

The New Partnership

Women and Men in Organizations



Nina L. Colwill

THE NEW PARTNERSHIP

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MAYFIELD PUBLISHING COMPANY

To: Erla Louise Colwill Anderson &
Guy William Colwill Anderson &
all the children of the 1980s.

May this book be quaint history before
you're old enough to understand it.

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Preface

In the past few years women and men have begun to enter into a new, more equal partnership in the organizations in which they work. The ramifications are being felt in every segment of our society, but nowhere more than in our organizations, where monumental legal, social, and structural changes are rapidly being implemented.

The major goals of this book are to increase awareness of the sex-role problems facing males and females, whether managers or subordinates, in today's organizations, and to explore some solutions to these problems. These are emotional issues, but issues that can be tackled reasonably, empirically, and positively. Thus, another important goal of the book is to bring to students and business people an awareness of the research evidence that addresses sex-role problems in organizations. It is my hope that readers will be motivated to use this knowledge in the analysis of specific organizational problems and in their own working lives.

Insofar as sex roles and sex-role attitudes interfere with work roles and work attitudes, the organization will suffer. The negative effects may be felt in two, often interacting ways: through less efficient job performance and through less satisfying social and personal lives for the men and women involved. This is not meant to imply that behaving according to traditional sex roles always contributes to organizational inefficiency. The problem arises when sex roles are inconsistent with work aims—when people fail to step out of well-learned sex roles in situations that clearly demand more flexible behavior.

A quick glance at the titles in the reference section of this book will reveal the extent to which the psychological, sociological, and organizational literature reflects a common approach to this issue: sex-role problems as "the woman problem" or "women's problem." But the book is not specifically for or about women. It is biased and unfruitful, perhaps even meaningless, to discuss sex roles as if they were not two reciprocal roles, as if women's roles were forced onto them in a vacuum by men, as if men were not affected by the same social process, and as if the male sex role did not also interfere with organizational efficiency.

In writing this book, I have tried not to dwell on the past. The socialization of boys and girls has been extremely well documented by scores of competent writers and researchers, and the function of this knowledge in changing common-sense notions about men and women is incalculable. In studying organizations, however, we must move beyond socialization in the home and school, for it may matter little to a manager how employees came to be aggressive, submissive, achievement oriented, or verbally adroit. Rather, the primary concerns of managers are how to make the best talent-job matches, how to assist in changing undesirable behaviors and strengthening desirable ones, and how to make their organizations run more smoothly. It is also important for the individual to recognize that methods of dealing with the world are not set in cement. Adults are changing every day when it is in their best interests to do so, and it is in the best interests of everyone to examine the ways in which career advancement and career enjoyment are curtailed by the comfortable, familiar sex roles learned so well in childhood.

This book is divided into nine chapters:

Chapter 1, "The Issues and the Approaches," examines the division of labor by sex, its history, and its disadvantages in today's dynamic society. The empirical approach to sex-role problems in organizations is addressed also, with a special note about some of the major problems in this type of research.

Chapter 2, "Attitudes, Beliefs, and Behavior," focuses on stereotypes, a special type of belief; prejudice, a special type of attitude; and discrimination, a special type of behavior. The ways in which stereotypes are formed and maintained, and specific steps toward attitude change, are presented.

Chapter 3, "Roles," looks at organizational roles and sex roles, with a special focus on the more specific organizational roles so often played by men and women in the workplace. Special attention is given to role conflict, especially the conflict between work roles and family roles.

Chapter 4, "Traits, Abilities, and Their Measurement," focuses on sex differences in various organizational behaviors and on some of the problems inherent in measuring these behaviors.

Chapter 5, "Achievement, Success, and Fear of Success," examines the ways in which we interpret our own success and failure and the attributions we make about the success and failure of others. It looks at the various ways in which researchers and theoreticians have explained sex differences in need for achievement, and it attempts to debunk the organizational demon, fear of success.

Chapter 6, "Power," is about the interrelationship of organizational power, interpersonal power, and feelings of personal power, and the different ways in which men and women have learned to use them.

Chapter 7, "Communication," focuses on the communication of power and status, and the relationship between sex and status in communicating a variety of messages. Based on a model of privacy as a status sym-

bol, it notes the many ways in which the status of both men and women is communicated through the amount of privacy they are accorded.

Chapter 8, "Groups and Leadership," looks at sex differences in group behavior, at the leaders who emerge from groups, and at the leadership styles of women and men.

Chapter 9, "Creating the New Partnership," outlines what I believe to be the greatest barriers to the new partnership and several specific steps to individual change, for as much as we would all love to change the world, all we really have at our disposal is ourselves.

