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MEN TALK ABOUT EXECUTIVE WOMEN

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Abstract

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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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Chapter I. Preface: Setting the scene

This thesis was inspired by my experiences of some twenty three years working in the New Zealand banking industry, during which time the number of women in senior management positions increased from virtually none, to the situation where in 2003, Westpac appointed Ann Sherry as the first woman Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to head a New Zealand bank. During this period the gender relationships and power structures in New Zealand, indeed the western world, changed remarkably. By the late nineties, a range of key New Zealand government positions including those of: Prime Minister, leader of the opposition and Attorney General; were simultaneously held by women.

When I first started working for a New Zealand bank in 1978, the formal mechanisms of discrimination against women had only just been dismantled. The women's section of the superannuation fund had been merged with the men's section, and the personnel policies that had long favoured men were being re-engineered to remove differential treatment based on gender. In those days, the role of women in banking was largely confined to teller, customer services or back office administration. Very few women made it to the role of branch accountant, let alone to the exalted status of branch manager.

The route to the top for men entailed a patient career, involving (hopefully) upward transfers from branch to branch. A banking career normally meant progressing through a well defined series of roles: starting as a school leaver in administration (postages officer); moving on to MICR cheque encoding; tellers; customer services; international; head loans officer; and finally, being offered the much coveted first executive appointment as branch accountant. Along the way, the occasional transfer to a head office department often served to accelerate this process. While these head office transfers sometimes resulted in a specialist career path; they more often represented steps on the career ladder through the accumulation of experience, networks and hopefully patronage. According to the lore passed on to me, it had not been long since this career had been entirely managed by Head Office Personnel. You would be called into the manager's office to be handed a blue envelope, advising that you had been transferred, and were to report to such and such a branch on a specified day to take up your next role. All things being well, the manager would then shake your hand and congratulate you on your promotion and rise to the next salary grade.

During the 1980's, New Zealand society and culture underwent massive structural changes. These changes opened up the economy through the elimination of tariffs on trade, removal of agricultural subsidies, and reduction of the power of the trade unions across many key industries. Concomitant with these changes was an acceptance of a market-led competitive model of industry and human behaviour that rejected length of tenure as a mode of advancement in favour of merit, while also shifting the responsibility for career from the organisation to the individual. These changes saw the Personnel Department transformed into Human Resources, and the blue envelope replaced by internally advertised vacancies and job interviews. Appointment by merit meant that gender should be irrelevant, especially in office based non-manual work such as banking.

At first women tended to rise to management ranks in the head office environment, where they could demonstrate special expertise. In my first head office role, my manager was a woman, who was one of the few bank employees at that time to have a degree. Other women in head office lower to middle management ranks, typically occupied roles in departments such as public relations or personnel. During the eighties, the retail banking model was radically transformed; the number of branches was reduced, and the authorities delegated to managers to approve loans were reduced in favour of centralised credit departments. The role and status of the branch manager was diminished, so that in many areas, branches were headed by staff of non-executive status. The branch manager, once a pillar of the local community and a person to be respected and even feared, became a filler of forms and mouthpiece of a distant credit department.

This reduction in the status and power of the branch manager, occurred at a time when women were starting to ascend from the teller, customer services and administration roles, they had previously occupied in the branch hierarchy. Because many of these women were working to supplement family incomes rather than being the primary breadwinner, they tended to be less mobile than the men they replaced. Men in the past, even if married, had usually been ready to uproot their family to move to another town or city to capture a promotion. For male staff, the promotion and transfer system had been a significant benefit of working for a bank. Apart from the attendant salary increase, promotions and transfers were linked to a system of fringe benefits. These fringe benefits, linked to their new salary grade, enabled bank staff to increase

their wealth through successively trading up the family home, using increased house capital values to leverage higher borrowing limits and very low mortgage interest rates (as low as 2.5% to 4.5% per annum). During the eighties, most of the fringe benefits available to bank staff were either “cashed up” (included as a one-off increase to the base salary package) or eliminated. While the ostensible rationale for removing these related to issues of “fairness” and “flexibility”, the Fringe Benefit Tax (FBT) introduced by the New Zealand government in 1985, provided the bank management with a significant motivator at the time.

While New Zealand as a whole, struggled during the early to mid-eighties to cope with the effects of the restructuring brought about by the radical economic policies of the new Labour government (known as “Rogernomics”), the very strict regulations that had previously governed the operation of the trading banks were removed. For a time, this resulted in a period of entrepreneurial exuberance and competitive activity among the banks, involving rapid credit expansion and a more aggressive approach to taking on risk. By the late eighties, it had become apparent that the rapid growth and change had over-extended many of the banks, and when the stock market crashed in 1987 the resultant loss of value and company failures resulted in near catastrophic levels of bad debt. The state owned Bank of New Zealand had to be rescued by the government, and a new breed of management emerged in the shape of Lindsay Pyne who was brought in as the Chief Executive Officer, tasked with putting the bank into shape so that it could be sold. Lindsay brought into the bank an influx of well educated, aggressive younger managers (sardonically referred to as “Pyne-clones” by the existing BNZ staff) including a number of women, among who was Theresa Gattung. Theresa was later to become Chief Executive Officer at Telecom New Zealand Limited; New Zealand’s largest public company.

By the mid-nineties, women had moved into many senior executive roles within the New Zealand banking industry. When I found a position in another bank (ABANK)¹ in 1995, I found women in two senior positions: one as a General Manager of marketing; and Nancy, as head of the Information Technology (IT) department. At that time, ABANK was held to have relatively liberal management policies that included: a flat management structure; low levels of bureaucracy; widely distributed authority levels; and family friendly employee policies. The IT department numbered some 150

¹ The name of the bank has been changed for privacy reasons.

staff and a management team of seven senior managers, including two women – Nancy and Gail. The male members of the management team, who were all under the age of forty, jokingly referred to themselves as "Nancy boys".

Soon after I joined ABANK, the bank was bought by a larger foreign owned bank (BBANK). The project merging the two banks' computer systems took some two years to implement, and at the end of this term, Nancy who had been leading a part of the conversion project, returned to head the IT department. Around this time, New Zealand management were put under pressure to capture the "efficiencies of scale" that had been anticipated to result, from merging the operations of ABANK and BBANK. In practice, this meant that costs were to be reviewed and pressure placed on managers to reduce staff numbers. By this time with the exception of Nancy, the entire IT senior management was male, and comprised mainly of managers who had worked in the old BBANK IT department. In my observation, the IT managers tended to express private expectations about having a woman leader that featured themes such as warmth, participation, nurturing and caring. Nancy adopted a fairly aggressive management style in response to the cost cutting pressures, and this seemed to conflict with the expectations of the management team. Cost cutting measures that were put in place during this period included: reviewing staffing numbers; pruning away many of the incentives that had been put in place during the merger process with the intent of retaining staff (such as administrative support to managers, and regular staff functions paid by the company); and reducing the relatively high levels of financial authority previously allowed to IT managers. The manager's talk about this situation tended to feature strongly negative evaluations of Nancy in personal terms.

During a facilitated "off-site" team building seminar for IT senior management featuring the use of the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), it was revealed that Nancy preferred the "Feeling" (F) form of decision making. This revelation provoked cries of disbelief and incredulity from the others present, which perhaps understandably, Nancy appeared to resent. Later that night after a very good dinner and wine, and after some present (including Nancy) had retired to bed, some of the guys got drunk. They congregated on the lawn under Nancy's window, and with a golf club, much noise and quite a bit of hilarity, sent divots into the air. From the talk the next day, it seemed to me that there was an element of challenge to Nancy in this behaviour; they were doing something naughty, almost like school boys.

When I reflected on those events much later, it seemed to me at least, that there was more to the situation than was obvious at the time. In this different picture of the situation, we have a group of male managers suddenly placed into confusion by the introduction of a woman leader, who is positioned negatively merely in doing what is demanded of her by her superiors. If performed by a man, her behaviour would be perceived as being manly and assertive, although regrettable, it is also curious, that the earlier group of men made a point of referring to themselves as “Nancy boys”; a term usually reserved for overtly homosexual men or “drag queens”. On reflection, these factors caused me to reappraise the situation in terms of a younger group of managers dealing with the fact of having a female leader. To ‘manage’ the situation, they represented the public face of their own sexuality in humorous terms, and later grouped together to challenge her authority when relations soured.

This thesis springs from a personal desire to understand more about organisational life in the context of my experiences; in particular, how men within the organisation make sense of and relate to women leaders.

Chapter II. Forms of Accounting

Legalized discrimination and barriers to the participation of women in positions of power in Western societies were largely removed by the late 1970's, and on the surface it would appear that since then women have made significant progress internationally in achieving executive positions in corporate organizations. In the corporate world, notable examples of woman leaders include: Carly Fiorina at Hewlett Packard; Andrea Jung at Avon; Meg Whitman at eBay; Anne Mulcahy at Xerox; and Anne Moore at Time Inc. Internationally significant woman political leaders over the last 40 years include: Golda Meir (Israel); Indira Gandhi (India); Margaret Thatcher (UK); Benazir Bhutto (Pakistan); and more recently; Hilary Clinton, Condoleza Rice and Janet Reno, all of the USA. In New Zealand, we have seen a number of high profile roles occupied by women in the last twenty years including: Governor General, Prime Minister, Attorney General, and CEO roles in major companies such as Telecom, TelstraClear, and Westpac. However, these international and domestic examples of women in leadership positions are more noteworthy as exceptions, than as evidence that equality has arrived around the world. Most corporate, governmental and political leadership positions continue to be occupied by men. Indeed, the proportion of women in leadership positions remains very low; only eight Fortune 500 companies in the United States being headed by women in 2005 (Catalyst, 2006). Although women in New Zealand have achieved many significant leadership positions in recent years; as at 2003, only 3% of New Zealand's top 200 companies and 18% of the 34 government departments were headed by women, and women occupied only 28% of the 120 seats in parliament (Ellis & McCabe, 2003). Although the last statistic has improved as a result of the 2005 election, with 40 of the 120 seats now occupied by women, men still outnumber women in the New Zealand parliament by a ratio of 2:1.

Women's continued under-representation in key institutions of influence and power is evidenced by a 2004 Human Rights Commission Census, which found that women held only 5.04% of all directorships in companies listed on the New Zealand Stock Exchange; only four listed companies had as many as two women directors on their board, while none had more than two, and sixty four of the eighty nine listed companies had no women directors at all (Olsson & McGregor, 2004). This pattern of under-representation was also found in the legal profession. Women held only 14.12% percent of partnerships in the twenty two law firms surveyed, even though more women

were admitted to the New Zealand Law Society (464 women to 316 men in 2003). In the academic world, women were found to hold only 15.82% of the senior academic positions in New Zealand universities.

This situation is paralleled in the United Kingdom, where a 2005 Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) report entitled "*Sex and Power: Who Runs Britain? 2005*" documents that in spite of a long history of individual women holding significant positions of power, on the whole women remain under-represented in such positions with only 8.3% of senior judicial positions, 8.3% of senior police, 9.7% of top business leaders and 9.1% of national newspaper editors (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2005). Added to that, the statistics show little in the way of improvement with increases of around one percentage point in some areas, but little overall change from the results of the 2004 survey. This has led to claims in the media that it could take as long as 200 years for women to achieve the same proportion of leadership positions as men (Stuff, 2006).

For many years the lack of women in leadership positions was accounted for in terms of a "pipe-line" problem (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This pipeline explained the continued absence of women from executive ranks in terms of the length of time it would take for women to come through the system to fill executive ranks, once overt discrimination had been removed. However, as more time has elapsed, the continued under-representation of women in executive ranks has resulted in a search for explanations beyond simple supply issues. These explanations can be seen to constitute clusters of accounts in which different people, cultures and institutions are held to be responsible for impeding the progress of women into positions of power. The "Glass Ceiling" metaphor is often used to describe and account for the situation, where reasonable numbers of women are able to rise far enough to be able to see the desired role, but are unable to penetrate some invisible barrier that stands in the way.

Depending on which account cluster one wishes to accept, this barrier or "Glass Ceiling" is manifested in role stereotypes, prejudices, hegemonic domination, hierarchical structures or organizational practices, that act to hold women back and abruptly reduce the representation of women between the middle and senior management levels (Fawcett & Pringle, 2000).

"Thirty years on from the Sex Discrimination Act, it is time for us to face some stark facts," EOC chief Jenny Watson said. "Women will not make it to the top in significant numbers unless action is taken to remove the

barriers that stand in their way and Britain will continue to miss out on women's skills and talents for another generation. ... More high-quality, highly paid, flexible and part-time work at all levels, including for senior staff, should be brought in," Watson said. ... She also called on political parties to use "positive action" to bring in more women. (Stuff, 2006)

Role Theories

The failure of the pipeline theory to adequately account for the continued absence of women in leadership positions turned attention towards the possibility that women might be disadvantaged through prejudice, arising out of stereotypes associated with particular roles.

One formulation of social role theory is provided by Eagly and Karau's (2002) role congruity theory, which proposes that that prejudice against female leaders, may arise when people perceive a conflict between the agentic masculine characteristics normally associated with leadership, and with the communal characteristics of the feminine gender role. Agentic qualities, which are normally associated with leadership and ascribed to men include: dominance, assertiveness, decisiveness, ambition, forcefulness, confidence and independence. On the other hand, communal qualities, which are normally associated with women include: affection, helpfulness, kindness, welfare-mindedness, sympathy, nurturing, and gentleness (Eagly & Karau, 2002). These characteristics are further divided into injunctive norms (expectations about what people in a role should do or ideally do), and descriptive norms (expectations about what people in a role actually do). It is against these qualities and norms, that people match their perceptions of how well individuals fit a particular situation.

According to Eagly and Karau (2002), women leaders are subjected to two forms of prejudice resulting from these perceived mismatches of role characteristics. Firstly, when women are considered for a leadership role, they are evaluated negatively as leadership candidates because the feminine characteristics associated with being a woman, do not match with the agentic masculine characteristics considered necessary to be a leader. Secondly, when a woman leader exhibits agentic behaviours corresponding to that role, she will tend to be more negatively evaluated than a man behaving in the same way, because that behaviour fails to conform to the prescriptive requirements of the feminine gender role (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

The predictions of social role theory have been found to be at least partially supported by research, in that gender role influences appear to affect the expectations of managers relating to career success (Wood & Lindorff, 2001). Wood and Lindorff's findings of sex based differences in expectations, and accounts of the factors affecting advancement, showed that men expect promotion more and indicate mainly situational factors such as being in the right place at the right time, personal style and working in the right area as influencing promotion. Men also tended to believe that failure to achieve future promotions would be due to factors such as personal inadequacy, politics or lack of opportunity. In contrast, women were more likely to believe that factors such as gender stereotyping, and organisational policies (formal and informal) influenced their promotion, and that any lack of future advancement would involve factors such as lack of interest, family commitments or negative stereotyping. As Wood and Lindorff (2001) point out, these sex-based differences may affect both promotion seeking behaviour, as well as the outcomes of the promotion seeking process. These factors indicate that Eagly and Karau's (2002) one-way view of the situation, may over simplify matters, by ignoring the potential women leader's own expectations and beliefs about promotion.

Many studies support the existence of gender-based stereotypes concerning the characteristics of successful managers, and the view that these stereotypes are not only manifested in prejudice exhibited towards women, as theorised by Eagly and Karau (Eagly & Karau, 2002), but also in self perceptions and expectations of the women who might be leaders (Powell, Butterfield, & Parent, 2002; Sauers, Kennedy, & O'Sullivan, 2002). Additionally, there is evidence that the masculine managerial stereotype is changing in response to changes in the numbers of women now occupying positions of influence within organizations. Workplace environments are also changing, with more emphasis on stereotypically feminine characteristics, such as good communication and people skills: rather than the traditional qualities of aggression, competitiveness and task orientation (Powell et al., 2002). In spite of this, it may be that the "woman manager" is perceived to be closer to the managerial stereotype, not because the latter has changed, but because the perception of woman managers has become more masculine (Fernandes & Cabral-Cardoso, 2003). In this regard, it may be relevant to question whether it is appropriate to consider prejudice against women in terms of a feminine stereotype rather than a "woman manager" stereotype: as these may have split

to such a degree, as to make the former irrelevant when considering the careers of women in organisations.

While Eagly and Karau's (2002) role congruity theory provides a pro-feminist account that explains the continued absence of women in leadership roles beyond the simple pipeline problem account, role theories constitute a relatively passive way of viewing the situation. They fail to take into account how prejudice may be actively produced to promote certain results for the parties involved. By locating prejudice in terms of accepted norms about the characteristics of femininity and leaders, discursive and political elements at play in the situation are overlooked and even obscured. Role congruity theory therefore leads one to a passive and even naive view of the situation, which proposes that prejudice may be accounted for merely in terms of "perceptions," based on cultural norms about particular roles. Lost in this account is any concept of agency, varying motivations, political maneuvering, gamesmanship, and personal accountability.

Messner (1998) points out that while many writers on the subject of masculinity make much use of sex role theories, feminist writers since the 1970's have tended to reject them, favouring instead the concept of gender relations. According to Messner (1998), the key criticisms leveled at sex role theory include: placing analysis at an individual level rather than focusing attention on questions of power and how relations operate between groups; obscuring relative imbalances of power through an implied "false symmetry"; normalising particular versions of masculinity and femininity; promoting sex roles in terms of biologically based categorizations rather than gender as a socially constructed phenomenon; and the denial of change through the promotion of a relatively static view of sex roles. Similarly, Eagly and Karau's (2002) role congruity theory can be seen to constitute a relatively static and normative account of how prejudice towards women as leaders, which serves to obscure different forms of leadership and fails to take into account the hegemonic implications, of how leadership is constructed in masculine terms.

Critique

Just as Faludi (2000), in her descriptions of failed masculinity in *"Stiffed"*, references (and reinscribes) a particular form of masculinity - white middleclass heterosexual - sex role theories, tend to privilege particular forms of masculinity, femininity, and leadership. In this regard, Betters-Reed and Moore (1995) note that the

female role referenced in sex role theories tends to privilege a form of femininity reflective of white middleclass heterosexual women, at the expense of femininities reflective of women occupying other positions - such as working class, coloured, or lesbian women. Indeed, performance in any given social setting is affected by an interaction of race, class and gender; each of which take on different degrees of relevance according to the nature of the specific situation (Yoder & Aniakudo, 1997). Even though it may be possible to identify gender as an obvious point of difference in a situation, it is not possible to enact gender in isolation from either race or social class. These other factors can result in different experiences for the individuals concerned. Yoder and Aniakudo's (1997) illustration of the exclusion experience of black female fire-fighters, versus the subordination experienced by their white female counterparts, points to the complexity of the gender-race interaction.

Women as Problem

Another group of accounts for the under-representation of women in executive ranks locates the cause of the issue in inherent or acquired characteristics of women, that tend to cause them to not to seek senior executive roles or make them in some way unsuitable for such roles (Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990). Such explanations differ from blatantly patriarchal assertions - in the order of "the place of women is in the home" - in that they do not directly act to exclude women from the workplace; they merely act to constrain the roles woman can occupy. As a source of prejudice against women, these explanations are rooted in differences in inherent ability and socialisation that cause women to self-select out of the pool of potential candidates, rather than relating to psychological constructs; such as stereotypes and perceptions of those in power.

Gender differences are constructed in popular psychology in terms such as men and woman coming from different planets, so that we have "*Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*" (Gray, 1992); women as spatially impaired communicators to men as non-listening map readers, giving us "*Why men don't listen and women can't read maps*" (Pease & Pease, 2000) and women as visually-cued direction seekers to men's abstract environmental awareness as in "*Men head East, Women turn right*" (Brock & Dooley, 2004). Pease and Pease (2000) account for these differences using the following story:

*Once upon a time, a long, long time ago, men and woman lived happily together and worked in harmony. The man would venture out each day into the hostile and dangerous world to risk his life as a hunter ... he was a **lunch-chaser** and that's all anyone expected of him. ...The woman's role was equally clear. Being appointed the child bearer directed the way she would evolve and how her skills would become specialised to meet that role. ... Things were simple: he was the **lunch-chaser**, she was the **nest-defender**. (p. 12-13)*

This simple story embodies an account of the stereotypical characteristics of men and women, commonly discussed in social situations. These stereotypes tend to include such things as: how men and woman differ in their approach to relationships; who tends to control the television; and how it is that men can't express their feelings while women are unable to parallel park a car. In the business world, one finds accounts of how men and women differ in relation to their ability to deal with stress, and their different approaches to competition. For instance, Gray (1994) tells us that hunter man often had cope with the stress of returning home with nothing in hand. To deal with this situation, he developed ways of being able to temporarily forget his problems by focusing on less important concerns; thus we get the male preoccupation with hobbies. In a similar vein, we are told that men's preoccupation with competition and competitive sports is a coping strategy for dealing with the remnant natural aggression that was previously employed in hunting food killing things and protecting the tribe (Gray, 1994).

Brock and Dooley (2004) argue that our mental life is guided by our DNA and the genetic information in our cells, and that through the wiring of our brains our behaviour is shaped by evolution. This includes impulses such as anger and sexual desire. They draw on brain research showing that the different sex's brains are "wired" differently; to propose that men and women have different responses to stimuli. For instance, men have a highly localised part of the brain responsible for speech processing, where women's brains tend to distribute speech across brain hemispheres. Using these arguments, along with their own interview -based research, which involved asking men and women how they and the opposite sex deal with change, Brock and Dooley (2004), contend that there are key differences in how men and women react to and deal with change. These differences include: men being more ready to move into action; moving more quickly to new beginnings; being less inclined to take the time to say goodbye to the past; being less able to express emotions; and being less resilient and less flexible.

Brock and Dooley (2004) go on to propose that these differences create misunderstandings between the sexes, when a change situation is encountered.

In these popular accounts, gender differences draw on simplified versions of theories from evolutionary psychology. Among a range of theories about how evolution has shaped us, evolutionary psychologists postulate that human males and females have evolved in different ways in response to the different investments each sex has, primarily in relation to issues of fertility and childcare (Buss, 1999). These differential investments account for a range of dissimilarities between the sexes including: short term and long term mating strategies; aggression; sexual infidelity; jealousy; mate preference; conflict between the sexes; patterns of kin relationships; inheritance and altruism (Buss, 1999). However, evolutionary accounts of differences between the sexes need to be balanced with the effects of socialisation and culture. Recent achievements of women illustrate that the previous absence of women from many areas of human endeavour, has in the past had more to do with a climate of restricted opportunity, often in the form of legal and social barriers, than inherent physiological or psychological deficiencies. Contrary to popular conceptions of gender differences, evidence on the street suggests that most women do seem to be able to parallel park a car, read a map and perform most of the other tasks necessary to operate in the modern world.

Turning to the business world, Anna Fels (2004) article in the Harvard Business Review entitled "*Do Women Lack Ambition?*" is typical of the questions asked in recent years about the failure of women to establish careers at the top levels of corporate and political organisations. According to Fels, women's talk about ambition often reveals a disquiet and nervousness about the subject, which for them was associated with "*egotism, selfishness, self-aggrandisement, or the manipulative use of others for one's own ends*" (p.51). In seeking an explanation for this "lack", Fels (2004) proposes that ambition comprises two key components: a need for mastery and a need for recognition or approval. Fels makes the point, that while women appear to have no less a desire to acquire skills and be affirmed for their achievements, even successful women still tend to shy away from taking the credit for their achievements, preferring instead to attribute their success to luck or otherwise, deflecting attention away from themselves. Fels (2004) proposes that the reasons for this tendency for demurral, centre on how femininity is constructed in terms of relationships and providing support for others, as opposed to masculinity; which is defined in terms such as self-reliance, strength of personality, risk taking, and decisiveness. Where men tend to inflate their assessment of

their own prowess and achievements, women tend to under-emphasise their capabilities and achievements and demur from taking the limelight. Fels (2004) says that not only do women face fierce competition from men for recognition of success, they also face a form of discrimination in that achieving femininity means they must forfeit opportunities for recognition both in the home and in the workplace. So, according to Fels (2004), it is a lack of the recognition or expectation of recognition, combined with a problematic definition of femininity that results in women failing to exhibit the ambition required to achieve advancement in the world of business.

Even where women have the requisite ambition, they are told that mistakes and miscues that they make in what is essentially a man's world rule them out of contention for the top jobs. Book titles advising women how to avoid fatal career mistakes include: Lois Frankel's *"Nice Girls Don't Get the Corner Office: 101 Unconscious Mistakes Women Make That Sabotage Their Careers"* (Frankel, 2004) and John McKee's *"Reflections in the Glass Ceiling: 21 Ways Women in Management Shoot Themselves in the Foot"* (McKee, 2005). Women are offered advice on: how to play the game, how to act, how to think, how to brand and market oneself, how to sound, how to look, and how to respond (Frankel, 2004). These accounts are reinforced in the media through book reviews and articles. An example of this is the New Zealand Herald report of an interview with Frankel when she visited New Zealand in 2005 to publicise her abovementioned book.

Frankel says the qualities expected of "nice girls" growing up - polite, softly spoken, compliant and relationship-oriented - can entrench submissive behaviour that becomes a liability to women entering the workforce. So if you didn't get the raise you were expecting or were passed over for promotion, Frankel says it's time to check whether timid girlish behaviour is holding you back? "Being quiet, unassuming, and seeking consensus may promote harmony in relationships, but it may not gain you much notice at work," says Frankel, a psychotherapist. (Story, 2005)

The choices women make about which academic subjects they prefer to study and the career options they take, has been the focus of much research over the past thirty years. Questions such as why it is that women tend to choose medicine over engineering, focus on how women's beliefs and values may be keeping them from taking on careers in fields such as engineering, information technology, physics and astronomy (Chamberlin, 2003). This work suggests that young women tended to perceive work in the physical and mathematically based sciences to have less of a people focus and, therefore, to have a lower value to society than occupations in the

social sciences or those with a biological aspect to them; such as medicine or nursing (Chamberlin, 2003). According to Eccles (1987), these psychological factors add to a range of institutional and cultural barriers, to limit or restrict the achievement of young women, by influencing the academic and vocational skills they accumulate through formal education and early career experiences.

