dir:44-45,48), etc.

C)   Localization: Time and space. Space is normally envisaged in terms of everyday places and not symbolic. An inside and an outside dimension is distinguished: The home and the work place. The home is presented as the prototypical place for women, while the interests of men are mainly outside: for them, the workplace plays a central role, together with pubs or other meeting places (RG, Dir:43). So, for women to leave their typical -nearly natural- space, very often entails negative judgements. As regards the temporal axis, the anecdotes refer to the here and now: When they are told,

a particular view of the state of affairs is imposed. This axis has a key role in the structuring of discourse, because speakers are dealing with social changes, those related to the situation of women. Some of them are already accomplished, others are predictable.

D)   Expression of feelings. Anecdotes embody the attitudes of the participants, specially their contempt for women who are devoted to their work (see, specially, RG, Dir:28-29 y 45-47), and their scorn towards the task of bringing up the children (see, for example, (11) and (14)).

The anecdotes mentioned above fall into a pattern. In the case of covert sexism, we have seen that meaningful anecdotes are used, but the generalisation itself is not formulated. These anecdotes operate as a stimulus so that the hearer arrives at the intended conclusion by himself. The tendency to admit equality, in abstract terms, in the the explicit expression of critical judgments and of negative attitudes towards women.

4.2.2.2. Mechanisms of induction and deduction

The analysis of the anecdotes (examples (8) and (10)) reveals, that in order to express and impose upon women their perception of their environment, men, particularly those of managerial status, use a way of reasoning that appears to combines induction and deduction: 1. induction: From observations, instantiating examples, -carefully selected anecdotes about women in the workplace-, generalisations about women are derived: Women are not sufficiently devoted to work; 2. deduction: Certain conclusions are drawn: Women limit their own chances, discriminate against themselves; and predictions are made: The situation will only change when they change themselves, without which nothing will change. By means of this strategy, there is an attempt to legitimise masculine discourse, a discourse that, for its understanding and persuasiveness, requires the control of the negative female stereotypes and clear masculine values that are typical of overt sexism. These stereotypes, though partly distorted as a result of the rationalisation that still holds in the discourse, are mainly derived from questions asked by the moderator about the limited presence of women in positions of responsibility. As Garfinkel (1984: 184) suggests, rationalisation is necessary since explanations are required.

(14)   *Yo os voy a contar un caso, surgió un problema, me llamó el director a una reunión urgente por la tarde, y la señorita que se llama Elvira dijo: "¡ahí, pues yo no me puedo quedar, me tienen que avisar con veinticuatro horas, porque los niños...". Y dije usted se queda, y claro, pero es que la salida que tuvo que si la comida de los niños es que a mí no se me ocurre, bueno es que yo no trabajaría teniendo niños lo primero... (RG, Dir:20)*

'I'm going to tell you about one case, a problem came up, the boss called me for an urgent meeting for the afternoon, and the girl, called Elvira, said " Ah! Well, I can't stay, you have to give me twenty-four hours notice, because the kids ..." And I said "you have to

stay", obviously, but the reason she gave was the kids' dinner. I would never have think of. Well, I wouldn't work if I had kids ...' (RG, Dir:20)

To persuade others and themselves, men use observation and induction ('that's what we see'; 'that's what happens'; 'we are objective'). Men want to present the discourse as something objective, and not as the particular view of an individual or a gender; their argument is based on a prejudice regarding 'possible objectivity' as 'objectivity as an ideal aim'. In this way, the weaving of motives in this argumentation strategy, developed within the dynamics of the group, has the effect of consolidating stereotypes -which offer direct support in overt sexism and indirect support in inhibited sexism- and producing new ones: 'Women managers lack feminine attributes'. At the same time, they project of their own positive image ("we aren't the ones responsible"), and exclude women.

