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Feminism’s marginal problem: Women in management

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Contemporary feminism has, from its inception, been ambivalent in its responses to the issue of women in management. On the one hand, feminists have recognised as a problem the limited numbers of women in management and the barriers that they encounter. They have promoted the development of programs such as affirmative action with, arguably, greater, or lesser success. At the same time, there has been a reluctance by some feminists to attach too much importance to the issue, given the manifestly more severe forms of discrimination encountered by other groups of women. According to this view, the problems of a privileged elite are a lesser priority, that is, marginal to more pressing feminist concerns.

This paper is based on research into career success predictors. It draws on work on culture and models of change in higher education to show that while interventions such as legislation granting maternity leave are significant initiatives to be strongly supported, the impact of such policies is mediated by the social rules of the organisation. These rules are a corollary of enduring value structures which are embedded in organisational cultures.

Research findings showed that the value systems, and especially the social rules which operate within organisations impact on men and women’s career success differently. This research provides valuable insights into the mechanisms operating at several levels (at the organisational level as well as at the level of individual women) which tend to construct women as marginal in management.

Seeking to understand the marginality experienced by women in management has benefits that extend well beyond improving the lot of individual women managers. This is because better conceptualisations of marginality and, concomitantly, power in organisations can provide leverage for more far reaching changes for women generally.

Introduction

Feminists have been ambivalent about according priority to the issue of women in management since the early days of contemporary feminism. There has been reluctance to give too much attention to this issue given, the manifestly more
severe forms of disadvantage and discrimination experienced by other groups of women (Hartley and Mackenzie, Davey, 1997). It has been perceived as marginal to more pressing concerns such as violence against women and children, women and welfare, equal educational opportunities and the provision of equal pay and conditions in employment.

So what is the issue or problem of ‘women in management’? Is it a priority for feminism? If so, why? This paper contends that understanding and analysing the status or position of women in management is far from marginal to feminist concerns. This is because there is an interrelationship between women’s experiences at different levels in organisations which means that the experiences of women at one level impact on women at other levels.

_The ‘facts’ about women in management_

The ‘facts’ about women in management, at one level, are easily grasped. Women, generally, remain under-represented at managerial levels. Occupational segregation means that a narrow range of occupations and management positions tend to be available to women compared with men (Still, 2002). There is also a lack of parity in pay and conditions between men and women at the same levels (Still, 2002).

At the level of representation commentators such as Hede (2000) and Still (2002) observe that there are differences in women’s representation at managerial level between the public and private sectors. They note that women’s representation in management in the Australian public sector compares favourably with other similar countries, whilst in the private sector it is considered likely that there has been no improvement, and possibly a decline in representation since 1986 in companies not covered by the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act (1999).

_Feminist interventions: How successful?_

Feminists have long recognised the workplace as a major social structure or institution which significantly influences women’s access to the economic and social benefits which generally result from participation in paid employment. Organisations and workplaces are important sites for the production and reproduction of the social world. Recent feminist studies have revealed that they are major sites for the social construction of gender (Adkins, 1994; Pringle, 1988).

Across the last three decades feminists have tackled the issue of women’s employment status using a range of strategies including campaigning for equal pay for work of equal value, for merit-based selection processes, for targeted professional development opportunity programs for women and for paid maternity leave. Feminist assessments of the effect of equal opportunity legislation and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and Affirmative Action (AA) programs, which constitute major workplace interventions, have been mixed in Australia (Hede 2000; Poiner and Wills 1991; Burton 1991).

What is clear is the message about the need to posit EEO strategies and programs within a wider program of organisational change management. Kezar (2000) found that political, social cognition and cultural models were especially significant in explaining change in Universities (2000). Whilst suggesting that it is especially important to mobilise strategies for cultural change around symbolism, history and traditions and by seeking to change people’s perspectives or mind maps, she concluded, unsurprisingly, that many aspects of the change process ‘remains elusive’.
We therefore contend that a better understanding of the organisational cultural features that determine marginality is a critical step for moving these debates forward.