Jacquelynne Eccles' (1987; 2005) model of achievement related choices is an attempt to construct a cohesive model of educational and occupational choice based on applying decision, achievement and attribution theories to educational and vocational decision making. The Eccles model proposes that achievement-related decisions are made on the basis of the individual's expectations of how successful they will be at a range of performance related tasks, and their perception of the importance of these tasks or Subjective Task Value (STV) (Eccles, 1987; 2005). Expectations of success and Subjective Task Value are mediated by cognitive processes such as: the individual's affective reactions and memories; their goals and self-schema's; interpretations of experiences; perceptions of the parent's or other significant figure's beliefs, expectations, behaviours and attitudes; and gender roles and activity stereotypes. These cognitive level factors are underpinned or based on the cultural milieu, the parent's beliefs and attitudes, stable characteristics of the child (including aptitudes, siblings, gender, and birth order) and previous achievement-related experiences (Eccles, 1987; 2005). Research based on the Eccles model has focused on examining factors, such as how parental attitudes and stereotypes influence adolescent's beliefs and achievement-related behaviours (refer: Belansky, Early, & Eccles, 1993; Jacobs, Chhin, & Shaver, 2005; Jozefowicz, Barber, Eccles, & Mollasis, 1994), and how young women's vocational aspirations and sex-role attitudes change as they transition the years following high school (Alfred-Liro, Frome, & Eccles, 1996; Ruble, Croke, Frieze, & Parsons, 1975). However, as Eccles (1987) points out, the very definition of achievement is problematic in that it is socially constructed, value laden, and subject to gendered interpretation. By applying a masculine interpretation of achievement, the question is skewed to ask "Why it is that women do not achieve as men do?", and this focus acts to obscure questions such as "What choices do women make and for what reasons?"

Where Eccles' (1987) concept of Subjective Task Value focuses attention on differences in the value women and men place on specific areas of activity, and proposes a model for how these differences might arise; others have proposed that

women and men may place a different value on the concept of work in terms of a psychological need. One such account proposes gender-based differences in the ways individuals construct the meaning of work. For instance, Axelrod (2001) contends that work is an essential element in the formation of the male ego ideal:

A man's commitment to his work is an essential component of the development of normal narcissism in adulthood. Doing a difficult job and doing it well gives a man a sense of having proven himself as a man in the eyes of others and typically is accompanied by affects of pride, even elation. Work provides a social context in which a man works out the balance between his own narcissism and the needs of others. (para. 23)

Following this line of argument, work may not have the same meaning for women whose attempts to conform to an idealised femininity would position them as only there reluctantly; forced often by economic circumstances, to be temporary inhabitants of the world of work external to the family home, especially where this involves occupations traditionally dominated by men. However, Axelrod is only talking of men and masculinity; there is no consideration in this of how it is that a woman's normal adult narcissism (if such a thing exists) might be developed and what if any role, work may play in this process. Nor does he consider how these processes might be socially constructed, and thus to some degree determined or shaped by differing historical and cultural milieu.

Critique

These accounts seek to make sense of everyday observations about the differences between male and female behaviour and achievement patterns. In doing so, they validate and perpetuate everyday ways of talking about gender, in which men and women are constructed as each having different skills, interests and abilities that make them better at certain tasks and more suitable to fill certain roles. By polarising male and female attributes, these accounts tend to obscure the statistical variations inherent in any population, and the extent to which the male and female sub-groups of the overall population might overlap. As noted above, in spite of apparently having some less ability in the area of spatial awareness, most women can indeed parallel park a car; they fly aircraft, pilot space shuttles, show-jump horses, skydive and find their way around the world as solo yachswomen.

In this sense, these accounts serve to promote particular explanations for differences in observed outcomes, while obscuring others. In focusing on the purported deficits of women, in terms of natural or socially determined characteristics or

deficiencies, and ignoring statistical variation; current practices and divisions are normalised and attention is drawn away from the role of institutions and practices that maintain the status quo. Given the way in which power in our society has been gathered into institutions largely controlled by men, diverting the question away from why it is that women do not achieve as men do, to what choices women make, (Eccles, 1986) hides a deeper question relating to how men and women can share power to the benefit of all, without excluding any particular segment of society.

Hegemonic Masculinity

The static nature of role theories, led many feminist writers to conceptualise the situation in terms of gender relations and the maintenance of “hegemonic masculinity”, which is defined as a set of practices by which male domination over women is institutionalised (Bird, 1996). In these terms, the norms of hegemonic masculinity are supported by homosocial interactions between heterosexual men, in which meanings associated with dominant forms of masculinity are reinforced, while those associated with non-dominant forms are suppressed. Crucial to the maintenance of hegemonic forms of masculinity, are meanings associated with emotional detachment, competitiveness, and the sexual objectification of women (Bird, 1996). Drawing on psychoanalytic theory, emotional detachment for men is construed as a consequence of development of boys in the traditional family structure, which leads them to separate from the mother and seek to establish an identity based on rejection of the feminine in themselves, and the pursuit of activities that are associated with masculine superiority (Chodorow, 1978). In these terms, the expression of emotions is associated with a loss of control; a weakness that leaves one vulnerable to others (Bird, 1996). Competition for men is associated with establishing a separate identity, that is not about commonality and sameness; but rather a degree of separateness and individuality, which in turn sets up the ground for systems of relationship hierarchies, as opposed to the symmetrical relationships that tend to result from a cooperative approach (Bird, 1996). Lastly, the sexual objectification of women provides a mechanism, to establish symbolic distance from the feminine, and it is this distance that provides the foundation for maintaining male superiority (Bird, 1996).

Hegemonic masculinity is constituted as processes and practices by which a gender order is defined, and in which a particular expression of masculinity is given precedence in relation to women and other subordinate masculinities. Furthermore, the

modern organisation can be seen to embody key elements involved in the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity, through the management of emotionality (Fineman, 2000), a focus on competitive behaviours (Mapstone, 1998) and controls over the expression of sexuality (Hearn, Sheppard, Tancred-Sheriff, & Burrell, 1989). In this context, the modern corporation, in which women have until recently been allotted only minor roles, may be viewed as an expression of hegemonic masculinity; that is, as an entity created by men, for men and in which men have acted to preserve male privilege. Criticisms of the mechanisms involved in the maintenance of hegemonic masculine control over organizations, have a parallel in critical feminist analyses of gender in sports in which:

Sport, it is argued, is an institution created by and for men. As such, it has served to bolster a sagging ideology of male superiority and has thus helped to reconstitute masculine hegemony in the 19th and 20th centuries. (Messner & Sabo, 1990, p.9).

However, masculinity cannot be conceived of in the singular, just as masculinity cannot be considered to be a stable “thing”; nor even based on a universally agreed set of shared ideas common to all men (Newton, 1998). Rather, any particular masculinity can be best viewed as a set of practices, by which individual men and groups of men define themselves in relation to gender. In organisational settings such as the healthcare industry, conflicting roles create an environment, where dominant forms of masculinity co-exist with more marginalised caring forms (Boyle, 2002). Even in organisations, where there is less observable role conflict than may be experienced in caring industries, emotional work is still at play, and may involve a stratification of roles where frontline staff deal with customers in an emotional space (as in debt collectors, policemen and prison officers), while management tend to be more concerned with handling and manipulating staff emotions (Fineman, 2000). These differences in the ways in which emotions are played out within an organisation, create spaces for differing expressions of masculinity.

The non-monolithic nature of masculinity can be observed in Susan Faludi’s (2000) book “*Stiffed*”, where many different versions of masculinity are documented, that variously portray failure and betrayal. However, while Faludi provides a veritable catalogue of failed masculinity, and men engaged in a vain attempt to find the meaning of being a man; the measure against which these men are being tested is only one version of masculinity – white, middleclass, educated and heterosexual. In constructing the current predicament of men in terms of this particular version of masculinity, not

only are the experiences of many men ignored, but the white, middleclass, heterosexual professional is effectively “reinscribed” as the standard against which all masculinity is measured (Walzer, 2002). By portraying this one-sided view of masculinity in crisis, Faludi obscures the stories of the many white middleclass men who still enjoy the power and privileges available to them, due to their current position in American society; debatably, at the expense of women in general, and also other working class, black, poor, or homosexual men. In this sense, Walzer (2002) contends that the debate about a male crisis can be seen to be more about white middleclass men confronting the fact that they are no longer the focal point of a “unitary national culture”, and the erosion of their authority in a world that is increasingly subject to the forces of globalisation and cultural pluralism. For Levant (1997), the “crisis” reflects a collapse of the “good provider” role for many white middleclass men; a role he points out has long been problematic for men from other backgrounds. While the plight of white middleclass men is often characterised in relation to a loss of empowerment, and lost masculinity due to “feminist” influences, women still have difficulty obtaining senior management and executive roles (Fagenson & Jackson, 1993), and the responsibility for much of the dislocation and restructuring Faludi (2000) documents can be attributed to the actions of other white middleclass males.

Discourses that construct men as “relatively” less powerful than women, subject to oppressive feminism, and as sexualised objects may be seen as a response to progress made by the feminist and gay rights movements in the twenty years leading up to the early 1990’s (Gough & Peace, 2000). These discourses construct men as victims of oppression by women, and the comparative failure of young men to achieve in school, is explained in terms of a loss of male role models and a sense of their masculinity. In constructing men as victims in this way, these accounts perpetuate exclusions of the voice of lived experience from women and men, who are not privileged by class, ethnicity or sexuality... those whose experience and social positions differ from those of white middleclass heterosexual men. This focus acts to reconstitute a gendered hegemony, by reversing the positions of men and women without attending to the multiplicity of lived experience of gender and gender relations. Further progress towards true equality of opportunity is impeded through the promotion of a version of events, which has the battle already won for women. Indeed, these discourses provide an account that proposes that not only has equality been reached, but that the positions have actually been reversed so that the oppressed is now oppressor. Riley (2001)

suggests that one mechanism involved in this is through the separation of activists from the values they espouse. These values are then adopted by the opposing group. Through this mechanism, men have been able to negatively characterise feminists, while simultaneously claiming feminist values so as to redefine them in their own interests. Riley found that the men she interviewed used a number of discursive tactics to characterise and demonise feminists as radicals bent on undermining men and forcing change through coercion and aggressive tactics; as opposed to merely seeking equality or emancipation (Riley, 2001). Having discredited the feminists, the values of emancipation and equality are then usurped and converted with reference to a gender-neutral approach that advances the idea that all people should be treated equally regardless of gender. Riley (2001), points out that although this gender-neutral approach seems reasonable and fair, it assumes that men and women are interchangeable, and glosses over the current asymmetries of power and status between the genders, and while appearing to be non-sexist, centres a male ideal as the standard person. A similar view on the reproduction of male dominance is provided by Gough and Peace (2000), who found that men use “subtle and complex ways of accounting” involving discourses such as the “men-as-dis/empowered / women-as-dis/*empowered*” discourse, which has the effect of obscuring and even reversing the power imbalance between the genders. According to Gough and Peace, change is forestalled and the status-quo preserved, through discourses that construct men as “feminised, objectified, excluded, and generally discriminated against” (Gough & Peace, 2000, p. 397-398).

One accounting for the male rejection of women from the workplace is provided by psychoanalytic theory which proposes that men in Western cultures experience a gender role conflict that results from dis-identification with the maternal love object (Blazina, 1997). This process of dis-identification leads men to attempt to conform to an idealised masculine role model by rejecting the aspects of the “feminine” in themselves. In the course of rejecting their own feminine qualities, they develop a “fear of the feminine” which is often projected onto real women, who thus signify those rejected qualities (Blazina, 1997). As a result of this fear of the feminine, men tend to position themselves in terms of restrictive gender-role patterns that include homophobia and a fear of intimate contact (Blazina, 1997). One consequence of this is that when men are placed in occupations traditionally dominated by women, such as nursing, they are likely to be subject to prejudicial evaluations such as being classified as homosexual or weak, in contrast to women whose status tends to be enhanced through occupation of a

traditionally male role (Evans & Frank, 2003; Tokar & Jome, 1998). This rejection of the feminine within themselves leads men to seek to define their sense of masculinity in terms of the norms available to them through male reference groups, and the tendency to do so has been shown to be associated with authoritarian, anti-women, anti-homosexual, and ethnocentric attitudes (see: Hughson, 2000; Kilianski, 2003; Wade, 2001; Wade & Brittan-Powell, 2001).

There is a long history of exclusion of women from roles involving power and influence in society, with religious societies such as the Church constituting perhaps the first widespread institutionalised instance of this phenomenon (Welch, 1982). For some, this is ascribed to gynophobia, or the dread of women, which has been attributed to a male reaction to the way in which women tend to monopolise the roles involving socialisation, and providers of primary care giving in our society (Welch, 1982). This control women have over young people during their formative years, is supposed to create resentment and even sadistic impulses, especially among boys for whom the object of these emotions is a different sort of being. Male resistance to the control of women and the effects of gynophobia are manifested in both the glorification and inferiorisation of women, and through institutionalised sex-separation involving the formation of exclusively male societies (Welch, 1982).

In this context, the business world itself can be seen to constitute an exclusive masculine enterprise. This view of the business world is portrayed in David Memet's play, "*Glengarry Glen Ross*" in which, according to Greenbaum (1999), women are largely excluded because they embody qualities of compassion, nurturance, and empathy; all of which are hostile to the ethos inherent in the male business world.

"In Western, capitalistic, industrialised countries, it should not surprise us to note that definitions of masculinity are tied to definitions of work. The world of business, therefore, is intrinsically connected to masculinity."
(Greenbaum, 1999, p.35)

By extension, gender is seen to be deeply implicated in the very basis of the political and economic arrangements inherent in Western capitalist society. Discourses about hegemonic masculinity contain the proposition that gendered conceptions and assumptions about human nature, and indeed the shape of reality, are deeply intertwined with the political and economic spheres of human endeavour. Marx identified gender and patriarchalism as the first class relation (Hearn et al., 1989) and, for Newton (1998), imperialist capitalism is directly related to a white, middleclass and heterosexual

version of masculinity. In this construction, hegemonic masculinity is at the heart of the prevailing dominant western ideology, which is based on the rights of the individual; self-determination over collective responsibility; the role of the marketplace in determining relative value; and the moral role competition has in promoting the strong, while winnowing out the weak and unfit. This worldview is heavily influenced by Darwinian ideas about the role of competition, and can be found in the works of libertarian economic theorists such as Ludwig von Mises who asserts that "Competition is an element of social collaboration, the ruling principle within the social body" (von Mises, 1936, p.321). The appearance of the world being essentially non-gendered is inherent in this account, in that gendered interests are not seen to be relevant. The world is constructed in terms of independent agents acting in their own self interest, in the context of the social activities of the marketplace.

The success of the Western economic and political model, as exemplified by the victory of the capitalist West and failure of socialist regimes in the East, is taken as validation of the capitalist model; and, by extension meanings attached to concepts such as individual rights and responsibilities, competition and community. The socialist concerns with social equity, community responsibility and cooperation, although also present to varying degrees in most Western nations through state funded social programmes, are discredited and marginalised as having failed in their very conception, by ignoring the fundamental nature of man and the role competition plays in the forward advance of civilisation. In this way, competition is presented as having an aspect of health and hygiene to it, in that it is seen to eliminate the weak and promote the strong for the good of all. Through this mechanism survival is assured and the best is preserved, while the sickly, the weak and the inferior are eliminated ... people, products, nations, organisations or ideologies. That this approach to the world might be gendered, is perhaps not readily apparent, until one considers specific instances in the context of the gendered involvement of men and women being involved in the private and the public spheres of life (Mills, 1989).

Critique

Constructing the situation in terms of hegemonic masculinity positions men as perpetrators and women as victims of some sort of insidious masculine enterprise. This positions men against women, in a competition of domination and control of resources; and, perhaps more crucially, the power to define the meanings of aspects of human

endeavour such as work value, morality, and the proper roles people may occupy in society. The issue then becomes identifying the male hegemony, and targeting the institutions they use to support their ambitions. This explanation for the current situation places a particular construction on history, which sees white European men as conspirators in a global power grab, and this construction ignores many other explanations which may have had an influence; such as the role of social class, differences in physical and cognitive capabilities of the genders, and the differential positions created by the investments each has in procreation and childrearing. The focus placed on white males, also ignores the ubiquity of male domination in historical and cross cultural contexts. Men have been in charge in most civilisations in the past, and continue to control the political and economic affairs in the majority of countries today, regardless of the espoused political ideology.

There is the danger of reification in talk of hegemonic masculinity, in that such talk constructs a process, and a way of thinking as something outside of the people and social interactions that feature in everyday life. Talk of hegemonic masculinity constructs something monolithic, something that is somehow shared by certain unnamed men in a stable form, a form that is uniform and relatively impermeable to change. In this way, the forces that shape our social structures become something “out there”, rather than practices and ways of knowing the world enacted in ordinary daily life (Hearn, 1996).

Moreover, there is a judgment inherent in talk about hegemonic masculinity, that suggests another way of doing things; one without domination and certainly without male domination. In this connection, John Moore, says:

As some feminists justifiably contend, women's liberation cannot simply mean women gaining the freedom to behave just like men. It has to mean gaining the power to overthrow (what they see as) patriarchal belief systems. (Moore, 1989, p.9)

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*I have difficulty seeing myself as a part of some hegemonic masculine endeavour bent on subjugating women for the sake of gathering power, and domination over the world in the name of the fraternal brotherhood of men. In any event, defining the form of masculinity I enact is difficult from the lived experience of it; looking out so to speak. While I do not have a strong sense of being a part of any sort of hegemonic masculine*

*endeavour in a personal sense, I am aware that being a well educated middle-class white male, positions me in a particular way. This position may have been to my advantage, because it has meant that some of the barriers that others face have not been placed in my way. On the other hand, the position provides a very narrow set of definitions for success, which in changing times can be difficult to negotiate.*

*Some of those definitions centre on what it is to be a man, and the sorts of careers that are acceptable for a man. In this, I am also a child of my time and carry the paradoxes of my ideas and my practices. While I applaud women who take on the challenge of the corporate world (misguided though they may be), the modern concept of househusband is laden with gender unease for me; in the very term, I sense diminished masculinity and an unacceptable level of dependence. Even if acting out the role, I would choose to define myself in a more acceptable identity for myself: artist, student, part-time worker, consultant or beach-bum. As a son, a husband, a brother to my sister and a father to my daughter, it has always been my position that women can and should fulfil their potential, in whatever areas of endeavour they desire to pursue. However, it is also true that my career has taken priority in my own family circumstances; my wife has stayed home to care for our children, and I have taken on the role of breadwinner.*

*While I will not admit to being gynophobic to the extent that I shun the association of women and feel the need to associate with men, I feel a fascination for women as sexual partners, lovers, wives, peers, and teachers. I sense the power that women have had over me at different phases of my life: my dependence on them for emotional support; their attraction to me as objects of sexual desire; their critical role in my professional and academic careers. This sense is typified in the experience with my first woman manager, who I encountered shortly after finishing university and joining the first bank I worked for. She was an assistant manager in a head office department and I was her analyst. I was quite in awe of her, and remember standing in front of her desk; her long, red, curved fingernails pointing out yet another error in a memo or piece of work, I had hopefully and maybe recklessly, submitted for critical review. It was some years before I had my next woman boss, but I recollect that same uneasy feeling of the little boy standing at the teacher's table, deeply fearful of shaming himself, while his lowly efforts at writing are criticised and found wanting. The funny thing is, at age 47 I still get that feeling and I still put myself in that position.*

*There is a sense then, that among the other aims I have outlined, this project is not so much about the emancipation of women, or even of men; as an exploration of my own relationship to women in power over me.*

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### **Corporation as Male Hierarchy**

The modern western corporation is organised on the basis of a particular set of financial imperatives (share price and profitability), and some key assumptions about how to shape human behaviour to obtain those ends. As a consequence, most western corporations are structured hierarchically, and the behaviour of their employees is shaped using an ostensibly rational system of rewards and punishments, centred on a cascaded set of personal objectives (a system often referred to as “management-by-objectives”), and a performance management system. The latter usually involves a formal annual performance review, during which each employee is rated to determine his/her eligibility for reward or punishment. As Jackal (1988) points out:

*This ‘management-by-objective system’, as it is usually called, creates a chain of commitments from the CEO down to the lowliest product manager or account executive. In practice it also shapes a patrimonial authority arrangement that is crucial in defining both the immediate experiences and the long-run career chances of individual managers. In this world, a subordinate owes fealty principally to his immediate boss. (p. 19)*

According to Jackall (1988), this demonstration of fealty involves following certain rules. For instance, subordinates are expected to: not over-commit the boss; keep the boss informed; keep the boss from making mistakes; not circumvent or give the appearance of circumventing the boss; not contradict the boss in public; follow the boss’s lead in conversation; laugh at the boss’s jokes; not upstage the boss and generally learn to efface themselves.

*In short, the subordinate must symbolically reinforce at every turn his own subordination and his willing acceptance of the obligations of fealty. (Jackall, 1988, p. 19)*

Although Jackall (1988) makes reference to “men and women” managers, the book essentially deals with male experiences. In this regard, it is possible to view the book as a documentation of a male society, in which loyalty is owed to the boss, but neither expected from nor given to those around or below.

Upward mobility is a critical measure of success in an organisation, and rewards tend to be structured with the assumption that employees, particularly managers, are



strongly motivated to succeed in this way. Those who have for some reason decided that upward promotion is not for them, either due to lack of talent or not being prepared to pay the costs of entrance, are seen to have failed or “stalled”. A manager in such a position may be regarded as a trusted lieutenant who knows his place, or with suspicion as someone who stands outside the reward and punishment system; and whose motivations may be unpredictable, or whose loyalties are only to himself. In this hierarchy, it is important not to be seen as someone who promotes his own interests above loyalty to the boss, even when correct on the facts. This aspect is illustrated in the New York Times, where conservative factions were reported to have accused Colin Powell, the then outgoing US Secretary of Defense, of having “*pursued his own agenda, and of being more interested in depicting himself as right on the issues than as loyal to his president*” (Jehl, 2004).

Gendered differences in the ways in which men and women tend to approach work, and the significance work activities have for them, provide a background against which men may make sense of both themselves and women in the work environment. Mapstone (1998) proposes that where men tend to approach the world of work as a form of game (admittedly a serious game, but a game all the same), women tend to regard games in terms of fun or recreation. According to Mapstone (1998), the games men play in the workplace accord women a lesser status than men; much in the same way that women’s sport attracts less media coverage, smaller rewards, and is less seriously regarded than men’s sports (Messner & Sabo, 1990). Not only are women positioned less favourably than men in these games, Mapstone (1998) contends that they may also be unaware that a game is in progress; which naturally means that even if they had the desire to compete, they are unable to play. One game that Mapstone (1998) contends men play is called the “Gender Game”. In this game, men set out to use expectations about gender roles to their own advantage. According to Mapstone (1998), while women may attempt to play the “Gender Game”, they often resort to manipulation – a characteristically feminine tactic (see also: Harlos & Pinder, 2000). This in itself is an admission that one does not possess the sufficient power to act directly. Mapstone contends that in situations where a woman is in charge, subordinate males may play the “Gender Game” to undermine the woman in charge, and in so doing illustrate her relative inferiority to men performing the same role. While Mapstone’s (1998) illustration of gender politics and the “Gender Game” is anecdotal in nature, the use of

male power to exclude females from roles traditionally regarded as white male preserves, is supported by other writers (for example: O'Neil & Egan, 1993; Wade, 2001; Wade & Brittan-Powell, 2001). Mapstone's (1998) "Gender Game" is therefore one way of viewing and accounting for how women are positioned in the talk of male managers, and how this talk serves to both maintain a privileged position, as well as reinforce a particular version of masculinity and its relation to the world of managerial work.

### **Critique**

The construction of organisations as male hierarchies is similar in some respects to the account of hegemonic masculinity, in that positions of power are filled by men and men's interests are preserved as a result. However, while the hegemonic account implies a degree of agency in the creation and maintenance of the situation, the male hierarchy is more an "accident of history" account. Men were around when the organisations were created (women were otherwise occupied), and men naturally created structures that suited them, and played out the games that men are apt to play according to their nature. That some of these games may involve excluding women, is just in the nature of what boys will do in a competitive situation. This account then, represents a somewhat naïve construction in that it minimises historical acts of discrimination against women, and downplays the active role men have played through institutions such as the law and religious practice, to exclude women from positions of power. Instances of such acts include laws that discriminated against women in terms of access to education, political representation, equal pay and others that gave primacy to male employment; such as when the jobs occupied by women during World War II, were given (back) to returning servicemen.