(15)   *Y tiene su propio sistema de valores, porque para una mujer lo primero a la hora de tener un hijo lo prioritario es dedicarse a su hijo y la empresa pasa a ser algo secundario (RG, Dir:17 y 18; véase también 15 y 29).*

'They have their own system of values. For a woman the most important thing in life is to have children, and the firm takes second place' (RG, Dir:17 y 18; see also 15 y 29).

In argumentation, instead of a hierarchical organisation in which it seems to be necessary to give specific evidence to support the statements, there is an argument schema of the type: Central/peripheral. The value of women in the workplace is questioned, and so is their dedication, by resorting to the peripheral, that is to say, by evoking anecdotes concerning peripheral matters: Drinking coffee, typing, the example of someone who does not wish to attend a meeting, etc.

(16)   *Tú sabes lo bonito que es llegar a la oficina y que te diga el jefe toma haz este papel a máquina y tac, tac, tac, sacar el informe y toma pum, a tomar café, iamos no me digasi. Hay veces que vienen a la una y me dicen me duele el estómago, claro sólo tomas café. No, no déjate que es muy bonito llegar a la oficina que traigan el papelito y que se vayan a casita hacer la comida a los niños y aguantar a los niños... (RG, Dir:22)*

'You know how great it is to get to the office and the boss says 'go and type this paper and find me that report', 'here you are', and then you have a coffee, isn't that right? There are times when they come at one o' clock to tell me that they've got a stomachache, 'of course, you don't do anything except to drink coffee'. No, no, forget it, its great to get to the office and to type a bit of paper and go home to make lunch for the kids and put up with them' (RG, Dir:22)

4.2.2.3. Overdetermination

In these anecdotes, women are overdetermined, thas, they are represented as participating, at the same time, in more than one social practice" (see footnote 10). In our case, this produces an excess of information about women mixing details from different domains, and features of traditional stereotypes and new images of working women. The examples includ different kinds of overdetermination, specially that called by van Leeuwen 'inversion', in which social actors are connected to two practices which are, in a certain way, opposites: Activities suitable for men (to spend their time at the office, to work for money, etc.) and activities suitable for women (to look after the children, to prepare the dinner, to paint their nails, to make use of their sexual qualities); the second kind of traditionally attributed activities inevitably prevent them from doing first type -their work- properly. Since the traditional type of activity -those considered suitable for women- are repeated in men's anecdotes about them, such activities are presented as natural to women, while their promotion at work is classified as unsuitable for them.

4.2.2.4. Positive/negative self presentation

The examples below show how exclusion is realised by means of the two practices: 'division' and 'rejection'. Division occurs particularly in those anecdotes that allow the implicit establishment of two domains: That of the home, ruled by women, and that of the workplace, ruled by men. Once this is established, a negative image of women who break into the male space is generated, and the non-participation of men in the household is justified. Anecdotes are a powerful means of constructing a negative image of women, who appear as the agents of their own exclusion.

The projection of the negative image of women plays a key role in the rationalization of sexism and hides several contradictions that underlie male discourse. In no case, are men presented as the agents of this discrimination. (Example 13 is repeated here as 17).

(17) - *Si, si,... y cada vez mas, yo lo he notado cada vez hay mas mujeres..*
(...)
- *Yo no creo que haya discriminación en absoluto..*
- *¿no?*
(...)
- *Quiero decir que no creo que haya discriminación..*
- *Es que la mujeres se auto eliminan mutuamente cuando empiezan su vida profesional...*

- 'Yes, yes, and more and more, I've noticed that there are more and more women...'
(...)
- 'I don't believe there's any discrimination at all ..'
- 'Isn't there?'
(...)
- 'What I mean is that I don't think there is any discrimination ...'

