Thompson, P. - McHugh, D. 2002
Work organisations

10 Gender, Sexuality and Organisations

No company can afford to waste valuable brainpower simply because it's wearing a skirt. (Anne Fisher, *Fortune*, 21 September 1992)

In the past decade businesses and business academics have discovered gender. Compared to other areas this has been somewhat late. There is a massive and important body of research and theory on gender, work and family (see Dex, 1985; Walby, 1986; Thompson, 1989; Bradley, 1996; Crompton, 1997; Rubery *et al.*, 1999). But that debate on the sexual division of labour focuses on occupational divisions, differential control in the labour process, female labour-force participation, segmented labour markets, or more broadly on patriarchy and capitalism. Organisations tend to be treated as passive recipients of wider social forces, with power only appearing indirectly, for example through access to employment. It is essential to 'see how organisational forms structure and are themselves structured by gender' (Witz and Savage, 1992: 8). That gap has been progressively filled with a variety of explanations and policy prescriptions.

Policy parameters and intellectual frameworks

Radical organisation theory has 'borrowed' the idea of 'gendered jobs' – ones that associate task requirements with the perceived qualities of a particular sex – and has begun to debate the extent to which organisations and their structures, bureaucracy in particular, can be considered as gendered. Empirically, the focus continues to be the 'glass ceiling' – the barriers to progress through organisational hierarchies. This narrower frame, which forms the subject matter of this chapter, has costs. Female managers are not the majority of women workers and the bigger, sociological picture can sometimes be obscured. As recent UK government figures show, the prime cause of the gender income gap is the concentration of women in lower-paid sectors of the labour market (*The Guardian*, 21 February 2000). Nevertheless, there are advantages in a narrower focus, drawing on what has been largely a 'dialogue between feminist theory and organisation theory' (Wajcman, 1996b: 262). Something new and specific has been added to an existing, powerful body of knowledge. At the same time the basic theoretical frameworks are reproduced and re-examined (see the parallels, for example, in the gender and technology debate: Grint and Gill, 1996; Webster, 1996).

That a new body of theory has had to address absences and disconnections is not surprising, as the visibility of gender in organizational analysis itself has been low. Recent surveys (Acker and Van Houten, 1992; Hearn and Parkin, 1992; Collinson and Hearn, 1994; Calás and Smircich, 1997; Alvesson and Due Billing, 1997) have trawled the major landmarks of theory and research from Taylorism to human relations and contingency theory, and have noted that though organisational processes are clearly

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influenced by gendered power relations, employees and managers appear to have no gender, and men and management are synonymous.

> Organisational scholarship has been, primarily, a literature written by men, for men and about men: how to gain the cooperation of men to achieve organisational ends through rationality: how to *man*/age. (Calás and Smircich, 1996: 222–3)

Weber is placed firmly in the centre of this 'malestream' organisational analysis. For him, the rise of bureaucracy brings with it an instrumental rationality in which impersonal rules, procedures and hierarchies are operated with technical efficiency. This is contrasted with traditional forms of authority reliant on individual privilege and personal allegiance. Issues of gender and sexuality are thus despatched to a private realm along with patrimonial and patriarchal relations, no longer to endanger rational–legal authority in the public sphere.

Banishing gender from the theory is far from the actual practice of organisational life, as many critics have subsequently argued (Pringle, 1989; Cockburn, 1991; F. Wilson, 1995). But by the time this conceptual invisibility was being challenged, a particular form of absence – from the management of organisations – had become the focal point of argument. The 1980s were in fact characterised by a degree of optimism that this was about to change. After all, women had been entering into the lower reaches of management and the professions, after having come to dominate the white-collar ranks in previous decades in many countries. According to 'trickle-up' assumptions, it was a question of watch and wait. To move the process along, equal opportunity initiatives were being taken by or forced upon many large companies, such as those involved in Opportunity 2000 in the UK. Progress, was, however, not wholly dependent on corporate beneficence. Optimism was fuelled by a combination of demographic, cultural and economic changes, such as the shift from manufacturing to private and public services, and from domestic to transnational companies. Taken together, they should have created a competitive imperative for companies to make room at the top (Adler and Izraeli, 1988; Adler, 1994). In other words it was not merely a matter of women getting *into* management, management were getting seriously into women.

That was the theory – the practice was different. By the mid-1990s the realisation was dawning that progress had been limited. There was movement in some specialisms (for example, human resources and marketing) and some sectors (for example, banking and finance), but by and large the glass ceiling was proving very durable. In the US a government-financed Glass Ceiling Commission estimated that women held only about 5 per cent of senior executive positions (*The Economist*, 10 August 1996). Institute of Management (1994, 1996) surveys painted a depressing picture in the UK: in 1995 the number of female managers was 10.7 per cent and that increased only fractionally during the later 1990s. Those in the senior category constituted only 5 per cent and at all levels there were differences in pay and perks, even for those similarly qualified and experienced. These trends hold true in sectoral studies, such as those in the health service (IHSM Consultants, 1994), and more detailed qualitative assessments of the position in large companies at the forefront of equal opportunity initiatives (Wajcman, 1996a, 1998). Higher up the ladder the position is worse, with less than 3 per cent of executive directors women (Caulkin, 1999). Even in Sweden with its family-friendly social policies and high rates of female labour force participation, only 3 per cent of senior executives were female, and an earnings gap of between 10 and 30 per cent existed (Kimmel, 1993). Australia too has a figure of 3 per cent in an economy where women make up 43 per cent of the workforce (*Guardian*, 17 January 2000). While some, such as *The Economist* (1996), still believed that given the different age cohorts of male and female managers it was still a matter of time, most other commentators concluded that there was indeed something different about the 'careers' of female managers that required explanation.

