

Managing
like

a

Man

Judy Wajcman

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Women and Men in Corporate
Management

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Introduction

The feminization of the paid labour force has been heralded as one of the most important social changes in the twentieth century. Many argue that women's new-found economic independence is revolutionary. It has been accompanied by a profound cultural shift, with the emergence of a new consciousness and widespread public discourse about gender equity. A liberal commitment to equality between the sexes is now broadly accepted and is even enshrined in law.

Western societies have achieved some progress towards gender equity in the public sphere of the labour market. In the private sphere, intimate relations are changing as well, with modern marriages said to be taking a new companionate form. What it means to be a man or a woman is no longer ordained by 'nature'. Gendered identities have undergone a major transformation.

Even so, as we approach the end of the twentieth century, men continue to monopolize the elite levels of corporate power in almost all regions of the world. While the legitimacy of patriarchy has been eroded, it is far from being rendered obsolete. The material and institutional structures of patriarchy are still largely intact.

How can we even begin to understand the persistence of sexual inequality within an explicit framework of equality? This book suggests that an investigation of the gender relations of senior management in a 'post-feminist' age can be instructive for a number of reasons. Firstly, the managerial job is a repository of power and authority, the site of decision-making and rule-making within organizations. Women's access to senior management is both a symbol and a measure of organizational change.

Over recent decades women have entered lower and middle managerial levels in large numbers without major disruption to the ways organizations operate. Only when they are present at the top are they perceived as a direct threat and challenge to male power. After being excluded for so long, women who have gained institutional power may make a difference to the way the job is done. How differently do men respond to women sharing what remains largely male territory?

Secondly, to study senior women managers is to study exceptional women in an atypical context. They inhabit a corporate world that is very male dominated, and they are inevitably disruptive to the status quo. When a woman occupies a position traditionally filled by a man, the significance of her sex, for both how she operates and how she is treated, is subjected to scrutiny in a way that the 'normal' hierarchical order is not. The usually hidden processes and tensions of gender relations at work are likely to be more visible in high-technology multinationals where women are breaking new ground.

Finally, there is an increasing preoccupation in both feminist theory and organization theory with questions of culture and subjectivity. These issues are particularly critical to management, because managers are deemed to have certain attributes and personalities, and a certain leadership style. After all, what managers do most of the time is communicate directly with people. So sharing a common language and understanding is crucial. Management literature is now preoccupied with the dynamics of cultural change within organizations and how to harness it in the pursuit of profit.

This book is innovatory in several respects. A key argument of the book is that management incorporates a male standard that positions women as out of place. Indeed, the construction of women as different from men is one of

the mechanisms whereby male power in the workplace is maintained. There is now an extensive literature on women and management, much of it prescriptive in nature. However, most of this writing is exclusively about women managers, treated in isolation from men. Quarantining women in this way has the effect of locating women as the problem, and reinforces assumptions that men are uniformly to the management-manner born. This book is unique in comparing men and women in similar senior managerial positions. It is a study of men and women who work alongside each other doing the same jobs, encompassing the experiences of both sexes in the managerial hierarchy. Since masculinity and femininity are inherently relational concepts, with meaning only in relation to each other, this study is then able to analyse the gender regimes of management.

I use the concept gender regime (a term introduced by Connell 1987) as a shorthand for institutionalized power relations between men and women where gender is a property of institutions and historical processes, as well as of individuals. Gendering processes are involved in how jobs and careers are constituted, both in the symbolic order and in organizational practices (discursive and material), and these power relations are embedded in the subjective gender identity of managers.

The nexus between work and home in the formation of particular gender regimes is central to the argument. Although studies of the workplace and research on family and home life are now well developed, these areas have become separate specialisms within sociology. This book examines the interconnections between home and employment within a single framework and presents substantial material on the home lives of managers. In addition, I bring together insights developed on gender and work from perspectives in different disciplines. Thus I draw

on industrial relations, on organizational behaviour and management studies, as well as on sociological and feminist analyses.