*Experiencing / exploring marginality*

Early writings on marginality in cultural psychology (Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1935) have focussed on markers of difference that define group affiliation, such as ethnicity, race, or disability. The exclusion that women experience in organisations parallels the experience of marginality as discussed in this literature. However, the marker of difference is gender, whereby masculinities and femininities are juxtaposed in selves and organisational identities, within contexts that privilege hegemonic masculinity. As a consequence, processes that result in discrimination, prejudice and marginalisation are embedded and activated through gender-polarising processes already existing in organisational culture. A psychological question of importance then is, how do individuals in organisations understand and cope with this complex gender juxtapositioning?

Marginality theory proposes that individuals who live at the juncture of two cultures, and can lay claim to belong to both may be considered as marginal (Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1935; La Fromboise, Coleman, and Gerton, 1995). These theorists further suggest that this form of marginality contributes to psychological conflict, that is, a divided or disjointed self. The common assumption of marginality theory is that living in two cultures is psychologically undesirable because managing the complexity of dual reference points generates ambiguity, identity confusion and normlessness (La Fromboise, Coleman, and Gerton, 1995).

Gender schema theory (Bem, 1981) proposes that sex-typed individuals more readily use gender to process information and create meaning in the world. It also supports the view that gendered personality dispositions are constructed, that is, they are related to gender ideology, or a belief system that divides the social world into dichotomous categories: male and female.

This paper contends that marginality theory (Park, 1928) and gender schema theory (Bem, 1981) together help explain the experiences and effects of marginality. *Gender marginality* theory suggests that both gender and group affiliation are determinants of marginality. It suggests that when conflict arises between gendered cultures, and the individual chooses to lay claim to both, that conflict is internalised and marginality is experienced.

This study unpacks the notion of marginality not only as a social process but also as a psychological state which is experienced internally and accompanied by psychological effects for individuals and organisations.

**Method**

Two studies were conducted as part of this research project. Study one was a qualitative inquiry involving semi-structured interviews with managers in three Australian organisations. Study two was a quantitative inquiry that broadened the participant pool to include all employers in two organisations which aimed to test and further develop the insights gained in Study one.

*Study One*

Study one included three well-established medium sized enterprises: a National metal trades manufacturer (pseudonym: MetalOrg) employing a total of 86 staff; a National computer software company (pseudonym: ComputerOrg), employing 136 staff and a Victorian service provider in the higher education sector (pseudonym:...
EducOrg), employing 39 full time staff supplemented with varying numbers of casual staff.

Participants in this study were 15 females and 20 males (average age 37.3 years). They held positions in their organisations with at least line responsibility or higher, for their department or other employees within their department. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured style around set topics. These topics were developed with an emphasis on exploring the effects of gender on participants’ experiences at work. Of interest was the extent of congruence in values and behaviours between personal identities and organisational culture.

Transcripts were coded using the NUDIST* (1994) package, using categories from gender marginality theory and analysed using an illustrative approach. An illustrative method of analysis uses empirical evidence to illustrate a theory (Neuman, 1994). The transcript data, and the researcher’s analytic memos and notes, were subjected to analysis via methodology appropriate to an illustrative approach.

**Study two**

Study two broadened the scope of the study to include all organisational members in order to map the networks within the organisation and to include the perceptions of subordinates. The main aim was to explore and assess the ways in which marginality was constructed through the relation of the self with the organisation.

Although all three organisations involved in Study one had been invited to participate in Study two, only one, ComputerOrg re-volunteered. Therefore a new organisation was recruited. The new organisation was a medium sized insurance company (InsurOrg), with 126 employees at the time of study. Of the population, 62 respondents from ComputerOrg and 88 from InsurOrg were included Study two. The sample comprised 73 males and 77 females.

