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# Deconstructing Harry: A Critical Review of Men, Masculinity and Organization\*

## ABSTRACT

*From a few critiques of the gendered nature of organizational research, feminist organizational analysis has developed into a mature paradigm over the past 25 years. The process has involved critique of the existing gendered field, the development and application of feminist theories of organization and a broadening focus to include issues of class, race/ethnicity, and, more recently, masculinity. Inevitably, perhaps, a feature of the developing paradigm has been the growth of conflicting ideas and unresolved contradictions that are now proving problematic as issues of gender enter the mainstream of organizational analysis.*

*Written from within a feminist organizational paradigm, this article argues that further research on the roots of discriminatory practices at work are to some extent hindered by the need to confront and debate conflicting ideas within the field. Thus, with particular reference to the recent interest in masculinities at work, this paper reviews some of the key underlying debates, including the nurture/nature debate, the narrow classifying of masculinity and femininity into mirror opposites, the construction of implicit notions of the "bad masculine" and the "good feminine," and the separation of mascu-*

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*lity and femininity from the lived experiences of people. The article concludes with a summary of some of the main aspects of the debate which, it is hoped, will contribute to further questioning and insights that will allow us to redress discrimination in the workplace.*

**Key words:** *Gender, masculinity, organization studies*

## INTRODUCTION

Prior to 1970 most, if not all, organizational and management research studied male subjects, did not consider female subjects different from males in any material sense and essentially turned a blind eye to the way sex and gender impact organizations (Hearn & Parkin, 1983). Ground breaking work by Acker & Van Houten (1974), Kanter (1977) and other feminist researchers opened debate on the significance of gender within organizational studies, contributed to the debate on workplace equity, and laid the basis of a gender and organization paradigm.

The new paradigm was motivated by a concern to address discrimination at work (Mills & Tancred, 1992), and many of the early contributions centered on 'exposing' the discriminatory character of both organizations and organizational analysis. Moving beyond critique, subsequent studies focused on developing feminist theories of organization. This was followed by numerous applied feminist studies that set out to reveal how organizational dynamics become discriminatory. As the field matured, debate broadened to include issues of diversity and masculinity. More recently, issues of femininity and masculinity in organizational behaviour have found their way into the mainstream.

As with all paradigms (Kuhn, 1970), feminist organizational analysis unites disparate researchers through a shared focus (e.g., addressing workplace sex-based discrimination) that has, for a period of time, overcome epistemological and methodological differences. The fissures that occur within a paradigm, as researchers confront contradictions, has yet to be experienced within feminist organizational analysis. This may be a matter of time, or the nature of the discourse (which de-emphasizes conflict and authorial tone), or the continued evidence of widespread discrimination. Nonetheless, several issues remain unresolved that serve to obfuscate rather than illuminate the roots of discriminatory practices. The problem lies not so much with the unresolved differences themselves but with a need for a more critical discussion and clarification of the issues involved. This is especially so where aspects of the debate are being taken up in the mainstream, often divorced from many of their original feminist concerns.

This article undertakes a critical review of fundamental debates within feminist organizational analysis, particularly in relationship to the more recent interest in masculinity that, we contend, illustrates some of the key problems with gender research. By reflecting on past

scholarship we hope to raise questions that stimulate new research, furthering the debates within feminist organizational analysis that move us forward in order to make workplaces more equitable and tolerant of diversity.

### **Back to the Future: The Nature/Nurture Debate**

The most fundamental debate within gender studies and social science remains the issue of whether a gendered sense of self is ascribed by essential, in-born characteristics (nature) or is achieved through processes of social construction and socialization (nurture). Certainly, the theoretical direction one takes will have implications for the characterization of 'men' and 'women' and how discriminatory factors are conceptualized and addressed. The problem is that the debate is often obscured by the 'common sense' argument that sexual identity owes much to a combination of both nature and nurture. The problem is, what combination?

Oakley's (1972) foundational distinction between 'sex' (the biological division into females and male) and 'gender' (the parallel and socially unequal division into femininity and masculinity) made an important contribution to feminist research. This approach allowed research on discriminatory practices to proceed unhindered by the burden of having to assign relative weights to nature and nurture. Oakley and subsequent feminist researchers were able to deal with the nature/nurture dichotomy by playing down the significance of biology and focusing attention on culture in the making of 'men' and 'women'. The problem is that relative weighting is nonetheless implicit and has implications for further research.

The distinction between 'sex' and 'gender' gained wide usage but, as Oakley (1981: 41) herself later reflected, "the two terms presuppose a degree of prior certainty about the separation of innate and environmental differences." The problem is illustrated by Popenoe (1980: 166–168) who attempts to argue that the "gendering of persons" owes much to cultural influences, yet he roots explanations of behaviour in biological accounts. He contends that while "males and females are genetically, hormonally and anatomically different from each other . . . these predispositions probably account for only a small part" of gendered identities. Yet his use of the terms 'male' and 'female' suggest natural, fixed categories, especially where 'sexual behaviour' is seen as the "result of hormonal conditioning."

Mackie (1987: 3–4) outlines some of the key problems involved in the sex/gender debate. She argues that the terms are often used interchangeably "because it is often difficult, even impossible, to disentangle biology from culture"; that there is a tendency "to view both sex and gender as inevitable, dichotomous qualities, deeply rooted in human nature," and there is a propensity "to understand gender as a property of individuals, not a principle of social organization." She concludes that while the sex/gender distinction is inherently problematic it remains a useful heuristic for understanding the social construction of differences between 'men'

and 'women;' allowing us to ask, "What relationships exist between gender and sex? How in modern society do the minor biological differences between the sexes come to assume such vast social importance?" (Mackie, 1987: 5). The problem is that while Mackie (1987) questions the sex/gender distinction she strongly implies that culture is the dominant influence. But it should be noted that the issue here is not whether culture or biology is the greater influence on gender identity but rather recognition of how a theoretical commitment to one more than the other shapes the foci and outcomes of research.