Gendering organisational analysis

As Acker (1992: 248–9) observes, to document difficulties and differences is one thing, to explain them is another. Acker herself contributed one of the most influential concepts in this task – the gendered substructure of organisations: the frequently implicit rules and arrangements that underlie practices taken for granted as rational. But if the structures and practices are gendered, how are they so? The explanations we examine in this section have contrasting answers, though they all move beyond any account that rests on individual differences, whether these are biological (G. Wilson, 1997; Browne, 1998), psychologically based (Davidson and Cooper, 1992), or derived from economic models such as human capital theory (Becker, 1985). Here, the cause of unequal access to opportunity and power is located in socialisation, sexuality, psychology or natural disposition. But gender inequality in organisations is simply too persistent and deep-rooted to be accounted for by any variant on 'you get out what you put in', to say nothing of the fact that women's qualifications tend to be superior to their male counterparts.

Kanter and organisational context

The disparity between ideal type and reality was picked up earliest by one of the few feminists working within conventional management theory. Kanter's (1993) *Men and Women of the Corporation* was a landmark work, setting out a serious critique of the male bias within internal power structures and an explanation for the widely-observed 'glass ceiling' restricting progress up the hierarchy (Rees, 1992; Davidson and Cooper, 1992). The emphasis on internal is important, because Kanter does not treat the corporation simply as a reflection of the outside world: 'to a very large degree, organizations make their workers into who they are' (1993: 263). She adopts what is described as a structural model, in the same manner discussed in the previous chapter with respect to writers such as Pfeffer. In other words, 'structural' refers to organisational rather than societal context. Kanter identifies three central determinants of behaviour: the structure of opportunity, the structure of power and the proportional distribution of people or social composition of jobs. Where the distribution is strongly skewed against women they will be marginalised, excluded and treated as 'token'. Tokens suffer from increased visibility and their performance tends to be judged by group rather than individual criteria.

Kanter demonstrates that no research exists that proves any sex differences in power as manifested through leadership or management styles: 'a preference for men is a preference for power' (Kanter, 1993: 199). In contrast, locked into the lower reaches of the hierarchy and sex-segregated jobs, women internalise relative notions of worth. Or, because they are playing to man-made rules, women have to resort to watchful strategies to avoid any role traps that would reinforce one of the many gender stereotypes (mother, seductress, iron maiden) that lie in wait. Cycles of powerlessness are further reproduced through the perceptions and actions of men, who use power resources to reproduce structures in their own image. This is also an informal process. Men prefer their own company and share certain language and understandings. This 'homosociability' reproduces the existing gender order. Dominant organisational cultures and ideas of rational decision-making and effective management are overlaid with notions of masculinity, and the space for difference is closed down (Ramsay and Parker, 1992). Men are seen as making better managers because they are tough-minded, unemotional and authoritative. The 'other gender' comes to be defined as temperamentally unfit for power; Cockburn characterises this view as, 'Women are not capable of authority. And they turn into nasty people when in authority' (1991: 89).

Subsequent feminist commentators, while acknowledging its path-breaking character, have often been harsh on Kanter. Her work has been located as part of a naïve liberal feminism that was trying to demonstrate that women are people too (Calás and Smircich, 1996), and as a contingent approach that treats bureaucracy as only 'accidentally gendered' (Halford, Savage and Witz, 1997: 7). This is a little unfair. Gender is co-incidental rather than accidental – it coincides with male power in organisations. Kanter does not believe that bureaucracy is neutral, but she does think that it can be *made* rational. She works within a neo-Weberian tradition that reveals the informal and varied nature of bureaucracy. But that particular form is not fate. If women are not 'different', the acquisition of power by women could or should 'wipe out' sex, and it is organizations that have to be remade, not individuals. The boss–secretary relationship and other evidence of organizational sexuality are seen as patrimonial, pre-bureaucratic relics (Pringle, 1989). Relics can be rectified by a gender-neutral rationality.

Despite the critiques, there is contemporary evidence around that supports her core empirical arguments, rather than the broader theoretical spin given to them. In her studies of gender and culture in eight Italian firms, Poggio observes that relationships tend to be more egalitarian where women cease to be in the minority, 'The different sizes of the female component . . . seemingly bear out the intepretations based on the concept of "token"' (2000: 398). Simpson's (1997, 1998) studies of career barriers demonstrate that gender mix continues to be the most significant determinant of women's experience in organisations. Many women working in mixed or female-dominated environments found them supportive and enabling. 'Token' women, however continue to encounter men's networks and 'clubs' that maintain asymmetric power relations through informal mechanisms, including sexual innuendo and harassment. For example, in more evenly mixed circumstances, the demands of increased workload were often acknowledged and some balance between home and work catered for. In many organisations, however, men used their additional capacity or willingness to stay late – 'presenteeism' – as a competitive weapon, recolonising management for themselves and criticising women who left 'early'. There has also been sympathetic research on the nature and impact of male networks in organisations (see Pfeffer, 1997: 93–8).

Kanter's desire to emphasise the social construction of gender rather then the burdens of sexuality is understandable, but her analysis does lead to conceptual problems. First, that the process of social construction is conceived far too narrowly. While it is useful to locate specifically organizational dimensions, 'Curiously absent is any sense that men and women are locked, indeed formed, in an unequal gender order that spans not only work, but childhood, sexual intercourse, domesticity, street culture, and public life. There is no sense of how the organization came to take the damaging form it did' (Cockburn, 1990: 86). As a consequence neither individual nor systemic male power is adequately confronted. Kanter underestimated male resistance, in part because homosociability was treated only as a by-product of vertical occupational segregation. Second, in arguing that powerlessness, not sex, is the problem for women, Kanter fails to see the way that the two processes are interwoven, or how new forms of power and control appear around the construction of sexuality (Pringle, 1989: 88).