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*Through my lifetime the rights and the status of women in our society have changed radically. Being born in 1958, I am near the end of the post war "Baby Boom" era. My parents born as they were in New Zealand in the mid-thirties, were not old enough for military service in the war, but were old enough to experience the post war liberation and reaction to the strictures of the war years. My younger years were framed in the post-war Sixties, when men went out to work and women stayed at home to look after the family. This arrangement was seen as part of the natural order of*

*society. While the middleclass norm, which involved women staying home to look after the family and house, was prevalent, many women were to be found in the workplace. The sorts of roles in which women were to be found, were more usually low level non-managerial positions such as: shop assistants, bank tellers, clerical assistants, nurses and teachers. Younger women tended to be concentrated into semi-professional careers such as nursing and teaching, to the extent that it was extremely rare to find a male who was a nurse, and during my primary school years I only had one male teacher – although at that time most school headmasters would have been men. Except for the odd career spinster, the presence of women within these professions was mediated by marriage and childrearing. Young women tended to enter the profession ex-training school; get married, leave to have a family and then return some years later, if at all; as the family became more self sufficient.*

*As the women's liberation movement gathered force during the late Sixties and early Seventies, many legislative barriers affecting women were removed, and excepting a few areas such as the military, it became illegal to discriminate against women in the workplace. During my high school years in the mid-Seventies, women's equality was a major topic of conversation; as women had already gained easy access to contraception and the mantra of the day was "Girls can do anything". As a university student in the days when having a university degree was starting to be less an elitist thing and more normal, the ratio of men to women was becoming more equal. This trend was reflected in the number of boys and girls who went on to university from my last year at high school. In the days of largely free tertiary education and student allowances, it seemed that gender was truly no barrier to equality of opportunity.*

*There is a sense in which my work career has slightly trailed the rise of woman in the organisations and the industries in which I have worked. As I arrived at higher levels of management, it was often to find that a woman had only just made into the position above, and that my male peers were only just getting used to the fact. During this time, the practices of the workplace have changed beyond recognition; gone are the days of the Friday afternoon beer at the pub with the boys from the office, and gone too is the Wednesday afternoon social golf for the managers. There is a feeling that the rise of women within the organisation has not just paralleled the fall of the institutions some of my peers may remember with nostalgia, but the presence of women has shaped what is considered acceptable and professional. Where once we had a beer and a round of golf, there is now the 20 minute latte and maybe a business lunch. The business*

*focussed language of networking has replaced the social and less purposeful language of camaraderie.*

*But as a man, none of these things have been something I have really been a part of anyway. I have no real affection for boozing with the boys, don't play golf, and have never been a participant or fan of organised sport of any kind. My interests are more academic and family oriented, and as such, it seems to me that I sit outside what might be regarded as the traditional male network. Furthermore, while I empathise with the people who still work there, my twenty years of experience of the corporate organisation with its hierarchies, reward and punishment mentality, performance reviews, cultural change programmes, budget cuts and politics has left me with a distinct aversion to ever being a subject of such an enterprise again.*

*Notwithstanding my own feelings about the nature of the organisation, the rise of women into the organisational hierarchy has paralleled the progress of my own career; providing a perspective where the women I have reported to have often been the first or among the first woman to have occupied that particular role, or a role of that level in the organisation. This was the same situation for the men I interviewed during this project.*

### **Resource Theory**

Control of resources, or at least the lack thereof, has been advanced as an explanation for why women have not featured in leadership roles in a number of situations. Resource Theory (see: Coleman, 1970; Welch, 1982) contains the idea that marginal groups who are able to command resources are more likely to be able to advance their interests and gain access to positions of influence within society at large. Lipman-Blumen (1975) links these differences in resources to sex based stratification of society, in which women's activities and achievements are given lower value than men's activities and achievements. It is this sex based stratification of society, along with a chronic inability to access significant resources, which makes it difficult for women to gain access to important social networks. In this account, while women are perceived to have less to contribute in an organisational setting, being relatively poorer in terms of access to tangible and intangible assets, they will continue to remain outside the corridors of power. Additionally, Lipman-Blumen (1975) asserts that the access women have to the world of work may also be influenced by the value they represent to men in other ways; through access to paternity, as adornments and as status symbols.

This objectification of women, as well as supporting a narrow concept of the range of roles for which they may be eligible based on physical appearance and their procreative potential, is also held to keep women out of the workforce as the ability to be able to afford to support a non-working spouse is a status symbol in itself.

The inter-relationship between access to socioeconomic resources and traditional gender-role ideologies has been found in a number of studies across different cultures and according to Foa, Salcedo, and Tornblom (1987) this suggests a pan-cultural phenomenon. For instance, Yelvington (1997) found strong support in a Caribbean setting for gendered resource theory, in positive correlations between male spousal violence and the wife's share of the total family income; but, only where the husband had a "traditional" family outlook. Likewise, Xu and Lai's (2002) study of Taiwanese couples found a rise in wives' bargaining power, as access to resources increased and traditional values waned. Nyman (2003) found that among Swedish couples, a woman's earnings and perceptions of money ownership were positively related to the control of money in the relationship.

While economic resources appear to form the focus of many of the studies mentioned above, Foa's resource theory encompasses a wider group of resources. These include; love and status and money, as being relevant to the ability of individuals from marginalised groups to gain positions of power (Foa, 1993). In some instances, the resources required to gain power appear to specifically exclude economic resources. For instance, Welch's (1982) cross cultural study, found support for a gendered resource theory of the exclusion of women from community religious roles, although the resources required were not economic in nature.

*Women are most likely to be shamans in societies in which they are highly influential in kin networks and yet retain little control over property.*  
(Welch, 1982, p.79)

Foa's (1993) extended definition of resources represents an important distinction in organisational settings, because in organisations salient economic resources tend to be related to job role and position, rather than something an individual may possess independently. As such, economic resources may not constitute levers to progression with the organisation, so much as by-products of it. The resources that relate to progression in an organisational setting; may be seen to have more to do with

experience, qualifications, reputation, social fluency and personal networks of obligation and allegiance (Jackall, 1988).

### **Critique**

Resource theory provides an account of the stratification of society along gender lines, in terms of control over resources. In explaining the situation in terms of unequal access to and control over resources, this account provides opportunities for actions aimed at re-aligning the way resources are allocated between the genders. In particular, how women and men share the control of marital assets and spending decisions. It provides a focus on the way family income earned by a sole “breadwinner” within the family, may determine the resources each party is able to bring to bear in the wider social community, so as to determine personal standing. The conclusion to be drawn is that as women increase their involvement in the workforce and achieve a greater share of independently derived resources, they will tend to improve their level of influence in society. Through this, they will tend to be more equally represented in leadership roles. This account therefore, centres attention on how women may increase their control over resources through independent involvement in the workforce, rearranging the way in which control of family resources is allocated between the sexes. In organisational terms, this suggests that providing women with equal access to employment opportunities should be sufficient to achieve eventual equality of status.

However, this account provides little to explain why it is that women find themselves in the situation of having few resources in the first place, and also how it is that while there are often large numbers of women on the lower rungs of the organisational hierarchy, very few have made it into senior management ranks. In this way, the account diverts attention from gendered institutional structures and practices that act to exclude women from leadership roles.

### **Conclusion**

The foregoing accounts represent a sample of quite a range of explanations for the lack of women in senior executive roles in most Western nations. These accounts thread their way through popular and academic discourse, so that it is common to hear about women breaking through the “Glass Ceiling”, and how women may or may not lack aggression, ambition and any number of other purported qualities, necessary to gain and

perform in an executive role. However, if one treats these accounts as just that, not so much as factual descriptions of reality, but rather as ways of accounting which act to position women and the speaker in a social sense, then they take on a different perspective. Instead of competing attempts to accurately describe reality, we have accounts, object and subject positions, and attributions of accountability, which collectively act to define different possibilities for action.

In this way, Role Congruity Theory provides an account focused on perceptions of roles. These perceptions are related to commonly held ideas about leadership and femininity. This attributes responsibility “out there” to society as a whole, and suggests actions to remedy the situation in terms of attempts to redefine perceptions. Talk about the “Glass-Ceiling”, employs a physical metaphor which suggests the role of a non-human barrier which must be smashed to gain access. Explanations that focus on the deficits inherent in women internalise the problem to women and eliminate other causes. They suggest remedies such as training and trait development of women to make them more suitable and in some cases may suggest that this is just the way it is. Accounts suggesting hegemonic masculinity attribute the situation to a fraternity of men who seek to exclude women for one reason or another. This positions the situation as a battle between women and men, and suggests lines of action in terms of challenging and dismantling the hegemonic male establishment.

While it may be unlikely that men in organisations will have a full repertoire of these accounts at their disposal, these accounts frame the situation in that they provide a range of different ways for accounting for the absence of women in senior management roles. By treating these explanations as accounts, the way is open to examining what men say about women in senior management roles, and how they employ these accounts to position themselves in relation to these women in terms of their own sense of masculinity.

### **Chapter III. Research Approach**

#### **Research Aims**

The aim of the research project has been to analyse how men in senior management positions reporting to women, talk about gender in relation to their experience, and how they construct the situation and position themselves in these circumstances. This project centres on themes such as gender, leadership, power and masculinity in the context of the modern corporate organisation.

The approach taken in this project is social constructionist. The project makes no claim to establishing universal laws of human behaviour, and whatever findings are intended to be taken in the context of the specific historical and cultural setting within which they are bound. The findings constitute one particular interpretation of the data. Other interpretations are possible, and no one interpretation may be considered to have any special privilege.

The uses to which knowledge may be put is also a concern in the production of that knowledge, so that the definition of what constitutes knowledge, and how it may be employed in terms of actions or lack of action are of concern to the researcher (Burr, 1995). In this context, the production of knowledge may be seen to be an active process in which the researcher, the research participant, others with whom the project is discussed and the reader of the final reports are inevitably changed by the experience in some way. The research project may be seen to be a socially active process, and must therefore be evaluated in terms of "how useful and liberatory" it is for the people affected, rather than in terms of "truth" or "accuracy" (Burr, 1995, p.162).

Those who are likely to benefit from this research project include women and men in senior corporate management positions, and those who may aspire to such roles. My hope is that by understanding how men experience women in the corporate hierarchy, the people involved will be better able to negotiate a way to share power and make changes to organisational life. Such knowledge should create greater opportunities for women and men to contribute to, and fulfill their career aspirations. I am also hopeful that by examining how male-centred organisational structures constrain behaviours and ways of living in particular ways, the research will play a role in suggesting emancipatory alternatives for multiple gendered organisational subjects.



## **Relevance of Gender**

The focus of this research project is explicitly centred on gender as a key area of discussion. The participants were selected on the basis of their gender, and that of the person they reported to in the organisational hierarchy. The interview questions were framed in the context of gender, and my own gendered experience is contained within the reflexive discussions contained within the paper.

The very act of placing gender as the central focus of research is not unproblematic. There is the possibility that by focusing on gender, the researcher may marginalise or ignore other important aspects of situation (Messner, 1998). It is therefore, important to be able to demonstrate that gender is already relevant to the people involved in the research (Weatherall, 2000), in order to warrant its use as an analytic distinction (Schegloff, 1997; Stokoe & Smithson, 2001).

There is ample evidence to support the assertion that gender is of relevance for a large number of people in organisations across many different settings. This includes commentary in management magazines and academic publications, on the role of gender in leadership, the absence of women from leadership roles, and on-going debates featuring the so-called “Glass Ceiling” (for example: Bové, 1987; Chusmir, Koberg, & Mills, 1989; Dubinsky, Comer, & Liu, 2002; Ellis & McCabe, 2003; Fagenson & Jackson, 1993; Hearn & Parkin, 1986; Koberg & Chusmir, 1989; Lyness & Thompson, 1997; Morrison, White, Van Velsor, & Center for Creative Leadership., 1992; Rotundo, Nguyen, & Sackett, 2001; Ruderman, Ohlott, & Center for Creative Leadership., 2002; Tischler, 2004; Tokar & Jome, 1998; Veale & Gold, 1998; Vinnicombe & Singh, 2003). It is also clear from my own experience of some twenty years working for corporate organisations that gender is the subject of much formal and informal discussion among the inhabitants. Gender considerations are involved in many organisational initiatives; such as whether or not to have a crèche, flexible work hours, staff recruitment and retention, sexual harassment policies and expatriate transfer and promotion.

## **Research to Date**

A great deal of research has been conducted into how gender impacts on organisational life. While much of this research has focused on questions of ideal managerial qualities, and demonstrating that women are capable of performing senior management roles (Marshall, 1995), the men in organisations have often been neglected as a focus of inquiry. According to Collinson & Hearn (1994),

*The categories of man 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 rarely the focus of interrogation. (p.3)*

Even where masculinity in an organisational setting is examined, the focus is often turned to women. For example, Diane Forbes (2002), studied the (re)production of masculinity in organisations, by revealing the internalised masculinity to be found in the discourse of a group of Black women managers. In this case, Forbes found that the women used language that acted to reinforce hegemonic and patriarchal practices. A further example of this focus on researching the situation by centering on women is provided by Dominique Beck and Ed Davis's (2005) report of Westpac Banking Corporation's EEO practices pertaining to senior management, in which they examined the bank's processes of cultural change, and interviewed a number of women executives about their attitudes and experiences.

The response of men to the presence of women in traditionally male power structures has also been researched in contexts such as the cane sugar industry in Australia, where gender equity strategies aimed at increasing the participation of women resulted in a backlash from men (Pini & McDonald, 2004). Pini and McDonald interviewed eighty women involved in women's networks, associated with the CANEGROWERS agri-political group. This study found that men in the CANEGROWERS group, employed discourses that acted to position the women's networks, and the women involved in the networks as lacking femininity. This served to reinscribe normative definitions of both femininity, and the masculine nature of agriculture (Pini & McDonald, 2004).

In a similar vein, Su Olsson and Robyn Walker (2004) examined the patterns of identification and differentiation in thirty senior women executives' representations of career identity. Olsson and Walker (2004) found that the women involved negotiate a paradoxical situation, using "*shifting, relational and frequently contradictory discursive constructions*" (p.250) of identity in relation to organisational culture. Olsson and Walker (2004), classified the aspects of the women's identity work in terms of five major dimensions: 1) Women executives: identity in a world of corporate masculinity; 2) "The men": identification with supportive males and mentors; 3) "The wo-men" Glass Ceilings, corporate transvestites, dolly birds and sissy women; 4) "The boys": game playing and bullshit; and 5) "The women": unities and networks.

However, the voices of men are not entirely neglected, as evidenced by Amanda Sinclair's (2000) paper, on whether the topic of masculinities can be taught to managers within the context of managerial education programs and; if so, whether it can be done by a woman. According to Sinclair (2000), masculinities tend to be both invisible and incomprehensible within the organisational context. Sinclair claims that the invisibility of masculinities and "the active neglect of gender in analyses of leadership" serve the interests of those who benefit from the status quo. Sinclair (2000) charts four phases involved in eliminating discrimination against women in the middle and upper levels of organisational management, by changing understandings about the nature of the problem and responsibility for it. These phases are: 1) denial: no problem; 2) the problem is women; 3) incremental adjustment; 4) commitment to a new culture. Sinclair says that not only is the concept of masculinity incomprehensible to many managers, it is also un-discussable. According to Sinclair, a lack of a concise definition of masculinity and awareness of what exactly masculinity involves, is allied to a reluctance to engage in dialogue on the subject, as evidenced by the managers in an MBA course. They reacted with hostility when she tried to bring it to the fore, in the context of formal discussion. Sinclair says:

*Similarly, working with managers, masculinities can rarely be tackled directly. Discussion can be prompted by talk of sons and comparisons between sons and daughters. But masculinities as a topic are rarely pursued within the formal structure of training – it will be approached during breaks, over coffee and as a one-on-one exchange. Reflections on masculine identity are generally regarded as an insight that is incidental to the main business of training or discussion. (Sinclair, 2000, p.91)*

Additionally, although Olssen and Walker's more recent focus was on how women negotiated career identity (see: Olsson & Walker, 2004), earlier work included research of men and women executives' representations of one another (see: Olsson, 2002; Olsson & Walker, 2003). This research, which employed a social constructionist approach to analysing interviews, found that women did not tend to feature in male executives' representations of career identity, whereas an awareness of men as a feature of the situation, was often evidenced in the women's comments. Key strands revealed in the men's representations were: 1) operating within a male domain; 2) a level playing field; 3) perceived similarities or differences between men and women executives; and 4) social and cultural change (Olsson & Walker, 2003). The theme of operating within a male domain entailed an unthinking construction of the organisation as a male domain

which excluded women, and the concerns of women who were either absent or silent in the accounts. The level playing field theme, revealed a representation of the world of work as a meritocracy, where gender was irrelevant with all staff being treated equally and having equal opportunity for advancement. The theme of perceived similarities or differences between men and women executives, revealed variations in the essentially no difference between men and women executives; while others focused on perceived differences on qualities such as empathy, aggression and emotion work. The social and cultural change theme involved suggestions that the organisation was accommodating the increasing presence of women, which was resulting from social and cultural changes.

In another professional area, Rosalind Gill (1993) examined the discourse of male radio Disk Jockeys (DJ's) in relation to their accounting for the relative lack of women in the profession. Gill identified five different accounts for the lack of women DJ's, including: 1) failure of women to apply; 2) audience objections; 3) gender differences; and 4) the suitability of women's voices. Gill found considerable variation in the ways these accounts were employed, and also that they were drawn on selectively to present a non-sexist face to the speaker and construct the lack of women DJ's in terms of factors associated with women, or preferences of the radio audience. In doing so, institutional sexism and organisational practices were obscured, and continued inequality within the radio stations was justified.

Although there is admittedly some research that does include men within the focus of inquiry, as evidenced by Olsson & Walker (2004) and Gill (1993), more often the voices of individual men are missing. Moreover, while it is only recently that women have ascended to senior executive roles, the situation of men reporting to women at these levels has been relatively rare and; therefore, represents an area which has been neither relevant nor easy to research. The research undertaken in this project is timely, in the sense that it sets out to provide a voice to the experience of men in organisational life, and also to explore a situation which is becoming more relevant as more women achieve senior executive and CEO positions.

### **Need for Qualitative Research Approach**

The question this project attends to concerns how men in senior management positions reporting to women, talk about gender in relation to their experience, and how

they construct the situation and position themselves in these circumstances. This question is wide ranging, in terms of there being no predetermined set of psychological constructs to be tested or examined.

While there is certainly some research that suggests men might construct explanations for the relative absence of women from certain professional positions, as in Gill's (1993) radio DJ's, there is little previous work to suggest how men reporting to senior executive women in New Zealand organisations, might talk about this situation. The lack of previous research, combined with a desire to give voice to the participants and examine the ways on which men position themselves in relation to women leaders, suggests that a discursive approach is appropriate for this project. Taking a discursive approach to the question provides a way to examine how different accounts are constructed, so as to position the speaker in relation to the subject, and also examine how these accounts are used to construct the possibility for action.

### **Social Constructionism**

Social constructionism refers to an approach towards knowledge and the nature of the world that stands in contrast to the historical empiricist and rationalist approaches. A social constructionist approach is defined by a set of key assumptions, which according to Burr (1995) include: a critical stance towards "taken for granted knowledge"; the idea that knowledge is inseparable from the processes that sustain, it as well as being both historically and culturally specific; and a conception of knowledge as active, in the sense that the way something is known implies what forms of action are made available or excluded. Furthermore, social constructionism represents a movement beyond dualist arguments, over whether theory or observation should rule, as to the primary source of knowledge to examine the social processes, which construct and sustain our understanding of the world through language.

From a social constructionist point of view, knowledge is not a simple reading of the world as though it is some sort of recording of objective fact. Rather, the social constructionist position is that experience alone is not sufficient in itself to account for the ways in which the world is understood (Gergen, 1985). For the social constructionist, knowledge is negotiated, categorised, and used through social processes, to achieve particular outcomes for those involved. In this sense, the concept of "truth" is not so much a simple reflection of the state of being, as a device employed to "warrant voice" (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1985). This conception of knowledge as

something derived from the social processes of negotiation, conflict and rhetoric, applies just as much to the process and products of the research activity as it does to the phenomena which form the focus of the research. In this sense, a social constructionist approach challenges assumptions of lack of bias and objectivity often ascribed to the research activity (Burr, 1995).

### **Discourse Analysis**

Discourse analysis has been approached in a wide variety of ways, and as Potter and Wetherell point out:

*It is a field in which it is possible to have two books on discourse analysis with no overlap in content at all. (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p.6)*

Mats Alvesson and Dan Karreman surveyed the range of discourse analysis approaches, in an attempt to clarify the meanings and key theoretical positions involved, in the use of discourse analysis as it applies to organisational analysis. Their first major distinction involves whether the discourse analysis approach focuses on the study of social texts, or on the study of social reality. According to Alvesson and Karreman (2000), in the former case, the researcher seeks to examine the interactional aspects of talk and text in defining social action. In the latter case, the researcher is concerned with identifying how social reality is defined through “*historically situated discursive moves*”, or ‘Discourses’, which are said to shape social reality through “*the power-knowledge relations established in the discourse*” (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000, p.1126-7). Alvesson and Karreman (2000) conceptualise a range of discourse analysis approaches along this dimension, including micro-discourse, meso-discourse, Grand Discourse and Mega-Discourse.

According to Edwards and Potter (1992), discursive psychology has a concern for how written and spoken language is employed in an active sense; that is to say, its focus is on how people use language to perform social actions. Rather than treating reports and accounts as simple statements of fact or opinion, the discourse analyst is concerned with how the speaker employs and shapes those accounts to manage his or her own position in relation to what can be understood to be the factual aspects of the account (Edwards & Potter, 1992). In these terms, discourse analysis opens up for analytical consideration: how speakers construct and present facts, so that any particular version is both credible and difficult to undermine, how the speaker’s deals with and manages his or her own stake in the events, and how the speaker attributes accountability.

Ian Parker defines a discourse as “*a system of statements which constructs an object*” (Parker, 1992, p.5), and includes all forms of verbal and non-verbal communication, including: words, written texts, symbols, pictures and even buildings, which convey meaning through their form and purpose. According to Parker (2002), discourse analysis is the study of how these discourses are employed, and how mental phenomena operate between people through the medium of language.

Rather than using the term discourse, Potter and Wetherell (1987) introduce the concept of interpretive repertoires which are defined as “*a lexicon or register of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterise and evaluate actions and events*” (p.138). Although there are parallels between Parker’s definition of a discourse, and Potter and Wetherell’s interpretative repertoires; in Parker’s discourse there is a tendency to reify the concept of there being discourses, which may be seen to have a life of their own. In contrast, the idea of interpretive repertoires implies a more fluid construction, and also provides an emphasis on the agency of the speaker in being able to draw on such repertoires to perform acts such as accounting and positioning.

The nature of this project is to examine how the participants construct the situation of reporting to a woman manager within an organisational context. This may include accounting for the relative lack of women, and the role gender plays in organisational life. In this regard, the approach taken aligns with Alvesson and Kärreman’s (2000) Grand-Discourse level analysis, that is: “*an assembly of discourses, ordered and presented as an integrated frame*” which “*may refer to/constitute organizational reality*” (p.1133). Additionally, the concept of an interpretive repertoire has been adopted as a frame for making sense of the systematic patterns of devices and metaphors employed by the participants to produce accounts and position themselves in the situation.

## Chapter IV. Methodology

Methodology as it applies to discourse analysis, is unlike a traditional quantitative study, where there will usually be a well formed question elaborated in the form of a number of testable hypotheses. In a discourse analytical study, the questions formed have consideration to construction and purpose of the discursive resources employed (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). In this sense, the question posed in a discourse analytical study, is more in the nature of a determination of how an account or position is constructed, and what is gained by the participants through this construction (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Furthermore, Potter and Wetherell (1987) point out there are no predefined set of steps involved, but rather a series of stages which are heavily reliant on the skills and tacit knowledge of the researcher, to bring sense to the texts which form the locus of the study. While some discourse analysts list as many as twenty steps (for example: Parker, 1992; 2002), Potter and Wetherell (1987) define ten stages for their approach to discourse analysis. These ten stages include: 1. the research question; 2. sample selection; 3. data collection; 4. interviews; 5. transcription; 6. coding; 7. analysis; 8. validation; 9. the report; and 10. application. The approach outlined by Potter and Wetherell (1987) has been employed for this project in the interest of simplicity.

### The Research Question

The original research question for this project was formed out of the experiences I had as a manager working for a woman in a group of male peers. My original question was framed in these terms:

*The main goal of this research project ... is to identify the discursive resources drawn on and employed by men reporting to female leaders of corporate organisations, and discover how these resources are employed to position the men and the leader in relation to the power structures inherent in such a relationship. By listening to these men's accounts of their experiences with and expectations of female leaders, I hope to enlarge understanding of the ways in which men make sense of a situation, where a woman has taken on a key leadership role; a situation which some men may experience as confusing and possibly a source of hostility or anger. I hope that through an improved understanding, men and women may be better placed to identify the mechanisms and purposes of discourses concerning women as leaders, so as to make this situation less difficult and confusing for both.*



In the event, I found that the use of interviews for collecting the data tended to constrain the participants' talk, so that rather than getting an open discussion featuring possibly stories characterising the experience of working for a woman boss, the discussion tended to be more formal. At the extreme end of this, there was one notable case, where I had a distinct feeling of having the company Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) policy quoted, or at least paraphrased, to me. Additionally, in the period during which the research has been undertaken, my own thoughts on the matter have developed, and new perspectives on the situation including my own position in relation to it, have come into play. These new perspectives and positioning are largely evident in the reflexive sections I have provided, and also in the direction taken in framing the project in terms of a series of differing accounts for the lack of women in executive ranks.

The nature of the research question has therefore; also been subject to some fluidity and re-evaluation during the course of the project. In the end, the research question that has developed centres on the themes of leadership, career and gender. In particular, the research question has resolved to consider how this group of men who each reported to a woman executive related to these themes and how they positioned gender as a factor in leadership and career progression.

### **Sample Selection**

The sample was determined from the original question, which concerned men who reported to woman in executive positions. The size of the sample was guided by the practicality of the number of available men, who might fit the criteria. This criteria was defined as male, middle to upper level managers of major New Zealand corporations having in excess of 2000 staff, and who at the time of interviewing either reported to or had in the previous two years reported to, a woman or women holding an executive level position (CEO or General Manager). In order to make this relevant to issues such as the "Glass Ceiling" preference was given to men reporting to a woman CEO.

The aim was therefore, to interview twelve men. While this does not constitute a large number by quantitative research standards, twelve is an acceptable number for a qualitative study where this number is at the upper limit of what could be dealt with, within the scope of a master's thesis, and sufficient to provide analytic saturation (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

### **Data Collection**

The participants for this research project were recruited from middle to upper levels of three major New Zealand companies (three participants from each), each employing over 2000 people, and one Government department (one participant). The original ten participants were reduced to nine, in view of the fact that one (the government department) declined approval for the interview to be taped, and a review of the notes taken at this interview, showed that the quality was not sufficient to make the material gathered useful for analysis. Two of the three companies were from the private sector, and both of these had a woman CEO to whom the participants reported. The remaining three participants reported to the woman General Manager Human Resources; of a state-owned trading company, with an otherwise all male senior management team of twelve including the male CEO.

Each of the participants was contacted through the researcher's personal network of contacts using a "snowball" approach of referrals from one person to another. Participants were initially approached by phone or email. On indicating a willingness to participate, they were sent a formal letter detailing in full: the nature and purpose of the research; their rights as participants; and a copy of the consent form (see Appendices A, B and C).

The participants were men spanning an age range between the mid-thirties to mid-fifties. All presented as well educated middleclass European New Zealanders, apart from one who was an immigrant from the United Kingdom.

