

# Women and Work

## *A Handbook*

Edited by  
Paula J. Dubeck  
Kathryn Borman

Assistant Editors  
Sonia Carreon  
Amy Cassedy

GARLAND PUBLISHING, INC.  
*New York & London*  
1996

- Martin, J. 1992. *The Cultures of Organizations*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Mills, A.J. 1988. "Organization Acculturation and Gender Discrimination." In *Canadian Issues, X(1)—Women and the Workplace*, edited by P.K. Kresl, pp. 1–22. Montreal: Assn. of Canadian Studies/International Council for Canadian Studies.
- Mills, A.J., and P. Tancred, eds. 1992. *Gendering Organizational Analysis*. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage.
- Morgan, G. 1986. *Images of Organization*. Chap. 6. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage.
- Morgan, N. 1988. *Women in the Canadian Federal Public Service*. Ottawa: Status of Women Committee.
- Ouchi, W. 1981. *Theory Z*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.
- Pollert, A. 1981. *Girls, Wives, Factory Lives*. London: Macmillan.
- Stiehm, J.H. 1981. *Bring Me Men and Women: Mandated Change at the U.S. Air Force Academy*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.

## Organizational Sexuality

Organizational sexuality refers to the relationship between organizational arrangements and the construction and manipulation of sexuality. Sexuality, at its most basic level, can be defined as a person's sexual self; those aspects of a person that make him or her sexually attractive to another. Despite the fact that sexual attractiveness can take various forms, dominant (male) images of heterosexuality persist, within which the creation and exploitation of female sexuality is a particularly pernicious aspect, but which also involves homosexual and lesbian harassment (Schneider 1982). Evidence of widespread sexual harassment in the workplace, and the exploitation of female sexuality (such as in advertising and sales techniques) has led feminists to examine the role of organizations in regard to sexuality.

Acts of sexual harassment are among the clearest examples of sexual behavior at work. At its most explicit, sexual harassment involves unwanted attention of a sexual nature, whether through acts of a physical, verbal, or otherwise suggestive nature: The overwhelming majority of cases involve the sexual harassment of a woman by a man. Studies of sexual harassment at work indicate that there is a relationship between the incidence and type of harassment and the character of the workplace itself. Some workplace environments, for example, either encourage or fail to discourage sexual harassment.

Power is a central issue in sexual harassment. Organizational arrangements create countless contexts or power inequities in which men occupy the majority or the only positions of power and authority. In many cases of sexual harassment organizational power is a factor, where the woman is bothered by an organizationally more powerful male or has to rely on a male power structure to intervene to prevent harassment. In several industrial counties the invidious character of sexual harassment has been recognized and legislation has been established to deal with it.

Less recognized as a problem is the manipulation by organizations of female sexuality. In addition to the clear and blatant use of female sexuality in advertising, numerous organizations utilize certain female looks, voice, style of dress, and behavior to sell their products or services. A prime example is the airline industry where various companies have required female flight attendants to present an image of attractiveness and attentiveness (Hochschild 1983). Other examples include the sexual imagery often expected of female receptionists, secretaries, and restaurant and other service-oriented positions that deal with the public. Not surprisingly, sexual attractiveness is frequently a factor in the recruitment practices of those organizations concerned with sexual imagery, but it can also influence the recruitment decisions of other organizations. Guteck and Cohen (1992), for ex-

ample, found that, in certain cases, male recruiters are more likely to hire those female candidates who are perceived as attractive over those who are not.

Other ways in which sexuality intrudes into the workplace include the use of sexuality to achieve personal and organizational ends, sex-role spillover, sexual imagery, and sexual innuendo. In the context of a sexualized workplace—that is, an organization that encourages sexuality—some women learn to use sexuality to achieve certain ends. Female use of sexuality, however, has been overstressed in the literature and in practice through the use of innuendo that links female success with sexuality. A far greater problem is sex-role spillover where patriarchal relationships are reproduced in the workplace creating numerous situations where women are expected to service the needs of men within the organization—such as fetching coffee. Collinson (1988), Pollert (1981), and Sheppard (1989) draw attention to the ways in which male managers use sexuality to control the activities of female subordinates, through the use of language (such as referring to female employees as “love” or “sweetheart”), an insistence on narrow dress codes (such as requirements that women wear dresses as opposed to slacks), through the use of touching and body language (such as the male manager placing his arm around a female subordinate), and sexual harassment (such as the use of demeaning remarks and behavior to force compliance). Studies of male sexuality (Willis 1977) have drawn attention to the relationship between organizational arrangement and masculinity, in particular the expectations that many organizations have for macho (blue-collar) and competitive-aggressive (managerial) behavior for their male employees, which, as a result, contributes to the development of narrow, negative forms of masculinity, forms that are usually antiwomen in their outcomes.

