

**Gender bias in organisations: From the arts to
individualised coaching.**

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Chapter 1: Towards workplace gender equality: an introduction

Gender stereotypes are a generalised view or a preconception about the attributes and characteristics of a particular group. In the case of this study, those specific groups are women professionals and leaders. Gender stereotype threat is the fear that a person's behaviour may confirm an existing stereotype of a group with which that person identifies, which can negatively impact an individual's behaviour. This book investigates the potential of arts-based methods in management education to moderate the impact of gender stereotype threat for women. Gender in organisations is a mature field that has been given much attention over the past thirty years. Meanwhile, arts-based approaches in management education is an adolescent field that has gained momentum since the early 2000s. The literature in both fields is extensive, and specifically there is an ever-growing interest in the impact of gender stereotypic behaviour in the workplace (Eagly and Heilman, 2016), and the untapped potential of arts-based methods (Sutherland and Jelinek, 2015). Further, Roberts and Creary (2013) suggested that navigating 'the self' is critical for working in a diverse world, and can actively engage individuals in shaping, and sustaining their own identity, which may serve well to challenge the complexities in a gendered work environment. This notion is a good fit with arts-based learning that revolves around emotional and subjective outcomes with the potential to influence the current dominant pedagogy in management education.

In the introduction to this book, we draw on the existing data and studies of the social and economic participation of women, gender in the workplace, and the failure to deliver gender equality.

1.1 Social and economic participation of women

The norms governing women's social and economic participation have changed over the past 30 years. One of the key developments in the UK was the introduction of the Equal Pay Act (1970), prohibiting any less favourable treatment of men and women in terms of pay; the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) promoting equality of opportunity between men and women; the Employment Protection Act (1975) making it illegal to sack a woman due to pregnancy; the lone parent income support changes (2008), which changed conditions for lone parent income support; and the changes to women's state pension age (2010), which increased the number of women working past 60 (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2018). Further, the last thirty years has seen dramatic and important changes in the world of work in the form of globalisation, workplace and society, including increased competitive pressures, disruptive technologies and greater social, ecological and sustainability consciousness (Christensen *et al.*, 2018; Purvis *et al.*, 2018). Significant changes in the workplace include: a global shift from a manufacturing-based economy to an information- and service-based one, benefitting women's employment in management positions, by increasing the value of 'brain power' over 'muscle power'; organisations' desire for a competitive advantage by mapping employees to their customer base; and more women in full-time higher education leading to more women being available for management positions (Powell, 1999).

Over the same period, the intersection between work and family life has also changed allowing more women to work (for example, women choosing to remain single, defer marriage or have 'house husbands') (Hurn, 2013); freedom of choice in reproduction

(Powell, 1999); more organisations introducing programmes to support family or caring needs (Hurn, 2013); lower fertility rates (Adsera, 2004); and an increase in single parent households fuelled by higher divorce rates (OECD, 2011). These changes have all contributed to an increase in the numbers of women employed in the UK. This meteoric rise led to an increase in female employment rates, which reached a record high at 72% in 2020, illustrated in Figure 1 below. However, it should be noted that the increase is partly due to changes in the state pension age for women.

INSERT - Figure 1: Male and Female Employment Rates: UK Jan, 1971 – March, 2020

The UK employment rate for men aged 16 – 64 was 78.6% in July-September 2020, indicating that the gap between the employment rate for men and women was about 6.6 percentage points, which represents the smallest gap in this indicator since comparable records began in 1971 (ONS, 2020). Furthermore, 40% of women in employment were working part-time in 2019, compared to 13% of men (House of Commons Library, 2020), and 54.7% of women report working on ‘zero hours contracts’ (a contract with no guaranteed minimum hours), compared to their share in employment not on ‘zero hours contracts’ (46.8%). In addition, it should be noted that 66% of people on ‘zero hours contracts’ are working part-time, compared to 25.3% of people in employment who are not on zero hours contracts (ONS, 2018b).