### **Interviews**

The interviews were all held in locations most convenient to the participants, usually in their office or a meeting room at their workplace. One interview was conducted at the participant's home. The interviews were conducted by the researcher on a one-to-one basis, using a semi-structured open format interviewing style (Parker, 1992), with each lasting from 45 to 90 minutes. The interviews were conducted in as open a fashion as possible, so as to maximise the opportunity for participants to express themselves freely and naturally on the topic; albeit, within the confines of an interview situation. A list of open-ended questions (detailed in Appendix D) was pre-prepared, so as to centre the discussion around the topic of interest, while allowing participants to bring to bear accounts and discourses reflecting their own experiences with a woman leader.

As the intention of the interviews was to source text as close to natural conversation as possible, the pre-prepared questions were referred to only as necessary, to guide the interview rather than adhere to as a strict template. This meant that where the interview flowed around the central area of interest, the questions were often laid aside. Where the conversation tended to get stuck, the questions were referred to more closely. Additionally, the pre-prepared questions were frequently supplemented by probing questions, to clarify particular points, or encourage the participant to expand upon a particular comment or theme.

Having regard to the fact that the researcher necessarily forms a major part of the interview context, I took pains to locate myself within the interview process by: being open to questions; being open about my own position in relation to the research; assuring participants of my discretion and the confidentiality of their responses, and; presenting a professional image compatible with the participants' organisational and cultural backgrounds.

### **Transcription**

The interviews were all recorded on 90 minute cassette tapes, using a cassette recorder with transcription capabilities. While it had been the intention to use this machine for transcription purposes, this was found to be difficult and an alternative solution was found. This involved recording the interviews to a MP3 computer file format, using a software programme called "Total Recorder" from High Criteria Inc. ([www.highcriteria.com](http://www.highcriteria.com)). This software provided the ability to note the current position within the interview recording using the precise time from the start, and also variable skip-back time intervals, so as to allow repeat hearings of difficult to understand and unclear sections.

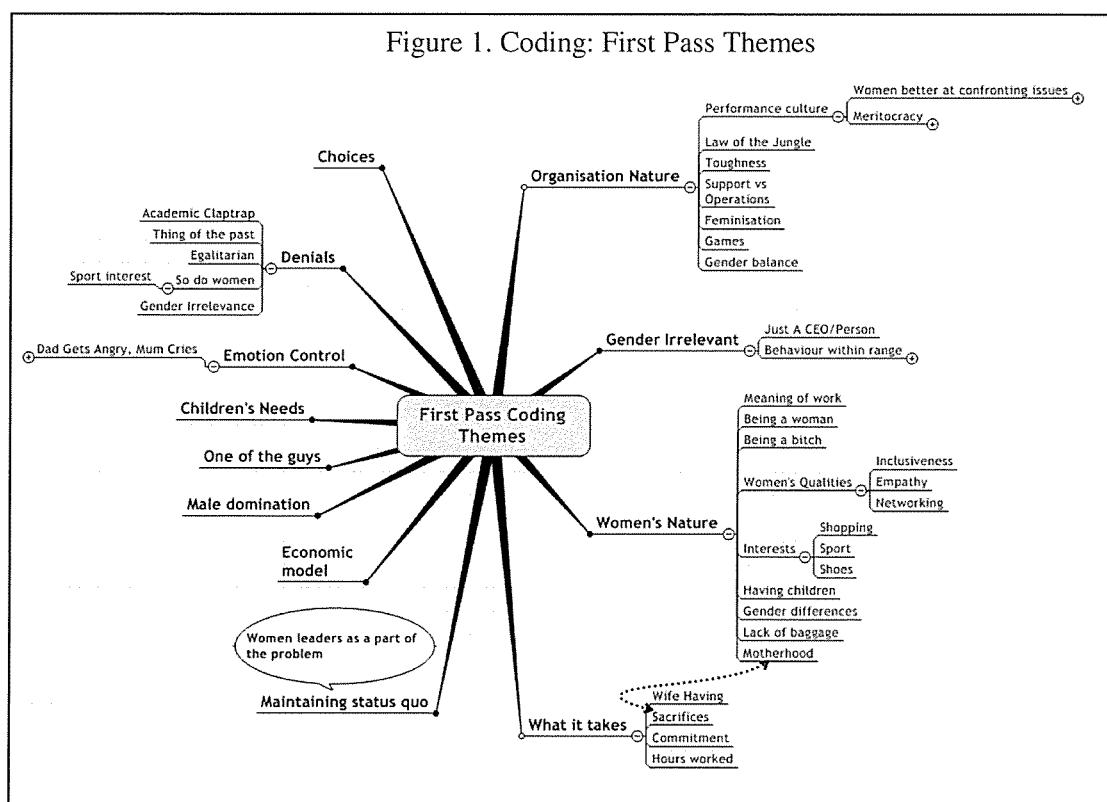
The interview recordings were transcribed word for word from the tapes. Consideration was given to using the orthographic system summarised in the appendix to Potter & Wetherell (1987, p.189). However, having regard to the nature of the study, which relates more to the identification of wider level discourses than immediate interactional phenomena, it was decided that this level of detail was not warranted. As such, speech details such as inflections, overlaps, and timings of pauses were not recorded in the transcripts.

The transcripts were produced in electronic form using Microsoft Word. These Microsoft Word files were then loaded into AnSWR (Analysis Software for Word

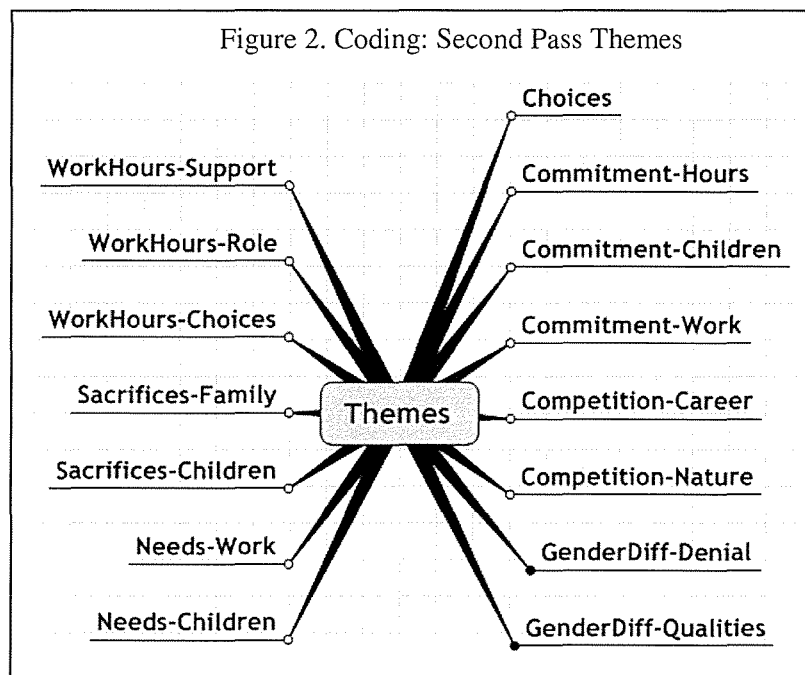
Based Records) for coding. AnSWR is a freeware qualitative analysis tool which was sourced from the website of the United States Center for Disease Control ([www.cdc.gov/hiv/software/answr.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/software/answr.htm)).

## Coding

Coding of the interview transcripts was approached as an iterative activity. The initial coding of the transcripts involved a first pass of the data to identify themes, which were added to the coding schema as they were encountered during the reading. This resulted in around 40-50 codes, which were then assessed for relevance to the question, and grouped into themes where were subsequently summarised in a mind map (see Figure 1).



This initial coding was then analysed, and a second coding of the set of interview transcripts was undertaken using a narrower range of themes (see Figure 2. Analysis: Second Pass Coding Themes). A more precise definition of each code was developed with examples (see Figure 3. Code Book Extract).



The full definition provided a statement of what each code was about, when it should be used, when it should not be used, and a piece of the text that exemplified the code in action. These code book entries were retained within the code book section of the AnSWR database.

Figure 3. Code Book Extract

### **Commitment-Hours**

**Full Definition:**

Commitment to the job and organisation expressed in terms of the hours worked.

**When to Use:**

Is used to differentiate fully committed from the partially committed or uncommitted. People who are fully committed will work long hours and make sacrifices in other life areas.

**When Not to Use:**

na

**Example(s):**

601. HARRY: Ah. Well, if I make a comparison between the way she works and compared to, um, other  
 602. women who, ah, report to her, cause there's no direct comparison in terms of peers at that  
 603. exec table, um, yeah, it is s bit different, um, and it's around, you know, she doesn't have to  
 604. fit work in around family and generally she hasn't got that commitment. So, you know, the  
 605. hours that she will work or the, the, the, the extent to which she will shift her, the way in  
 606. she's organised her day in order to make sure certain work things happen I think is at a level  
 607. that would be very, very difficult for, um, a woman with children to do.

Coding proceeded by way of a close reading of each of the interviews, and application of the codes on a segment-by-segment basis using the AnSWR software. Each segment was highlighted, and codes that seemed relevant to what was going on were applied from the code book. This often meant that any particular segment might have several codes allocated to it, depending on what was being discussed at that point.

Once all of the interviews were coded, the coded segments were then exported from AnSWR as a set of Microsoft Word document files. Each of these Word documents contained all of the coded text segments relating to a particular theme. Because any particular segment might be coded for more than one of the themes, segments of text often found their way into several Word files.

### **Analysis**

Potter and Wetherell (1987) provide no set methodology for the analysis stage – indeed, they specifically state “...*there is no analytic method, at least as this term is understood elsewhere in social psychology*” (p.169). However, they do identify two key phases of the analysis stage: the search for patterns in the data; and then identifying functions and consequences suggested by the accounts. The search for patterns is concerned with finding areas of consistency and variability. In this respect, it is important to look not only at features that are shared with in the accounts, but also at areas where there are differences. According to Potter and Wetherell (1987), the search for function and consequence centres on forming hypotheses, and then searching the data for supporting linguistic evidence.

Given the open nature established by these guidelines, the approach taken in this study to the analysis stage was initially unclear. After a great deal of reading of the data, consideration of the key themes identified during the coding phase, and a number of false starts, some consistent themes emerged that seemed to point to a pattern in the way the participants were accounting for the relevance of gender in relation to the organisation. In this regard, one particular segment from one of the interviews that seemed to encapsulate these themes had stayed in my mind throughout. In terms of its construction as an account, perhaps the most significant feature of the segment was the way it was narrated so as to allow each of the themes to link to a particular paragraph. The analysis was therefore, undertaken using this particular segment of text, as a springboard for developing each of the themes identified during the reading of the data.

The process adopted involved breaking the main segment into the four themes, and considering each of these in turn. Each theme was addressed initially in relation to its headline section of the segment, and as this developed other data was drawn on, and a process of free association was employed to bring to bear elements of my own experience and subjective reactions to the theme. In many instances, the process of free association suggested links to other texts, which provided support or a wider context to

the theme. These other sources were drawn into the analysis, so as to provide an insight into how these connections extended from the data.

Each of the discourses identified through this process was then considered for function and effect, in terms of the actions it seemed to make possible, and for those it obscured or denied access to.

### **Validity**

Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggest that there are four main techniques that may be employed to validate the findings of a discursive analysis. These include: checking for coherence of the analytic scheme; attending to how the participants orientate to the discourses; looking for new problems created for the participants through their use of the discourses; and exploring how fruitful the discourses are in generating new solutions.

The *cohesion* of the scheme was examined, in terms of how the set of discourses identified acted together to achieve a particular outcome. Coherence was also examined in terms of how the discourses provided a linked and complementary set of accounts around the need; or more specifically, the lack of need to take action. The participant's *orientation* to the discourses was examined, in terms of how they organised their accounts, so that apparently conflicting aims were separated and any inconsistencies minimised or otherwise dealt with. According to Potter and Wetherell (1987), as well as solving problems for the speaker, the linguistic resources employed are often also responsible for generating a range of *new problems*, that the speaker must then attend to through the use of secondary systems. Identification of these secondary systems provides a form of validity check that a primary system is operating. The *fruitfulness* of the findings is the last, and according to Potter and Wetherell (1987), the most powerful check of validity. In these terms, fruitfulness refers to the how well the analytic scheme is able to "*make sense of new kinds of discourse and to generate novel explanations.*" (p.171).

The validity of the results is covered in the Discussion (section VI).

### **The Report**

This paper forms the principal report for the research. As suggested by Potter and Wetherell (1987), the report has been designed to document as completely as possible my analysis of the data and the conclusions I have derived from it. In many senses this

is inherently so, because the majority of the analysis work was the writing of the analysis section. Except for some editing and rewriting for the sake of readability, this section of the report represents a record of the analytic work in action.

### **Application**

While this paper, as the principal output from the research project, may be read by some few academics and possibly some others, the research process has informed my own understanding in ways I had not expected. These new ways of understanding the world now frame the ways in which I communicate, and provide my own perspective on accounting for gender in organisational settings. This process of communication with the wider community about these issues, commenced virtually from the conception of the project. It has formed a discussion point and focus of interest, that has shaped my interactions with people who have been involved in the project; either as participants, academic peers, or acquaintances.

In terms of the undertaking I provided to each of the participants, a summary of the results of this research will be made available to them. It is my hope that they may find it useful as a way of understanding their own situation and practices.



## Chapter V. Analysis

- FRED: But, you know, inherently the world is a competitive place. People want, you know, you know, the animal kingdom does it the same, there's.... a pecking order is established, um.
- Steven: And, so what you are saying is that this is just the natural way that things operate and that organisations are shaped by those natural forces of competition and, and, you know, trying to get one over the other and establish an order?
- FRED: Mmm. And, as the world has got more sophisticated the sheer strength of the male species has meant they don't dominate everything. Because people are looking at more holistic things and women, women's less physical strength has come through.
- Steven: Right
- FRED: I mean, at first we tried to do it by *physicalness*, when we couldn't, when we couldn't, when *physicalness* wasn't enough we legislated so they couldn't have power, we wouldn't let them vote. Um, you know, so all those barricades, you know, they've broken down the physical barrier, and then they broke down the regulatory barrier. Um, you know, there are, and now the only barrier is, um, you know, an emotional one. You know, "What do you choose to do?"

I have started the analysis section with a segment of an interview that I had initially rejected as trite; perhaps even, reproduced for my benefit. However, on reflection, I came to the realisation that whether the account was indeed played for my benefit or not, it works in the sense that Fred is leveraging on some key shared understandings. These understandings concern the nature of competition, a construction of fundamental gender differences, and a commonly held historical account for the perceived lack of women in positions of power; particularly the lack of women in executive positions in business. These shared understandings, frame the way in which we jointly make sense of the situation of women in organisations.

The account Fred provides in this segment draws on four key discourses. The first is a Darwinian naturalistic discourse, which positions competition as a force inherent in the natural world; a force which inevitably binds and shapes human behaviour and the nature of the organisations man creates. The second discourse concerns Gender Differences, in terms of the relative strengths and qualities of men and women. This discourse proposes that men are physically strong, but emotionally weak, women's complement of this arrangement. The third discourse pitches men against women, in a Gender War, which relates a staged retreat by men in a battle where men have sought

over centuries to exclude women from positions of power. Lastly, the idea of people having to make choices introduces an Individual Choices discourse, which is instrumental in shaping the way in which people relate to each other and organisations; and in particular, how responsibility is assigned for change in accommodating either the needs of the individual or those of the organisation.

### **a. Darwinian Competition**

FRED: But, you know, inherently the world is a competitive place. People want, you know, you know, the animal kingdom does it the same, there's.... a pecking order is established, um.

Steven: And, so what you are saying is that this is just the natural way that things operate and that organisations are shaped by those natural forces of competition and, and, you know, trying to get one over the other and establish an order?

Fred's assertion about the competitive nature of the world introduces this section of the discussion. I chose to start the analysis at this point because the theme of competition was frequently brought up during the interviews, as both a fundamental assumption about the nature of human beings and human society in general, and a rationale for the organisation and actors within it behaving in particular ways.

In asserting that the world is inherently a competitive place, Fred draws on a social Darwinist way of understanding the world that characterises human behaviour in terms of survival of the fittest (Clark, 1981; Crook, 1999). This way of understanding casts competition as a "natural" force dictating the way people and organisations act, in just the same way as it is purported to in the "*animal kingdom*." Although Fred distinguishes between people and the animal kingdom, he links them together so that the idea of the natural world as a competitive place, in which species and members of species establish hierarchies based upon the survival of, and domination by, the strongest is joined to the idea that people are fundamentally competitive by nature. It is implied that as a result of these competitive instincts or forces, the ways in which we interact as individuals and as groups are dictated by natural forces we can neither deny nor resist. The work done here is to construct competition as an inherent and inevitable characteristic resulting from our being a part of the natural world. In this way, we are neither in control of, nor ultimately responsible for, the sorts of behaviours and actions implied by our acting in a competitive manner. Such actions are in accord with the way the world is naturally. Recourse to the natural world in this sense carries a form of "voice of God" warrant that serves to make the account resistant to challenge.

Fred's reference to a "*pecking order*" links the way in which traditional organisations are structured into hierarchies to the interpersonal competition found in the familiar domestic scene of relations between chickens in the farmyard. It is implied

that such hierarchies are a part of the natural world. In the pecking order of chickens, a hierarchy is established to sort out which will first feed from the grain scattered in the hen house. This naturalistic metaphor reinforces the down-to-earth ordinariness of Fred's construction of competition as something inherent to our being a part of the natural world. It is a simple extension of this metaphor, to include the nature of an organisation as a barnyard, incorporating hierarchies and competitive behaviours. The work done in this construction can be seen if competition is considered to be not just the result of our being a part of the natural world, but rather that completion is produced through a reciprocal relationship between structure and individuals, and arises as an inevitable result of the way certain sorts of human institutions are arranged. For instance, Jackall contends that:

*"... the struggle for dominance is an inevitable by-product of the pyramidal construction of bureaucracies that fuels managers' driving competitiveness." (Jackall, 1988, p.195)*

According to Macnaghten (1993), nature is often granted an existence in its own right, which is closely associated with the concept of wilderness. In this sense, nature is a given; it is treated as a singular entity, which is associated with a clean pristine quality of being untouched by human hand. Nature is therefore, granted an ontological status of being real, existing as separate from human experience. This ontological status can be seen in the claim Fred makes about competition in the animal kingdom. His assertion presents the animal kingdom and its pecking orders as given; beyond dispute, outside the realm of human affairs, and certainly not the subject of human interpretation and construction. This natural order is constructed in terms of the strong and fit taking precedence over the weak, and by extension; unworthy.

Fred's construction of competition strikes a chord with me, in that this is a very business-oriented view of the world as I have come to know it during my years within the corporate environment. The working model of corporate life most often expressed is that the fit survive and the weak are extinguished. This applies to both people and to organizations, and it is most often linked to an attitude that positions growth as a fundamental imperative. For instance, during my time working as a manager in the banking industry, we were continually told that net profit after tax (NPAT) must increase by at least ten percent each year, in order to achieve the expected share price yields for market investors. Notwithstanding the well known "Peter Principle" (Peter &

Hull, 1969) that maintains people are promoted until they reach a position they are not competent to perform, it is normally assumed that the strong survive and the weak perish. This is considered to be a good thing for the organisation in that it ensures vigour and continued growth capability. In this way, the winnowing of the weak and promoting of the strong is seen to be a not just a practical outcome of competition, but rather a moral good. This supposedly Darwinian approach to the way of the world is expressed by Sherman and Sookdeo in an article entitled "A *Brave New Darwinian Workplace*", published in the 1993 edition of Fortune magazine:

*Abraham Zaleznik, a psychoanalyst and professor emeritus at the Harvard business school, believes the theme of the dawning era is greater accountability on the part of both individuals and corporations. Says he: "We're all up against a relentless, impersonal reality called the marketplace, which will reward those who do good jobs and punish those who don't." (Sherman & Sookdeo, 1993, para. 6)*

*The new workplace will be ferociously Darwinian for corporations and individuals alike. Without the financial strength that comes with well-managed operations, companies won't be able to afford to focus on what used to be called the softer management issues that are becoming all-important. Without inner strength, individuals may hesitate to accept responsibility for their lives. (Sherman & Sookdeo, 1993, para. 30)*

These two paragraphs express the competitive imperative at the root of each individual's responsibility to take control of his or her own career and performance. In this sense, the message is both competitive and individualistic in nature.

Darwin's writings contain much to justify a survival of the fittest construction of his theory of evolution. However, it is also possible to interpret Darwin's writings in terms of selection, through co-adaptation and co-existence (Crook, 1999). Darwin's theories of evolution (Darwin, 1859) have been used by some to justify an approach to human activities, often termed "Social Darwinism". These theories take natural selection and a survival of the fittest doctrine as inevitable natural modes of human behaviour. Although Social Darwinist ideas have been linked to various theories of eugenics, racial superiority, and British imperialism, since Darwin published his book in 1859, the historical debate shows that these ideas may not have been as main stream as is now popularly believed. For instance, Crook (1999) contends that during the latter 19th and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Social Darwinism was seen by many conservatives to be too extreme in that it was anti-Christian, challenged moral values, and was based on a

survivalist ethic. In contrast to this, in modern business these ideas have an aura of universal acceptance, so that one is not surprised when Sherman and Sookdeo (1993), refer to the business world in animal terms, as becoming “*ferociously Darwinian*”. As a result, the softer human elements must be discarded as indulgent luxuries to be sacrificed when the real world represented as the competitive market, forces companies to redefine the rules so that it is every man for himself.

The segment of the interview with Fred on which I chose to centre the analysis followed on from a discussion about my assertion that organisations have been shaped by men in particular ways. Fred’s response was to assert that he did not think it was just the men who were doing it, and this then flowed into the following section about the nature of the world.

- FRED: I mean, I just think the world, { } I don’t know, it’s hard to say, the world’s on a, you know, on a, on a, on a plane and it’s going to take something of some magnitude to try and slow it down...
- Steven: Sure
- FRED: and take the entire world back to, you know, thirty hour weeks and, you know, advanced lifestyles and not being competitive and ...
- Steven: Mmm
- FRED: I mean, you’d have to take the compet, I mean, it would have to be just an entirely different world.
- Steven: Right
- FRED: When you... I think man has, and I mean that by, you know, women have an inherently competitive streak in them.
- Steven: Right
- FRED: But, you know, inherently the world is a competitive place. People want, you know, you know, the animal kingdom does it the same, there’s.... a pecking order is established, um.
- Steven: And, so what you are saying is that this is just the natural way that things operate and that organisations are shaped by those natural forces of competition and, and, you know, trying to get one over the other and establish an order?

Taken as a whole, the segment suggests an inevitability and momentum of the changes affecting modern organisational life. It is “*on a plane*” suggests a jetliner in flight traveling at speed with a set course and no way to jump off, and limited ability for the passengers to affect the destination. The unstoppable nature of this momentum is emphasised with statement, “...it’s going to take something of some magnitude to try and slow it down ... and take the world back to, you know, thirty hour weeks...”. I have this image of someone trying to wind the whole planet backwards, so that it moves to the slower old days. The old days here, bring to mind a shared mythology of the

business world in the 70's and early 80's, when office workers were reputed to have regularly taken long lunch hours on Fridays, and managers were usually found on the golf course mid-week. There is quaintness and nostalgia involved in what Fred is saying to me here, which sets up these old work practices as no longer businesslike; something we did when the pace of life was slower and competition was not a concern. In this way, the old days are cast as a halcyon period when life was simpler, almost like when we were schoolboys drifting in the endless days of summer.

Fred's reference to "*advanced lifestyles and not being competitive*" links the sophistication of the way our lives are constructed to the idea that competition is an integral part of that sophistication. For me, the idea of advanced lifestyles links with the advances in technology over the past thirty years; so that, as the complexity of the technology has increased, so too is our lifestyle supposed to have become more complex. This advancement is in turn linked to: the speed of communication and higher expectations of information turnaround; personal availability; and drives for ever greater efficiency and profitability. In this sense, we compete with ourselves to better our standard of living and with the people around us for higher paid jobs with greater responsibility and status. At an organisational level, the increased sophistication comes from greater integration with global markets, involving dealing with a multiplicity of cultures, social conditions and ways of doing business. Organisations compete in this global space for customers, employees and for access to markets for their goods and services. Competition is what sorts the winners from the losers; winners survive to become bigger corporations, while losers either stagnate and are absorbed, or eventually die.

When Fred says, "*I mean, you'd have to take the compet, I mean, it would have to be just an entirely different world,*" I take his meaning to be that changing the way things are would not be merely very difficult, it would be tantamount to creating an alternate reality. In this sense, competition is seen to be not just an integral feature of how business and human affairs are organised; rather, competition is fundamental to the structure of reality. The fundamental role of competition as it applies to people, is reinforced when Fred says, "*I think man has, and I mean that by, you know, women have an inherently competitive streak in them.*" Fred's initial words in this sentence mention "man", and for me this is a generic statement about humanity. By narrowing

this down to speak of “women”, it seems to me that he is making a specific statement about women being no different to men in this respect. My impression is that he is contrasting this “*inherently competitive*” construction of women with the more generally accepted image of women, which features a femininity defined around being collaborative, consultative and nurturing.

The construction of competition as an inherent characteristic of human beings was also linked to the rewards of achieving a top level position within an organisation. The following extract from the interview with Terry illustrates this. This segment came near the end of a discussion about executive rewards, and whether the presence of women executives, might be a factor in there being more scrutiny and talk about excessively high executive salary packages.

TERRY: Now, what will happen with all these, with a much more balanced gender mix at the top and in the middle, and at the bottom? I think in the commercial sector as long as there’s lots of money on the table, I think you’ll just get human beings behaving very self interestedly, and very competitively playing lots of games and politics and, ... because that’s how the game gets played, tends to get played in a competitive environment

Terry contends that regardless of gender, competitive behaviours will be driven by the nature of the game being played, and the considerable rewards at stake for success. According to this model of human beings, there is an inherent tendency to act “*self-interestedly*” to play games and indulge in politics. I feel a shared understanding in what Terry is saying here about games and politics, which is about the way the game is played outside the stated objectives of the organisation, so as to gain and maintain personal status in the hierarchy. The non-business aspect of this has a negative value in that political activity is not always in the best interests of the organisation. It often serves to further personal goals, at the expense of the organisation’s goals. Terry acknowledges this tension and signals that it is not just about money; it is about “*how the game gets played in a competitive environment.*” The very nature of the organisation is that it sets up a game that is played between people for financial and status related rewards that are associated with promotion to its upper ranks. In this game, people jostle for position to promote their own self-interest using the political resources at their means, against the people with whom they work ostensibly in the common cause of the organisation’s goals. For me, this connects to the idea of people collectively acting in their own self-interest as a good thing, where ideas and products



are refined by the evolutionary forces of survival. In this sense, self-interested competitive behaviour of the individuals can be viewed as having long term utility for the organisation; albeit at the risk of short-term inefficiencies. These may be managed using mechanisms designed to moderate these sorts of behaviours, such as: performance management systems; policies and processes; and audits.