Part of the problem is that Kanter utilises the narrow Weberian conception of power as freedom of action and ability to get things done. As we observed earlier, though, it is 'structural' rather than individualistic and, as with French and Raven, her whole discussion covers the well-trodden territory of the first dimension of power as a relatively fixed resource, operating through the panoply of peer alliances, sponsors and the like. While insightful in its own terms, such a framework inevitably neglects the broader dimensions and relational character of corporate patriarchy (Witz and Savage, 1992: 16). Kanter's work represents the best of her tradition, but the limitations of orthodox organisation theory, particularly the tendency to separate the workplace from broader social and historical processes, are frequently reproduced. Though she opened the gate, other perspectives had to be present to establish gender as a fundamental structuring principle of power and organisations (Mills and Tancred, 1992; Witz and Savage, 1992).

Theorising difference

Most theories attempting a gendered analysis emphasise durable difference rather than potential sameness. One of the most interesting developments in this respect has been a shift in mainstream behavioural and managerial literature that has turned previously 'negative' female qualities into positive assets. In an influential *Harvard Business Review* article, Rosener claimed that a second generation of managerial women were making their way to the top, not by aping men, but by being themselves: 'They are succeeding because of, not in spite of, certain characteristics generally considered to be "feminine" and inappropriate in leaders' (1990: 120). In this, the claims of evolutionary psychology are stood on its head. Those that believe that natural selection can explain workplace behaviour argue that the 'sparse representation' of women among senior executives arises from their genetic predisposition not to be aggressive, competitive and willing to take risks (Browne, 1998). In contrast, men's testosterone predisposes them to strive for status and dominance, and only women exposed to an unusual amount of these hormones will be aggressive enough to compete in the workplace (G. Wilson, 1997).

In contrast, like Rosener, many management writers, organisations and consultants now claim to find a 'natural selection' in reverse. There is a strong similarity between how women see their leadership qualities (participative, collaborative, interactive, consensual, focused on soft skills such as teambuilding) and the new structures and styles required in the modern decentralised, post-bureaucratic organisation

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(Martin, 1993; Institute of Management, 1994; Change Partnership, 1999). The editor of *Management Today* (quoted in *Guardian*, 7 March 1999) having surveyed 1000 British managers, recently pronounced that 'If men want to be successful managers, they must behave like women'. On an international stage, it is claimed that in transnationals characterised by networks of equals, women are well suited to move organisations from hierarchies to horizontal webs of relationships (Adler, 1994).

There is a surprising continuity with some of these arguments among radical feminists, though shorn of the optimism about working within the male system. Ferguson (1984) regards the structures and discourses of bureaucracy as inherently male. She locates the problem in women's exclusion from the public realm. When they do emerge, not only are their jobs marginalised, but so are the more expressive values and modes of action developed in the private sphere. Such an alternative rationality can provide a means for women and other people in subordinate positions to challenge bureaucratic, male power. Such thinking draws upon a view that has always been present within feminism, expressed by the novelist Fay Weldon, that 'women had special virtues that men had not' (*New Statesman*, 27 September 1999). Those virtues are corrupted by the system and male power and would be better directed towards building women-led or women-only structures which would be participative and non-hierarchical. There are also parallels here to eco-feminism, where science and nature are seen as in themselves masculine (Griffin, 1984). As Calás and Smircich note, 'Radical feminists have taken the traditional association of women with nature (in contrast to man with culture) and found it a source of strength and power' (1996: 226). Thus it is held that there is a different way of knowing the world that is less verbal, more emotional and spiritual.

Many other commentators, feminist and otherwise, have found the above conceptions of difference to be *essentialist*: in other words, that we can read off behaviour from some inherent essence that is, in this case, male or female. Sometimes this is biological, reducing women to their sexual and reproductive capacities, albeit as source of strength rather than weakness. Even when not *biologically* essentialist, such arguments tend to treat men and women as fixed categories, and are unable to deal with change and variation in roles and practices: 'Cross-cultural research has shown that there is no behaviour or meaning which is universally associated with masculinity or femininity: they are socially constructed and changing categories' (Grint and Gill, 1996: 5).

An emphasis on social construction of identity is typical of Foucauldian and post-structuralist perspectives. Preferring to talk of symbolic rather than material resources, such writers emphasise the existence of a bureaucratic *discourse* that relies upon a male rationality which shatters the apparent neutrality of rules and goals (Pringle, 1989). Through case studies such as the boss–secretary relationship, Pringle stresses the requirements of masculine rationality and its associated identities in the workplace to do battle with the feminine 'other'. Other contributors to the debate treat gender as a form of power/knowledge (Fineman, 1993; Putnam and Mumby 1993). It is argued that instrumental rationality within bureaucracy is defined by its opposition to emotionality. Feelings expressed by employees are either denied, suppressed or appropriated by the company for its own, instrumental ends (this overlaps into discussion of emotional labour – see Chapters 13 and 18). The potentialities of discursive construction of gender identity are highly varied. Class, age or ethnicity can cut across gender, producing different types of masculinity and femininity. Indeed, having separated sex and gender, it is then possible to argue that 'Masculinity is and can be performed by women. Women who are successful managers perform *hegemonic masculinity*' (Cheng, 1996: xii, original emphasis). It is difficult to avoid concluding from this type of argument that women cannot 'win'. If they rise to the top, they have then 'joined the other side'.

