**"Negotiating gender minority –
Success strategies of women managers"**

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Introduction

Feminist scholar Catherine Hakim in the 1990s started to even the ground[1] for what was later called "Preference Theory" (Hakim 2000). It bases on the assumptions that "the contraceptive revolution" in the mid-sixties, the "equal opportunity revolution" marked by the advent of affirmative action, the "expansion of white-collar occupations", the "creation of jobs for secondary earners" and the "in liberal modern societies ... increasing importance of attitudes, values, and personal preference" (ibid.:3) results in "(women's) genuine choice in affluent ... societies ... between family work and market work." (ibid.:1) which represents a freer choice than that of men whose gender role casts them as the breadwinner of the nuclear family.

Working as an architect and project manager between 1996 and 2001, I saw the 38% women I had studied with (Nickel 2000:130) dwindle to a roughly estimated 4% or lower share of female run offices in Berlin (Foerdervererein Deutsches Architekturzentrum 2000:313-321[2]). Reconciling the lower pay, prestige and position with a notion of „genuine choice" (Hakim 2000:3) to me seems an adventurous exercise.

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[1] see Hakim (1995, 1996), Ginn, et al. (1996), Bruegel (1996)

[2] Judging from the chamber of Architect's Berlin-Brandenburg register, the number is higher, but even I who have not been working in planning for the last three years let alone run my own practice am still listed there. The FDA's register provides a better indicator of a cross section of those architects who were felt to have contributed to the re-metamorphosis of Berlin into the German capital since it publishes commissions like kindergartens and apartment buildings, which - parallely to the sexual division of labour - represent the majority of projects won by female run offices.

It is therefore safe to say that I came to this paper with a certain set of hypothesis firmly in place, but also with the hope, that my results would support Hakim's view of individual choice.

Translations into English are my own. This concerns all sources listed with their German title in the bibliography.

1.0   Methodology and methods

1.1   Introduction to research

The corporate environment has traditionally been a masculine one.

Feminists like Cynthia Cockburn have argued that men "(resist) to sex equality" in the workplace for instance by "engag(ing) in ideological work to divide women from each other" (1991:12). They sacrifice women in favour of a "male contract" prompting them to strike "little man/ big man deals" to "avoid men in lower ranks rebelling" (ibid.:62). They form informal business networks excluding women, undermine female solidarity, generally "vilify feminism" (ibid.:70) and refuse to abolish language and other cultural symbols denigrating women.

Motivating factors include fear of the "domesticity (and heterosexuality) women bring into the work place ... spoiling fraternal relations" and presenting additional competition (ibid.). If women ever gain the majority, this fear may turn into hostility, as happened in New Zealand when the top five government positions were won by women and the public 'nicknamed' the administration "Helengrad" (The Guardian supplement 17.07.2001:8).

But one does not have to subscribe to this view of men as hostile towards women in order to acknowledge, that any group of people in the striking minority is faced with a set of disadvantages - and possibly advantages - the majority is not faced with.

The inverse notion however - that men have a humanitarian interest to share their power with women in my opinion requires more corroboration than the often quoted and - as a later section of this paper will explore - possibly even deconstructable argument, that the economy cannot do without the human capital inherent in women. (e.g. www.eoc.org.uk)

My research questions therefore are:

What are the issues women in senior executive positions in the private sector face on the grounds of their sex? What strategies do they use to overcome them if perceived problematic and which ones are the most effective?

Hopefully interview results will also indicate measures to promote the latter.

1.2   Research methods

Discovering statistical evidence proving discrimination against women is not as straightforward as it may seem and it gets harder the further up the corporate ladder the object of research is located, since those bodies who have the means to collect quantitative data on a large scale usually do not focus on elites let alone elite minorities. For instance the UK government census 1991 does not even correlate hierarchical position and gender in its section on female participation in the labour force.

Similarly - although the 'glass ceiling' i.e. "the invisible barrier that has kept and continues to keep women and minorities out of top management jobs in large commercial organisations" (Bradshaw, et al. 2000:229) is common knowledge to the degree that it has become proverbial and numerical monitoring of an - after all - comparatively small sample would suffice to produce statistical data, - none exists.

I therefore decided to conduct my own small scale field research in the form of interviews with senior executive women in order to test hypothesis like 'The Glass Ceiling exists' (see questions 1.10/ 1.11 in questionnaire). I was hoping for the opportunity to further explore the validity of some of the arguments used to take the discriminatory sting out of the absence of women in top positions e.g. that people who have the chance might actually choose to prioritise their work-life balance over the remuneration, power and prestige that go with top positions which would support a 'preference' theoretical approach.

All interviews were conducted in July/ August 2001.

1.3 The Questionnaire Structure (see Annex I)

The questionnaire is divided into six sections. The first two collect personal details and ask, whether interviewees have a preferred gender configuration in the workplace i.e. within teams, staff to report to as well as subordinates. Although interviewees are asked to elaborate on their response, options to tick are given and no space safe for the back of the page is allocated to write this elaboration in. This was done to generate quick, 'of the top of the head' responses in this part of the questionnaire.

The next sections (numbers 3.0, 4.0 and 5.0) investigate the interviewee's attitude towards affirmative action. In section 3.0 statements are listed representing various locations within the discourse asking the interviewees to indicate their (dis)agreement. This section serves primarily to acquaint the interviewee with the discourse and - if she does not have one already - support her in discovering her opinion. (As one of the interviewees said: "I had not realised I had a ... feminist ... opinion before" (HR/ People Manager, 54)). It also serves to indicate to the interviewee, that these statements are already documented and that - since she is not participating in quantitative research - it would be preferable, if her input surpassed the content of the questionnaire.

Personal experience with affirmative action is the subject of section 4.0 and 5.0 asking the interviewee to differentiate between kinds of affirmative action and whether or not she approves of it.

Finally in section 6.0 the interviewee is asked to name other strategies on how to remedy the under representation of women in senior executive positions.

The aim here is to collect new impulses. The optimism to actually discover new aspects is in my opinion justified by the distinction all interviewees share: A large pool of personal experience. Although this does not make them experts in the field of affirmative action, particularly not if they, taking an 'equality' stance, think affirmative action unnecessary or even harmful, I still think that if anybody it would be these accomplished women who could add new aspects to the debate. (This also contributed to my decision to interview mainly senior executive women as discussed in the following section.)

The underlying idea of the structure was to try and make interviewees contradict themselves and then count on their sense of intellectual responsibility to animate the discussion and generate the most inspiring results taking great care not to venture into the realm of speculation, but always adhering to areas they had personal experience in. The fact that I am interviewing an intellectual elite i.e. not easily manipulated group of people who are used to being treated as experts I hoped to counterbalance with a certain degree of unawareness of for instance the degree of under representation of women in executive positions, a knowledge gap which I found to be prevalent amongst them.

The following examples illustrate how the questionnaire structure worked:

One of my hypothesis was, that a coping mechanism of executive women is to deny the extent of sex discrimination and consequently to deny the urgency for affirmative action. Unless they are prepared to state that female under representation in high positions is solely due to women's own and free choices

- and I have yet to meet an interviewee saying this although some would claim that "women are their own worst enemy" (Librarian, 61 referring to female prioritisation) - by the time the interview has progressed to section 6.0 where they are asked to name other strategies towards equal employment opportunities it becomes a question of honour - having disapproved of affirmative action - to make an intellectual effort here.

Another example for this strategy would be, if an interviewee had stated under 2.0 that gender configurations in teams and hierarchies 'did not matter' (the most common response so far) and from her attitude towards affirmative action it is deductible that in her opinion it is personality immanent female traits that make women less adapt at succeeding, my next question would be why then she does not prefer to work with men if she thinks them in some way more competent.

1.4 Interviewee Sample (see Annex II)

The decision to collect data on senior executive women working in the private sector by (mostly) interviewing them themselves is not a self-explanatory one and requires further comment:

Ideally I would have preferred not to restrict my sample to any particular hierarchy level, gender or company structure and I did attempt to mix it regarding ethnicity[3], class and working hours[4].

To conduct field research for a thesis of this dimension however automatically starts off by considering academically legitimate ways of limiting the amount of data to be collected. In order to limit the amount of correlations among different characteristics of interviewees the sample was to share the following characteristics:

- interviewee recruitment took place via professional women's networks (Zonta International and CWN) which had the benefit to avoid unacknowledged preselection by recruiting them through people I knew
- they all held (or had held) senior management positions in the private sector

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[3] unsuccessfully, since the two non-white female managers I approached did not participate. To further research the interdependence of different kinds of oppression i.e. race and class correlated to sex discrimination would be very interesting. The reply rate to my first round of recruitment was such, that I did not chase anybody into participating. Maybe in this instance I should have!

