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**Book Review — Digitized Version**

[Rezension] Gary N. Powell: Women and men in management. Beverly Hills [u.a.]: Sage, 1988

Organization studies: An international multidisciplinary journal devoted to the study of organization, organizing, and the organized in and between societies

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## Book Reviews

### Gary N. Powell: *Women and Men in Management*

1988, Beverly Hills, London: Sage. 260 pages.

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Gary Powell took on a major task: to review the large body of literature on women in management that has emerged in the past 15 or so years. His purpose is to focus attention on how women and men interact in the workplace. Laurie Larwood, a pioneer in research on women in management, honours this publication in her introduction by writing 'with this book, a circle has been successfully turned and closed'. Both Powell and Larwood feel that the time is right for a transition in perspectives. They stress that enough has been achieved in research specifically on women in management to warrant closing this particular stream of investigation and to open a new one on women *and* men. While I am sympathetic to their aim, I disagree with the premise on which it is based, and therefore propose a very different research strategy. A look at the focus of the research conscientiously reviewed by Powell and the conclusions it permits serves to document my concerns.

The book is organized in eight chapters. It opens with a brief historical overview of the economic roles of women and men that is designed to provide an understanding of the traditions on which gender stereotypes are based. Chapter 2 confronts these stereotypes with the results of research on actual sex differences and explores the influence and consequences of childhood socialization on the development of girls and boys. Next, studies on how individuals and organizations make employment decisions are reviewed, examining how factors such as the sex segregation of occupations, biases of recruiters, personal characteristics and life situations affect decisions. The effects of gender stereotypes on the work relationships between male and female peers are treated in Chapter 4, including the issues of sexuality and harassment. Research on sex differences in managerial behaviour is reported in the following chapter and the concept of androgynous managers is discussed. The body of career path research on female and male managers is looked at in Chapter 6. Equal opportunities practices and experiences are presented in Chapter 7, including factors engendering resistance, on the part of both men and women, to attempts to end sex discrimination. The book concludes with two scenarios, one postulating little change, another suggesting the achievement of greater equality of opportunity in organizations, the reduction of sex differences, and the improvement of male/female work relationships.

A thread running through all the chapters is the examination of the validity of stereotypes and their impact on managers. A great deal of effort has been given by researchers in this area to distinguish between *sex differences* and *gender differences*. The concept of sex differences refers to how males and females *actually* differ, that of gender differences is used to focus on

how people *think* males and females differ. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the general conclusion drawn from the literature, is that the impact of people's belief in stereotypes is significantly greater than the empirical validity of their substance. Research shows that the less information managers have about an individual, the more likely they are to take recourse to stereotypical expectations, and this effect is often found to be heightened when decision-makers base their decision on what they believe are other people's biases (e.g., those of other employees or clients). The consequences of these findings for recruitment decisions in particular are obvious.

A second thread that emerges from Powell's review of the literature is the gradual shift in focus from research examining individual women as representatives of their sex in companies to seeking an understanding of how group conditions influence the behaviour of women in management. A key consequence of this shift was that no longer were women automatically seen as 'the problem', since the situation itself came to be recognized as contributing to the barriers women faced in their development as managers. The distinction drawn between uniform, balanced, tilted, and skewed groups and the strategies available to the members of the groups in each situation, for example, cast a very different light on the tendency of some women managers to make little attempt to advertise their accomplishments, to mention but one trait. This is not necessarily simply 'typically female retiring behaviour' but rather the logical choice of one survival option for a token member of a skewed group. One factor Powell does not mention is that valuable insights for this research have also come from work on minorities and on immigrants in the United States. They have helped to explain forms of behaviour that had previously quasi automatically been attributed to 'female nature'. The tendency for immigrants to work particularly hard on their tasks and pay somewhat less attention to organizational politics than the members of the traditional dominant group is but one example. Research on the psychology of minorities in their indirect exercise of power through dominants goes some way towards cracking the myths of the 'natural' inability of women to exert power directly.

