

**GENDER AND MANAGEMENT:
A CRITICAL REVIEW OF RESEARCH**

by

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Summary

This article selectively reviews gender and management research. A flavour of what it can be like to research in this area is offered alongside a more substantive account. The article maps the many strands of work potentially relevant to exploring gender and management. It covers aspects of the field such as its diversity, emerging development, potential marginality and increasing clarity of definition, and considers implications for researchers. The appropriate integration of gender awareness into mainstream theorising, alongside its separate development, is advocated. Major themes and issues in gender and management research are summarised and briefly addressed. Dilemmas about seeking to promote change but needing to speak within current conventions of management and academia are noted.

Introduction

In this paper I hope to give you an impression of current research into gender and management, and some flavour of what it might be like to work in this academic area. This account is, of course, selective, both because I see from certain perspectives and because ‘the field’ (if so coherent a label can be used) is too expansive to summarise in an article of this length. I shall particularly concentrate on suggesting core themes and issues, and raising questions I find interesting or challenging. My review is tailored to this Journal and its multi-disciplinary audience, many of whom may not be familiar with, or perhaps at all interested in, gender research. Also it holds in mind the British Academy of Management’s 1994 Conference title - ‘The Impact of Management Research’. I shall, however, reframe attention to impacts to mean consideration more generally of the relationships between management lives/practices and research, as gender-related inquiry is often shaped by what organizations are assumed to want or fear. This review is intended to be as much part of a process of inquiry as a statement. I hope to receive feedback from it, in various ways.

Research is potentially both a personal and political process (Marshall, 1992). Working on gender is certainly both in high measure. As I write, for example, I do so as a gendered person who has to live with many of the issues identified in the literatures, and knowing that gender is contentious terrain in various ways, partly because it is associated with hopes or senses of threat about change. There are therefore often parallels between researchers of gender and the processes they research. I shall note some of the resulting dilemmas below. I doubt if authors of other research reviews will be so acutely aware of such issues, although I may be mistaken. The consequently illuminated challenges are, however, more generally relevant to contemporary UK academic life.

The term ‘gender’ is gaining popularity. Its meaning was once assumed to be relatively clear; it was used to refer to the social expectations and roles attributed to or experienced by people based on their biological sex. But gender is taking on a much broader and more diffuse set of meanings. It has become a general label for talking about women, men, the relationships between them, related aspects of organizing, processes through which gender differentiated behaviour patterns are enacted, and associated issues of power in various guises. This development is useful in some ways, allowing a wealth of potentially relevant frameworks and

issues to be labelled concisely and therefore more readily invoked. It encourages inclusive, potentially non-partisan analyses; it incorporates attention to gendered processes and to men's interests, although the emphasis of research is still on women. The wide realm of issues currently labelled 'gender' is also doubtless potentially confusing. And I wonder if too-ready use of the label could sanitise and distance, reducing the potential disturbance of explorations by encouraging people to pay superficial attention and avoid contentious issues.

Gender and management as a field of study

In my view gender and management is not a particularly coherent field. There is a wide-ranging array of potentially contributing strands which includes women in management literatures; critical theories of organizations and organizing (particularly informed by post-modernism and feminism); analyses of gendered power relations; critical research on men and masculinities; and feminist and pro-feminist contributions. These strands are each themselves diverse in their underlying frameworks, academic influences and approaches to sense-making. They are all developing and diversifying rapidly. As this process progresses we see the emergence of successive waves of material, each building on or transforming the issues of their predecessors. Feminist contributions, for example, offer a rich proliferation of voices, including work portraying black (hooks, 1984; Bell and Nkomo, 1992; Better-Reed and Moore, 1992) and lesbian (Kitzinger, 1987; Hall, 1989) perspectives. One of their major themes has been that of emerging from silence, of 'unlearning to not speak' in Piercy's (1973) delightful phrase.

The literatures which overtly address gender-related issues stand in relation to a vast body of unlabelled research, which is assumed to be gender neutral. The gender-unaware nature of this inquiry, which constitutes the mainstream of theory in most academic discipline areas, is increasingly criticised and challenged. Collinson and Hearn (1994) identify a recurring paradox in much available literature on work, organizations and management.