- 'It's that women exclude themselves when they begin their proffesional life' (RG, Dir)

4.2.2.5. Purpose of the anecdotes

1. Anecdotes in the conversation are used to objectivize the statements that are made about women in the workplace. In this way, statements about women seem to be based on real experiences and not on evaluative judgments.
2. The use of anecdotes supports and fosters generalisations of the type 'this is not an isolated case' or 'all women are like that', but also distorts the information. For example, in (14) the anecdote about the woman who did not wish to stay any longer at work than she was obliged to by her contract was used as evidence for the limited commitment of women to the firm.
3. Anecdotes express once again the statements made about women, allowing the hearer to infer others that are left implicit. *Abductive reasoning* is used so that, from a consequence (the anecdote presented), an antecedent can be inferred by the audience ('women are like that'), thanks to premises that they already have in their minds (Peirce 1966: 1581). The generalisation is based on prejudice. As in almost all the parts of the process of rationalisation, it is fed by *a priori* beliefs (Boudon 1992: III).
4. Anecdotes justify social operating consequences: Discrimination is denied or, at least, is justified.

5. The cognitive basis: Argumentation and categorization

As in all discourses, male discourse allows the establishing of distinctions: Women vs. men; the domains of women vs. the domains of men; female qualities vs. male qualities; situations of discrimination vs. situations of self-discrimination, and so on. At the same time it identifies phenomena, and allows the organization of experience, and the search for answers.

Each lexical choice (women who 'self discriminate'; 'women who are committed to working: Divorcees, spinsters, widows and unattractive women' and so on) (example 5) has a role in organizing individual experience. The discourse allows us access to the conceptualization of the context, and that conceptualization itself is the base on which the discourse rests, functioning as a set of shared concepts that, being shared do not need to be made explicit. In this way, the movement from observation to generalization and from there to the derived consequences can only be achieved by means of those understandings that, as implicit premises, allow the hearer to make the appropriate deductions. The fact that these premises are not formulated linguistically means that to understand the argument and to persuade, it is necessary to use negative stereotypes of women (the prototype of the working woman is the secretary; the woman manager obtains her position by means of her sexual qualities, and so on) and purely masculine values (success in life is success in one's profession; children are a woman's responsibility, and so on). In this way, example (18) requires for its understanding a high degree of shared knowledge and judgements (which tasks women usually do; the woman

who reaches a post achieves this by means of her sexual merit), such as male values and habits, descriptions of how women emphasize their physical aspects and ignore other qualities, etc.

(18)   *yo me acuerdo una chica graciosísima que fue, pues surgió un tema, ella llevaba unos contenedores para basura, <u>yo no sé qué hacía una chica vendiendo o alquilando contenedores para basura,</u> bueno pues como era tan absurdo la situación, a mí me resultaba extraño pues que una chica <u>mona</u> y tal con un medio uniforme, una chica muy graciosa, intentara alquilarte o venderte unos temas de contenedores de basura pues yo te digo francamente que a mí eso pues me descentraba, yo sabía lo que costaba lo que podía llegar el precio lo que no y tal, pero el que fuera ese tipo de chica y no sé que pues no la veía en ese momento y de alguna forma me sentía raro, <u>yo creo que ellas lo utilizan,</u> imagino que el director de márketing o de comercial de esa empresa <u>utilizaba chicas en ese sentido</u> porque eran mucho más, no se, entraban más, o vendía un producto tan extraño como ése pues con una rapidez. (RG, Prof:19)*

'I remember a cute girl who was, well this subject came up, she was handling rubbish containers, and I don't know what a girl was doing selling or renting rubbish containers, anyway as it was such a stupid situation, I felt weird that it was such a beautiful girl like that with a kind of uniform, a really cute girl, trying to rent you or sell you something to do with rubbish containers, well to be frank it really threw me, I knew what it costs, what the price would be and what it couldn't be and so on, but the fact that it was that kind of girl and I don't know, well, I didn't know what to make of it and I just felt kind of strange, I think that they use it, I guess that the marketing or sales director of that company was using girls like that because they were much more, I don't know, they got through more, or could sell such a strange product as that really fast' (RG, Prof:19)

To go beyond the fact that "the girl was pretty and very pleasing", to the fact that she was able to sell things quickly, and finally, to the generalization (I believe that "they make use of it" without specifying what it is that they make use of), it is necessary to deduce that she used her physical qualities as a woman to sell. This conclusion is supported in the fact that it seemed strange to him that she appeared to take it seriously. From this rather inconclusive anecdote, it is deduced that "they make use of it", and what is even worse, it is not even women themselves, but their bosses, who take advantage of women's sexual attractions and reap the benefits.

