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The work of construction site managers: problematizing perceptions of embodied work practices

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ABSTRACT

Over the past few decades, scholars have paid increasing attention to work of site managers in the construction industry. In particular, the work situations of site managers have been increasingly depicted as demanding and stressful. The reasons for these situations have been explained as arising from macro-level characteristics of the industry itself. This includes, for instance, the influence of structure (loose coupling) and culture (masculinity and paternalism) that is suggested to promote a particularly demanding work situations characterized by overwork, stress, fragmentation and pressure to be in control of all activities on site.

This thesis takes a critical perspective on the assumption that the everyday work practices of site managers can be explained as causally derived from macro-level characteristics of the industry. Instead, a need to take into account the managers experiences, meaning-making and responses is called for. The aim of the thesis is to explore practical manifestations of site managers' everyday work and how they experience and cope with their work life situations. For this aim, an interview study design with an exploratory and interpretative approach has been chosen.

The thesis discusses findings based on three appended papers. By applying an everyday practice lens on the managers work, the discussion highlights the emergence of four separate yet interrelated conceptualized phenomena that warrant further research. These are reproduction, normalization, autonomy and resistance. These phenomena are discussed in order to highlight nuances, complexities and paradoxes underlying site managers work and to conceptualize new understandings of work in the construction industry. Instead of viewing site managers work as derived from macro-level characteristics, the thesis argues for a need to increasingly consider how issues of overwork and workaholism become reproduced and resisted in context where these tendencies seem to be normalized. The thesis concludes by emphasizing the need for future research on site managers work situations to critically elaborate on the relationship between, on one hand masculine culture and identities *vis-à-vis* practices of (over)work, and on the other hand autonomy and resistance *vis-à-vis* control.

Keywords: autonomy, construction work, embodiment, masculinity, workaholism, work practices

Acknowledgements

Appended papers

This thesis is based on the following appended papers.

Paper I

Sandberg, R., Räisänen, C., Löwstedt, M. and Raiden, A. (2016). Exploring the Work Practices of Site Managers as Processes of Embodiment. *In proceedings of the 32nd Annual ARCOM Conference, 5-7 September 2016, Manchester, UK.* (Awarded best paper)

Paper II

Sandberg, R., Raiden, A. and Räisänen, C. (2016). Workaholics on site! Sustainability of site managers' work situations? *In proceedings of the 21st WBC16 Congress, 30 May-3 June, Tampere, Finland.*

Paper III

Sandberg, R., Räisänen, C., Löwstedt, M. and Raiden, A. (forthcoming). Liberating the semantics: Embodied work(man)ship in construction. In Sage, D. and Vitry, C. (2018) *Societies under construction: Geographies, Sociologies and Histories of Building.* Palgrave.

Additional publications

Räisänen, C., Sandberg, R. and Raiden, A. (2015). Passion or delusion: Middle managers constructing new meanings of work. *In book of abstracts of the WORK2015 conference, 19-21 August, Turku, Finland.*

Sandberg, R., Räisänen, C. and Raiden, A. (2015). What's taking space on site? Embodied place making in construction. *In the proceedings of the APROS/EGOS conference, 9-11 December, Sydney, Australia.*

Sandberg, R., Löwstedt, M., Räisänen, C. and Raiden, A. (2016). The site manager as an omnious being: Exploring the 'body' in embodiment of organizational spaces. *In the proceedings of the 32nd EGOS Colloquium, 4-6 June, Naples, Italy.*

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1. Introduction

Over the last few decades, a growing body of literature has paid attention to the work situation of middle managers in organizations (Peter and Siegrist, 1997; Linstead and Thomas, 2002; Singh and Kumar Dubey, 2011; Parris et al., 2008). Middle managers role is often depicted in negative terms, such as 'stuck in the middle' and 'caught in the crossfire', having to cope with conflicting expectations of different actors in the organizational hierarchy as well as conflicting goals, objectives and political agendas in the organizations (e.g. Keys and Bell, 1982; Dopson and Stewart, 1990). It has also been said that middle managers play an increasingly marginalized role in work organizations where they are "here on their way out, continuously being reduced in number when organizations adopt flatter structures" (Styhre and Josephsson, 2006: 521). Widespread trends in working life towards downsizing and flatter work organizations have also increased the job pressures for middle managers who remain in the organization. A substantial increase in responsibilities and work tasks, as well as an increased span of control over subordinates seems to have become the 'new deal' for many middle managers (Thomas and Dunkerley, 1999; Balogun, 2003; Newell and Dopson, 1996; Wallin et al. 2014). It is perhaps not that surprising that a number of studies have highlighted that middle managers are a risk group for job-related ill health, such as stress, burnout, fatigue and poor well-being (Peter and Siegrist, 1997; Huy, 2002; Hunt, 1986; Berntson et al., 2012).

In this thesis, I address the work and life situation of a specific group of middle managers that has been highlighted as particularly demanding, namely site managers in the construction industry. In a sense, site managers resemble, yet at the same time deviate from the typical image of middle managers. From one perspective, site managers are a group that often are said to play an important and strategic role in construction organizations. They are the project leaders who stand at the center of value-adding activities and have full responsibility for all activities and outcomes in the project (Styhre, 2012). As Mustapha and Naoum (1998: 1) suggest, "the site manager stands at the heart of the building process. His [sic] ability will strongly influence the success or the failure of the project for the contractor, the professional team, the client and ultimately the general public". In regard to this, site managers are often said to have a highly autonomous role – acting as a 'CEO' of construction projects – in which they have ability to influence both the shape and procedures of the project (e.g. Polesie, 2013). This depiction contradicts the image of middle managers as increasingly marginalized in organizations (e.g. Dopson and Stewart, 1990).

From another perspective, site managers are depicted as one of the most demanding positions in the entire construction industry (e.g. Lingard and Francis, 2004, 2006; Styhre and Josephsson, 2006; Djebarni, 1996). Their work situation has been characterized by a heavy work load, substantial overwork and expectancies to be involved in virtually all activities, planning and decision-making in the project (Djebarni, 1996). In addition, site managers are often highly committed and typically feel responsible for all events and activities on site (Styhre, 2012). Already three decades ago, studies warned that apart from being one of the most demanding jobs in the industry, requiring a broad repertoire of skill sets and experience, stress and poor well-being seemed to be higher among site managers than other middle management categories (Davidson and Sutherland, 1992). More recently, the construction literature has shown that the job pressures and responsibilities have been increasing and diversifying, thus identifying site managers as a risk group for stress, burnout and poor health and well-being (Djebarni, 1996; Fraser, 2000; Haynes and Love, 2004; Lingard and Francis, 2004, 2010). This

gloomy characterization ties back to the image of middle managers as 'caught in the crossfire' and 'muddling in the middle' (Newell and Dopson, 1997).

In regard to the increasing interest in the work situations of construction site managers, those studies that have examined their work have tended to draw on macro-level characteristics of construction work in the industry when explaining practical managerial outcomes in their everyday situations. For instance, Styhre (2006; 2011; 2012) in a series of studies on site managers highlight two conditions that are said to shape the everyday work realities of managers on site. The characteristics of site managers work is said to be caused partly by structural contingencies in the industry (Styhre, 2012; see Dubois and Gadde, 2002), where loose couplings between actors and tight couplings between activities in the project puts a lot of pressure on site managers, and partly by cultural contingencies (Styhre, 2011; see e.g. Applebaum, 1999), where gendered ideologies in the industry favors an image of the site manager as a masculine and paternalist father figure. According to Styhre (2012), these contingencies leads site managers to adopt a coping response characterized as 'muddling through, indicating a desire to be in control and a fragmented and omnious tendency towards 'being everywhere at the same time' to solve problems as these crops up.

Considering the emphasis on site managers work and roles as an outcome of macro-level characteristics of the industry, we still know little about how the managers everyday work becomes embodied and manifests in practices in spaces and at times. Moreover, we know less about how the structural conditions connect with the managers everyday work situations. How are they experienced, embodied, coped with, and possibly resisted and altered? A risk with drawing too heavily on such reductionist frameworks is that it risk overlooking the meanings, symbols and ritualization tied to the mundane practices of everyday life (de Certeau, 1984). In other words, by reductively deducing day-to-day behaviors from 'grand' theories about conditions in society and organizations, we come to take the conditions for granted – as a matter of fact – and we lose sight of the complexities, ambiguities and paradoxes underlying their unfolding.

