

# **Chapter One**

## **The Research Problem**

In Australia, women occupy 12% of senior management positions in private sector organisations (Affirmative Action Agency,1999a) and 19% of Senior Executive Service (SES) positions in the Commonwealth Government Public Service. (Australian Bureau of Statistics,1997, p129) There have been incremental changes in the percentage of women at senior management levels in the private sector over the last five years (Affirmative Action Agency,1999a) and moderate increases in the proportion of women in the SES over the last thirty years (Australian Bureau of Statistics,1997, p124). However, considering that legislative initiatives such as, the Sex Discrimination Act (1984), the Equal Employment Opportunity Act (1984) and the Affirmative Action Act (1986), have been implemented in Australian workplaces for well over a decade, the persistence of such marked gender inequity in senior management has proved highly resistant to change.

Statistics such as these clearly show the extent of the gender imbalance in senior management, commonly known as the 'Glass Ceiling'. However, they do not reveal the complex causes of the phenomenon nor the reasons for its persistence. The theoretical debates concerning gender equity explain the 'cultural dynamics' embedded in organisational contexts which, when supported by sexual stereotypes, reinforce the persistence of low proportions of women at senior management levels (Hearn *et al.*,1989; Marshall,1993a; Powell & Butterfield,1984; Schein,V.,1976; Sheppard ,1989). Differential power relations between the sexes that have become 'stereotypical' over time constantly call into question the 'legitimate' authority of women as managers and also partly explain the statistical realities (Chafetz,1990; Connell,1987; Epstein,1981,1988; Still,1993).

The operation of power and authority and the values, norms and practices of elites have proven to be major foci of sociological study. The study of elite values is important because, as writers such as Anderson (1974), Clegg (1989), Giddens (1984), Lukes (1974), and Weber (1947) have argued, the power ascribed to them by individuals and groups within society is reinforced by repeated subconscious practices that remain largely unchallenged. The contention that the ideas of the ruling class become the ruling ideas of society (Marx &

Engels,1969) is one reason why the study of elites is central to the study of sociology. The study of the values, norms, and practices of senior managers is important due to the force of their ideas on the consciousness of individuals within society. Known in sociological terms as hegemony, the power of elites can be prescriptive, in the sense of a birth right, but can also be ascribed to them by the constant cultural work undertaken through socialisation, including education (Cockburn,1991; Gramsci,1971; Waters,1989).

However, sociological research and literature on class divisions has historically been gender blind (Smith,1990;Waters & Pakulski,1996). Consequently, theoretical debates about the authority of the ruling class were originally based upon an assumption of patriarchal pre-eminence (Weber,1968,p1009). In order to explain the constraining effects of class and gender on individual women, feminist theories combine a critique of elites with a critique of gender stereotypes (Chafetz,1990; Cockburn,1991; Walby,1990). This combination of theoretical perspectives more clearly explains the position in which many senior management women find themselves in Australian organisations, a position that in many cases allows them the right to attain a senior management appointment but not the ‘legitimate’ authority that goes with that position (Still, 1988). However, the values, norms and practices of senior decision-makers tend to direct the culture of an organisation (Schein,E.,1992). Consequently, the values, norms and practices of senior management women should affect the way in which gender equity issues within organisations are viewed.

It is the contention of this thesis that the values, norms and practices of senior management women will directly affect both the implementation of gender equity programs in organisations and the values, norms and practices of other individuals towards gender equity in an organisational context. Therefore, determining the values, norms and practices of senior management women in Australian organisations will give some indication of their ability to assist other women into positions of power. The values, norms and practices of these women will be explored with reference to the following issues effecting gender equity in the workplace: the ‘Glass Ceiling’, Affirmative Action legislation, quota systems, feminism, and sex discrimination.

### ***1.1: The Extent of the Problem***

In 1992 the International Labour Organisation predicted it would take nearly 1000 years for women to gain the same economic and political clout as men if present trends continue. Based on data from 41 countries, the report shows the number of women in managerial posts

improved only slightly between 1985 and 1991. The Netherlands recorded the biggest increase with 1.5%, followed by Puerto Rico, Canada and Singapore with 1.3%. Of the 41 countries studied, only Greece and Paraguay witnessed declines in the proportion of female managers. Based on these trends, the report forecast it would take five centuries for women to gain the same access as men to management positions, and a further 475 years to get equal representation in the higher echelons of political and economic power (International Labour Organisation, 1992).

However, instead of showing an incremental increase, some statistics show the number of women in management stagnating or declining, especially at senior management level. A UK National Management Survey carried out by the Institute of Management and Remuneration Economics in 1994 (a sample of 20,890 employees in 330 organisations) showed that the number of female managers and Directors in the UK's largest organisations was on the decline (9.5% in 1994 compared to 10.2% in 1993). The percentage of women managers had fallen at almost every level of management. The survey also confirmed that the average profile of the female manager compared to her male counterpart has hardly changed over the past decade. She earns less, is less likely to have a company car, is on average seven years younger and has been with the organisation for a shorter period (Davidson,1994,p16).

A comparison of remuneration levels between males and females at senior management level clearly shows the extent of the inequity. A survey undertaken of 500 companies in Australia in 1994 showed that in senior management positions, the percentage difference in base salary between men and women was 20% and the percentage difference in the company car purchase price was 40% (Bagwell,1994, p1).

Over the last ten years, data on women in senior management in Australia have improved in scope, detail and quantity. This was mainly in response to government reports such as the Lavarch committee report (1992) that highlighted the need to monitor the progress of women in decision-making roles. In 1994, the Affirmative Action Agency began collecting data showing the proportion of women at different levels of management. Consequently, longitudinal data on women at senior management levels of private sector Australian organisations has only been available for the last five years. These statistics show an incremental increase in the percentage of women in senior management over that time from 8% in 1994 to 12% in 1998 (Affirmative Action Agency,1999a, p4).

Statistics on the proportion of women who are board members on boards of directors show that, in 1997, women accounted for 7.3% of non-executive director positions on boards in Australia but only 1% of executive directors. Overall, women make up 6% of the total proportion of directors. The upward trend of these figures, although slow and incremental, should continue due to the fact that from 1996 to 1997 13% of new directors were women and 16% of companies say they will appoint a woman should a vacancy arise (Buck, 1997, p1). It has been much easier to track the progress of women at the senior executive levels of the public service where there has been a steady and moderate increase over the last thirty years from 0% in 1967 to 19% in 1996 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1997, p129).

Hede's (1995) longitudinal study of gender inequity in management, using census data and Australian Bureau of Statistics data, calculated the progression of women into management ranks over nearly two decades. He developed a 'Managerial Inequity Index' that measured the representation of women in management while controlling for their overall representation in the workforce. Comparing men and women's indices between the years 1965 and 1995, Hede found that the index had not substantially changed over time and that the value of the MI index for women decreased significantly between 1966 to 1975. However, from 1975 to 1986, the negative trend was replaced by a significant positive trend in the women's MI index, and from 1986 to 1994 the index remained constant. Hede's findings show that women's progression into management increased between 1975 and 1986 under the influence of the Commonwealth Government's Anti-Discrimination Act but has stagnated since 1986. He concludes that 'a comparison of the 1986 and 1991 Census figures further confirms the finding from the present labour force analysis that there has been no increase in the underlying representation of women in management since 1986.' (Hede, 1995, p17). Hede also predicted that, on 1995 trends, it would take until 2066 for women to reach 50 per cent of the managerial category. However, with a predicted slowing down in improvement rate after workforce equality is reached in 2011, it will take well over 70 years before there is gender equality in management (Hede, 1995, p19).