One of the conclusions we can draw from this example is "that they are useless, they are troublesome, and if they get there we all know why it is". The stereotypes and male values allow this reasoning to be used and, to be taken as something generally agreed upon, since these interpretations do not appear to lead to divergence among the group. The anecdotes revert to these stereotypes, reaffirming them.

6. The core of argumentation: Rationalization and self-exoneration

By means of the dialogic organization of discourse, other discourses are invoked within discourse. In this case, the legitimate discourse is always present implicitly, and goes with and explains the denials of discrimination, by these who are responsible for recruitment and promotion. Legitimate discourse is part of a frame that is presupposed, and has been agreed upon, and provides the context in which actions and utterances are to be taken (Goffman 1961; 1986a). Even if, in everyday interaction, there always remains some degree of uncertainty, the assumption of legitimate discourse, precisely because of its nature, easily becomes a shared perspective. Participants cannot admit their sexism, which entails the transgression of legitimate discourse. They have to avoid this transgression and, as a consequence, they plan their utterances so that they will seem non-sexist. In the same way, women's discourse seems to accuse men of discrimination, and of this the participants seem to be perfectly aware. The awareness of this transgression and of the existence of the accusations explains why it finally becomes the main topic of these conversations. Example (19) shows how the question introduced by the moderator is understood and reelaborated as a direct question about sexism and discrimination:

(19)   *¿En este aspecto (promoción), el género es importante? ¿Que sea hombre o mujer?*

'Related to this (promotion), is gender important? If the person is a woman or a man?'

This question is reelaborated by speakers as (20) and, later on, as (21):

(20)   *es a lo que iba tu pregunta, ¿hay discriminación para ocupar un puesto por el simple hecho de ser mujer?. Por lo que a mi respecta, no.*

'this was your question, wasn't it? Are women discriminated in promotion only because of the fact that they are women?. As far as I am concerned, they aren't'

(21)   *-yo la pregunta la he entendido que si por el mero hecho de ser mujer se le discrimina a la hora de promocionar, no era esa la pregunta? -Bueno, preguntaba por lo valores concretamente.*

'- I understood the question like this: Are they discriminated because of the fact they are women. Wasn't this the question?
- Well, I was asking for values'

In this sense, we can speak about dialogic organization or intertextuality, even if discourses which are refuted remain implicit. In this way, discourse about discrimination which, at first glance, seems to be an exchange of opinions dominated by consensus, is, in fact, organized as a discourse of self-defense, against the accusation of sexism. This fact explains the relevance of self-defence and positive

self-presentation strategies (see example (17)).

The interpretation of the moderator's intervention, and the positions assumed by one of the participants, who admits in a restrained way the existence of discrimination, permits the construction of an exculpatory discourse, in which a series of arguments are examined and negotiated (discrimination does not exist in management positions and positions of responsibility; it is the criterion of quality that impedes the promotion of women, -because of their low commitment, and so on). Since explicit accusations or declarations of sexism are not formulated by any of the interlocutors, self-defence tactics could only be explained evocating and being aware of the legitimate discourse of the equality of genders; a discourse that does not allow one to confess to being sexist.

The contradiction that exist between legitimate discourse and labour practices and behaviours, and the definition of labour space as eminently male, in which women play a marginal and subsidiary role ((15), (16), and (17)), has two consequences: 1) on the one hand, it prevents overt expressions of sexist positions and the recognition of sexist practices (it would be equivalent to the transgression of legitimate discourse, and in this way, we can speak about the 'democratization of discourse'); 2) on the other hand, it promotes men's need to defend their work space from the other gender, and to keep their dominant position in it. These constraints derive in sexist social practices, which cannot be openly admitted. This is what produces inhibition, as a way of rationalization.