[4] again unsuccessfully so since I did not meet a female manager who was working part-time.

The underlying assumption was, that since executives are not born in that position but have to start further down the hierarchy, they were able to gather first hand experience of different hierarchical perspectives. I was thus hoping to be able to collect data both on what it is like to work for as well as what it is like to be a female manager from one and the same interviewee.

Further to that women in senior executive positions could be powerful allies should one be able to activate them for the struggle towards equal opportunities, simply because their position lends them more implementation power than subordinate ones do.

Also, since I assumed that some first hand experience on executive networking might be beneficial to this dissertation, I could at the same time do both: Recruit senior interviewees and have a brief insight into female networking.

And lastly, when embarking on a career in management, the employee tends to focus on "proving (herself)" (investment banker, ca 30) on 'learning the ropes'. I argued that senior women with their knowledge of the established structures would be better equipped to develop reformative theories towards the elimination of gender discrimination.

I later revised my opinion, prompted by an interviewee pointing out that it had its pitfalls: The same psychological mechanism that made "a pupil, who had worked incredibly hard ... for an exam ... state, that it had been 'easy' after he received his grade A" (junior consultant, 29) might make executive women

belittle or even deny the difficulties and gender discrimination they had encountered on their career path.

In fact, this observation matched my own: I had attended a "Work-Life Balance Workshop" organised by Helena Dennison and Vanda Green of the City Women's Network (CWN) in July 2001. First time attendees kindly get allocated a 'buddy' and mine was most critical of the project as well as my 'business card' and gave me some advice on how to revise it. This is how it should have looked :

> If you are kindly prepared
> to participate in my MA dissertation
> research taking issue with
> **EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES**
> **FOR WOMEN IN**
> **SENIOR EXECUTIVE POSITIONS**
> please contact me:
>
> Rhoda Tretow
> Dipl.-Ing. Architektin
> MA Gender Culture and Modernity
> at Goldsmiths College
> Tel/ Fax: 020 8245 2390
> mobile: 0049 177 311 57 62
> e-mail: rhodatretow@gmx.de
>
> Interviews will take about an hour!
> THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

When I was explaining my research to prospective interviewees, the most common comments seemed to support the to me and the other junior attendee surprisingly existentialist view that "there is nothing outside of our control that imbalances work/ life relations". (discussion mediator of my workshop group 12.07.2001)

So another one of my hypothesis - that senior executives who have chosen to become a member of an all-female business network are conscious of gender issues in the workplace and might even be familiar with some of the academic discourse, which would in turn benefit the quality of my research - could not be proven.

In fact, had I known that the prevailing attitude towards gender issues is reflected in comments like "You only hit the glass ceiling if you belief in it. I think, it does not exist." (Senior Human Resource Manager, guest at CWN workshop, July 12th, 2001) and automatic associations of the term 'gender relations in the workplace' with - I assume from her irritation she referred to sexual - "relations between men and women" (Management Consultant, CWN member, 12.07.2001) maybe I would have perceived the challenge as too big.

2.0   The future so bright?

2.1   Female participation in the workforce

Entering the labour force is generally perceived as a step towards the elimination of the sexual division of labour allocating the responsibility for the domestic sphere along with the corresponding workload to women by "changing (her) primary self-identity as a housewife, ... her bargaining power and weight in decision-making." (Hakim 1996:178)

"Throughout the 20th century, a steadily growing percentage

of women has joined the paid labour force."

(Hilkert Andolsen 2000:452)

This quote taken from the "Companion to Feminist Philosophy" introduces a chapter called "Wage earning women, reproduction, and fair treatment" which invokes images of positive and ongoing dynamic changes towards equal employment opportunities.

But where does this notion come from?

According to the ILO (www.ilo.org) the percentage of economically active women stagnated between 1990 and 1995 at 53.1% and rose to 54.5% in 1999. Therefore there is a positive trend to be identified, particularly when correlated to the number of working men which sank from 75.4% in 1990 to 71.6% in 1999 according to the same sources thus showing an overall trend of a sinking number of economically active persons.

However statistics I found to be circulating in feminist literature show a more optimistic picture namely a prognosed increase from "47% in 1961" to "74% by 2001" (e.g. Hakim 1995:431, Ginn, et al. 1996:168). Given that the last UK numbers the ILO supplied were above mentioned 54.5% in 1999, it is fair to say that this prognosis missed its mark by about 20%!

A heated debate initiated by Hakim's 1995 article "Five feminist myths about women's employment" accusing feminist scholars of falsely stereotyping five different gender issues claiming them to be "well-established 'facts' " (1995:430) when "demonstrably untrue" (ibid.:427) employed a different approach to challenge the notion of constantly rising female participation in the workforce:

She uses statistics "well-publicised since over a decade ago" (ibid.:431) according to which "(t)here was absolutely no increase in the volume of female employment, measured in full-time equivalent numbers (i.e. counting each part-time job as half a full-time one) from W.W.II up to 1987" in Britain". (ibid.)

Correlated to the increase in female economic activity it is not surprising therefore that "83% of part-time employees are female" (www.eoc.org.uk) with all the negative impacts this may have on promotion opportunities and social security.[5]

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[5] For a comprehensive discussion of the implications of working part-time see Hakim (1995), Ginn, et al. (1996), Bruegel (1996) and Hakim (1996, 2000).

It is at this point that feminists disagree: Whilst Hakim's critics claim that part-time work does constitute "control of (one's) own earnings (to an extent that changes a woman's) sense of identity (and contributes to) changing roles in the family and the distribution of poverty" (Ginn, et al. 1996:168, quoting Lister 1992, Brannen et al. 1994) and that it is part of "the shifting pattern of the distribution of paid work between household members (which is) real, and ... relevant to feminist scholarship" (Bruegel 1996:175) Hakim (1996) responds that it does and is not to the degree propagated by "the academic community" (Hakim 1995:429).

Whichever side one is inclined to take: My point here is, that a brief literature review (see introductory quote as well as Code:2000) reveals that firstly the notion of constantly rising female employment contrary to what Hakim's critics claim, namely that it is one of the "views (challenged by Hakim) not held by most researchers" (Ginn, et al. 1996:167) in fact seems to be prevalent in academic literature as well as 'public opinion' as illustrated by this paper's interview results.

This exercise has therefore served to highlight the dangerous discrepancy between statistics and 'public opinion' which in the case of my own study revealed that all of the participants were of the opinion that the number of female senior executives is constantly rising, a fact hard to corroborate by statistics:

Neither the British Census 1991 nor the Equal Opportunity Commission provide quantitative data correlating gender with hierarchical position so it is

hard to determine, whether what 100% of the interviewees answering that particular question in my study believe to be true is or is not. The only data collected by an official government body I did come across were discouraging: In Germany between "0.6 (and) 13.5%" of senior executive positions are held by women with a "negative correlation between the factors 'size of company' and 'number of women' " i.e. in large corporations boards of directors are usually men only, (Regnet 1997:241) whilst in the for affirmative action structurally more accessible public sector numbers of female executives were highest. Regnet concludes, that although overall - i.e. including the public sector - the tendency goes towards more women in management, at the current rate equality with their male counterparts will be achieved "in the year 2230" (Regnet 1997:242)

The majority of sociologists agree, that the number of women in executive positions has been and still is a marginal one (see e.g. Wunderer, et al. 1997, Davidson, et al. 1992, Kanter 1993 and 1977 etc.). In the absence of quantitative data, an alternative method of prognosis is the analysis of labour market trends:

Given socio-economic developments in the last decade which for instance in Germany and Switzerland saw the "non-event of the prognosed lack of personnel with leadership qualifications" (Wunderer, et al. 1997:6) relying on a trend putting more women in executive positions because - as often quoted - employers cannot afford to ignore the "continuously growing" (ibid.:7) human capital represented by female workers becomes problematic.

As a political strategy, joining ranks with those in power by emphasising how it is in everybody's best interest to use the human capital inherent in highly qualified women could make sense. It is certainly a strategy the EOC has adopted. Its press releases illustrate this by their gender neutral language for currently gendered work and emphasising employers interest in employing women: "... people (with) child care responsibilities end up leaving the labour market altogether. This does not make sense for Britain's economy any more than... the employer who loses experienced staff." (EOC 24.07.2001), "The interest of women and men, work and home, are inextricably linked." (EOC 19.07.2001). "If employers want to attract the best qualified and skilled staff ... then they have to tackle the pay gap ... **women earning 18% less per hour than men** .... as a matter of urgency." (EOC 20.06.2001) to give but a few examples.

However evidence that there is a damaging lack of senior executive personnel in the UK is not given. Of course human resource managers would rather be able to choose from four than two applicants, but does this constitute "a matter of urgency" (ibid.)?