Poststructuralist writing (which we return to in the next section) is at the same time highly relativist in identifying different discourses of masculinity and femininity, but also seeks and talks of single, durable gender differences. For example, in the collection of articles by Cheng (1996), hegemonic masculinity is used as an over-arching concept to explain dominant patterns in different work contexts such as those of trial lawyers, manufacturing management teams and military colleges. An over-emphasis on gender can subsume other influences on attitudes and behaviour that may impact on men and women, notably occupational and professional identities. So, for example, nursing has traditionally promoted a preference for control over emotions in the name of professional values (Bolton, 2000). It does not take us very far to use hegemonic or any other form of masculinity to explain this. Theorising gender in organisations has to avoid over-emphasising difference, and carefully to explain the origins and impact of gender relations. As Wajcman notes, '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' (1998: 2). To return to an earlier discussion, any evidence that new nurturant, soft skills are practised in organisations by women or anyone else is thin to non-existent. 'Feminine' values may be self-attributed, and tell us more about how managers like to see themselves than what they actually do. It is also notable, in Rosener's case, that her sample was drawn overwhelmingly from small and non-traditional organisations where the space to behave differently may be greater.

Of equal importance, more empirically rigorous studies show that attitudinal differences between men and women at work are exaggerated. Studies of commitment show little or no difference between the sexes (Ramsay and Scholarios, 1998: 9). Based on her research into large multinationals with ostensibly progressive HR policies, Wajcman observes that 'there is no such thing as a "female" management style and that the similarities between women and men far outweigh the differences between men and women as groups' (1996b: 333). Surveying a range of other studies, Izraeli and Adler (1994: 9) also note that 'negligible differences' were found. Both sexes are increasingly constrained by the lean and mean character of contemporary organisational life, with growing performance pressures on managers (Simpson, 1998). This is not an argument that seeks to displace gender as a key factor. Women continue to *experience* considerable constraint to career progression, while men retain greater opportunities to use formal and informal networks to advance their interests. What Wajcman and Simpson highlight is the difference between gender styles and gendered treatment. Much of the current literature is getting the significance of this the wrong way round. By over-emphasising the former, too much optimism is being generated about possibilities for women managers in a harsher, more directive corporate climate. As a senior female manager reported to Wajcman, 'The word that is being used is discipline . . . and these changes in management style favour a male style . . . management say the right things on diversity issues, but the tangible results are getting worse' (1996b: 275).

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and women think and act, 'we should see gender relations within organisations as complex, dynamic and potentially at least, unpredictable' (Halford, Savage and Witz, 1997: 13). This is best explored with reference to culture and career.

Culture, careers and networks: embedding gender

The gendering of organisational analysis has brought fresh insights to existing issues, for example to conventional accounts of bureaucracies as male career structures. Public and private bureaucracies developed along gendered lines, introducing large numbers of women into routine clerical jobs. The existence of practices such as marriage bars, where a female employee would be compelled to retire on marriage, facilitated the retention and promotion of male clerks. In this sense the growth of large-scale organisations has seen the creation of mini-patriarchies where the expansion of the public sphere is shown to be 'premised on men's power and dominance in the private domains' (Hearn, 1992: 81). Even when those practices finished, evidence (Crompton and Jones, 1984) shows that internal labour markets in sectors such as banking provided alternative career routes for male clerical employees.

However, Hakim's (1995) controversial work has challenged feminist orthodoxies. Using UK data sets, she argues that women's location in lower-status, lower-paid jobs is primarily an outcome of voluntary strategy rather than involuntary imposition. Many women choose to value benefits such as flexible hours, friendly workmates and good relations with the boss rather than career advancement. While it is important to recognise differentiated motives and circumstances among women, critics have argued that Hakim pays insufficient attention to the social and historical contexts that shape preferences and may lead some women to make pragmatic adjustments and accommodations (Anker, 1997; Ramsay and Scholarios, 1998). It also remains the case that a substantial number of 'career women' face real constraints inside the organisation.

For example, our understanding of organisational culture has also benefited from a gender 'twist'. It functions as a useful gateway to gender analyses because culture focuses on the way that individuals construct the understandings and subjectivities that underpin behaviour and structure (Acker, 1992). Culturally-defined norms and values therefore crucially contribute to maintaining and reproducing the dominant patriarchal ideologies and practices (Alvesson and Billing, 1992; Green and Cassell, 1994). The argument, as we have seen, is that in bureaucracies, women are frequently strangers in a male-defined world. Culturally competent behaviour reflects largely masculine monocultures (Gerhardi, 1996; Alvesson and Billing, 1997). This goes beyond the obvious cases of resistance to women attempting to establish a presence in largely all-male preserves such as the police and fire service (Salaman, 1986; Keith and Collinson, 1994). There is evidence of women managers being perceived as threats to male self-image (Sargent, 1983; Cockburn, 1991). The latter study quotes one female senior manager: 'They certainly saw me as a huge threat when I first came. They made me feel very, very uncomfortable for six months. The woman bit. Men don't like it. They don't feel comfortable with women as superiors' (Cockburn, 1991: 141–2). Such women, as Sheppard's (1989) study found, often feel compelled to devise strategies of how to 'blend in'. The collection of essays in Colgan and Ledwith (1996) also provide numerous examples of the ways in which women in different occupational contexts devise adaptation strategies to survive and progress in male-dominated environments.