In order to overcome such oversights, scholars have recently highlighted a need to investigate managerial work in organizations so as to take into account practices, activities and events that influence workers' expectations, meanings and world-views about what is desirable and necessarily related to everyday work (Sveningsson et al., 2012). For instance, Tengblad (2012) advocated a practice-based approach to the study of managerial work and leadership so as to include the complexity, heterogeneousness, uncertainty and unpredictability of organizational work places. Moreover, previous studies have suggested that inquiries into the micro-level of how middle managers navigate and enact their day-to-day realities at work can be a powerful tool to understand how macro-structural conditions become reproduced, reinforced and possibly altered in organizations (Willmott, 1997; Thomas and Linstead, 2002; Smircich and Stubbart, 1985).

In this thesis, site managers work situations are examined through a managerial practice lens, where the managers experiences, sense-making and coping responses are central to the inquiry. Inquiries into these lived realities in turn serves as a stepping stone to examine how the managers navigate and cope with their overall work and life situations. The thesis thus explores practical manifestations of site managers everyday work and how they experience and cope with their work and life situations.

The overriding aim of the thesis is to critically examine the everyday work of site managers in order to problematize the image of managerial work practices as causally derived from macro-level characteristics of the construction industry. For this aim, an interview-study design was chosen, with an exploratory and interpretative approach that allows for in-depth inquiries into the experiences, perceptions and meaning-making underlying the site managers work. In regard to the aim, I examine the work of site managers by focusing on two specific research questions:

RQ1: How do site managers work days unfold and how do they experience and talk about their work?

RQ2: What are the implications of the site managers work regime on their work and life situations?

The rationale of these research questions is to problematize previous conceptions of site managers work and to open up for an exploration of site managers work from a practice perspective. More specifically, they open up for an exploration of how a practice perspective on the managers day-to-day work can contribute with new understandings of the conditions of work in the construction industry. The overall rationale of this thesis is to serve as a foundation for thinking and to discuss ideas and possibilities for the way forwards to the doctoral degree.

1.2. Structure and layout of the thesis

The previous chapter has provided a general introduction to the study. It presents the research problem at hand and the importance of exploring the work and life situations of site managers in the construction industry. The aim is presented and from what perspectives the topic will be studied. The second chapter gives a theoretical framing of the study. The first section of the framing presents the work of construction site managers in regard to context of the construction industry. The second section of the framing addresses the work of site managers in regard to masculine culture and identities in the industry. The third chapter presents the methodological approach. The case organization is presented, as well as how the study has been conducted in the organization. Following is a description of the data collection and method of analysis. In the fourth chapter the appended papers are summarized. The purpose and design of the appended papers are presented followed by a brief presentation of the findings. In chapter five, the findings from the appended papers are discussed from a holistic perspective, i.e. analyzing the findings from the three appended papers combined. Patterns and phenomenon emerging in the findings are presented that. These patterns are discussed in order to problematize previous conceptualizations of site managers work, as well as to highlight viable paths for future research. Chapter six gives a conclusion of the study. Implications for theory and practice are presented.

2. Theoretical framing

This chapter provides the theoretical underpinning of this study. Previous theories on site managers work and work situations have highlighted how these are entangled in structural (e.g. Dubois and Gadde, 2002; Styhre, 2012; Mäki and Kerosuo, 2015; Dossick and Neff, 2011) and culturally masculine conditions (e.g. Styhre, 2011; Olofsdotter and Randevåg, 2016, Raiden, 2016; Arditi et al., 2013). Of course, there are other conditions as well that influence and contribute to shape the work practice of site managers, but these two conditions have been highlighted as explaining how site managers adopt a work pattern of 'muddling through' (Styhre, 2012, 2011), characterized by overwork, self-reliance, a desire to be in control and a fragmented orientation of 'being everywhere at the same time'. This chapter presents the work of site managers as it has been conceptualized in regard to the loosely coupled structure and masculine culture of the industry. The chapter further addresses how these conditions have been suggested to explain issues of overwork and the demanding work and life situations among the managers.

2.1. The work of construction site managers

The construction industry has been referred to as the epitome of a project-centered industry, where the predominant value-adding activities are located at site-level in the individual construction project (Dainty et al., 2007). Construction projects are heterogeneous configurations, gathering a wide number of stakeholders from different spheres, professions and organizations, such as clients, architects, contractors, subcontractors, suppliers and craftsmen. Many of these parties engage in the project, individually or in teams, at different stages and in predetermined sequences. This diversity makes for a fragmented reality where the parties, besides working as separate entities, also need to negotiate boundary interfaces on intra and inter-organizational levels (e.g. Dainty et al., 2006; Dossick and Neff, 2011; Fellows and Liu, 2012).

Against this background, the construction industry has been depicted as a loosely coupled system (Dubois and Gadde, 2002). In part, this term refers to how the different actors engaging in the project are loosely coupled to each other (e.g. Styhre, 2012). But the term also denotes how the temporal project organization inherently is loosely coupled to the permanent organization. Due to specific central features embedded in the construction process, it has been said that the industry is unsuitable for centralized forms of authority, planning and decision-making (Dubois and Gadde, 2002). These features include, for instance, unfamiliarity among management with local resources and environment, reliance on the need for local adjustments on site level, and uncertainty and complexity derived from working in an unpredictable environment (see also Stinchcombe, 1959). As a consequence, construction projects have been said to benefit from a high degree of autonomy and self-control (Applebaum, 1999; Steiger and Form, 1991; Riemer, 1979).

Within this loosely coupled system, construction site managers have been said to have a particularly free role (Polesie, 2013; Applebaum, 1999; Styhre, 2011; Dejbarni, 1996). It has been suggested that they require a certain autonomy in order to navigate the complex and unpredictable realities of construction projects (Djebarni, 1996; Polesie, 2013). Styhre (2006), for instance, has depicted the site manager role as similar to a CEO, referring to how they run the project as if they were independent and uncoupled from the permanent organization. Autonomy has also been highlighted as a key-feature why site managers enjoy their job

(Polesie, 2013). As will be shown in this thesis, the role of autonomy, and its entanglement in structural and (masculine) ideological elements in construction organizations, is a phenomenon that I will elaborate on in order to provide new perspectives on site managers' work and life situations.

The site manager has often been referred to as a hub in the industry. According to Mustapha and Naoum (1998: 1): "The site manager stands at the heart of the building process. His [sic] ability will strongly influence the success or the failure of the project for the contractor, the professional team, the client and ultimately the general public". Yet, at the same time as site managers benefit from a high degree of autonomy in their role, the loosely coupled configuration in which construction projects are embedded puts considerable pressure on management of the construction site (Styhre, 2012). Although the actors who are involved in the project are organizationally loosely coupled to each other, the work activities need to be tightly coupled during the construction process on site. A strict budget and time schedule combined with tendencies towards leaner work organizations and supply chains allows little deviation from the initial plan.

The single actor who is responsible for orchestrating the work of all these loosely coupled actors and ensuring coordination of all activities is the site manager. The site manager is de-facto project manager during the production phase of the project. Styhre (2012: 135) suggest that in order to balance the idiosyncratic configuration between loosely coupled actors and tightly coupled activities, the site manager is responsible for both the process and result of the project. As a formal project manager of the production phase, he/she is held accountable for legislative, financial, administrative, procurement, planning, coordination and leadership aspects pertaining to production (Styhre, 2006). In everyday work situations, their practical work activities come to revolve around the tension between formal planning and ad-hoc problem solving (Styhre, 2012; Fraser, 2000; Davidson and Sutherland, 1992). This is translated into a highly fragmented reality, where managers are subject to high and many expectations, demands and interests that not seldom stand in conflict and clash with each other.