Hede's study is the only study in Australia that measures women's progress in management over time. His results show that, since the introduction of the Affirmative Action Act in 1986, the proportion of women in management has not substantially increased. He also suggests that this levelling out cannot be attributed to the Affirmative Action program but

could be the result of a 'backlash' in workplace attitudes against women because of the program. According to Hede, this backlash has effectively neutralised any Affirmative Action initiatives. At the very least, the figures show that the existing employment equity legislation is not having the impact that many expected, namely, the eradication of systemic discrimination against women in organisations and the speeding up of progress towards gender equality in management.

In August 1996, 4% of all employed women (146,300) were managers and administrators compared to 10% of employed men (478,400). Almost one-quarter of people employed as managers and administrators were women. However, statistics show that the occupational context within which women work affects their representation at managerial levels. Women represented just under one third of all farmers and farm managers, compared to approximately one-tenth of generalist managers. The proportion of women in different management and administration occupations varies considerably. For example, 87% of child care coordinators were women, compared to 29% of education managers (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1997, p129).

Occupational segregation according to sex is one important factor in the persistence of gender inequity at senior management levels. 'Sex-typed' occupational categories are a product of both structural and individual representations of gender stereotypes that are reinforced and reproduced by the norms and mores that make up the 'culture' of an organisation. The complexity and variety of the causes of the gender imbalance in management will be discussed in detail in Chapters Three and Four.

Still *et al.*, (1992) undertook two separate, but replicated, studies nine years apart to provide a comparison of women's position in management in Australian private sector organisations over that time. The results revealed that far from improving their overall position in the past nine years, commercial organisations offered fewer opportunities for women managers in 1992 than they did in 1984. While some progress had been made in a few areas (such as exposure to training), the researchers felt that this had been brought about more by compliance with equal opportunity laws than the recognition of a woman's worth (Still, *et al.*, 1992, p15). Overall, the findings suggest that the position of women in management in the private sector in Australia has regressed rather than progressed in the nine-year period under review.

In the second phase of her study of 262 Australian organisations in 1992, Still had four categories of managers: supervisors, junior managers, middle managers and senior managers. Table 1.1 shows that, according to these categories, women constituted just 1.3% of senior managers as compared to 10.1% of men (Still *et al.*, 1992, p6). According to the two studies, the gains women have made in management ranks have been mainly in the middle management levels. In contrast to the middle management areas, the number of women in senior or executive management ranks has stagnated by comparison. Still's study showed a marked decrease in the number of women at both senior and junior management levels when comparing 1984 and 1992 data (Still *et al.*, 1992, p6).

**Table 1.1: Management Composition of Participating Organisations (Proportion of Men and Women Employed at Each Management Level)**

	1984	1984	1992	1992	
Management Level	Men	Women	Men	Women	%Change
Supervisors	31.8	58.3	35.4	71.0	+12.7
Junior	35.3	24.6	20.6	13.7	+10.9
Middle	21.6	14.6	33.9	14.0	-0.6
Senior	11.3	2.5	10.1	1.3	-1.2

(Source: Still *et al.*, 1992, p6)

The growing numbers of women in middle management and the apparent stability of numbers of women in senior management over the last ten years supports the concept of a 'Glass Ceiling' for women trying to achieve senior management status.

An example of the effects of organisational type on the proportion of women in senior management positions is the comparison between the public and private sectors. Until 1966, married women were barred from holding permanent positions in the public service. (When the marriage bar was lifted, women were able to gain the experience needed to reach the higher levels of management, however, the number of women in senior executive service positions remained low through the 1960s) It was not until the late 1970s that the number of women in these positions began to marginally increase (0.4% in 1970 compared to 1.8% in 1979). During the 1980s, female representation in the SES increased dramatically. In 1980, 2% of the SES were women compared to 10% in 1989 and 19% in 1998. However, within the SES, women are much more likely than men to be in the lowest managerial level (band 1).

The statistics available on management women in Australia show the extent of the occupational segregation according to sex and the disparity between the proportions of men

and women in management, however, they do not assist in explaining the complex causes of the statistical disparities. Furthermore, the statistics do not directly address the effects of the structural change mechanisms introduced in order to address gender inequity such as the Sex Discrimination, Equal Employment Opportunity, and Affirmative Action legislation.

## ***1.2: Complex Causes of Gender Inequality***

Gender inequality is not an entity; it is an ever-changing set of social practices. There are sociological and psychological reasons for sex inequality at senior management levels that are reinforced by the repeated practices in the culture of an organisation. The exercise of power accompanies the causal relationship between organisational type and gender inequity.

According to Newman:

An understanding of power is crucial to an understanding of the ways in which dominant cultural meanings are sustained and reproduced: meanings which are gendered (whether women are present or not) and radicalised (whether non-white people are present or not). Cultural power exists through meanings which are held in place by a plurality of relationships and cultural practices which establish and maintain consent. In other words, women continue to help support organisations in which they are marginalised because of the ways in which gender relations are inscribed and 'naturalised'. It is in the domain of culture that meanings are established and work identities formed (Newman, 1995, p28).

Workplace culture greatly effects the ability to bring about change in the dynamic process of gender imbalance that persists at senior management level. The relationships between values, norms and practices are complex and are mediated through organisation structures, cultures and politics. The power imbalance in many organisations can effect perceptions of merit by incorporating values, norms and practices that appear gender neutral but sustain a climate more favourable to some groups than others. Generally those values, norms and practices are in favour of those who have been better placed to define them, and in the context of senior management this is mostly men.

Measures to redistribute women into different jobs without examining the tasks, values and interrelationships in and around them are unlikely to succeed. Gender considerations have been found to affect hiring, assignment, training and

development, promotions, conditions and pay. Definitions of merit are unavoidably subjective in defining job requirements and the capacities of individuals to meet them, especially at senior management levels of organisations. For these reasons, organisations continue to reproduce gender inequity unless there are concerted and thorough efforts to understand and transform the ways men and women can participate in organisation life and processes (Affirmative Action Agency, 1992a, p59).

Apart from the processes within organisations, there are other external social structures that mitigate against the increased entry of women into positions of power in Australia. These are broader structural factors that may not appear to be effecting women's chances for promotion such as the increasing focus on 'economic rationalisation' of organisational processes (Pusey, 1991), the inherently gender-biased philosophical bases of equity principles, the fragmentation of the women's movement caused by the 'sameness versus difference' debate, and the difficulties in reaching a 'shared understanding' about equity principles brought about by the contradictory terminology in Equal Employment Opportunity legislation and Affirmative Action legislation. These exogenous social factors may have impacted on the values, norms and practices of senior management women towards gender equity in Australian organisations. However, there have been no studies undertaken that have canvassed the values, norms and practices of senior management women with regard to gender equity.

It is the intention of this study to look in detail at the values, norms and practices of senior management women with regard to all of the practices that shape gender equity, individual, organisational cultural, and external social changes. The individual practices of senior management women will be explored through the respondent's backgrounds and their experiences with gender equity. The organisational cultural effects will be explored by comparing the values, norms and practices of senior management women who work in the private sector with those working in the public sector. The effects of external social change on the values, norms and practices of these women will be explored using specifically designed attitude scales.

### ***1.3: Aims of the Study***

The aim of the study is to undertake empirical research into senior management women in

both the private and public sectors in Australia, with a view to understanding the following research objectives.