### **Behavioral Implications of Sex/Gender Distinctions**

Within organizational analysis two main variants of the sex/gender divide can be found in a 'sex differences' approach, focussed on comparisons between 'men' and 'women', and a 'gender' approach, focussed on the social construction of gendered persons. Each in its own way is dogged by the problem of the nature/nurture debate.

**The Sex Difference Approach:** In organizational studies a biological approach is evident in much of the liberal feminism that informed the development of a 'women in management' (WIM) perspective in recent years (Calás & Smircich, 1992). The WIM perspective not only played a very important role in the development of anti-discrimination and equity perspectives, but also in rallying people to challenge discriminatory practices. Debated change strategies include encouraging 'women' to act more like 'men' (Henning & Jardin, 1977); androgyny training, whereby 'women' and 'men' adopt gender-neutral styles of behaviour (Bem, 1981); and/or recruitment patterns that develop female role modeling (Gutek, 1985). These suggestions have all been criticized from a gender perspective for focusing on individual change, or placing an over-reliance on supposed 'female' qualities, while ignoring the 'masculinist discourse' within which organizational action is constructed, occurs and is maintained (Calás & Smircich, 1996; Ferguson, 1984; Mills & Chiamonte, 1991).

The problem is particularly evident in recent mainstream accounts which conflate sex and gender and frequently work with stereotypical characterizations of 'men' and 'women'. In the following examples, authors build on the notion of fixed categories of 'men' and 'women' whose character is rooted in biological differences. In a discussion on 'gender and leadership', Robbins (1998: 377) contends that "the similarities between men and women tend to outweigh the difference" but what differences there are suggest that "women fall back on a more democratic leadership style, while men feel more comfortable with a directive style". The argument is clearly designed to support employment equity yet is, to some extent, undermined by a reliance on biological difference, which is at the heart of claims for discriminatory practice. This problematic is more transparent in Field's (1998: 145) approach to employment equity where he states that,

"For most individual characteristics there is no difference between females and males . . . However, there is evidence that:

- Females are better at verbal ability, though the gap is narrowing;
- Males are better at spatial and mathematical/quantitative ability;
- Males are more aggressive;
- Females are better at perceptual speed and dexterity;
- Females mature faster than males, but this difference declines with age;
- On average adult males are taller, heavier, and stronger than females."

Following up with "implications for organizations and their hiring practices", Field (1998: 146) draws on the example of fire fighting to assert that:

"Even though some women are able to meet the standards of physical performance set for a firefighter . . . a woman in top condition still finds it difficult to physically outperform a man in top condition. Essentially, in this high performance screening, biological differences between males and females are making the difference in who is hired."

Field does not question who established the standards in the first place, who gets to judge whom, nor whether one level of 'approved' performance should be valued higher than another level of 'approved' performance. Instead, he asks: "What is fair? Should women be hired even though they don't perform quite as well on the physical tests as the top men? Would that be discriminating against the men who would have been hired had the women not been hired?" (Field, 1998: 146). He concludes by saying that there are no easy answers to these questions, yet he implies that 'men' are, at least in these circumstances, more capable than 'women.'

Among the many criticisms of the biological approach is therefore that it reinforces discriminatory notions of difference by suggesting that males and females consist of inherent differences, and that these differences – rather than cultural practices – shape opportunity (Eichler & Lapointe, 1985). As Margrit Eichler (1980: quoted in Richardson, 1981: 169) has argued, by asking people what they believe about the differences between the sexes, researchers may be reifying the stereotypes; "the stereotype takes on a life of its own, becomes normative, and empirical reality is measured and evaluated against the norm. Reality has been stood on its head."

**The Gender Approach:** In an effort to overcome the problem of "biology as destiny," social constructionist theory has ignored, de-emphasized, or contested biology through a focus on 'gender processes', or cultural factors that shape people's images of what it is to be a 'man' or a 'woman'. This approach has been important in drawing attention to the structure (Agòcs, Burr, & Somerset, 1992) and processes (Morgan, 1988) of organizations in the construction of

gendered identities. This approach encourages the organizational researcher to identify how forms of structure and process contribute to the relative worth of masculine and feminine characteristics in a given organizational situation. Kanter (1977), for example, argues that the 'opportunity structure' of an organization acts as a powerful signal of the worth of women in comparison to men and, in the process, acts as a powerful symbol of gender identity; organizational power becomes strongly associated with masculinity to the extent that one defines the other. In a similar vein, Schein (Brenner, Tomkiewicz, & Schein, 1989; Schein, 1973; Schein, 1975; Schein, 1994) demonstrates how associations of men with managing led 'male' and 'female' managers alike to view leadership as something fundamentally masculine.

By examining work processes, numerous feminist accounts have revealed the links between forms of work, work structure and masculinity. This demonstrates that the way that organization, managing, and work are all conceived is favorable to 'men' rather than 'women' – particularly when it comes to the hiring and promotion of 'women'. Within this framework masculinity and forms of work often become conflated and inseparable. French (1985), for example, argues that the "harshness of industrial work" may have, in its early stages, fueled the need in male workers to develop new images of womanhood (associated with domesticity) and masculinity (associated with tough, competitive work practices).

In their otherwise insightful accounts, social constructionists have been plagued by two key problems. First, accounts are often haunted by the shadow of biology. It is almost linguistically impossible to refer to 'men' and 'women' without implicitly referencing biological differences. To speak of 'men' or 'male' workers adopting new forms of masculinity, as Mills (1998) or Wicks (1999) do for example, cannot help but suggest that masculinity is a form of cultural dressing on a distinct, and preexisting biological form. Rakow (1986: 12) has gone further than most in addressing the problem of biology by arguing that "the relationship between biology and culture can no longer be assumed to be a simple layering of one on top of the other, resulting in cultural differences added on to already existing biological differences between two pre-given sexes." Refuting the notion of two distinct and dimorphic sexes, Rakow (1986: 20–21) goes on to argue that "[T]wo sexes are created out of a variety. Other combinations of chromosome patterns and secondary sex characteristics exist than what is considered male and female." In her argument Rakow draws attention to the powerful labeling process that underlies gender divisions and is discriminatory not only to those labeled 'women' but to those who are either unwilling (e.g. homosexuals) or unable (e.g. hermaphrodites) to conform to the two ideal-typical (i.e. heterosexual) notions of 'men' and 'women.'