It has been said that work on construction sites is often 'chaotic' and complex (Cicmil and Marshall, 2005; Ness, 2010), constituting an ad-hoc environment in which unanticipated situations constantly emerge and militate against formal planning and standardization. In order to cope with the conflicting demands and responsibilities of their work, Styhre (2012) suggested that site managers tend to adopt a work practice of 'muddling through', illustrating a reactive pattern of trying to be everywhere at the same time to solve problems as these crops up. It is suggested that site managers perceive their job as skillful and improvisational problem-solving, where their prime objective is to deal with practical problems and situations that threaten the continuity of the production. According to Styhre, planning pertaining to economic, technical and administrative issues are commonly dealt with outside 'normal' business hours, often during early mornings, evenings and/or weekends. Although the specific work practices may vary, the managers are most often driven by a common goal that the production must continue regardless of interruptions and contingencies. Furthermore, this pattern is reinforced since the site managers are often highly committed and feel responsible for all events and activities on site (ibid. 132). As a consequence, many managers spend long hours on site and are expected to be available at all times to manage the project (Watts, 2009).

It has moreover been suggested that the work of site managers has grown increasingly demanding. It is suggested that the escalation of demands on site managers is much due to new challenges such as increased job complexity and fragmentation due to advances in technology

and telecommunication; increased job-performance pressures to be available at all times; uncertainty exacerbated by cost restraints due to swift fluctuations in the world economy; and, recent trends to strengthen bureaucratization of construction projects by increasing standardizations of processes, practices and communication, as well as accountability and control (Santos et al., 2002; Edum-Fotwe et al., 2004; Styhre, 2006; Styhre and Josephsson, 2006; Polesie, 2013).

In construction research, loose coupling is arguably one of the most influential theoretical frameworks when explaining processes, events and actor relations in construction research. A wide number of articles apply loose coupling as an analytical lens to scrutinize practices in construction organizations. However, scholars rarely engage with this concept in order to understand how it manifests or is embodied in practice. How do actors experience, make sense of and cope with their everyday work in the face of such a seemingly all-embracing logic? How can we understand an agentic view in regard to such a logic? These are aspects that I address in this thesis.

2.2. Gender, masculinity and bodies in construction

The construction industry is often depicted as a highly gendered work context entangled in symbolic associations of masculinity, or 'manliness' (Applebaum, 1999; Hayes, 2002; Thiel, 2007; Ness, 2012; Olofsdotter and Randevåg, 2016). From the outset, it has been said, the industry has been associated with traits, behaviours and craft skills that are typically labelled masculine. The physically and often harsh conditions in combination with a strong craftsman tradition has favoured a dominant image of an ideal construction worker as a strong, virile and risk-taking male breadwinner; someone who is autonomous, self-reliant, single-minded and who is able to endure the hardships on site (Hayes, 2002; Thiel, 2007; Ajslev et al. 2016; Gherardi and Nicolini, 2002; Denissen, 2010). Indeed, the construction literature so far has provided ample evidence that a predominant masculine norm is indeed the ideality against which bodies and identities are measured, and against which workers measure themselves (e.g. Paap, 2006; Denissen 2010; Smith 2013; Raiden 2016).

The role of the site manager has been suggested to be reliant upon masculine norms and ideals (Styhre, 2011; Raiden, 2016; Olofsdotter and Randevåg, 2016). According to Styhre (2011), the masculine ideology in the industry favors an image of the site manager as a paternal figure who is autonomous and self-reliant and who is in full control of all situations and activities on the construction site. Styhre further suggested that the masculine ideology prescribes an ethos of overwork where site managers are expected to be present and work long hours and put work ahead of everything else (see also Kondo, 1990; Ness, 2012; Watts, 2009). From this perspective, overwork is not only something that is demanded of the site managers in order to cope with practical and technical aspects of their work situations (cf. Styhre, 2012). It is also a symbolic ideal that signifies what it means to be a successful leader who is able to manage a project. As suggested by Watts (2009: 54): "[l]ong working hours and visibility hold a symbolic meaning and act as proxies for excellence and commitment. These values are difficult to unsettle and shift, particularly in an industry that has shown itself resistant to change of any kind". In a sense, this ideal corresponds with Acker's (1990) conceptualization of a masculine ideal worker image that pervades organizational structures, processes and positions.

It has also been suggested that site managers more readily identify themselves with the craftsman community on site than with white-collar workers (e.g. Thiel, 2007, 2013). Site managers are not only expected to manage the continuity of the project in regard to conditions

posed by loose coupling. They are also expected to be present and lead the workers in 'the dirt and the mud' (Hayes, 2002), and to engage in the everyday nitty-gritty practices on the building site. Scholars have highlighted how workers with a craft status commonly put emphasis on autonomy and self-reliance in their work (Trist and Bamforth, 1951; Mills, 1951; Sennett, 2008; Applebaum, 1981). Autonomy is seen as a source for pride and enrichment in craft-oriented jobs. In the construction industry, it has been shown that craftsmen on site take considerable pride in their job, especially in taking part in constructing a building that contributes to a larger public good (Watts, 2009; Hayes, 2002).

The craftsman identity has been said to be inherently intertwined with masculine conceptions. As Kondo suggest in her book *Crafting Selves* (1990) that the crafts*man* is precisely a man. The craftsmanship becomes embodied through "a certain kind of masculinity", where the worker endures hardships in silence, rely on his own skills and competencies of 'getting things done' with the limited resources available and regardless of how burdensome the circumstances may be. In addition, Mills (1951: 220ff) compared the craftsman with the ideal of a male breadwinner with workaholic tendencies: "The craftsman's work is the mainspring of the only life he knows; he does not flee from work into a separate sphere of leisure, he brings to his non-working hours the values and qualities developed and employed in his working time; the leisure […] called for is 'the leisure to think about work, that faithful old companion…' there is no split between work and play". This image bears a resemblance to Styhre's (2011) depiction of site managers as self-sufficient, in control and putting work ahead of all else.

In the construction literature as well as in practice, bodies are central. Many of the attributes that are associated with the physical and harsh conditions on the building site – strength, virility, endurance and self-reliance – are representations that have been associated with a masculine and 'manly' body (Thiel, 2006; Paap, 2006; Ajslev et al., 2016; Pink et al., 2012; Applebaum, 1999). Following this view, it is via the ideal of a masculine and 'manly' body that a worker can perform well on site and endure the harsh conditions. The physicality of construction work has therefore often been viewed as a focal point around which the workers craft their masculine identities (Paap, 2006; Ajslev et al., 2016; Wolkowitz, 2006; see also Kondo, 1990). Ness (2012: 662) showcases this entanglement in a simple, yet telling quote from a construction worker: "We perform dirty work because we're tough and masculine". The quote reveals how the conceptualization of 'construction work' is synonymous with a cultural interlacing of physical and material attributes of the job, gendered identities and bodily attributes (see Wolkowitz, 2006). In order to understand the influence of this masculine 'physical culture' (Thiel, 2007) on site managers work and identities, it is important to address the role of the body. More specifically, it becomes crucial to address the processes of how site managers embody ideals and attributes in their work. This is something that I will address in this thesis.

The construction industry is not only a masculine industry, it is also a highly male-dominated (Greed, 2000; Fielden et al., 2000; Sang and Powell, 2012; Styhre, 2012). It has been shown that the representation of women in the construction workforce is approximately 10 % (Dainty et al., 2004). In terms of gender, it has been suggested that the industry is a 'hostile environment' that discriminates against the inclusion of women and other groups that have minority status in the industry (Fielden et al., 2000; see also Gale, 1994; Sang and Powell, 2012). In regard to this, it would be valuable to scrutinize gender differences in site management work and the experiences of female managers within this supposed ubiquitously masculine environment. Can female experiences, perceptions and responses of their work provide new insights into how the masculine culture becomes manifested and reproduced?

There are substantial conceptual overlaps between Styhre's depiction of site managers as a masculine and paternalist figure (2011) and site managers as 'muddling through' (2012). Both conceptualizations highlight a person who wants to be in control and who tries to be everywhere at the same time to solve emerging problems. These depictions also highlight the significance of presence, presenteeism and overwork in regard to internalized expectations and demands (see also Kunda, 1992). Styhre (2011: 953) suggest that the characteristics of the work and role of site managers are mutual outcomes of practical and material characteristics of the industry, including the loosely coupled configuration of the industry itself, and ideological characteristics, including the masculine ideology where the site manager is seen as an autonomous and self-reliant father figure.