- The experiences and views of senior management women towards the dominant culture of their workplaces. Their experience with the use of power and whether they view themselves as powerful people.
- The experiences and views of senior management women with programs to increase gender equity, such as Equal Employment Opportunity, Affirmative Action and quota systems.
- A comparison of the views and experiences of senior management women working in the private and public sector in order to highlight the differences and similarities between the two groups. The aim behind comparing the public and private sectors is to explore the effects of differing organisational cultures on senior management women's values, norms and practices regarding gender equity.
- The backgrounds of senior management women and how their background has defined their status as a senior management woman and their individual views on gender equity.
- The effects of independent variables on the values, norms and practices of senior management women with regard to issues of gender equity.

#### ***1.4: Research Questions***

In order to fulfil the aims of the study, seven research questions were developed.

1. What type of experiences have senior management women had with the dominant culture of their workplaces? How have these experiences affected their working lives?
2. What do senior management women think about the gender inequity in senior decision-making roles of Australian organisations?
3. How knowledgeable and supportive are senior management women of the Affirmative Action legislation?
4. What proportion of senior management women are supportive of programs of positive discrimination, such as quota systems, to address the gender imbalance at senior management levels?
5. What do senior management women think of feminism, and how do they view themselves in relation to feminism?
6. Do independent variables such as organisational type, identification with feminism, age, education, family background, political affiliation, income, marital status, parental status,

- religious affiliation, experience of sex discrimination, and experience with mentors effect the propensity of senior management women to assist other women in the workplace?
7. What are the extent of differences and similarities between the values, norms and practices of senior management women employed in the private sector compared with the public sector?

### ***1.5: The Importance of the Research***

There are four main reasons why studying the values, norms and practices of senior management women regarding gender equity is important. Firstly, the concept of equal access to elite roles for women is contingent upon more women reaching senior management level. However, the views of senior management women as a group towards gender equity are largely unknown. Therefore, how do we know whether the women who reach senior management levels will champion the cause for gender equity? Secondly, exploring the stereotypical myths that exist about senior management women will reveal their position on gender equity as a group. Therefore, we will know the probability that increasing the numbers of women in senior management will also positively reinforce gender equity processes in organisations. Thirdly, to explore the effects of the different organisational cultures of the public and private sector on women's values gives insight into how these different cultures could influence social change. Fourthly, there is a need to fill the research void that exists in the area of senior management women. I will briefly discuss each of these reasons here.

#### **1.5.1: Exploring the Views of Senior Management Women Towards Gender Equity**

Firstly, increasing the number of women in powerful positions in society is a critical outcome in order to bring about gender equality generally. Chafetz states that:

Changes in the nature of women's work, and the levels of rewards that accrue to their work, mostly reflect technological, economic, and demographic forces. To the extent that these forces are controlled by wilful human agency, it is by elite incumbents, who are overwhelmingly male. In short, in gender stratified societies women constitute a pool of labour whose members are manipulable by the powerful actors who fill roles that allow them to control dominant social institutions and organisations. Equal access to elite roles constitutes the most difficult problem in achieving gender equality. Yet without it, all other improvements in women's status remain incomplete, fragile and easily lost.

Equal representation for women among societies elites constitutes the single most important change required to produce a system of gender equality (Chafetz, 1990, pp220-221).

Kanter's (1977) theory of 'critical mass' hypothesises that 30% of women in powerful positions are required before women's status will begin to become accepted in powerful roles. However, the 'critical mass' theory does not automatically assume that women will be substantively different in their values, norms and practices towards issues of gender equity. It is proposed that the increased presence of women will automatically challenge the stereotype of 'manager equals male' and bring about the change in attitudes required to fundamentally change the stereotyping of senior management roles. I dispute the critical mass theory on the grounds that there have been no research findings to show the values, norms and practices of senior management women towards gender equity. Therefore, it is premature to assume that by increasing the numbers of senior management women gender equity will automatically be addressed in organisation cultures.

### **1.5.2: Explaining the Stereotypical Myths that Exist about Senior Management Women**

Secondly, by exploring the validity of stereotypical myths such as the 'Queen Bee Syndrome', the contention that 'Women are better Managers', or the imagery of the 'Painted Bird', I will be able to expose the construction of meanings behind such stereotypical myths. The 'Queen Bee Syndrome' is a syndrome whereby powerful women appear to be less than willing to assist other women into positions of power because they believe it may undermine their own powerful position.

(Abramson,1975; Poiner & Wills, 1991, p72; Staines *et al.*,1974) The contention that women will manage 'differently' to, or better than, male managers when they do reach positions of power is another myth developing in the literature on women in senior management (Sinclair, 1998). Feminists have evoked powerful imagery to highlight the 'stereotype' of the management woman who is 'falsely conscious' of her status as a senior manager. Daly labels these women 'Painted Birds'.

Since men in power are the ones who choose their token women to represent 'the female half of the species' in the territories of male prerogative, we can see the strong possibility that those chosen for such roles will be drawn from the ranks of token women-those most tokenized, cosmeticized, most identified with male purposes. In the face and voice of such a construct, who is doubly or triply Painted Bird, women who are in the process of peeling off the patriarchal paint can sense the snarl of phallic power. For here, in yet another guise, is the all too familiar token torturer, the woman who often unwittingly pleases her masters by selling out her own kind (Daly, 1978 cited in Sawer, 1990, p26).

Greer points to the futility of women aspiring to meritorious processes in circles dominated by masculine power.

Female interlopers are often quite unaware of the intensity of the inter-male negotiation and consolidation going on around them. When push comes to shove the guys repair to the men's room and plot their strategy. The woman who thinks her male colleagues are dealing with the case on its merits rather than as a pawn in a long-term power play will only remain in her position of eminence as long as she serves their purposes. It is no accident that women inducted into male hierarchies so seldom identify with other women or advance the interests of other women. They wouldn't have risen so far in the organisation if they did (Greer, 1999, p295).

The stereotype of the 'Queen Bee' is based on assumptions that persist over time. Poiner and Wills (1991, p70) suggest that change inevitably carries with it the threat of disruption. Consequently, those who have the power to implement change resist for two reasons. First, people advantaged by a bias in a system are reluctant to advocate a shift in that bias away from their interests. Second, they may fear criticism of their leadership because they did not secure organisational stability. A major research aim of the thesis is to explore the extent to which senior management women identify with the difficulties other women face in their management careers and measure the extent of their willingness to advance the interests of other women.

### **1.5.3: Exploring the Effects of the Public and Private Sector on Senior Management Women's Values**

Thirdly, to fully explore the similarities and differences between women in senior

management in the public sector compared to the private sector there is a need to empirically compare the differences between each sector. By comparing the values, norms and practices of public sector and private sector women, I intend to highlight the differences and similarities in their position on issues relating to gender equity. The purpose is to discover what effect the different organisational cultures have on the practices senior management women are currently undertaking, or are willing to undertake, to increase the proportion of women in senior management.

#### **1.5.4: Filling the Research Void**

Lastly, there has been very little research undertaken on this group of women in Australia. Much of the research undertaken on senior management women in Australia has been qualitative only. The results of quantitative research undertaken so far have either been hampered by low response rates (Still's study in 1992 achieved 12% for the first study and 17% for the second) leaving the results open to questions of reliability and validity, or did not address senior management women's views on gender equity (Hede, 1995; Korn Ferry International, 1997).

#### **1.6: The Research Claim**

The low proportion of senior management women in Australian organisations is a concern for a number of reasons. Firstly, senior managers (or elites) can effect the parameters of important economic and political decisions that impact upon society at large. Therefore, it is important that a substantial proportion of those decision-makers are women because, as the majority segment of the population, women have specific needs which may or may not be addressed depending upon the orientation of senior decision-makers (Chafetz, 1990).

