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MEN TALK ABOUT EXECUTIVE WOMEN

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of  
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## Abstract

### MEN TALK ABOUT EXECUTIVE WOMEN

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Since the 1970's women have steadily gained access to higher levels of corporate management. Formal mechanisms of discrimination on the basis of gender have long been consigned to the past, and organisations now promote themselves as family friendly and valuing work-life balance. However, in spite of women occupying the lower ranks of organisations in nearly the same numbers as men, women still hold only a minority of executive-level leadership roles.

This thesis is based on a series of interviews with men in senior management positions who at the time, reported to women Chief Executive Officers and General Managers. The ways in which these men talked about gender as a factor in organisational life were examined for the discursive resources used to explain or account for the situation. Four key discursive resources were identified: 1) Darwinian Competition; 2) Gender Differences; 3) Gender War; and 4) Individual Choices. These resources were used in a variety of often conflicting ways to eliminate or marginalise gender issues and any concerns warranting action. This rendered the organisation, its institutions and practices safe from change.

## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to all mothers who are surely the people who contribute the most to society, in terms of producing and raising our most precious and valuable asset, and yet for some perverse reason are rewarded least for their efforts.

## **Acknowledgements**

Many people have contributed to this thesis in terms of the ideas expressed in it; not least because at any one point in time, we all stand at the front of an historical body of human thought and achievement, that brings together for us in this moment, the ideas that make whatever we do possible. I therefore acknowledge all of those myriad people who have unknowingly contributed to making this paper possible.

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