As suggested in the introduction, quite a large body of literature has addressed practices in regard to loose coupling and masculinity in the construction industry. But if we do not address the experiences, meaning-making processes and responses in regard to these elements, there is a risk that they remain 'black-boxes'. For instance, is it possible to resist these patterns and do things differently? Site managers have been pinpointed as a key-actor in reproducing masculine ideologies in the construction through their enactment of a paternal leader figure (Styhre, 2011). But how does such a reproduction manifest in practice? As mentioned, considerable literature has addressed autonomy among site managers and craftsmen in the construction literature. This discursive emphasis on autonomy tells of an absence of control and resistance in site managers' work. Of course, there are studies that have addressed power and control in the construction industry (e.g. Clegg, 1978/2013; Clegg and Kreiner, 2013; Styhre, 2006, 2010; Polesie, 2013; Baarts, 2009 to name a few). But are there aspects of site managers' autonomy that have not been problematized and can reveal new insights about their overwork and work life situations? These are some aspects that I hope to address in this thesis.

3. Research design and data collection

A qualitative approach with an explorative and interpretative focus has been adopted in this thesis. According to Bryman (2015), qualitative research methods are generally characterized by an interpretative knowledge theory where emphasis is put on an understanding of how actors interpret the(ir) socially constructed reality. In this sense, qualitative research is often characterized as relying on a social constructionist ontology (see also Berger and Luckmann, 1966). An exploratory approach is based on the idea that in order to understand a phenomenon in-depth, it is necessary to approach it in broad and fairly open-ended terms (Stebbins, 2001). Explorative research is flexible, allowing the researcher to probe different directions, which means that the process can take different turns along the way. Explorative research can thus be both time and energy consuming. Such an approach calls for the reflexivity and critical awareness of the researcher to challenge and revise findings and insights throughout the research process (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009). In practice, this often entail that the research process is characterized by an abductive pattern where both empirical interpretation and theoretical revision influences the analysis (see also Peirce, 1955).

Based on this explorative and interpretative approach, an interview study design has been chosen. Qualitative interviews have been suggested as an appropriate research method when studying how people experience, interpret and conceive of their life worlds (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Aarseth, 2009). Qualitative interviews allow in-depth inquiries of how interviewees experience, perceive and make sense of a situation or a phenomenon. Fairly open-ended qualitative interviews can enable the conversation to be flexible and adaptable, and to follow unforeseen directions that emerge during the interview, which can then provide new and interesting research trajectories (Bryman, 2015).

3.1. Research design

The research design in this study includes two sub-studies. In this section, I will present these studies briefly.

3.1.1. Sub-study 1

The first sub-study comprises an interview study that aimed at examining the work of site managers from a 'best practice' perspective. The rationale for this study was to study the role of construction site managers in regard to change processes in the industry, and how site managers influence the success or failure of construction projects. The data included 19 site managers, 20 closest higher-level bosses and 1 foreman. The respondents came from several different large and mid-sized construction organizations from all over Sweden. In the study, the data collection was purposive. CEO's and top managers from large and mid-sized contractors in Sweden were asked to name their "best" site managers. It is therefore important to note that this specific selection is reflected as a bias in the data. When we have conducted further studies we have seen, however, that many of those work patterns and work-life implications that were apparent among the "best" site managers were also common for the "random" site manager as well.

It should be noted that I was not involved in the collection and transcription of the interviews in this study. These were conducted before I started my PhD program. However, since the study included a large bulk of data that related to the focus of my own project and had not been

included in previous publications, I was invited to analyze the data and utilize it in my project. The purpose with this decision was to give me empirical insight into the work of site managers early on in my research process.

3.1.2. Sub-study 2

Based on the findings and insights from the first sub-study, I had the possibility to develop a second sub-study that allowed a more focused perspective on site managers work situations. Sub-study 1 together with a literature review enabled me to narrow the focus of sub-study 2, as well as to probe issues that previously had emerged and that I felt needed to be problematized. The aim of the second sub-study was thus to conduct in-depth interviews with site managers regarding how they experienced their work and how work influenced their overall work and life situations, including aspects of work-life balance, inter-personal relationships and well-being. In this study, data was collected from one construction company in Sweden, which is one of the largest construction companies in the Nordic countries. In the company, the role of site managers is formally that of a first line manager. Their immediate superior is the project manager who has personnel responsibilities for the site managers in the project. In turn, the site manager has personnel responsibility for all other employee categories, e.g. team leaders and craftsmen, working within his/her project. Site managers constitute the largest managerial group in the company.

The respondents were selected randomly from the list of site managers working in West Sweden, and included individuals with different career backgrounds, gender, age and work-life situations. The initial sample consisted of 8 site managers and 1 production manager. In-depth interviews were conducted with all of the managers. Based on the initial round of interviews, two life stories were selected to be further explored in subsequent follow-up interviews. These consisted of a junior male manager who had worked in the company for only a few years, and a senior female manager who had worked in the company her entire career. The reason why they were selected was that they had substantially different experiences and approaches to work and to their work and life situations. They agreed to be followed up over the next few years, and thus formed two individual 'cases' to zoom in on. Hitherto, they have been interviewed on two occasions.

3.2. Data collection

3.2.1. Interviews

All the interview data were collected through in-depth open interviews using an open-ended interview guide that encouraged the respondents to talk freely and recount their life stories. The respondents were ensured anonymity in that all information revealing identification would be omitted in the final research product. They were also offered the possibility of reading the transcripts of the interviews. The respondents were further informed that parts of the interview would be of a private nature concerning aspects of how they experience and manage their work situation, as well as topics concerning their well-being and work-life balance. None of the respondents expressed concerns or objections with this approach. On the contrary, quite a few actually expressed enthusiasm and were happy for the opportunity to talk and express their concerns regarding what they perceived as an important and relevant topic.

The interviews lasted from 40 minutes to 2 and a half hours (approx. average time: 1 and a half hour). The locations of the interviews were most often either in a meeting room or the site managers' office located on the construction site or at the company's main office in Gothenburg. Before initiating the interviews, the respondents were asked if they had any questions or needed further clarification.

At the outset of the interviews, the respondents were asked to provide the essential bio-data and to briefly present their backgrounds and career paths to date. Subsequently, the respondents were asked a few broad initiating questions concerning their work and expectancies on their role in order to 'open up' the conversation. After this initiation, however, the interviews took the form of conversations, with the respondent doing most of the talking. The aim on my side was to keep the interference at a minimum. I therefore refrained from asking questions that would interrupt their story. 'Free' storytelling has been suggested as an appropriate interview technique when the respondents underlying assumptions, world-views and meaning-making processes guide the conversation (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

In sub-study 2, toward the end of the interviews, the respondents were asked to write down what they interpreted as a 'typical work day', from when they got up in the morning until they went to bed. The purpose with this 'exercise' was to better visualize what the managers working days looked like. While writing, the managers were encouraged to articulate their thoughts out loud so I could take part of how they were thinking and resonated. This exercise was also intended as an overlap; while concentrating on one typical day, the respondents repeated some of the information already conveyed, albeit in a different, and sometimes contradictory way. This provided insights into ambiguities, contradictions and paradoxes underpinning their stories. This exercise was also valuable since it forced the managers to reflect over the timeline of their work days and to provide insights into the extent and frequency of certain work and family tasks that would have been difficult to capture during the interview. During this exercise, it was not uncommon that site managers were surprised to actually visualize their own estimations of how much time a certain task, such as writing e-mails, attending meetings, commuting and working in the evening, actually consumed.

In sub study 2, observations were also made and documented of the respondents' body language. The purpose with this approach was to achieve a thicker description of the data that could complement the verbal interview recordings. For instance, I wrote down notes on the physical appearance of the interviewee and the place where the interview was conducted. I reflected and took notes during the interview sessions regarding jargon, body posture, facial expressions, clothing, interactions, dialect and so on. For instance, during some interviews, colleagues to the site managers repeatedly came in and interrupted the conversation and asked and/or demanded something of the manager. I then wrote down the responses and interaction of these interruptions and later asked the managers how they experienced these episodes. I also wrote note regarding the setting in which they worked, including the building site and office/meeting room, corridors etc. If allowed, I took pictures of the setting with the requirement that I would not publish them. Directly after the interviews, I sat down and transcribed these notes and reflected over observed phenomena, events and/or episodes that could complement the recorded interviews and provide new understandings of their work.