Marginality was conceptualised as differences between self and organisation ratings on a set of traits and values. The operationalisation of marginality was achieved through reducing (through principal axis analysis) 63 gender related traits (Antill, Cunningham, Russell and Thompson, 1981; Helmreich, Spence, and Wilhelm, 1981; Bem, 1974; Heilbrun, 1976), and 36 values (Rokeach, 1973) to six marginality scales. Three were associated with stereotypically feminine characteristics (Expressive, Communal, Inner Happiness), and three were associated with more stereotypically masculine characteristics (Autonomy, Social Conformity, Explorational). A description of the marginality scales is provided in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marginality Scales</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expressive</td>
<td>Has a strong feminine orientation, with a focus on concern for others, compassion and empathy. Also included sensitivity to others, affection, awareness of feelings of others, helpfulness, sympathy and understanding. All items were socially desirable feminine traits as defined in the original sex role scales.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>Has a strong masculine orientation with characteristics such as dominance, decisiveness, strength, assertiveness, risk taking and leadership. All items were socially desirable masculine traits as categorised by the original sex role scales. The factor loadings Expressive and Autonomy mirrored those found by Coan (1989) and Palermo (1992).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Communal

Has a strong feminine orientation such as an orientation towards world peace, world beauty, family security, national security, loving, forgiving etc. These values appeared to describe a sense of world order with a sense of comfort being expressed through equilibrium and connectedness. This factor resembled a factor extracted by Braithwaite (1998).

Explorational

Has a strong masculine orientation (see Feather 1984), with a focus on excitement in life, accomplishment, broadminded, imaginative, courageous, capable and intellectual. It appeared to describe a sense of expansion and growth through interpersonal and intra-personal dynamics.

Social Conformity

Has a stronger masculine orientation (see Feather 1984). Defined by values that espouse a sense of an ordered social world, that provides both enabling and constricting elements. Characteristics of this dimension were enabling values such as pleasure, comfort, social recognition, and instrumental values that espouse social mores such as obedience, responsibility and politeness. This factor appeared to mirror a factor also found by Braithwaite (1998) which captured values that ensure safety and protection through adherence to social mores and the acquisition of status.

Inner Harmony

Has a strong feminine orientation, (also found by Feather 1984), with a focus on inner harmony, self-respect, mature love, true friendship and honesty. These values appeared to reflect an internal focus and desire to achieve a sense of equanimity within oneself and with others. Cronbach’s alpha for organisation ratings alpha was 0.86, and for self-ratings alpha was 0.82.

Findings

The findings from both studies confirm that women managers continue to experience marginality in the workplace. However, they offer different but complementary insights into the problems and issues associated with the experience of marginality.

Findings: Study one – examining marginality

The qualitative research found that women managers continue to experience structural and cultural discrimination and exclusion. These include perceptions that female managers are in some way ‘deviant’, difficulties in negotiating a management approach that accommodates the way they personally ‘do’ gender, and the organisation’s gendered expectations of managers. They also show that women experience significant internal conflict in attempting to match their individual value systems with those of the organisation.

This research also resulted in some positive findings. It showed that women managers do see themselves as change agents in an organisation, however willingly or not they accept the role. They deployed a range of ‘gender management’ strategies to survive as managers, which could be considered in a positive light, even if these are not always strategies that all feminists can endorse. Further, there is evidence that women managers can succeed in subverting and changing an organisation’s social rules.

The work/home nexus

Although participants in Study one acknowledged that their organisations had gone some of the way in implementing work-life friendly policies, they also acknowledged
that in practice, these policies were not perceived as congruent with the demands of the management or work role. This confirms findings by Lewis (2001), who explains that when these policies are not mainstreamed, their take up is often poor.

Women were particularly adamant that home and work should be kept separate, but for them, unlike men, success in one sphere was related to success in the other. Some women in the study experienced immense conflict managing the demands of home and work which was primarily expressed in terms of quality of life issues. The ultimate consequence of this conflict in a number of cases was the stated intention to leave the organisation. The resolution of the work-home dilemma for women in the study often resulted in compromise and sacrifice.

**Women managers as deviant**

Male managers’ responses to women in management revealed a reticence that may be associated with the perceived deviant position that women hold as managers. Responses to the questions posed about ‘women in management’ were met by a variety of nervous reactions from the majority of men, such as coughing or nervous laughter. This suggests that the questioning itself was linked to confronting the status quo in the workplace, which was later confirmed by female managers’ perceptions. It appeared that these were not questions that male managers were comfortable in addressing.