Furthermore, there remains a gender pay gap for full-time workers which is entirely in favour of men in all occupations, although occupational crowding has an effect since those occupations with the smallest gender pay gap have almost equal employment shares between men and women. Holding all other factors constant, for 2017 women's pay growth in respect of age was lower than men's pay growth, and also stopped growing at a younger age. From age 40 onwards, the gap widens reaching its peak between the ages of 50 to 59 (ONS, 2018a). The gender pay gap among all employees in the UK was 15.5% in 2020 (Office National Statistics, 2020).

Despite the increase in female employment rates, the proportion of women in managerial and senior positions is reportedly modest across all sectors. In 'public life', the proportion of women in managerial and senior positions increased from 31% in 2001 to 35% in 2016 (House of Commons Library, 2018). This proportion is, however, 23.6% for Managers, Directors and Senior Officials, as defined in the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) (ONS, 2010). The percentage of women managers remains higher in 'traditional' female sectors – for example, health and social services, and human resources (House of Commons Library, 2018). Data shows that women's representation on the Financial Times Stock Exchange (FTSE) 100 boards has risen from 11% in 2007 to 28.6% in 2019 (Hampton-Alexander Review, 2019).

Women are outnumbered by men in leadership positions in the neighbouring European Union's (EU) corporate sector. On average, only 23.3% of board members of the largest publicly listed companies in the EU are women. This represents an

increase from 11.9% in 2010 when the EU first put the issue of women in leadership positions high on the political agenda. However, there is still considerable progress to be achieved if gender balance is to be attained (European Commission, 2016).

The above dramatic and important changes in the workforce have focussed researchers and theorists on the many benefits that women could bring to the workplace. Firstly, gender diversity enables improved financial performance and organisational credibility (Perrault, 2015). Secondly, improved governance and ethics result from enriched decision-making (Watson, 2015). Thirdly, female talent can be leveraged by increasing the understanding of gender policy issues through more prevalence of female role models (Terjesen *et al.*, 2014). Finally, improved ratings for corporate social responsibility can be achieved (Bear *et al.*, 2010). The balance of evidence from the literature concludes that gender diversity is required for more fundamental reasons other than organisational performance alone, suggesting a broader duty towards various stakeholders. Furthermore, greater diversity signals to stakeholders that the organisation pays attention to women and minorities, being socially responsible which results in enhanced corporate reputations and potentially positively impacting on performance.

1.2 Potential of arts-based methods in supporting workplace equality

The data quoted above shows that the efforts of governments and organisations to address gender inequality in the workplace have achieved only symbolic (Lee-Gosselin *et al.*, 2013), but tokenistic results. Gendered behaviours are passively developed in childhood and adolescence from the observation of social norms

(Marcus and Harper, 2014). This social enculturation establishes and teaches individuals the accepted norms and values of the culture of society as well as its accepted behaviour. In response to gendered behaviours in the workplace, the literature reports that leader characteristics are changing to incorporate both male and female qualities (Berkery *et al.*, 2013). However, violating acceptable gender norms can have a significant impact on work-life harmony, as women attempt to deal with the various challenges in today's organisations. In this respect, women are also affected by other cultural factors that create a labyrinth of numerous barriers, such as household and childcare responsibilities. Scientific research that appears to have given attention to studies that fit prevailing cultural norms (Eagly and Heilman, 2016) – thus discouraging studies that can reveal the true complexity and consequences of gender from those most significantly impacted – is causing growing unease amongst authors and researchers. Furthermore, management education programmes have not adequately tackled gendered issues in the workplace (Kelan and Dunkley Jones, 2010), as leadership is generally presented as being gender neutral and culturally neutral. As such, leadership theorists have failed to acknowledge the impact of those factors, including gender stereotypes, which in turn, has created problems in the development of tomorrow's leaders, who need to understand their own preferred styles and behaviours, and how these may differ from those preferred by others (Eagly and Chin, 2010). Therefore, this study adopts an unconventional kind of management education, an arts-based approach to provide a broader humanistic perspective and prepare women leaders to cope with behaviours associated with gender stereotypes, which potentially hinder career aspirations and/or career progression.

