



Book review

Management Learning

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DOI: 10.1177/1350507616673247

mlq.sagepub.com



Faniko K, Lorenzi-Cioldi F, Sarrasin O and Mayor E, *Gender and social hierarchies*, Routledge: London, 2015. 193 pp. ISBN: 9781138938113.

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‘Gender and Social Hierarchies’ is a collection of peer reviewed research articles examining the impact of gender-based social hierarchies within education, the workplace and beyond. It is written in three parts. Part I explores the consequences of gender stereotypes, Part II discusses women’s struggles in the workplace and Part III uncovers gender-related prejudice.

I liked the no-nonsense introduction to this book which states that women in the workplace are equal in ambition, ability and commitment but that inequalities in career advancement and remuneration remain. These, to me, are the key issues in a nutshell. It goes on to recognise that there are more women in the workforce now, albeit in lower salaried, more feminised occupations, and that gender stereotyping throughout early life and the steady build-up of discrimination over time reinforces different treatment in the workplace. I applaud this matter of fact start. I think the gender differences in the workplace between men and women have been much documented over time and rather than spend too much time deliberating about the whys and wherefores of how we got into this position, this introduction suggests a more proactive review to follow of where we are today and what we need to do about it.

Part I of this book demonstrates the consequences of gender differences throughout various stages of our education and within specific careers. The first chapter looks at the gendering of young people’s aspirations, through research aimed at pupils aged 13–15 (boys and girls) and their parents. For girls, it seems that holding traditional sexist beliefs themselves, and having this reinforced by parents, is connected to aspiring to gender-typical career aspirations. This was not the same result for boys. This reminds any parents of the impact of their views, ambitions and actions on their children. The second chapter addresses the ‘leaky pipeline’ (p. 26) of women into senior positions within academia, with the suggestion that this is linked to the devaluation of the achievements of girls within school (girls being seen as compliant and boys as intelligent) leading to women being stereotyped as less competent later on. This is followed by a chapter looking at how Physical Education is taught in Swiss elementary schools and whether this has an impact on the performance of different genders. The results showed that boys performed better particularly at more masculine activities and that the gender stereotyping affect was enhanced the older the pupils were. Recommendations are made for teachers including focussing on less masculine activities, reducing the masculine perception of some sports and creating girls only interventions. Considering the long-term impact on health in adulthood, let alone the ongoing impact of self-perceptions by women, these suggestions seem crucial to shaping a more healthy future. Chapter 4 discusses how, despite the ‘feminization of medicine’ (p. 67), women are under represented as physicians and that

men and women bring different qualities to their patient interactions but notes that there is potential for conflict between female physicians and male patients.

I was fascinated by all the research in this section (Part I) and could easily see some common themes emerging in respect of the impact of our own personal beliefs and qualities and how the beliefs of others (parents and teachers) also play an important role. As such, I felt it was a shame that these were not summarised as key themes at the end of this section, with ideas for making changes. There were ideas at the end of each chapter but key themes were not merged as one.

Part II explores women's struggles in the workplace, with chapter 5 describing how negative stereotypes threaten women's leadership not only through their 'self-regulated cognitions' (p. 78) but their performance too. This chapter suggests ideas on how to reduce this negative perception, for instance, exposing women to successful women role models, yet also notes its contradictory effects. Ways around this are discussed and explained. This is my favourite chapter as it quickly highlights the issues for women in the workplace and gives ideas on how to encourage women to better help other women. Chapter 6 introduces affirmative action policies (e.g. quotas) and the connection between education and acceptance of them. A study of 232 public sector workers in Albania showed that those with higher education attainment had less support for affirmative action programmes, and this was the same for both genders.