The research is based on a study of managers in high-technology multinational companies that boast sophisticated equal opportunity policies and are formally committed to their implementation. However, this project is not simply an evaluation of sex equality strategies in the workplace. Rather, it is a comparative analysis of men's and women's experience in a changing corporate climate.

I approached five major companies, all of which agreed to participate. Although located in Britain, they are global companies with strikingly similar approaches to the management of labour. The companies are all multinationals, and indeed the firm where most of the data were collected, the case study company, is US owned. Although multinationals' behaviour in relation to labour is shaped by the regulatory systems of particular nation-states, there seems to be a general move away from hierarchical organization towards a more flexible structure. Corporate restructuring, accompanied by organizational 'delayering' and the decline of the long-term, single-organization career, is the common trend in capitalist economies. The organizational processes which are reshaping management in the UK mirror those operating in American, European or Australian firms. The central issues raised in the book, therefore, are not specific to one country but have a much wider relevance.

The companies operate in the technologically advanced sectors of oil, chemicals and computing services, and were selected for the following reasons. Firstly, they are companies widely acknowledged to be at the forefront of equal opportunity policies. So the project set out to study best practice companies. Secondly, it seemed appropriate and timely to examine the private sector. Most existing

research in this area deals with the public sector, for example, the British National Health Service. Finally, it is often claimed that the new fastgrowing high-tech industries provide easier access to women managers than those that have inherited long-standing organizational structures.

This research adopts a questionnaire survey methodology. However, I also draw extensively on qualitative data derived from indepth interviews conducted during 1994 with 20 women and men managers in the case study company. The interviewees, who participated in the survey, exhibit characteristics typical of the profile of the overall sample. A full description of the case study company, which I have called 'Chip', can be found in chapter 4.

The use of the term 'manager' varies considerably from one organizational setting to another. In some it is used to designate levels of status or personal prestige, while in others it delineates a variety of functional responsibilities (see, for example, Nicholson and West 1988; Stewart 1967). Generally the term describes those who, in one way or another, and to varying degrees, coordinate and control the behaviour of others. For this study I accepted the definition used by the organizations themselves. Senior managers, the subject of this study, are those earning over £40,000 a year in 1993. This level of managerial salary is consistent across the five companies involved, all of which recognized £40,000 as the cut-off between senior and middle management. Given how few women there are in the most senior positions, this definition also allowed for a reasonable sample size. It produced a remarkably similar number of women (on average 24) across all the companies. Although the companies in the study would be regarded as 'leading edge' cases, in fact women are still seriously underrepresented at senior levels of management in all those selected for analysis.

The questionnaires were sent to 439 managers between October and December 1993.¹ All of the senior women managers and a representative sample of men in equivalent grades were surveyed. A total of 324 managers completed the questionnaire: 108 women and 216 men. The response rate of 74 per cent (89% for the women and 68% for the men) is exceptional for a mailback questionnaire, indicating a high level of interest in the subject matter of the survey. Male managers were included, both in their own right and as a control group in relation to the women. A simple random sample of the men would have been, on average, more senior than their female counterparts. So a crucial element in the research design was matching the sample of men so that they were similar to the women in all respects other than gender. The findings presented here are based on the aggregate data from the five companies, and all the differences referred to in this paper reach the conventional (5%) level of statistical significance. They are unlikely to be due to chance.

The profile of women who have achieved senior management positions in all the companies is broadly similar to that of their male colleagues. Crucially, as stated above, the research design controls for differences in managerial level. In terms of age, the highest proportion of managers in the survey (56%) is in the 35-44 age group (see table [1.1](#)), reflecting the age distribution for this occupational group in national labour force surveys. Women managers tend to be younger and have joined the organization more recently. However, there is no sex difference in the age of first managerial appointment: 87 per cent of both men and women reach managerial level by the age of 35. Respondents move around within the company. Over 80 per cent of both men and women were recruited to their present post through internal promotion. Indeed, over 60 per cent of the sample have been with their

company more than a decade. So men and women have had equal exposure to the promotion system in their company.