The interview with Mike provided a context for the competitive imperative for organisations, which was related to the market economy. It was interesting that the interview with Mike was largely shaped by his position that gender is irrelevant as a factor in the structure of organisations, and in the way they operate. This segment, as well as providing an insight into his account of how the market economy drives competition, illustrates one of his tactics for addressing gender related questions. In this instance, he reframes the topic I introduced about gender in organisations in terms of change affecting the entire market.

- Steven: Ok. So, do you think the, the nature of New Zealand organisations are changing significantly at the moment in terms of gender and the way they operate?
- MIKE: I think the whole market's changing to be perfectly honest.
- Steven: Yeah
- MIKE: Look, you know, I think that the reality is it's a very competitive market out there, just, I mean locally and then externally as well. So, there's the internal market and then there's the external market and you have to compete.
- Steven: Right
- MIKE: You actually have to be able to actually compete off-shore and on-shore
- Steven: Mmm
- MIKE: you know, that's the reality.
- Steven: Yeah, right
- MIKE: To actually grow the economy you have to be competing in both, and by its very nature you always have to be always at the leading edge; always looking at what's actually happening, what's working, what hasn't worked. You actually have to be trying new things, and the reality is that that's changed and change is here with us for good, and I think we all in our own way resist change; um but the market's changing and if you don't change at the pace, if not faster than the market, then you go out of business. Because there will be somebody will be doing something better, whether it be cheaper, a better product, you know, a better service
- Steven: Yes, indeed.
- MIKE: Or, or permutations of all of those things.
- Steven: Right.
- MIKE: And that erodes your market share, and if you don't have market share then you don't have customers, and you can't generate revenue or income and if you don't generate that you go out of business, um and you know, I think that it's a foolish person that keeps looking inwardly, in at their own

business and saying, saying, well we're doing things better, because you actually have to be changing at the pace of the external market, not the internal market. Because you might be doing things better but all it might mean is that you're staving off going out of business, you know, by a couple of months.

Steven: Yeah, right

MIKE: You actually compete externally, not internally.

In this segment, Mike speaks to me about the nature of competition in a global market. The global nature of this market Mike describes as “reality” constructs undeniable forces of competition involving internal competition, by which I understand him to mean within New Zealand; and also external forces of competition pitting the organisation against a range of international players. The global element acts to reinforce to me, the inevitability of competition and our lack of power to overcome its impact on the relatively small Australasian based organisations, which have to make their way against vastly larger European and US based multinationals. Mike speaks to me here in terms of our shared experience of working in an environment, where organisations are continuously undertaking change as a permanent way of life driven by the need to: stay ahead of the competition; retain customers; and develop new markets. In what Mike is saying, there is a sense of the inhabitants of organisations, even all of society, being continually off-balance and challenged to keep our place. No one is safe who sits still and waits or takes time to think. Action and movement are essential to staying alive in a world where you stand lose everything if you are not continuously vigilant. Competing then, is not something we do to “play the game” or to amuse ourselves; competing is about fighting for survival. I understand in what Mike is saying that this is about survival of the organisation. In a personal sense, it is also about the survival of the individual, because individuals are personally associated with the organization, and the reputation of being a manager of a failed company is to be avoided. Added to that, being involved in a company that is sinking or failing can be personally stressful; budget and staff cuts, reduced bonuses, salary cuts and redundancy, can all impact on the individuals employed by a poorly performing or failing organisation.

The account given by Mike therefore sets the behaviours and structures of the organisation more as a product of the way the competitive market operates, than as a something designed by its leaders and inhabitants to suit their own needs. His account rejects the assertion, that the characteristics of the organisation's inhabitants are relevant

in considering how the organisation is structured. Rather, the structure is determined by the external forces brought to bear on the organisation. In particular, the assertion that organisations have been shaped by particular groups, such as men, is directly challenged by this position, which is that the structure of the organisation is gender neutral. This position was also taken by Terry, when I proposed that organisations had been created by men for men as follows:

Steven: So, if you were to say that, you know, all this game playing, you know, major organisations were, you know, according to some people created for guys, by guys and the game playing is part of that sort of environment, it, it seems to me these people are playing as guys. They are playing the game by the guy's rules in the guy's way.

TERRY: But, but that, that makes one huge assumption; which is your opening word. That these were games designed by guys for guys. How about they are games designed by humans in organisations and to win as a human this is the games you have to play. To convince me that its guys for guys you would have to demonstrate to me that female staffed and run organisations of comparable scale behave any differently...

The proposition I put to Terry came out of my observations about how organisations deal with women's issues, (for instance: childcare, parental leave, domestic leave for sick children, flexi-time for child care), and the comments women have made to me about the difficulties they have encountered working for organisations. Terry's response to this proposition substitutes the word "*humans*", which explicitly de-genders the situation, and this act is reinforced when he repeats the word later in the same sentence: "*How about they are games designed by humans in organizations, and to win as a human this is the game you have to play*". This positions the organisation as a gender-neutral setting, in which people play according to the propensity of human beings to seek to win "the game". His challenge then, is for me to come up with a comparable organisation run by women, which operates any differently. From my point of view, the challenge is a device that is difficult to combat, given the history of how corporations have largely been created and run by men until recent times.

After exploring a few possible examples of organisations with woman leaders, Terry expanded on his position that my starting point in this argument was false, and proposed as an alternative hypothesis; that the behaviours seen in organisations are not so much to do with gender, as a result of natural a human response to having to work within a competitive context.

TERRY: Um, my observation is, its not, is this, there's a, your starting point's fallacious to these behaviours are, because the organisation's in which these behaviours are evident started out being staffed by mainly, well entirely by males, that the behaviours that we're seeing are therefore a manifestation of male, exclusively male behaviour, which females that have come in have then emulated. Um, and, I don't know, I would say that there's and equally plausible hypothesis that the behaviours we see in any organisation above a certain size human beings put together will behave, will tend to behave in a certain way and its not gender exclusive at all, its how, um, what the most likely set of behaviours that evolves in, given a certain set of descriptors of the type of organisation. Like, by definition a large organisation in the commercial sector already operates on the basis of competition by definition, ...

Steven: Sure

TERRY: because it's operating in the market place which is competitive in order to sell a product and therefore, and there's a, and there's a lot of incentive on the table, there's a lot of money and therefore, and so it goes on.

Steven: Right

TERRY: Um, and, ah, the fact that an alternative hasn't appeared in those organisations that have since ended up with large proportions of women management and in [CountryY], I'd say, I am sure there are plenty of examples where there's a significant over weight of women from the top down. I mean, I've noticed when I was in [CountryY] from time to time they are, they are far more gender balanced than [CountryX] and New Zealand companies. Um, and I would imagine there's a huge variation in some companies might have sixty or seventy percent female staff and some might have thirty, but its just the way that, its within a statistical distribution. And, I haven't heard in the management literature of any, any comment that businesses largely run by women, like sixty percent plus internally behave particularly differently.

It seems to me, that Terry concedes certain elements of the proposal are correct when he says; "*these behaviours are evident started out being staffed by mainly, well entirely by males,*" However, he rebuts the proposal that the behaviours have been shaped in a gendered way, and its extension that the women seen behaving in a similar manner are merely emulating or reproducing the male behaviours, by proposing that these behaviours are a non-gendered product of the environment. The distinction between female and male behaviours is central to what is going on here, and this issue is examined in more detail in the section b. of the analysis, which concerns the Gender Differences discourse. However, Terry's counter proposal draws on the inherent competitive nature of commercial organisations, "*Like, by definition...*", which is driven by the organisation "*operating in the marketplace which is competitive ...*", and also the rewards attached to executive roles, "*and there's a lot of incentive on the table, there's a lot of money and therefore, and so it goes on.*"

Terry then goes on to expand on this argument by citing a lack of evidence for any alternative mode of operation based on female structures and behaviours. He constructs this as a well known fact when he asserts says, “*the fact that an alternative hasn’t appeared in those organisations that have since ended up with large proportions of women management*”. However, the authority of this statement is brought into doubt when he expands his assertion by saying, “... and in [CountryY], I’d say, I am sure there are plenty of examples where there’s a significant over- weight of women from the top down.” The impact of Terry’s assertion about the situation in [CountryY] is reinforced and given force through his use of the words “over-weight of women” which extended “from the top down”. The latter, surely being a curious direction for it to extend from, given the usual statistics showing high proportions of women in the lower ranks, and very few in the upper echelons of organisations.

In the last paragraph of this segment, Terry refers to his personal observations of the situation in [Country Y], where he asserts there are organisations with a significant proportion of women in management, “*I mean, I’ve noticed when I was in [CountryY] from time to time they are, they are far more gender balanced than [CountryX] and New Zealand companies.*” He used his own observations as warrant for his proposal, that [CountryY] is more gender balanced than [CountryX]. This proposal is given a scientific authority in the next sentence, through reference to words such as “variation” and “statistical distribution” and percentage ranges. “*Um, and I would imagine there’s a huge variation in some companies might have sixty or seventy percent female staff and some might have thirty, but its just the way that, its within a statistical distribution.*” These sentences build an air of authority which Terry then supports by referring to a lack of evidence of business owned by women as behaving any differently. In this case, the breadth of his reading in this area is assumed, given a common understanding that as an executive in a large company he might be expected to be well versed in management literature such as the Harvard Business Review, Fortune magazine and other similar resources. The final sentence completes the challenge to my original proposition, by excluding any counter examples in the body of knowledge he has established, “*And, I haven’t heard in the management literature of any, any comment that businesses largely run by women, like sixty percent plus internally behave particularly differently.*”

*This discussion highlights one of the areas in my approach to the project that relates to the stereotypes and resultant expectations I have held of women. There is in this a tendency to regard women as being less competitive than men in both a personal sense, and in their interactions within an organisational setting. I also find that I have an expectation that women will behave in ways that engender cooperation, through their possession of superior interpersonal and communications skills as compared to men. This results in a form of idealisation of feminine society; one where competition is eschewed in favour of co-operation and confrontation is defused through communication and conciliation.*

*For me then, this points to a way of thinking about the organisation as inherently gendered due to the masculine behaviours typically evinced in such a setting. The competitive drive is perhaps the most masculine of the behaviours I associate with the society of men, and the one I least expect among women. Terry and Mike's challenge to that way of thinking is to propose that it is the world which is inherently competitive, and people react to it by adopting competitive behaviours in order to survive and progress within the environment as it presented. Their argument is that even in a society of women, organisational behaviour will tend to show similar characteristics to what we have seen in organisations in the past, due to the impact of external forces present in the wider environment.*

*Having considered my own experience of working with a number of career women with stay-at-home husbands, my inclination is to link this position with the discourses inherent to Resource Theory (outlined in section 4 above). In this way of thinking, behaviours are positioned as resulting from environment and the capability to enact, rather than from assumed characteristics such as gender.*

Resources also featured in the interview with Frank. This segment followed on from a discussion about the "Glass Ceiling", during which he dismissed the whole idea saying "No, no, no. That was invented by academics, it's, ah, crap."

FRANK: Yeah, no, I, I mean if you take a pure business view towards these things, um, you know, if, ah, if you're not leveraging all your, your resource capability in an organisation regardless of, of gender it's poor business management as far as I'm concerned. No, I. The glass ceiling I think is a, is, is a piece of academic thinking that may have had a may have had some

relevance, you know, ten or fifteen years ago, but and it might still be prevalent in some organisations, but I just, no.

Frank positions the organisation as a rational economic actor making best use of the people at its disposal regardless of gender. He rejects the idea that barriers exist within an organisation, through an “It stands to reason” argument, that positions such actions as irrational and; therefore, not something that would be considered in business. The “Glass Ceiling” concept in this account is positioned as “academic”, which in the world of business often decodes to mean divorced from reality and the product of ungrounded pondering. However, he retreats from this wholesale rejection to concede that such an effect “...*may have had some relevance, you know, ten or fifteen years ago, but and it might still be prevalent in some organizations ...*”. In doing so, he casts it into the past and other places.

In summary, the construction of competition as a primary determining force in the way organisations are shaped and interact both externally and internally as forums for social interaction, limits discussion about the role individual managers may have in shaping their own areas of responsibility. This casts the primary focus of concern on competitive response, to what is seen to be the threat of the day. This use of competition in the business world makes extensive use of sporting metaphors involving common terms such as: “the playing field”; “players”; “moving the goal posts”; “level playing field”; and “team”. Moreover, competition discourse is not just limited to the world of business; it is a dominant theme of modern western society, and is a way of thinking that shapes consideration of topical issues such as free trade, globalisation, international conflict and racial tensions. John Ralston Saul’s critique of the culture of competition provides an alternative point of view that for me illuminates how competition is being constructed by the men I interviewed:

*What is it that links Sylvester Stallone, the Olympic movement, non-Olympic sport, the desperate need of everything second-rate to call itself world class, and the organisation of most human activities into measurable races? Competition. What matters is the fact that we compete, not why we do so. The resulting champions will be our stars and give the impression that they are leading us somewhere. ... This allows the technocratic classes - particularly in business - to enshrine the act of competition as the religion of individualism, while avoiding more complicated questions - such as long-term commitments or social responsibility. (Saul, 1993, p.511-2)*

The enshrinement of competition within the organisation is apparent in the ways in which it was employed as a discursive device by the men in the study, both as an explanation for the ways things are, and as a rationale or excuse for not taking personal responsibility for initiating substantive change. As Saul points out, competition is closely linked to the positioning of subjects as independent autonomous individuals; individuals who interact in their own best interests and have limited if any responsibility for each other. This positions the organisation and its senior managers as referees and arbiters of the resultant interpersonal conflicts that arise between peers, as they jostle for advantage in a game that is won through advancing up the corporate ladder. In this environment, gender is not to be taken account of in terms of fairness or equity or even to create diversity. Rather, gender, if it has any relevance, represents a set of characteristics that create advantage or disadvantage for the individual in his or her quest for success. Man or woman, the game is the same.

In the discourse of competition, it makes no sense to propose that the organisation is gendered. Because competition is a natural force, and organisations are positioned as having been formed through a natural expression of human competition, it follows that gender has little bearing on the resultant organisational structures and behaviours. The men in the study, made particular effort to include women as competitive beings just like their male peers. Terry's challenge for me to come up with an alternative organisational model based on feminine qualities was emblematic of this positioning. It was noteworthy that in making this challenge he ensured that the task was limited to finding organisations of a similar size; thereby, eliminating the sort of smaller family-modeled organisations that many women who have rejected "The Corporation" as a way of life, have created in its stead (Martin, 2001). Even without considering these smaller organisations, his challenge provided a difficult task given the historical dominance men have enjoyed in the public sphere in Western society, where women have only recently managed to establish a footing.

By focusing on one particular construction of Darwin's theory of evolution, the discourse of Darwinian Competition selectively marginalises other messages in Darwin's account, involving elements such as co-operation and symbiotic relationships. The marginalisation of co-operation and symbiosis displaces and devalues these elements as possible tactics in the business world as well, so that these become dis-



preferred and unnatural. Interestingly, co-operation and symbiosis are also culturally 'characteristic' of the feminine and the maternal respectively, so that these aspects of being a woman become dispreferred, and consequently eliminated as models for organisational behaviour.

## **b. Gender Differences**

FRED: Mmm. And, as the world has got more sophisticated, the sheer strength of the male species has meant they don't dominate everything. Because people are looking at more holistic things and women, women's less physical strength has come through.

Throughout the course of the interviews, I posed a series questions designed to create discussion about whether working for a woman executive was different to working for a man in the same role. The occurrence of talk about gender differences was inevitable, given the way the interviews were framed in terms of speaking to men who reported to women, in CEO and senior executive positions. However, even within this context, certain distinct ways of expressing the relevance or irrelevance of gender emerged, which were used by the participants to position themselves and women in relation to organisational practices. The questions I posed elicited denials from some participants that gender had any relevance at all, and also talk about the relative strengths and weaknesses of women and men as leaders. These seemingly contradictory ways of talking about gender differences were used to position the men and the organisation in relation to questions of how gender equality is perceived, and the need (or lack of need) to take any action to promote more women to executive positions.

In the paragraph I have chosen to headline this section, Fred extends upon the theme of competition as a phenomenon affecting human beings as a part of the natural landscape, and goes on to consider the relevance of men and women in the workplace, in terms of an account of the relative strengths of men and women. The initial focus on this is to propose that there has been a transition from physical strength as the primary instrument of male domination, to a situation where the power balance is somewhat more even. However, there is no indication in Fred's account that this adjustment has gone as far as to reverse the balance. Fred then proposes a difference between men and women in terms of strengths, when he refers to "*women's less physical strength*" coming through.

The first sentence of this paragraph links to the one before, continuing the naturalistic theme through use of the words "*male species*". However, this sentence also marks a break with that theme through the assertion of an increased level of "sophistication"; a word that carries implications of a higher realm removed from and transcending nature. Although at first read, the word "*species*" would appear to be a

slip of the tongue, this word works in context to establish a link between the male form of physical power and the primitive natural state that is being left behind in the move to a more sophisticated world; a world in which certain feminine characteristics and weaknesses in the natural world become strengths. The apparent paradox expressed in this sentence, which seems to assert that superior male strength is somehow preventing total domination, is resolved if one considers that men often rely on physical strength. But, when physical strength is no longer appropriate in the social environment, this leaves a space for women to come to the fore, by employing other skills and abilities more applicable to the situation. Fred's use of the words "*sheer strength*" and "*domination*" act to emphasise and reinforce his account of the completeness and monolithic nature of the influence men had over society in the past.

The break from the naturalistic discourse in this paragraph marks the first difference in Fred's account between the genders; that men possess a greater physical strength than women. This physical strength is more primitive and more closely aligned to the natural state world; it is physical rather than sophisticated. The second difference is that women have other less physical strengths more suited to environments where holistic thinking is required, and which become apparent as male strengths reach their limits and diminish in relevance. The paragraph provides an uncomplicated account of sex-based differences that draws on common understandings of the way in which men and women are biologically constructed differently (men on average tend to be stronger, larger and have greater muscle mass), popular constructions of gendered behavioural differences as portrayed in the media, myriads of pop psychology books and evolutionary psychology textbooks. This account charts a waning of male strength which is seen to diminish as society has increased in complexity, and the personal characteristics and skills required in this more complex environment have changed, so that strengths associated with women have come to the fore. Fred's text evokes a sense that the time of male domination has passed, and women who possess the strengths required by the new environment, will increasingly dominate in the workplace.

The specific nature of the relative strengths was detailed in a number of the accounts provided by the various participants; although, the accounts were often highly qualified as is seen in the following segment from the interview with Don:

DON: I don't think there's much difference between males and females. I think people can make good leaders and people can make bad leaders, and lots of people are somewhere in between. And so, if I was to, you say generically, is there any difference. I'd say men tend probably to err toward the performance, drive, commanding sort of outcomes, results, whereas the women managers I've dealt with including Roslie, who is my manager are, will err to the softer side, they'll have a more bias on the human issues, um, and, you know, trying to understand. They're, you know, more natural empathetic, more willing to have conversations which make people feel this and do. So, there's sort of a difference but it's, yeah, in a generic way. I don't know if that's true or not it's just a sort of an observation, ...

Don responds here to a question regarding the difference between male and female Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) by first discounting the idea that there is very much difference at all. His use of the word "people" in the second sentence emphasises this gender neutral position, and when he repeats the word later this acts to give the gender neutral position even more weight. The next sentence is couched in hypothetical terms when he says, "*And so, if I was to, you say generically, is there any difference, I'd say...*" In framing his words in this way, my feeling is that Don is constructing an easy exit should he be challenged, on what could be ground that is both difficult to defend, being his own opinion, and also vulnerable to accusations of stereotyping or sexism. The differences Don mentions create a picture not so much of members of each gender having strengths which they employ differentially, as each having tendencies to err or over-do certain practices. Don positions men as erring towards being performance driven and commanding, concerned primarily with outcomes and results. In contrast, women including Roslie, Don's manager, are said to err by being softer and more inclined to be concerned with "*human issues*" and "*trying to understand*". This sets up a bi-polar system, where the male orientation towards action, outcomes and dealing with things is set in opposition to a female tendency towards relating to people and seeking to uncover and resolve the personal motivations and issues of others. Don expands on the feminine characteristics in the following sentence to emphasise the qualities of empathy and willingness to engage in conversations aimed at managing people's feelings and actions. He describes women's empathy as "*natural*"; something innate to women. In this way, he is also proposing a naturalistic construction that stands in contrast to the idea of Darwinian competition, in its focus on human empathy and feelings, as opposed to survival and domination. It seems to me, that Don is saying these tendencies only become apparent when they are overused, and that this supports

his position that gender is largely irrelevant in the leadership context. While there are a number of positive words such as “*empathy*” and “*willing*”, being used to describe feminine qualities, there is a dismissive or cynical tone in the way he says “... *trying to understand ...*” and “... *make people feel this and do ...*”. This stands in contrast to the neutral tone in the words he uses to describe men’s tendencies; such as, commanding, outcomes, and results. All of these carry strong affinity to corporate culture and may be found in many a corporate mission statement.

Don closes this segment by conceding that there may be a difference between the genders, the difference is generic in nature. The word generic seems to imply a weak effect across the population, an effect likely to be overshadowed in individual situations by a range of other factors. The last sentence reinforces his defense against challenge by reducing the fact status of his account, and limiting its generality by making it “*just a sort of observation*”; much less than a finding of any scientific significance. He reduces it to something less than even a careful or studied observation of his own. The net effect of this is to firstly admit that differences between men and women managers may exist, and then to construct these differences as weakly expressed gender based deviations from a non-gendered ideal. In doing this, Don is able to account for any observed and popularly recounted differences between the genders, while maintaining a position that ideally gender should not be relevant as a factor.

The tendency of men and women to over-express at opposing ends of an emotional spectrum also features in this segment from the interview with James:

JAMES: And, most people think of ma, you know, male, males will tend toward this aggression and hostility sort of end and, and most females will end at the other, the sympathy and identification sort of end, um, and so, were you talk about, um, emotion, you know, um, over shh, you know, over expression of emotion from the male it’s gonna be the, you know, aggression and from the female it’ll be the tears and the screaming or whatever, it’s you know, um, cause the same is sort of, you know, in, in some of that research around, um, ah, around troubled kids, you know, and, ah, their parents and they say, “Well, you know, why don’t ya talk your parents about it?” and they say “Oh, shit no, I’d never tell Dad, he’d go off the bloody rails.” “Well, why don’t you tell Mum?” “Oh, no, Mum would, Mum would just, ah, cry, ball her eyes out” - you know?” Because she, she’d say “You poor thing!” and she’d take all of my troubles on board as if they were hers and, and not know what to do.” And, and the right place to be is sort of in the middle

The account given here has men erring towards aggression and hostility, where women err towards sympathy and paralysis resulting from emotional overload. This position is supported through a “research” based story about troubled kids and their parents, which provides a way of typifying this situation. Again, the conclusion reached through the story is that there is some sort of a middle point between these two extremes.

A defensive approach to talking about the relative strengths of gender is evident in the following segment from the interview with Geoff. Here the construction of feminine intuitions is firstly qualified by asserting difficulty of definition, and then by using words such as “*probably*” and “*gross generalisation*”.

GEOFF: ... I think she does have some feminine intuitions which have helped her in certain management situations, and of course those are quite hard to define... but I, ah, you know; I think women probably, and this is a gross generalisation but, I think they’re more self aware than men and I think they probably are better adept at assessing and sizing other people up and reading the political...ah, waters as well.

STEVEN: Ok, so that sort of interpersonal sort of skill thing.

GEOFF: Yeah, I, I think they have a, a heightened sense of some of those. I don’t mean to say there’s a gulf between male and female managers. I don’t think there is. But, I think probably more so in New Zealand as well, we’re, the Kiwi bloke can be a bit um, black and white on things.

GEOFF: Women are better at just teasing out the subtleties.

In contrast to Don’s construction of the relative differences as being expressive of gendered errors from the norm, Geoff positions the qualities he ascribes to women in a positive frame, as opposed to the ways men deal with situations. In the first instance, Geoff speaks of Roslie having “*some feminine intuitions*”, which he goes on to describe as being more self-aware than men, and also having the ability to better assess people and read political situations. In response to my rephrasing his words in terms of an interpersonal skill, Geoff provides a confirmation of my understanding, and clarifies and limits the extent of his position by saying that he does not mean there is a “*gulf*” between the genders. I feel that having constructed an account of difference and advantage for women, Geoff is shaping the account to ensure that his position is bounded, and provides what might be seen to be somewhat objective in its assessment. Geoff further contextualises his construction of women, by constituting the “*Kiwi bloke*” as having a tendency for being “*black and white on things*”. In this, I understand him to mean that New Zealand men tend to take fixed positions in opposing camps on

issues, and fail to consider options covering possible mid-points and compromise solutions.

