

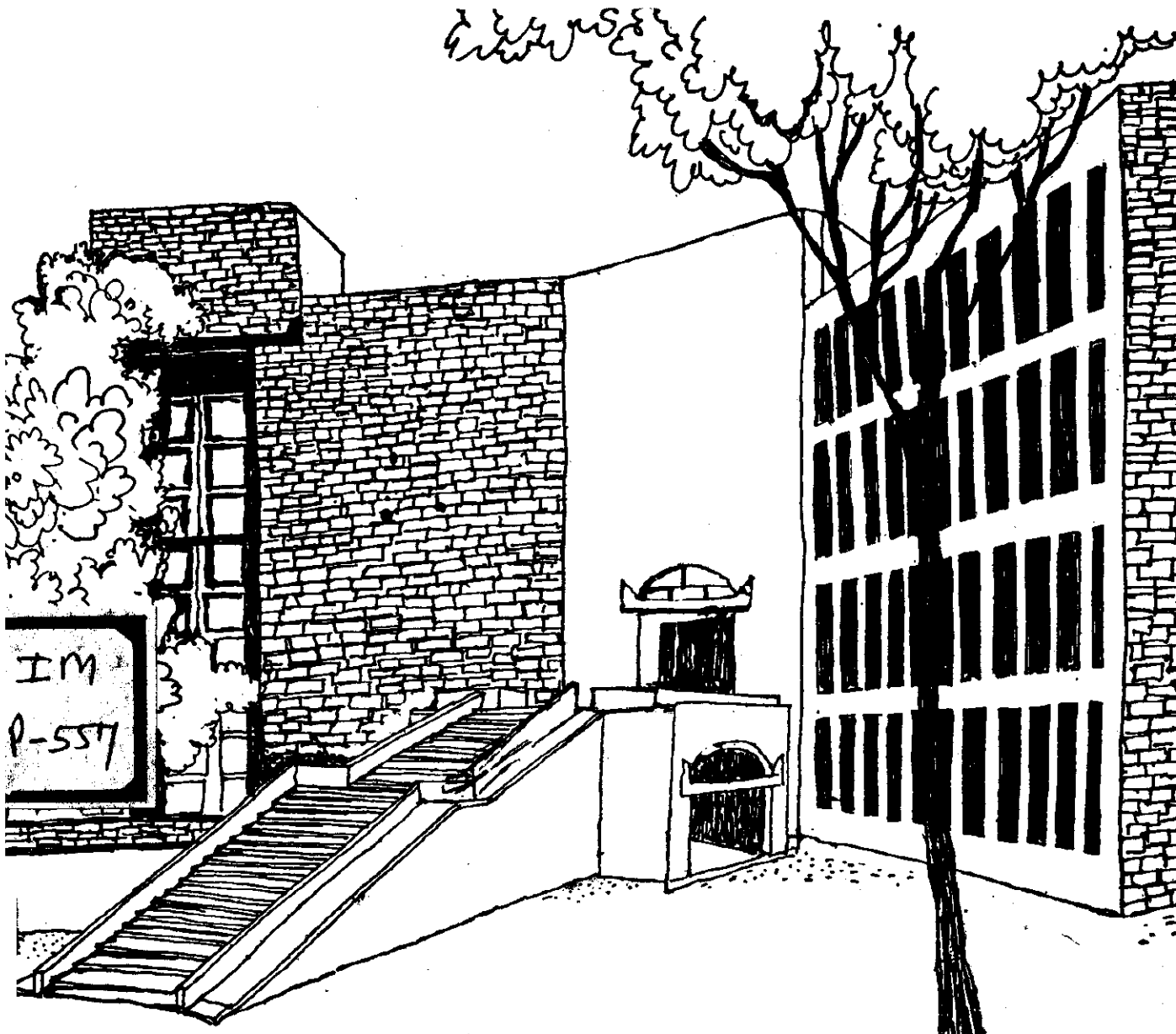


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Working Paper



HOW FAIRLY IS THE FAIR-SEX TREATED? AN AGENDA
FOR RESEARCH ON MANAGERIAL WOMEN IN A MALE-
DOMINATED ORGANIZATION

By

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W P
No. 557
1985
(557)

W P No. 557

April 1985

The main objective of the working paper series of the IIMA is to help faculty members to test out their research findings at the pre-publication stage.