Viewed as a joining of ranks with the European wide efforts to implement „Gender Mainstreaming"[6] (Döge 2001:8) – which always seems to include gender neutral language for gendered terms – the EOC's strategy does make sense.

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[6] Internationally discussed since the Women's World Summit in Nairobi 1985, „gender mainstreaming" i.e. the strategy to integrate equal opportunity measures for women and men in all areas of society, was adopted by the EC as political strategy in 1995. (Döge 2001:8)

However in my opinion in order to be successful the advantages employers might have in recruiting women must be sound ones. The most straightforward one would be that "blocked opportunity ... tends to generate employees who, among other things have low aspirations, lack commitment to the organisation, become hostile to leaders, behave ineffectively in leadership roles themselves, take fewer risks or become socially isolated and personally stressed." (Kanter 1977/1993:266)

Others include the belief that "parenthood makes (the primary carer) more efficient at work" (Sunderland 2001:9) not only because anybody who can juggle the responsibilities of childcare with a demanding job surely is a good manager, but also, because those who make the decision to do both, might be more focused in the office, because they cannot do overtime and might show a higher level of commitment, as they perceive their "time in the office (as) quality time, the only time (they) have for (themselves)" (PR Manager, 40). Since currently the sexual division of labour is in place even amongst senior executive women (see section 4.0), this view of parents as the more responsible employees would for the time being be primarily of benefit to women.

In this section I attempted to show that firstly 'public opinion' believes that the number of women in executive positions is constantly rising, a notion that could not be corroborated by statistical evidence or - if you would like to adopt Hakim's point of view - could even be proven incorrect.

One of the consequences of this discrepancy between statistics and ‚public opinion' relevant for this paper's research is, that the notion that eliminating sex discrimination is constantly advancing lulls senior executive women into a false sense of optimism and prevents them from getting actively involved. This attitude is reflected in a general unawareness of subjects related to equal employment opportunities (e.g. "I do not know, what affirmative action means." (Joint CEO/ Managing Director IT Company, 62)). The struggle for equal employment opportunities thus looses powerful potential allies.

2.2 The 'Glass Ceiling' - Interview results

The majority of interviewees denied ever having experienced this invisible barrier keeping women out of top management positions or even denied it existed at all:

One interviewee claimed that "(y)ou only hit the glass ceiling if you belief in it. I think, it does not exist." (Senior Human Resource Manager, guest at CWN workshop, July 12th, 2001)

Another interviewee who initially claimed that she had neither witnessed nor experienced the glass ceiling effect upon closer examination of her company's management structure had to admit, that had she not had a baby she in the meantime would be or even had already been facing it herself: Although she had been one of the few women in top management in a major retailing company it turned out, that 'top management' consisted of three hierarchical levels her job being part of the lowest one *just as all the jobs held by the other female managers*. The top two levels were constituted of male executives only and she admitted that she probably would not have been promoted further.[7]

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[7] She claimed that "she did not want to be promoted further" because she did not "think she would be suitably qualified for a high pressure job like the ones above her position" a modest self image not corroborated by any factual evidence in her educational or professional background. She did come to the conclusion that it was probably the glass ceiling she had witnessed and ended up speaking out in favour of quotas even for top management boards although she had initially been opposed to any form of affirmative action.

She started working part-time soon after the baby was born considering herself lucky that her company had offered her this opportunity, even if it meant that she was down-graded hierarchically and had to accept a salary cut which put her earnings at less than half of what she had earned before.

A position employers take when challenged about the low numbers of women in executive positions is, that at a senior level absence due to maternity leave would cause a degree of discontinuity not reconcilable with high positions. However, even if one agrees with this, women usually encounter the 'glass ceiling' at an age when most are not considering having children anymore.

Here ageism reinforces 'glass ceiling' tendencies, as it targets women harder than men, because they are perceived to be " 'older earlier' " (Itzin, et al. 1995:82).

Success strategies–
Analysis of interview results

This section locates the results of this paper's interviews within the discourse on different strategies employed to overcome sex discrimination encountered in two different loci: In male dominated company structures and in the private realm illustrated by the sexual division of labour.

A further distinction is made between individual strategies and those I would like to call 'systematic'.

3.1   Individual Strategies

3.1.1   Taking advantage of 'Tokenism'

In a quantitative study executed by the Institute for Leadership and Human Resource Management at the University of St Gallen, Switzerland[8] "39% of women agreed to the statement: 'I experience comparative advantages because of my sex.' " (Wunderer, et al. 1997:127)

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[8] sample profile of Wunderer et al.'s study:

Female Manag.	Male Manag.	Female co-workers	Male co-workers	Female HR staff	Male HR staff
83	76	256	241	18	19

(Wunderer, et al.:1997)

"I've been at sales meetings where all the trainees were going up to the managers - 'hi, Mr So-and-so' - trying to make that impression, wearing a strawberry tie, whatever, something that they could be remembered by. Whereas there were three of us (women) in a group of fifty and all we had to do was walk in and everyone recognised us."

(in Kanter 1997:213)

This statement illustrates the most significant career advantage women may gain by being in the minority: More easily acquired profile through higher visibility.

Other advantages are prompted by a 'sex role spill over' e.g. often women are being treated more politely, conflicts tend not to escalate as much if a female mediator is present and they also found that alternative suggestions made by women are often listened to more attentively. (Wunderer, et al. 1997:128, interview results)

It is the latter that may present potential for long-term change towards equal employment opportunities: If above described methods often referred to as 'soft skills' are acknowledged to be the more profitable way of 'doing business' it would mean that adopting them represents a move away from masculinist company structures. This effect can even be achieved without underwriting that stereotyping 'soft skills' as feminine is justified thus avoiding having to use 'self-stereotypisation' which - as will be shown in section 3.1.3 - can be problematic.

The disadvantages of identifying with the 'token' status however are numerous: Because of the higher visibility of tokens, they are likely to be more closely monitored i.e. their "mistakes (might be) overvalued" (Marshall 1984:100-101). At the same time visible characteristics like "dress" are likely to be over- and "competence and achievements" undervalued (ibid.).

Another aspect is, that if an executive woman builds part of her career on her 'token' status supporting other women represents a loss of power - the more women there are the less she stands out. Further to that this is obvious not only to her. Whether the consequence really is that such a female manager refrains from e.g. mentoring other women or whether her sense of female solidarity is so well developed that she is willing to pay this price: Other women are likely to label her a 'Queen Bee', hostile towards other women. This stereotype itself then becomes an obstacle to female solidarity (see section 5.0).

3.1.2 Adopting male patterns of behaviour and seeking entry into their informal networks

> "To be successful women have to become honorary men."
>
> (McDowell (quoting J. Acker 1990) 1997:137)

Another strategy to deal with sex discrimination in the workplace is to adopt male patterns of behaviour, to become 'one of the lads'. By not being perceived as a female, she who employs what Davidson, et al. call an "androgynous strategy" (1992:96) she is not going to be sexually harassed (other than intellectually by having to listen to and possibly even join into misogynist conversations.)

But how successful can such a strategy be? As a female director of Northbank in London is quoted: "I can never be a man as well as a man is." (in McDowell 1997:137) Women who employ this strategy have to invest part of their strength into this transformation, an effort, men do not have to make. Of course there are women who identify with 'laddish' culture more than with any feminine one just as there are men who differ from the 'white, 'healthy', heterosexual, middle class' norm who have to put extra effort into conforming to an extent that enables them to function as 'one of the lads' and they too face potential for a conflict of identity. That however does not make it easier for women, whose problems with being 'honorary men' peak when they have children.

In McDowell's research in the London City she came across mechanisms men employ that make it harder for women to join informal networks. Her interviewees reported that in order to belong to the group, a kind of loyalty test was expected from women which was to "join in negative comments made about their own group". If women do join in their "pattern of behaviour is often called the 'queen bee syndrome' " (Wunderer, et al. (quoting Staines et al. 1974) 1997:45) which will be discussed in section 5.0 in this paper. It is typically interpreted as a sign of hostility towards each other and used to confirm negative aspects of female sex-role stereotypes while in this context non-association with other token women is merely an effective success strategy.

Further to that 'laddism' includes - at least on the surface - a fierce sense of loyalty towards 'the mates' and if a woman talks badly about other women, men might perceive it as a lack of solidarity towards the likes of her which - although maybe prerequisite for joining their group - does not generate respect.