Increasingly analysis of culture has been complemented by that of networks. Access to networks has long been seen in conventional organisational theory to be a crucial factor in gaining structural advantage. Recent studies have demonstrated that women and ethnic minorities have less access to informal networks, and have different opportunities to convert their own organisational resources to network advantage (Ibarra, 1993, 1995). Whereas women feel comfortable in formal settings such as meetings, men create cultures in which in- and after-hours socialising can play a crucial role in sharing information, playing 'office politics' and securing privileges (Tierney, 1996; Simpson, 1997, 1998). Not surprisingly, women tend to use formal processes to seek promotion, while men prefer informal ones (*The Economist*, 10 August 1996). Surveys reveal that though women identify a variety of barriers to career advancement, the club or clique-like character of senior management is perceived to be crucial (Wajcman, 1996b). Interestingly a much smaller proportion of men identify informal networks as a problem, which suggests that the taken-for-granted masculinity of organisational cultures renders them invisible to the 'dominant sex'.

Cultures are, however, not homogenous. Poggio (2000) identifies a continuum of 'women-friendliness' in her culture case studies. Different types of masculinity may produce a range of managerial styles, from authoritarianism, paternalism, entrepreneurialism, careerism to informal relations where men form an in-group that simultaneously differentiates them from other groups of both sexes. The last group corresponds to the 'locker room culture' identified in a typology developed by Maddock and Parkin (1993); other gender cultures include the traditional 'gentleman's club', the 'barrack yard', and the more contemporary 'gender blind' and 'feminist pretender' arrangements, where new men affirm equal opportunities while nothing has really changed. This can be broadened further by referring to cross-cultural factors. In some national or regional cultures, such as those in East Asia where family businesses remain influential, membership of social networks outweighs credentials as a form of access. This can work for women in some circumstances, but militates against progression in the broader corporate economy (Izraeli and Adler, 1994: 8).

Halford, Savage and Witz (1997) draw useful and broader theoretical conclusions compatible with these kinds of findings. Organisations are neutral and depersonalised, but their gendered substructures are embedded within different cultural and historical contexts. Furthermore, organisations are populated by agents who reinterpret and contest existing practices and procedures. Gender, therefore, is inherently variable and continually enacted. Webster makes a similar anti-essentialist point about women's relation to technology, which she describes as 'one of exclusion through embedded historical practice, reinforced and reproduced in contemporary work settings' (1997: 25). Many of the examples and arguments drawn from such perspectives increasingly depend on analysis of sexuality instead of, or in addition to, gender. It is to this that we now turn.

Enter sexuality

Sexuality had begun to creep out of the shadows of gender in the sociology of the workplace through well-known studies of the characteristics of female (Pollert, 1981; Westwood, 1984) and male (Willis, 1977) wage labour, and the use of sexuality and gender as a method of control (see Thompson, 1989: 196–7). What such studies facilitated was a move beyond issues of sexual division of labour to those of sexuality in

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the division of labour. This rested largely on the fact that work behaviour was overlaid with masculine and feminine identities. In this light, homosociability is not only a rational economic action to secure collective interests, it is a way of defining and defending sexual identities. This is as true of pranks and practices of the female factory workers studied by Pollert and Westwood as of the male workers in truck plants (Collinson, 1992), or abattoirs (Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990). While some of this might seem to be at the marginal, social end of work activity, defence of sexual identity can be intimately connected with protection of access to employment. This is most tellingly revealed in Cockburn's (1991) examination of the attitudes and practices of printworkers, who clearly felt female employment to be a threat not only to their livelihood, but to their sense of (masculine) self that had become inextricably bound to the nature of their craft.

The entry of sexuality into organisational theory, while drawing on the above studies, has also been contingent on a number of other developments. The first of these is the critique of the previously-discussed Weberian model of *de-sexualised bureaucracies*. From this absence, sexuality is suddenly to be found everywhere – in language, practices, relationships, displays, design, hierarchies and managerial strategies. In some instances it is seen primarily as a tension between a partially-submerged underlife of sexuality and the dominant calculative rationality that would seek to repress it in the name of efficiency (Burrell, 1992); in others it appears as a substantially-embedded set of practices much nearer the surface of everyday organisational life (Hearn and Parkin, 1987; Hearn *et al.*, 1989). To return to a previous example – that of Shepherd's (1989) account of 'blending in' strategies of female managers – it is clear that this frequently involved changes in appearance and body language so that female assertiveness would not threaten male sexual authority. Whether focusing on underlife or surface practice, what was being revealed was the public nature of what had been previously consigned to the private realm. In their detailed examination of sexual misbehaviour in the workplace, Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) argue that this is not merely a theoretical shift, but a practical one. The decline in gender-segregated workplaces and the increase in female employees has combined with workplace cultures that allow more elements of sociability and informality to create greater opportunities for sexual interactions. Both employers and employees have blurred the boundaries between the public and private, and between organisational and social selves.

Such trends help to explain the growing litigation and politicisation surrounding both convivial and coercive sexuality at work. In other words, companies are finding it increasingly necessary to regulate sexual interactions. While there is a growth of codes governing romantic relations, most of the emphasis has been on sexual harassment. Indeed, this has been the second route to visibility in management and organisation theory (Gutek, 1985; Stanko, 1988; Di Tomaso, 1989; Collinson and Collinson, 1989, 1994; Thomas and Kitzinger, 1997). There is no single and precise definition of harassment, in part because it is overlaid with particular legal contexts and treatments (Wilson and Thompson, 2001). Nevertheless, there are common themes focusing on the unwanted, intrusive or persistent nature of the behaviour. Such practices can 'pollute' the work environment, according to a European Commission code of practice. Again while there are contrasting explanations, there are also common themes. Whether at the office party or in promotion processes, sexual harassment can be seen as a means through which individual men exert their power over women. The varieties of forms of harassment can be seen as power plays or controlling gestures arising mainly as responses to the threat to identity and material interests when women enter male occupational territories, or from the abuse of power in supervisory and other authority relationships. Unlike Kanter's analysis of gender, sexuality cannot be confined to the organisation. Barbara Gutek's detailed and authoritative study utilises the concept of sex-role overspill to emphasise the broader social connections: 'the carryover into the workplace of gender-based roles that are usually irrelevant or inappropriate to work'. These may include conceptions of women's nurturing capacity or being a sex object, to the stereotype of men's natural leadership ability.

