'Between A Rock And A Hard Place'
Towards a Theorisation of The Role of Gender in Junior Management

Matthew J. Brannan
School of Economic and Management Studies
Darwin Building
Keele University
Staffordshire
ST5 5BG
United Kingdom
Tel. 01782 583610
Email: M.brannan@mngt.keele.ac.uk

And

Vincenza Priola
School of Economic and Management Studies
Darwin Building
Keele University
Staffordshire
ST5 5BG
United Kingdom
Tel. 01782 58
Email: V.Priola@mngt.keele.ac.uk

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BIOGRAPHIES

Matthew Brannan is a Lecturer at the School of Economic and Management Studies, Keele University. He has recently completed a PhD thesis which explores workplace resistance within a call centre environment. He has written on the sexualization of call centre work and the socialization of its workers.

Vincenza Priola is a lecturer in management at the School of Economic and Management Studies at Keele University in the UK where she is also a member of the Research Institute for Public Policy and Management. Her research interests lie in the area of gender and work and she is particularly interested in feminine and masculine managerial identities. Another area of interest is team-work.

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Abstract

This paper seeks to theorise the role that gender plays in the careers of junior female managers. We do this by drawing upon two separate empirical studies, firstly a large-scale study based on interviews with female managers in the West Midlands (UK) is used to explore the growth of female participation in junior managerial roles with reference to the notion of managerial careers as seduction. We explore the routes the women have taken into junior management careers and the barriers that exist to progression toward more senior roles. Secondly, a small-scale ethnographic study of a large service-based organization, also based in the West Midlands, is documented in an attempt to theorise the organizational role of female junior managers. While the dominance of masculine values and practices in organisations is explored, we also argue that growing female participation at junior managerial levels can only partly be explained by female managers adopting, or appearing to adopt, masculine behaviours. We seek to contribute to a fuller explanation by drawing attention to the way in which senior managers in the case study sought to employ female junior managers particularly for their perceived feminine skills. Significantly, however the ethnography reveals the ambiguously gendered construction of female junior managers roles through an exploration of the enactment of both masculine and feminine practices during the 'doing' of management.

Introduction

The growing recognition of organizations as locations of gender processes (Marshall, 1995) has led to accounts of the experience of female managers as embodying these processes (Mills and Tancred, 1992). Attention has usefully focused upon the inequality that exists between male and female managerial careers in terms of initial access, promotion, progress and reward (Davidson and Burke, 2000). A central theme to emerge from this literature is the extent to which female managerial careers appear to be overwhelmingly restricted to lower levels of management (Powell and Graves, 2003). This paper seeks to explore and theorise the role of female junior managers by drawing upon a large scale study based on over fifty interviews with female managers in the West Midlands region of the UK, along with a small scale ethnographic study of a large service-based organization also based in the West Midlands. The interview data presented seeks to outline the scope of managerial careers for female managers whilst documenting the enduringly seductive appeal that managerial opportunities seem to offer female employees. Furthermore, the extent to which female managerial participation is restricted to lower levels of managerial hierarchy is explored.

The growing attention paid to the gendering of managerial careers has usefully highlighted the requirement for successful managers (however this is defined) to adopt, what are culturally considered, masculine characteristics (Collinson and Hearn, 1996; Kerfoot and Knights, 1998) with a corresponding / resultant peripheralisation and/or devaluing of feminine characteristics within the organizational realm. In exploring the experience of doing junior management, we argue that female participation at junior managerial levels can only partly be explained by women

adopting masculine characteristics. We seek to contribute to a fuller explanation by drawing attention to the way in which senior managers in the case study organization sought to employ female junior managers or team leaders particularly for their perceived feminine skills. Despite the construction by senior managers of team leader roles as requiring feminine characteristics, we explore the fragility of such assumptions by documenting how the nature of the role/tasks performed within the specific organisational context of the case study exercises a strong influence on the feminine/masculine behaviours of these female junior managers. By doing so, we argue that the ways in which these women do management were subtly, yet ambiguously and contradictorily, gendered.

Our contribution therefore is firstly to document the experiences of female managerial careers through an analysis of extensive interview data. This focuses attention on the perceived seductive nature of managerial careers for many women whilst drawing attention to the lack of real opportunities and barriers for progress beyond junior levels. Our theoretical contribution seeks to fill the existing gap within the literature on masculinities and femininities at work by drawing attention to they ways in which feminine skills are demanded, in specific sectors and managerial roles, specifically for the way in which these are employed to control other employees (Tancred-Sherrif, 1989) and enchant customers (Korczynski, et al., 2000, Korczynski, 2005).