3.1.3 'Strategic Essentialism' -
Using feminine stereotypes as an advantage

Whether out of 'strategic essentialism' or because of absorbed self-stereotyping - after all women are not immune against the stereotypes prevalent in their society either - according to the results of this paper's research the majority of interviewees seem to believe in gender stereotypes where opportune:

Of the first seven questionnaire's completed, all interviewees when asked about their preferred gender configuration on teams answered 'mixed' (as opposed to all male/ female or even the gender neutral *no preference).* Asked to elaborate, a typical response would be that in mixed teams men and women could "learn from each other" (HR Manager (Finance), 34) or that "you would probably get a better mix of skills" (Industry Consultant IT, 58).

When probed further, answers included the following: "Women approach scientific research more thoroughly. ... . It appears to me that men often ... do not pay attention to detail, only have a certain aim in mind and do not look right or left, overlooking related issues that should be reviewed more carefully. Women would do that differently." (Physicist, Research Project Manager, 30). One HR manager (34) stated, that "women have a different, more tactful and human approach" to conflicts.

The feminist discourse has taken issue with the legitimacy of 'strategic essentialism' before. In the age of "flattened hierarchies" (Wajcman 1998:137),

traditional stereotyping of women seems to fit the specification of today's manager of whom 'soft skills' are required better than the more traditional image of patriarchal leadership.

But: Should "good managers use all they have to as a tool (including their femininity)"? (Wajcman 1998:120 quoting male manager quoting female manager) Clearly this strategy highlights the rift between the sexes and there is also the danger that along with the positive stereotypes the negative ones are reinforced.

"(M)en and women do not come to work ... with their gendered attributes fully in place (but rather) the workplace itself is a site for the inscription of sexual difference" (McDowell 1997:114).

Sexually speaking, one of the consequences of this is, that using "the business world as a ... sexual playground and succeed ... will forever mark women as ... 'just women' when what they want is to be taken seriously for the good things they have to offer. For every woman who ... screws her way up the ladder, another will get screwed." (Collins 1984 in Segerman-Peck 1991:176).

When talking about 'strategic essentialism' however, it usually is not sexuality that is referred to, but rather skills stereotyped as feminine. Leaving ideology aside for the moment - just how effective a tool would strategic essentialism be in this case, where the sheer quantity of negative female stereotyping might outweigh the positive?

In the following table, traits traditionally stereotyped as 'male' or 'female' are listed and juxtaposed to traits valued in managers:

Stereotypical Male	Ideal Manager	Stereotypical Female
• *dominant**	• *willing to lead*	• self-subordinating
• *independent*	• *independent*	• dependent
• *unemotional*	• *emotionally in control*	• emotional
• *self confident*	• *self confident*	• sensitive
• *active*	• *dynamic*	• passive
• *rational*	• *rational*	• intuitive
• *pro-active*	• *decisive*	• caring
	• *not shy of confrontation*	
• *success oriented*	• *competition oriented*	• relationship oriented
	• **considerate***	• **empathic**
	•**communicative**	• **co-operative**

* italics indicate characteristics corresponding between stereotypical male and ideal manager
** bold indicates characteristics corresponding between stereotypical female and ideal manager.

(Rosenstiel 1992 quoted in Rosenstiel 1997:269)

Often the gendered characteristics are constructed through their binary interdependence. For instance as Cockburn states, "the independence of men (is) predicated on women's lack of it." (1991:79)

Obviously the overlap shown above between stereotypically male traits and those attributed to ideal managers is much larger than those of the stereotypical woman. Therefore from a numerical point of view, there seems to be a rather large potential for backfiring in employing 'strategic essentialism' here, even if soft skills like 'sensitivity' and 'empathy' are becoming more acceptable. The result of this exercise therefore supports official UK policy:

"The EOC's annual report (2000-2001) ... identifies (that) stereotyping is damaging to ... women."

(www.eoc.org.uk, 19.07.2001)

What the overlap also illustrates is the conflict in gender roles female managers face which bears the potential to cause problems with her identity both for herself as well as for subordinates. An attitude towards female superiors is illustrated by an answer one of the interviewees gave who ticked 'male' in the category 'preferred gender of superior' in this paper's questionnaire. When asked why, she replied that of the two female superiors she had had, one was not assertive enough while the other was "very self-confident and *pushy*, but (lacked the) 'human touch' and empathy". (HR Manager, 34, italics added).

What is illustrated by this example is that it is harder for women to be accepted as managers: Some feminine stereotypes are diametrically opposite to what is expected from the 'ideal manager'. e.g. 'passive' and 'dynamic'. Not only does a woman manager have to overcome possible self-stereotypisation of being 'passive' she is also far easier labelled the negative 'pushy' by her co-workers rather than the 'ideal manager' characteristic 'competition oriented'. Even if she manages this act of balance, if she does not at the same time fulfil her gender role in that she is not being emotional she might be conceived as "lacking the human touch" (HR manager, 34) whilst a man might get away with competitiveness, because he is not supposed to be 'emotional'.

"The fact that (certain) qualities (like assertiveness) are regarded as ... positive ... in men and negative in women" (McDowell 1997:130) puts women managers in a 'no-win' situation, one that she might encounter in other areas as well: Quotes like "It's hard to strike a balance - if you are seen as feminine or desirable they think you're available, and if you are not they call you a dyke." (interviewee, 28, trader at Northbank in McDowell 1997:141)[9] can be found throughout this paper's literature.

To put it simpler still, Regnet (1997) lists a number of perceptions which also illustrate the tension arising out of "implicit personality theories and different gender role expectations" (1997:248): "If he displays family photographs on his desk he is a good provider, if she does her family has priority over the job. If

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[9] This could easily be a reason to prefer working with women. However I found no statistical evidence for this and this paper's research does not support it either.

his desks spills over he is busy and diligent, if hers does, she is untidy. If he talks to co-workers he is talking shop, she is gossiping" etc. etc. etc. (ibid.:248)

This section has shown, that due to the divergence between female stereotypes and those of the ideal manager it is harder to conform to the image of a competent senior executive for women than it is for men.

The individual strategy to use feminine stereotypes when and where it suits the woman manager is therefore - due to its stereotype reinforcing potential - likely to be damaging in the long run.

3.2   'Systematic' Strategies

Section 3.1 has illustrated why individual strategies employed by women in a male dominated environment – though successful in some cases - are ineffective as tools towards equal employment opportunities. This section will discuss 'systematic' strategies like Affirmative Action.

3.2.1   Affirmative Action

"Positive or affirmative action programmes: reflect an understanding that social, political and economic structures were often established at a time when there was widespread discrimination against women, and that without temporary measures to alter those structures, efforts to achieve equality of outcomes would be unjustifiably slow. As a general rule, such programmes require four components: (i) corrective action, such as setting numerical targets or quotas for women's participation in activities and decision-making positions from which they have previously been excluded; (ii) promotional measures designed to redress the causes of discrimination, such as giving women greater opportunities to education and training; (iii) a timetable to attain set objectives and to apply measures; (iv) supervisory machinery to monitor progress and to assure that once the consequences of past discrimination are removed, the positive action will be done away with."

(www.e.quality.com 2001)

"I believe that affirmative action ... just offers women the

chance to be men."

(Management Consultant, 59)

"I believe that equal opportunities is a key issue for the 1990s, which will be a decade when the promotion of women's opportunities in the workplace will be far higher than ever before on the business and the boardroom agenda. (Affirmative action I)nitiatives .. in which members ... have accepted that in the long term their organisation will be best served by a balance of women and men in the workforce ... at all levels are extremely important. Neither employers and unions nor women themselves, ... can do it by themselves. The leadership and ... action of Government will make the vital difference."

(Joana Foster, Chair EOC and President of the European Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities, quoted from the Preface of Davidson, et al. 1992)

Half above referred to decade later, scholars taking issue with women in executive position find it difficult to project an aura of even careful optimism: In the introduction to "Women in Management - Qualifications, Styles of Leadership and Affirmative Action Strategies" the editors, who have conducted an extensive field study on the situation of executive women focusing on Germany and Switzerland[10] come to the following conclusion:

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[10] see earlier footnote for research sample

"Recently disillusionment seems to be more and more on the agenda: In spite of diverse efforts to further female participation in management positions, the number of women managers remains a marginal one . ... . **The prognosed "Megatrend Women" has so far failed to materialise.** Disappointed by what initially seemed to be promising concepts and tired of a debate many of those in positions responsible for human resource management felt was led too ideologically, the interest in "Affirmative Action for Women" or "Equal Opportunity Policies" respectively had withered over the last couple of years. ... . "

<div align="right">(Wunderer, et al. 1997:5-6)</div>

This rather pessimistic view is mirrored in the results of my own research conducted in the UK in 2001: Those interviewees who have been part of the workforce long enough to remember the origins of the affirmative action wave - though statements like "It's evident that unless something specific is done, women do not get promoted in a male culture" (Industry Consultant IT, 58) are frequent - often display the same disenchantment with affirmative action as mentioned in Wunderer's quote above. As one interviewee put it:

"In my role as management consultant going into many organisations I have seen many affirmative action initiatives.