'The categories of men and masculinity are frequently central to analyses, yet they remain taken for granted, hidden and unexamined. Men are both talked about and ignored, rendered simultaneously explicit and implicit. They are frequently at the centre of discourse but they are rarely the focus of interrogation.' (p. 3)

Their suggestions, for which there is widespread approval, are explicitly to name men as men in research which studies their activities, experiences and beliefs, rather than develop theory as if they are gender-free people, and to appreciate diversity amongst men as appropriate.

What kinds of gender appreciation can be integrated with management?

As I have indicated, gender research is potentially highly diverse. But when applied to management I believe that there are boundaries of acceptability which constrain and narrow the field. Much gender relevant literature challenges existing distributions of power in society, questions the nature of organizations and their purposes, and critiques social practices based on public and private gender differentiation. Many feminist analyses, for example, would be considered in dubious taste or offensive when set alongside mainstream organizational theory (Calas and Smircich, 1992). So there is a filtering of what becomes incorporated. Work which has a reform intent, which seeks to promote change within existing patterns and practices, is

relatively acceptable (although its suggestions for change may not be heeded). Literatures which are more challenging receive little acknowledgement in mainstream management theorising. But similar suggestions - for example about more flexible working patterns - seem acceptable from other sources, such as Handy (1989).

I think it is a significant theoretical and practical imperative to heighten awareness about, and challenge, processes which limit the scope of the gender and management field. If the natures of employment, organizations, management and careers are changing, then constraining our boundaries of thinking and imagination is especially unhelpful, fostering the unintentional replication of previous patterns - of theory and management practices - in new guises.

Living with complexity

As there are so many potentially relevant perspectives and development and diversification are occurring so rapidly, making knowledge in the gender and management field can be a turbulent, challenging business. It is here that we can see some of the boundaries of acceptability in play. Researchers are living with levels of complexity which seem unlikely to characterise other academic areas. There is a prevailing sense of flux and change. Apparently adequate sense or analysis can soon become challenged or overtaken by alternative views. Research in the area is evolving, ever-shifting, revealing new facets, becoming more complex and changing form. Often there are parallel developments in organizational practices, such as campaigns to promote women's development, revising the demands made on researchers. Debates about gender-related issues are played out continually socially and through the media. Theories may be reflected in researchers' own personal and professional lives, and vice versa. Unfortunately the generative quality of these developments can sometimes turn sour. For example, ferocity pervades some debates and counter debates so that creating theory about gender can feel like walking a minefield, with many places not to tread.

There are personal, political and epistemological challenges for the researcher hearing so many, often changing, potential voices. These voices represent a wonderful richness and yet are difficult to incorporate alongside each other and within the realms of management as it is more commonly portrayed. Whilst appreciating diversity is being heralded as the next phase in academic development and human resource practices, living this out in practice and theoretically is challenging, to say the least. Each researcher will have their individual strategy for coping (perhaps influenced by their peer alliance group); these may well change with time (Marshall, in press a). Part of the reflexivity required to work on gender is a continuing self- (and peer-?) scrutiny on what these are and how they may be affecting our work.

In my work I am conscious of these dilemmas. I seek to maintain openness to diverse influences, but doing so can prove challenging and can lead to some disruptive experiences. A particularly heightened example of the latter happened to me recently. I was reading hooks (1984) on the train journey to deliver a paper on women's experiences of working at senior management team and Board levels (Marshall, in press b). hooks, in her direct style, had been challenging the concerns which had helped formulate contemporary feminism (through the work of Friedan, 1963, and others). Her argument, in summary, was that:

'Specific problems and dilemmas of leisure class white housewives were real concerns that merited consideration and change but they were not the pressing political concerns of masses of women. Masses of women were concerned about economic survival, ethnic and racial discrimination etc.' (hooks, 1984, p2)

Turning to issues affecting people at Board levels felt like entering a different - highly privileged - world, a world whose preoccupations had just been caste into considerable doubt.