By rationalisation we mean the attempt to make something (one's own life experiences, an opinion, a feeling, etc) publically acceptable (Garfinkel 1984: 267). In this sense, rationalisation contrasts with spontaneity, as Habermas described regarding the rationalisation implicit in dramatic action. This distinction can be applied to the context of our group meeting: In interaction, "the participants take advantage of the situation and organize their interaction by means of regulation and control of the reciprocal access to each other's subjectivity. The concept of self-presentation means, therefore, not spontaneous expressive behaviour, but the stylization of the expression of their own experiences, presented with a concern for the image that each would wish to give to an observer" (Habermas 1989: 487). However, the fact that it is not spontaneous does not necessarily mean that the speaker who uses rationalisations is consciously attempting to deceive the listener, since, as Weber indicates, the underlying motives may conceal, even from the actor himself, the true source of his/her actions (Weber 1979: 9).[13]

As we have seen, the final consequence of this discussion dominated by sexism is the exclusion of women, not only from the workplace, but from the world of all that is positive, of the valued and valuable. Argument-based sexism discredits the opposite gender, and at the same time brings praise for one's own gender.

Thus, inhibition, as part of the rationalization process, permits self-exoneration: "Partial expressions not only result from cognitive and communicative economy, but may also be a functional move in strategy of impression formation, in which speakers want to avoid negative inferences about their social beliefs" (Arkin 1981). We find in the discourses analyzed a clear example of how expression strategies are directly related to interactional strategies of 'face-keeping' or positive

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[13] For different definitions of rationalisation, see Schutz (1974).

self-presentation (van Dijk 1991: 32). It is the non adherence to legitimate discourse and the sexist social practices, which has to be denied to present a positive image in agreement with 'democratic values', and all the discursive strategies and linguistic devices we have examined contribute to this aim.

The essence of the argument seems to be to deny, on the part of those who hold or exercise power, that there is discrimination. The main object of the discussion is self-justification (as to why women are not promoted) or self-exoneration, whilst blaming women (as other devices seem to indicate, in addition to anecdotes). In this sense, it can be affirmed that this sexism is inhibited, at least, to some extent; the managers could have said: 'We don't promote them because they don't deserve it, because they should stay at home,' etc. As Bourdieu (1985: 115) suggests, inhibition gives men the monopoly of all the advantagess: The advantage of working to maintain the status quo, and even giving arguments for this, and the advantage of denying any accusation of sexism. However, inhibition desappears in the last section of the discussions, in which the participants express themselves more spontaneously and react against the suggestions of the moderator that they could change their habits, and, by helping more at home, encourage greater integration of women in the workplace. Now, this type of statement is made explicitly:

(22)   -*Tú tienes más posibilidad de equivocarte con una mujer para ciertos puestos que con un hombre, en cambio tú puedes meter a un hombre de escribiente, de secretario y funciona estupendamente...*
        - *Yo te puedo decir que las dos que tenemos en ventas son nefastas...*
        - *Y luego que si está en estado, que si va a tener un niño... (RG, Dir: 45)*

        -'You are more likely to make a mistake with a woman for certain positions than with a man, you can put a man as a clerk, a secretary, and he does really well ...'
        -'I can tell you the two we have in Sales are dreadful'
        -'And then she gets pregnant, she's going to have a kid'
        (RG, Dir:45)

The aggression shown towards women who are dedicated to their job, whose prototype is the single or divorced woman -that is to say the woman who is not a mother- may be interpreted as a sign of an identity crisis: In this case, the response to a threat towards masculine hegemony. We would suggest that the expressions used are so aggressive as to point to a significant underlying insecurity on the part of men.