Second, social constructionism is often dogged by essentialist accounts that suggest characteristics associated with femininity e.g., caring and cooperation, are somehow rooted in 'women's' essential character. Rosener (1990), for example, contends that organizations are

marked by a traditional "command-and-control" leadership style associated with men that can be contrasted with an "interactive" leadership style – involving a concern with sharing and cooperation – that is associated with women. A curious variation of the essentialist account argues that 'feminine' characteristics, although originating with 'women', can be learned by 'men' and vice-versa. This paradoxical relationship suggests that femininity and masculinity are not fixed categories. Consequently, attempts to define them (even in relational terms) will always be problematic because they are not only contingent upon local conditions in society and organization but are in a constant state of transformation and flux.

**Postmodernism and Gender:** In recent years feminist postmodernism has provided new ways of thinking about the problem of discrimination at work. These accounts have largely overcome the sex/gender dichotomy by problematizing its very existence, focusing on issues such as subjectivity, discourse, knowledge and power. This approach denies the "assumption that women and men have essential natures," arguing instead that gender is socially constructed in discourse – "a social construction which encompasses desire, the unconscious and conscious emotional life" (Weedon, 1993: 167). In other words, people are gendered through discourses that not only construct images of typical manhood and womanhood, but typically privilege one over the other through a series of understandings ('knowledge') and practices. Thus, according to Weedon (1993: 99), "gendered subject positions are constituted in various ways by images of how one is expected to look and behave, by rules of behavior to which one should conform, reinforced by approval or punishment, through particular definitions of pleasure which are offered as natural and imply ways of being a girl or woman and by the absence within particular discourses of any possibility of negotiating the nature of femininity and masculinity."

Similarly, Acker (1992: 250) refers to gender as "socially produced distinctions between female and male, feminine and masculine." It is not something "that people are, in some inherent sense [but] a daily accomplishment that occurs in the course of participation in work organizations as well as in many other locations and relations". From this perspective the dominant discourses present in society and its institutions tend to create a certain inevitability of social norms relating to 'men' and 'women'. Post structuralism, as an ideological and political position, tries to dislodge these understandings at their very foundations (Hekman, 1990).

Feminist postmodernist accounts have enriched our ways of understanding gender discrimination but they have not escaped a number of criticisms, namely of essentialism and political annihilation. Ferguson's (1984) discussion of the relationship between bureaucratic discourse and gendered selves, for example, has been criticized for relying heavily on an essentialist notion of 'woman' and the idea of a 'feminine discourse' as an antidote to existing bureaucratic, capitalist (ostensibly 'masculinist') discourse (Billing, 1994). On the other hand, feminists who are otherwise sympathetic to postmodernism contend that political action to

address sex-based discrimination is inherently inconsistent with a postmodern account of reality that resists categorization of actors into categories such as 'men' and 'women' (Heckman, 1990). Many feminists are therefore uncomfortable with the politics of postmodernism, yet at the same time they admire the attempts to insurrect subjugated knowledges (Foucault, 1980) and initiate resistance to hegemonic discourses (Ferguson, 1984).

Essentialist critiques of postmodernism are, however, quite rare. It is, ironically, their very success at overcoming the notion of biological determinism that has raised the greatest difficulties for feminist postmodernists. As Calás & Smircich (1996: 244) have noted, postmodern feminism's "focus on language and discourse has often been criticized as untenable for feminist politics." In other words, in contrast to approaches that stress "women's voice/women's experience" (e.g. Hartsock, 1983; Smith, 1987) that are able to rally actors to a course of action, postmodernist or poststructuralist feminism, through its deconstruction of the binary oppositions upon which terms 'woman' and 'feminine' are defined, limit the possibility of collective action (Calás & Smircich, 1992; Hekman, 1990). Although at some level postmodernist feminism can be complementary to the ends of the "women's voice" perspective, feminist politics based on a "women's voice" perspective will not likely be successful in achieving their aim of women's liberation. "The expectation of making a better world, which women's voices espouse, is questioned by poststructuralist feminism as another attempt to reinscribe a dominant sign in a world that is more complex than what women's voices often believe it to be. From a poststructuralist feminist approach, the work is never done; you have to keep on questioning who you can be as you are today" (Calás & Smircich, 1992: 232). This led them to conclude that, "it's not only about 'gender' anymore." They argue that we need "a new paradigm that transcends all identity politics;" that "pursuing the separate interests of women isn't adequate and is even diversionary," that 'women's issues' are symptoms of problems that affect everyone."

Flax (1990: 232) offers a very different way of reconciling postmodernism and feminism in proposing that:

"A feminist deconstruction of the self . . . would point toward locating self and its experiences in concrete social relations, not only in fictive or purely textual conventions. A social self would come to be partially in and through powerful, affective relationships with other persons. These relations with others and our feelings and fantasies about them, along with experiences of embodiedness also mediated by such relations can come to constitute an 'inner' self that is neither fictive or 'natural.' Such a self is simultaneously embodied, gendered, social, and unique. It is capable of telling stories and of conceiving and experiencing itself in all these ways."



This approach offers a valuable framework with which to explore the relationship of the gendered self and organizational/institutional discourse.