Women and Management

There is evidence that, among other factors, the increased proportion of females in the workforce[i], equal opportunities legislation and current debates and research on gender

in management have influenced the increasing representation of women in managerial roles[ii]. While the proportion of women managers may be increasing[iii], an examination of the representation of women in managerial ranks reveals that the increase is limited to junior and middle levels and that women do not achieve leading positions in private and public organisations. Women comprise less than five percent of senior management in the UK, in the EU, and in the US (Davidson and Burke, 2000). Adams (2002) reports that within the largest 100 listed companies the number of women in executive positions is very low (less than two percent)[iv]and that 42 of the 100 FTSE companies have no women on their boards. In the UK, thirty-seven percent of companies do not employ women in management positions while the average European percentage is fifty (Vinnicombe, 2000). In addition, it has to be highlighted that a greater proportion of women are employed in professions than in corporate management and in female-dominated sectors than in male-dominated industries (Reskin and Roos, 1990; The Women's Unit, 2001).

Research (e.g. Powell and Graves, 2003) suggests that it does not seem to be only a matter of time until the gap between women and men in management positions is closed. A change in cultural values and practices is needed within organisations, as well as within society, for women and men to achieve equality. In reviewing the status of women in management, Powell (2000) brings together the reasons for the increased proportion in recent years of women in junior managerial levels. He reported that among the factors that influenced the increased proportion of women in management is the increased number of women earning university degrees in all disciplines in the US, in Europe and in many other countries. The increased educational attainment and enhancement of academic credentials of women has

subsequently accompanied an increased commitment to professional and managerial careers. Simultaneously, economic and legal developments (e.g. legislation on equal opportunities) benefited women's progression into managerial positions. Due to economic expansion, western countries experienced a higher demand for labour in a period of declining labour supply (due to a decreasing fertility rate since the 1970s). This translates into more opportunities for educated women to enter newly created managerial jobs. The global shift from a manufacturing-based to an information and service-based economy, which values highly educated workers, with emotional or aesthetic skills (Hochschild, 1983; Bolton and Boyd, 2003; Witz et al., 2003) over manual skills, has also boosted the presence of women in junior and middle managerial levels.

Whilst the proportion of women in management is increasing at junior and middle levels, the proportion of women in senior roles remains relatively small. Researchers have explained this with the dominance of the patriarchal social (and organisational) system, in which the male has power and authority (e.g. Walby, 1986; Witz, 1992; Ledwith and Colgan, 1996; Powel, 2000; Katila and Mariläinen, 1999, 2002), and the subsequent dominance of masculine values and practices in organisations (e.g. Cockburn, 1991; Gherardi, 1994, 1996; Collinson and Hearn, 1996; Kerfoot and Knights, 1998; Priola, 2004).

Theoretical understandings of the dominance of masculinity in organisations have tended to be produced from within a poststructuralist feminist framework (e.g. Irigaray, 1985, Butler, 1990) where masculinity is seen as a discursively constructed mode of being. Masculinity and masculine identities refer to 'values, experiences and

meanings that are ascribed to men more than women in a particular cultural context'
(Alvesson, 1998, p.72) and which in the workplace are associated with aggressive
competition, goal driven and instrumental pursuit of authority, dominance, control
and success (Kerfoot and Knights, 1998)[v]. Among others, Kerfoot and Knights (1998)
and Collinson and Collinson (1997) suggest that women managers can survive and
progress only if they encompass those behaviours and practices regarded as
masculine. Hearn (1998), likewise, argues that women do management in different
ways without fundamentally challenging the long established masculine culture. Thus,
gender processes within the workplace highlight the potential for a multiplicity of
gender positions within any given role within the organizational hierarchy.

However, it has also been suggested that women often are not passive recipients of
masculine practices but that, while experiencing conflicts and tensions in managing
their identity and subject position, may be implementing some changes in the ways
they do management. Such different ways of managing may not be determining
'feminine' working cultures but result in more open communication, more supporting
and nurturing working environment (Priola, 2004) and/or may refer to the exhibition
of 'enchanting' behaviours in order to achieve greater control of subordinates and
collaboration with customers (reference removed for review).

Methodology

In attempting to explore and theorise the role of female junior managers this article
draws upon two studies that were designed and implemented separately. The
deliberate combination of research methodologies and data is not designed to

overcome the problems associated with either methodology, nor do we advocate this 'mixed' methodology as a practical solution to the challenges of gender focused organizational research. Rather we believe that the combination of the findings from these different studies does provide insights into the contemporary position of female junior managers in organizations. The interview data provides a useful discussion of a large sample of female managers by providing insights into the concept of career as being seductive for many female employees and by highlighting the difficulties to progress within masculine systems of work. The ethnographic data explores the lived experience of a small team of call centre workers who were managed by a female team leader. It highlights the typical roles that were required to perform by the team leader (a typical junior management role) . The combination of findings from both these studies allow for a tentative theorisation of the role of junior managers.