I am not using this illustration to engage in the substantive (and valuable) debate it invites, but to acknowledge the importance of its nature in two ways. Firstly, research on gender and management can be shaped by the perceived assumptions, preoccupations and 'realities' of the current organizational world. In this sense the researcher is often operating on ground other people, with their own particular interests, have defined (Rakow, 1986). These interests, in turn, typically encode social values and political-power processes which are covert, partly beyond ready conscious awareness, but also multiply reinforced through organizational, social and interpersonal processes. Dominant management discourses and negative stereotypes of women's supposed attributes have significantly shaped gender and management inquiry. Researchers have, for example, expended considerable energy addressing ideals of management style, under pressure to prove women similar to men to earn them credibility as managers (see below). Seeing through these covert framings is very difficult; generating alternative constructions which are not unawares similarly framed is exceedingly difficult (Martin, 1994).

Secondly, the gender and management field is created partly by researchers' patterns of managing the potential confusion, richness and diversity of available perspectives. This management of academic self has to happen as a gendered person with a life to lead, career to consider and so on. It is worth remembering Maslow's (1966) warning that science can become a defence against anxiety.

I personally find it easier to keep the area's potential confusions, excitements, insights, tensions, and shifting perspectives in play by aspiring to hold theories lightly, letting appreciations evolve but never expecting them to take too fixed a form, realising that there is no truth to discover and that I shall never 'get it right'. But I do not claim always to live up to my best hopes for myself. Perhaps it would be reassuring sometimes to have some orthodoxies to believe in. I find Berman's (1990) exhortation to post-paradigmatic living helpful - and suitably confusing.

'How things are held in the mind is infinitely more important than what is in the mind, including this statement itself.' (p 312)

So, for example, researching gender is part of my academic identity, but not the whole of it, and often using feminist frames of analysis is simultaneously committed and a known choice, not the whole of me either.

Aspiring to academic definition and integration

Gender research is still a relatively separate, some would say marginalised, field. Its insights are not well incorporated or acknowledged in most 'mainstream' theorising. (Can you have a mainstream if diversity is being appreciated? Perhaps not, but there is every appearance of being one.) Many organizational behaviour analyses of topics such as leadership, cognitive style and organizational culture, for example, seem unaware that gender-related critiques of their areas exist. Many research reports of workplace situations in which gender seems highly likely to have some significance - for example where workforces are predominantly female and supervisors and managers predominantly male - proceed without considering this possibility.

I believe that it is now appropriate to consider gender as potentially relevant in every area of study, as well as to pay it separate attention as appropriate. In any research endeavour I would ask the question: ‘In what ways is gender important here?’ Sometimes the answer will be that it seems relatively unimportant, but this should not be assumed. Conducting analyses as if gender might matter is not just appropriate to the behavioural sciences, but also to other disciplines of management such as economics. Their foundational assumptions are matters of choice (often political) and social construction, and therefore worth examining. So, for example, the designation, valuing and payment of different sorts of work (as well as many other aspects of economics) have gender-associated aspects (Waring, 1988; Robertson, 1989). One valuable model for analysis which both interweaves consideration of gender in more widely-based analyses and focuses on gender issues at times is the work on organizational rules by Mills and Murgatroyd (1991). How to move between perspectives of analysis, including those of gender, deserves more attention in curriculum development for undergraduate and postgraduate courses, and in research training programmes.

As I write the comments above I am aware of a core political issue in this area of research. I hear the questions: ‘Who cares?’ and ‘Why should they?’ How to attract the attention of people who have power to define meanings and to generate theory, and are quite happy not to complicate their lives by seeking to take gender into account is a persistent dilemma in the field, and in organizational life generally. There are no easy answers to these questions, although there are many rhetorics which seek to bridge the gap in interest they suggest. Not knowing whether there is sympathy, indifference or antipathy for what they might say affects many researchers of gender. They frame research and speak in highly uncertain contexts. It is little wonder that issues of voice, language and communication figure significantly in gender-related research.

The various literatures of relevance to gender and management have so far existed in relatively separate forums, associated with the discipline histories of their originators. There are now more collecting places, such as special journal issues (Greenglass and Marshall, 1993; Human Relations, 1994), and more dedicated journals such as Women in Management Review and Gender, Work and Organization. The consolidation of gender as an academically respectable area has potential disadvantages as well as obvious benefits. It could contribute to a privileging of intellectual knowledge above practical and experiential forms of knowing (Heron, 1981; Belenky et al, 1986) and take inquirers away from action, reducing the potential impacts of research.