Social scientists concur that using arts-based methods in management learning provides an opportunity to explore the aesthetic sphere affording alternative ways for leaders to make sense of increasing complexities beyond the boundaries of scientific methods and analytical reasoning (Adler, 2006). Aesthetics comes from *aisthetikos* whose Greek meaning is “sense perception”. Barnard (1938) described five key elements of aesthetics: ‘feeling’ (showing emotion or sensitivity); ‘judgement’ (the ability to come to sensible conclusions); ‘sense’ (sight, smell, hearing, taste, touch); ‘proportion and balance’ (equilibrium in judgement); and ‘appropriateness’ (fit for purpose). Many researchers agree that aesthetics presents fertile ground for experiential learning, innovation, creation, and improvisation (Koivunen and Wennes, 2011; Sutherland and Jelinek, 2015) that lead to an ‘intelligence of feeling’ as described by Witkin (2009, p.59). Aesthetics and the arts have comparable qualities which have been understood for many years:

‘abstract art frees our brain from the dominance of reality, enabling it to flow within its inner states, create new emotional and cognitive associations, and activate brain-states that are otherwise harder to access’ (Aviv, 2014, p.1).

These behaviours of compassion, understanding, and feeling are described by Sutherland (2012, p. 26) as ‘the soft issues of managing and leading’. Social scientists agree that using arts-based methods in management education provides an opportunity to explore the aesthetic sphere, thus affording alternative ways for leaders to make sense of increasing complexities beyond the boundaries of scientific methods and analytical reasoning. This aspect, in turn, affords the transformation of the experiences through the development of non-rational or non-logical capabilities in a

personified way to cultivate human potential and experiential knowing (Springborg and Sutherland, 2015; Springborg and Ladkin, 2018).

1.3 Theories supporting an arts-based methods approach

Arts-based methods flow from the underlying assumption that such methods can make important information available for sensemaking and reflection (Springborg, 2010), which can have a profound impact on an individuals' understanding of an experience or situation (Taylor and Ladkin, 2009). Further, traditional, rational-orientated means of doing education are recognised as not meeting the challenges found in organisations today (Adler, 2011, Edwards *et al.*, 2013), and that the wider adoption of experiential learning methods in executive education and leadership development could be beneficial (Weick, 1998; Kolb and Kolb, 2008). According to some scholars, management education programmes have not adequately tackled gendered issues in the workplace, with the education of business leaders continuing to be based on a masculine model (Kelan and Dunkley Jones, 2010; Ely *et al.*, 2011). In turn, this issue has created problems in the development of tomorrow's leaders, as individual leaders need to understand their own preferred style and behaviours, and how these may differ from those preferred by others (Chin and Sanchez-Hucles, 2007).

In arts-based methods, the experiential path is critical, as the intersection of engaged participation, and making connections between the arts-based event, and oneself occur (Sutherland and Jelinek, 2015), with the end product being 'aesthetic knowing' (Hanson *et al.*, 2007). In this approach to management learning, connections arise

through three interlinked ideas: sensemaking processes (Weick *et al.*, 2005); reflective activities (Cunliffe, 2009b; Gray, 2007) influenced by consideration of 'self' and 'others' (Holt and Macpherson, 2010), which are discussed further in the following sections.

1.3.1 Sense-making

Sensemaking activities involve inquiring into and thus interpreting an individual's sense of belonging and fit within a social context to derive meaning from challenging situations, and to reconstruct a positive sense of self. Essentially, 'when people engage in sensemaking, they impose abstractions and categories that mean they move farther and farther away from their initial impressions' (Weick 2007, p.12).