The large-scale study was based on 56 interviews conducted with women managers within various sectors[vii]. This study was part of large multi-methods project looking at Women in Management in the West Midlands (Gilbert et al, 2005)[viii]. The research aimed at investigating the experiences of local women of specific personal, organisational and cultural barriers that may be holding them back and the factors that act as forces for their participation and progression into managerial careers. Women participants occupied different roles within their organisations and the majority were at junior and middle management level. A few women (eight) were directors of their own company. Among the women who participated in the study, the majority worked for the public sector (61 percent) and a high proportion of them were managers in more female-oriented sectors (e.g. education, health service and care services)[ix]. The

managers in the private sector (34 percent) worked in retail, banking, construction and engineering, IT, business consultancies and care homes.

During the interviews, women were also asked to complete a biographical 'career map'. They were asked to identify and report on a A3 format paper, and in whatever format they preferred, the steps they had taken since leaving school, up to where they were now and where they were heading. In devising their maps, the interviewees were stimulated not only by the researcher/interviewer but also by some questions reported into boxes at the four corners of the paper. These were:

1. When were the times and occasion?

    What were the 'tools' you used…

    What were the ways…

    Who were the people…

That helped you in your careers so far?

2. What were the times and occasions?

    What were the 'weapons'…

    What were the ways…

    Who were the people…

That hindered you in your career so far?

3. Looking back, what/who would have/could have made a difference?

4. When would it/could it have made a difference?

The second study involved the researcher adopting a complete participant (Gold, 1958) role within the large call centre based in the West Midlands. The researcher

applied for and was successful in securing employment within the call centre for the purpose of conducting ethnographic research. Whilst the term ethnography is contested, specifically in relation to the poblematising of processes of description, reference and the construction of authority (Linstead, 1993), in this context it is used to suggest a research process designed and conducted to allow the researcher to become a full participant in the everyday life of the call centre worker. Similar techniques have been widely used in researching gender in organizations (see for example Adkins 1992; Cavendish, 1982; Collinson, 1992; Filby, 1992; Hodgson, 2003; Pollert, 1981). The researcher, upon commencement of employment was therefore involved in all aspects of the call centre work process and worked along side other Customer Service Representatives and was subject to the same terms and conditions. Collection of data was facilitated through the compilation of a fieldwork journal or log, which was written whilst within the call centre and took the form of an extensive word document stored on the researcher's call centre workstation. The fieldwork journal was used as the basis for data analysis after completion of the observation period and follow-up interviews were conducted with key call centre staff following withdrawal from the field. The follow-up interviews allowed for ideas and concepts to be discussed with call centre workers whilst observations of interest and clarifications of various practices were also sought. Both data sets (a) the interviews notes and the women's 'career maps' and (b) the fieldwork journal and the follow-up interviews) were analysed searching for emerging discourses and themes.

Why Management?

In exploring women's routes into management, it emerged that education and self-determination are at the core of a career in management. However, it appears that educational qualifications act both against women's participation in management and in favouring women's managerial progression. While in the UK, approximately three-fifths of further and higher education students are female (UNESCO, 2002), the proportion of women studying business compared to men is lower (30 percent) than those studying law (44 percent) and medicine (44 percent). In addition, only a quarter of MBA graduates are women (Vinnicombe and Colwill, 1995). The discussion of the reasons why fewer young women than men aspire and prepare for a career in business go beyond the aims of this paper. However, women's education attainments (whatever the disciplinary background) act in their favour in sectors where routes to management are clearly delineated and where the majority of part-time workers are likely to be women (e.g. retail and service sectors). Steven (2000: 23) points out that people who require part-time work are usually 'limited in their choice of occupation by what is obtainable to fit in with the specific hours for which they are available'. The implication is that they may find themselves in jobs for which they are over-qualified or, for those previously in work (e.g. women who have taken a career break), their part-time job may be of lower status than their previous employment. When such women decide to take on a full-time position their qualifications and experiences may act as an advantage for them to move on to managerial positions. While this aspect may contribute to the explanation of an increasing proportion of women at junior managerial level, several other issues contribute to the lower proportion of women in senior levels.

From an initial examination of the interview data it appears that women's self determination to progress and succeed is fundamental to their career progression. The reading of the women's accounts of determination and perseverance, in spite of the difficulties and obstacles they experienced, leads to the question: why did/do they want to be in management? The research suggests complex motives and this session explores this issue further.

It has been suggested (Whitehead, 2001) that management contains seductive elements that makes it an attractive career path for both women and men. The 'promise' of organisational power and status and the ability to control others (as well as oneself) make the position of the manager particularly attractive. This was evident in most women's responses. They all talked about the difficulties they experienced throughout their career and emphasised their strong determination to overcome these and achieve a position of influence. Status and power exercise a strong attraction but the ability to influence, perhaps even to control others, seems a strong pull for the women below who emphasise the possibility to 'facilitate people coming together strategically', to be 'listened to' and to 'help people develop'. In investing in the subject position of manager, they both engage with discourses associated with the 'people management' aspect of the position. Most interviewees (with the exception of a few entrepreneurs), in fact, constructed management as 'nurturing people', 'influencing people', never as 'making decisions', 'solving problems' or 'determining processes'. In emphasising her influential position within her organisation, Anita, below, also highlights the status that, through her job/profession, she has achieved within her community and the benefits that it has brought to her family and friends.