INDIAN INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT
AHMEDABAD-380015
INDIA

How Fairly is the Fair-sex Treated? An Agenda for Research
on Managerial Women in a Male-dominated Organization

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Abstract

Though Indian women have been joining managerial ranks in growing numbers, little research has been conducted to investigate their problems in the male-dominated world of work. Based on a review of literature, this paper suggests workplace integration, non-availability of mentors, problems of token status, conflict between sex-roles stereotypes and work roles, sexuality and the workplace, evaluation and attribution of women's performance, problems of playing the leader and differential treatment in personnel matters as some of the issues which need immediate attention of researchers.

How Fairly is the Fair-sex Treated? An Agenda for Research
on Managerial Women in a Male-dominated Organization*

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The managerial woman often evokes mixed reaction. There are people who hail the entry of women into management as a triumph of the equal rights movement; and there are those who see in this trend a serious threat to the institution of the family as well as to the organizations which choose to hire women as managers. The issue of women in management, even before taking off the ground, has got entangled in a web of emotions, myths, half-truths and some truths!

Now that the Indian managerial woman has already arrived on the scene, and her tribe is increasing, it is time to disentangle facts from fancy, and study objectively what it means for a woman to function as a manager in a male-dominated world. The Indian research on managerial styles and effectiveness has so far assumed male occupancy of managerial positions, and has limited usefulness for women managers. Therefore, it is necessary, from the perspective of the academician, the practitioner, as well as the policy maker, to undertake research in this vital area in order to understand the aspirations and apprehensions of the woman manager; her contribution to organizational functioning as well as the rewards she receives from her organization; the individual and organizational problems created by the presence of a

* This article is based on a paper presented by the author in the National Conference of Women Entrepreneurs & Executives: Their Roles, Problems & Opportunities, New Delhi, February 19-20, 1985.

woman manager, and strategies for coping with those problems; and the future that awaits the managerial woman in Indian organizations.

The objective of this article is to suggest, on the basis of a comprehensive review of literature, some directions for research on the Indian woman manager. Since our major concern is the work-world of the woman manager and what it means further to work in a male-dominated organization, we have restricted our review of literature to these issues only. Other issues like the impact of working woman on the institution of the family and problems of work and family interdependence, though important, are outside the scope of this paper.

In our effort to develop an agenda for research on the Indian managerial woman, we have relied heavily on the studies conducted in the West. Work done in India in this area is woefully inadequate and in fact the objective of this paper is to stimulate greater research in this area.

Though many people, men as well as women, hold a unisex view of the woman manager ("A manager is a manager is a manager, and sex does not matter"), commonsense denotes and research confirms that a woman manager faces a number of gender-related problems over and above the problems faced by a male manager. This paper highlights some such problems:

1. Problems of Integration:

(Workplace integration is the first problem facing any new entrant to an organization.) It is important for a newcomer to belong to a peer group, yet in a male-dominated workplace, the arrival of a female newcomer creates disturbances in the male-network. Her very presence, irrespective of her behaviour, creates difficulty because the previous male network stands threatened (Wolman and Frank, 1975). Male colleagues cope with this unfamiliar situation in subtle ways. As Kanter (1977) has reported, the entry of a new type of a member in the male-group results in polarisation. She found that in the presence of women, men tended to emphasize what they could do "as men", in contrast to women (like sharing off-colour jokes and power-oriented war stories, and prefacing them with apologies to women present). Bernard (1964) has reported the exclusion of women from the social network. (Women managers in such situations are involved in purely work-related matters and systematically excluded from all other informal interactions.)