The interviews with senior managers were littered with attempted humour and narratives constructed from language derived from the lexicon of political correctness. Stereotypes informed managers’ views of women in management. The question also provoked narratives about other oppressed groups, suggesting that the classification ‘woman’ was generally related to classifications of ‘other’.

*Researcher: What’s your view of women in management?*

*Manager 2: Excellent, doesn’t um..., it doesn’t really worry me this gender business at all. The gender, sexuality, colour, it doesn’t concern me at all, there’s good women, bad women, good black people, good white people, I couldn’t be concerned.*

However, some men, apparently more aware of the gendered processes that impede women’s career success, flagrantly admitted that ‘men did not respect women managers’.

Both women and men attributed causes for the lack of women in senior roles to women’s lack of experience rather than lack of structural opportunity. However, female managers also explained men’s fears as a reaction to women disrupting the status quo, particularly in relation to attitudes and behaviours in the workplace.

**Juggling gender: Organisational gender and the gendered self**

Female managers in this study felt that women in managerial roles were caught between dichotomous modes of behaviour: feminine and masculine. To survive in the wider organisation, they felt that they had to adopt a masculine mode of behaviour. However, the women faced criticisms for diverging from expected role behaviours. They were caught in the juncture between gender-prescribed categories. They described instances where they were often criticised for being too masculine or too feminine by both men and women.

In general, being too feminine appeared to involve being too sympathetic, too caring, not objective, frightened and insecure. Being too masculine appeared to involve being too aggressive, and not communicative.
As reported by Sheppard (1992) and Stiver (1999), masculinity is equated with being business-like and professional. In trying to understand what 'being professional' means, Stiver (1999) suggested that 'professional' is equated to 'being like a man' (p. 228). It coincides with a fantasy that involves 'men [moving] through every work situation strong, confident, self-sufficient, and clearly not emotional, because to be emotional is the worst kind of unprofessionalism'.

'Gender management' strategies

Female managers described strategies they had used, or seen others use, to address gender bias in organisational processes, or deal with cultural expectations. Sheppard (1992) and Cassell and Walsh (1997) found that women in their studies also employed a suite of 'gender management strategies'. These comprised strategies for 'blending in', such as overfunctioning: working harder than male colleagues; underfunctioning: deliberately keeping a low profile; flirtation: using sexuality as a form of power; the mask: withholding personal information and appearing to assimilate to dominant models of behaviour; and mothering: adopting a nurturing role in the organisation.

Some women in this study described their gender management strategies as comprising overfunctioning behaviours, such as attaining educational qualifications that were 'solid', indisputable and often higher than their male counterparts, and 'being better' generally, on all other areas of performance than their male counterparts. Other strategies involved building strong expressive ties with other women and men in and outside their organisations.

Some female managers also described strategies that could be defined as underfunctioning, such as working to rule and not volunteering their opinions about how to improve the workplace or organisational wellbeing. Decisions to adopt these strategies had in the main been reached after women's efforts had been ignored or unacknowledged by the organisational senior management team. Therefore, they appeared to be a reaction to disillusionment and disappointment with experiences of discrimination and barriers to success.

Some women stated their belief that it was futile to confront the status quo head on.

_I see women doing it in a way that I think is the wrong way quite often, I see them getting...very aggressive, and trying to impose themselves on the status quo which in my book is a waste of energy ..._

They explained that 'fitting in' was a necessary requirement for survival in male dominated domains, and being combative with male counterparts was counteractive to that end. Therefore they designed 'mask' strategies around 'ignoring' or 'joining' behaviours that expressed masculine and sometimes misogynist views, such as sexist language and humour. They also designed strategies around suppressing their femininity in an attempt to 'harden themselves' as described by one female manager at MetalOrg:

_I can tell a lot of people are shocked, they probably think I am rough. But I do not care about what they think, I am way past caring what they think. If I had cared about what they'd think I basically wouldn't have survived in this place._

Women managers as change agents

Most of the women in managerial positions across the three organisations saw themselves as change agents in some form or other, describing this role as a 'necessary burden'. They perceived their successes in both personal and collective terms. They were particularly aware of the structural factors that impeded their
career success and the presence of the 'glass ceiling' within their own and other
women's experiences and had therefore become involved in activities intended to
improve the position of women in their organisations. These ranged from being
central to the women's networks in their organisations, and therefore providing
other women with models of behaviour (for 'successful women') and support, to
acknowledging that central to their goals was the active shaping of the
organisational culture in order to remove impediments for other women.