A central and recurring theme of organizations is heterosexuality. Signs of sexual preference other than heterosexuality are rarely tolerated within organizations. Very little research has yet been done on homosexuality at work, but what evidence there is indicates that gay women and men are usually expected to conceal their sexual preferences from organizational view (Schneider 1982, 1984). Pressure to conform to heterosexual views of reality put additional strains on gay women (Hall 1990).

Debate on organizational sexuality is relatively new and as yet the concept is highly contested. At least four major ways of understanding organizational sexuality can be identified, as (1) a biological essence, or the reproduction of essential drives in organizational contexts; (2) the outcome of social roles, where relatively fixed sex roles become translated into organizational behaviors; (3) a fundamental political category, “an historical constructed collectivity of interest and community set within definite relations of power dominance” (Hearn and Burrell 1990, p.6); and (4) a communicative practice and discourse of power “maintained through the order of the discourse and the mutually reinforcing interventions of power, knowledge and pleasure” (Hearn and Burrell 1990, p.6). In any event, each of these perspectives shares a view of organizational sexuality as a barrier to equity at work.

*Albert J. Mills*

### **Bibliography**

Collinson, D.L. 1988. “Engineering Humour: Masculinity, Joking and Conflict in Shopfloor Relations.” *Organization Studies* 9:181-99.

- Davies, S. 1989. "Inserting Gender into Burowoy's Theory of the Labour Process." *Work, Employment & Society* 4:391-406.
- Guteck, B.A., and A.G. Cohen. 1992. "Sex Rations, Sex Role Spillover, and Sex at Work: A Comparison of Men's and Women's Experiences." In *Gendering Organizational Analysis*, edited by A.J. Mills and P. Tancred, pp. 133-50. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage.
- Hall, M. 1990. "Private Experiences in the Public Domain: Lesbians in Organizations." In *The Sexuality of Organization*, edited by J. Hearn, D.L. Sheppard, P. Tancred-Sheriff, and G. Burrell, pp. 125-38. London: Sage.
- Hearn, J., and G. Burrell. 1990. "The Sexuality of Organization." In *The Sexuality of Organization*, edited by J. Hearn, D.L. Sheppard, P. Tancred-Sheriff, and G. Burrell, pp. 1-28. London: Sage.
- Hearn, J., D.L. Sheppard, P. Tancred-Sheriff, and G. Burrell, eds. 1990. *The Sexuality of Organization*. London: Sage.
- Hochschild, A.R. 1983. *The Managed Heart*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Pollert, A. 1981. *Girls, Wives, Factory Lives*. London: Macmillan.
- Schneider, B.E. 1982. "Consciousness about Sexual Harassment among Heterosexual and Lesbian Women Workers." *Journal of Social Issues* 38:75-98.
- . 1984. "The Office Affair: Myth and Reality for Heterosexual and Lesbian Women Workers." *Sociological Perspectives* 27:443-64.
- Sheppard, D.L. 1989. "Organizations, Power and Sexuality: The Image and Self-Image of Women Managers." In *The Sexuality of Organization*, edited by J. Hearn, D.L. Sheppard, P. Tancred-Sheriff, and G. Burrell, pp. 139-57. London: Sage.
- Willis, P.E. 1977. *Learning to Labour*. Farnborough, England: Saxon House.

### **Sexual Coercion in the Workplace**

In recent years there has been an increase in the amount of attention given to sexually coercive behavior in the workplace, its origins, and the implications for relations between men and women working together. Part of the problem lies in early socialization patterns in the educational system, which emphasize socially constructed differences in men and women and offer distorted views of sexuality and sexual norms. Stereotypical gender socialization sets up interactive patterns between men and women that are conducive to date rape and sexual harassment. Furthermore, males and females often define sexual encounters differently and thus view sexual harassment in the workplace in the context of gendered expectations. The consequences for perpetrators and victims of sexual harassment are discussed, and the implications for interactive patterns between men and women in the workplace are addressed.

By the time children reach elementary school, they are engaging in sex-segregated activities and reinforcing traditional conceptions of masculinity and femininity (Thorne 1986). In childhood conversations, boys tend to negotiate for status while girls seek intimacy and connections in their interactions (Goodwin 1991). These differences are reinforced in adolescence in the separate activities through which high school and junior high school students seek status with their peers. Since very little information is given to children and adolescents concerning sexuality and sexual feelings, they often turn to each other to make sense of cultural messages (Corsaro 1985). In the process, they tend to reproduce sexually coercive attitudes and behaviors within their own peer interactions. Kanin (1984) found that peer-group socialization in high school was a critical factor in explaining the behavior of date rapists, in that these men had been a part of peer groups that viewed women as sexual conquests.

One important source for social messages about sexual interaction norms is the education system. Schools, from primary through the high school level, reinforce very narrow, opposing definitions of masculinity and femininity (Thorne 1986).