7. Conclusions: Towards an interpretation of inhibited sexism

If male discourse is both accepted and legitimate, in contrast with female discourse, if within it the criteria of the businessmen are reproduced, and if its intention is the defence of the status quo and the established social order, them it is appropriate to ask why inhibition occurs. In fact, the women interviewed judge this kind of male

reasoning as the normative discourse, and consider it to be clearly discriminatory, because declarations of equality, always in abstract terms ('all human beings are equal'), exist side-by-side with a kind of reasoning which is clearly sexist and which supports traditional negative stereotypes and the androcentric perspective of the workplace. Our analysis suggests two possible answers. The first is related to social and ethical changes, which entail changes in discourse, in the same way that the democratisation of a society tends to restrain the formulation of explicit, negative judgments concerning gender or race. Sexism and racism are inhibited in discourse. The second answer is related to the first: The excessive emphasis on self-exoneration demonstrates the awareness that there exists a feminine criticism which accuses men of practising discrimination in the workplace. In male discourse we can observe an implicit awareness of this criticism by women, by means of an implicit poliphony, which implies that female discourse is becoming more established and gaining support, opening the breach already opened by the democratization of society in normative discourse (see (13)).

The fact that a discourse is refuted, when it is neither present, nor referred to, but already internalized from the moment it is acknowledged and the need to reply to it is felt, shows that the female argument has gathered sufficient force so that a man who openly admits to discriminatory practices cannot count on having a positive social image. The position of these men is made difficult, almost untenable: How can they maintain the idea that both genders are equals and simultaneously not support the access of women in the workplace and, in particular, to managerial positions; how can they argue that the woman's work should remain as a help to the family budget and, similarly, that the man's role in the household should be restricted to 'lending a hand'; how can they argue that success in life is based on professional success, on personal achievements, but, in the case of the woman, what should satisfy her should be looking after the children. Inhibited sexism minimises and hides these contradictions, but does not sustain them; to support them, the participants return to the discourse of exclusion, of the observable discrimination that is a feature of overt sexism: 'They should have a place but they're either not capable or they exclude themselves'.

Finally, inhibition also indicates a key moment in the process of relations between genders. Inhibition is the threshold of two distinct tendencies, the border line between two alternatives: 1. Inhibited sexism has not taken the complete step. Overt sexism can re-emerges in difficult times, such as the present with the worsening of the economic crisis[14]. One possibility then is either the return, as a refuge, to a more or less traditional sexism or the appearance of new forms. 2. The other possibility is to go the whole way to the full recognition of the legitimacy of equality and its practical application in daily life.

The concept of a dividing line which is strategic and indicates the stopping of a process can be clarified by using the mathematical topology of catastrophe

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[14] It does not appear to be a coincidence that various social analysts agree in considering contemporary society as a society of risk: Luhmann (1979), Beck (1986, 1991, 1992), Giddens (1993). Neither does it seem coincidental that the renewal of a more open sexism co-occurs with moments of crisis - typically, but not necessarily, financial, as could be observed within the United States during the era of Reaganism (Reagan - Bush).

theory (Thom 1983; 1985; Woodcock and Davis 1986; Arnold 1987; Martin Santos 1990). A substantial part of this theory has attempted to determine the moment when a barrier forms in an area that was previously undifferentiated. The barrier moves like a wave through the area and later becomes stable and intensifies. In the previously homogenous area, which, in our case, goes from the most traditional sexism to equality between the genders in all aspects of daily life, inhibited sexism constitutes a barrier in a state of increasing stabilization and intensification. This frontier zone, according to catastrophe theory, has the property of hysteresis: The possibility of two responses to the same position (Zeeman 1977). The function of hysteresis is that of delaying or retarding. Here the two responses are: Either acknowledgement of equality and the end of discriminatory behaviour; or the maintenance of inequality. However, hysteresis is also a rhetorical figure of speech, referring to the placing before of what comes after, in this case accepting in normative discourse the equality between genders without having previously accepted the circumstances and implications of that equality. In Martín Santos' words, the perfect delay would be a hysteresis (Martín Santos 1990: 113). Inhibited sexism is a hysteresis that could delay the attainment of equality. Since no-one is openly discriminating, who are those responsible for discrimination?

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