I believe they were necessary 10-20 years ago but now feel

outdated. The arguments sound tired and have lost their force

- even if they are still valid!"

(Management Consultant, 58)

While this interviewee belonged to the group of those who initially held a negative view on affirmative action, agreeing to statements 3.1.1 and 3.1.2 of the questionnaire[11] which broadly speaking refer to a discursive position affiliated with the view that affirmative action is not reconcilable with the principle of equal rights, under point 6.0 where she was asked to suggest other strategies returns to affirmative action, proposing "company policies created, MONITORED and ENFORCED by enlightened management until they are the norm."

This answer echoes the results of Cockburn's field study in three differently structured companies in the UK she conducted in as far back as the 1980s. Cockburn discovers a certain wariness of affirmative action or equal opportunity policies long before the EOC announced the era in 1992 (see introductory quote):

"Those with whom I spoke in the course of the research

reported in this book were coherent and united in their

disappointment with the achievements of 'equal opportunities'.

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[11] 3.1.1 "Special treatment will reinforce the gender stereotype of women as the 'weaker sex' and ultimately be counterproductive to the aim of achieving equal employment opportunities."
    3.1.2 "Special treatment is going to cause so much male resentment that it will result in a backlash."

> The law ... is too weak and difficult to use. Organizations taking positive action are too few and their goals and methods too limited, ... *Policies adopted are seldom implemented. Implementation is not monitored.* Non-compliance is not penalised, nor is co-operation rewarded."
>
> (Cockburn 1991:215, italics added)

Consequently it did not come as a surprise to her that only "one or two women supported affirmative action measures whilst other women managers kept their distance". (ibid.:40)

Given the apparent lack of alternatives for instance reflected in my research in that most interviewees who were initially opposed to affirmative action return to it when asked for ways forward, and in spite of the general disenchantment it is not surprising that a decade later, official UK EOC policies still have it high on its agenda which is summarised as follows:

> "1. Equal Pay
>
> 2. Improvements to work/ life balance
>
> 3. Positive action to increase the number of women in public life
>
> 4. Responsibility on public bodies to root out sex discrimination
>
> 5. Wider access to justice"
>
> (www.eoc.org.uk/Equality21/manifesto.html, Manifesto 2001)

The following are excerpts from the EOC's elaboration on points three and five taking a firm stance in favour of affirmative action:

" ... We will not see an increase of women at Westminster[12] without special measures being taken. Research across seven countries has proven that positive action is the only way of making a real difference to the numbers of women in parliament. ... . The proportion of women selected to replace retiring MPs, at 10.7%, is lower than at any general election since 1983.[13] ... . There is plenty of evidence that women, once they reach a critical mass, make a significant difference to policy and to the organizational culture. ... . The EOC wants to see a law that enables political parties to use special measures like twinning, zipping and quotas in their selection of candidates."

<div align="right">(ibid. 2001)</div>

The manifesto 'concludes' that "there must be an effective mechanism to monitor and enforce any new legislation", which sounds suspiciously like the conclusion one would draw from Cockburn's research conducted back in the 1980s! Of course manifestos by their very nature need to be brief, but in my opinion two half-sentences like 'and women have been saying this for over a decade and you can look up new strategies we propose on www.eoc.org.uk' would have given the manifesto more impetus.

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[12] To explore the (dis)similarities between the private and the public sector regarding their ability to implement equal opportunity policies would exceed this paper's capacity. I am using EOC data here in the hope that if more women were present in senior positions of public life, the stereotyping of women might slowly change into an acceptance of women in high positions in the private sector as well.

[13] These numbers indicate that in this particular area of politics the development is pointing in a negative direction! (see earlier section on whether the stereotype of the number of women in the workforce being on the constant rise is true or not.)

Although bodies like the EOC seem to still operate mainly with an affirmative action language like "quotas" and even inventing new ones like "twinning" and "zipping" the question is if - if agreed that affirmative action indeed remains to be the most important way forward - it could not do with an image make-over.

The way Wunderer, et al. (1997) and Cockburn (1991) are using 'equal employment opportunities' and 'affirmative action' synonymously for instance is opening the possibility of abandoning the latter term which seems to have become burdened with negative connotations.

3.2.2 Female networking

"Women network differently from men."

(Dennison, Chair of CWN, 12.07.2001)

In her thesis "An exploration of issues faced by senior business women and how they use networking as a support mechanism" (2000), Dennison identifies a number of "themes prompting (senior business women) to join" the City Women's Network:

(Dennison 2000:43)

- peer support
- social exchange
- business contacts
- personal development opportunities
- self-confidence/ self esteem
- power and position
- discrimination and coping mechanisms
- the power of the 'old boy network'

(Dennison 2000:43)

Apart from sex discrimination (as well as the desire to form a female version of the 'OBN') supposedly these motivations are the same - if to differing degrees - than those prompting business men and women to join executive networks in general.

Dennison states that 'peer support' was the most cited motivation to join CWN. She concludes that network members experience support since it "enables them to meet people to whom they can relate easily, gain support when subjected to discrimination, exclusion and harassment and cope with isolation and loneliness ... . CWN's members are senior and still tend to be the only woman in a particular position within their companies and are therefore likely to be suffering the result of 'tokenism'. " (ibid.:71)

This was reflected in my interviews: As one interviewee put it: "It is hard to meet other like-minded women elsewhere whom I can talk about the business part of my life to. ... (S)ometimes I just do not know what to talk about with (housewives)."

The most often cited reasons to join an all female network during my research are comprehensively illustrated by a quote from the same interviewee, who used CWN for "emotional support .. (as well as) commercial support (in the form of) recommendations or business", likened it to the ‚OBN' which according to her was "good stuff" and linking up the "influence" she as a consultant held with "the power of line-management staff" (HR/ People manager, 54) She was also a member in mixed gender networks, some of which she quit again because "they did not generate business".

Since 'gaining business' was high on the agenda of the interviews I conducted, Dennison's observation, that the network "is also latterly beginning to provide opportunities for career leverage (and) in this respect women are just

beginning to use their network for a purpose that is similar to the (OBN)". (2000:72) came as a surprise.

Dennison's view, that "the methods (employed to generate business) are shaped to suit female preferences (in being) more open, less secretive and less competitive", although possibly true as an observation, when used to illustrate the advantages of female networking are baggaged with the same problems I allocate to using gender differentiating stereotypes in general described before.

Amongst the attendees of the CWN workshop I could detect a negative attitude towards stereoptypisation: There was for instance a general reluctance to prioritise the impact of child care on the work-life balance during the discussions as if problematising what at this point is a gendered subject primarily concerning women would somehow make the results of the workshop less relevant to men and therefore less valuable. One organiser of the workshop expressed her regret at the fact, that few of the male invitees had shown. The adverse effect the presence of men would have on the 'female sanctuary' in which those who spent the greatest part of their time in the sexual minority could enjoy showing their "girly" side (Dennison 2000:71) was only mentioned jokingly.

In this it differed from the other professional's network I had the opportunity to attend a meeting of: Zonta International. Founded in 1919 with a membership exceeding 34.000 worldwide, Zonta is probably the best established professional women's network with the aim to "improve the legal, political,

economic, educational and professional status of women". (www.wsms.co.uk/zonta/zontaint.htm) Here membership is "exclusive for women" in the UK as in all other countries where legally possible (former president, Industry Consultant IT, 58).

One disadvantage of gender exclusivity might be that given the negative experiences with mainstreaming[14] there is a strong argument that female networking might relief moral pressure on male organisations to allow female membership and might yet further reinforce the gender rift with men having access to the more powerful networks.

In my opinion, the greatest advantage of all-female networks is their potential to provide a forum for highly qualified discussions about organisational change towards equal employment opportunities conducted by members of a group who - unless they feel they have successfully become 'one of the lads' - have had to make efforts to perform gender in ways they would not have chosen would they not be in the minority in the workplace. On an optimistic note, this - by their sexual minority status - non-conformist group of people might be predestined to think of new strategies to overcome sex discrimination and might then even have the power to put them into practice.

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[14] e.g. in 1993 during the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna the Women's Unit re-merged with the Division of Human Rights they had divorced from in 1973 in order to form a women's division. This (re)mainstreaming was (mostly) welcomed and thought to put gender back onto the agenda of a more powerful, more ‚mainstream' UN body. (www.un.org)

3.2.3 Female Mentoring Programmes

The most obvious advantage of having a female mentor is that she can double as a role model who has had to incorporate her domestic arrangements into her work schedule (or vice versa), a problem as described in the next section men are usually faced with to a lesser extent.