Table 1.1 Percentage distribution of respondents according to their age

Age categories	Men	Women
Under 25	0	0
25-34	9	23
35-44	56	56
45-54	33	21
55 and over	2	0

While human capital theory emphasizes women's supposed lack of qualifications, recent studies have found that women are generally better qualified in formal terms for equivalent jobs. However, no gender differences in educational qualifications emerge in this study, with almost half the respondents having degrees and a further third having some sort of postgraduate qualification. With regard to the related issue of training, once again the same proportion (74%) of both men and women have taken a training course that they themselves had suggested for their own self-development, financed by the company.

Respondents were asked about their job title. A higher proportion of men than women describe themselves as managers (85% of men and 69% of women), whereas 31 per cent of the women describe themselves as functional specialists. A substantial proportion of both men and women in the study describe themselves as 'general managers' (26% and 20% respectively). When asked about their principal management function (see table [1.2](#)) the women are more likely to report being in personnel/human resources and service functions, whereas men are more likely to report being in marketing and sales. These responses broadly reflect the wider labour market patterns

of gender specialization in management function, although if anything there is a smaller concentration of women in the human resources function than one might expect (see Legge 1987).

Table I.2 Percentage distribution of respondents in terms of principal management function

Functional specialism	Men	Women
Administration/company secretary	1	2
Management services	1	0
Finance/accounting	9	12
Education/training	1	2
Personnel/HR/IR	5	14
Production/manufacturing	2	2
Computing/IT	10	7
Development/strategic affairs	8	7
Marketing/sales	31	21
Corporate affairs/public relations	2	4
Management consultancy	4	6
General management	24	18
Other	2	5

However, there is a marked sex difference in the numbers of people for whom the respondents are directly responsible. Whereas 64 per cent of the women manage fewer than 10 people, this is true for under half of the men. Over 20 per cent of the men manage more than 50 employees, whereas only 12 per cent of the women carry similar managerial responsibilities. Men are more than twice as likely as women to have responsibility for over 100 employees. So even at the same managerial level, men are given greater managerial responsibilities than women. It should be noted, however, that this is not independent of management function. As more of the women are professional specialists, they are less likely to have extensive responsibilities for subordinate employees.

The research findings from this project specifically inform the arguments developed in chapters 3 to 6. While the original empirical research presented here is fundamental to the argument I am making, it is not possible to address all the relevant issues that bear upon the topic through a single set of data. So I have situated my data within the wider context of contemporary theoretical debates in this area, as well as drawing upon and bringing together the broad range of other recent findings on managers in large firms.

The book begins with an overview of the theory and practice of sex equality in organizations. In this first chapter, I review feminist debates about whether we should aspire to equality based on sameness as, or difference from, men and the political consequences of adopting one or other of these positions. I argue that these academic theories cannot simply be translated into a feminist practice on equal opportunities. Rather, we should reject the sameness/difference dichotomy and focus instead on policies that challenge the norms of male work patterns. Even the recent focus of equality initiatives, managing diversity, still holds men up as the standard against which women are measured and found wanting. This standard has to be radically challenged. In the following chapters, I explore how gender is threaded through the fabric of organizations and the managerial job, and suggest ways in which this pattern might be changed.

Chapter 2 assesses conventional explanations of women's underrepresentation, or men's overrepresentation, in the higher levels of management. I go beyond the orthodox analysis that invokes the unequal domestic division of labour, to argue that the 'sexual contract' constitutes women and men as fundamentally different kinds of workers. I then discuss recent developments in organization theory that focus on the construction of masculinity and femininity at work. Management is an occupation

historically and culturally associated with men. It is seen as intrinsically masculine, something only men (can) do. The very language of management is resolutely masculine. Organizations are then a crucial site for the ordering of gender, and for the establishment and preservation of male power.

In this book I have also used the term management to describe the organization of domestic work in the household. I do this for two reasons. One is to highlight the sex-biased definition of management which, like the established usage of 'work', refers to paid employment in the labour market. The other reason is that it also draws attention to the increasing commodification of domestic tasks within the home.