As a woman I am interested in women's issues so a lot of my work, the money that I
have raised just by the sweat of my brow, I have raised for women's issues, like
women writers and that kind of thing. I wouldn't do it just for men writers and I can't
imagine a man would do that.

**Overcoming or resolving gender conflict**

Unlike managers in the other organisations participating in the study, managers at
EducOrg believed they had 'resolved' the gender problem. They believed that while
people were promoted on the basis of ability, EducOrg had achieved a good gender
balance in their management structure. This had not always been the case
however.

Female managers acknowledged that women had increased their representation in
management at EducOrg through having a feminist President, and other like-
mined staff. The organisation's social justice philosophy had also aided in
changing the culture. The male managers acknowledged that EducOrg provided
women with more of a level playing field, with value being placed on providing
opportunities, and most importantly, encouragement for women to succeed.

*It's happened a lot through having a woman as President. They obviously thought it
was important to have women employed in key areas, and I think it is just that the
men never thought of it in that way.*

In EducOrg feminist ideologies in leadership were attributed to turning these views
around. It is also worth noting that EducOrg was situated within a large university
environment that may have already been disposed to more expressive and
communal value orientations.

This supports our view that adverse consequences for women are more strongly
evident in organisational cultures devoid of these characteristics. The impacts of
these findings are in highlighting the importance of making values explicit within
organisational contexts. As we have seen from the women's narratives, where the
influence of gender polarisation remain veiled, women's marginal positions are
more likely to be attributed to their individual deviance. The attribution is made at
the expense of scrutinizing the organisation's propensity to espouse only those
cultural domains admissible by hegemonic masculinity.

**Findings: Study two – defining and measuring marginality**

Study two aimed to further explore the nature of marginality by particularly teasing
out personal and organisational determinants. Marginality was operationalised as
incongruence between personal values and those perceived in the organisations.
The operationalisation of marginality allowed a way to tap into unconscious
processes of identity formation that enabled the exploration of the internal conflict
manifested as marginality.

To test the hypothesis that women would experience greater degrees of marginality,
a six (marginality scales) x two (sex) Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted
for each organisation separately.
Results showed that marginality was experienced differently in the two organisations studied. All participants experienced higher levels of marginality in InsurOrg and in particular, women experienced greater marginality in relation to Expressiveness ($F(1,86) = 6.32$, $MS = 1.17$, $p<.05$). In ComputerOrg women experienced greater marginality along the Social Conformity dimension ($F(1,60) = 5.25$, $MS = .47$, $p<.05$).

In order to investigate what determined these differences for males and females between organisations on self and organisation ratings from which marginality scales were comprised, further ANOVAs were performed. Results are shown in Table 2. They indicated that there were more differences between self and organisational ratings (for both men and women) along those dimensions that are stereotypically associated with femininity: Expressive, Communal, and Inner Harmony. A closer look at univariate statistics confirmed that marginality was more likely to be constructed through the absence of feminine values in organisational ratings, rather than a propensity for women to be more ‘feminine’ than men.