## CONSTRUCTING MASCULINITY

Until recently the sex/gender and organizations debate largely focused on how organizational processes constructed discriminatory images of 'women'. The question of masculinity remained under-theorized, often unspoken or implicit (Collinson & Hearn, 1994). Feminist accounts (particularly social constructionist and poststructuralist accounts) have opened up the space for analyzing the links between 'men', 'masculinity,' 'power/knowledge,' and gender discrimination. By focusing on masculinity, organizational theorists can begin to unravel not only the processes involved in gender discrimination, not only some of the key actors ('men') involved in those processes, but also the processes by which those actors come to acquire and maintain their gendered identities.

A central problem in the literature, however, is the issue of what constitutes 'masculinity' and what is its relationship to notions of 'man' and 'manhood'. Too often, 'masculinity' (as well as femininity) is used unproblematically as a description of 'men', and this has implications for the study of organizational behaviour. Field (1998: 145), for example, argues that "for most mammals (including humans), the basic body plan is female and stays that way until told otherwise by masculine hormones". This not only suggests that masculinity is a biological entity but that we would have little to gain by understanding the processes by which masculinity is developed. On the other hand, social constructionist accounts are often problematic where they make a simple connection between masculinity and males. From the social constructionist perspective, masculinity is an achieved status. People learn what behaviors and attitudes they should have according to their label – male or female. Further, when a male is acting in culturally condoned gender-appropriate ways, he is viewed as masculine, and when a female is acting in gender-appropriate ways, she is seen as feminine (Richardson, 1981). Although this approach it is valuable in focusing attention on what is considered gender-appropriate behavior in a given organization or society, and how that might impact discriminatory practices, it is nonetheless problematic in suggesting that 'males' acquire 'masculinity,' without exploring the contexts in which labels develop and change.

Kimmel (1987: 14) broadens the focus by suggesting that "masculinity and femininity are socially constructed within a historical context of gender relations." This perspective suggests that what it means to be a 'man' and what characteristics are to count as 'masculine' will vary over time and in different contexts. If this is so, then we might expect to find differences in the form that masculinity takes in a particular organization at a particular time. The question then

is, what are the implications of changing forms of masculinity on gender discrimination? Are forms of masculinity always problematic for 'women' in organizations? Are some aspects of 'masculinity' (e.g. new wave sensitivity) less discriminatory in their consequences?

Interestingly, many commentators suggest that changing forms of masculinity do not substantially alter relationships of discrimination. This argument is similar to the biological perspective in its implications for further research, i.e., that what we learn about masculinity will have little impact on behavioural outcomes. Kimmel (1987), for example, develops our understanding of masculinity as a social phenomenon that is defined in relationship to femininity, developed in contexts where benefits accrue to 'men' from a society based upon the institutional power of 'men' over 'women', supported by inherited definitions of masculinity and femininity. Although this approach helps us to gain greater insights into the relationship between masculinity and discriminatory practices, we are faced with the conclusion that 'men' are likely to resist any ultimate change in understandings of masculinity that will alter their power basis vis-à-vis 'women.'

Several theorists have attempted to deal with the relationship of masculinity to discrimination through a focus on "multiple masculinities" as ways of documenting different (rather than greater or lesser) forms of oppression and discrimination. Mishkind, Rodin, Silberstein & Striegel-Moore (1987: 46–47) identify five "traditional archetypes" of masculinity – soldier, frontiersman, expert, breadwinner, and lord, arguing that they are "archaic artifacts, although the images remain". Although they contend that the frontiersman and the lord are no longer viable masculine roles and that the breadwinner and expert are no longer exclusively masculine roles, they conclude that contemporary 'men' may be left "grasping for the soldier archetype (which) conveys the image of the strong, muscle-armored body . . . in an exaggerated attempt to incorporate what possible options remain of the male images they have held since youth." Alone among recent accounts in suggesting that key discriminatory images of masculinity may be dying, Mishkind et al. (1987) hold on to the view that some form of dominant masculinity (the soldier) is still sought by 'men'. They do not explain why or where such a drive for a discriminatory form of masculinity develops or why the soldier remains the only 'choice' for men.

In a similar vein Fuller (1996) argues that there is evidence of different forms of masculinity but contends that, far from being extinct, different masculinities will be evident in any given time and place. However, despite naming several extant forms of masculinity – Sporting Man, Macho Man, Business Man, Working Class Man, Middle Class Man, Homosexual Man and New Man – she, like Mishkind et al. (1987), centers her analysis on a single "hegemonic masculinity." She argues that underlying all conventional constructions of masculinity is a single idealized form based on the deep-rooted notion of unequal power relations between 'men'

and 'women.' Masculinity therefore acts as an idealized code with its own script, that in patriarchal societies values 'men' over 'women.' Individual men are presented with an idealised form of masculinity which they may adopt in full, or part, or reject (Fuller, 1996: 229).

Fuller (1996) and Kimmel (1987) therefore both draw upon Connell's (1987) notion of "hegemonic masculinity" as part of a gendered interrelation "that is centered on a single structural fact, the global dominance of men over women." For Connell (1987: 183, 186), "Hegemonic masculinity is always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women." Arguably, "the most important feature of contemporary hegemonic masculinity is that it is heterosexual, being closely connected to the institution of marriage; and a key form of subordinated masculinity is homosexual". This provides valuable insights into the study of how certain forms of masculinity and different forms of femininity become subordinated to a dominant form of masculinity. However there are several problems with the notion of hegemonic masculinity. First, although it may be true that historically masculine and feminine behaviors were defined in relationship to heterosexual marriage, it does not fully explain why such a narrow focus has maintained its force in today's world. Is it not possible for different forms of masculinity to gain prominence in certain times and situations? For example, does talk of feminist organization (Robbins, 1998) mask the existence of new forms of masculinity (and femininity)?