The question of whether women are becoming more like men or are 'doing it differently' has been popularized in discussions about whether high-flying women bring a distinctive female style of management to organizations. Chapter 3 examines the thesis that management style is itself gendered, in terms of whether there are differences in how women and men actually manage. After placing these arguments in the wider context of corporate restructuring in the 1990s, I conclude that the similarities between women and men who have achieved senior management positions far outweigh any differences between women and men as groups. This commonality comes about because women's presence in the world of men is conditional on them being willing to modify their behaviour to become more like men. If there are no significant sex differences in management style, in what ways are women disadvantaged by the fact that they are not men?

Chapter 4 takes issue with the argument that men and women have a profoundly different orientation to paid employment, and that work is more central to men's identity. The women and men in my study have similar

career patterns and are equally highly motivated. What needs explaining is why, in general, women's experience of organizational life is so different from that of their male colleagues. The systematic difference here is that women encounter sex-specific obstacles to promotion opportunities. Although men's attitudes towards formal equality for women managers are by and large favourable, there is a divergence between such attitudes and organizational reality. I explore how the masculinist assumptions underlying management structures and practices continue to marginalize and exclude women from senior management roles.

Organizations are infused with sexuality and emotion. Chapter 5 considers how relationships between the sexes are negotiated, including the way sexual harassment is dealt with in an equal opportunity environment. The motif of women's 'difference' is explored further here. I argue that women are sexualized in a way that men are not, and that male sexual imagery pervades the symbolic order of organizations. As a result, women managers face the contradictory demands of being feminine and being businesslike. Their authority is always in question and under threat. In male-dominated companies such as those in my study, this problem is particularly acute.

Echoing themes from the previous three chapters, chapter 6 presents an analysis of the management of home life. An emphasis on the gendering of jobs and the masculinity of organizations should not distract us from the extent to which opportunities in the labour market are shaped by people's family commitments and aspirations. In this chapter, I examine the extensive and complex domestic arrangements necessary to sustain the life of a senior manager and find that the occupation itself is premised on a particular organization of family life. The pressures of combining work and home responsibilities affect men as well as women. However, men and women do not have the

same relationship to the domestic sphere and this domestic inequality has far-reaching consequences for their ability to be equal at work. The differences between men and women managers are much more marked in how they manage their household than in how they manage at work.

In the conclusion, I reflect on the contradictory nature of women's relationship to power. On the one hand, management as an occupation has been opened up to women, providing fresh possibilities. On the other hand, power and authority, while taking new forms, remain gendered as male. While sex equality policies in the workplace have not been transformative in themselves, they have been crucial in contesting and making more transparent the established gender order in organizations.

Note

1 All the managers in the sample are 'white'. This book is about the gender relations of management. Many of the issues I raise could be related to the ethnic and racial characteristics of senior managers. Hence the absence of non-white managers in the sample reflects reality at the level of management studied here.

1

Sex Equality in Organizations

One of the central tenets of the contemporary women's movement is that sexual inequality is tied to the fact that in every society men and women largely do different kinds of work. Indeed, sex segregation in the labour market is now a subject of mainstream quantitative sociology. Existing divisions have tended to result in studies of work and employment that look at men and women in isolation from each other. This research looks at women and men doing the same work and is thus an excellent basis for evaluating the impact of equal opportunity policies, and comparing the experiences of the sexes and their relationship to the organization.

The entry of women into senior management has generated much popular debate about whether they are 'making a difference' to the way organizations are run. The emphasis has shifted from encouraging women to emulate a male leadership style to asserting the value of qualities characterized as feminine that women bring to management. This bipolar framework of sameness or difference can be seen in other responses to the barriers women face at work. Different family commitments are traditionally the reason cited for women not reaching senior levels. Some argue that with the advent of 'family friendly' policies, women can now have the same careers as men. Others argue that a separate 'mommy track' should be provided to accommodate the different careers of women. This stance fits well with the emergent policy of fostering diverse and pluralistic patterns of work and careers that are

equally valued. In the present chapter I explore the extent to which the theory and practice of equal opportunities, as currently conceived, address these questions and problems. Reflections on feminist thinking about sameness and difference, equality and diversity, are important here and as a thread woven throughout the text.