I want to remain in a position where I can facilitate people coming together, strategically. …. what matters is to make something bigger over what I am given, find points of interest and feel supported and listened to by both male and female colleagues' (Rosemary: Project manager in a large public sector organisation).

My father influenced my career choice and my husband is a driving force … I am determined and find that in my position it is important to be able to have influence and help other people develop. … I am well known in the community, through my profession I have helped family and friends (Anita: retail/professional service partner and managing director).

For both women in the extracts above to achieve their positions they had to overcome difficulties. Rosemary experienced discrimination and lack of support, she changed directions many times and decided that she wanted to remain in a position of influence and have the respect of her clients and colleagues. As well as the power to influence others, from the interview with Rosemary, it emerged that the power to control herself and overcome her weaknesses exercised an equally strong attraction. The position of the manager as rational and self-controlled becomes even more seductive when experiencing the need for emotional support and emotional strength. While Rosemary refers to her determination as associated to the process of overcoming periods of low self-esteem and progress further, Anita emphasises her determination as associated to the support of her family. Self-determination is constructed by Anita as a strength enthused by the emotional support of her husband, the influence of her father in her career choice and the help of her mother in looking after her children.

> I didn't get support in my career choice, being Asian my family wanted me to become a professional …. but I want to demonstrate that I can do better and achieve success in such competitive environment (Shamila: IT manager in a large IT MNC).

Some women may be seduced by the promise of status and power to influence others and oneself. Others may be seduced by the wish to prove themselves and others that they can do better and achieve success in environments, which are traditionally male dominated (as Shamila above) or that may represent difficult challenges (as Mandy below).

> I have developed leadership skills all throughout my life. I was a leader at youth club and at 14 I won the Duke of Edinburgh's award, which laid the foundations for my later experiences. Systematising this type of opportunities for teenagers could make the difference…. After I had the children I took a career break during which time I re-trained as a teacher and did some part-time teaching, but I didn't enjoy it, so, while at home, I started a small business as an importer of fashion. When the children were more independent, I went back to college and set up my home care business which currently employs 30 people (Mandy: owner and managing director of a small care company).

For Mandy above, being able to 'lead', take decisions and being in control of the processes which influence her job is fundamental. Her teaching job was seen as fitting in with her family requirements, however it did not fit in with her desire to be in control of her activities. She saw the option of being entrepreneur/managing director as an opportunity to achieve a position of leadership, status and influence (as been in control of the business processes and her subordinates).

Barriers to Management Progression

Among the 56 women managers interviewed only one held a senior level position as a regional director within a public sector organisation. Other eight were directors of their own companies, one of which was a limited company. All other women were in junior and middle managerial roles. In discussing the difficulties associated with their career progression, most of the interviewees referred to the masculine culture of their workplace, in particular in heavy industry such as engineering and construction and in consultancy. Some women suggested that they did not or could not do anything to change the masculine system but only tried to have good work relationships, be respected and fit in.

> During my MSc I was one of few female students, it was a technical course. After I progressed into a career in a traditionally male dominated sector. I never fit in, not only I was a woman, but also I was discriminated against for being educated. It was extremely demoralising and I lost my self-confidence, I needed to feel listened to. After a big crisis, I left that career and went to work in African villages (Rosemary: Project manager in a large public sector organisation).

> My organisation and specifically my department is very male dominated, there is strong competition, a long hours culture, the work is really based on a male model. It is difficult if you are a woman, even more difficult if you have a family (Rose: manager in a public sector organisation).

Along with the experiences of competitive environments, some of the aspects that women reported when asked clarifications on what they referred to when they talked about 'male models', 'male domination', 'male systems' were the lack of training provided to them, the lack of support offered by superiors and the limited

expectations they perceived their managers had of them. They attributed these factors to their gender. This impression was that because they were women it was implicit that they would leave in the future to have a family and, if they would come back to work after maternity leave, that they would stop from seeing their career as a priority in their lives.

In my first job, I was motivated to move on quickly. I continually asked for training courses and opportunities to learn in order to progress but my manager was always reluctant until I started applying for other jobs. I could see that some of my male colleagues were moving on within the company (Suki: marketing manager in the banking sector).

As a black woman I have experienced racism and people generally had low expectation of me. I have never received career guidance… However, self motivation and strong family values have helped me in my career (Fay: project manager)

Throughout my career path I have experienced racism, sexism and other obstacles such as harassment and bullying. It was very difficult to get encouragement and support. However, I have worked through these issues and have found an area of work which I am relatively happy with (Robi: senior care manager in a public sector organisation).