Hagen and Kahn (1975) on the basis of their study of competent women suggest that a competent woman would be given the status commensurate with her performance, but her male colleagues will not like her. They conclude that "The fact that she will not be liked when competent, however implies that the atmosphere - the reinforcement con-

tingencies - will work against her performing well. Therefore, high ability women may not perform upto their potentials" (Hagen & Kahn, 1975, p. 372). This lends support to Horner's theory (1969) of fear of success which postulates that women have a fear of success because of the incompatibility between achievement and femininity. Horner (1972) emphasises the cultural constraints that are mediated through sex-role expectations.

Often women isolate themselves by withdrawing from social situations so that their male colleagues do not feel constrained. As Epstein (1970) has reported, "Some of the women lawyers I interviewed, for example, avoided joining colleagues at lunch. One commented "Sometimes when the natural thing to do would be to join an associate and a client at lunch if you were a man, you feel, well, maybe I'd better not. It might be awkward for them" (p. 176). This exclusion, whether other-, or self-imposed results in loss of valuable soft information about the functioning of an organization, and the loss gets aggravated in organisations where new knowledge and ideas flow heavily through the informal network (Nieva and Gutek, 1981).

2. The Non-availability of Mentor:

A mentor is an organizational godfather who helps a newcomer break-in easily into the organization and get assimilated into the system. He/she gives a newcomer special

inside information as well as valuable advice (Wells, 1973), and takes personal interest in grooming a bright youngster for a challenging professional career. Yet, as Epstein (1970) has observed, women rarely get sponsored in this manner because the mentors, mainly males, assume a lack of career commitment in females and are unwilling to stake their professional reputation in inducting a female 'apprentice'.

3. Problems of Token Status:

Kanter (1977) has proposed that if women as a category comprise (less than 15%) of the total workgroup in an organization, they are viewed as "tokens" representing their category, rather than as individuals. Such female 'tokens', if in managerial positions, are included into the male network and bestowed power and access as a representative of the female manager. However, this influence and access is not available to all deserving females, and it separates the representative further from the population she represents!

The effect of token position or solo status has been studied by Taylor et al (1978). Using college students as subjects, Taylor and her colleagues found that in slides showing mixed sex groups, the tokens whether male or female, were found to be more prominent on a number of dimensions than a person in a more sex-balanced group. They also reported that solo status evokes more extreme evaluations in positive as well as negative direction.

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(The visibility due to token status creates performance pressures for women. They are under constant lime-light: though they have the advantage of being noticed, it is often offset by the stress of being observed all the time.) Cooper and Davidson (1982) report that professional and managerial women in token status experience special stresses not felt by men in similar organizational positions which include overload, visibility, being a test case for future women, lack of female role models, etc. Out of 60 women managers studied by Davidson and Cooper, some did complain of the disadvantages associated with high visibility; many viewed their lone female status as a challenge and enjoyed the visibility. However, quoting the work of Harnett and Novarra (1979), Cooper and Davidson conclude that the responsibility of representing the entire social category is often a major stressor for women in a solo status.

Stereotypes

4. Conflict between Sex Role and Work Role:

Women managers often face role-related conflicts due to the prevalence, even in work situations, of strong sex-role stereotypes and prescriptions for "desirable feminine behaviour", which clash with "desirable managerial behaviour". In order to compete successfully in a male-dominated environment, women have to be sufficiently aggressive. Yet, in order to retain their "femininity", women should not

appear to be too assertive. Fogarty et al. (1971) have found that women managers have better chances of being accepted by their male colleagues if they do not underplay their femininity. Yet the attributes associated with femininity like dependency, warmth, emotionality, etc. are considered unsuitable for upward climb on the managerial ladder.

(A very revealing study of sex-role stereotypes by Broverman et al. (1972) shows the existence of strong stereotypes about different characteristics of men and women. They report that the attributes ascribed to men are positively valued more often than those ascribed to women.) The positively-valued traits form a cluster of related behaviours which entail competence, rationality and assertion; and the positively-valued feminine traits form a cluster which reflect warmth and expressiveness. Since more feminine traits are negatively valued than the masculine traits, women tend to have more negative self-concepts than men and show a tendency for self-denigration. Kanter (1977) has also found that behaviours that characterise the dominant male-culture are not acceptable behaviours for women. Yet the typical male behaviour (the competency cluster) is often seen as desirable managerial behaviour. McGregor (1967), for example, ^{describes} a successful manager in following words: "The model of the successful

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manager in our culture is a masculine one. The good manager is aggressive, competitive, firm and just. He is not feminine; he is not soft or yielding or dependent or intuitive in the womanly sense. The very expression of emotion is widely viewed as a feminine weakness that would interfere with effective business process (p. 23)".