Second, there appear to be different forms, or at least contours, of hegemonic masculinity; Mishkind et al. (1987), for instance, suggest five dominant forms, while Morris (1997) identifies four. What bearing does this have on the study of dominant forms of masculinity? Is hegemonic masculinity reducible to male dominance over 'women' and, if so, how is that maintained in the face of various social and legislative changes?

Third, if indeed hegemonic masculinity is simply about male dominance, what is the point of studying 'multiple masculinities?' According to Collinson and Hearn (1994), by uncovering the different ways that 'men's' power, discourses and practices are developed and maintained we are better placed to resist and address discrimination at work. Fuller (1996), on the other hand, argues that the study of masculinity is reducible to the study of ways to resist and overcome hegemonic masculinity. One might ask how it is overcome if it retains its hegemonic force or why resistance is even desirable if hegemonic masculinity is the ideal.

Fourth, if, as Connell (1987: 184) argues, "the cultural ideal (or ideals) of masculinity need not correspond at all closely to the actual personalities of the majority of men," then how is it sustained? This seems to contradict postmodernist thinking that argues that gendered subjectivities are created and maintained through discursive practices. Gramsci (1978), from whom Connell borrows the notion of hegemony, had in mind an ideological force rooted in cultural practice and leadership. In this regard 'men' would have to maintain a position of

'organic leadership' to retain hegemony over 'women'. What happens when a large number of 'women' enter a situation of organizational leadership and discourses of appropriate behavior change?

Finally, in the hegemonic masculinity framework there is little scope for the development of dominant images of femininity. "All forms of femininity in this society are constructed in the context of the overall subordination of women to men" (Connell, 1987: 186–7). Does this mean that forms of discourse that favor or value 'women' over 'men' or rate 'women' and 'men' equally are impossible? If so, how is it possible to address discriminatory practices?

### MASCULINITY IN ORGANIZATIONS

Over twenty years ago Kanter (1977), in her foundational work on women in large, formal organizations, noted that their day-to-day experiences differed markedly from those of their male counterparts, largely as a result of the power men possessed by virtue of their maleness and their formal position in the organization. For Kanter, issues of sex and power were related, but not inseparable; 'men' had power because of their ability to perform certain tasks, effect change and in general "get things done." The "masculine ethos" she aptly identified may be one of the first attempts to depict organizations as fundamentally gendered, with very definite roles prescribed for 'women' and 'men'. Although Kanter detects nothing subversive or systemic about the ways in which 'men' are advantaged, she does identify a taken-for-granted masculine culture of management, supported by 'women' both at home and at work as "office wives." Around the same time, Hofstede's (1980) research on the worldwide IBM organization examined differences in national cultures that have been appropriated by organizational researchers to study cultures within organizations themselves. One of Hofstede's dimensions is what he calls 'masculinity,' a set of values predicated on the predominant socialization pattern for 'men' to be more assertive and for 'women' to be more nurturing. This notion of masculinity is culturally specific to Western post-industrial societies. 'Masculinity' is therefore used in a very traditional way (Mills & Simmons, 1999), viewed as an overflowing of machismo, neglecting the possibility that other kinds of masculinity are expressed in any given culture and that masculinity takes different forms in different cultures (Woodward, 1996). Despite this limitation, what Hofstede labels 'masculine' can be helpful in describing a dimension upon which national and organizational cultures differ, even if there is nothing definitively 'manly' about what he labels masculine.

As feminist scholarship continued to explore gendered power relations in organizational contexts, attention slowly began to be paid to 'men' and masculinity. Highlighting the ways in which 'men' and masculinities are central to organizational analysis, yet rarely examined di-

rectly, Collinson and Hearn (1994: 13) depicted five types of masculinities that "remain pervasive and privileged," any or all of which can be enacted in the social contexts of formal organizations. Identifying the multiple masculinities of authoritarianism (intolerant of dissent or difference), paternalism (using authority to protect others), entrepreneurialism (hard-nosed and competitive), informalism (informal currency creating in- and out-groups) and careerism (pre-occupation with hierarchical advancement) suggests that no one masculinity is hegemonic in all situations, even if these masculinities are more prevalent than others. Despite naming these different forms of masculinity, there is little attention directed toward the impact of having one particular form of hegemonic masculinity or how the tensions between masculinities is resolved in organizational settings. Collinson and Hearn (1994) recognize that these masculinities can cause inherent conflict in 'men' as they are torn between individualistic competition and solidarity of 'men' as a group, yet leave unexplored the significance of these multiple masculinities, how this contributes to discriminatory practices, and how a multiplicity of forms actually extends gender-based theorizing beyond the long-acknowledged male-dominance in organizational cultures, processes and structures.

Collinson and Hearn (1996), who continue to uncover the taken-for-granted assumptions of what constitutes 'good' management and implicitly good 'men' have perhaps made the association between masculinity, management ideology and practice most clear. Historically management and 'men' have been examined simultaneously because most managers were 'men'. The result was an unquestioned association between 'men' and powerful organizational actors that infiltrated management thought by silencing gendered aspects of organization. As such, views of what constitutes effective management became "imbued with particular notions of masculinity" (Collinson & Hearn, 1996: 4). Management and masculinities can therefore be usefully considered as relational constructs, culturally and historically produced and reproduced in ways that seem to strengthen the hegemony of masculinity, in whatever particular form that may take.

Increasingly we are seeing that femininity and masculinity are not essentialized constructs, rather ones that can take on a variety of characteristics, shift over time and between contexts (Connell, 1987; Hearn, 1992; Morgan, 1992). This development is a logical extension of the attention now being paid to workforce diversity (e.g. Prasad et al., 1997), with the impact of differences in class, race, sex, age, sexual orientation and religion resulting in fragmented concepts of masculinity and femininity. As a result, what constitutes 'femininity' and 'masculinity' is now being seriously questioned, and along with it the utility of these concepts in guiding organizational research.