Those women who could not fit in and adjust to the masculine environment have changed organisations and sectors and often opted for a more female-dominated sector. Among these, however, a few suggested that even in sectors such as education and health care there were lower expectations and support for women and that the culture was still based on masculine values and practices.

When I got my professional qualifications I moved into project management. I was a young female working with two older men. I felt used, I didn't like the position I was in, I couldn't get

the respect I needed from both the team and the boss and I needed more emotional and professional support. I was feeling very isolated and stressed and started to experience panic attacks. For the second time in my career I felt that I needed to escape but this time rather than go away I changed career and sector … I don't think I can change the predominant consultant male model (Rosemary: Project manager in a large public sector organisation).

Having used the interview data to explore the routes taken into junior managerial positions of the respondents and the barriers that existed to their career progression, this article now turns to consider the role of female junior managers at a call centre in the West Midlands.

Theorising Junior Management at FirstCall

As a call centre worker the researcher was part of a small team, which was dedicated to the provision of IT support for a specific client organization. The team consisted of between five and seven members over the period of the observation and included a team leader (Diana) and Problem Manager (Rob). The labour process of the call centre is detailed elsewhere (references removed for review), however it is necessary to note that the Call Centre exhibited a relatively flat hierarchy. Work was organised in teams (10); a team leader, assisted by a problem manager, led an individual team. Yet despite a roughly equal gender divide between Customer Service Representatives (CSRs) the vast majority (90 percent) of team leaders were female. The following section seeks to compare the team leader role with that of the subordinate but more technical role of the problem manager.

Problem Manager: Job for the Boys?

Problem managers, as the name suggests, were often required to handle 'problem issues' such as complaints, reports and difficult clients. Problem Managers exercised some degree of autonomy over their own working patterns and were generally thought to be less monitored than other CSRs, having already demonstrated their commitment to the organisation by achieving the status of senior CSR in time-served fashion. Problem managers were also invested with a degree of authority granted via the individual team leader and, as such, they were often placed in a pseudo-supervisory position *vis à vis* other CSRs. Although it was not unusual for problem solvers to be female, the majority (80 per cent) were male. Despite the lack of financial reward the increased status that accompanied the role of the problem manager meant that the position was highly sought after amongst the more aspiring CSRs. In discussing career objectives with CSRs the role of the problem manager was nearly always identified as being desirable and attainable.

The basic work process involved the answering and coding of incoming calls from client employees reporting computer problems. Call Centre CSRs would complete a scripted interaction to ascertain the extent of the problem and all relevant information. Once the call is concluded the CSR would prioritise the problem and pass on details to one of many external support agencies for resolution. In this respect the call centre's role is best considered as an interface between organizational IT problems and third party resolutions. From a management perspective the key criteria upon which the call centre's performance is judged is the degree to which all incoming calls are answered (and how quickly) and the number of current open calls which have not yet been resolved. Therefore, in spite of the fact that the CSRs were not in

themselves able to resolve the IT problems they were presented with (except for very routine or minor problems), considerable pressure (in terms of contract negotiation) is placed upon the call centre to ensure the problems are resolved quickly. Within the context of the team, therefore, pressure is exerted from the team leader and problem manager to ensure that calls are answered quickly, details taken accurately and, most importantly, that open calls are quickly resolved. This became apparent from the experience of the work process as staff were continually urged to answer calls before the "second ring" whilst actively and sometimes aggressively seeking to close existing or open calls.

Promotion to the role of problem manager reflected significant experience as a CSR. The role often involved handling the most difficult calls and these were conceptualised as being technical in nature. The call centre offered limited promotion prospects but the twice-annual appraisal and review process was designed to highlight how CSRs could demonstrate skill and competencies that were considered to be of a problem solver level. More often than not these skills where explicitly technical in nature, they involved the resolution of some problems without recourse to third parties (known has first-time fixes) and mastery over the call centres own internal technical instruments. They also included elements such as the ability to cope with the pressure of numerous incoming calls, to identify the nature of the problem quickly and some skills relating to the client such as being able to explain solutions and problems in non-technical terms. The role of problem manager was therefore constructed as being active, technical and at times heroic. The version of entrepreneurialism, itself a masculine discourse (Collinson and Hearn, 1996), which emerges from discussion with CSRs clearly foregrounds the requirement for activity

and the appraisal processes required that potential problem managers were expected to enact these clearly masculine characteristics. This in part, we suggest, accounts for the overwhelming tendency for the call centre to overwhelming promote male CSRs to the post of problem managers despite the equal gender divide with respect to the general CSR pool.

Team leaders: Job for the Girls?