The shift from a purely individual to a group perspective in research on women in management was accompanied by work on institutional factors hindering women in companies. Such research reveals that the roots of problems often lie not only with the men and women in organizations but with the very rules, structures, and processes embodied in these organizations. Powell reviews literature in this area and closes most of the chapters with a practical discussion of the implications for management. For example, he outlines the steps a company can take to introduce a policy on sexual harassment. For example, he suggests that companies should become more active in schools to influence the formation of occupational aspirations and expectations in the socialization of children, and at another point he sketches the key ingredients of an effective equal opportunities management system.

This book, then, is a useful compendium of a great body of research, up to the present time, on women in management. Both for the reader who is seeking an introduction to the field and for those who are familiar with the area and need an accessible overview over the many studies that have been conducted, it is a valuable publication. It is unfortunate that it is limited to research conducted in the United States; no reference is made to the work that has been done in Europe. Even more unfortunate is the fact that no attempt has been made to integrate perspectives from research outside dominant management paradigms: emerging feminist research is not treated.

These two weaknesses are not Powell's alone. In this sense he is a faithful mirror of his fellow researchers (male and female) in the United States. It would, in fact, be almost unfair to point this out if this book purported only to be a review of past work. It is, however, a cause for concern since Powell would also like to suggest a future agenda, an undertaking for which he receives support from Larwood. Taking a step back to look at the development of the field as it is reflected in this conscientious book, one cannot help but be struck by its lack of originality. Reduced to their essence, the majority of mainstream studies on women in management to date have done little more than to prove that women are not as bad at management as they are reputed to be! An unfortunate amount of time appears to have been spent by the research community on proving or disproving stereotypes and much confusion seems to have been contributed by 'laboratory-type' research situations. The fact that Terborg bemoaned the distorting effect of artificial conditions on research results in 1977 already did nothing to stem the flow of such work (conducted particularly assiduously by American business school professors on their students).

Powell and Larwood propose that the time has come to 'close the circle', and Powell cites emerging mainstream management literature that is searching for new models of managerial behaviour, having found that the traditional masculine model is no longer appropriate (if it ever really was). The image of the circle is unhappily apt in describing the state of the field: a figure that remains flat on the surface and does not lead to new avenues. There is an urgent need for greater depth and innovative perspectives. I would therefore propose that we think more in terms of a spiral and seek impulses by delving into sources that have remained for far too long foreign to traditional literature on women in management in particular and management in general. A major step in this direction would be to pursue the lines of inquiry suggested by Jean Baker Miller and Carol Gilligan to mention but two of the most prominent scholars who have sought to explore from a feminist perspective such basic management issues as the use of power and the development of moral judgement. Rather than starting from traditional male management models and values, and measuring the ways women do or do not deviate from them, these scholars are trying to uncover and give voice to alternative female models and values. These two points of departure naturally lead to diverging

outcomes. Whereas studies in the former approach culminate in the observation that some difference between men and women is 'OK' or that a new kind of sameness (androgynous management) can be generated, the latter is propelled by a sense that there is value in difference and power in diversity. The greatest contribution to creative thinking in this field has been made by the British researcher Judi Marshall, whose book *Women Managers. Travellers in a Male World* should become required reading for all students of management. When they turn to this, after having read the careful review of standard research provided by Powell, they may be disappointed by the sterility of much of the work to date and amazed by how much remains to be discovered outside 'the circle'. For the sake of all of us who work in organizations, it is to be hoped that many will try to explore the stimulating horizons pioneers in management thought, such as Marshall, open for us.

<b>References</b>	<p>Miller, Jean Baker 1976 <i>Towards a new psychology of women</i>. Boston: Beacon Press.</p> <p>Gilligan, Carol 1982 <i>In a different voice</i>. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.</p>	<p>Marshall, Judi 1984 <i>Women managers. Travellers in a male world</i>. Chichester: Wiley.</p> <p>Terborg, James R. 1977 'Women in management: a research review'. <i>Journal of Applied Psychology</i> 62/6: 647-664.</p>
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