Despite the ambiguity surrounding exactly what 'masculinity' is, there remains little doubt that in patriarchal societies what is associated with masculinity typically dominates that asso-

ciated with femininity (Hartmann, 1976). Here Connell's (1987) concepts of "hegemonic masculinity" and "emphasized femininity" are once again appropriated to attempt to both illustrate the thoughts and actions present in a wide variety of organizational contexts and critique the status quo based on its systems of relative advantage and disadvantage. The use of these concepts does help us see how some forms of masculinity are subordinated to others (e.g. homosexual/heterosexual, black/white, blue collar/middle class, wimp/jock), yet at the same time does very little to explain how it is that these notions of an 'ideal masculinity' persist despite the sheer numbers of 'men' lacking these characteristics, and the many dysfunctions associated with their pervasiveness (e.g., Kaufman, 1987; Maier, 1997). As Connell (1987: 185) suggests, hegemonic forms of masculinity are not necessarily "what men are . . . but what large numbers of men are motivated to support". For forms of masculinity to retain their hegemonic properties, 'men' must find their attributes desirable, at least to a certain extent, and use this desire to subordinate other femininities and masculinities.

Somewhat paradoxical is the attempt to define what hegemonic 'masculinity' is. Kerfoot and Knights (1996) identified "control" as the defining aspect of contemporary masculine identity, suggesting a concomitant (perhaps natural) compulsiveness to conquer the weak or helpless. As this attribute becomes reflected in management practice, managers become highly instrumental in their control, depersonalizing situations only to gain extrinsic value as control becomes exercised. In this paradigm, everything becomes a contest, with agency directed toward the pursuit of organizational goals in order to maintain a strong 'masculine' identity. Morgan (1996) depicts a somewhat less primal image of masculinity, one that simply reflects the dominant ethos present in the wider society.

Masculinity can, however, contain tensions between individualistic and collective motives, many of which are reconciled in organizational contexts. As such, certain 'masculine' identities may gain their hegemonic properties, and hence allowed to strengthen and reproduce, through the daily practices in which individuals engage, and hence result in different 'femininities' and 'masculinities.' This observation reinforces the critiques of gender as fixed, essentialized categories that are uniformly produced and reproduced through participation in formal organizations. Martin (1996) focuses on competition as the basis of masculinity, suggesting that 'men' will assert their 'masculinity' in order not to lose, especially to 'women'. She suggests that when valuable resources are at stake and when job security is threatened, 'men' will exercise their hegemonic masculinity by doing things such as promoting 'men' as a group, seeking paternalist aid from other more senior 'men', openly criticizing 'women', and ganging up on woman as a group because of the threat they pose to 'men' as a group. These actions seek to maintain an image of management as a masculine practice, available to 'women' only to the extent it does not disrupt the current state of male privilege that is representative of

patriarchal societies and the formal organizations functioning in them. This view of management presumes, however, both a degree of essentialism in terms of how 'men' treat 'women', and an unstated assumption that 'women' as a group would not act in similar ways to defend their privileges given the opportunity. Again we see a conflation of 'men' and 'management' based on particular historical conditions, yet treated as generalizable to society and organization.

The pervasiveness of a masculine ethos, characterized by objectivity, competition and adversarial relationships can lead to undesirable organizational behaviors, many of which have become institutionalized despite their ineffectiveness. Regardless of what particular type of masculinity is hegemonic, there exists a tension between it, other subordinated masculinities and femininity. These tensions are clearly a part of organizational life, the location of the inculcation of many gendered cultural norms (Mills, 1992). Dominant discourses of masculinity in organizational settings, those that venerate authority and control, will frequently contribute to psychological problems in 'men.' Seidler (1989) suggests that a preoccupation with controlling the potentially uncontrollable reduces 'men's' lives to evaluating self-worth on the correctness of the decisions they make. When masculine identity is secured through effective managerial decisions and actions, a constant state of judging and evaluation is created in which 'men' must constantly "measure up" to an external standard, one that frequently subordinates individual priorities, interests and goals to externally-assessed success, authority and status. Kaufman (1987) also views the pressures of patriarchy on 'men' to be paradoxical, supplying both the basis for pleasure and pain as 'men' become torn between maintaining a masculine image through their work and functioning successfully in personal and family relationships. Because masculinity is a social or cultural construction, it is fragile by lacking a biological reality, and existing only within relationships with 'women' and other 'men'. 'Being masculine' is not always easy, and unfortunately many 'men' inflict psychological and physical harm to themselves and others as they strive to exert their power over others as 'men' in a patriarchal society. Maier (1991; 1997) takes these observations one step further by suggesting that "corporate masculinity" can be psychologically dysfunctional for not only 'men,' but also the organizations in which they work.

A more recent trend in gendered organizational analysis seems to be a critique of the 'masculine,' what we refer to as the construction of the notion of the 'bad masculine.' For instance Kerfoot and Knights (1996) talk of 'new wave' management practices that represent a move toward feminization, ostensibly leading to more desirable organizational outcomes. Increasingly it is being questioned how compatible traditional (which have come to be viewed as masculine) forms of organization and management are with current economic and social conditions, which are suggested to place increasing demands on social relationships rather



than technical considerations. The increasing importance of the service sector in the development of world economies, and the need for flexibility to respond to hyper-competitive and rapidly-changing environments have been used to problematize the ways in which organizations are currently being managed.