The third route is filtered through the discussions of sexuality and power. As Halford, Savage and Witz note, 'What has emerged from the radical feminist and radical organisation literature is a clear view that women's subordination at work is "eroticised" or "sexualised"' (1997: 21). These complex relations require a separate discussion in their own right, though themes also overlap with those already discussed in the first two routes.

Contrasting perspectives on sex, power and organisations

At one level, associations between sexuality and power in the workplace are uncontentious. Pringle's (1989) work on the boss–secretary relationship successfully established this territory, demonstrating the historical roots and contemporary features of the 'office wife' phenomenon in which women are used to enhance masculinity and authority. Analyses of service sector work have extended the argument. Adkin's case studies are used to argue that 'women employees had as a condition of their employment, the requirement to provide sexual services for male customers and employees' (1992: 214). This is not meant literally, but refers to controls over forms of dress, appearance, and engagement in being chatted-up and other verbal sexual interactions. Women's work is therefore eroticised subordination. In some ways this builds on previous discussion of emotional labour. Hochschild's (1983) study of flight attendants, as well as the later British account by Tyler and Taylor (1997), show how companies require the largely female employees to manage their own feelings to improve the 'quality' of the service encounter. Part of this process of 'acting' involves a projection of sexuality through visual and verbal display; the female flight attendant is 'part mother, part servant and part tart', as one of Tyler and Taylor's respondents put it (1997: 13). Similar patterns were identified by Filby (1992) in his account of the uses of female labour at the quality end of betting shops.

Emphasis has also been put especially on the process of *embodiment* (Acker, 1990; Halford, Witz and Savage, 1997: 25–8). Beyond the obvious examples of dress and display, consideration has been given to the routine degree of sexualised body work through interactions of doctors, nurses and other medical staff (Witz, Halford and Savage, 1994), and the associations between skill and physicality in police work (Keith and Collinson, 1994). In the latter, bodily discourses provide not only a means of keeping women officers in their proper, feminine place, but are used to make further, regional distinctions: 'In the South the people are like the landed gentry, so the police are just big girls' blouses' (female police sergeant, quoted in Keith and Collinson, 1994: 17).

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sexuality and power, understandings of power are precisely the factors that divide many contributors to the debate. Take the question of sexual harassment. Though this is clearly *about* power, it does not necessarily involve a particular *theory* of power. Whereas Gutek does not see sexual coercion as the norm of male–female relations inside or outside work, the increasing number of radical feminists writing in this area are only too happy to do so. Admittedly much of this has nothing to do with the workplace as such. Sexuality is seen as the primary source of male power (MacKinnon, 1979), and heterosexual desire as the eroticisation of conquest and subordination (Jeffreys, 1990). Harassment is the conduit to the organisation in recent studies focusing on academia (Ramazanoglu, 1987), social work (Wise and Stanley, 1990) or professional education (Carter and Jeffs, 1992). What these and other writers have in common is the view that harassment is not aberrant, unusual or different in kind from flirtation, banter or affairs: 'it is instructive to note that "sexual harassment" and "ordinary sexual encounters" follow more or less exactly the same levels of expression' (Wise and Stanley, 1990: 20). All this is a version of MacKinnon's argument that organisations are the site of compulsory heterosexuality. As a theorisation of power, this takes us back to zero-sum notions where, in this case, men and women are erotically joined solely through mutual threat and share no common interest. Or as Carter and Jeffs (1992: 240–1) put it, 'Sexuality is always about power and is always about "us" as well as "them"'.

Others, particularly those influenced by Foucauldian perspectives, would agree that sexuality and power are intimately linked, but strongly question its characterisation. Foucault's writing sees sexuality and the body as central to power and its reproduction. Such studies 'explore how power disciplines and shapes women's bodies, movements and expressions' (Cooper, 1994: 437), though it works through internalisation and self-monitoring rather than coercion from the top or as the result of ideology. As we discussed earlier in relation to gender, seeing organisational sexuality in terms of discursive production necessarily requires an emphasis on social construction and fluidity rather than fixed and essential power relations:

> Subjectivity is constituted through the exercise of power within which conceptions of personal identity, gender and sexuality come to be generated. Thus, men and women actively exercise power in positioning themselves within, or finding their own location amongst, competing discourses, rather than merely being 'positioned by' them. (Brewis and Kerfoot, 1994: 8)

Research shows that some of these positioning processes are based on discourses of *difference*, which promote negative representations of women or men who do not play the masculinity game (Collinson and Collinson, 1989; Cockburn, 1991). But this will vary according to work situations and the available knowledge resources. Studies of local government and banking by Witz, Halford and Savage identified the deployment of discourses of gender *complementarity*. Mixed-sex work groups were endorsed by management as a means of countering the undesirable effects of all-male or all-female sociability. But employees positioned themselves too, finding fun in flirtation and romance. Contrary to the radical feminist argument, 'All the women drew an extremely clear boundary between "flirtation" and "sexual harassment"' (1994: 20).

Greater space to see the interrelationships between power and pleasure arises from Foucault's theorisation of the former as productive, relational and capillary.