Apart from the special needs of women, the unique culture of a commercial or bureaucratic organisation tends to be influenced by the values, norms and practices of senior managers. Senior decision-makers tend to direct the 'culture' of organisations which, in turn, effects the conditions under which employees work. (Schein, E., 1992, p49) This is especially the case in private sector workplaces, as unlike government bureaucracies, there are fewer regulatory mechanisms to mediate the individual power of senior managers. The Office of the Status of Women in Australia maintains that when executives on boards are chosen through the processes of government organisations, the proportion of women is much higher than when executives are chosen through the private sector system (Office of the Status of Women, 1999).

The culture of an organisation is made up of invisible attitudes and organisational practices that change over time and are difficult to counter. The central research objective of the thesis explores the ways senior management women affect or support the organisational cultures in which they work, particularly with regard to issues of gender equity at senior management levels.

It is important to study the views and practices of senior management women because if they are in positions of leadership, their views and opinions will tend to affect the views and practices of many of the people in their organisation. Schein, E (1992, p49) makes the point that it is leadership in the history of an organisation that has created the particular culture content that defines many organisational practices. Furthermore, the categories of culture content are those that exist within the leader's head. Consequently, every leader should be highly conscious of their own assumptions in each of those content areas. This is particularly the case with gender equity. If leaders of organisations are not sufficiently aware of the debates and difficulties pertaining to gender equity, they are likely to overlook their importance. Still (1993, p77) proposes that the cultural framework and normative rules that operate within organisations are male-dominated and have never accommodated women and their needs. Managerial women face dilemmas in 'cultural awareness' of a type that never confront their male counterparts who accept the organisation, with its male-dominated cultural context and norms, as given. Because of their paucity in numbers, women are left alone to resolve these dilemmas. How they resolve them and what eventuates from their resolutions regarding gender equity is the central focus of the thesis.

Lastly, as an issue of human rights and equality, women should have an equal access to share in the wealth of the world. In order to share equally in the wealth of the world access to resource-generating work is an important outcome for women. Chafetz asserts that:

Women's collective opportunities to enhance their status, relative to men, rest on their increasing access to resource-generating work. However, such access is largely controlled by elites who are male, and it changes primarily in response to forces outside the control of women (Chafetz, 1990, p11).

The complexities involved in the causes of the persistent gender imbalance at senior management level are many, varied and embedded specifically in each cultural and organisational context. Consequently, the changes needed to increase the proportion of

women at senior management levels are both structural, in terms of legislative measures such as Affirmative Action and quota systems, and attitudinal in terms of the extent of stereotypical views held by individuals about gender roles. The complex causes for the persistence of the glass ceiling will be discussed in Chapters Three and Four. However, focusing upon the causes of the phenomenon is not the central aim of the thesis. The central aim of the thesis explores the values, norms and practices of senior management women in the context of the structural and attitudinal barriers to women's success in senior management. The thesis specifically focuses upon senior management women because the barriers to gender equity at senior management levels can be influenced within the organisational context by the views and behaviours of existing senior managers. The central claims of the thesis are:

- That the values, norms, and practices of senior management women can effect a change in the gender balance in an organisation and these values, norms, and practices have not been previously empirically defined.
- That the stereotyping of the individual senior management woman as a 'Queen Bee' conceals their intentions towards gender equity and their willingness to assist other women.
- That senior management women are personally both constrained and enabled by structural, ideological, and individual factors embedded in the culture of their organisations.
- That it is necessary to explore both the values senior management women hold towards gender equity and their practices regarding gender equity to discover the level of their commitment to gender equity.
- Lastly, that senior management women are constrained and enabled differently depending on whether they work in the public sector or the private sector organisational context.

As stated above, statistics on the percentage of women in senior management positions in Australian organisations show the extremely slow and incremental increase over the last thirty years. This thesis does not set out to empirically measure the complex causes for this social phenomenon but specifically explores the willingness and capability of women in senior management positions to undertake strategic action to address the gender imbalance. The

answer to the research problem will be explored by taking into account three levels of analysis:

- Firstly, the constraining and enabling forces that senior management women experience in their workplaces.
- Secondly, the specific cultural practices embedded within organisations that operate to exclude senior management women from exercising power in the workplace.
- Thirdly, the individual values, norms and practices of senior management women that may constrain their ability to identify problems concerning gender equity and act upon those problems.

These factors have arisen within a specific historical context and will be discussed with reference to the changes that have taken place and impacted upon gender equity at senior management levels. In order to explore the mechanisms that either constrain or enable senior management women to bring about strategic action for women in organisations, a combination of structural, organisational cultural, and individual aspects will be explored.

The institutionalisation of late capitalist viriarchal hegemony is an historical process that has embedded a 'masculine' defined dominant culture in the workplace, particularly at management levels of organisations. The dominant 'masculine' culture has been reinforced and reproduced through the sexual division of labour, occupational segregation according to sex, and the process of socialisation and education (Connell, 1987; Walby, 1990; Waters, 1989). A comparison between the practices in the public service compared to those of the private sector shows the uneven implementation of reform agendas such as Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action, and the marginally greater success in the public sector because of the greater regulatory mechanisms inherent in bureaucratic practices (Connell, 1987; Weber, 1947). Contradictions inherent within Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action legislation impact negatively upon the capability of senior management women to enact strategic action by imposing both structural and ideological obstacles (Bacchi, 1993; Burton, 1988, 1991; Poiner & Wills, 1991).

The dominant 'masculine' culture that reinforces gender inequality in senior management could manifest itself in a type of 'dual consciousness' in senior management women (Waters, 1989). This 'dual consciousness' manifests in the conflicting and competing paradigms of 'difference' and 'sameness' that have split the feminist movement (Bacchi, 1990). Consequently, any practical reform agendas of the women's movement are stifled

between attempts to bring about full and equal status with men, and those who believe that women should position themselves as different to men. Feminist principles now appear confused and contradictory to many women. The need to define alternatives to the existing methods instigated to increase the proportion of women in management is urgently required. Challenges mounted against barriers to women's advancement caused by viriarchal hegemonic control of power hierarchies must be sustainable and consistently reviewed.

Strategies such as incentives for women to stay within their positions, child-care, positions for their spouses in the same area if required (this strategy could apply mainly to rural locations), the employment of other women at the same level at the same time so that a gender cohort can be established ('critical mass'), legislation for equal pay, status, benefits and bonuses between men and women at senior management levels, and the same access to power for women as men at this level need to be explored. These are some of the 'radical' ideas that would be required if organisations and individuals were serious about hastening the pace of change and increasing the proportion of women at senior management levels. These ideas would have to challenge the debate about equal treatment of men and women and begin to redress the gender imbalance through methods of positive discrimination.

My contribution to research in the area of women in management attempts to focus specifically on the willingness of senior management women to support radical change mechanisms such as quota systems to speed up the process of change towards gender equity in senior management ranks. The research also aims to explain why senior management women either will or will not make efforts to change the status quo and whether senior management women in public service organisations are more predisposed to bring about change than women in private sector organisations.

### ***1.7: Limitations and Delimitations***

The research method and objectives will not attempt to measure the broad contributing factors which maintain gender inequality at the senior management level, although these will be outlined as background to the theoretical perspective in Chapters Three and Four. It is not the purpose of this study to fully explain the causes for the large gender imbalance in senior management. Nevertheless, there will be discussion about the causes of low numbers of women in senior management in relation to the research objectives throughout the course of the study.

The study is also unable to assess the longitudinal consequences of the findings. In other words, to determine whether the values, norms and practices of senior management women regarding gender equity have changed over time. However, in the concluding chapter, reference will be made to the implications of the findings for further research.

The study is also not able to assess the effects of each specific organisational context on the research findings. A comparison of the values, norms and practices of women working in either the private or public sector will be the only organisational comparison undertaken.