Fondas (1997) argues that management theory is going through a process of feminization that, as yet, have not been recognized. She contends that "feminine qualities" – such as surrendering control and sharing responsibility, helping and developing others, and building a connected network of relationships – are at the heart of recent theories of management. Ostensibly the increased prevalence of these themes is evidence for widespread 'feminization' of society; (stereotypical) "feminine qualities" have been recognized as critical for organizational success in today's competitive environment, but mainstream management theoreticians and researchers are unwilling to name it as such (Fondas, 1997). However, if we look closely at the three themes that Fondas uses to argue for a 'feminization of management' it can be argued that they closely parallel Collinson and Hearn's (1994) masculinities of paternalism and informalism. Thus, it is a source of confusion whether a concern with relationships is a 'masculine' or 'feminine' trait. 'Men' may form these 'relationships' on the golf course or in the pub, and 'women' in more formal, inclusive settings, but the concern with building meaningful relationships with people cannot be categorized as the exclusive domain of either 'women' or 'men'. By naming a set of 'feminine qualities' that is shared by all womankind, Fondas (1997) neglects the multiplicity of gendered identities that 'women' and 'men' necessarily possess. The argument for multiple gender identities has now been developed and widely supported (e.g., Brittan, 1989; Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985; Collinson & Hearn, 1994; Connell, 1995), yet the cultural and historic associations of gender and current management practices is ignored when we say that there is a feminine style now part of management discourses.

A problematic implication drawn from this (new) type of thinking is that 'women', because of their presumed superior social skills, will become more important in the success of modern organizations. Perhaps, as Fondas (1997) contends, the recent management trends of empowerment, business process re-engineering and total quality management represent "feminization" of organizational practices. This argument holds true only to the extent to which we essentialize femininity with an interest in, or concern with interpersonal relationships, and hold it up on opposition to an essentialized masculinity that has virtual disregard for these types of relationships. It is unlikely, however, that the argument can be put this simply. Considerations of social aspects of work have *never* relied on either reference to supposed female qualities or the presence of women in the workforce. The Human Relations school of management thought, for instance, noted for its concern with interpersonal relations and the psychological well-being



of the employee, was developed at a time when 'women' were relegated to more menial, low-paid work (if they were part of work organizations at all).

Prescriptions for imbuing organizations with 'feminine values' (Maier, 1993), encouraging 'feminist management' (Martin, 1996), creating a 'feminist discourse' (Ferguson, 1984), 'inverting the values' of capitalist masculinist organizations (Calás & Smircich, 1997) or 'feminizing' management practice (Fondas, 1997), although not without merit, are probably oversimplified solutions to rather complex issues of gender, culture and organization. At the core of a number of these "feminizing arguments" is the implicit idea that what is bad about organization is 'masculine.' This creates a false dichotomy that seems to ignore the multiplicity of gender identities (e.g. Connell, 1987) and the androgynous nature of the human character (Singer, 1976), that, from our perspective, may actually hinder our ability to uncover the roots of discriminatory practice. The argument for employment equity should not have to rely on convincing organizational power brokers that women have inherent qualities that can be utilized for the good of the company. Surely we would not want to argue that 'women' who are aggressive, highly competitive and authoritarian should not be employed. By drawing attention to such things as an ethic of care, an aptitude for managing social relations, an ability to coordinate in absence of top-down authority, or a concern with democracy and cooperation, organizational theorists provide a valuable critique of existing management practices. But conflating these qualities with 'women', 'femaleness' and 'femininity' does not do justice to the capacity for all humans to change, or recognize the range of differences within 'women' and 'men' as social groups.

## FEMININITY AND MASCULINITY IN ORGANIZATIONAL LITERATURE

The increasing acceptance of gender-based organizational research in more mainstream academic circles has seen the introduction of terms such as 'masculinity' and 'feminization' being used to describe abstract values, practices, ideologies and even organizational structures and forms in relatively unproblematic ways. As an example, introductory organizational behavior texts (e.g. Robbins, 1998) talk of a "feminine organization" based on 'female' values and structural preferences. This approach is consistent with current trends to essentialize female attributes in isolation from historical and cultural contexts, and present them as challenges to the status quo which is ostensibly masculine because of the numbers, status and power of 'men' in formal organizations. From women's styles of learning (Belenkey, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986), leadership (Rosener, 1990), knowledge practices (Jacques, 1992), moral-cognitive development (Gilligan, 1982), management (Fondas, 1997) and communication (Tannen, 1990), there seem to be strong tendencies to categorize human actions as distinctly masculine or fem-

inine. Part of the problem with these types of categorizations is their separation from what people actually do in their day-to-day lives, and what is characterized in society or the organization as 'masculine' or 'feminine.'

In order to label something meaningfully as 'feminine' or 'masculine' there must be some association with what 'women' and 'men' actually do, or at least aspire to do. It seems that we still base these definitions on rather dated definitions of 'womanly' and 'manly' behaviors, with the former being comprised of traits such as empathy, caring, sensitivity, collectivity, preference for egalitarianism and a concern with relationships (Fondas, 1997; Kerfoot & Knights, 1996; Maier, 1997; Martin, 1996), and the latter the exact opposite. The reality is, however, that there is nothing innately 'feminine' about these traits, only a cultural association that occurred at some point in time that has now been taken to be a fixed category that is somehow the exclusive property of 'women' as a group. This is, of course, not to say that these traits are no longer associated with 'women', or that they are any more or less desirable than they have been in the past. Although stereotypically feminine traits have been ascribed a lesser value in patriarchal societies (Lerner, 1986; Rosaldo, 1974), one cannot ignore either the cultural determinism of the categories of 'feminine' and 'masculine' themselves, or the continued transformation of these categories as social and economic conditions change.

A focus on femininity and masculinity as important aspects of organizational behaviour is certainly an advance from previous years of neglect (Hearn & Parkin, 1983). Nonetheless, there are a number of problems in the ways in which gendered terminology is being appropriated by mainstream management. First, replacing competitive, ruthless ideologies with cooperative, caring ones (what appears to be the essential difference between how 'masculine' and 'feminine' are characterized) should, by necessity, lead to greater employment equity. To begin with, a burden is then put on 'women' (and, to a lesser extent, 'men') to prove that they fit with the organizational discourse of femininity. There is also the problem that the conflation of 'woman', 'femininity', and 'organizational caring' can be problematic for 'women' where there is an organizational shift towards a more aggressive style of leadership.