For me, this account of the Kiwi male is a part of a cultural heritage where men are seen to be decisive, drawn to taking sides (as is reflected in popular New Zealand national sports, such as rugby, which feature games having two teams facing each other on opposing sides), dogmatic and adamant in a single minded commitment to see the job done. Qualities of the Kiwi male evoked for me here, are those epitomized in national heroes like Ernest Rutherford, Richard Pearce, Edmund Hillary, Colin Meads and Burt Munro; simple, honest, unassuming men of the land, who quietly and unreasonably stand up to face challenges that pit them against forces and tasks, that lesser men fail to achieve through lack of resolution or courage. There is a sense of the solitary individual in the image I have of each of these men, including Colin Meads who while famous for playing for the All Black rugby team, epitomises the rugged hill country farmer of the New Zealand heartland; black-singletted, fencepost on shoulder, solitarily taming the backcountry. The solitary, determined and single-minded qualities inherent in this construction of the Kiwi male, stand in contrast to what Geoff asserts are required to succeed in and negotiate the complex intricacies of the modern corporation. This new environment requires intuition, political savvy and the ability to recognise and manipulate subtle, interpersonal relationships. Geoff's account positions women as the inheritors of this new world, and marks the passing of the Kiwi bloke who seems destined to fade from the scene, as irrelevant as a dinosaur in the modern corporate world.

The ability of women to change and take feedback is another of the qualities Geoff suggests as different during the interview. This is framed in terms of women being more willing to set aside egotistical concerns and seek advice.

GEOFF: I do, I do think that there is a, that women can be more prepared to park their egos and listen and seek advice than men.

STEVEN: Right

GEOFF: It would be sort of an observation from my experience in the corporate world.

This construction of gender differences is mirrored in the "Why men don't listen and women can't read maps" sort of question posed in many popular psychology books (for example: Pease & Pease, 2000) and a vast range of women's magazines. At another

point in the interview, Geoff extends on this theme of the positive qualities possessed by women in terms of approachability and openness, which he frames as engendering an identification and inclination to more ready interaction between Roslie and other women employed by the organisation.

GEOFF: ...and she's energetic and enthusiastic. When we take her around the country to meet with staff the response is always amazing, people think of her being very open and approachable. I think women particularly identify with her though. I think women identify with her more strongly.

STEVEN: Sure

GEOFF: So, ah, a woman working in a call centre, was it a traditional grey haired man, they might feel less inclined to email Roslie than they do; that's my hypothesis. [Laughs]

STEVEN: Right

GEOFF: Yeah, cause. And it, it is just because she's warm and approachable and open, maybe, or is it because she's also a woman...

STEVEN: Sure

GEOFF: Don't know, can't prove it.

STEVEN: Yeah, exactly

GEOFF: I think at, at the margins it does make a difference.

It is revealing that this account contrasts Roslie, who was at that time a well presented career woman in her early forties, with the stereotypical CEO being "*a traditional grey haired man*", and who Geoff hypothesizes would be somewhat less approachable for the woman he describes. This account constructs a picture of connection, between the largely female workforce typical of services industries and a woman CEO, based on feminine qualities of approachability, openness and a sense of commonality based on the CEO being another woman.

This ability to relate particularly to other women at a human level that transcends differences in organisational status was echoed by Terry as follows:

TERRY: Perhaps compared, certainly compared with males though, there is one particular behaviour that was, I thought was particularly noticeable and different, and that was that she was qu, more than comfortable, um, chatting a, and this might sound sexist, at an inverted commas girl talk sort of level with, with all the sec, the personal assistants and secretaries, you know, the, the ones that come back into the office with their babies to show off she's quite happy just joining in with them all and yakking and talking baby talk. Something I have never, ever seen a male chief executive do. So, I think she is able to relate at a very common touch sort of level to all staff. Not just in a particular role.



Terry constructs a common office scene in this account of the woman CEO emerging from the executive office, to engage in “*girl talk*” with the female office staff and personal assistants; admiring the latest baby brought into the city by a proud and often tired mother, encumbered by the accoutrements of motherhood. The freedom inherent in Terry’s description of this scene, constructs for me a kind of envy that these women can be happy to pass the day in such apparently inconsequential matters. The lightness of the words used in the description of the scene represents for me a typically male dismissal of the emotional and relationship work being done by the women present. Terry shows an awareness that his dismissal of the scene as trivial may lead to accusations of being politically incorrect, and carefully defends himself in advance by saying, “...and this might sound sexist...”. My interpretation of which is something like; “This may sound sexist, but between us men you know what I mean.”

Terry speaks to me here in terms of a common male understanding and a feeling of being on the outer when women gather to talk “girl talk”, or to discuss babies and motherhood. While it may be the case that many men experience a commonality with these concerns, and are now able to enter more readily into this largely female community during early fatherhood, (especially nowadays with the advent of the househusband), it is my experience that this still remains an uncomfortable place for men. This is a place fraught with unfamiliar concepts and emotive behaviours unbefitting the dignity normally associated with masculinity. Terry is speaking to me in terms of ambivalence towards babies as the centre of the women’s focus that springs from a sense that what is going on represents an intrusion of the private sphere into the public sphere. The office is a place of business where the focus is meant to be maintained on the matters at hand. The proper focus being on attending meetings, planning actions and resolving issues directly related to achieving the objectives of the organisation. In this public sphere, mothers and babies represent an unwelcome merging of one realm into another. This creates the uncomfortable situation of having to enact emotions and behaviours usually reserved for the private sphere. The requirement to perform in this way raises the risk of being seen behaving in ways that conflict with those required to maintain a reputation for authority and professional image.

In this context, Terry’s observation that he had never seen a male CEO act in the way this woman did seems only to be expected. The role of CEO is the ultimate symbol

of authority and professionalism within the company, and therefore, sets the standard for all other employees. Terry's construction of this woman CEO as being able to relate to others at a "*common touch sort of level*" expresses an ability to cross the organisational class system with its worker, supervisor, manager and executive levels. He does this by providing an account, of how this women CEO connects with women further down the organisational class system through "*girl talk*", and a shared interest in children and issues connected with motherhood. In my experience, while men may cross these boundaries, the vehicle for doing so tends to be centred on subjects like sports, cars or personal activities like running or holidays. All these tend to be characteristically masculine interests with a devalued emotional content.

Gender-based differences in the topics chosen for discussion in social contexts were also mentioned by Colin who worked with a mainly female staff under Janet, who held the position of General Manager Human Resources.

COLIN: Ah, don't really worry me, but [laugh] unless you want to talk about the football in the bloody breaks, but. Yeah, so that, you know, so, I mean, I guess that's what women face is the you know, was the social scenarios [] that you run. So, what are people talking about in the breaks? So, if you're not part of it. So, I ain't part of blouses and shoes and shopping, so you, you do tend to get excluded, I suppose, you're self selected out of it, really.

STEVEN: Right

COLIN: So, yeah, I mean it's conversely if its a male thing all talking about the rugby or something and you're not interested in it, Umm, you know, you're not in the conversation. So, you know, it's those sort of more subtle things that you're either included or excluded, you know, and they're all interested in something, and well you're not. So, [Laughs] and you haven't got any knowledge, or any, any ability to say anything, so [Laughs]

STEVEN: Yeah, right

COLIN: Ah, yeah, that can be quite difficult, I mean, probably Janet is quite interested in, in rugby and cricket and those sort of things and may potentially, you know, still stay in the conversation. So, I guess, yeah um, you know, to enter the game, I mean the game has a whole lot of strands to it, it's not... You know, there's pure work. So, you can talk to your work. But, I mean, there's more subtle end of it that's not, not work so much. I mean, are you in that, that game as well, you know?

STEVEN: Yeah

COLIN: So, you know, I mean it's almost, almost a social game, I guess.

STEVEN: Yeah

COLIN: If you are, I mean, if you're in, you're in, well, whatever the gender.

The key element for me in this account is that members of either gender may find it difficult to fit in to a social situation where they do not share the interests of the rest of

the group. It also provides an account of the effort minority group members may undertake to fit in. In this case, Colin first expresses how he feels excluded from the group of women whose talk features topics like blouses, shoes and shopping. Taking his own experience as a base, he then goes on to conjecture about the converse position featuring a woman in a mainly male group. In this section, Colin talks about the sorts of topics men tend to speak about in social settings.

*So, yeah, I mean it's conversely if its a male thing all talking about the rugby or something and you're not interested in it, Umm, you know, you're not in the conversation.*

Although Colin mentions rugby as a topic that might not be something women are interested in, or know enough about to participate in a discussion, he goes on to propose that Janet is “probably” quite interested in both rugby and cricket.

*I mean, probably Janet is quite interested in, in rugby and cricket and those sort of things and may potentially, you know, still stay in the conversation.*

The qualifications he uses in this sentence through the words “probably” and “may potentially”, provide an element of doubt as to his belief that these are true interests for Janet, much less passions. There is a suspicion here that the interest she may show in these subjects is possibly reproduced as a way of fitting into the social environment; just as any apparent interest he might express in blouses and shoes and shopping would be. Colin goes on to say that failing the ability to join in the topics of choice, the default is talking about work. However, his final words are that work talk does not provide sufficient connection to participate fully in the social environment for either gender.

The theme of interests in sports and interests in shopping provided another basis for comparison between the sexes. This talk tended to feature a stereotypical gender split, in which men were supposed to be interested in sports, and women in shopping. The former mostly featuring rugby and cricket, and the latter mostly featuring clothing and shoes. However, when the participants spoke of the women CEOs and managers they worked for, it was common for the participants to emphasise how much these women were genuinely interested in sports. This purported interest was associated with talk that tended to minimise gender differences and acted to emphasise a position denying the relevance of gender in the work context.

This position of gender irrelevance can be seen in the following segment from the interview with Fred, where I asked about Roslie bringing elements of being a woman into her role as CEO.

- Steven     Would you say that Roslie sort of behaves, has, has a sort of, does she bring elements of being a woman into the role at all?
- FRED:     Oh, yeah, well, oh, yeah, undoubtedly.
- Steven     And, how would you see those sort of being expressed?
- FRED:     Um, well, I mean, for a start she wears a skirt to work.
- Steven     [Laughs]
- FRED:     But, I mean other than that, being a woman, I don't know what being a woman really means in that context. So, I mean, ...
- Steven     Being someone's wife, someone's girlfriend, someone's...
- FRED:     She never brings that side of it to work. She just brings full on Roslie Markham to work everyday.
- Steven     Ok
- FRED:     Um, I don't know whether, I mean, and, and, and she is a woman but I don't know whether she brings any sort of, I don't, I have, it's really hard to think of her as, of, of, of bringing womanly stuff to work. I mean, does she come to work and behave like a daughter? No. Um, does she behave like my wife? Sometimes. Um, rarely behaves like my mother. Um, yeah, so, I mean she just comes to work and does her job. And, it's, and it's not consciously thinking that it's a woman.
- Steven:    Ok. So, I mean, would you say that, I mean, she's one of the guys or...?
- FRED:     Nope. She sort of doesn't, doesn't socialise. Well, she doesn't party, um, go out and drink beer with girls or boys. Um, so, no, I mean, she, um, yeah, I mean, obviously she's got interests in things, um, outside work that are different to a male boss. But, half, but equally she's got a lot of things interested in, I mean she does go to rugby matches and have some, you know, interests that are more what, you know, what would perhaps you would associate with a stereotype male. Equally, she has interests that you'd associate with a stereotype female.
- Steven:    Mmm
- FRED:     But then, like most, but like many men and women do have those sorts of interests. She likes going shopping for shoes and clothes. But then, so do lots of men. Um, so, yeah.

In the first instance, Fred's reply is to make a joke of the question by setting up a trap in which he says "*Oh, yeah, well, oh, yeah, undoubtedly.*" When I respond to this seemingly promising line of discovery, he springs the trap by referring to the obvious difference of her wearing a skirt. For me, this device provides Fred with a sense of the absurd, in which an obvious physical difference is emphasised and used to mark the question as disingenuous, by diverting attention to something anyone (any fool) could have observed, just by looking. The idea that there might be deeper differences involved, such as behaviour or attitudes, is sidestepped. Fred goes on to assert that he is

does not know what being a woman means in the context. When I provide a clarification in terms of a sample of typical feminine roles, he firmly disavows that she brings any of that side of her into the work context by saying, "*She never brings that side of it to work.*" The splitting of home lives and work lives implied in this statement, contrasts with the next sentence when he says, "*She just brings full on Roslie Markham to work everyday.*" For me, this expresses a position that the personal life is a separate concern, almost another world, which has little bearing on the world of work. The Roslie constructed here is someone able to bring her "*full on self*" to work everyday; but apparently that self presented in the office does not include other aspects of her totality, including being a woman. The conflict in this is revealed, when he lists as rhetorical questions, a series of roles normally associated with being a woman, in terms of their relationship to him. While his self-provided answers to two of these rhetorical questions concede some element of Roslie acting in these roles, Fred goes on to put these aside and reaffirm his position of gender irrelevance when he says:

*Um, yeah, so, I mean she just comes to work and does her job. And, it's, and it's not consciously thinking that it's a woman.*

These two sentences embody for me a process of de-gendering Roslie, so that she is first constructed as just another person doing a job, and then she is depersonalised when he says, "*...and its not consciously thinking that it's a woman.*" There is a sense in this that Roslie is being constructed in the image of a non-gendered object; essentially as a worker unit in the organisational factory. But, there is also a sense that the male norm is being asserted, and that behaviours and ways of being that contradict that norm are being linguistically filtered out of existence. My response to Fred was in this context, when I asked him if he would say she was like "*...one of the guys.*" Fred immediately denies this is true, and goes on to qualify this denial in terms of Roslie not socialising, partying or drinking "*beer with girls or boys.*" The focus of his response associates being gendered with activities external to the workplace, but more specifically, with activities not normally linked to executives. There is a huge disconnect between his response and my expectation of how a senior executive might behave in this picture of a CEO partying and drinking beer. This disconnect is further widened when he makes reference to the "girls and boys". It seems to me that Fred again uses absurdity as a device to deflect attention from a direction of questioning about how gender is expressed in the workplace. The out-of-work context of his

response is repeated when he concedes that she has interests outside work that are different to a male boss. This is then qualified by an assertion that she has interests, such as going to the rugby, that are more stereotypically male. This focus on rugby is for me tempered by the knowledge that it is common practice for senior executives to host corporate clients and business associates to sporting events; such as rugby and cricket matches. In this context, an interest in rugby or cricket is an occupational prerequisite, as these events create social occasions where business may be discussed in a less formal situation, and which are used to forge personal relationships having business utility. The last few sentences of this section reinforce a construction of gender irrelevance; women have interests that may be considered stereotypically male, and conversely, men often have interests that may be consider stereotypically female; such as shopping for clothes and shoes.

As well as a generalised construction of gender as irrelevant, the interview with Terry revealed a positional aspect to this, which emphasised power as a key feature of the CEO role making gender irrelevant.

TERRY: Yeah, I, I think in retrospect, I saw a lot more gender based issues relative to female executive team members, so we're still talking general managers, in GenCorp than I did at, with Sharon. And I think, so I think there's a, I think the biggest issue is, is that there's the nature of being chief executive as opposed to the nature of being just a General Manager. The power issue is so big and this whole CEO is personification of the, the company, and what it takes to become a, to get to the CEO position is such that gender distinctions have gone. They're not even thought of, I mean, and its ultimate high stakes, I mean taking on the chief executive of a company the size of GenCorp, if you're in it and you want a career in it, is kinda like a fairly one way road. Different if you're dealing with a General Manager peer

The power I understand Terry to be talking about here is bound up in considerations of the sorts of contract conditions that typically affect general management staff. For instance, general managers are usually employed on individual contracts. They are seldom unionised, and may be disposed of if not at the whim of the CEO, at least through an organisational "restructure"; albeit, at the price of paying out whatever severance package may be detailed in their employment contract. This means that as well as being more closely involved with the CEO on a day-to-day basis, general managers may feel the power of the CEO more keenly than other staff who see the CEO as remote, and who are typically protected by union conditions, considerations of appearing to be a good employer, or just the effort required to remove someone at lower

levels versus whatever benefit may be seen to accrue from such an action. But more than that, there is implicit in what Terry is saying to me here a sense of the CEO as some sort of mythological figure who has these great powers, and who embodies the organisation in a tangible way; much like the symbolism inherent in the grandiose head office building with its palatial executive suite occupying the top floor.

TERRY: Is it, is a, is a chief executive, descriptors of a chief executive, are they gender neutral or are they male versus female?

STEVEN: Sure

TERRY: And I'd, my first reaction is that it's neutral relative to the role of the chief executive. If someone then analyses those descriptors and said those are clearly, because they've got some sort of deciding what is clearly feminine and is clearly masculine, therefore using those descriptors the role of chief executive is clearly one or the other. But from my point of view the attributes of a chief executive are the attributes of a chief executive and, and from my point of view whether it's a male or a female in it is, is irrelevant with quite a separate issue as to whether the, those, that description is associated with one gender or the other gender. For instance, it's often said a female, I've, a feminine role is nurturing and supportive and collegial and that sort of thing. If you were to apply that to, in my experience, virtually all chief executives, um, and take into account the nature of the enterprise, cause I think, you do need to, you do need to take that into account, cause the needs for a chief exec can be very, very different according to context.

STEVEN: Yes

TERRY: But, for most commercial enterprises driven by a profit motive, the shareholders, I would say that, um, a caring, nurturing characteristics would not be associated with the role of chief executive. The role of chief exec, the descriptions of a role of chief executive would associated more with those you would see attached to the word leader, ah, someone who provides direction, who provides leadership. I don't think that's gender specific. But, that might be just my view.

STEVEN: Sure

TERRY: Cause certainly looking at the, the women I've been speaking about and say again that the number of CEOs I've worked for you couldn't tell that they were any, within the range of behaviours you get from a, from chief executives they were as decisive as, um, firm in their views, um, competitive, um, etcetera, etcetera

Although Terry constructs the role of the typical CEO as gender neutral, the description he provides conforms to an agentic male stereotype. The nurturing, caring qualities most often associated with feminine are constructed as being irrelevant in a profit driven commercial environment. He presents instead a construction of the CEO as a leader that excludes such qualities; this construction of the leader is decisive, holding firm views, competitive, and providing direction through strong leadership. The presentation of this construction of the leader as gender-neutral is supported by

reference to women CEOs who are said to have operated in this fashion, and is given warrant through personal report and the scientific sounding phrase “*within the range of behaviours*”. The net result of this is a construction of gender-neutral leadership, largely devoid of feminine characteristics.

In summary, discourse about gender differences was employed by the participants to achieve two separate and apparently conflicting objectives. Talk about the relative qualities of men and woman as managers served to acknowledge the obvious fact that men and women are different; at least in terms of their physical attributes and gender roles. This talk about relative qualities tended to draw on and relate ideas from popular psychology and stereotypical gender differences, such as women being better at empathy, collegiality, consultation and interpersonal skills; while men are more competitive and action-oriented. The feminine qualities were portrayed in this talk as being more relevant to management in the modern world, than the detached agentic non-emotional impersonal style stereotypically associated with male managers. Being able to express the relative superiority of women provided a way of emphasising a lack of personal sexism and alignment with currently prevalent views on appropriate management style. In emphasising the superior qualities of the feminine, it is suggested that women will tend to move into management positions by supplanting men through a process of natural selection; men will either have to adapt to the feminine style of doing things, or will gradually fade from the situation. However, acknowledgement of gender differences could also be used in a negative sense to express tendencies to err by over-expressing typically masculine or feminine qualities. In this case, gender neutral management style is established embodying a balance of qualities comprising elements of both the agentic masculine and empathic feminine stereotypes. Gender neutral talk acted to establish a non-sexist position, that created a politically correct construction that gender is not relevant in the workplace, and extended to a construction of the role of CEO as impervious to gender influences by the nature of the power and symbolism invested in that role. The construction implies that there is no issue of gender to consider; no action is necessary to establish equality in terms of gendered representation, because the way of being a leader is dictated by the nature of the role in a particular context. Both of these constructions of gender in the workplace as it affects leadership suggest that there is no action necessary to establish greater access for women to the upper levels of the organisation.



Furthermore, talk about gender neutrality and the irrelevance of gender acted to normalise existing practice as non-gendered in the first place. This position is open to challenge. For instance, Cunha and Cunha (2002) argue that even where organisations have adopted the language of teamwork, the behaviours produced tend to not serve an inherently feminine ethos featuring values of connection and intimacy; but, rather they act in the service of a masculine ethos in which status and independence have primacy. By constructing leadership as gender irrelevant, the gendered ethos of commercial organisations, which guides and shapes the actions of their chosen leaders, is obscured. The people, who get to these positions, will tend to be selected on the basis of their ability to reproduce the attitudes and behaviours matching the situation. This position is supported by Rindfleish and Sheridan (2003), who found that while many Australian women who had achieved senior management roles acknowledged the need for change, they had not tended to use their roles to challenge gendered organisational structures.

### **c. Gender War**

FRED: I mean, at first we tried to do it by physicalness, when we couldn't, when we couldn't, when physicalness wasn't enough we legislated so they couldn't have power, we wouldn't let them vote. Um, you know, so all those barricades, you know, they've broken down the physical barrier, and then they broke down the regulatory barrier. Um, you know, there are, and now the only barrier is, um, you know, an emotional one. You know, "What do you choose to do?"

The Gender War discourse provides an historical account of a longstanding battle between men and women over women's right to share power within society. In this segment, Fred charts this war in terms of the an account featuring the decline of hegemonic masculinity through both a progression of control measures or exclusion measures, and also as a retreat behind a succession of barriers in the face of an advancing 'tide' of women. His account provides a picture of an intentional historical campaign by a largely monolithic body of men to exclude women. First, by the use of physical and then by legislative control; and finally, through a form of blackmail where women are positioned as having to choose between opposing commitments or desires.

The historical perspective this constructs is one that initially involves men as having established power over society, and women in particular, through the use of physical strength. This part of the account raises images of the barbarian cave dweller enforcing control over the women of the tribe through brutality and violence. In doing so, it positions men as savage bullies who collude to use their superior weight and strength to suppress and exclude women from decision making roles. The discursive work done here links these supposed past practices of male-dominated primitive societies to a sustained and coordinated gender war pitting male power against female aspirations for equality. The seductively simple idea that physical strength alone might be sufficient to order society is one of a series of explanations that have been advanced to account for differences in the way primitive societies are structured along gendered lines. The truth status of these accounts has been challenged in various scholarly works, including Brightman's (1996) description of a range of different accounts for the gendered division of labour observed in many primitive societies, where differentials in physical strength represent but one. While strength may have some role in explaining the division of labour, Brightman (1996) observes that physical strength is substantially a function of training, and there is considerable overlap in strength between the genders.

The role of women as carriers in many societies (I picture here women carrying earthenware pots of water for miles of their heads everyday) has meant that in many cases their strength has been greater than may be supposed and in some cases, greater than the strength required for traditionally male roles such as hunting (Brightman, 1996).

The account of physical strength as the key determinant provides an anti-romantic image of primitive society, in which violence against women is employed as a control mechanism to establish and maintain male prestige and primacy. This draws on ideas similar to those expressed in William Golding's "Lord of the Flies", in which a group of English school boys marooned on a deserted island revert to a savage state involving tribalism, violence and murder. Golding's story constructs man as a being with an inherently animal nature that must be repressed and held at bay, with the source of many of the problems of humanity being due to a regression to the primitive nature of man (Lederer & Beattie, 1969). It is significant that Golding's story concerns an exclusively male society; there is no direct maternal or feminine presence in the account, and the story is very much about the nature of "Man". The narrative can therefore be understood as an account of the need to control inherent male aggression for the sake of civilised society; an account which is repeated extensively in popular culture. In a similar vein, the focus of family violence is often on the role of the male aggressor. This is reinforced by a constant flow of statistics from the justice system, telling us how men constitute the overwhelming majority of violent offenders. Beyond the punitive measures practiced through the criminal justice system, a common societal response to male aggression is to channel its expression into more acceptable and often celebrated forms of ritualised violence. Young men are encouraged to join contact sports such as rugby, boxing and martial arts to direct their "natural" aggression into more acceptable channels. During times when there is a high rate of crime, which is often associated with high unemployment, calls are heard for young men to be forced to undergo a period of compulsory training in the armed services. These calls can be seen to demonstrate a concern for the forced imposition of discipline, as a means to instill self-pride and self-control, through the agency of the harsh "drill sergeant" role and arduous physical training. In spite of dubious evidence of efficacy, "boot camps" modeled on the military model, find popular support in political discourse. The media have been employed in a number of countries, in an effort to instill respect and discipline in young

offenders (Atkinson, 1995). In such an environment, the aggression and waywardness of uncontrolled young men is met with institutionalised violence aimed at establishing discipline and conformity.

By making physical strength the first historical element, Fred's account suggests a particular version of how male violence has shaped gender relations and gendered organisation of society. Other accounts, which may be seen as challenges to this construction, provide alternative explanations for the gendering of early human, hunter-gatherer societies. These alternative explanations feature a number of often interlinked factors including: customs based on physical differences such as: menstruation and blood taboos; exclusionary practices based on differential socialisation of boys and girls; reproductive immobilisation; marital specialisation and economic specialisation (Brightman, 1996). Gonsoulin (2005) provides an account where the decline of gender equality is traced to a period in Eurasian history between 4500 and 3000 BC when technological and economic changes combined with religious and cultural events to produce a gendered stratification of society. Gonsoulin (2005), points out that although there is a general acceptance today that *"the current misogynistic and patriarchal nature of the world's great religions as universal or ever-present truth of religion in general"* (p.2), archaeological evidence shows that prior to the advent of civilisation as it is understood, religion formed a key component in shaping more egalitarian societies.

For me, Fred's text evokes an historical account of a cross generational gender war, pitting men against women for domination of the public sphere, and the right to take the privileges that come from having primary status in society. The progression from physical strength as a means of controlling women entails an escalation of the gender war, by means of the law as a new tool in the male armory. There is an implication in Fred's story, that the escalation of the conflict was required out of a waning or failure of the power of the physical control employed by individual men, on the women in their sphere of control. Although Fred does not explain this waning of physical power, it appears to me as a natural progression from the savage or barbarian past, implicit in the use of physical superiority as the dominant instrument of control. It suggests constraints of culture and law acting to impose upon men, a form of control that limits their (our) ability to act just as they (we) please.