These conflicting expectations place women managers in an irresolvable dilemma: if women managers want to retain the approval of people, they must be warm and expressive; yet if they want to succeed managerially, they must give evidence of possessing the competency cluster. The female sex role and the managerial work role thus become mutually exclusive. As Nieva and Gutek (1981, p. 59) observe: 'If a woman is successful at work, she becomes, almost by definition, less successful at being a woman... A woman typically runs the risk of alienating her male environment if she comes on too strong and of being totally ignored and suppressed if she comes on too weak".

Many a time, gender-related roles tend to be carried over into the work place. Even professionally competent women are side-tracked into service roles where they are supposed to play the traditional 'helping female' by rendering assistance to another, more visible role generally occupied by a male. Thus, women are absorbed in dead-end posi-

tions where they cannot demonstrate their skills and potential for higher positions, and therefore, are bypassed by more deserving males, with a 'proven' record of competence. Women executives are often expected to perform the "strok-ing" function and to stay away from the fight for power and position. Cooper and Davidson (1982) report the underutilization, and undervaluation of women managers.

5. Sexuality and the Workplace:

Research on women managers also take into account the sexuality that women bring with them to the workplace. Quinn (1977) has reported more negative than positive consequences of women's presence. The negative consequences include distraction of men; their tendency to take long lunch breaks; excessive delegation to women; excessive sharing of sensitive information, etc.

As against Quinn's study which represents a concern about women exploiting their sexuality to gain undue organizational advantages, a number of studies have explored the problem of sexual harassment of working women, including managers. Gutek et al (1980) report that 10 to 15 percent of women have to leave their jobs because of sexual harassment. Benson and Thomson (1980) have analysed the sexual harassment in terms of its short-term impact -- (women

using avoidance strategy and in the process losing valuable work opportunities) and the long-term impact (lowered career commitment of women). Both these effects have important implications for the integration of women in the workplace.

To sum up, research indicates that workplace integration poses a number of dilemmas for the woman manager. She must retain her femininity to enjoy the approval of her peers, yet the possession of these attributes disqualifies her for the next promotion because a successful executive to the common mind is essentially a male model. She must represent her category as a token, yet must maintain her distance from other females in subordinate positions. Presence of women disrupts the all-male social networks so organizations should hire few women, yet it is precisely their small number which attracts so much visibility and creates distraction. Whenever it suits an organization, women managers should stand out as a proof of organization's liberal outlook, yet they should blend with the male-dominated organizational ethos rest of the time.

All these areas including the sexuality-related problems offer fertile field for research in the Indian context, particularly in the light of strong cultural patterns which imply relative 'male superiority' and 'female inferiority'; marital role patterns in which the power rests with

husband and the wife plays a dependent, submissive role; and the traditional work patterns in which till recent part men have been in the dominant position of leadership and women have played the subservient service roles. Having women in managerial positions upsets these cultural patterns significantly. How the Indian woman managers cope with the issues of workplace integration is a significant question for research.

Women's Performance: Evaluation and Attribution:

A second interesting research area is evaluation of women's performance and perceived causes thereof. This section briefly presents major findings in this field. Once again, the studies reported below have been conducted in the West and there is a need to carry out similar research in the Indian work setting.

A landmark study conducted by Goldberg in 1968 showed that evaluation of performance tends to be prejudiced against women. In this study, 40 college women were asked to evaluate six professional articles attributed to male and female authors in terms of writing styles, professional competence, professional status, and the ability to influence readers. On all dimensions articles attributed to John T. McKay were evaluated as being better than the same articles attributed to Joan T. McKay. Interestingly, John was evaluated more favourably than Joan in all the fields including the more "masculine" ones like law and city planning and the more "feminine" ones like elementary school teaching and dietetics.