The team leader was in overall responsibility for ensuring that calls were answered promptly and that open calls were resolved as quickly as possible. Despite this responsibility, however, most the tasks in relation to these goals were devolved to problem managers who made these goals the specific objectives of day-to-day workplace routine. Thus, the researcher observed how Rob, the problem manager, reviewed the numbers of open calls on an hourly basis, constantly sought to remind CSRs about the importance of responding quickly to incoming calls and sought to minimise CSRs time away from answering calls, with constant verbal communication with the rest of the team.

Team leaders were more likely to be occupied with formal assessment of performance through the appraisal system, the management of the overall team and negotiation between senior call centre managers, the team and the client. It is in these areas that this paper argues that feminine skills were perceived as being of particular value, hence accounting for the disproportionate level of females who occupied these junior management positions. The location of the role of team leader as interconnection between senior management and team and between senior management and client

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organizations meant that the role often included the need to be diplomatic. The reasons for this varied but often revolved around the need to represent the interest of the team to senior manager, such as representing poor team performance as a resource issue, rather than a team failure. The following discussion with Diana the team leader revealed the advocacy required as part of the team leader's role.

Researcher: Can you tell me a little bit about your job?

Diana: Well the buck really stops here, it's me who's responsible to make sure we reach out targets in terms of grade of service and that open calls are resolved. But you know about that – you've seen how I make sure that you're all on top of the calls.

Researcher: yes, but I was wondering about the thing you do that we don't see

Diana: well there is a lot to that too. Very often I feel like it's my job to stick up for you guys, when the SDM's (service delivery manager) got a bee in his bonnet over our call times it's me who has to point out that we're one CSRs down and actually if they got their act together to sort more staff out we'd reach our target easy. I think that's a really important aspect of the job!

Researcher: Do all team leaders do this?

Diana: You have to, it reflects on you! When they criticise your team, they are really saying that you're crap that you can't organize a piss up in a brewery, so you kind of have to fight your corner.

As the above comments make clear, team leaders reported that they often felt the need to act as an advocate for, or on behalf of the team. Despite the protective and nurturing dimension to this type of work it is clear from Diana's use of language such as 'fight your corner' that such representations were often constructed in pugilistic, even violent terms. This was also true to the extent that team leaders were required to act as an interface between the team and the client. During the observation it became

clear how Diana engaged in daily contact with key client personally via telephone calls. Diana referred to this as 'touching base' or time set aside, normally within the first hour of the shift starting, where she would make contact with key client staff. Diana stated that this was part of her job although she saw it as being proactive by ensuring that any issues that the client had regarding the levels of service offered by the team could be "nipped in the bud".

Closely linked with the role of 'advocate' for the team, is the key role that the team leader played to reward good performance with acknowledgement:

> **Researcher:** How do you know when you have done a good job?
>
> **Guy:** The team leader will say well done – that is a really good job. We don't really get a lot of feedback from the service managers as to whether you have done a good job, you are just providing a service to them and they are probably so busy that they just get on with it. You will hear about bad comments. If you have done something wrong you will hear about that. It is a shame that you don't get more feedback saying 'well-done', say on reports or if you have done something extra for them. But mostly it's the team leader, I have had a couple of e-mails from her, which is nice really, makes you want to do your job doesn't it? Being a problem manager you are dealing with problems all day and usually it is complaints and it does get you down a bit actually so its nice to have the acknowledgement that I'm doing something right.

The issue of praise and support was an area that many CSRs reported as making a huge difference to their daily lives. The team leader was identified in nearly all cases as being the originator of this support and it was claimed to be especially important to 'bring through' new staff; that is to say to encourage them with praise and support. Whilst informal feedback and support of this nature have a very nurturing dimension to them, contradictorily, more direct control over CSRs labour process often took the

form of the 'bollockin'' and consisted of a collective reprimand from the team leader. The following interaction was recorded whilst on a lunch break which was spent observing CSRs.

> **Diana**: [shouting] oi, you lazy bastards, [addressed to the rest of team] look at the grade of service figure! Get your fingers out … Jenny, stop chatting up Chris and answer some calls, Matt get off wrap-up you've been on there for 8 minutes…
>
> **Jenny:** [indignantly] … I'm not chatting anyone up, I'm closing down a call…
>
> **Diana:** Jenny, [exasperated] I need you to answer calls, look at the queue! … it's my head on the block up there [points to Call Centre managers desks]

Diana firstly appeals to the team's sense of purpose, suggesting that the team are being lazy; this implores the deployment of greater productive activity. Secondly, she uses the phrase '*get your fingers out'*, although a common phrase, this has a quite literal meaning in the context of the Call Centre. It suggests that the CSRs should engage in more productive activity, clearly using their fingers to manipulate the telephone or keyboard. Thirdly, Diana appeals to the grade of service figure – a seemingly objective and rational measure of team performance, in this sense the grade of service provides a proxy measure of productive activity. When the grade of service figure starts to decline, the team leader reasserts control relations over the team in an effort to correct the decline. Significantly, the grade of service figure helped to maintain productive activity, not merely when the figure was declining, but more generally through a carefully fostered culture of competition:

> **Diana:** … [shouting across the Call Centre] haha, look at InsuranceDesk [rival team] … 45 percent grade of service … just like the team leader … bag of shit.