Viewing events from the 'bottom-up' and through micro-practices is much less likely to result in behaviour being read-off from universal conceptions of position and behaviour. In Pringle's work, secretaries were far from passive objects of the boss's banter, deriving pleasure from imitating, exaggerating or ridiculing existing stereotypes (1989: 103). This can be supported by other studies which are not necessarily from a Foucauldian perspective. Discursive practices in which women use sexuality and 'sexy chat' as a means of acting as subjects is best exemplified in Filby's (1992) previously mentioned study of daily life in betting shops. Though management tried and partly succeeded in using women's bodies and personalities to promote the product, female employees turned the tables by developing their own aggressive 'scolding' and 'joking' routines to keep customers and managers in their place.

Evaluation: under and overpowered explanations

Foucauldian theory and research on power and sexuality has proven a useful antidote to essentialist conceptions of men as automatic power holders and women as eternal victims. It reinforces existing research that shows the workplace as a site for a variety of forms of sexual and romantic relationship (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999). Sexuality is the most complex of social relations, and 'we need a model of power relations which can also deal with power as it is exercised in friendly or intimate encounters' (Davis, 1991: 81). Of course, all sexual relations cannot be described in this way. But even in the case of the most instrumental of sexual exchanges – prostitution – the dynamics of power and control cannot necessarily be described as men securing direct power, nor as motivated solely by the desire to affirm a masterful manhood (O'Connell Davidson, 1994a: 2).

But it is the very specificity of sexuality as a site of power that creates a problem. In different ways, both the radical feminist and Foucauldian perspectives fail to recognise this. For each theory sees sexuality as the standard template of how power works, and this has a number of negative consequences. Radical feminists cannot see sexuality without seeing power, 'both its intention and its end, its product, is power' (Wise and Stanley, 1990: 15); hence they fail to grasp its varied construction and practice. Foucauldians, at least those writing in this area, cannot see power without seeing sexuality, and therefore tend to extend the latter's reach beyond its usefulness. Much of the rhetoric about the body falls into this trap. For example, Witz, Halford and Savage comment on a woman manager who had worn a red suit in order to get noticed at a dinner:

> It really does serve to illustrate how embodied organizational participants can call up their embodiment through ways of presenting the body. The choice of a red dress is evoking a number of associations between red and the womanly body – the most obvious is the association with red and sexuality, the least obvious is that between red and bleeding. (Witz, Halford and Savage, 1994: 23–4)

Furthermore, the very fluidity and complexity recognised in post-structuralist perspectives may not be as applicable in other sites of power, particularly when we remember that the object of analysis is *organisational* sexuality. Whereas power is zero-sum in only the most coercive sexual encounters, in many workplace situations it is, as we argued earlier, often not as negotiable and is possessed and exercised by agents with a radically unequal access to power resources. Organisational sexuality is therefore influenced by the potential characteristics of both sites of power, with varied consequences for choice and constraint.

A further worry about Foucauldian theory is that it tends to overestimate the former at the expense of the latter. 'Power here is not the oppressive power implicit within liberal feminism as a zero-sum analysis where power is a possession. Rather, power for Foucault is productive, it allows us to think ourselves and our individuality as we find/fit ourselves in(to) various discourses' (Brewis and Kerfoot, 1994: 8). The problem is that organisational processes, gendered and otherwise, are not just discourses in relation to which we can position ourselves. Gender regimes are constituted through symbolic order and material practices (Wajcman, 1998: 3). The constraints to the success of equal opportunities policies, for example, are also linked to material sources of power, particularly those expressed through internal and external labour markets. Without this recognition of relatively durable structures and constraint, gender risks 'being swallowed up in the bottomless swamp of permanently shifting meanings and ambivalent discursive constructions' (Komter, 1991: 47)

In presenting bureaucracy as a discourse in general, and a discourse of male rationality in particular, current theories are in danger of throwing the practical and theoretical baby out with the bathwater. We will return to the issue of rationality and make a qualified defence of the Weberian position in the final chapter, but for the moment we want to link the theoretical discussions to more practical issues about dealing with gender inequality, not merely to add a policy dimension, but because the discussion raises key theoretical questions.

From equal opportunity to managing diversity?

Equal opportunity (EO) policies advocate formal, collective responses to gender inequalities in the workplace, marking an end to an individual differences approach that promoted the idea that women had to 'fit in' in order to succeed. In contrast, under EO the onus was on organisations to change. This ranged from targets to improve the number of women at various levels of the organisation; formalisation of procedures and specification of equitable conduct dealing with access to and treatment in jobs; family-friendly career support systems, including career breaks, job sharing and flexible hours; and additional training such as assertiveness and personal development. Overall, it can be seen as the prime policy response to the heightened visibility of gender issues outlined in this chapter, as well as a somewhat more reluctant compliance with legal regulation of sexual and other forms of discrimination.

EO was always controversial. Business critics resented 'bureaucratic' regulation of labour markets and processes. Meanwhile, radical critics (Symons, 1992; Simpson, 1997) often see it as a form of liberal feminism that encourages a superficial view that organisations could be gender neutral if appropriate procedures and policies were followed, and inequalities could be dealt with if opportunities were made available and women took them. Given the evidence examined in this chapter, it has not been difficult for critics to find problems to feed on. Even flagship progressive companies, such as those involved in Opportunity 2000 in the UK, have been shown to make limited progress (Wajcman, 1996b). An emphasis on formal procedures tends to neglect underlying structural and attitudinal factors. As a consequence, external or internal legislation may be ignored or marginalised in practice, particularly where senior managerial support is weak or operational managers are hostile (Jewson and Mason, 1986; Collinson *et al.*, 1990).