Major themes and issues

In Table 1 I list some of the major topic areas and themes in gender and management research, giving illustrative references. This is a rather ragged list conceptually, and certainly incomplete. I use it to give the outsider to the field some appreciation of its range and concerns. I shall not review each of these topics/themes in detail here. Instead I shall comment selectively on issues I find particularly interesting or indicative at the moment.

- Table 1 about here -

Power

Issues of power are at the heart of much gender research and theorising, both as content and as aspects of research process and politics. Power appears in its many potential formulations. It may be about status, authority, position and access to decision-making. Studies and debates about the relative scarcity of women at senior management levels (approximately 2% in the UK) and concerns that the proportion of women in management may actually be declining (Institute of Management, 1994) are relevant examples. Power also appears as associated with the right to name, define and value (Spender, 1984), issues at the heart of many gender discussions. There are also the powers of communities (of senior managers or academics) to recruit and reward in like-image, to include and exclude, to assign resources, and to define agendas or frameworks of meaning. Whether (even senior) women managers can significantly influence organizational cultures is currently, for example, an issue for debate. Working with these power-associated themes significantly challenges academics and management practitioners. Intended organizational change may well, for example, be undermined because rights to define the world and sanction deviance are retained by previous power elites, reinforcing underlying assumptions and dominance relationships. The current use and disparagement of so-called 'political correctness' seems to be a working out of some of these issues which has turned decidedly sour.

Are women and men really different?

The above is a remarkably persistent question in the gender field (Marshall, 1984). Early studies on women in management often set out to establish women's similarities to men in terms of leadership behaviour, motivation and the like, to earn them acceptance against unquestioned norms of the successful good manager. Schein's (1976) classic study and title - 'Think manager - think male' - summed up the world in which women were meant to prove themselves. Women managers were repeatedly shown to be similar to male colleagues, but their acceptance in management did not necessarily follow. A later trend of research sought to reject the 'male as norm' base of management and argue that the qualities previously stereotyped as 'female' are also potentially valuable. Rosener (1990), for example, found in her studies that women more often than men adopted an interactive management style closely aligned with the then perceived model for the future - transformative leadership. This feminization of management has not, however, necessarily won women acceptance, especially at senior levels. It may be a trap anyway, if some junior, low-pay, management jobs, which require 'harmonising skills', in de-layered organizations are assumed ideally suited to women whilst more senior policy posts are still typed as needing toughness and other stereotypes of male management (Calas and Smircich, 1993).

I need to withdraw from the details of this debate before I become more entangled. The issue of difference/sameness is now often more subtly pursued than previously, but it still does much to shape research on management. It can seem like a search for The Ultimate Truth, a search heavy with political and power connotations. Various authors point to the dangers of emphasising gender categories and therefore inappropriately polarising them (Bacchi, 1990) or neglecting the obvious variety within each (hooks, 1989). I agree with Cockburn (1991) that (and always remembering the previous point) it is sometimes appropriate to think of men and women as the same and sometimes appropriate to think of them as different. I also believe that

some temporary polarising of 'male' and 'female' has had its values. It has legitimated exploring the (elusive in many senses) 'feminine principle' and encouraged a significant phase of articulating and valuing characteristics and possibilities - such as co-operation and intuition - which were not previously so available in dominant formulations of management and organization.

I do not think that this question - of whether men and women are really different - will dissolve until fundamental conceptions of management fully move beyond their foundations in male experience and sex role stereotypes. If 'male as norm' persists (or white as norm) however covertly, comparisons between groups, and the use of frames of difference/similarity, will have an inevitable attraction. Differences once 'found' are interpreted through values. Research on gender is still haunted by the implicit injunction not to show women different and hence inferior to idealised assumptions about managers and their lives. This is ironic given the widespread espoused belief that the nature of management and organizations are undergoing radical change.