Secondly having a same sex mentor skirts all issues of heterosexual tension, tensions that in most cases reported to me during this paper's research are only projected onto the mentoring relationship from outsiders. It is this sexual aspect that is foremost referred to when talking about the "comfort zone" in working relationships, (e.g. male bank employee's response when asked, why he preferred working with men, McDowell 1997:201)

So there is a case for female mentoring as a mechanism to overcome sex discrimination young women might encounter on their career path into senior executive positions.[15] [16]

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[15] For a comprehensive discussion of female mentoring refer to e.g. Segerman-Peck (1991) or Dennison (2000)

[16] As one interviewee reported, the number of senior female executives was so low in her bank, that the official mentoring programme suffered from lack of female mentors! (HR Manager, 34)

4.0   The Woman Manager's Children

Executive women - particularly if living in dual income households - usually have the financial means to delegate household chores.[17] But the problematic potential the sexual division of labour holds for them too is usually revealed when they have children: Firstly because full-time childcare is expensive, but also because new insights made over the last two decades into "early childhood development" have put parents under increasing pressures to dedicate time and effort to their children's psychological and intellectual development from a very early age on, an effort "(I) fear is hard to reproduce in hired childcare". (paediatrician, 31)

Just how prevalent the sexual division of labour is, is reflected in parental leave legislations:

Whilst feminists are debating, whether or not there is a female essence pre-disposing women to be the better carers (e.g. Gilligan 1982, Scott 1990, Irigaray 1993, Nash 2000, Bacchi (ed) 1990) international legislation speaks a clear language: In the UK, Germany, Japan and Italy to name but a few countries father's have zero right to - paid or unpaid - paternity leave.

Comparatively one of the least generous legislations governing maternity leave of the countries stated, is to be found in the UK, where "all (female) employees are entitled to 18 weeks ordinary maternity leave" and "additional ... leave ... of up to 29 weeks from birth of baby" might be available. During this period of

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[17] Household chores are usually delegated to other women, so this mechanism is in fact reinforcing the sexual division of labour.

absence from work, mothers are entitled to financial benefits at the rate of "90% of earnings for the first six weeks". (www.tiger.gov.uk)

Further to that corporate as well as family culture in the UK did not use to make allowance for paternal leave: Of those fathers whose companies voluntarily grant them leave, "less than 2% ... are believed to be using the unpaid ... provisions." (The Guardian supplement 02.06.2001:2).

However some advancement has been made: From "April 2003, employed fathers will receive the right to two weeks paid paternity leave (at a lump sum of) £100 per week" (www.parentsatwork.org.uk), a decision the EOC welcomed as "*the end*[18] of a long journey." (www.eoc.org.uk. 07.03.2001, italics added).

But how prevailing is the sexual division of labour in families were the mother is also a manager?

Feminists have often stressed, that "the lack of universal, affordable child care" (Mandell, et al. 2000:499) represents one of the "main barriers to women's employment" (challenged by Hakim 1995:429).[19]

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[18] Hopefully labelling this legislation which both in terms of remuneration during leave periods as well as length is nowhere near treating mothers and fathers equally stems from political strategy rather than the EOC's long term goals!

[19] Hakim challenges this view in her article "Five Feminist Myths about Women's Employment" (1995), starting a heated debate which can be looked up under Ginn, et al. 1996, Bruegel 1996 and Hakim 1996.

But how does having dependent children impact on female manager's lives, whose financial means usually allow them to buy 'custom made' child care?

In a research project observing "managers in high technology multi-national companies (located in the UK) that boast sophisticated equal opportunity policies and are formally committed to their implementation" (1998:3-4), Wajcman's sample of 100 male and 100 female interviewees cutting through hierarchy levels and age groups reveals the following distribution of housework between men and women:

Hours spent on housework* by managers

Family type	Men	Men's partners	Women	Women's partn.
Dual career family (i.e. both employed full-time	9	19	20	11
Manager with partner employed part-time	9	34	-	-
Manager with partner not employed (i.e. full-time housewife)	11	51	-	-
Single/ divorced manager	9	-	15	-

*Housework is defined as cooking, cleaning, laundry, shopping and child care.

Respondents with children reported more hours of housework, the women 34 hours and the men 14 hours.

The first deduction from this comparative exercise is, that the division of labour is firmly in place in all partnership constellations, with female managers in every single instance putting in more hours than their partners, whose hierarchical level of occupation is not stated in the table i.e. could even be lower.

In correlation to Wajcman's research on how many hours of housework part-time employed partners of managers put in, she concludes that "most of the male managers (71%) have the services of a full-time housewife, even when the wives actually have a part-time job". (Wajcman 1998:142)

It follows that the introductory remark about female managers being able to buy high quality domestic and child care thus skirting having to put in hours of housework themselves seems not that straightforward.

Further to that Wajcman's research indicates, that "hiring other women" in order to avoid having to "cajole ... husbands" into pulling their weight and "(to) substitute (the female manager's) own domestic labour" does not wholly relieve her:

Women with children generally stress the difficulty of reconciling home and work particularly because of the quality and reliability of hired child care: "Lose

a nanny and life falls apart ... . The most stressful thing I found about having children is getting the right nanny and keeping her.' " (in Wajcman 1998:152)

Further to that the sexual division of labour extents into hiring domestic help, itself creating another set of quite extensive chores which according to Wajcman are usually the woman's responsibility:

> "I tend to take care of the nanny side ... I worry about doing all the tax and national insurance for (her) and worry about all the paperwork, making sure she gets paid on time, that she gets the housekeeping allowance. And the cleaning and the gardening stuff.   ... I have a live-in nanny because my hours are so unpredictable and I pay for her out of my taxed income her national insurance ... and for the cleaner and ironer."
>
> (in Wajcman 1998:152)

It follows that female managers - although at work facing the same requirements as their partners - at home remain to be constructed along the same lines as traditional housewives which in turn cuts into the "genuine(ness)" (Hakim 2000:2) of her choices:

> "The most difficult problems for senior women still come from the expectation that - for a senior position - work must come before all other aspects of life. The stress this loads on able women with families is, in my view, far too great for many women *to want* to take a senior job."

So while "(m)en's careers are underpinned by the domestic labour of their wives" (Wajcman 1998:141) female managers though financially speaking having access to hired help, remain in charge of managing home life, thus evidently even if women get relieved from the double burden by contracting out domestic chores, the gender stereotype does not follow suit and these women remain to be seen as the primary carer, even if expressed not by caring labour itself but rather through managing the caring labour.[20]

The discriminatory consequences are great not only on a practical level:

> "(T)here is a problematic tendency to use a 'job model' to explain men's work patterns and a different one, a 'gender model' in order to explain women's work patterns. ... (this amounts to a) tendency to push our understanding of women's employment in a different direction from that of men to a greater extent then is warranted" thus reinforcing the gender rift.
>
> (Walby 1991a:167 quoted in McDowell 1997:85)

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[20] The fact that the sexual division of labour remains in place has of course serious repercussions for women's quest to enter the labour market in senior executive positions: Younger women face discrimination in recruitment processes because HR managers fear that they could have children. If women have children they are seen as the less reliable employees since they have other priorities next to the job, responsibilities they often take care of by "switching from full-time to part-time" employment (Mandell, et al. 2000:500), a working mode almost non-existent in senior executive. For a comprehensive discussion of part-time work and gender specific reliability of employees, again please refer to Hakim (1995), Ginn, et al. (1996), Bruegel (1996), Hakim (1996 and 2000)

Therefore although the provision of child care remains an important facilitating factor, enabling women to join the workforce at all, the second strategy adopted by the EOC - to try to include fathers in the standard identity of the primary carer - seems to promise more long-term changes in the de-stereotypisation process.

3.0   Female   Resistance   to   equal   employment   opportunities - Fact or fiction?

"The fundamental taboo weighing on female solidarity and restricting female power is this: Women cannot display solidarity towards other women", because of their dependence on men.

(Hite 1997)

"Men genuinely enjoy the company of other men, whereas women on the whole don't much enjoy the exclusive company of women."

(Herald 1983 in Dennison 2000:43)

"(E)ight out of 10 female workers say other women are worse enemies in the office than men."