Managerial writers began to use such evidence to mount a critique of the 'ineffectiveness' of EO and US-based affirmative action policies (Blakemore and Black, 1996). An alternative was advocated under the heading of *managing diversity*. That has proven very influential in practitioner communities (see Kandola and Fullerton, 1994). The content of diversity differs, as management and policy makers struggle to come to terms with the growing heterogeneity of the labour force in terms of gender, ethnicity, age and disability (de los Reyes, 2000). In some contexts such as Sweden, as de los Reyes observes, issues of ethnicity and migrant labour predominate, though in general, 'few studies deal with the impact of ethnicity in work organisations' (2000: 260). Nevertheless, there are commonalities in the approach. As the employment policy director of Grand Metropolitan put it, 'Managing or valuing diversity differs from the conventional approach to equal opportunities in that it seeks to create a climate whereby those involved want to move beyond the achievement of mere statistical goals' (Greenslade, 1994: 28). Like many companies they prioritise the business case for any measures, notably that diversity reflects demographic change and therefore the available talent pool, enhances competitiveness by adding value to the capacity for innovation, and matches the profile of clients and customers.

The policy terrain shifts to an emphasis on personal development, support for individuals through coaching and mentoring, education to change the culture of the organisation, and broadening managerial responsibilities beyond the human resource function. This is obviously linked to and extends the scope of HRM – competitive advantage is not just through people, but their diversity (Herriot and Pemberton, 1994). Multiculturalism can be achieved without the divisiveness of EO, with its associations with conflict, exclusion and special interests (Blakemore and Black, 1996). The different perceptions, language and ways of solving problems of men and women are complementary and can both add value (Masreliez-Steen, 1989). As Kirton and Greene (2000) note, there is a shift away from norms of assimilation and towards 'positive messages' about recognising talent through and despite social differences.

Some feminists working in the management field support this. Adler argues that an equity approach assumes similarity, while MD is based on assumed difference: 'The first focuses on increasing the representation of women managers; the second, on increasing their utilisation at all levels of the organisation' (1994: 24). Such arguments clearly reflect the broader shifts in approach towards a 'soft' essentialism in feminist thought: that women can be themselves and be of value without having to assimilate. This kind of approach is superficially attractive. It draws its main explanatory power from an understanding of the significance of the kind of informal cultures and networks discussed earlier, and some of its policy mechanisms, such as mentoring, may be a useful addition.

However, MD remains limited in theoretical and practical terms. It attempts to combine what would appear to be contradictory: a focus on individuals rather than groups, yet a recognition of collective categories and change goals. The shift of emphasis towards individuals disconnects those goals from any collective force of disadvantaged groups, and regards all difference as equally salient (Kirton and Greene, 2000: 113). Measuring progress qualitatively rather than quantitatively uses the language of complementarity and depth, yet allows organisations to evade the constraints of targets and facilitate male appropriation of 'feminine styles' without substantive change in representation or progression (Wajcman, 1996a: 347). Complementarity, according to Adler, means that 'firms expect women managers, to think, dress, and act like women' (1994: 26). Aside from the fact that this is at odds with previously-discussed evidence about the much exaggerated differences between the attitudes and behaviour of male and female managers, there is 'the danger that any argument based on women's attributed differences from men will be used to reassert their essential inferiority and justifiable exclusion from certain public roles' (Webb, 1997: 163).

For all its weaknesses, EO offers a minimum defence in terms of policing procedures and behaviour. Moreover, it is consistent with the evidence we have examined that it is the formal domains of organisational life where women feel more comfortable and protected (Simpson, 1997: 126). It is true that changing informal cultures is a more difficult and long-term task, but the issue is whether it is more effective when combined with formal mechanisms. Achieving substantive equal opportunity will be a struggle, it will require more extensive legislation to encourage family-friendly policies, it will be lengthy and there will be losers. None of this fits easily into the way that many proponents of HRM view the world.

Conclusion

Despite the continued practical obstacles to career progression, some things have changed in gender relations at work. Research clearly shows shifts away from the earlier stereotypical associations of 'ideal' management with masculinity. However, while these views have virtually disappeared among women, they are still present in the perceptions of many male managers (Brenner *et al.*, 1989). Even where women are still struggling as 'tokens' in difficult environments, there is little evidence that they are falling into the role traps identified by Kanter (Simpson, 1997). In contrast, while male managers may endorse general statements about equal treatment, their views are often 'soft' and more deeply-held beliefs remain unchanged. For example, Wajcman (1996b) found that while there was no difference between the sexes when they were asked which sex made better managers, a sizeable minority of men (21 per cent) said they would prefer to work for a male manager.

Theoretically there have also been major shifts. It is unlikely that organisation theory will ever return to gender-neutral models of bureaucracy or anything else. Indeed, as we have shown in this chapter, debates on the glass ceiling and other issues have added fresh insights which complement existing knowledge of gender and work, such as on labour markets (Rubery *et al.*, 1999) and professions (Witz, 1992). The distinctiveness of that debate and its focus on organisational factors should not let us lose sight of the bigger picture. A capacity to enter the labour market and rise up the career ladder remains strongly affected by unequal domestic responsibilities, so studies of work–family boundaries need to inform organisational analysis (Crompton, 1996; Burke, 1997; Wajcman, 1998). Conflicts between job and family are particularly acute where mobility is a prerequisite for career advancement and social norms strongly reinforce the primacy of female domestic roles, as illustrated by Ng and Fosh's (2000) study of international airlines in East Asia.

In this chapter we have focused on the two key debates that have shaped that analysis, but it is worth noting that there may be tensions between the literatures on gender and sexuality. Some commentators believe that the avalanche of writing on sexuality is beginning to squeeze out attention to those many aspects of the 'gender paradigm' that are distinguishable from issues of sexuality (Witz and Savage, 1992). In relation to this, more conventional economic issues have tended to be marginalised in the emphasis on culture, discourse and identity. More controversially