The modern idea of law is one that is a rational system codifying the norms of civilised behaviour, blind as to the individual characteristics of the subject, and applied even-handedly to all. These sentiments are summarised by Richard Brisbin as follows:

*In a modern liberal regime like the United States, the law is a disciplinary institution. The law is designed as a generally applicable body of rules to discipline the chaos or uncertainty conducive to the pathology of injustice. Law aims at the discipline of a person's morality, character, social status, or psyche, and it is regarded as an absolute good because it is a rational instrument protecting the essential political requirement of personal liberty. (Brisbin, 1993, para. 6)*

However, Fred's account presents two edges to the sword of law. The law is; firstly constructed as a constraint upon the actions of individual men to control women through physical strength alone. Secondly, Fred asserts that having lost the use of this means of control, men employed a system of laws to maintain the exclusion of women from roles having influence and status within society. These two views of the law create a tension between an even-handed protective role of law in shaping civilised society, and the role of law as an ideologically driven instrument of vested interests. While the implication of Fred's account is that there is a transfer of control from physical means to a non-physical legal framework, the nature of the law is that its ultimate sanctions are physical in nature. It is just that these sanctions are executed within a codified structure, and warranted by law enforcement bodies. As pointed out by Brisbin (1993), even where the laws enacted by legislators might be assumed to be neutral, "*officials of a liberal regime can implement interpretations of rights that cause violence, repression, and disciplinary subjection against individuals who have not acted to harm or to offend profoundly other persons*" (para. 9). In this sense, Fred's account draws on a common understanding that while the legal system has certain protective elements largely of benefit to all (such as prohibitions on crimes like murder, rape and theft), there are other aspects of the law that only serve the interests of certain minorities and sections of society who wield power or are able to influence the lawmakers. Fred is therefore drawing on the idea that men have been able to usurp the ostensible neutrality of the law to retain all power by excluding women. Given that most laws over the centuries have been enacted by men or bodies, mainly if not exclusively, comprised of men, the capability of men to do this seems unsurprising.

As with the account of “physicalness”, this account of the men using the law to exclude women tends to classify all men in the same group and this omits a number of other accounts. By constructing men as one monolithic body-politic, united in a common cause dedicated to preserving power, the account obscures the situation of many marginalised groups of men excluded from power for a multiplicity of reasons. Legal and socially defined disenfranchisement, has affected men and women over the centuries: Roman Catholics were denied the vote in England up to 1829; only landowners could vote in many European countries up until the mid-1800’s; non-white people could not vote in the USA until 1870; indigenous Australians couldn’t vote until the late 1960s; and in many countries convicted criminals (who tend to be mostly men) are still denied the right to vote. In this sense, Fred’s account focuses on just one thread of a widespread move during the later Victorian period and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, towards enfranchisement of the adult population in Western countries.

While Fred’s account of the transition from physical means of exclusion to the use of the law seems to provide a relatively straight forward shift, this stands in contrast to historical accounts in which the status of women in society has been the subject of considerable debate at a number of junctures. For instance, Ann Oakley (1972) contends that from 1540 until 1640 women had enjoyed considerable equality in their ability to engage in commercial activity, and differences between the sexes were not seen to be highly significant. From 1540 to 1640, gender roles became the subject of considerable debate, with the rise of a view that saw the convergence of gender roles as symbolic of societal breakdown, threatening the stability of marital and domestic arrangements. Oakley contends, that although the conditions of this period did not produce any immediate change in the status of women, the economic, legal and political position of women declined through to the Victorian era, by which time the inferiority and weakness of women was commonly assumed. The culmination of that decline was reached in 1832, when women were specifically excluded from the franchise in England.

Fred’s account of the use of law to exclude women from positions of influence also draws on ideas about the exclusion of women from religious roles. This includes on-going media coverage and discussion of the position of women, as clergy in the Anglican and Catholic churches. In some cases, the issue of the ordination of women,

together with that of ordaining homosexual men, has been the source of such diverse and entrenched opinion as to threaten to split particular church bodies into conservative and liberal dioceses across national and geographic lines. The position of women within the Catholic Church, has recently entered into popular discourse through Dan Brown's book *"The da Vinci Code"* (Brown, 2003), and the subsequent movie of the same name. In this tale, Brown's characters speak of the exclusion of women from the church as a way of suppressing paganism, which featured the sacred Goddess as the supreme deity and the replacement of the Goddess with a male Christian God:

*'I should add,' Teabing chimed, 'that this concept of women as life-bringer was the foundation of ancient religion. Childbirth was mystical and powerful. Sadly, Christian philosophy decided to embezzle the female's creative power by ignoring biological truth and making man the Creator. Genesis tells us that Eve was created from Adam's rib. Woman became an off-shoot of man. And a sinful one at that. Genesis was the beginning of the end for the goddess.'*

*'The Grail,' Langdon said, 'is symbolic of the lost goddess. When Christianity came along, the old pagan religions did not die easily. Legends of chivalric quests for the lost Grail were in fact stories of forbidden quests to find the lost sacred feminine. **Knights who claimed to be "searching for the chalice" were speaking in code as a way to protect themselves from a Church that had subjugated women, banished the Goddess, burned non-believers and forbidden the pagan reverence for the sacred feminine.**' (Brown, 2003, p.322) [Emphasis added]*

However, the Catholic Church's position on women would seem less clear cut than Brown makes out; Pope John Paul II, in his 1988 *Mulieris Dignitatem* (John Paul II, 1988) speaks with great reverence about women and their place within the Church. But, the language John Paul uses is very explicit in the gendering of God and the Church remains steadfast in its opposition to the ordination of women (John Paul II, 1994). This is in spite of there being, a strong movement from within the Church itself for this to change (see for instance [www.womenpriests.org](http://www.womenpriests.org)). For me, the Church canons preventing women from gaining access to positions of power within the Church are at least as important a part of the framework of legal barriers Fred conjures, as the 1832 law that prevented women from voting in Britain. Given that these Church laws predate such civil laws by many centuries, and that the Church played a much stronger role in the day-to-day lives of ordinary people than is currently the case (at least in Western nations), the role of Church law takes on a significant part of the framework of legal barriers drawn on in Fred's reference to laws designed by men to exclude women.

However, this aspect has no place in Fred's construction, because religion has no place in the corporate workplace, which is ideologically as free from the influence of religion and religious ideology as it is gender neutral.<sup>2</sup>

For me, the ultimate vanquish of women in the gender war is represented in modern culture in stories about the treatment of women in radical Islamic societies, and in particular, the practices brought about during the rein of the Taliban in Afghanistan during the 1990's. Prior to their ousting by American forces after the 9/11 terrorist attack on the Twin Towers buildings in New York, the Taliban were able to achieve a comprehensive exclusion of women from all institutions of Afghan society outside the family home. These conditions were documented and entered in public discourse through the late 1990s in reports from various Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's), as is typified by the following extract from a report by Physicians for Human Rights entitled "*The Taliban's War on Women - A Health and Human Rights Crisis in Afghanistan*".

*The Taliban is the first faction laying claim to power in Afghanistan that has targeted women for extreme repression and punished them brutally for infractions. To our knowledge, no other regime in the world has methodically and violently forced half of its population into virtual house arrest, prohibiting them on pain of physical punishment from showing their faces, seeking medical care without a male escort, or attending school.*

*After taking control of the capital city of Kabul on September 26, 1996, the Taliban issued edicts forbidding women to work outside the home, attend school, or to leave their homes unless accompanied by a husband, father, brother, or son. (Physicians for Human Rights, 1999, para 4-5)*

The intersection of religion, custom and civil law represented in the Taliban's temporary victory over women presents a vastly more complex picture than the simple story Fred presents in his account, and it points to the centrality of the white well-educated middle class culture that locates our discussion within the upper echelons of corporate life.

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<sup>2</sup> The influence of the Protestant work ethic in Western organisations is so pervasive as to be largely invisible unless one looks to practices in other cultures. While this ethic with its focus on achieving salvation through work and unceasing toil may have been perverted through the loss of its religious basis, it still persists as the ideological basis in Western organisations for the unremitting need to strive and define self in terms of a dedication to hard work and self sacrifice in the interests of career and the corporation (Jackall, 1988).



Fred employs the powerful metaphor of breaking down the barricades to describe how women reacted to the mechanisms of exclusion he proposes men used against women. I have images of the 19<sup>th</sup> century suffragettes chained to iron railings in front of Edwardian terraced houses being arrested by burly policemen, clamoring women marching cobbled streets with placards to break down actual wooden barricades erected to prevent them from reaching the halls of power, so that austere Victorian gentlemen do not have to face them or even see them. These images merge with those from any number of civil disturbances involving a clash between a conservative central power represented by uniformed and armed body of men and a rabble of unruly demonstrators setting out to challenge that power. In this sense, Fred's story is one that draws on a body of images ranging from 19<sup>th</sup> century accounts of the French Revolution, as depicted in stories such as Charles Dickens "A Tale of Two Cities", and in media coverage of more recent events like: the Vietnam War protests of the 1970's; the 1981 Springbok tour protests; and more recently, the demonstrations over the intervention in Iraq. The use of barricades evokes strong emotionally laden images of confrontations, between largely disorganised, powerless subjects and the armed, invariably male, proxies of power. There is a sense in this, that the so-called regulatory barricades are also physical, and that in breaking them down, often first involves breaking down the physical barriers put in the way of those who seek change.

Fred's account is that having removed all other barriers, there is now only an emotional barrier standing between women and what they seek. According to Fred, this emotional barrier is constructed from the rhetorical question posed to women "*What do you choose to do?*" This question constructs a binary opposition between pursuing a career, and conforming to the norms of motherhood and femininity. In the Gender War account, this emotional barrier is constructed as tension between aspiring to career and accepting the conditions of entry, or taking the traditional road eschewing a personal claim to power, money and status, in favour of acquiring these things at second hand, if at all. This choice positions the men as accommodating women even while resisting them, by maintaining work and employment practices that make it difficult for women to participate in the world of work while also performing in the role of mother. Fred's assertion is that this is a forced choice. This is a choice where the boundaries of the options have been engineered so as to take advantage of the emotional needs or desires of women for family and motherhood, in such a way as to render the chance of women

opting for a career less likely. The use of emotion as a tool employs a construction of women being more inclined to base decisions on emotional criteria, and less inclined to employ rational decision criteria as supposedly a man would.

It is Fred's contention that the choice between career and motherhood has been constructed in such a way as to make each option mutually exclusive; it is only possible to adequately do one or the other; not both at the same time. Furthermore, because the male experience is that building a career usually involves an investment of time spanning many years (often one or two decades), a choice in favour of taking time out for family effectively reduces career opportunities for women. The impossibility of doing both is related to a question of commitment to the organisation and to career. Commitment to the organisation is a key qualification for consideration as a candidate for promotion within the organization. Managers are continuously assessed by their superiors and peers, as to whether they have attitudes compatible with promotion (Jackall, 1988). Putting the needs of the organisation ahead of self and other life interests is a tangible sign of commitment. Fred talks about this conflict of commitments at another point of the interview when he says:

FRED: Female leaders who have children, particularly if they're, some, some have ah a husband or partner whose willing to play that support role, many of them don't. Um, particularly the younger ones who, you know, and they, they have, and if they want to have children and they tend to be committed people, they don't want to be uncommitted to their children. So, they, so therefore they don't have the sheer level of hours to put in. They want to go. They want to spend some time at the beginning and the end of the day with their children. They don't want to work fourteen hours straight days. They might work fourteen hours, but they'll, it has to be more compartmentalised up. And they decided, they just decided to rebalance their level of commitment to multiple things. And, I think those women therefore do make different managers to the ones that are fully committed to the job. And it's not, and when I say fully committed, its commitment in terms of hours, because I think everybody gets, I think both people are fully committed when they're there, some are just there for longer ...

The force of this argument is to link commitment as a key personal quality for managers to hours of attendance. Fred works to defend against possible accusations that people who decide to devote time to parenting are uncommitted by distinguishing two different forms of commitment. These are commitment in the form of an attitude, and commitment in terms of being available. The contention is; that there is a conflict for women who are dedicated to being committed to multiple aspects of their lives, in that it

is not possible to be both committed as a parent/caregiver, while also being fully committed as an executive.

The conflict between committed parenting and the demands of the job were also emphasised in the interview with Don when he talks about Roslie, the CEO of a major New Zealand company to whom he reports.

DON: She's chosen to be a hundred percent focused on her career. So, you know, she made a deliberate choice and she herself says she doesn't, she doesn't know how women can balance those things. So, she doesn't believe, you know, I think she's on the public, you know, she's said in magazines, she just doesn't know how she could ever have done what she did if she had children and had another life, she gives a hundred percent to it. So, yeah. So, I get, I think there can't be much doubt that's true, if you, you know, if you've got a nurturing role. Now, um, the women who succeed in that do it in a different way, they, you know, they mostly, the one's I've seen succeed have this sort of flipped around family, they have the househusband, who, you know, they, or they're very big users of nannies and stuff and I've, I've got, um, I've only got one woman direct report at the moment and that's how she, you know, her, she's got the reverse household. The, the husband is the child care provider and she's the main earner. You know, so there's the, I mean the one's who where the career thing's the bigger thing that's, that model works, but when they, when they're expected to do both it doesn't, it's too hard, I think, it's just too draining and yeah. Yeah, carrying both those responsibilities looks impossible to me [Laughs].

Don uses Roslie's own words to warrant his proposal that the demands of being an executive are incompatible with parenthood, and that being fully committed to the organisation requires sacrifices in other life areas. The phrase "*She gives a hundred percent to it*" is significant; the spelling out of the "*one hundred percent*" reinforces that this is an admired and valuable trait/behaviour in corporate life. His use of this phrase is for me, a symbol of his admiration of her ability to give this level of commitment. Don's removal of doubt about the situation, establishes a form of authority over the material. This is his considered opinion that is beyond challenge, and this is positioned as a gender neutral argument through the use of "*if you've got a nurturing role*". By using the word "*you've*", Don constructs the possibility of either men or women being affected, and in this way, the role is split from the person so that the role becomes non-gendered. "*Now....*" reinforces his authority over the subject matter. The focus is turned back to women who succeed, and in this he is positioning himself as a disinterested observer.

Don's construction of how women succeed places emphasis on the actions of women; their personal decisions and choices. They have this "*sort of flipped around family*" which reasserts as the norm, the stereotypical gender role model. The reference to the househusband is quickly glossed over when the details are not readily available "...who, you know, they,..." , and a more concrete example provided "*or they're big users of nannies and stuff*". A concrete example of the househusband is provided, although in referring to "*she's got the reverse household*", Don reinstates what is considered to be the norm. Details of this arrangement are missing, and the role of househusband is implicitly equated to that of housewife (this would be a contentious assertion for many women I have spoken with about this sort of arrangement). The househusband role is further narrowed down to his role as "*child care provider*", which omits the other household responsibilities normally associated with the housewife role. I interpret this to mean that for women whose careers have higher priority than their male partners, Don is saying that the househusband arrangement can work. Whether their career is more important to them or not, women, however, may be expected to carry both the career and the housewife roles. When Don says, "*Yeah, carrying both those responsibilities looks impossible to me*", this reveals to me, a situation which leaves him personally and complacently unmoved; a position reinforced by his laugh at the end.

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Like the women Fred is talking about, I find myself caught between my own feelings that women should be free to be able to enjoy a career which will deliver the same sort of sense of self and independence that I have as an active part of the world of work and my feelings about children needing a fulltime parent. As a man in a somewhat traditional heterosexual relationship, I have never been put in the position of being asked to choose between the values I have centred on; the belief that children should be supported through to adulthood; versus, my own need to find success, status and fulfilment through a professional career. Given the degree of my own commitment to career, and the knowledge of how this has only been made possible through the support of my wife, who has taken on the role of fulltime caregiver for our children, I have a sense that it may be truly impossible for a woman to take on both roles, when the world of work is constructed as it is. I have both worked a four day week at one stage for some eighteen months myself, and also worked with others who have worked reduced hours. In these circumstances, I felt both the pull to conform and be present, and also

the frustration of having to take into account the work hours of individuals, who were not available when I needed them.

In business today immediacy counts; this is reinforced by our increasing use of mobile email, mobile phones, text messages and instant messaging. The habits of business in the age of the instant response militate against people being able to opt out, by limiting their involvement in private concerns. Is this unreasonable? Absolutely! But, I find within myself, this feeling that great things are only achieved by the unreasonable and usually with great sacrifice.

For me, this means dedication to achieving something exceptional in any particular area of life: career, family or sport. The sort of total dedication required can only be provided by excluding or sacrificing other areas of life. Being unreasonable about what one wants; is about maintaining focus, not spreading or dissipating one's energy and not being diverted from the goal. In this sense, the desire to be both homemaker and career executive seems to me problematic; I cannot see how one could do both well, and that trying to do both to such a level, would mean that one or both would undoubtedly suffer.

When I consider how this works, I feel that it is this lust for excellence, to be the best, score the highest marks, and achieve the most notable award that sits at the heart of this way of thinking. It is not enough to climb a mountain, it has to be the highest mountain, and the route to the top has to be the most difficult! Success is measured against how many others could get there, but also in a personal sense it is related to how much effort was employed, and how great a percentage of one's available resources one was willing or able to expend on the achievement. Success that is easily achieved remains unsatisfying; failure to achieve something really hard is only mitigated by "At least he gave it his all".

Fred's construction of this segment resonates with the metaphor of a war or battle. He employs a three-part list structure to provide illocutionary force, and draws on the strongly evocative theme of breaking down the barricades. In its military resonances, Fred's account evokes Winston Churchill's famous speech to the British Parliament, where he defiantly called the nation to war, saying:

We shall go on to the end, we shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be,

we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender...(Churchill, 1940, para 20)

For me though, Fred's statement constitutes not so much a rallying cry as a lament over a forced retreat. Most of the battles have been lost, and all that remains is to guard the home territory in the hope and expectation that women will choose the traditional role of motherhood over career, and not see through the shabby trick that hides behind the façade of choice. This rhetoric works, at least in part, because it inherits the stubborn fight-back sentiments inherent in Churchill's challenge to the people of Britain and the Commonwealth countries; that included New Zealand, as one of the key planks of white British influence. It works for men of my generation (the so called "Baby Boomers"), because these words are a part of the culture we grew up with; our parents and grandparents would talk of the dark days of the War; of rationing, the threat of the Japanese invading; and of the way the British fought back the German onslaught during the Battle of Britain. The gender war account is therefore created in the context of our shared upbringing in a time when Churchill's words were a recent memory, a memory preserved in legends of our family and cultural history. Furthermore, Fred's use of a military theme draws on a theme of brothers-in-arms, so that I feel I could be included as a comrade on the side of my fellow men.

While the Gender War construction appears to provide a tidy account of men as some sort of brotherly body of comrades fighting a rearguard action in the battle to exclude women from power, for me, this account provides a one-dimensional view of men's relationships with women. Relationships between men and women are multi-dimensional, so that men are variously fathers, husbands, sons, mentors, confessors, confidantes, friends, colleagues and lovers, to a range of women in their lives. For me, two of these relationships have particular relevance to the situation of men and women in organisational life; these are the father/daughter relationship and the mentor/protégé relationship.

It seems disingenuous to suggest that most women have a father, and yet this aspect of male/female relations is absent from the gender war discourse. In contrast to the one dimensional story offered by the Gender War, Robert Polhemus (2005) presents a different version of history, at least during the 19th and 20th centuries, which he contends are the period when the biblical story of Lot and his daughters comes into its

own. According to Polhemus, the Lot story is relevant not so much as a tale of incest and female seduction in the literal sense, but rather as a metaphor for the passing of the intellectual seed from fathers and father figures (indeed, from patriarchy itself), to talented and ambitious younger women. More than that, Polhemus contends that the Lot story embodies women's drive for agency, in which the moribund model of the backward looking mother-object is left behind (literally turned to salt in the biblical story) in favour of a subjectivity invested in the creation of something new from the seed of the father. While Polhemus traces this passing of the intellectual seed through the father-daughter relationships of figures such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelly, the Bronte sisters, and Shirley Temple, it is possible to see this passing in organisational terms in many of the mentor relationships and on-going collaborations between older men and younger women in business; for example, Theresa Gattung and Roderick Deane of Telecom New Zealand. In this view, the simple Gender War account with its monolithic body of male hegemony becomes more problematic, because while women may have struggled for entry to the male-dominated public world of business, this struggle has often been aided by father-mentors who sought to realise the potential of younger women in their sphere, whether they be daughters or protégés.

As the father of a seventeen year old daughter, Polhemus' ideas about the passing of the intellectual "seed" seem quite natural to me. For me at least, fatherhood carries with it a sense of projecting oneself into the future, and this projection carries both biological and intellectual elements. There is in parenthood a sense of immortality, so that a child represents a continuity of existence of self through genetic inheritance, and also through the ideas and values passed on through the processes of parenting. This need for immortality is inherent in great architectural achievements like the pyramids of Egypt, the cathedrals of Europe and any number of other monuments constructed by man. It is also present in the legacy of lasting achievements of nations, organisations, works of art and deeds that change history. That older men should find a willing and eager reception in younger women striving for authority and a sense of their own subjectivity in a world where these things seem to be in the hands of men, is not so surprising. I feel this in the intelligent adults my children are becoming, in the acceptance, challenge and integration of my own ideas into something new, and hopefully, deeper and stronger. That I should prevent my daughter from achieving

whatever she sets her mind on, by acting for the male side in a gender war is inconceivable. And yet, I admit that my actions in other contexts may have been and may continue to be at times, sexist and may have contributed to the maintenance of barriers to women in general. It is a paradox that the conditions for which one raises ones' children may not always mirror the conditions one creates and reproduces in other life contexts.

In the introduction to the analysis, I related how my initial reaction to Fred's account was that it was trite and perhaps reproduced for my benefit. That comment applies especially to the section relating to what I have termed the Gender War. It would be a valid criticism to say, that in asking the interviewees about gender in the context of leadership within the organisation, I may have shaped their responses to either conform or to challenge my inferred position in relation to the topic. I see this effect, in action in the following section from the interview with Harry, where I proposed a certain position from the third person stance "A lot of people...." , and then continued to propose a much more definite stance about the way rules in organisations have been set up.

Steven: A lot of people, you know, see the organisation, modern corporation as a, sort of a male creation, you know, something that was created by guys, for guys.

HARRY: Mmm

Steven: And that the rules pretty much suit, you know, the way guys have set it up for themselves. I mean, do you see things that way within, within the organisation here?

HARRY: Ah [...] ah. I suppose, um, yeah, if I think about specifics, ah, I, I... the, the demands placed on a senior corporate manager here or in other organisations, I think, traditionally at least, are built on some assumptions around a male type life, you know? In other words, um, you know, career if not first, certainly, um, a very close second to your family life. But, it's a second in the sense that your family life is very accommodating and that you've probably got, if you've got a family. So, if you're a single guy with no attachments then, you know, you're hard out for the job and that's your main focal point. Um, if you've got a family, well, it's probably that you're going to have a wife at home who can, you know, look, basically run the family so that you can be away on work things, you know, basically not endlessly but, you, you, there's a low level of commitment, you know, you don't, you can leave at, be at work at seven in the morning and leave at seven at night and be away from home, you know, regularly. And, that shouldn't be an issue.

Steven: Right

HARRY: So, those are, if you call that a male, it's a patriarchal view, I guess. A Western patriarchy around family structure, social structure. Um, ah, maybe some of the, oh, I dunno, I don't know enough about anthropology to know.

Um, I mean most societies have been patriarchal, haven't they? But, I was going to say in terms of the, the status symbols and so on, whether they are archetypically male. I don't know.

After some initial digesting of the proposition, Harry manages to relate my proposition back to some things he has observed, and reflects back the question to me with his rhetorical question, *"I think, traditionally at least, are built on some assumptions around a male type life, you know?"* He then goes on to expand on this by providing examples, and talks about the levels of support that a man might have if he has a wife at home to look after the family. He finally concludes that all this shouldn't be an issue –something we both understand to be the case, as this is the pattern we are familiar with. The last paragraph of this section is more of a direct reflection of my original assertion, an intellectualisation of the issue, in terms that I acknowledge my position as an academic researcher, probably interested in exploring the nature of patriarchy and concepts such as the Glass Ceiling. The latter of these, being something I was quite open about.

As with Fred's account of the Gender War, Harry's response reveals to me an expectation of what I would find acceptable, or something we could agree about when he says:

"I mean most societies have been patriarchal, haven't they? But, I was going to say in terms of the, the status symbols and so on, whether they are archetypically male. I don't know."

I feel he is anticipating that he will find common ground with something that is in me. Therefore, whether he truly agrees or not (and, his final *"I don't know"* places this as something he has either not thought about very deeply or is hedging his bets about), he is expressing a form of common knowledge. Fred's account of the Gender War falls into much the same category; it is relevant as a form of understanding and accounting for the situation, whether it has any truth status or not.

As a common way of understanding the history of how women have been excluded from positions of power, and have in recent years gained a measure of equality, the Gender War discourse presents a simple picture couched in terms of a monolithic male hegemony bent on preserving male power. It offers the possibility for action, in terms of breaking down barriers erected by men to exclude women, and holds

up as a device the emotional barrier of choice; revealing the false dichotomy and one-sidedness of the “choice” presented to women. However, in glossing over the complex web of class, culture, religion and tradition involved in establishing gender separation, and also the multifaceted nature of most men’s relationships with women, it closes down a number of alternative options for action, based on these other dimensions.

Lastly, as an account of the retreat of male dominance, the Gender War discourse suggests no urgent need to do anything to change the situation. In this way, the Gender War discourse has much in common with post-feminist accounts that position the feminist struggle as no longer relevant, because the battle has already been won (Peace, 2003).

d. Individual Choices

FRED: “What do you choose to do?”

The question Fred poses about what women will choose to do completes the interview segment I have used to frame this analysis. Although the sentence also forms a component of the paragraph dealt with in terms of the Gender War discourse (discussed in section c. above), for me it has a wider significance as a key element in the way the participants spoke about responsibilities of the individual versus those of the organisation. In this sense, the discourse of Individual Choices provides a way of accounting for how responsibility is assigned for accommodating the differing needs of the individual and the organisation.

In the context of the headline segment, Fred poses this question as the last barrier in a succession of barriers erected by men, in order to exclude women from executive positions within the organisation and society at large. Fred’s construction of this barrier is of an emotional choice attributed to women where they are put in the position of having to choose between motherhood and the norms of being a woman, and the time and commitment expectations associated with having a professional career. But, there is a wider dimension to this construction that is not so much about gender, although the implications may have gendered effects. This dimension concerns the relationship between the organisation and the individual, and how the individual is positioned to accept responsibility to change and accommodate in order to fit.