(A number of other studies have confirmed the existence of this bias which leads to downgrading of women purely because of their sex. A striking feature of this bias is that it operates subtly and contaminates objective thinking without the evaluator's awareness about it.)

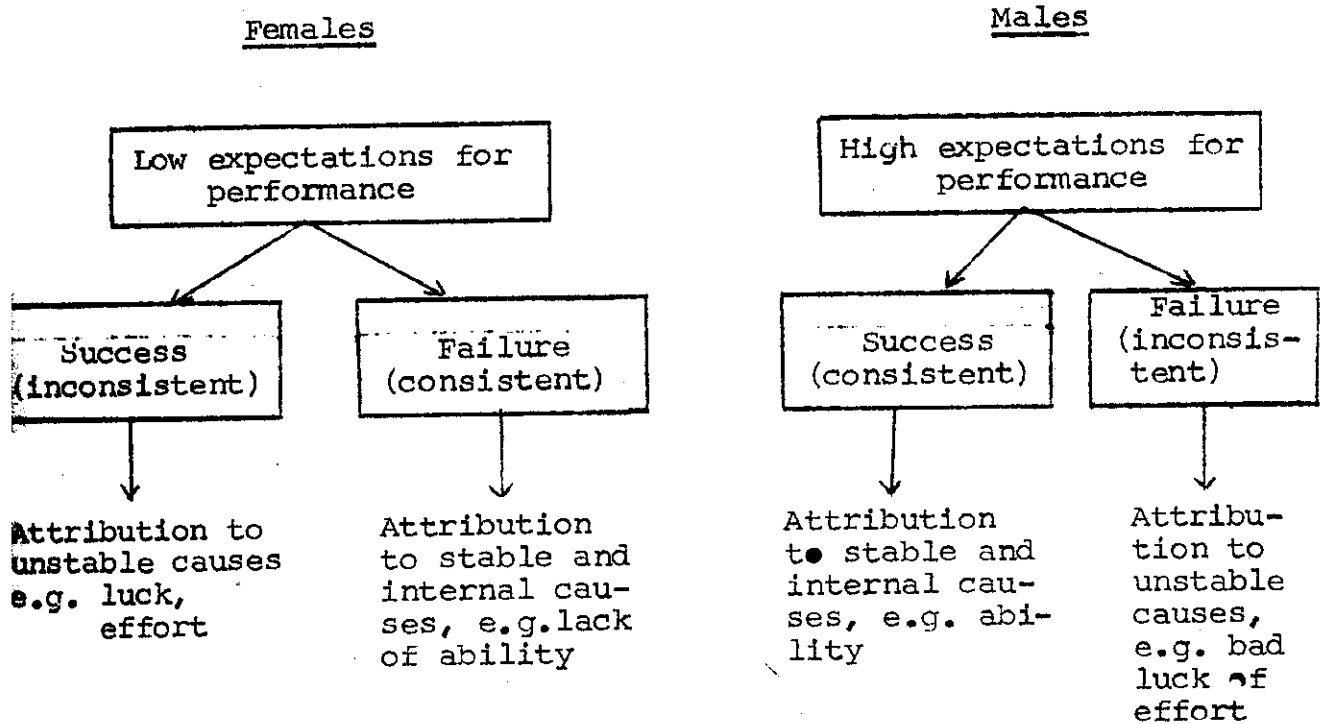
(And in the organizational setting it starts operating right from the point of selection.) Studies by Rosen and Jerdee, (1974) and Haefner (1977) testify to this discrimination and show that male job applicants tend to be selected more frequently than the equally-qualified female applicants for managerial and scientific positions. Other studies (Dipboye, Arvey, and Torpstra, 1977) show that given identical characteristics of hypothetical male and female applicants, males are more likely to be hired than females and to be offered higher initial salaries. Deaux and Tayer (1973) found that in general male applicants for a study-abroad programme received more favourable evaluation than female applicants with identical background.