The study will not specifically address the implications of the differing demands of the public and private lives of senior management women. Being able to account for the extent to which the sexual division of labour within the home maintains gender inequality at senior management levels is considered to be a larger research project lying outside the scope of this research. However, comments from women in the qualitative phase about domestic issues will be reported as they arise throughout the course of the discussion of results.

The extent to which gender inequality is reproduced and reinforced within organisations will not be measured by the data, although the phenomenon will be discussed as an important limiting factor in the study. The respondents in this study are situated in workplaces that cover the broad spectrum of the Australian workforce. The author recognises that this broad spectrum is subjected to occupational segregation according to sex which tends to concentrate women into certain 'sex-typed' industries. The consequence of this is that the organisational context within which a senior management woman works can influence her individual experiences, views and behaviour.

Finally, the study does not make the claim that women are the only disadvantaged group in the context of organisations and the constraining and enabling forces in those organisations. The author fully endorses the fact that there are other, perhaps more personally constrained, minority groups within organisations such as ethnic and racial minorities, homosexuals, indigenous, and disabled groups. However, the author also believes that these groups each have specific sets of constraining and enabling practices to negotiate. Therefore, it is not my intention to combine the experiential diversity of all of these groups with the experiences of women. The theoretical basis of this study will explore the proposition that it is useful to keep in mind that there are usually greater differences within groups than there are between groups

(Devanna, 1993, p213). It is the differences within and between senior management women as a group that will be explored in the empirical research. The limitations and assumptions relating to the theory and method will be discussed in their respective chapters.

### ***1.8: Data Collection Methods***

The data collection methods were chosen for their ability to explore and aid in understanding the position of individual senior management women, senior management women as a group, and comparing the values, norms and practices of women in the private and public sector. A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods was chosen to ensure that issues arising from the data could be treated in both an inductive and deductive fashion.

The purpose of the qualitative phase was to explore the values, norms and practices of senior management women with respect to the objectives of the study and also to set the guidelines for the quantitative study. The purpose of the quantitative phase was to confirm or deny the propositions that arose from the findings of the qualitative study with as random and representative a sample of senior management women as possible.

### ***1.9: Chapter Outlines***

Chapter Two reviews literature and research pertinent to the research question. The topics covered range across the differences between male and female managers, similarities between male and female managers, and the sex-role conflict of management women, to how the concept of gender is embedded in organisations.

The following areas are critiqued: the ways in which research on women in management has been categorised, the individual versus structural barriers to women in management, why women leave organisations, male attitudes to women managers, and finally, research on the attitudes of women managers. Most of the research undertaken shows how the sex-stereotyping applied to women managers is perceptual rather than real and also how sex-stereotyping cannot fully explain the paucity of women at the senior decision-making levels of society. Only a small proportion of very recent research engages with the values that senior management women hold and how their values inform their norms and practices as managers.

Chapter Three outlines the philosophical bases of equity programs and the social changes that have taken place within the last two decades that have impacted on the way in which gender equity is viewed. Changes include: the legislative initiatives of

Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action, the 'sameness versus difference' debate in feminist philosophy, and the increasing economic rationalisation in organisations. These issues have been addressed in the thesis as a precursor to the discussion about the values, norms and practices senior management women hold regarding gender equity.

Chapter Four discusses the theoretical framework underpinning the methodology and the research claim of the thesis. The theory used combines principles from critical theory and feminist theory. It critiques classical sociological theories for their 'gender blindness' in largely ignoring the special circumstances of women in the social hierarchy. Concurrently, certain feminist theories are critiqued for ignoring the structural imperatives that impinge on both men and women in society and for being reductionist by making their theoretical paradigm contingent on the experiences of individual women. The theoretical framework combines aspects from feminist theory and critical theory in order to address the unique structural and individual social circumstances of senior management women.

Chapter Five shows how the specific objectives developed from the theoretical framework have been applied to the research methodology in order to explore and confirm the research objectives. This chapter includes an explanation of the research design and technique, an outline of the limitations of the study, a strengths and weaknesses analysis of the methodology, and an outline of the data analysis.

Findings from the qualitative phase of the research are presented in Chapter Six, along with a discussion of the findings, conclusions from the qualitative phase and objectives for the quantitative phase arising from the qualitative phase. The qualitative findings are presented in broad themes related to the topics discussed in the interview schedule.

Chapter Seven consists of findings from the quantitative phase and a discussion of those findings. Similar to the qualitative results, the quantitative results will be discussed in themes with an appendix of tables for reference to the statistical results from the survey data. The majority of the findings in the quantitative data are presented as bi-variate analyses with the multi-variate analysis, which explores the combined effects of multiple variables on the research objectives, presented at the

end of the chapter. The final chapter, Chapter Eight, will be a discussion of findings and conclusions from both phases of the study, the implications of those findings and suggestions for further research.

# ***Chapter Two***

## ***Review of Literature and Research***

The aim of the thesis is to explore and describe the values, norms and practices senior management women hold towards gender equity, policies that have been implemented to address gender inequity, and the personal commitment and practices of senior management women to increasing gender equity in management. In this chapter I will show how the existing literature and research on women in management has not addressed the individual values, norms and practices of senior management women with regard to gender equity.

### ***2.1: Context and Background to the Research Themes***

Both the Australian and international literature and research on women in management is extremely diverse and spans a number of disciplines. Research and literature on the subject is located in the fields of business management, organisational behaviour, psychology, social psychology, sociology and women's studies. There is less literature or research on senior management women that has been generated solely from an Australian context. The majority of literature and research that is available refers to women in management generally and not specifically women in senior management.

Much of the research confines itself to two broad areas. Firstly, it attempts to explain the reasons for women's limited ability to gain senior decision-making positions in organisations. Secondly, it compares women's and men's abilities as managers. Furthermore, the literature and research tend to focus on women in management as individuals and avoids engaging with the complexity of the social structures responsible for the reproduction of persistent gender inequality, such as the sexual division of labour and occupational segregation according to sex (Epstein, 1981; 1988).

Research on women in management is a relatively new phenomenon. It began in the 1970's in North America, in the 1980's in Western Europe, the mid-1980s in Asia and only in the late 1980's in the former Communist countries (Boyacigiller, 1996). Research on women in management in Australia started as late as 1982. A major focus of the research is the attempt to counter stereotypical myths perpetuated by sex-role stereotyping. Such myths claim that, for example, women are unreliable employees because of their commitments to their family, or that there are such large differences between the capabilities of men and women managers that those differences alone explain the fact that there are only a few women at senior management levels. Psychological and social psychological research conducted on the differences between men and women managers attempts to uncover truths about the primacy of gender differences to the management role. In many cases, the research undertaken succeeds in showing that the few differences there are between male and female managers are largely inconsequential to the requirements of effectiveness or efficiency in management roles (Die *et al.* 1990; Dobbins & Platz, 1986; Higgins & Pate, 1995; Neales, 1994; Still *et al.* 1986; Vilkinas & Wise, 1995; Wajcman, 1996). In fact, some research contends that women are viewed as more effective, efficient, and committed managers than their male counterparts (Freeman, 1996; Powell *et al.* 1985). However, the stereotypical myths about women's effectiveness as managers persist. The fact that these myths still exist tends to support arguments asserting that unequal gender relations are based on the primacy of socialised attitudes and beliefs.

In this chapter I have combined the research and literature on women in management and catalogued it according to the most salient themes related to the research objectives of the thesis. These themes range in order from the largest and most influential areas of research to the smallest and least influential. The purpose of cataloguing the research in this way is to clearly show any gaps in the current state of knowledge. The research in this thesis is most closely aligned with that of the last theme, covering the characteristics of senior management women, which is the smallest area of literature and research.