3.3. Analysis of the data

A narrative approach to the analysis of the data seemed reasonable. Narratives have long been viewed as a fundamental form of human understanding and sense-making, through which individuals structure and organize their experiences of the world (Polkinghorne, 1995; Yilijoki, 2005). In organizations studies, scholars have generally focused on narrative analysis as a way to examine how people shape their identities and how meaning is created in their everyday life (Rhodes and Brown, 2005). This approach suited the focus of this thesis which is to explore how site managers experience and makes sense of their everyday realities at work and how they cope with their work and life situations.

Initially, we analyzed the data to identify and code various fragments that made up the respondents' narratives. We then related these fragments to the context in which the narrative is constructed to achieve what Polkinghorne (1995) labels as an 'embodied nature' of the narrative, meaning that we located other significant actors, places, boundaries, events etc. and tried to distinguish relationships within the context. Drawing on Polkinghorne (1995) and Lindebaum and Cassell (2012), narrative analysis was applied in order to code all these fragments that made up the narrative. We then constructed a chronological ordering of events from these elements that linked to an overall plot concerning how the managers experienced their work and managed their work and life situations (see also Czarniawska, 2004).

3.4. Methodological considerations

As mentioned, qualitative interviews provide several advantages when actors experience and interpret their realities. There are, however, disadvantages with interviews as a methodological approach. Interviews should not be seen as a technique to convey an undisputable and realistic 'truth' from the interviewee to the interviewer. For instance, Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) have shown how impression management and political agendas can, and often do – either consciously or unconsciously – confound the interaction between the interlocutors. However, this is also a limitation that can be mitigated in the way the interview(s) are performed. For instance, the interviewer can ask follow-up questions, ask for clarifications, explore contradictions and ask the same question several times in different ways in order to move beyond static and rehearsed presentations and, in this sense, enable a more vivid portrayal of the topic under study. These techniques call for critical and reflexive awareness from the researchers (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009). Additional approaches that enabled mitigation of biases are that transcripts and recordings be analyzed by another scholar. These are all approaches that I have adopted, or at least tried to adopt, in the study. A limitation of the study is a lack of methods that could scrutinize the managers' work practices from complementary perspectives, such as participatory and/or non-participatory observations, shadowing and document analysis. These are approaches that I am considering and have adopted in a recently initiated follow-up study.

4. Summary of papers

4.1. Paper I: Exploring the work practices of site managers as processes of embodiment

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to explore how practice enactments and outcomes in construction are embedded in the lived everyday work activities of people working on site. More specifically, we look at the work of site managers – conceptualized as 'muddling through' – to see what it can reveal about structural and cultural conditions for construction work.

Design: Applying a narrative approach, we draw on in-depth life-story interviews with two site managers – a man and a woman – in a large construction company in Sweden. The two respondents were purposely selected from a group of respondents in the company, including 8 site managers and 1 production manager, representing two very different and contrasting ways of enacting work practices.

Findings: While the work practice of site managers previously has been explained as a mutual outcome of structural and gendered cultural conditions, the findings in the paper suggests that the practical outcomes of these conditions must be understood as enacted. In order to highlight this, the findings emphasize how the two managers enact their everyday realities in different ways. In order to understand this difference, the study suggest that scholars need to take into account the embodied nature of site management work. Specifically, it is revealed how the site manager role inherently is imagined to be occupied by a male body. This body perspective, in turn, reveals the limitations of previous explanatory frameworks and opens up for new possibilities to study the work of managers in construction.

4.2. Paper II: Workaholics on site! Sustainability of site managers' work situations?

Purpose: This paper explores the work patterns and related well-being implications of site managers in construction. In particular, the paper focuses on several features of workaholism found among the managers, operationalized as involvement with work, drive and work enjoyment.

Design: An interpretative approach was chosen based on in-depth interviews with 21 site managers in several construction organizations. A narrative and thematic analysis was applied where the theme 'workaholism', and its different representations, inductively emerged during our data analysis.

Findings: We found representations of a diverse range of workaholic types among the managers, including highly enthusiastic workaholics and more disenchanted workaholic, some on the verge of burnout. Negative well-being implications could be found among all the types of workaholics regardless if they found enjoyment in their work or not. The paper highlights a tendency where the managers express a desire to be self-sufficient, yet at the same time complained about the lack of support in their work. The paper further raises the idea that the organizational conditions favors managers to develop workaholic behaviors as a defense and/or rationalization mechanism in their work.

4.3. Paper III: Liberating the semantics: Embodied work(man)ship in construction

Purpose: This paper explores how construction managers embody their work and non-work roles and responsibilities vis-à-vis themselves, their co-workers and the organization. In particular, we examine the relationship between an entrenched masculine and normalized inscription of an ideal body and the embodied performances of construction work as these unfolds in practice.

Design: In this chapter, we focus on one respondent's body and its performance in an attempt to discern the perceived experiences, emotions and conceptions of a physical body-in-context in regard to prevalent discursive representations. Our presentation and analysis revolves around the embodied perceptions of Mona, a Swedish female senior site manager, whose story showcase the interplay between subjective agency in regard to the dominant masculine culture. The study both draws on and critiques Judith Butler's gender performativity theory.

Findings: The findings highlight nuances and complexities concerning the interplay between embodied subjective agency in regard to prevalent discursive ideal in context. On one hand, Mona's story shows how subjects in the construction industry are constituted in regard to a historically and dominant masculine discourse. However, her story also reveals how her performative enactment cannot be reduced to discursive prescription since inconsistencies and ambiguities underlying the ideal opened up alternative subject positions from where she could engage with the discourse to partly rework it to her advantage. She resisted the masculine discourse, but in the process of manipulating the ideal, she also confirmed its hegemony. The study thus highlights a need to further address the relationship between discursive reproduction and resistance as a disruptive force in regard to construction work.

5. Findings and discussion

In this thesis, I have attempted to look at practical manifestations of site managers daily work and how they experience and cope with their work and life situations. In order to achieve this, an exploratory and interpretative approach was chosen which enabled in-depth inquiries into the practices and meaning-making processes underlying site management work. Considering this practice approach, it is relevant to ask what specific use has an everyday practice lens on the managers day-to-day work contributed with in the study.

At a first glance, the findings and different patterns that emerged in the three papers appeared somewhat scattered in relation to each other. This is not surprising considering the explorative approach of the study. However, of particular interest in the papers were four phenomena that emerged when analyzing the findings in the studies from a holistic perspective, i.e. analyzing the findings from the three appended papers combined. These four conceptualized phenomena are *reproduction*, *normalization, autonomy* and *resistance,* which are discussed below. There are probably other patterns/concepts that could be highlighted and discussed from the studies, but I have chosen these four concepts since they since they have been the most salient and, in my view, warrant further research. By discussing the data in regard to these concepts, I will answer the research questions posed in the introduction concerning how the managers' work days unfold and how they experience and talk about their work (RQ1) and the implications of site managers work regime on their work and life situations (RQ2). The concepts reproduction and normalization are discussed in separate sections below. However, I have chosen to discuss autonomy and resistance in a combined section due to their mutual entanglement with conditions of control in the context of construction work.

5.1. Can reproduction be disrupted?

The culture on construction sites has often been depicted as 'fixed', conservative and unchangeable, often associated with stereotypical images of masculine construction workers (e.g. Freeman, 1993; Hayes, 2002; Applebaum, 1999). Scholars have emphasized how the culture holds self-defining qualities that functions as a strong source of identification in the industry (Thiel, 2007; Löwstedt and Räisänen, 2014; Ness, 2012). Hayes (2002: 651), for instance, suggested that "site existence might be harsh, uncertain and dangerous – not a future operatives immediately wanted for their sons – but it was informal, manly and self-defining". Emphasizing masculine and working-class ideals, such as independence, self-reliance, pride, 'roughness' in the job becomes a way to assert a positive collective identity on site (Hayes, 2002; Paap, 2006; Thiel, 2007; see also Sennet and Cobb, 1972; Willis, 1977). These identifications have in turn been said to militate against change initiatives that threatens the collective identity (e.g. Ness, 2012; Hayes, 2002) and to promote a demanding work culture characterized by long working hours, presenteeism and poor work-life balance (e.g. Watts, 2007; Lingard and Francis, 2010). These latter characteristics have been shown to be particularly salient in the role and work of construction site managers (Styhre, 2011; Olofsdotter and Randevåg, 2015).