Much of the existing call centre literature highlights call centre environments as being characterised by electronic surveillance (Fernie and Metcalf 1998, Taylor and Bain, 1999, Kinnie, et al., 2000) and it became clear from observations made over the course of the fieldwork that team leaders were required to monitor the performance of the CSRs within their team. This was also known by the CSRs and the following interview response makes it clear.

Researcher: So what do you think of the monitoring system? Do you think it is a good way of monitoring your performance?

Mel: I think so. I suppose the team leaders are always listening out to you phone calls making sure that you are polite to the clients. There is nothing statistical to say that you are being rude or aggressive!

The role of monitoring performance became a key issue for a number of call centre staff. Diana was known to monitor her team extensively, and, although unhappiness with this arrangement was not expressly voiced, the concept of such close managerial surveillance was a theme that generated a certain amount of dissent. Interestingly Diana frequently justified such monitoring as being an on-going form of monitoring for training purposes, by suggesting that she could identify specific training needs from remotely listening into her team's conversations with clients.

Discussion and Conclusions

In exploring routes into junior management our data reveal the role that seduction plays in making careers appear attractive to female potential managers. The data

highlight the determination that female managers have shown in securing managerial roles and in terms of being successful and a sense of perseverance in terms of overcoming barriers to entry. Many barriers to managerial careers were conceptualised as being based upon existing masculine organizational cultures and in some cases these barriers are considered to prevent further progression. Powell and Graves (2003) suggest that when women believe that they are disadvantaged by the glass ceiling (however one may interpret it), they may be less likely to express an interest in open top management jobs than equally qualified men. The frustration experienced by women seems to motivate some of them to quit their organisation and move on to a new career path, often to self-employment (see also Marshall, 1995). This is not only evidenced by our study but also by recent government data, which report that women in the UK are starting businesses at more than twice the rate of men (The Women's Unit, 2001).

The embodying of masculine characteristics as a means for progression supports existing frameworks such as that offered by Knights and Kerfoot (1998). Such a framework offers a plausible account of the success of female senior managers by arguing that success more often comes to those female managers who are able to adopt and display masculine characteristics. Furthermore, many female managers report a desire to exert organizational control and influence, which was seen as an important factor in understanding the enduring appeal of managerial careers. We argue that this can be understood as a desire to exercise control and autonomy of one's own career as much, if not more so, than wanting to exercise control over others. The rational, self controlled and autonomous managerial abstract was often contrasted with notions of irrational, subservient non-managerial carers. This

interpretation is supported by the espoused concern on behalf of female managers to offer leadership in terms of the development and support of others rather than in term of decision-making. In addition to the developmental and support discourses, management was also constructed around terms such as influence rather than authority and control.

The interview data presented here are used to give voice to women managers themselves and to explore the construction of management and managerial roles from their own perspectives. In contrast, we use ethnographic data to explore the doing of junior management roles from within the case study location. This provides an opportunity to explore the process of how, for example, the roles of team leader and problem manager embody gender differences and identities in relation to the types of tasks required. The role of team leader has been highlighted in comparison with the junior but more technical role of problem manager. We argue that the gender composition of the team leader role shows an organizational preference for the employment of female team leaders. In contrast to this, the gender composition of problem managers and senior managers were both overwhelmingly male. In attempting to account for this, we draw attention to the types of tasks that both problem managers and team-leaders were typically required to perform. The role of the team leader appeared to be distinguished within the call centre as requiring the mediation of tension between call centre managers, the team of CSRs and the requirements of customers. In the case study the tasks required of team leaders were conceived as feminine; we suggest that this is why the organization seems to show a strong preference for the employment of women in this role.

Despite the perceived feminisation of the team leader role, the ethnographic data reveal that team leaders often adopted what might be consider more masculine characteristics in terms of exerting direct control over CSRs and encouraging competition between rival teams. We argue that this draws heavily upon masculine discourses of entrepreneurialism and herocism and as such challenges the idea of specific feminine and masculine gender differentiation. As suggested by Gherardi (1994: 601) 'in our working lives we create both material products and the symbolic product of a role assumed by a sexed body and performed by a gendered actor for an audience, which not only judges the appropriacy and coherence of the performance with the symbolic universe of gender, but actively participates in the production of competence rules'.