However, there are some studies which point to the contrary direction. A study by Jacobson and Effertz (1974) has found that for the same performance women receive disproportionately more praise compared to men. The authors say that this could be because women's leadership performance was seen as unexpected, out of role behaviour and therefore it received so much recognition.

Attribution of Women's Performance:

An interesting stream of research has probed whether women are evaluated in the same way as men. Researchers report gender differences in the perceived cause of performance. A person's performance can be attributed to four major factors (Weiner et al., 1971): ability, effort, task difficulty and luck. These can be either internal (like ability and effort) or external (like task difficulty and luck) and stable (like ability) or unstable (like effort). A number of studies indicate that even when women are seen as performing well, they are denied the credit for their performance which is attributed to external factors like luck; whereas in the case of men the performance is attributed to internal factors like their skill (Deaux and Emswiler, 1974; Cash et al., 1977). Coming to the stability dimension (ability versus effort), again males are favored over females. For females, good performance is attributed to effort (which is temporary, unstable) whereas in the case of males, it is attributed to their ability (which is enduring, stable). Also, female success in examinations tends to be attributed to easy courses, or easy question paper (an external factor) whereas male success is seen as resulting from their ability (Feather and Simon, 1975). The reverse is true for unsatisfactory performance. Female failure is explained more in terms of a lack of ability, than the male failure which is often attributed to task difficulty. This relationship between expectancy and attribution is explained in the figure below (Deaux, 1984).

Expectancy Model of Attributions: Actors



This model indicates that attribution to stable/unstable factors basically depends upon whether the performance is consistent with expectations. And these expectations vary depending upon the nature of the task. For example, if the task is defined as masculine in nature, females have low expectation of success and attribute their success to unstable cause like luck whereas males with high performance expectations attribute their success to stable causes like ability. Deaux and Farris (1977) report no difference in expectations when the task is labelled as feminine. The generalisability of these results to the Indian context needs to be established.

Playing the Leader:

Though there is little evidence to show that women are less/more effective than men in managerial positions, playing the boss entails some differences when the boss happens to be a female rather than male. Literature contains mixed results on sex differences in leadership traits. Although research by Kahn, Hoxtes and Davis (1971) shows males to be more competitive, and work done by Hollander and Haaland (1965) shows males to be less compliant than females, majority of studies including Roussell's (1974) have found no sex differences in traits usually associated with leadership like aggressiveness, suggestibility, professional knowledge and sense of power.

Studies of leadership styles and gender differences have thrown up some interesting findings. Certain leadership styles have generally been associated with different sexes. For example, following sex-role stereotypes, female leadership has been associated more with consideration than initiating structure. Research by Day and Stogdill (1972), Bartal (1973), Bartal and Wortman (1975), etc., shows that the stereotypes about the expressive female and instrumental male leadership behaviour are unfounded.

However, the evaluation of the efficacy of certain leadership styles appears to be influenced by the sex of the leader and the subordinate. For example, Rosen and Jerdee (1973) reported that a reward style was rated as more effective

for male supervisors than for female supervisors, while a friendly-dependent style was rated as more effective for supervisors of either sex when used with subordinates of the opposite sex. Similar results were reported by Petty and Lee (1975). Petty and Lee also observed that the sex of the superior and the subordinate influences the subordinate satisfaction with the leadership style of the superior. Male subordinates reporting to female bosses appear less satisfied with their bosses than male/female subordinates under male supervisor, or female subordinates under female supervisors. The dissatisfied male subordinates perceived their female bosses as being lower in consideration (traditionally associated with typical female behaviour) and higher in initiating structure (which is incongruent with sex-role expectations) than subordinates in the other three categories. This indicates an interesting carryover of deeply entrenched sex-rolé patterns, and needs to be particularly probed in the Indian setting where culture strongly reinforces male-dominance and female-subservience.