## **2.2: Differences between Male and Female Managers**

The foremost, and now most substantial, body of research conducted on women in management originates from the USA. The main focus of much of this research is the proposed difference between male and female managers. The research arose partly in response to two main issues. Firstly, persistent gender stereotyping pervaded management 'culture' at that time. Secondly, it responded to contemporary research on gender differences which proposed that the different behavioural and attitudinal characteristics observed between men and women were desirable and should be promoted (Chodrow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982).

Found mainly within psychological literature, research on the differences between men and women managers contains contradictions and is still controversial. The outcome of much of the work on the topic shows that differences that do exist between male and female managers are more perceptual than real. Also, that the more obvious practical differences in management style between men and women should be encouraged, not suppressed, in order for society and organisations to benefit from a diversity of management styles.

Schein's (1973, 1975) research conducted in the USA was among the first of its kind to attempt to measure sex-role stereotypes in relation to the characteristics required for management. Using a specially devised psychological attribute scale, Schein showed how men and 'masculine' behaviour fit the stereotype of a successful manager more closely than women and 'feminine' behaviour. Similarly, Cecil *et al.* (1973) found that personality, appearance and skills were perceived to be the most important qualities for women applying for an administrative position, whereas motivation, ability, and interpersonal relations were more important qualities for men applying for an identical position. They suggested that at that time women were perceived more as clerical than administrative employees (Die *et al.* 1990). Powell and Butterfield (1979) went on to support Schein's (1976) basic assertion that when most people think of a manager they think of a male.

Research conducted by Greenglass (1993) also highlights the behavioural differences between male and women managers. The research shows that women managers were higher on Type A behaviour, speed, impatience, and job involvement scale scores

than male managers and were less likely to have families than men. Men, on the other hand, appeared to benefit more from marriage, reported higher salaries, and enjoyed greater family support. Schminke and Ambrose (1997) have described the different models employed by men and women managers when dealing with ethical issues at work. Their research on ethical differences between the sexes partially supports Gilligan's (1982) thesis that women are qualitatively different to men in their outlook.

Still (1988, p48) explored the question of differences between men and women's management style in her study on Australian women managers. She found that there were differences between male and female managers and that these differences caused male managers to be preferred over female managers. 'Apparently it is the unpredictable and "female" elements in women's nature which makes some people dislike them as managers. For instance their fussiness, "bitchiness" or "cattiness", over-reaction to power because of prior socialisation, and inexperience' (Still, 1988, p49).

This dislike was reflected heavily in the question of whether people preferred males or females as bosses. The majority preferred males as bosses (51.8%) as opposed to females as bosses (18.7%), with a fair proportion (29.5%) of the sample being either indifferent, undecided, or having no response. The preference for male bosses was strongest among the three male groups and the women non-managers. The woman managers and the women future managers (students) in the sample were less sure, with 34 per cent of the women managers being unable to make a choice. This was an interesting result in itself as it showed the uncertainty inherent amongst women on the subject of male or female superiors (Still, 1988, pp47-53). In a similar vein, Sinclair's (1994) study of eleven of Australia's top male CEOs discovered that women had a 'destabilising' effect on them in board meetings and senior management meetings (Sinclair, 1994, p33). The male CEOs described feelings of being uncomfortable around women who were in positions of power.

Another reason given for people who preferred male bosses was that men know how to be aggressive whereas women did not. There tended to be a correlation in the

respondent's mind between aggression/assertiveness and dominance/authority. However, the reality of male and female managers assertiveness may be quite different. Two studies have shown that Australian women managers are as assertive as male managers. In the first study they were found to be more assertive than men and women of the general population. In the second, there were no significant differences in expressed assertiveness levels between 137 men and 115 women managers (Still *et al.* 1986, p53).

Personality and psychological factors aside, however, research has shown how women perform better than men in management depending on the measurement criteria applied. A study conducted by the Foundation for Future Leadership in the USA suggests that women perform better than men on 'key management categories', including keeping productivity high and generating ideas, but they did poorly at handling frustration. The study dealt with 915 corporate workers. Thirty-one areas of management were surveyed and broken down into seven categories: problem-solving, planning, managing relationships, leading and communicating. Women did better than men in 28 of the 31 categories and excelled by a wide margin in 25, but were behind in a key area: self-promotion (Freeman, 1996, p2e).

Research on women managers also tends to suggest differences between men and women on the basis that many women do not identify with organisational cultures based on stereotypical male styles and values (Allan, *et al.* 1992; Davidson & Cooper, 1992; Young & Spencer, 1990). The lack of willingness of women to identify with 'masculinist' management cultures is one reason put forward for the large numbers of management women leaving large organisations (Still, 1993, p59). Marshall (1995b, p72) suggests that women have different and more desirable qualities at their disposal than men. 'It seems likely that women have free access to both communal and agentic strategies of being, and may be more flexible in this sense than are men.' Marshall uses the example of the aspirations that many women have of combining paid employment with motherhood as an example of this combination of communion and agency.

The debate about whether women are better managers than men is flawed on a number of levels. Firstly, research shows that the traditional definition of a 'good' manager has been sex-stereotyped (Powell & Butterfield, 1979; Schein, V., 1976). Secondly, although only a small amount of reliable research exists on the subject it shows that, while there may be personality and psychological differences between men and women these differences do not translate into practical disadvantages in the way women manage. In fact, quite the opposite is true as the differences between the management styles of men and women could positively enhance the spectrum of 'good' management practices (Burton & Ryall, 1995). Consequently, even if one were to discover the required attributes for the perfect manager this does not necessarily mean that either sex should be preferred over the other.

Greer (1999) criticises the assertion that women are 'better' managers on the basis that their management style is more nurturing, more collegial, more communicative, more instinctual as being another subtle way of subsuming women under the power of men.

The old rule probably still holds good; if women are running the front office, power must have taken refuge somewhere else. Insisting on women's management style as fundamentally softer and more accommodating is a very good way of ensuring that power stays where it is, in the men's room (Greer, 1999, p295).

### **2.3: Similarities between Male and Female Managers**

Contradicting the studies that show differences between male and female managers, a study conducted in Australia to identify sex similarities and differences on expressed personality and executive leadership behaviour preferences showed more similarities than differences between the two genders. The study used the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator Form G and the Hart and Quinn (1993) Executive Leadership Role items. The results showed that females do not appear to be so different to their male counterparts in either their preferred personality type or preferred executive leadership role (Vilkinas & Wyse, 1995, pp296-312). Similarly, Higgins and Pate found that even if there were slight differences between the styles of male and female managers their actual styles were not as important as how they are judged on their *expected*

style. They found that the expected styles of male and female managers only differ according to sex stereotyping (Higgins & Pate, 1995, pp151-157).

Higgins and Pate's research aligns itself with research undertaken by Die *et al.* (1990), which shows the majority of differences between male and female managers is mainly perceptual as opposed to real. That is, it is predominantly men's (and some women's) *perceptions* of women's abilities as managers which stereotype women's abilities within organisations. The research also explores the differences in the perceptions held by males and females about women's managerial capability. In their study women consistently rated other women higher than men as managers. The same women also predicted that their male peers would rate them significantly lower than the men in the study predicted their male peers would rate them. So even though the study found that men rated male and female managers the same, when asked about the performance of their peers the males rated their female peers lower than their male peers.