**Table 2**
Mean differences between males/females on gender organisation ratings/self-ratings scales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males Means (St. Deviations)</th>
<th>Females Means (St. Deviations)</th>
<th>Total Means (St. Deviations)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self Ratings</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressive</td>
<td>5.32 (0.56)</td>
<td>5.52 (0.65)</td>
<td>5.41 (0.76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.54)</td>
<td>(.76)</td>
<td>(.73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>InsurOrg</td>
<td>5.41 (0.58)</td>
<td>5.88 (0.65)</td>
<td>5.67 (0.73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.76)</td>
<td>(.73)</td>
<td>(.73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>4.91 (0.70)</td>
<td>5.06 (0.73)</td>
<td>4.98 (0.70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.70)</td>
<td>(.73)</td>
<td>(.71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communal</td>
<td>3.97 (0.56)</td>
<td>4.22 (0.51)</td>
<td>4.08 (0.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.53)</td>
<td>(.51)</td>
<td>(.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration</td>
<td>4.1 (0.39)</td>
<td>4.1 (0.43)</td>
<td>4.10 (0.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.39)</td>
<td>(.43)</td>
<td>(.41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Conformity</td>
<td>3.87 (0.39)</td>
<td>4.00 (0.50)</td>
<td>3.93 (0.44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.39)</td>
<td>(.50)</td>
<td>(.44)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner Harmony</td>
<td>4.26 (0.36)</td>
<td>4.52 (0.42)</td>
<td>4.38 (0.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.36)</td>
<td>(.42)</td>
<td>(.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a: n (males) = 34; n (females) = 28; N = 62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b: n (males) = 39; n (females) = 49; N = 88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i: F(1,60) = 4.27, MS = 2.31, p&lt;.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii: F(1,86) = 9.79, MS = 4.78, p&lt;.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii: F(1,86) = 17.66, MS = 3.58, p&lt;.001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv: F(1,60) = 6.87, MS = .99, p&lt;.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v: F(1,86) = 11.41, MS = 2.03, p&lt;.01</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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In ComputerOrg females in particular described their organisational culture as Expressive. However unexpectedly, females in ComputerOrg did not describe themselves in other feminine terms, (apart from Inner Harmony) any more so than did males (F(1,60) = 6.87, MS = .99, p<.05).

However, the results were quite different in InsurOrg. There were significant differences between males and females on self-ratings on Expressive (F(1,86) = 9.79, MS = 4.78, p<.01), Communal, (F(1,86) = 17.66, MS = 3.58, p<.001) and Inner Harmony (F(1,86) = 11.41, MS = 2.03, p<.01) scales. There were no differences between males and females in their self-descriptions on characteristics stereotypically associated with masculinity.

These findings, taken together, and summarised in Table 3, suggest that the determinants of marginality differed for women in each organisation. In InsurOrg women were more likely to describe themselves in stereotypically feminine terms, and less likely to use the same descriptors for their organisation. Whereas women in ComputerOrg described themselves in feminine terms, and described their organisation in more expressive terms. Therefore perceptions of self-identity and organisational-identity appeared more balanced for women (and men) in ComputerOrg. As further evidence of an imbalance in InsurOrg, men were also more likely to report higher means on Autonomy than males in ComputerOrg. It is not surprising then that employees of InsurOrg overall experienced greater marginality.

These finding suggest that when the organisational culture is described by women in accordance with values to which they affiliate, they will tend to experience less marginality. In addition, the results in ComputerOrg suggest that when Expressive values are evident in the organisational culture, women will be more likely to identify them than men. Therefore, as proposed by gender marginality theory, marginality is a determinant of conflict between two cultures that women lay claim to, but only in so far as that conflict is consciously recognised through differences between self and organisation gender identity and the salience of gender issues raised by ones' group affiliation, in this case, to the group women.

**Table 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>InsurOrg</th>
<th>ComputerOrg</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Significant Differences on Marginality Scales</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All respondents indicate higher means on all marginality scales</td>
<td>All respondents indicate lower means on all marginality scales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females report higher means than males on the <strong>Expressive</strong> scale</td>
<td>Females report higher means than males on the <strong>Social Conformity</strong> scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Significant Differences on Gender and Values Scales</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females report higher means than males on self descriptions on the <strong>Expressive</strong> scale</td>
<td>Females report higher means than males on organisation descriptions on the <strong>Expressive</strong> scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females report higher means than males on self descriptions on the <strong>Communal</strong> scale</td>
<td>Females report higher means than males on organisation descriptions on the <strong>Expressive</strong> scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females report higher means than males on self descriptions on the <strong>Inner Harmony</strong> scale</td>
<td>Females report higher means than males on self descriptions on the <strong>Inner Harmony</strong> scale</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