For a woman manager this trend poses special problems. Being a manager by definition implies . . . the ability to get the work done through other people (including subordinates). But for women managers the exercise of this ability gets restricted due to non-acceptance of some of her leadership behaviour by male subordinates. Due to cultural factors, the sex

of the woman manager, rather than her managerial competence, becomes salient, particularly with male subordinates and her acceptance as a leader gets obstructed to that extent. Leadership styles and behaviours of women managers vis-a-vis male, female, and mixed-group subordinates, is once again a fertile field for inquiry.

8. Differential Treatment in Personnel Decisions:

A number of studies have reported differential treatment of women in organizational settings. Shaw (1972) has found that the gender of the applicant has a differential impact on applicant perception and selection decision to the disadvantage of women. Terborg and Ilgen (1975) report sex discrimination in monetary remuneration which has been supported by other researchers also. On the basis of their in-basket simulation Terborg and Ilgen report that although participants hired a female as frequently as an identically qualified male, the female was offered a significantly lower salary, was assigned to routine tasks more frequently than to challenging ones, and the second year salary offer further increased the initial salary discrepancy between sexes. This and similar studies indicate that other factors remaining constant, women tend to be underpaid compared to their male counterparts. Some studies suggest that both males and females expect women to earn much less than their male colleagues. Indian data need to be collected on this issue.

Also, women's upward mobility in the organization tends to be restricted. Rousell's study (1974) of educational institutions shows that women remained for longer periods at the lower administrative positions than men. The female department heads had remained in their present position for a longer period than the males. Similarly, the female assistant principals had remained in their present positions^{for} almost twice as many years as the male assistant principals. Rosen and Jerdee (1974) report differential treatment of women in promotion and employee development decisions. These slow promotions and discriminatory practices are often justified on the ground that women care less about their careers and professional growth than men do, that women do not want promotions, and therefore do not put in enough effort. Yet, as Nieva and Gutek (1981) observe, these responses could be a reaction to the organizational reality which shows very few women in the upper echelons, and in order to adjust psychologically to this reality, women themselves scale down their career aspirations. Likewise many times intrinsic motivators like challenging assignments are withheld from women on the assumption that they would not be interested. However rigorous research needs to be conducted to establish the validity of these assumptions.

Coming to hygiene factors, a survey conducted by Crowley et al (1973) indicates that women value convenient work hours, ease of travel and pleasant work surroundings more than men do

and the work of Quinn and Shepard (1974) as quoted by Nieva and Gutek (1981) shows that women do have more comfortable jobs than men.

The foregoing discussion suggests a number of interesting research questions for the Indian managerial woman. These revolve round the organizational treatment meted out to her as compared to her male counterpart. Does she enjoy the same salary and perks as her male colleague? How does her career profession compare with that of men with comparable background and in similar positions? Is there any difference in her training and development, and utilisation vis-a-vis her male colleagues? Do organizations use the same mix of motivators and hygiene factors for the women managers as they do for the male managers?

Summary:

To sum up, extensive research has been conducted in the West to study the problems faced by women managers. These studies have explored women's problems of workplace integration, conflict between sex-role and work-role, problems of playing the leader, evaluation and attribution of women's performance, differential treatment in personnel matters, etc. While each of these is a significant issue for study in the Indian context, unfortunately little systematic research has been carried out in our country.

Though working women have started arousing the interest of Indian researchers (Gupta, 1979; Reddy, 1979; Usha, 1983; Hemlatha and Suryanarayana, 1983), such studies are very few and most of them deal with women at the non-managerial level. The few articles dealing with women managers and attitude towards women managers (Singh, Iyer and Gupta, 1984) serve more to arouse general interest in women managers, rather than to report specific research findings on issues related to women managers in the Indian context.

There is thus an urgent need to take up research in this area and explore the work world of the Indian managerial woman. In the context of increasing national priority being attached to women as a social category, and the women joining managerial ranks in increasing numbers, research in this area is indeed overdue. Besides its academic value, it is of tremendous relevance to the present and prospective employers of women as well as to managers belonging to both the sexes as research would help indicate the extent of utilization/underutilisation of this valuable human resource, highlight the specific gender-related problems faced by women and also suggest organizational strategies for overcoming them.

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