It may be taken as an indication of the success of equal opportunity legislation and policies that this study is possible. There are now some women at the top. Yet a marked gender imbalance persists at the apex of organizational career structures. Conventional equality initiatives have had a limited impact on women's position in the workforce. There is not much room at the top for women, and we shall see that successful women are not so much representatives of, as exiles from, their sex.

The drive for 'equal opportunities' within organizations has been decried as too limited a strategy in some quarters, while provoking strong opposition in others. Its central objective is to break down the sexual division of labour and this makes it a controversial reform. It involves dismantling the barriers that block horizontal movement by women into male-dominated areas of work, as well as those that prevent their vertical progress to higher levels in organizational hierarchies. Its implementation means opening up access to the organization by fair recruitment practices, providing training courses for women, and reviewing appraisal and promotion procedures. Such initiatives should result in an increase in the numbers of women in senior professional and managerial positions, and greater recognition of their competence and authority.

It is now widely acknowledged that these policies have not achieved the changes they are supposed to achieve. In this chapter I discuss the theoretical frameworks within which equal opportunity policy has developed. Feminists have long debated whether women's subordination can best be

overcome by a focus on equality as sameness with men, or by a recognition of sex difference. We will see that arguments based on sameness and on difference have always been in play, and are apt to be invoked according to their strategic utility in particular circumstances. Both approaches, however, position women as the problem and accept men's life experience as the norm. They fail to challenge the conceptualization of work, and of organizations, as gender neutral. The title of this book, *Managing like a Man*, proclaims the profoundly gendered character of an apparently neutral occupation from which women have been largely excluded, namely, managerial work.

From Equal Opportunities to Positive Discrimination

Legislation against sex discrimination in the United Kingdom dates from the 1970s. The Equal Pay Act 1970, which came into effect in 1975, made it unlawful to discriminate between women and men in pay or other terms of their contracts of employment. It specified that women were entitled to the same pay as men if doing the same or broadly similar work. A companion Act, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, made it unlawful to treat women less favourably than men (or married people less favourably than single people) in education, training or employment, or in the provision of goods, facilities or services. It introduced a concept of indirect discrimination, which is deemed to occur when an employer applies to both sexes a condition of a kind such that the proportion of one sex who can comply with it is considerably smaller. In 1976 the Race Relations Act was passed, introducing the same provisions in relation to ethnic minorities as those applying to women.

This legislation and other influences such as labour market changes have stimulated the development of equal opportunity policies at the organizational level. These policies emerged as a response to shortcomings in anti-discrimination legislation, such as the reactive nature of anti-discrimination laws and the reliance on individual complaint. The provision of equal opportunities, by contrast, is described as proactive intervention to create a non-discriminatory environment.

In the UK formal policies are usually initiated and controlled by personnel/human resource departments and tend to follow a common format based on the codes of practice issued by the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality. These policies outline procedural approaches to avoid discrimination and promote equality. The first part is based on the steps considered necessary to comply with the anti-discrimination legislation. The second part outlines those initiatives compatible with, but not required by, the legislation which are thought likely to enhance the opportunities of previously disadvantaged groups. Such policies are now widespread and form part of normal business practice, particularly among large organizations. A recent company-level industrial relations survey found that 75 per cent of those surveyed had an equal opportunity policy in place (Marginson et al. 1993).

Signs of progress towards greater equality of opportunity in employment can also be seen in the growth of Opportunity 2000. This business-led campaign was launched in 1991 with support from the Conservative government, to 'increase the quality and quantity of women's participation in the workforce' by the year 2000. Its focus has been on higher management. The organization claims to include the most progressive UK companies and counts among its founder members a quarter of *The Times* Top One Hundred Companies. As for the companies, membership enhances