Paying attention to our senses ensures the ongoing process of sensemaking that creates personal experience, which is second nature to artists, who view this process from the perspective of something that is sensed, not something that is calculated (Springborg, 2010). For example, paintings bring attention to something previously unnoticed; and, through theatre, attention is directed to unnoticed aspects of life, achieved by taking a distance from reality. Direct sensory experiences can be described as a tacit form of knowing, where experiences encourage meaning-making related directly to personal experiences as part of the human system, rather than an organisational issue thereby 'enacting one's true self' (Ladkin and Taylor, 2010, p. 72). Indeed, as Weick (2007, p. 15) himself observes, 'all of these non-logical activities enable people to solve problems and enact their potential'.

The primary motives of sense-making are: (i) to make sense and reflect on the difficulties experienced in career progression (Roberts and Creary, 2013); and (ii) to bridge the gap between old and new roles, and identities (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010). Sensemaking, therefore, involves activities of inquiring and interpreting one's embeddedness within a social context that helps individuals derive meaning from challenging situations and re-construct a positive sense of self.

Many authors highlight the value of considering sensory experiences, placing a significant importance on spending time with the experience, without reflecting upon it, or in drawing conclusions from it. These scholars refer to this aspect using Heidegger's concept of dwelling (Wicks and Rippon, 2010; Sutherland, 2012), or using explanatory phrases, such as 'staying with the senses' (Springborg, 2010). Seeley and Reason (2008), drawing a parallel between the ability to 'hang out' in uncertainty, without trying to use the mind to reach certainty, argue that reflecting too quickly will interrupt the intellect. This approach is an act of allowing an impulse (or impulses) to come in, a form of 'open' attentiveness that offers the phenomenon a chance to state its own gesticulation, and such holding back requires discipline, which, as such, may offer the potential to remove the vulnerability of stereotype threat.

1.3.2 Reflexive practice

Reflexive practice stems from the roots of critical theory and has been discussed by social scientists for over 30 years, influenced in the main by feminist researchers and those from hermeneutic and critical theory traditions (Gray, 2009). Reflexivity is about

questioning one's own taken for granted assumptions as opposed to reflexive practice which is reflecting on actions and is a continuous process of learning.

In more recent years, reflexivity has become a focus of management and leadership development (Gray, 2007) and, according to Cunliffe, (2009b, p.406) is fundamental to management learning because it is about 'who we are, how we relate to others, and what we do – and that is why reflexivity is a cornerstone for ethical and responsive management'. Therefore, by engaging with the arts, it enables us 'to draw upon, and subsequently reflect on, a deep well of unconscious stuff' (Taylor and Ladkin, 2009 p. 58). The unconscious aspects may be unexamined suppositions that the individual operates from (Springborg and Sutherland, 2015), or even that organisations operate from. In using reflexive practices, practitioners are particularly concerned with unsettling and questioning notions of social realities, or those developed from experience of those realities, and whether we can explain social realities accurately and with neutrality. Fundamentally, it is recognising the role we play with others in shaping our social and organisational realities (Cunliffe, 2009a): for example, gender stereotypes. Drawing on social constructionist suppositions reflexivity involves questioning existing experiences rather than the reflexive questioning of ideologies, texts, or theories. A questioning of self rather than others means 'shifting our assumptions from learning from an epistemological (learning about theories and techniques that can be applied to practice) to an ontological perspective involving learning within experience' (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004, p. 35).

Reflexivity enables possibilities for change in everyday interaction and, 'little by little, this can undermine the structures and practices of domination' (Cunliffe, 2002, p. 37). In essence, by focusing on experiences, change may occur from within, through recognition of one's own place, and the ability to shape knowledge, learning and organisational realities. As Weick *et al.*, (2005) argue in relation to sense-making, individuals engage in situating activity to develop who they are, their knowledge of self within specific contexts.