(Cosmopolitan (UK), August 2001)

"Women scratch each others eyes out if working together"

(Hite 1997:129)

Previous sections have illustrated how women - e.g. via advantages that go with being amongst the "numerically few" (Kanter 1977/ 1993:viii) - can get co-opted into misogynism. An apparently hostile attitude towards other women was also detectable in some of this paper's interview responses, where the

atmosphere in an all female team would be described as "very bitchy and competitive" (Junior Consultant, 29) and a preference for male superiors was stated, because while the interviewee "also had some of her best experiences" with female superiors, she had "been blackballed" by women managers for no apparent reason other than her sex and thus thought that men were more reliable in their responses. She had also had a male mentor which might have influenced her preference. (HR/ People Manager, 54)

A part aspect of what has been witnessed here is often called "Queen Bee Syndrome" (first coined by Staines 1973 and quoted in e.g. Marshall 1984:109, Davidson, et al. 1992:109, Wunderer, et al. 1997:45), a catch phrase notably absent from the feminist literature reviewed for this paper (e.g. Code 2000, Jaggar, et al. 1998, Newman, et al. 1995). To analyse, whether or not this is due to a disbelief in its existence or maybe even a certain tabooisation in feminist circles of a theory that on the surface seems to question the possibility of 'sisterly solidarity' would be an interesting exercise for further research. Since the phenomenon is a recurrent one in female narratives taking issue with gender relations in the workplace and carries a high potential for damaging women's careers in my opinion it needs to be discussed here, whether as fact or as disprovable but prevalent stereotype. The latter is being suggested for instance by Wajcman's research (1998:64): Of her sample group when asked to comment on the statement that "it is difficult to work for a woman manager" only 4% of women agreed opposed to 10% of men.

Further statistically relevant evidence supporting the hypothesis, that the Queen Bee Syndrome is not being observed as much as female narratives

seem to imply has been produced by Wunderer et al.'s 1997 study who followed a lead they discovered during their preliminary interviews, in some of which "female senior executives would display a critical often even negative attitude towards women" and the "term Queen Bee Syndrome" was used describing a woman "who blames women themselves for not being more successful, rejects affirmative action and might even try to block other women's career paths." (ibid.:45)

They asked male and female senior executives whether they saw the responsibility for the under representation of women in senior executive positions as being *"the women's own"*. (ibid.:47) with the following results:

	Strong Agreement (%)	Medium Agreement (%)	Disagreement (%)
Men	43	29	34
Women	55	37	7

(ibid.:47 summarised)

However subsequent to correlating it to other relevant factors, Wunderer, et al. come to the conclusion, that "the 'Queen Bee Syndrome' exists, but only in moderation, ... since other crucial determinants like the denial of discrimination against women" could not be proven in the same study. (ibid.:49).

Upon closer inspection of literature employing the term 'Queen Bee Syndrome' my finding was that it is not direct evidence of the Syndrome that can be

observed, but rather the projection of it onto female superiors. White for instance documented a "lingering feeling within (the researched) organisations that their leader had achieved (her position) despite the structural and attitudinal blocks and (she was now thought to belief) that other women could do so too." (1995:209).

Another divisionist trend has been documented by Cockburn, according to whom a "mutual resentment between those with children and those without" (1991:96) is another prevalent stereotype which occurs particularly when through equal opportunity measures mothers acquire new rights. A survey conducted by Women in Journalism (WiJ) made a similar observation of "a gently simmering resentment among women without children" against those who are benefiting from improved maternity legislation. (The Guardian supplement 31.05.2001:8).

Perhaps my personal agenda does not allow me to accept, that women let themselves be co-opted so effectively into male corporate culture, but even if the following might sound far fetched I will include it here because it could be evidence for yet another mechanism inherent in the sexual division of labour hindering female solidarity: Luce Irigaray's work (1977) as interpreted by Goddard (1994:74) states: "Whereas 'man' is recognised as separate and separable from 'father', there is no space within (male-centred) dicourse for 'woman' disassociated from 'mother'." When a woman has children, she faces a "gender discontinuity" (ibid.) men do not which in my opinion could contribute to the rift between mothers and non-mothers described in the previous paragraph.

For completeness sake and because when talking to men this explanatory approach is what most responses are based on, the following serves to illustrate an essentialist approach:

"Women are conditioned by generations of mothers to make themselves attractive to men. When they turn thirty, they become invisible, but the rivalry never dies."

(Financial Director)

The reasons why this rivalry is gendered in that it only prompts women to lack gender solidarity are then explained by biological notions of women not being able to survive without a physically stronger male.

Further to that within the feminist discourse there is a faction that perceives the notion of female solidarity as a problematic political strategy in the face of differences regarding class, race, ethnicity, religion etc. For instance could it render invisible oppression of coloured women by white women, an argument belonging into the discourse on ethnocentricity which is usually countered with the argument of diversity amongst women.[21]

Further to that the 'equalist' attitude - protagonists of which are generally shy of any kind of gender discrimination be it in positive form like affirmative action as

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[21] As a possible way forward Hill Collins (1990) for instance suggests a matrix of interactive standpoints capable of acknowledging women's diversity by presenting a model which allows for simultaneous analysis of different kinds of oppression.

described in a previous section - might be mistaken for misogynism. The majority of interviewees for this paper's research had never been mentors and if they had they had not preferred female mentees mostly because it had simply not occurred to them to favour somebody because of her or his sex. For somebody who knows the problems young women, who for instance take part in their company's official mentoring programme, but have to make do with a male mentor because there are not enough women in senior executive positions prepared to mentor them might find the 'equalist' attitude effectively hostile towards women, when my research merely showed that it is a mixture of the unawareness described in previous chapters, a lack of time and the fact that indeed most of today's female managers have not experienced themselves the benefits of a same sex role model rather than misogynism that prompts 'equalists' to take this attitude.

However eventually these female managers contribute to unequal employment opportunities. The most effective way forward here in my opinion once again is raising female manager's awareness to counteract their instrumentalisation into tools reducing female employment opportunities in senior executive positions.

Conclusion

Women Managers - Prevalent attitudes

This paper's research indicates that those women who have made it into the top echelons of management tend to feel they were able to do so largely because of priorities they set themselves.

When asked about discriminatory mechanisms they have witnessed on their career path senior interviewees tend to belittle them or deny having encountered any. When asked about the impact of the sexual division of labour on their lives, they tend to belittle or deny it.

This 'Stop-moaning-and-get-on-with-it'-attitude - undoubtedly an effective individual coping strategy - I also found prevalent among junior executives, who at their career stage are usually modelling themselves on senior colleagues, also employ denial as a coping mechanism and are often not prepared to question the 'ropes' they are busy 'learning'.

So to a certain extent interviewees supported the "Preference Theory" (Hakim 2000) as briefly outlined in the introduction to this paper.

However, in the in-depth interviews I was able to conduct, the go-getting attitude displayed at first often proves to be a thin veneer covering "frustrating" experiences of sex discrimination like encountering 'the Glass Ceiling', "not earning the same as a man in the same position" (HR/ People Manager, 54), downgrading accompanied by salary cuts subsequent to maternity leave,

suffering adverse effects of 'tokenism' etc., which directly contradict the notion of "genuine choice" (Hakim 2000:2) fundamental to "Preference Theory".

'Individual strategies'

A further argument against the individual responsibility implied by a preference theoretical approach is illustrated in the section on individual strategies to overcome sexual discrimination. Here I attempted to show, that individual strategies are not aiming at and are therefore sometimes – if unintentionally so - damaging to processes of social change towards a more even gender configuration in top management.

'Systematic (double) strategy': Eliminating the sexual division of labour

Employing a preference theoretical approach to the sexual division of labour's impact on women manager's lives, proponents in my opinion would be hard pressed to produce evidence, that women managers actually prefer putting in more hours of housework than their partners as illustrated in Wajcman's research (1998) quoted in section 4.0.

The EOC's strategy of degendering parenthood by trying to include fathers in the norm of the primary carer has been identified as possibly the most effective one towards the elimination of the sexual division of labour. However, although the UK legislation granting paternal leave is one step in this direction, surely two weeks at £100 does not reach far enough. It would be interesting to further research the justification for this gender segregation in parental leave law.

Since progress in this field therefore seems to be slow, as a medium-term strategy a re-evaluation of part-time work away from the image of the less committed worker could be another way forward, since it is often the only opportunity for mothers to re-enter the labour force.

'Systematic' strategy: Affirmative action

One hour of conversation usually sufficed to make supporters of the thesis that "Special treatment will reinforce the old gender stereotype of women as the 'weaker sex' and ultimately be counterproductive to the aim of achieving equal employment opportunities." (Questionnaire) suggest female quotas even for top management positions, one of the most promising ways forward seems to be consciousness raising amongst women managers in order to get them involved as strong allies in the struggle for instance in the form of mentoring younger female executives.

What the results of this research have shown, is, that the majority of interviewees - and the EOC - do not see a real alternative to affirmative action. Since my research paradoxically has also shown, that the term itself produces 'of the top of the head' responses hostile to affirmative action, an image make-over seems in order and would facilitate above mentioned consciousness raising.