Individualising gender issues and change solutions

There is a tendency in much gender and management research to explain phenomena and look for solutions at the individual level of analysis (Marshall, 1993a). Even when more systemic explanations of phenomena are seen as appropriate, resulting suggestions for action tend to favour person-centred remedies such as training (Guttek, 1993). This training may be for women, to empower them in relation to the organizational world as it is, or for men, to help them develop gender awareness. Generally more change is demanded of women than of men. For example many discussions of work-home issues still portray women as the primary parents and as the people in charge of domestic responsibilities. They must adjust their career patterns and manage the practicalities of multi-stranded lives. This individualised emphasis in sense-making is unlikely to foster radical change in organizational or social cultures and practices. It may, however, reflect a 'realistic' appraisal of the limited change energy available in these realms.

From gender as attribute to gender as process

An important development during recent years has been the research and theory which appreciates gender differentiation and gendered power dynamics as processes, rather than conceptualising gender as relatively fixed or uniform attributes of persons or social groups (Lewis and Morgan, 1994). In their chapter entitled 'Doing gender', for example, West and Zimmerman (1991) discuss the continuing work people engage in to create identities as gendered people and to interpret other people's behaviour in such terms. This literature particularly illuminates the subtle dynamics through which gender differentiation - and any associated notions of relative power or dominance-subordination - can be played out, maintained or resisted. It also reveals many organizational processes, such as communication (Rakow, 1986; Mills, 1991; Marshall, 1993b) as inherently gender-associated. One intent of such work has been to offer an empowering sense-making to individuals, who otherwise might be portrayed as powerless in the face of structures which inherently either devalue them or assign them superior roles which they cannot escape. This reasoning might suggest, for example, that organizational cultural dynamics are not 'realities' to which people must adjust but can be shifted towards greater equality as they are re-created through daily interaction.

This argument is persuasive and helpful, but does not mean that all contexts are amenable to change in this way.

Kanter's (1977) highly influential study of the dynamics of tokenism (defined as relative number) is in this realm. She argued that the job makes the person, that behaviour (such as low commitment or perceived lack of ambition) which may be assumed to be characteristic of a person as a member of a particular social group is often an appropriate reaction to their social or organizational circumstances. I have recently found that the processes of visibility, contrast and assimilation which she described as affecting members of marginal social groups are experienced by some women managers operating at senior management team and Board levels (Marshall, in press a).

The importance and contentiousness of critical studies on men by men

(Note: By no means all critical studies on men are being conducted by men; see, for example, Sinclair, 1994). Men's voices are increasingly being heard in the gender field. They are particularly researching dynamics generally; challenging the gender-neutrality of mainstream theory; exploring how male sex role stereotypes may affect men and the kinds of leadership they develop (Simmons, 1987; Keen, 1991); and researching men's identity work (Roper, 1994), different forms of masculinities (Collinson and Hearn, 1994), and men's reactions to equal opportunities initiatives (Vince, 1991). These contributions are a significant development, they bring a more inclusive appreciation of the gender field than can be achieved by studying or problematising women's experiences alone. Some explore the processes of 'naming men as men' (Collinson and Hearn, 1994) in analyses of organizations. Most are exciting, illuminating. Also some offerings are treated with suspicion by women, in case they become a competitive defining of the field, issues and comparative concerns, and take the lime-light.

Diversification

There is a general trend towards both appreciating differences within social categories previously treated as potentially unitary - such as women and men - and elaborating the meanings of concepts within the field. For example, the notion of 'male-dominated' organizational cultures has recently become prominent for describing certain kinds of environment and patterns of interaction which many women, and men, find inhospitable and potentially ineffective (Marshall, 1993c). Researchers are now offering differentiated notions of gendered cultures (Maddox and Parkin, 1993; Collinson and Hearn, 1994), which provide valuable bases for in-company audits (as guides not templates) and explorations.

In conclusion: Intent on change?

Much gender and management literature has an overt or covert change intent. But researchers face the dilemma of how to frame their messages. Many would assume that most power holders in organizations are unconvinced by 'social justice' arguments and would be unsympathetic to radical questionings of the nature of organizational life.