70
## Significant Differences by Sex and Organisation on all scales

| Males report higher means than males in ComputerOrg on self descriptions of Autonomy | Females report higher means than females in InstrOrg on organisation descriptions of Expressive |
| Females report higher means than females in ComputerOrg on the Explorational scale |

Unexpectedly, there were no differences between men and women on other marginality measures, including Autonomy. This suggests that both women and men in the organisations studied were adept at ‘doing’ masculinity, as required by the demands of their gendered environments. These findings suggest that women, rather than being unable to adapt their behaviours and values towards masculine modalities, were succeeding as well as the men in their endeavours. However, they also described themselves in more nurturing, communal and accepting terms. Therefore, rather than being a determinant of individual differences, the factor that discriminated the organisations on levels of marginality appeared to be perceptions of the existence of Expressive values and practices in the organisation.

These findings suggest that the determinants of marginality in a given organisational culture may be determined by the imbalance within that organisation’s value spectrum more so than any significant differences between men’s and women’s personal dispositions, characteristics, behaviours and abilities.

## The implications

So what are the implications of this study of marginality and women in management for contemporary feminists concerned to achieve changes for women in organisations and in management? What does this study contribute to our understanding of women in management in Universities?

The problem, as Meyerson and Fletcher (2000, p. 127) state, is that ‘gender discrimination now is so deeply embedded in organisational life as to be virtually indiscernible’. The social rules and value systems operating in organisations are frequently unstated and often denied and yet, as this study shows, they are an important indicator of marginality. Where individual and organisational value systems conflict, women managers will experience marginality. It is evident, then, that structural workplace changes without cultural change are likely to be ineffective. If we propose that cultural change ‘from the top’ is required in an organisation, such as that evidenced in EducOrg, then what features of that culture need to be specifically targeted? The answer suggested by this research is that marginality is more likely to be constructed when the organisational culture is devoid of ‘feminine’ values, and in particular ‘expressive’ values. Women can adapt their behaviours and can move more freely across gendered cultures when these values or orientations are strongly embedded in the organisational culture.

While a better understanding of the causes of marginality may assist women in understanding their plight, can we say more about the types of cultural interventions required to help them alleviate and prevent the effects of marginality?

Kezar (2000) suggests that cultural models of change are best utilised in university contexts. She also suggests that it is important to deploy a range of formal and
informal political processes and means designed to secure maximum support for the proposed changes. She specifies ‘persuasion, informal negotiation, mediation and coalition-building’. In her view, gradual change is more easily achieved than major change, and organisations should strive to create homeostasis and balance external forces with the internal environment. She also suggests the need to articulate and maintain core characteristics.

While we support Kezar’s contention that targeting the cultural domain is critical for achieving change, she is silent on which features of the organisational culture require targeting, and in what priority. The contribution that this paper makes is in providing valuable pointers regarding what to target at the organisational cultural level based on theoretical understandings.

We propose that it is the absence and denial of values stereotypically associated with femininity in organisational cultures that provide the conditions within which women continue to experience marginality in organisations. It is therefore important that feminists intervene to ensure that expressive values are clearly expressed and that they are expressed in organisations in ‘people friendly’ ways. This means that efforts need to be made to facilitate the deployment of these values in cultural symbols and artefacts, such as missions, strategic plans and in processes such as work-planning human resources and promotion processes. If we ensure that the values articulated through the whole range of organisational documents and processes tend across the whole of the gender spectrum rather than favouring those values associated with hegemonic masculinity then we should have the basis for a framework required to build more sustainable and equitable cultures in Universities. We contend that it is only once these values are deliberately enacted, such as in the case of EducOrg, that ‘doing equity’ can advantage women at the different levels of the university hierarchy, including management.

References


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1 Details of four principal axis analyses conducted to form two gender and four values ratings scales are available upon request to the authors.