'Systematic' strategy: Re-evaluating women's work?

In section 2.1, I argued that highlighting advantages employers might have to employ women could prove effective in the long term, but only if these advantages can be proven convincingly and the process does not involve

stereotypisation, the problems of which were illustrated in the section on 'Strategic Essentialism'.

Way forward

Having sketched possible strategies towards the elimination of gender discrimination in top management, the way forward for my research is going to be the conceptualisation of implementation methods particularly in those fields and groups this paper's research has shown to be neglected in the current discourse.

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The Questionnaire

Attached questionnaire is revision B. The following questions were added in revision C:

 1.16 'Why did you join an all female network?'
 1.17 'How effective do you find it?'

QUESTIONNAIRE
"Negotiating gender minority – Success strategies of women managers"

PLEASE RETURN TO:

Rhoda Tretow
Reichenberger Str. 125
(SF Gewerbe)

10999 Berlin

info@gender-aktuell.de
www.gender-aktuell.de

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR PARTICIPATING! Should you prefer to fill out a form by e-mail/ fax or would you prefer to be interviewed personally (approximately 0,75h), please let me know. **Please remember that the statements do not reflect the opinion of the author. If you feel that some of the questions require too elaborate an answer please send the partially completed questionnaire back anyway. Every response counts!**

For researcher's use only:
Questionnaire No. ___, received __ / __ / _____

PREFACE

The aim of this questionnaire is to collect qualitative data. Consequently we are most interested in comments regarding your personal experience or accounts of situations you have witnessed! The statements made in – for instance - section 3 of this questionnaire therefore merely serve to outline the discourse on aspects of equal employment opportunities and any additional comment you make is very welcome! For this purpose lined paper to comment on is attached to the questionnaire.

Data collected by this questionnaire is going to be used confidentially. Items already marked with an asterix are not going to be used in any form unless you specifically authorize it by ticking this line: _____ . Should you prefer further anonymity, please specify. (e.g. by adding asterixes.)

1.0 Personal Details
leave out any information that might be too sensitive even if handled confidentially

1.1 Name/ Company*: _____

1.2 Age: _____

1.3 Last full-time training/
    degree: _____

1.4 children (no./ age) _____

1.5 (un)married, etc.: _____

1.6 Which particular
     trade/ industry do
     you work in? _____

Please note: If you are currently not working (maternity leave, retirement, etc.) please state your highest ranking/ best paid job or the one most relevant to my area of study.

1.7 Would you characterize
     your trade/ industry
     as a male domain?   yes/ no

1.8   workplace based in

(country/ city)   _____

1.9 Total no. of
     employees: _____

1.10 Position/
     Job title: _____

1.11 How many women
     occupy comparable
     positions or above?   ca. ___ of ___ *(total number of comparable positions)*

1.12   Have you ever had a mentor: no/ yes ---> male ___ / female ___

1.13   Have you been/ are you a mentor: no/ yes ---> male/ female protégé
If the answer to one of the last two questions is 'yes', **please elaborate on back of page.**

1.14 Are you a member of a
     professional network (e.g. chamber of
     architects, Women in Management etc.)?:   no/ yes: _____

1.15   Is Membership exclusive to women?   yes/ no

2. Preferred Gender Configurations in the Workplace

2.1   Who do you (or did you)
prefer to report to? Why?
Please elaborate your response *on*
back of page   man/ woman/ no preference

2.2   Do you have a gender preference
regarding staff who reports to you?
Why?
Please elaborate your response *on*
back of page   men/ women/ does not matter

2.3   Which gender configuration do you
prefer in teams? Why?
Please elaborate your response *on*
back of page   mixed/ all male/ all female/ no preference

3.0 Are you in favour of affirmative action as a tool to achieve equal employment opportunities for women?

Which of the statements do you most agree with and **why? STATEMENTS MADE ARE EXAMPLES ONLY! ADDED ASPECTS VERY WELCOME!** You will find a page for your comments attached to the questionnaire.

3.1 (Answers relating to the following argument:) "Affirmative action is not reconcilable with the principle of equal rights":

3.1.1 "Special treatment will reinforce the old gender stereotype of women as the 'weaker sex' and ultimately be counterproductive to the aim of achieving equal employment opportunities."

3.1.2 "Special treatment is going to cause so much male resentment that it will result in a backlash."

3.2 (Answers relating to the following argument:) "Personality immanent female characteristics cause the low number of women in executive positions, therefore the question is, whether affirmative action is really necessary.":

3.2.1 "I am living example that women can achieve executive positions without special treatment."

3.2.2 "The glass ceiling metaphor is a myth."

3.2.3 "The comparatively low number of professional women in executive positions is <u>more likely</u> due to any of the following reasons than the product of patriarchal oppression:

3.2.3.1 "<u>free</u> lifestyle choices (e.g. having children)"

3.2.3.2 "female characteristics that do not fit in well with executive positions, as women tend to be not go-getting enough, shy away from necessary confrontation etc."

3.3 "Affirmative Action is not necessary, because being a woman in a "men's world" might have some disadvantages, but it also has some advantages"
(*if you agree, please name advantages: e.g. "women are being noticed =*

remembered more easily than men, easier to gain profile", "women have less trouble finding mentors". etc.:)

_____

_____ *(please enter or use space at back of page)*

3.4 **"Affirmative action will ultimately serve to undermine executive women's self confidence, since they can never be sure whether their success is due to personal achievement or merely based on their gender."**

3.5 **Sample statements in favour of affirmative action:**

3.5.1 "Social justice in the form of **equal employment opportunities incl. equal pay will only be achieved by actively promoting the status of women**, at least for the time being, when women are a striking minority in executive positions."

3.5.2 "I am in favour of Affirmative Action, because since **women themselves are not immune to stereotypes** characterizing them as 'inferior' they have been so absorbed into office culture, that even women themselves are often not conscious of the discrimination against them."

3.5.3 "I am in favour of Affirmative Action, because stereotypes characterizing women as 'weaker' have been absorbed by women to an extend that **their view of themselves has suffered**. Therefore measures need to be taken to reinstate women's sense of themselves and help them gain self-confidence."

4.0 If you have experienced or witnessed affirmative action, please describe the type of action taken and the - positive or negative - outcome

_____
_____
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_____
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_____*(please use back of page for further comment)*

5.0 Are there kinds of affirmative action you find agreeable while you consider others unacceptable? *(e.g. you might find eliminating gender discriminating language and content from company guidelines or establishing Affirmative Action Resource Units in larger companies useful measures whilst considering female quotas for executive positions unacceptable because ...)*

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_____*(please use back of page for further comment)*

6.0   Other strategies towards equal employment opportunities:

6.1   e.g. Highlighting advantages companies have from employing women. (What advantages could these be?)

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_____*(please use back of page for further comment)*

YOUR COMMENTS

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YOUR COMMENTS

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Interviewee Sample

Note: If some of the job titles seem vague this is largely due to interviewees' confidentiality requirements which tended to be high, due to a combination of the perceived sensitivity of the subject and their 'token' positions which render
women managers easily identifiable.

		Questionnaire completed	Personal Interview	Informal Conversation
1.	Hotel Manager, 62 married, 1 daughter	yes	yes	
2.	Physicist/ Research Project Manager, 30 unmarried, no children	yes	yes	
3.	Librarian, 61 divorced, no children	yes		
4.	HR/ People Manager, 54 divorced, 2 daughters	yes	yes	
5.	Industry Consultant IT, 58, married no children	yes		yes
6.	Management Consultant, 59 married, 2 children	yes		yes
7.	HR Manager (Finance), 34 unmarried, no children	yes		yes
8.	Joint CEO/ Managing Director (IT), 62 divorced, 2 children	yes		
9.	Sports Producer (IT), 29, unmarried, no children	yes	yes	
10.	PR manager, 40 divorced, 1 daughter	yes	yes	
11.	Financial Director married, no children		yes	

		Questionnaire completed	Personal Interview	Informal Conversation only
12.	Paediatrician, 31 married, 1 daughter		yes	
13.	Senior HR Manager			yes
14.	Junior Consultant, 29 unmarried, no children	yes	yes	
15.	Investment Banker, unmarried, no children			yes
16.	Investment Banker, 33, married no children	yes		

<u>Acknowledgements</u>

A 'Thank you' note for a thesis of this size may seem a little over the top, but since its results have to such a large extent depended upon the participation of so many people I came to with no credit other than my student ID, I will write it anyway:

Special thanks goes to Sue Mansfield of Zonta International, for making me feel welcome at their meeting and introducing me in a way her fellow Zontians - judging by the reply rate - obviously felt left them no option but to participate.

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