In recent years we have seen a succession of rhetorics designed to make people take women's rights to equality seriously. The force of the 'demographic time bomb' argument - that significant labour shortages would mean organizations needing to make the most of female talent, perhaps in the form of women returners after parenting - was largely countermanded by recession, delaying and other changes in employment patterns. Currently 'the Business Case' and 'Competitive Advantage' case (Adler and Izraeli, 1994) are being advocated. These assert that it is good economic sense for organizations to develop their female employees. They offer coherent proofs within established economic, market rationales. But I doubt whether they convince many previous sceptics. Whilst some organizations take equality and diversity agendas very seriously, many pay lip-service only or generate equal opportunities policies which are not enacted with commitment (Hammond, 1992).

Arguments for change are generally made within the frame of what are considered to be business concerns in order to be acceptable. They seek reform. They are both convincing and potentially dangerous. They could unwittingly reinforce value systems, notions of success, rationales of management and organizational practices which have been based on gender inequalities. Gordon (1991) described organizationally successful women she studied in the USA as 'prisoners of men's dreams' because their aspirations and lifestyles had become shaped by established norms and values. She argued that they had therefore failed to encourage significant change and review which would better accommodate their, sometimes different, patterns of concern and talent, and which many people envisaged that increasing numbers of women managers would automatically ensure.

Gender research faces a parallel dilemma. Its concerns, the assumptions of organizational theory and life to which it relates, and the criteria of academic discourse and rigour by which it is judged are likely to be shaped by dominant conventions. Can it both earn academic and practitioner respectability and maintain the radical vision which has informed much of its more creative and insightful contributions? Can researchers both challenge basic assumptions of management and organization and be welcomed? The doing of gender research seems potentially at least as ambiguous and precarious as an endeavour as does the doing of gender.

The last ten years particularly have seen a flourishing of gender related work. As the field matures researchers may be under pressure to conform to dominant academic forms in order to gain funding, be published and achieve tenure or promotion. I hope that these pressures can be resisted - they benefit no field of study. Gender researchers, perhaps more than others, have to live with their potential to be disruptive, to produce theory and research which is experienced by other people as disturbing (in the many senses of that word). They have to live with their potential marginality. I think the challenge is not to seek to overcome marginality, but to maintain it, awarely and with choice, and find ways to be heard. I also hope that living this dilemma can often be a playful rather than compulsively serious endeavour. I particularly hope that the greater 'professionalisation' of gender and management research within the academic community will not reduce its vitality and risk taking. With these arguments I could be returning to challenge the individual researcher and their management of self. This is partly my intention, but only to place the emphasis here would be to individualise a more general phenomenon. The challenge of how to treat apparently discordant voices and revisionary conceptualisations is one the academic community generally faces. And this thought reminds me of another important issue in gender and management research - the question of whether the themes with which it deals are 'merely' selective representations of more general processes, in this case issues of conformity and orthodoxy in academic life.

Table 1: Major topic areas and themes in gender and management research, with illustrative references

Women in management - counting, describing, explaining them	Davidson & Cooper, 1992 Adler & Izraeli, 1994
Career development - mainly of women	Gallos, 1989; Marshall, in press a
Processes which may limit women's career opportunities - eg 'the glass ceiling'	Hansard Society, 1990
Employment-home life conflicts	Lewis, 1991; Davidson & Cooper, 1992
Power - multiple explorations of	Spender, 1984; hooks, 1984, 1989; Martin, 1994
Change - advocated	
- potential processes of	Hammond, 1992
Whether men and women are <u>really</u> different	Statham, 1987; Bacchi, 1990; Rosener, 1990
'Male-dominated' organizational cultures	
- their resilience	Cockburn, 1991
- consequences for women and men	Roper, 1994; Marshall, in press a
'Doing gender' - processes through which gender differentiation is created, sustained, resisted	West & Zimmerman, 1991
Challenging supposedly gender-neutral organizational concepts - eg bureaucracy	Ferguson, 1984
Critical studies on men and masculinities	Collinson & Hearn, 1994
Reclaiming 'lost' issues which are gender-associated	
- eg sexuality, emotions, sexual harassment	Hearn et al, 1989
Assessing the effects of Equal Opportunities initiatives	Aitkenhead & Liff, 1992
Studying non-bureaucratic organizational forms	Iannello, 1993

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