The following segment from the interview immediately preceded the section used to headline the analysis. In response to my comment about his description of a barrier for women formed by the long hours typically worked by executives, Fred speaks in terms of choices.

STEVEN: Yes. But, within the organisation that sort of expectation forms a barrier, I mean, mothers...

FRED: I think

STEVEN: must find very hard to overcome.

FRED: No, I don’t think there’s an expectation cause you, cause it’s a, I think as an organisation we’re about making choices

STEVEN: Mmm

FRED: You can choose, you can, you know, you can choose to do this or you can not choose to do this. But, if you make choices about other things being priorities in your life then you’re making a choice that work is less

important. I mean, that's, nobody frowns upon you making the choice here, it's just that you've got that right to do. So, you'll. So, the role that you can play in the organisation is determined by the other choices that you are making.

The idea that there might be an expectation to conform is rejected, and instead the organisation is projected as valuing choice. The substitution of expectations with choice provides a positive construction of the organisation in which providing choices for the individual is a good thing. This acts to present the organisation as liberal and flexible, so that individual needs are accommodated through the availability of different options, from which he or she may choose. These choices are taken to be indicative of the relative priorities the individual places on either their private affairs or those of the organisation. As Fred goes on to say, the priorities of the individual as evidenced by the choices made then determine the possible roles that the individual can play within the organization. In this construction, the organisation determines the nature of the options presented for participation, and the individual is then expected to select from among these options. In making this choice, the individual seems to have little ability to be able to challenge or reshape the options, so that other possibilities become available for participation. So, while the talk about choices seems to provide an impression of flexibility, for me it obscures an underlying take-it or leave-it position, where the organisation determines the conditions of the options available for participation, and the individual is left to accept or decline. This means that there is little room in this construction for negotiation, or finding other ways of accommodating the needs of the individual by changing the practices of the organisation. In particular, this doesn't accommodate the needs of a particular gendered group – mothers – and it doesn't do so precisely because it refuses to recognise them as anything other than 'individuals', who are responsible for choices.

There is a sense of powerlessness in this construction that I had not anticipated when I commenced the analysis. My expectation had been that senior executives would have had a considerable degree of control over the terms of their engagement with the organisation, and a greater ability to negotiate the terms of their participation than people lower down the organisational structure. However, the research participants described their situation in terms of continually negotiated boundaries between work and home, where expectations of personal sacrifice were pervasive and although these expectations may be resisted, the nature of the role meant that there was little option

other than to comply. This sense of struggle and ultimately of a sense of resignation and powerlessness is evidenced in the following discussion with Geoff.

- GEOFF: And, her life would be easier if we had no home commitment, then we'd be available all the time.
- STEVEN: Yeah, well, exactly.
- GEOFF: Yeah.
- Both: [Laugh]
- Steven: And so I guess it was, you know,
- GEOFF: And, she does, she understands that's not going to happen
- Steven: [Laughs] You're not all going to sort of, you know, farm off your kids just to please the organisation.
- GEOFF: No, no. But I think that's, she would put it to us, that that's your choice...
- Steven: Yes
- GEOFF: Operating at a senior level does require that sacrifice. And if you don't want to make it, that, that's for you to make. I mean she can't...
- Steven: Sure
- GEOFF: And she has obligations to the board and to shareholders to run a management team and a company and deliver results. So, you know, she can't shirk that. So, if you're available then you're available and if you're not, you're not. But, that's...
- Steven: Yeah
- GEOFF: that's your choice. And I mean I think that's fine, that's fair.
- Steven: Right
- GEOFF: If it didn't suit me, I'd, I'd say look it doesn't suit me, get someone else.
- Steven: So, it's sort of like, you can't have your cake and eat it too sort of thing...
- GEOFF: No
- Steven: I mean, you can't decide to have, you know, this full balance thing...
- GEOFF: Not at a senior level, I think
- Steven: and also at the same time
- GEOFF: Life here is not accommodating in that regard.
- Steven: Right, yeah.
- GEOFF: Maybe we could try harder.
- Steven: Right. Ok
- GEOFF: We could do that, but...

In Geoff's account, Roslie has expectations which relate to the continuous availability of her management team. Roslie's position is driven by her obligations to the shareholders and the board to deliver results; these obligations are inescapable, and dictate continuous focus on the needs of the organisation. In this account, Roslie puts an unspoken choice to her managers; to be available or not. Placing home concerns above the demand for continuous availability, represents a choice which is interpreted in terms of not being prepared to make the sacrifices required by the role. The concept of "work/life balance", which forms a popular theme in current organisational discourse, is dismissed here as not being something people at senior levels can choose; as the

organisation demands precedence. Geoff expresses a sense of rebellion in his account of joining with his colleagues in resisting the unreasonable demand for continuous availability. However, this is only a partial resistance; the expectations associated with having a senior level role prevail, and meeting these means making sacrifices.

The lack of accommodation by the organisation means that the terms of the options presented are not negotiable, so that "*Life here is not accommodating in that regard*". Geoff continues on wistfully saying, "*Maybe we could try harder*", and less powerfully "*We could but...*" In these closing lines, Geoff expresses for me a sense, that he lacks both the will and the ability to make substantive changes to the situation. While as an individual he has options, the nature of these options as they affect his role in the organisation, is neither subject to substantive negotiation nor amendable to change. This lack of control and sense of powerlessness to alter the terms of the engagement is also present in the following segment from the interview with Fred.

FRED: So, that does, I mean, I think that makes a, that does make a difference to your ability to be, you know, a fully committed leader. [...] I think, you know, I mean, I suspect if you did a study of senior executives and roles that that, and their roles with their children, you'd discover the most appalling statistics of, you know, seconds that they actually spend with them. I know what my life is like. Is that I don't spend much time with my children during the week. And, much of the time I do spend with them is a, is a distracted time when I'm not a hundred percent on task with them.

For me, the positioning of the individual as a choice-maker is linked to the idea in modern Western culture of individuals as active, largely solitary agents who individually determine their own destiny. This theme in our society places the onus on individuals to decide and act in their own interests, and positions employers as selectors of the best talent from people competing for employment. When I consider this from an organisational perspective, there are a number of threads which combine to produce a coherent image of the situation, in which this is the only possible way it can be. This image involves an account of rapid changes, and the need to respond to forces from outside the organisation. The speed of change within organisations often means that any attempt at long-term planning is futile: employees come and go as they move between organisations for better conditions and promotion; organisations change and evolve so that business units; and roles shift while employees are continually being hired and retrenched. Throughout this rapidly shifting and evolving situation, individuals move

between jobs, careers and often countries in an effort to get ahead, achieve career and life goals, or simply find some way of earning a living.

This ethos of individual choice is deeply engrained in the way our political and economic systems have been shaped, and how our ideas about freedom have been constructed. The influential economist Milton Friedman, who is credited with having shaped the post-war economic system of the United States, and with having had a profound influence on the policies of conservative politicians such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, writes as follows in the book he co-authored with his wife, Rose, entitled “*Free to Choose: A Personal Statement*”:

One set of ideas was embodied in The Wealth of Nations, the masterpiece that established the Scotsman Adam Smith as the father of modern economics. It analysed the way in which a market system could combine the freedom of individuals to pursue their own objectives with the extensive cooperation and collaboration needed in the economic field to produce our food, our clothing, our housing. Adam Smith’s key insight was that both parties to an exchange can benefit and that, so long as cooperation is strictly voluntary, no exchange will take place unless both parties do benefit. No external force, no coercion, no violating of freedom is necessary to produce cooperation among individuals all of whom can benefit. That is why, as Adam Smith put it, an individual who “intends only his own gain” is “led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectively than when he really intends to promote it. I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the public good.” (Friedman & Friedman, 1980, p.1-2)

The ethos of individuality casts people as largely independent actors who create themselves and their life outcomes solely on the basis of the choices they make as individuals. It is apparent from Friedman’s argument, that in acting in their own self interest, the interests of society as a whole are advanced. There is no need to take any other particular action aimed at the public good; indeed such actions are specifically held to be at best of little utility, and one may conclude, possibly even detrimental.

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*My individuality, my ability and right to choose for myself, has always been something I have taken for granted. It has shaped the way I live my life and when threatened, it has aroused in me strong feelings that have challenged even longstanding relationships. This right to choose is a part of my upbringing, in a way that when I think about it, was steeped in a culture of individualism and individual choices. It is in the*

area of religion that my earliest recollection of this occurs. My parents were not religious in any particular way, and although my grandmother was religious, her religion was private in that she did not go to church, but rather read and took guidance from the Bible herself. For some reason, I can only suppose that had to do with family, or for my moral education, my parents sent both myself and my younger sister to Sunday school at the nearby church. I can recollect my sister and I returning home from Sunday school one morning, and when I complained about having to go (having already by age 7 or 8 years made up my mind as to the subject), we were given the choice. Although being given this option may be taken as having to do with our parent's ambivalence on the subject, it seems to me that such a choice would not be presented to children in many other cultures. The decision of a child, to opt out of what might be considered a fundamental part of the ethos of community would not be entertained.

The course of my academic and work careers, have likewise been areas where I have always carried a total conviction of my right to decide, and an assumption that while others may be consulted the final say remains my own. This has extended throughout my life from the subjects I chose at school, to the type and major of my degree, and then to the career vocation I chose to pursue thereafter. I did not, and never felt the need to, consult my parents when I married, let alone seek their permission or approval. My career since embarking into the world of work has been one where I have at times drifted and at other times had a firm conviction of where I wanted to go. But, through it all, I have felt that it has been mine alone to determine.

The major changes in my career and ultimate exit from the corporate ladder, came when I realised that the impression of safety I felt while working for the corporation was a delusion, and that I had allowed myself to become mesmerised by a feeling of security and loyalty that the organisation was not capable of delivering. This reassertion of my duty to own and shape my future for myself rests strongly in me, so that I feel not a sense of community or collegiality in organisational life, but a dangerous seduction and abrogation of responsibility to self and the people who depend on me. The choices presented by the corporation are not to my liking, and like many others I have opted to adopt a career outside the strictures of corporate life, while still engaging with it as an independent consultant. Moreover, the responsibility I feel is one of being able to maintain the adaptability and drive to create my own future.

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Yet, these accounts of individuality stand in contrast to other ways of thinking in which individuals are seen to be defined in terms of family and community ties, where these ties create mutual obligations of support and rights of consultation. Orbach and Eichenbaum (2000) suggest the idea of the individual subject as a bounded entity unaware of the mutual dependencies between the people around them arises from an upbringing that obscures these inter-relationships and has a mythological status in Western society. For me, the seemingly paternalistic organisations that prevailed until the early 1980s held elements of this in terms of the mutual obligations expressed in talk about the now quaint and old fashioned idea of employee loyalty.

In non-Western societies, this idea of family and community obligation often transcends what we would consider individual rights, so that marriage partners are chosen by parents, careers by communities, and it not unheard of for communities to select individuals for emigration to a better life in another country. Harré (1989) suggests that ideas about individuality may be culturally specific, and that beliefs about ourselves as autonomous individuals having agency are not necessarily shared by people from other cultural backgrounds; rather, they arise out of our Judaeo-Christian heritage. In this context, the individualist construction of how people engage with the modern corporate organisation is revealed as a reductionist account, in which the layers of community normally inherent in human interaction have been stripped back to the rule of contract law, and people as independent economic units. In this account, there is a form of Derrida's idea of logocentrism, in which the inter-relatedness of the organisation and the individual is obscured, so that one loses sight of how organisation is brought into being as having a reality apart from a group of people who collectively and inter-dependently strive to bring about particular objectives (Duney, 2001).

The discourse of Individual Choices may be seen to be an integral component of this reductionism in that it centres attention on the individual as the choice-maker, and absolves the people with power in the organisation from having to justify the options presented or negotiate terms of engagement. This way of talking obscures the choices taken on behalf of the organisation in the formulation and presentation of the options it makes available to employees. By focusing attention on the choices of the individual, this talk enables people in the organisation to discount the need to accommodate individual circumstances and differences in abilities to contribute. In this way, it acts to

normalise prevailing definitions of what is deemed to be evidence of commitment to the organisation, so that those who are unable to meet those norms are automatically classified as making choices that exclude them from participation. In doing so, the apparently incontrovertible expectations of the role remain unexamined and possibilities for creating alternative ways of working are excluded from consideration.

Chapter VI. Discussion

The system of discourses identified in the analysis provides an understanding of how gender is positioned so as to neutralise it as an issue for action. Each of the four discourses in the scheme represents a different but related way of accounting for how the concerns of women as gendered subjects are rendered irrelevant in terms of achieving career progression and surviving within corporate organisations. The scheme is first discussed in terms of the validity techniques outlined by Potter and Wetherell (1987) – cohesion, participant's orientation, new problems, and fruitfulness – then in terms of possible implications and applications, and finally, possible avenues for future research.

On one level, the *cohesion* of the scheme was provided through the narrative nature of the segment of text that was chosen to frame the analysis. Although this segment of text might be criticised for its truth status in terms of the historical accuracy of the account, it has an inherent continuity that is employed to produce a relatively self-contained discursive act. This segment was selected to frame the analysis because it contained in one place many major elements of the themes identified earlier on. The segment, provided a thread derived from the data that linked each of the discourses identified, into a cohesive whole. Beyond this level, the discourses identified in the analysis are cohesive in that they provide four differing but linked ways of talking which individually and collectively allow the speaker to minimise the need for the organisation to make changes in order to accommodate women as gendered subjects. The Darwinian Competition discourse positions gender as irrelevant in an organisational context due to the undeniable forces of natural competition that dictate an environment based on survival of the fittest, where gender and gendered characteristics are merely factors that provide advantages or disadvantages to the individual. This discourse of Gender Differences acknowledges differences between the genders and positions these differences as either insignificant in relation to other factors having a bearing on leadership effectiveness, or in terms of how they now tend to favour women; as the demands on leaders have changed to make stereotypically feminine qualities more relevant. In its post-feminist construction of a battle between men and women where women have largely won, the Gender War discourse also provides little incentive for the organisation to change. Lastly, the Individual Choices discourse acts so as to place all of the responsibility for change and accommodation on to the individual; the

organisation is constructed as having fulfilled its obligations in terms of equality and fairness by providing options from which individuals are free to choose as best meets their needs. Taken together, these four discourses provide a set of complementary and inter-linked ways, of discursively dealing with the subject of gender so as to render the organisation free from responsibility to change.

The ways in which the *participants orientated* themselves in their accounts, demonstrated an awareness of the implications of gender as a political issue within organisational life. For example, this was evidenced in the way Harry and Fred both oriented their responses so as to reflect back what they presumed to be my stance on the issues and to deflect possible criticisms of sexism. In some instances, the accounts were organised so as to acknowledge both obvious and stereotyped physical and psychological differences between women and men, while also constructing a position that gender is not relevant as a consideration. At times, the differences were acknowledged in a way that constructed them as favouring women, and at other points these differences were minimised so that they were constructed as being, if observable at all, statistically insignificant as compared to other personality factors.

A number of *new problems* were created for the participants, through their use of these discourses. For example, the Darwinian Competition discourse minimised gender as a factor, in the way in which organisations had been created and continued to be structured. In doing this, it was proposed that the competitive external forces of the marketplace and interpersonal competition were primarily responsible for the structure of the organisation and its internal practices. The problem this created was to account for the observation that historically most organisations have been shaped by men in the absence of women. One way of dealing with this discrepancy was to assert, as Terry did, that human beings are inherently competitive. This meant that first, Terry had to attend to popular feminine stereotypes of women being more co-operative and communal than men, which he did by specifically narrowing his assertion to include women as being inherently competitive. He then reinforced this argument by challenging me to produce an example of a comparable organisation mostly controlled by women that operated any differently. Likewise, talk about gendered differences created two sets of problems resulting from the two different approaches to taking about difference: acknowledgement and denial. Where the differences were acknowledged,

the speaker was placed in the position of negotiating accusations of sexism. This was often accomplished by casting the differences as favouring women, in terms of changes to the environment, making feminine qualities more relevant. Where gender was denied as a basis of difference, the speaker was placed in the position of having to account for gender stereotypes, and this was accomplished by accounting for any differences that might be observed as gendered tendencies to deviate from some non-gendered norm.

In terms of *fruitfulness*, the four discourses provide a way of understanding how several discursive resources may be brought to bear so as to neutralise defining characteristics of a particular group within the organisational context. In these terms, the scheme may provide new ways of understanding how members of other marginalised groups, who even after gaining some degree of access to the organisational hierarchy, may still find that needs related to defining characteristics remain unfulfilled and that making change to accommodate those needs is problematic. Simply put, each of the discourses provides a way for the dominant group within the organisation, to position defining characteristics of significant minorities in such a way as to make change unnecessary - even against the laws of nature. In this context, it is possible that members of marginalised cultural groups even after gaining access to organisations may find similar sets of related schemes employed to render the organisation safe from accommodating their particular defining needs.

As I hope is evident from the analysis, the four discourses draw on ideas that are deeply woven into our popular culture, and even the basis of our political and economic systems of thinking. This means that challenging the positioning that is inherent in the use of the discourses will often mean challenging some ideas taken-for-granted knowledge inherent in the common understanding of how the world functions. For instance, challenging the discourse of Darwinian Competition means running against the capitalist free market philosophy that currently dominates business, sports and even academic life. To suggest that co-operation may provide better outcomes for people and businesses runs completely counter to the common understanding of natural selection as a progressive evolutionary process, and the idea that survival of the fittest has moral value in that it serves to strengthen the whole by promoting the strong while weeding out the weak. However, the identifying and labeling of these discourses provides a mechanism through which to examine their weaknesses and inconsistencies. In the case

of Darwinian Competition, Darwin's own observations of cooperation and symbiosis in the natural world suggest viable alternative models for human behaviour, which may not be as constrained by or subject to laws of the jungle as is proposed. In a similar way, by examining the Gender War discourse, it is possible to observe its narrow cultural setting and masculinist perspective. In its monolithic construction of men and masculinity, the experiences of fathers, lovers, and mentors are omitted, as are marginalised masculinities associated with factors such as class, race and gender preference. Furthermore, while the post-feminist contention that women have largely won the gender battle and there is nothing remaining to do is open to challenge on the basis of the statistics alone, examination of the Gender Differences discourse suggests lines of enquiry centred on questions about what exactly has been won, and on what terms. Lastly, by examining the choices provided to women as individuals, the construction of the organisation as a liberal employer is subject to question, as the nature of the options and the terms of engagement are brought into focus. Similarly, it is possible to examine how free these choices might be, how it is possible that individuals can stand apart from their personal circumstances, and the reference frame for determining how much accommodation, if any, might be made in relation to the needs of gender, race, religion, or culture.

In the end, the original question I set out to address about how men position themselves in relation to women in CEO and senior management positions was not answered in quite the way I had anticipated. While the data contained a great deal, indeed much more than could be accommodated by this study, the focus of the interviews tended not to feature the intimate male-to-male discourse that I had experienced as a peer in a management team. To a certain degree, I believe this was due to the framing of the situation: I came into the environment as a researcher; and although the interviews were informal, it was still an artificial situation with a tape machine; and I was not a peer or close associate of the men. Additionally, the participants were senior executives who all seemed to be fully aware of the political implications of their words, and tended to frame their responses carefully with this in mind. On reflection, this may not come as any great surprise given that shaping and projecting a certain version of the organisation is often said to be a defining characteristic of any leader. In this context, it is likely that the original question might have best been answered, using an in-situ research methodology such as grounded

theory. This would naturally be a possible frame for future research, and based on my own experience, one which could provide a rich source of material for the researcher. Another possible research avenue suggested by the findings would be to examine discourses centred on other key personal characteristics of people in organisations (such as race or religion) to establish whether similar discursive resources and strategies are employed in protecting the organisation from change.

* * *

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Appendix A. Participant Information Sheet Cover Letter

dd mmm 2004

Mr. *[Participant Name]*
[Address1]
[Address2]

Dear *[First Name]*,

This letter has been sent to you in confirmation of an email or verbal contact in which you indicated your interest in taking part in a study of how male managers make sense of their experiences of working for women in executive leadership positions.

This study will involve interviews with approximately twelve (12) male managers who are currently, or have recently, reported to a woman or women in CEO or general management positions within large New Zealand corporate organizations. This study is being undertaken in partial fulfillment of my Master of Arts degree in psychology. The project will culminate in the submission of a thesis to the Massey University and may also result in presentation of the findings in relevant academic forums. A separate report summarising the findings will be made available to all participants.

I would like to interview you in-person at a scheduled time in the next few weeks. The interview will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes including time for completion of administrative formalities. In order to obtain an accurate record for analysis purposes I would like to audio tape the interview. Audio taping of the interview will be at your discretion and recording will be discontinued at any point during the interview on your request. At the conclusion of the study the audio tape will either be returned to you or destroyed as per your instructions.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to answer any questions asked during the interview and still remain in the study. Your participation in the study is on a purely anonymous basis. All identifying names, titles and other identifiers will be removed during the transcription process and any responses or comments you make during the course of the study will not be quoted in any final output without your express permission.

I will be following up this letter with a telephone call to determine a convenient time and location for the interview.

Your willingness to participate in this evaluation is very important to me, and I appreciate your participation. The enclosed Research Information Sheet describes more about the study including the confidentiality provisions.

Sincerely,

Steven Howard

Appendix B. Participant Information Sheet

Male Managers Talk about Woman Executives

INFORMATION SHEET

Researcher Introduction

You are asked to participate in a research project conducted by Steven Howard, from the Massey University School of Psychology, Palmerston North. Steven is a self-employed consultant who is undertaking this research as a graduate student in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Master of Arts degree in psychology. This research project is design to study how male managers make sense of their experiences of working for women in executive leadership positions.

The supervisor for the research study is Mandy Morgan who is a Senior Lecturer in the Massey University School of Psychology at Palmerston North.

Contact Details:

Researcher: Steven Howard

Research Supervisor: Mandy Morgan
Senior Lecturer
Massey University School of
Psychology

Participant Recruitment

Participants recruited to this study are (or have been) male managers of a New Zealand corporate organization who currently (or have in the last 2 years) reported to a woman CEO or general manager. Due to the qualitative nature of this research study interviews will be conducted with approximately twelve (12) participants only. Potential participants in this study have been identified by referral and publicly available information.

No payment will be provided to individuals for their participation in this study.

There are no known physical or psychological risks likely to affect anyone taking part as a participant in this study.

Project Procedures

The data collected for this research project will be obtained by transcribing the audio taped interviews held with each participant, or in the event that a participant declines permission to tape their interview, from notes taken by the researcher during the interview process. The interviews held with participants will involve questions designed to stimulate conversations centred on the area of interest. Each participant will be invited to check the transcript from his interview and amend, delete or supplement the contents. Analysis of the transcripts will then be undertaken using discourse analytic techniques.

Any information obtained in connection with this research project that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. During transcription all names and other identifying details will be removed and substituted with pseudonyms. Audio tapes and transcripts will be held in locked storage when not in use for the purpose of transcription or analysis during the period of the research project. Audio tapes will either be destroyed or returned to you at the conclusion of the research in terms of your instructions specified on the Consent Form. Transcripts will be retained in locked storage for a period of five (5) years following the conclusion of the research project as is normal for research data.

Participant involvement

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete an in-person interview within the next two months, at a time convenient for you. The interview will require approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The researcher will contact you by telephone to schedule a convenient time.

During the interview, you will be asked questions about your experience of working in an organization headed by a woman executive.

If you agree to participate in this research please complete the attached Consent Form and return it to the researcher.

Participant's Rights

As a participant in this research you have the right to:

- decline to participate or withdraw from the research at any time during the research period (March 2004 to December 2005);
- ask questions about the research at any point;
- refuse to answer any particular question;
- decline for your interview to be recorded on tape and, if you do consent to it being taped, you may request the recording to cease at any time;
- leave the interview or request assistance at any point;
- request return or destruction of any audio tape recordings relating to your participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded;
- request removal or amendment of any part(s) of the transcript resulting from your interview;
- grant or decline consent for your responses to be quoted in the research report.

Support Processes

Should you experience any physical or psychological distress as a result of your participation in this research project please contact either Steven Howard or Mandy Morgan.

Project Contacts

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Steven Howard, or Mandy Morgan, Senior Lecturer, Massey University School of Psychology, Private Bag 11 222 , Palmerston North. \

MUHEC Approval Statement

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Protocol 04/09. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this project, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 350 5249, email humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz

Appendix C. Consent Form

Male Managers Talk about Woman Executives

CONSENT FORM

THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF FIVE (5) YEARS

- I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.
- I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.
- I agree/do not agree to the interview being audio taped.
- I wish the audio tape relating to my interview to be destroyed / returned to me at the conclusion of this study.

Signature:

Date:

.....

Full Name - printed

.....

Appendix D. Indicative Interview Starter Questions

1. How long have been working for? OR How long ago and for what period of time did you work for.....?
2. What is your experience in reporting to a woman leader before working for?
3. Did become your boss before or after you came to hold your current/that position?
4. How does reporting to make you feel?
5. What behaviours did you expect to find in a woman manager?
6. Did you expect anything different than you might have expected from a male manager?
7. Do you believe women make good leaders? If so, in what way? If not, why not?
8. Are there any barriers faced by women in becoming a leader? What?
9. How do you explain the fact that in spite of a few women having made it to leadership positions in New Zealand, they are still under-represented in leadership positions in New Zealand corporations?
10. How do you perceive yourself in terms of questions of gender equality?
11. What does work mean to you in terms of being a man?
12. What specific episodes characterise for you the experience of working for a woman leader?
13. In your experience how do your male colleagues and others regard as a leader? What sorts of things do they say about her as a leader?
14. What characteristics and behaviours make for a good leader?
15. Are women leaders disadvantaged by not being included in social events and activities – such as golf or being interested in sport?
16. Does, or any other woman leader you are aware of, try too hard – as in being more of a guy than the guys? In what ways?
17. Does work mean something different to men and women? If so, in what ways?
18. Would you say that women who make it into leadership roles have been co-opted by the male “system” at the expense of their femininity? If so, can you explain how?
19. What specific action do you take to bring women through into leadership roles within your company?