This study confirms the constitutive power of a historically and discursively dominant culture that shapes the subjectivities of site managers in the construction industry. This was most apparent in how managers actively related to a masculine ideal in their everyday work, for instance by striving to live up to an ideal of being self-reliant and in control of all activities on the construction site (paper II). In regard to this, many site managers reproduced a reactive

coping pattern resembling Styhre's (2012) conceptualization of 'muddling through'. However, the study also reveals that the influence of the dominant discursive ideal was contingent of the site managers own responses to this condition. This became apparent when inconsistencies and contradictions underlying the masculine discursive ideal enabled managers to resist ascribed gendered subject positions to proactively influence their work situations (paper III). From this position, we argue that the site managers enactment cannot be reduced only to discursive prescription, as suggested by Butler (1990) and Foucault (1990, 2012), but implicates a reflexive process that offers possibilities to intervene in and rework the discourse (following Smith, 1988; Nelson, 1999; see also Spicer et al., 2009). Against the background of the culture in construction as 'fixed' and associated with rigid masculine stereotypes, the significance of reflexivity underlying the influence and reproduction of the dominant work culture has hitherto received little attention in the construction literature. This is an aspect that warrants further research.

Reflexivity is a process that brings about change in the process of reflection (Hibbert et al., 2010). So, how can we understand change in regard to a work culture that is known to be reluctant to change and is associated with stereotypes? The study shows that in order to contribute to possibilities for change, construction scholars further need to understand the *why* and the *how* of cultural and discursive reproduction, as well as how actors resist patterns of reproduction (paper III). If actors are able to intervene in and rework the dominant discourse at the same time as they are constituted through it, then it is important to further address the conditions of and for these processes. This study contributes empirically and theoretically to shed some light on the processes of reproduction and resistance. Specifically, the study highlights the significance of enactment and embodiment as analytical lenses to investigate how construction site managers reflexively engage with the cultural discourse. For instance, the findings reveal widespread expectations on the site manager's role to be inherently embodied and occupied by a man (paper I). From this perspective, it becomes valuable to examine how female site managers mobilise their bodies to engage with and disrupt normalized gendered preconceptions embedded in the discourse and rework these through deliberate enactments (paper III). Considering an increased interest among construction scholars in studying the lived realities of people working on site (see e.g. Chan and Räisänen, 2009; Pink et al., 2012), surprisingly few studies have addressed the role of bodies and embodiment in the unfolding of these lived realities. The study argues for a need to 'bring the body back in' (Zola, 1999) as an analytical tool to investigate culture, identities and work practices in the construction industry.

5.2. Normalization of workaholism

An interesting feature that emerged in the findings was a tendency among construction site managers to normalize workaholism, as well as its harmful implications on their well-being and social life. This is a pattern that became apparent during the interviews, and it is an implicit pattern in all the appended papers. For instance, the normalization could take the form of trivializing, marginalizing and 'talking away' health and family problems caused by work. They reframed these problems during the interviews so they appeared less deviating and strange and instead presented as a normal element in their everyday work and life situations. On one hand, the managers could talk freely and complain about their work situations and the harmful consequences caused by their overwork. This included, for instance, how the site managers talked about divorces, health problem, stress, burnout and neglect of family and friends. On the other hand, however, they trivialized these accounts through how they talked about their role, depicting the harmful consequences as if these were expected and ordinary features of their job (if you want to work in this business you have tolerate and endure these kinds of consequences).

Consequently, for the site managers, it did not necessarily entail a contradiction to depict their family and health as "collateral damage" of work while simultaneously stating that they have a "good work-life balance" (paper III).

It is difficult to explain this behavior from previous theories of construction work and the work of site managers. Previous studies have commonly explained site managers' overwork as an outcome of external changes, pressures, demands and expectancies (e.g. Styhre, 2006; Styhre and Josephsson, 2006). Studies that have looked at intrinsic forces driving overwork are fewer and have often addressed the site managers overwork as an outcome of the dominant masculine culture which favors an ideal of commitment, presenteeism and constant availability (e.g. Watts, 2009; Styhre, 2011; Lingard and Francis, 2010; Papers I, II, III). From this perspective, the site managers seem to have internalized the ideal as their own and act upon the expectations associated with the ideal. The connection between overwork and masculinity has been said to be particularly salient among site managers since the masculine culture favors a paternalist ideal among site managers, where they are expected to be self-reliant, work long hours and be in control (Styhre, 2011; Olofsdotter and Randevåg, 2015).

Linkages between the masculine ethos of overwork and the managers' workaholic tendencies are many in this thesis. The findings support the notion that overwork, presenteeism, autonomy and self-reliance holds a symbolic meaning underpinning the ideal of a successful site manager. However, the masculine ethos of overwork does not in itself explain why site managers themselves seem to normalize workaholism in their stories, nor why they ambiguously emphasize and trivialize their accounts of poor well-being caused by their overwork. In order to explain this tendency, it is necessary to address what workaholism *means* to the site managers and how they rationalize and make sense of it in regard to their own health, well-being and relationships. For instance, Watts (2007) has suggested that long working hours, presence and visibility act as a symbolic proxy for being a successful construction worker. So how do the site managers relate to this ideal? And how do they engage with this symbolic proxy?

In his study *Engineering Culture* (1992), Gideon Kunda has shown that becoming addicted to work and to burn yourself out has manifold meanings in organizations. For instance, it gives a negative impression since it signifies that the employee has lost the ability of self-management (p.199). Crossing the boundary of one's own limitations and losing the ability to distance oneself from work are signs of poor self-control. It reveals that they are not able to handle pressure. On the other hand, addiction to work is not only seen as negative in organizations since it sends a positive message that a worker has invested the whole self in the organization (see also Fleming and Sturdy, 2009). It symbolizes that they are willing to give their everything to work – a true sign of commitment and self-sacrifice (p.203). Furthermore, for middle managers who strive upward in the organization, success is dependent on not only hard work, but also the ability to align with the ethos, style and system of signs in the company (Jackall, 1988; see also Reid, 2014).

The interviews in this study indicate that one of the most distinct ethos in the organization is to be autonomous and self-reliant (see also Applebaum, 1981, 1999; Hayes, 2002; Thiel, 2007, 2013). The symbolism of autonomy can then be used as an analytical tool to scrutinize the relationship between workaholism and the masculine ideal. The identification with this ethos could explain why the managers themselves justified poor well-being and their neglect of family life. The stories of how managers, for instance, work while they are sick, attesting invoices in the TV sofa with a child on their knee, and going to work in the middle of the night become embodied signs that they are able to manage *their* project no matter what the

circumstances, i.e. they have proven themselves to be independent and self-reliant (paper III). When the managers abuse their own bodies in excessive overwork, the physical manifestations of this abuse – overweight, high blood pressure, stress, burnout etc. – signify the ability to live up to the ideal. These findings go beyond the image of site managers overwork as primarily an outcome of externalized pressures (e.g. Styhre, 2012; Djebarni, 1996; Fraser, 2000; Haynes and Love, 2004) and it highlights a much more complex and ambiguous process underlying internalized pressures caused by identification with masculinity (e.g. Styhre, 2011; Olofsdotter and Randevåg, 2015; Watts, 2007).