This is a book about sex differences in organizational behavior, and, more important, it is a book about pseudodifferences and nondifferences. It is impossible to study for very long in this area and not to be struck by the fact that there are more similarities than differences between women and men. Both men and women have hearts and lungs and ears and pituitary glands, to be sure, but they also have many of the same dreams and plans and fears and joys. There is no psychology of women, contrary to the assumption behind many book titles, any more than there is a psychology of men. There are certain sex differences in behavior, many of them examined in this book, but they are all governed by common systems of logic: We do what we believe we have to do to be rewarded. The men and women who people today's organizations were reared in somewhat different worlds and often bring different sets of behavior to the workplace, but the differences between Susan and Jane or the differences between Bob and Hank are often greater than the differences between Susan and Bob. This simple truth is the basis for the new partnership: Men and women can combine their strengths to change their organizations and to realize their own potential.

This is a book about men, women, and organizations. And this is a book of optimism: optimism for the future efficiency of organizations and for the humanity of the people who comprise them.

Nina L. Colwill

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In writing this book, I have collaborated with four colleagues who brought their special areas of expertise to the chapters they co-authored.

- WENDY L. JOSEPHSON, co-author of Chapter 2, "Attitudes, Beliefs, and Behavior," teaches in the department of psychology at the University of Winnipeg. She has worked extensively in the areas of attitudes and sex differences and has served as an equal opportunity consultant to a large federal government department.
- HILARY M. LIPS, co-author of Chapter 5, "Achievement, Success, and Fear of Success," is an associate professor in the department of psychology, University of Winnipeg, where she teaches and researches in the area of sex differences. Dr. Lips is the author of a new book entitled *Women, Men, and the Psychology of Sex Differences*. She has co-authored *Psychology of Sex Differences* and has studied attributions of success and failure in sex-role appropriate and sex-role inappropriate occupations.
- BARRY SPINNER, co-author of Chapter 7, "Communication," is an associate professor in the department of psychology at the University of New Brunswick. Dr. Spinner's current research focuses on privacy and communication processes, and he has been involved in several studies examining sex differences and sex-role expectations in communication.
- DANIEL PERLMAN, co-author of Chapter 8, "Groups and Leadership," is an associate professor in the department of psychology, University of Manitoba, where he has served as an administrator and has taught courses in organizational psychology and group dynamics. Dr. Perlman has been a consultant to a number of Canadian and American organizations; he has been involved in several studies in the area of sex differences, sex roles, and nontraditional career paths; and he has participated in an IBM project for the integration of minority employees.

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It's been a piece of heaven, folks, but I'm glad it's over.

N.L.C.

THE NEW PARTNERSHIP

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CHAPTER 1

THE ISSUES AND THE APPROACHES

In February, 1964, a bill that was to change the history of organizations was introduced into the United States House of Representatives. In 1963, the Equal Pay Act had amended the Fair Labor Standards Act in an attempt to bring blacks on par with whites in employment. But any employer who chose to discriminate could still find huge loopholes that allowed for prejudicial hiring. The new “equal opportunity” bill, now known as Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, was formulated to rectify this situation.

Not everyone saw equal employment opportunity for blacks as an ideal to be supported, however, and opponents planned to make the bill appear so ludicrous that it would be unanimously defeated. Their strategy was to draw equal opportunity to a logical and most ridiculous conclusion—to suggest that employers not be allowed to discriminate by sex.

The House of Representatives broke into laughter that reverberated throughout the continent. The media loved the joke: editorial columns and feature articles fantasized about male bunnies and female construction workers (Loring & Wells, 1972). But not everyone was laughing, and the acceptance of Title VII, the sarcastic accident, is now history.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was formed to enforce the new legislation, but it soon became apparent that it

The author of this chapter is Nina L. Colwill.

did not intend to extend its efforts to the policing of sex discrimination. Newspapers continued to advertise jobs by sex, and EEOC would not interfere. However, professional women had been mobilized to fight for Title VII, and many of them united under the umbrella of the National Organization for Women (NOW). They demonstrated, marched, lobbied, and fought in the courts under formal structure and strong leadership. From NOW grew the Women's Equity Action League (WEAL), which has concentrated on sex inequalities in the legal system and has been responsible for a large number of legal reforms (E. C. Snyder, 1979).

North America was ready for social change. Inflation was forcing employment on both adult members of many families; more female heads of families were emerging; and women were beginning to question the gap between male and female salaries, privileges, and job opportunities. Effective birth control had resulted in smaller families, and women were having their children later in life and were living longer. These changes meant that women were being employed in greater, more vocal numbers than ever before. The family was changing, the workplace was changing, and the ensuing political, social, and economic climate required organizations to keep pace.

Sociologists, political scientists, and economists could argue forever about the causal direction of social change over the past two decades. Was the great influx of women into the labor force changing organizations, or were changing organizations drawing women into the workplace? Although effective birth control is usually hailed as the most important factor enabling women in large numbers to enter full-time employment, one could argue equally well that effective birth control was necessary for the first time in history *because* many women were choosing a lifestyle that included permanent employment. The means for effective birth control have been with us for decades, but church and state laws have prevented the dispensing not only of birth control devices, but even of birth control information. Women in the workplace may well have been the force that shook the laws and spurred on the technology. It is impossible to isolate a single causal factor; a host of factors interplayed in complex ways. But whatever the reasons, sex-role liberation has arrived, and it bears none of the earmarks of a passing fad.