The interconnected location of the team leader role and the specific organisational environment seems to exercise a strong influence on the ways in which the female team leaders do management and ambiguously and contradictorily (Hearn, 1998) construct their gendered roles of women and managers. Diana displayed feminine behaviours associated with nurturing and supporting the team and negotiating with the customers as well as more masculine behaviours aimed at providing discipline and motivation through competition and direct control. We argue that the specific call centre context determines conflicts and tensions over the more feminine aspects of negotiation and support required by the team leader subject position. In fact, the issue of employee control has been central to much of the growing call centre literature, which shows how integrated telephone and telephony systems, together with other forms of electronic surveillance 'render perfect' managerial control (Fernie and Metcalf, 1997). Specific aspects of call centre control are highlighted as regulation of

the pace of work through call distribution systems, monitoring and evaluation of work through collection and analysis of detailed statistical data and recorded copies of individual interactive service encounters, and finally the reward and discipline of the workforce through HR systems supported by recorded data. The degree to which call centres might usefully be characterised as panoptic environments, thus denying the potential for worker resistance, has been highly contested (Knights and McCabe, 2000; Bain and Taylor, 2000, Taylor *et al.* 2002, Taylor and Bain, 2003). Callaghan and Thompson (2001), drawing extensively upon Edwards' (1979) notion of contested terrain, show how the fundamental aspects of workplace control as established by Edwards: pace and direction of work, monitoring of work and reward and discipline of the workforce, are structured within call centre environments.

The interconnected location of junior female managers within the call centre has a strong resonance with Tancred-Sheriff's (1998) analysis of adjunct control tasks that female clerical workers are often required to perform. Significantly, however, whilst acknowledging the seductive nature of participating in the authority of management (ibid: 48), clerical workers and, in this instance junior call centre managers, have little opportunity to influence the nature of the labour process they perform. In fact, the role of the call centre team leader seems constructed around feminine discourses associated with more 'feminine' communication and relations (with subordinates, superiors and customers), which explains the female dominance at this level. However, it is also embedded within specific masculine practices of competition, monitoring and surveillance which determine and constrain the ways in which female junior managers relate to their ambiguously gendered managerial subject position.

Thus, in accounting for the growth of female participation at junior levels of management the study articulates the enduring appeal of managerial careers which will ensure new entrants into this arena. It also shows that while management in general is perceived by the women interviewed as associated with masculine ideals, their specific managerial subject position is constructed as associated with more feminine discourses (e.g. influence, support). From the ethnographic study, it is also clear, that the enactment of junior management, in this case at least, often involved not simply the embodiment of traditionally masculine characteristics but a position in which the boundaries between male and female universes become fluid, negotiable, intersected and merged (Gherardi, 1994). In the call centre example it was women who were perceived as offering the necessary fluidity to be able to successfully respond to these contradictory demands. This requirement is highlighted most clearly when the role of team leader is compared with the role of problem manager with its robust and permanent attachment to heroic values of technical specialism.

A key issue to emerge from this research is the way in which the masculine culture of organisations educes in women managers (as experienced by the women in the interview study and by the call centre team leaders) the experience of contradictory positioning (see also Gherardi, 1996). To preserve their feminine identities, they construct management as associated with feminine discourses. However, in positioning themselves as managers they resort to masculine behaviours mainly aimed at controlling the work environment. Although not evident from this research, it has been suggested (e.g. Gherardi, 1996; Prichard and Deem, 1999) that such contrasting positions may elicit unpredictable behaviours and anxiety concerned one's competence, abilities and work relationships.

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[i] Women constitute over 50% of the UK workforce (Equal Opportunities Commission, 1998, in Davidson and Burke, 2000).

[ii] The proportion of women managers increased between 1980 and 2000 from 26% to 45% in the US, 14% to 26% in Australia, 25% to 35% in Canada and 16% to 29% in Sweden (Powel and Grave, 2003). Whilst the Equal Opportunities Commission reported that the number of female managers increased by 20 per cent between 1991 and 2000. (EOC, 2002)

[iii] This trend seem to be universal, although the proportion of women in management may vary considerably across countries in relation to differences in national cultures and in the definitions of the term '*manager'* (Powel and Grave, 2003).

[iv] "Out of 600-plus senior executive jobs in Britain's boardroom, only 10 are filled by women" (Adams, 2002).

[v] Masculinity should not be seen as a fixed category but rather as fragmented, diverse, ambiguous subjectivities which are multiple and shift according to cultural and historical contexts (Collinson and Hearn, 1994).

[vii] The interviews were conducted in 2004. Women participants worked in public (34), private (19) and voluntary (3) organisations of various sizes. All organisations operated in the West Midlands but were not necessarily regional establishments. Some were large national or multinational organisations.

[viii] The project was co-financed by the European Social Fund and the Learning and Skills Council (Black Country).

[ix] This reflects the national picture, where women workers are concentrated in the public administration, health and education sector (4.788.000 women compared to 2.141.000 men) (The Women's Unit, Cabinet Office, 2001)