Similarly, Luthar's (1996) study of an evaluation of performance and leadership ability in male and female managers found that there was 'some support' for the gender contrast effect in that 'autocratic' female managers were perceived to be higher performers than 'autocratic' male managers. Also, the study found support for the 'perceptual similarity thesis' in that male subjects tended to evaluate other male managers higher while female subjects were partial to female managers in their evaluations. In particular, female subjects gave autocratic male managers very low evaluations on performance and judged them to be inferior leaders. The female subjects, however, gave female autocratic managers substantially higher evaluations in terms of both performance and leadership ability (Luthar, 1996, p337).

Other research has also shown how men and women will attribute differing factors to the success or failure of leadership acumen for men and women based upon already held stereotypical views of sex roles. Rice *et al.* (1980) found that both women and men who had more traditional attitudes towards women managers believed luck to be an important factor for the success of women leaders and effort to be an important factor for the success of male leaders.

Garland and Price (1977), Schultz (1994), and Stevens and DeNisi (1980) have extended the findings from this research by showing how men are more likely than women to attribute both the success and failure of leaders to internal factors such as personal ability. Women, on the other hand, are more likely to attribute success to internal factors such as ability and failure to external factors such as the nature of the task. In Schultz's research the objective was to take up the idea of Dobbins and Platz (1986), that research which simply compares male and female leaders on criteria such as initiating structure, consideration, satisfaction with leadership, and leadership effectiveness, does not properly take into account the already personal biases held by the subjects of the research. This suggests that research that focuses solely on the rational task-oriented behaviour of managers may be inherently biased.

Schultz's solution to this was to use attribution theory in order to control for this in-built bias. The research clearly shows the differences amongst men as a group and women as a group rather than subsuming these differences under the rubric of discrete gender categories. In my view this has been a positive development within this particular field of social science research, a development which forms part of the basis upon which this study has emerged. To directly compare men as a group and women as a group assumes homogeneity within each gender which is a failing of much social psychological and psychological research on women in management.

A Swedish study, undertaken in 1994, concludes that the dissonance in the perceptions of males and females in the study was the most important finding. It was the already held stereotypical beliefs of the respondent's that tended to dictate certain attitudinal positions about gender relations.

Women regarded themselves and other women as competent while men regard women as inadequate in various ways. The men said that there was a shortage of competent women. The women did not feel that men were able to assess their competence, and that a low value is set on women's competence when judged according to male norms. Men see the family as an obstacle, presenting it as a hindrance for women. It is worthy of note that women alone are regarded as being affected by the consequences of building families and having children. The men considered that women did not want to have managerial posts, while the women

were quite definite that women did not want to be managers to the same extent as men (Wahl, 1995, p76).

The two quite different visions of men and women emerge from this research, as well as a lack of dialogue between the sexes. Men *believe* in their perceptions about women, taking them as an objective truth, whereas women have *opinions* about men. According to Wahl (1994), these different perspectives are shaped by a 'masculinist/universal' symbolic and discursive structure. So for a change to occur in gender relations it must occur both in practical terms and in women's awareness of themselves and of other women. Lundsden (1996, pp189-190) points out that things seem to be moving in this direction in Sweden, with greater networking activity and a feeling of common interest and solidarity among women in middle to high positions.

Australian research on the topic of differences between male and female managers has not been as prolific as research which has taken place in the international arena. The Graduate School of Management at the University of South Australia published a study in 1994 on the reported, rather than the perceived, management styles of male and female managers. Instead of asking others how they saw the management style of male and female managers they asked the managers themselves. The research was conducted using a set of eight areas crucial to management expertise and asked the managers to award themselves points according to where they put their emphasis in these different areas. The results showed that there was no difference between the way the male and female managers perceived themselves or reported their management styles. The major difference that the study did expose, however, was the number of staff that male managers had reporting to them compared to the number of staff female managers had reporting to them. Male managers tended to manage 39 or more staff, while female managers tended to have an average of 15 or fewer staff (Neales, 1994, p201).

In 1986 Dobbins and Platz reviewed seventeen studies on sex differences in leadership and concluded that male and female leaders exhibit equal amounts of initiating structure and consideration and have equally satisfied subordinates. Most importantly, male leaders were rated as more effective than female leaders, but only in laboratory settings.

Contradictory conclusions can be drawn when reviewing the research conducted on the differences between male and female managers, contradictions that render the whole question of 'difference' controversial. There have been just as many efforts to identify similarities between male and female managers as to identify differences. On balance, however, there are far more similarities than differences in the way men and women 'manage' and over the last twenty years, research has shown that women are as effective as men as managerial leaders (Bourantas & Papalexandris, 1990 cited in Davidson 1994, p16; Ferrario, 1994).

Powell *et al.*, (1985) extend the concept of similarity between male and female managers and show that women are actually more committed managers than males. Results from the study show that female managers were more committed to their careers, as opposed to their family or home lives, than male managers with equivalent ages, salaries, educations, and managerial levels. The researchers concluded that, 'Seldom have studies shown that women have more of something that organisations are looking for than do men. Yet that is precisely what this study has found' (Powell *et al.*, 1985, p45).

Similarly, Wajcman (1996) argues that there is, 'no such thing as a female management style and that the similarities between women and men far outweigh the differences between women and men as groups'. Wajcman focuses upon the idea that in many instances there are powerful organisational imperatives that allow for few substantial modifications in management approach. The data in the study were drawn from a large study of men and women senior managers in five multi-national companies. The survey found no major differences between the views of women and men in response to more general questions about the role of women in management. However, there were some subtle differences between the strength of male and female responses that proved interesting.

Although both men and women were overwhelmingly positive about women managers' skills, commitment, and right to combine a career and motherhood, men were more likely to 'strongly disagree' with the statement that there should be positive discrimination among either men or women. Twice as many women as men 'strongly agreed' that women managers have positive skills to bring to the workplace; well over twice as many women as men 'strongly disagreed' that male managers are

more committed to the organisation than women; and a higher proportion of women 'strongly disagreed' with the statement that women should not combine a management career and motherhood (Wajcman, 1996, pp340-341). These results indicate that the men and women in this study were identifying more strongly with their own gender group.

With regard to questions about working with or for female managers 86% of respondents said that neither men nor women made better managers (although only 45% of these respondents had actually worked for a woman manager). Preferences for working with managers of their own sex varied with 21% of men and 10% of women preferring to work for males. Neither men nor women expressed a preference for a woman manager. Wajcman suggests this indicates that women are still far from being fully accepted in senior management positions.

Wajcman's study incorporates more of the organisational and societal aspects that impinge upon the perspectives and behaviour of managers than many of the strict psychological studies cited earlier in this chapter. Because of this it raises questions about research in this field, questions such as why, when asked, do most people characterise themselves in terms of dominant cultural values. For example, men and women tend to stereotype their own behaviour according to cultural ideas of gender-appropriate behaviour, as much as they stereotype the behaviour of other groups (Epstein, 1988). Wajcman suggests that it is ironic that the participatory and co-operative leadership style with which the majority of both men and women identify also corresponds to current notions about a 'female management style'. If this were true, Wajcman suggests that rather than women having to become more like men to be effective managers, men would have to become more like women.

The problems related to data based upon self-identification are highlighted in Wajcman's method. Wajcman herself points out that the evidence from the qualitative case-study material confirms that there is a major discrepancy between the rhetoric of 'soft' management and the 'hard' reality of practice.

Another important factor, highlighted by Wajcman, which impinges upon management style is the business environment generally. For example, an economic climate which leads to exercises of 'downsizing' featuring continuous restructuring

and job losses is not conducive to sustaining work relationships based on high levels of trust and co-operation. Therefore, a logic of survival results in heightened individualistic competition for jobs which makes both men and women revert to the male stereotype, or traditional style, of management because it is the most familiar and easily understood method (Wajcman, 1996, pp344-345).