Second, the use of a binary opposition between feminine and masculine does not recognize either the multiplicity of femininities and masculinities, or the possibility for individuals to possess aspects of both (Collinson & Hearn, 1994, 1996; Connell, 1987; Hearn, 1992; Morgan, 1992). The opposition between categories is a central concern of poststructural theorists who seek to reveal the power relationships that are maintained through discursive practices (Weedon, 1993). In dichotomous thinking, opposed terms (such as femininity and masculinity) are viewed as Aristotelian contradictories, where the two categories must exhaust all possibilities. When 'feminine,' for example, is viewed as an absence of 'masculine,' then we tend to view every possible human trait or behavior as simply one or the other. Through the creation

of opposed terms such as these, the distinction(s) between genders becomes both reified and exclusionary. Stating that management theory is androcentric because of its neglect of gender, and concomitant veneration of a male-centered perspective on organizational matters, would not likely receive much dispute. Identifying systems of relative advantage and disadvantage by analyzing networks of power relations (e.g. Foucault, 1980), silences and omissions in texts (e.g. Derrida, 1976) and the specific linguistic and rhetorical techniques employed in conversation (e.g. Van Dijk, 1993, 1994) all suggest that a dichotomous form of understanding social reality is prevalent, yet problematic. Because, as discussed above, the organizational status quo has been confounded with 'maleness,' the alternative logically appears to be something less masculine, that is more 'feminine.' Unfortunately the prosaic definitions of masculine and feminine make these types of prescriptions problematic.

Finally, the apparent disconnection between the daily actions of embodied persons from the ways in which management literature uses the terms 'feminine' and 'masculine' makes recommendations to 'increase feminization' (or however this may be phrased) sit uneasy with many people (both 'women' and 'men'). What was considered 'appropriate male behavior' a generation ago may not, however, be as accepted by society today. It is relatively easy to criticize the "founding fathers" of management for basing their techniques on technical aspects of work, largely ignoring the fact that real people performed these tasks (Willmott, 1984). To hold this view of workers (as mindless, identityless automatons) as 'masculine' neglects the changes in society, organization and management practice that have occurred in the past generation. Times have changed economically, demographically and competitively, all of which have helped redefine the role of workers and managers in formal organizations, encouraging things such as self-management, empowerment and employee development (Bridges, 1994; Kanter, 1989; Mintzberg, 1989). Rather than make broad sweeping statements involving femininity and masculinity, we believe there needs to be a clearer understanding of how these categories are in fact understood by individuals in organizations and society, in addition to how the hegemonic masculinities suggested to exist are actually constructed and reproduced in the thoughts and actions of 'women' and 'men'.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the longtime presence of theorizing and research on gender in organization it remains in many ways peripheral to the study of organization. This seems to present gender researchers with a mixed blessing; there remains a great deal of opportunity for exploring the nexus of influences 'women' and 'men' face by virtue of their membership in formal organizations, yet there also seems to be some resistance or uncomfortableness with making gender as central to

an understanding of organizational behaviour. Not deterred by these challenges, we (as privileged, white 'men') continue to try to make gender a central analytic perspective from which organizational dynamics can be understood. Through the process of our ongoing dialogue, we found a certain uneasiness with how gender (specifically notions of femininity and masculinity) is currently being represented and used in management discourse. We came to recognize that despite our continued support for studying how institutionalized power relationships (many of which are strongly gendered) affect individuals in organizations, there were some difficulties associated with studying such broad categories as 'men', 'managers' and 'masculinity.' As Collinson and Hearn (1994) warned, there is a certain amount of exclusion that accompanies categorization; emphasizing masculinity runs the risk of forgetting 'women', and labeling certain types of masculine behavior implies discrete categories of 'manliness.' These analytical difficulties pose real challenges for the use of essentialized constructs such as 'feminine' and 'masculine,' especially as they are currently being used – as prescriptions for altering the (ostensibly discriminatory, ineffective, inefficient) organizational status quo.

The feminine/masculine dichotomy is itself at the heart of many of the problems we see in how gender is being used in management education. By essentializing these constructs, isolating them from the historical and cultural contexts which gave rise to them, suggesting that anything 'feminine' is subordinate to anything 'masculine,' and focusing on a hegemonic form of masculinity, it is easy to fall into the trap of making recommendations that commit the same sorts of errors – substituting a 'bad masculine' with a 'good feminine' in organizational structures, processes and behaviors. The difficulty in defining these constructs, separating biological from cultural influences on 'feminine and 'masculine' behavior, understanding what forms of masculinity and femininity are hegemonic and how this can occur in isolation from the actions of the majority of 'women' and 'men' all portend problems in uncritically using the concepts of 'feminine' and 'masculine' in ways that are becoming increasingly commonplace.

Although most gender research is motivated by an attempt to reveal and/or discourage discriminatory practices in organizations, there is a risk of the current use of the 'good feminine' being equally discriminatory, and not clearly to the benefit of those traditionally discriminated against. The very concepts of 'feminine' and 'masculine,' despite their contribution to how we understand the impact of organizational arrangements on 'women' and 'men', need to be problematized so that we do not seek simple solutions to complex organizational problems. Care must be taken not to make the spurious assumption that some things (for example rationality, competition and aggression) are 'masculine', thereby automatically assuming that other things (for example caring and trust) are by definition 'feminine,' a risk associated with the reification of the feminine/masculine binary opposition.

Feminist organizational analysis has reached a mature stage in its paradigmatic development. As such it has generated numerous insights into the nature of discriminatory practices but it has also developed a number of unresolved, often contradictory, notions that have implications for further research. As researchers within that framework, the very richness of the debate has brought us to a point where we feel the need to go back on some of the debates in order to move analysis forward. We have no ready answers but we readily attest to the fact that our own work contains many (if not all) of the underlying problems that we have identified throughout this article. This article is a contribution to what we hope will be a further sharing of problems within our understanding of the gendering of organization. ■

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