Chapter 7 highlights the 'glass cliff' metaphor (p. 105), whereby women have an increased chance of achieving a leadership position in times of organisational crisis and thus have an increased risk of failing. It is discussed that their selection could be due to women possessing the right traits to deal with change or that to make the required changes atypical leadership is required or even perhaps that organisations are appointing new women leaders to take the blame. Chapter 8 focusses on work-life balance through research with 960 employed women looking at factors such as job strain, job and life satisfaction, job insecurity and work stress. The overall results showed that women (with and without children) reported high levels of job satisfaction with low levels of job strain and work stress, suggesting that family responsibilities did not have an impact on women's stress levels. As a working mother of three, I found this intriguing, and definitely feel this is an area for further research. Again, I felt that all these chapters in this section (Part II) displayed some similar themes about negative perceptions and stereotypes; the strength that women bring to leading change (without the need for organisational quotas) and their ability to manage multiple identities. Again, I felt a summary emerging from these key themes at the end of this section would have been helpful.

Part III is titled 'Gender related prejudice' which seemed an odd title to bring these chapters together, as in my view, this is a theme that underpins the majority of the chapters of this book. Chapter 9 takes a slightly different stance to the majority of the chapters and discusses key theoretical models in an attempt to explain why gender inequality is still present in our society and workplaces today. An interesting new model of gender prejudice, power and discrimination is proposed including hierarchy-attenuating and hierarchy-enhancing factors at the institutional, group and individual level. Chapter 10 highlights why women may agree with or even endorse sexist beliefs directed at their gender, through a study of 25 psychology students. Chapter 11 looks more specifically at negative attitudes towards Muslim women and gender differences towards the acceptance (or otherwise) of head scarves; suggesting that typically Swiss women have more tolerant views, perhaps because of their stronger left-wing political bias. The final chapter, chapter 12, introduces the notion that heterosexual males have a need to differentiate themselves from women and gay men. This is the only chapter that has men as the main focus and shows their need to affirm and maintain their distinct gender identity. This chapter ends stating that to build and maintain a harmonious society, we must acknowledge the identity needs of each group, reduce the threats between them and, in turn, hope to increase positive consequences for the different groups involved. This

seemed like a fitting ending to the book. The book actually concludes with two pages stating how the collective works were pulled together and the hope that it will support positive action for the future.

I enjoyed reading this book. I found it easy to follow, and I would recommend it for scholars in all social science disciplines. I think the diversity of topics and different research approaches used here uncovers many of the multifaceted aspects that get in the way for women and minority groups within the workplace. I really enjoyed reading about the different research projects, and I'm sure students and academics alike will find scope for further research within the discussions and limitations sections of each chapter.

However, I have two suggestions for any future editions. My first suggestion (as previously stated) would be to have a summary chapter between the three different parts or indeed just one at the end which summarised the key messages and themes coming through the various research studies. It struck me that there were some 'system-legitimizing dynamics that help to preserve the social hierarchy' (p. 3) but that there are some key internal aspects at play too. Perhaps a short summary of these aspects and some overarching ideas on how to address the key themes in the workplace would have been helpful. My second suggestion is linked to the origins of the research. It seems clear that the majority of the chapters have come from a symposium in Switzerland, hence why the majority of the research was carried out in Switzerland too, which from my own personal UK perspective has given me a very interesting and up to date insight into this and a small number of other countries. However, it would be interesting to test some of the results and assumptions made here by comparing and contrasting experiences from other countries, for instance, the chapter 11 research on headscarf acceptance.

Finally, this book positions itself on the very first page as giving a 'fresh and coherent picture of applied research' and this I think it does. It then goes on to say that it looks at the 'intricate relationship between gender and social status'. Overall, I think there is more emphasis on gender than social status but certainly it has given me a better insight into where we are now in respect of gender inequality and how organisations, education systems and individuals can contribute or reinforce this. Plus, it has given me some ideas on what needs to change. The book ends with some questions, for instance, 'should we not break down the fences, change the rules and impose parity?' (p. 189) I'm not sure about imposing anything but after reading this book, I'm all for breaking down fences and changing the rules!