The findings further provide clues to understand the paradoxical pattern in the managers' stories when they openly displayed and complained about their health and family issues and later on trivialized these. For instance, when the managers 'confessed' their problems to me during the interviews, this can be seen as a kind of narrative evidence of their victimization by an overly demanding work situation (and top-management) that takes a toll on their bodies and health (e.g. Bruner, 2004). By establishing themselves as victims in the narrative, they set a certain scene where they present themselves as performing their work against all the odds. From a gender perspective, such 'confessions' might be interpreted as a weakness that stands in conflict with the image of the 'macho' and heroic construction worker (e.g. Hayes, 2002; Paap, 2006; Gherardi and Nicolini, 2002). However, by setting the scene in this way, they open up for the possibility to transform the plot through their deliberate and agentic actions in a way that strengthens their self-image (e.g. paper III). The transfer from confession to trivialization can be interpreted as a move to conjure heroism through the deliberate actions that they perform. For instance, they do not perform their work under straining conditions, they perform their work *despite* the fact that it causes them strain. Being able to convey an image that family and health problems are an expected feature of the job and that they have the ability to manage these problems can be seen as a token that they are *true* site managers (see Ness, 2012). The self-sacrifices become a sign of their self-reliance and dedication to work, a confirmation of the ideal (Kunda, 1992). This provides an, if not new, then at least a different perspective on how site managers reproduce masculine ideals in the construction industry (cf. Styhre, 2011; Paap, 2006).

An apparent feature in the data is how the normalization of workaholism is dependent of how the managers themselves justify their work and life situations. There is thus a need to further explore and theorize the different regimes of justification (e.g. Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991) present in the site managers' daily work situations, and how these regimes can be linked to institutionalized conditions embedded in their work context. For instance, the managers subjective justification of their work situations seems to be entangled in, and draws its rhetoric from a masculine craftsman identity (e.g. Mills, 1951; Kondo, 1990; Sennett, 2008). As suggested by Kondo (1990), enduring hardships in silence and 'getting things done', performing one's skilful labour with the limited resources available and despite the burdensome conditions can be seen to lie at the heart of the craftsman identity. Patterns of masculine self-reliance and enduring hardships – 'a good man manages himself' – was common in many of the managers' stories. They hesitated to ask for help when needed, and they took great pride in finalizing the project without the interference from outsiders in *their* realm. Based on these insights, linkages between gender ideals, identification and justification of work regimes seem like a viable path to explore further.

Furthermore, drawing from these insights, embodying the masculine ideal of being self-reliant and enduring hardships highlight a temporal element in how the managers justify their work situation. "Enduring hardships" conveys an image that things will get better when the hardships

eventually have been endured. In other words, it entails a postponed reward of some kind for all the efforts and sacrifices that site managers put into their work. In his book *The Corrosion of Character* (1999), Richard Sennett argues that the reason why people can establish and maintain a coherent personal character[1] in their work life and avoid alienation is through a mutual understanding of a long-term principle where they can make short-term sacrifices in order to reach a future goal. When the site managers endure hardships and periods of exhausting overwork, this is done with the notion that calmer periods will follow (paper III). In this sense, they can justify neglecting their family, social life and personal health since they know that things will get calmer on the other side, and then they can recover. As a manager put it: "I just need to keep on struggling… until it gets calmer". However, when site managers in this study describe calmer periods, it appeared as if these seldom materialized. And when they eventually did they did not strike me as very calm at all since they appeared to leave little room for mental and physical recovery (ibid.). Recent studies have started to explore fantasies of the self and how these influence employees' abilities to resist and/or justify patterns of overwork (e.g. Costas and Grey, 2014; Ekman, 2013; Muhr and Kirkegaard, 2013; Bloom, 2016). Considering the influence of the masculine craftsman identity, with its emphasis on endurance, silence and self-reliance (e.g. Kondo, 1990), it seems like a interesting path to explore the role of fantasies and how these influence site managers abilities to resist patterns of workaholism.

5.3. Autonomy and resistance in the (seeming) absence of control

The findings in this study suggest that autonomy in construction seems to be a much more ambiguous and elusive phenomenon than previously suggested (e.g. Applebaum, 1981, 1999; Riemer, 1982; Styhre, 2011; Hayes, 2002). This was a phenomenon that became apparent when I asked the managers how they perceived their role. Here, most of the managers stressed that they saw their role as free and that they had the autonomy and authority to run their projects freely. One of the most apparent features in their stories was that freedom to run the projects independently was important to them (see also Styhre, 2006). For instance, this was manifested in their stories in the way that said that they enjoyed the responsibilities and the work enrichment enabled by autonomy in their role. This feeling of ownership and enrichment was something that they said generated enormous pride and satisfaction, especially when they could see the building grow in front of them and say "I built that!" (paper II). However, at the same time as the managers saw themselves as free, and valued freedom as one of the most important features of their job, they did not seem particularly free at all when they described their work and life situations. They complained about how their role was tied to all too many expectations and demands, and they normalized expectations of presenteeism and excessive overwork. Their role was described as a 'superman ideal' that they desired, yet at the same time felt was unattainable to them. They wanted to be self-reliant, yet they complained about how lack of organizational support caused them to work excessively long hours (ibid.) Hence, at the same time as they enjoyed and justified their seemingly free work situations, they also expressed needs to resist it, and even escape from it (paper III), in order to achieve a sustainable work life situation.

For individuals who identify themselves as free and autonomous, what is there then to resist? If they are autonomous, why do they not exert self-control to manage their situation in the way

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[1] Sennet defines personal character as: "the long-term aspect of our emotional experience. Character is expressed by loyalty and mutual commitment, or through the pursuit of long-term goals, or by the practice of delayed gratification for the sake of a future end."

they desire and that satisfies their needs? Scholars in management and organization studies have started to address the complexity underlying these questions (e.g. Kärreman and Alvesson, 2009; Ekman, 2013; Costas and Grey, 2014; Robertson and Swan, 2003, Reid, 2015). Many of the studies that have addressed these issues have done so in professional and knowledge work, with considerable attention paid to the work and context of management consultants. I would argue that asking these questions in the context of construction is particularly relevant. Here, quite a large body of literature has argued that the industry lacks an effective management control apparatus to influence site personnel (Stinchcombe, 1959; Applebaum, 1981, 1999; Riemer, 1982; Steiger and Form, 1991; Hayes, 2002; Dubois and Gadde, 2002; Thiel, 2007, 2013). Partly, this has been said to be due to the craft administrative organization of the industry that restrain management's abilities to exert bureaucratic control (Stinchcombe, 1959). But it has also been said to be a consequence of how craftsmen on site form part of a cultural community with a strong social identity, guided by scepticism and hostility towards management initiatives in the project (Ness, 2012; Hayes, 2002, see also Collinson, 1992). Rather than being controlled directly or indirectly, it has been suggested that site operations are characterized by an 'orchestration of work' where the personnel need to be trusted (Thiel, 2007; see also Gouldner, 1954). Considering the emphasis on trust, orchestration and communication and the common depiction of construction projects as more or less uncoupled from the influences of the permanent organization (see Styhre, 2006), surprisingly few studies have hitherto addressed the influence of power relations and hidden control mechanisms in the construction industry. Some notable exceptions are Clegg (1976), Baarts (2009), Styhre (2010) and Clegg and Kreiner (2013). But are there other control mechanisms involved that have been overlooked in construction research?

Of course, it should be noted that there are studies that have questioned and problematized the image of site managers work as free and autonomous. Eccles (1981), for instance, has criticized the claims of craft administration in construction, and argued that the industry holds bureaucratic elements. More recently, Styhre (2006) claimed that the professionalization of the project management function in construction has implied a bureaucratization of the work of site managers. In a similar vein, Polesie (2013) has suggested that trends among construction companies to increase standardization have led to decreased autonomy and increased control of the site managers. The findings in my study corroborate that the site manager role has been subject to increasing administration and paperwork, thus increasing pressure on their already perceived pressured work situations (paper I, II and III). However, despite the bureaucratic control mechanisms, they still claimed to be free and self-reliant. This too could be explained by normalization; historically, site managers have been seen as rulers of their site kingdom, a role they have difficulties relinquishing. We could argue that their often self-imposed overwork is a manifestation of their hanging on to this role as it is rapidly becoming an anachronism. Therefore, bureaucratic control does not in itself explain the site managers justification of their extreme work practices at the same time as they expressed a desire to resist them.