This chapter discusses the division of labor by sex: why women are segregated into some occupations and men into others. It examines and rejects physical sex differences as a full explanation for sex-differentiated labor and turns to two conflicting alternatives: evolution and social functionalism. But whatever the origin of a division of labor by sex, there are tools of social science research that can help us understand the new partnership; thus some of the problems in sex-differences research are presented next to help provide the reader with a more critical eye.

THE DIVISION OF LABOR BY SEX

Probably the most consistent finding in the entire literature of sex difference is that of a division of labor by sex. In spite of a few isolated examples of what North Americans now call sex-role reversal (Mead, 1935), the phenomenon is amazingly consistent from culture to culture and from society to society. In primitive African tribes and sophisticated western cultures, men usually perform the strenuous jobs requiring cooperative effort and mobility, and women are involved in occupations that accord them solitude and low mobility. Men have hunted, trapped, herded, fished, traveled, and gone out daily to seek their fortunes, while women have prepared and gathered food near the home, nurtured the young, and performed service tasks for the family. Even where the society is a manufacturing one, dependent upon specialized labor, men tend to manufacture the tools of their trades and women the tools of theirs. Thus, men work with metal, wood, and stone to create weapons, sailing vessels, and musical instruments. Women work with clay and fabric, wool and cotton; they weave and sew, cook for others, and make pottery (D'Andrade, 1966).

Physical Differences and Sex-Differentiated Labor

Many explanations have been advanced for the consistency of the division of labor by sex, physical sex differences being the most obvious one. In every human society there are sex differences in height, musculature, and skeletal size, with males being taller, bigger, and stronger than females (D'Andrade, 1966). Yet in some societies physical sex differences are very small, and in all societies the overlap is such that some women are bigger and stronger than some men and some men are smaller and weaker than some women. Furthermore, these differences are not completely under genetic control and are, in fact, strengthened by the very process of sex-differentiated labor. Men are stronger and more muscular than women, not only because they are genetically programmed to be so, but because they perform, from early childhood, tasks that require more exertion than those performed by females.

In societies such as the Bali, where both males and females tend to be frail and their work involves little exertion, sex differences in strength and musculature are very small. In the past few decades, however, some Bali males have been employed as dock hands for European organizations, and their musculature has become much more like the typical male musculature of other cultures (D'Andrade, 1966).

The effects of environmental control on women's physical strength are equally dramatic. Although men have traditionally outpaced women in

the Olympics, for instance, the gap is rapidly closing in running, jumping, swimming, and throwing events. In the 1974 Olympics, men's edge on women in the shotput and discus throw was only 4 percent, down from their 11 and 18 percent advantages in 1934 (Luce, 1976). Much has happened since 1934, nutritionally, medically, and socially, and somehow the environment has changed physical potential. It seems that women have been affected more than men by these changes, for although both men and women have improved in optimal-performance sports over the past half century, women have clearly improved more.

The physical strength issue may be an irrelevant one, however. Physical strength plays no part in most occupations, and the division of labor by sex in manufacturing societies bears little relationship to the size or strength of its employees (Gagnon, 1976). The unwritten rules about which tasks can be performed by which sex often differ regionally. In the Midwestern United States, for instance, cornhuskers are traditionally female, while in the Far West they are male (Blau, 1978). Yet within a given geographical region the system is so inflexible that a first-grade child can sex-type most occupations with amazing accuracy (Clarke, 1978).

The Evolution of Sex-Differentiated Labor

Where did the division of labor by sex originate and how is it maintained? For two possible explanations we turn to the nature-nurture question. Are sex differences in organizational behavior biologically or socially determined? Although few scientists today would lay claim to the definitive answer, it may be helpful to look at two prototypical positions. The extreme genetic, or "nature," position states that, as humans evolved, the traits and abilities required in certain occupations were genetically programmed in a sex-differentiated way. Thus, the argument goes, men evolved into superior hunters, herders, and corporation presidents, and women into better nurses, homemakers, and librarians.

It is difficult to discuss the division of labor by sex without mentioning the family. Two critical factors unique to human evolution have made sound family structure a crucial human institution. The first is the long and helpless infancy of the species: because human young cannot feed or fend for themselves for many months after birth, they are completely dependent upon devoted care for survival. The second is the nonoestrus hormonal cycle of the human female: because the human female does not go into heat but can be sexually receptive at all times, sexuality probably serves as a more binding force among male and female humans than it does among lower animals. Thus, it is thought, the family was born through the sexual bond of men and women who aided in the care of helpless infants. The evolutionary argument would have it that men, being stronger and