The findings in this study point to another direction that has not previously been emphasized in the construction literature. They indicate that the reason why site managers have problems resisting work is dependent of their own identification with autonomy, especially its masculine entanglement with self-reliance. In a significant way, this view differs from previous studies that emphasize overwork and workaholism as internalized masculine ideals (e.g. Watts, 2007; Styhre, 2011; Hayes, 2002; Lingard and Francis, 2010). The data support that site managers identify with the ideal and how it encourages overwork, presence and presenteeism (Watts, 2007), yet, an interesting aspect is that identification with self-reliance seems to lead site managers to internalize external pressures and demands as self-chosen, even when their stories

suggest that these are imposed on them (see Mazmanian et al., 2013). For instance, a common theme in the stories was that the managers had difficulties delegating work tasks and ask for organizational support since this interfered with their self-image as independent. This pattern was further complicated by the fact that they felt that organizational support was rarely offered them in practice even when they silently desired it, and at rare occasions asked for it (paper I and II). So, here we have a situation where the masculine ideal puts pressure on them to feel responsible for all activities on site (Styhre, 2012). They refrain from asking for help, but due to the many demands put on them, they *need* support in order to make ends meet in the project. However, their narratives reveal that the core-problem in their situation is that, even if they would ask for help, there is only scarce help to be gotten (paper II). They seem to compensate for this lack by working long hours and on weekends and vacations. It appears as if they rationalize and persuade themselves that their self-reliance is self-chosen, but an underlying narrative shows that they are actually forced to be self-reliant since they lack options. In other words, their perceived autonomy seems to be partly an illusion (Hodgson and Briand, 2013). What accounts for such an interesting and paradoxical behaviour? This is a question that I hope to answer in further research.

This pattern provides insights into the paradoxical nature of autonomy in site managers' work and life situations. It raises the notion that the discourse of masculine self-reliance enables a distribution of power that aligns with (top-)managerial interests and makes it difficult to recognize and resist (see Kärreman and Alvesson, 2009; Ekman, 2013). If the managers patterns of justification highlight how groups and individuals rationalize their decisions, then a control perspective could highlight how these patterns connect to managerial interests and incentives. Based on these insights, I believe it would be fruitful to further critically examine linkages between managerial interests and control, masculine identities and resistance (see e.g. Collinson, 1992). For example, how do top-managerial dominant discourses change over time as socio-economic conditions shift?

These potential linkages raise a provocative question: *do construction organizations have an interest in sustaining and reproducing a collective masculine identity based on autonomy and self-reliance in the site-culture?* This question is provocative since it goes against the grain of how masculinity hitherto has been presented in the construction literature. It is commonly assumed that construction organizations aim to eliminate or constrain the masculine mindset on site, for instance in regard to discrimination (e.g. Fielden et al., 2000; Greed, 2000; Sang and Powell, 2012); Styhre, 2011) and since it conflicts with managements' attempts to achieve a more bureaucratized work organization with increasing management control and standardized site operations (e.g. Polesie, 2013; Styhre, 2006). However, to date, the industry is still reliant on distributed project organizing with a need to decentralize authority, planning and decision-making to the individual project (Dubois and Gadde, 2002). As Styhre (2012) has suggested, in this loosely coupled configuration, it is unavoidable that considerable pressure is being put on the site manager at the same time as their autonomy is being curtailed by standardization processes such as industrial building and lean thinking. The company *needs* a competent jack-of-all-trades who has an overview of the whole complex situation, and who is willing to solve whatever practical problems that crop up. At the end of the day, they *need* someone who is willing to do substantial sacrifices and who is willing to step up and solve the practical 'chaos' (Ness, 2010) on a site simply because this is how value is created in and for the construction companies (Mustapha and Naoum, 1998). So, from this perspective, the company needs someone who can 'muddle through' for them. In this sense, perhaps 'muddling through' should not be conceptualized as an individual coping response, but as an ideal that is desired and

normalized within this specific context. The question then is if it is possible to resist such a normalized ideal?

6. Conclusions for now and the way forward

The initial purpose of this thesis was to explore practical manifestations of site managers everyday work and their experiences of coping with their work and life situations. Throughout the research process, four interrelated phenomena have emerged throughout the exploration of the managers everyday work practices. These are cultural reproduction, normalization, autonomy and resistance. By discussing the data in regard to these phenomena, it has become clear that the managers responses to their everyday work situations are not so much a question of *coping*, as a question of *resistance*. The findings showed how the managers struggled for their autonomy and how they attempted to resist a normalized and reproduced work situation in which the dominant masculine ideology puts a lot of pressure on the site managers, but also how the reproduced situation leads them to put considerable pressure on themselves. Based on these insights, two specific questions emerge from the exploration in this thesis. What conditions underlie the normalization of managers workaholic tendencies in the construction industry? And, is it possible to resist these normalized tendencies? These are questions that warrants further research to answer.

Throughout the discussion, several interesting empirical findings emerged that highlight paradoxical patterns in the site managers' work situations. These include, for instance, the contradictory pattern of trivialization underlying the managers justification of their work situations, tensions between autonomy and self-reliance and how the managers appear to be controlled although studies emphasize the lack of control in the construction industry. These paradoxical patterns could be seen as mysteries (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2011), representing odd and strange tendencies that deviate both from my personal pre-conceptions and theories that previously have depicted the work of construction site managers in the construction literature. Although these mysteries are not solved in this thesis, they do provide a basis for future research to follow up and critically elaborate on. This is indeed something that I hope to contribute to.

The study has several implications for theory and practice concerning construction work. The study indicates that both scholars and practitioners further need to problematize common assumptions about the relationship between the masculine culture and work practices in the industry. For instance, it is commonly argued that the masculine 'macho culture' in the industry must be resisted and eventually eradicated. My findings do not oppose this; on the contrary, scholars and practitioners need to find effective ways to "combat" destructive norms and values that, for instance, lead to discrimination and hostility towards minority groups and individuals that do not live up to the masculinized ideal of a construction worker. However, the study does indicate that certain traits, skills and behaviors that are labeled masculine, and that are seen as widespread and problematic in the industry actually appear to be encouraged in *practice*. The masculine norm of autonomy and self-reliance appears to be, not only an outcome of norms and values in the alleged reified masculine culture, but also encouraged through practical aspects. This includes factors, such as loose coupling between actors (Dubois and Gadde, 2002), conditions of complexity and uncertainty on site-level (Gidado, 1996) and the need for site management to plan and orchestrate operations in tightly coupled sequences (Styhre, 2012). These factors in combination lead to pressures that favor a masculinized image of construction managers as someone who is paternalistic, self-reliant, independent and in control (Styhre, 2011; Buckle and Thomas, 2003; Packendorff and Lindgren, 2006). An implication of this perspective is that even if construction scholars contest masculine norms and values, the 'infamous' and unwanted ideal risks being reproduced if we do not address the practical conditions that reproduce it. Embodiment and enactment have been suggested as viable

analytical lenses to address this issue, but there are probably other lenses as well that could be valuable.

This thesis has argued for a need for scholars to increasingly consider issues of power, control and resistance in the construction industry. The industry has been said to lack effective control mechanisms, and personnel working on site have been said to benefit from a high degree of freedom and self-control. This thesis has problematized this image and has suggested connections between (top-)managerial interests and site managers (masculine) identification with autonomy and self-reliance. This perspective ought to be examined further since it could provide new valuable explanations for site managers work situations and overwork.

Overall, the thesis has shown how macro-level characteristics of the industry, such as its masculine culture and loosely coupled structure, indeed shapes and reproduces the work situations of site managers. But it does so in more complex and unexpected ways than previously suggested. When studying the work of site managers from an everyday practice perspective, it has been shown that the influences of these conditions are filled with paradoxes, complexities, contradictions and unforeseen linkages (e.g. Tengblad, 2012). These findings reveal new insights on the work of site managers, but it also provides a deeper understanding of the work conditions in the industry. These insights and understandings could not have been captured by reductively deducing the managers' lived realities from grand theories (de Certeau, 1984). These insights call for a further need to critically examine the lived realities of managers and workers in the construction industry, and in other industries, in order to provide new insights on the conditions of work in a rapidly and globally changing world.

7. References

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