Wajcman's study is convincing with regard to the strength of similarity between male and female management styles. Similar to the studies on differences, it highlights the perceptual differences that occur with regard to male and female managers and their competencies. Wajcman makes the point that given the organisational constraints under which her female respondents have to survive 'it should not surprise us that in fact many women managers adapt and survive by being more male than the men'. An important feature of Wajcman's work is its ability to explain management women's behaviour according to both the broader context that impinges upon their success and the more individualistic phenomena that direct their (limited) 'choices' (see Peitchinis, 1989, p73 for a discussion about the limitations on women's occupational choices). Wajcman's research also highlights the fact that senior management women's behaviour is constrained by the organisational context in such a way as to make it appear 'more male than female'.

#### ***2.4: Sex-role Conflict of Token Women Managers: Issues of Identity***

The phenomenon of women having to become 'surrogate' men in order to be successful in business is a classic example of what Pateman (1988) terms 'Wollstonecraft's dilemma'. The basis of the concept is that if the social contract is one between men, and if citizenship rights are therefore similarly masculine, then women who seek equal rights with men seek to become surrogate men. Furthermore, women who seek equal rights with men in the male-dominated world of paid employment have also been constrained to behave as surrogate males (Crompton & Le Feuvre, 1992, p97). 'Wollstonecraft's dilemma' could be experienced by senior management women as a feeling of ambiguity with regard to their gender identity.

A manifestation of the ambiguity of the gender identity of women in positions of power is the exaggerated focus upon their way of dressing. Elshtain (1981) and Sawyer and Simms (1984) believe that politicians consciously manipulate the images associated with the small proportion of women in senior political positions in order to reassure ourselves of the essential femininity of female political figures. Dixon expresses the importance of image manipulation as:

The conscious and unconscious manipulation of the image of the powerful woman needs to be teased out again and again, in academic and public media. It is important to question what have become stock readings of past and present actions and to scrutinise the evidence. A closer look at the nature of power and access to it is also vital, but study of the imagery itself is a prime example of theory which should and must effect practice (Dixon, 1992, p222).

Likewise Sawyer (1990, pp25-27) describes in graphic detail the 'politics of dress' that became a major issue for senior women in the public service in Australia in the 1980s.

Crompton and Le Feuvre (1992) conducted research on women managers in France and Britain that shows how a formal equality of access is a necessary but not sufficient condition to achieve a real equality of practice for women in management. They note how few women in both France and Britain have been able to pursue careers within financial organisations. Interestingly, despite the different labour market characteristics of the two countries, the experience of women is remarkably similar, suggesting that the organisations themselves are the crucial forces shaping women's career paths. One result of the study showed that the few women who have pursued careers have had to do so by adopting 'male' characteristics, or by becoming 'surrogate' men (Crompton & Le Feuvre, 1992, p115).

Along similar lines to the 'Queen Bee Syndrome', a term first coined by Staines *et al.*, (1974), Kanter (1977, p237) described the stereotype of the 'iron maiden', a strong woman working in male-dominated organisations who does not conform to the more usual 'feminine' roles. Kanter argued that this stereotype reflects a strategy adopted by some women in order to succeed but left the individual woman in a state of

'unnatural self-distortion' because it required continual watchful effort to stay away from role traps and not to exhibit characteristics that would reinforce stereotypes.

Powell *et al.*, (1985) takes personal role-related dilemmas that management women may experience and attempts to see them in a positive light. Instead of assuming that management women are 'victims' because they have had to face more barriers than men, Powell suggests the fact that women have had it so tough makes them more valuable to organisations than men.

Women can be viewed as having more barriers to overcome, both internal and external, to hold managerial positions than do men. Internal barriers result from the internalisation of sex role stereotypes which regard work as no more than a temporary endeavour for women at best. External barriers result from the tendencies of some organisations to discriminate against women as they hire and promote managerial talent. Thus a woman with the same age, education, salary, and level of managerial position as a man may have had to overcome more barriers, resulting in a greater commitment to her career. Men on the other hand, experience greater sex-role expectations to be the breadwinner and to be successful at work than do women. They could find themselves in managerial jobs in response to such pressures even if they possessed less of a career orientation than women in equivalent positions (Powell *et al.*, 1985, p45).

Powell concludes that instead of corporations promoting female talent primarily to achieve the societal goal of equal employment opportunity they have now been provided with an additional reason for moving more women into management. Because of greater commitment to their new occupation than men, women managers could be enhancing the 'bottom lines' of many corporations.

The pressures individual women feel to become surrogate men within organisations has been recognised as a personal stress that can bring about a type of 'gender identity crisis' (Davidson & Cooper, 1983). However, Still (1993) has taken the concept of the 'ideal' androgynous manager and compiled advice for women as to how they can develop similar profiles to male behaviour in their working lives in order to compete

with men on their level and aim at success in a predominantly male world. This strategy is an example of a belief in the normative and individual model of change that emphasises the need for individuals to change rather than the structure of organisations. Cultural feminists such as Greer are particularly wary of this strategy as it places women in a personally precarious position.

Masculinity is a system. It is the complex of learned behaviours and subtly coded interactions that forms the connective tissue of corporate society. Women who are inducted into masculinist hierarchies are exported tissue, in constant danger of provoking an inflammatory response and summary rejection (Greer, 1999, p294).

A study undertaken in Canada (Sheppard, 1989) on the image and self-image of women managers reveals information on gender-specific 'coping strategies'. In-depth interviews were undertaken on thirty-four women managers and sixteen male managers in a variety of companies. The purpose of the study was twofold. Firstly, it explored the different ways in which definitions of 'femaleness' and 'maleness' are used to define and maintain organisational power relations. Secondly, it explored the ambiguity and punitive potential of perceptions of sexuality (for example, eroticism) in the organisational context.

The results of the study revealed a striking focus by both groups on 'femaleness' rather than 'maleness' when probing for perceptions of gender and sexuality. Femaleness was in varying degrees a problem primarily for women, and secondarily for men. 'Maleness' remained embedded in the organisational context and as such was not experienced as problematic. If male behaviour was problematic to the women in the study it became difficult to challenge because of its normative ties to the prevailing organisational structure. Thus, women wanting to attain success almost invariably experienced an unnatural and exaggerated focus upon their own gender identity (Sheppard, 1989, p144).

What this research shows is that organisational behaviour for women can involve 'strategies of gender management', as deliberate behaviours are needed to balance the conflicting statuses of 'female' and 'manager'. This status conflict is heightened by

the woman manager's sense of marginality, and of always being potentially or actually seen as different and on the periphery.

Sheppard's study discovered a range of such strategies which seem to vary with type of organisation, rank within the organisation, presence of other women, characteristics of the particular organisational culture, and the personalities and biographies of individual women. For example, the study elaborates on two gender management strategies, 'blending in' and 'claiming a rightful place'. Both entail the correct balance of feminine and businesslike qualities in order for women to appear credible within the organisation. However, even if one were to be perfectly adept at managing these gender strategies the women in the study felt constantly vulnerable to unpredictable violations of the balance, such as men giving greater salience to women's sexuality or femininity. This identity conundrum led the women in the study to take responsibility for these violations by blaming their ability to properly manage their gender status.

Being a 'token' makes one more visible, and this creates special performance pressures on the individual. Tokens must always be twice as careful as others, for their performance is nearly always public. Therefore, it may be more difficult for them to share confidences with colleagues. Also one small mistake is taken as a representation of failure on behalf of the token's representative group. Whereas, a certain level of failure may be overlooked on the part of male managers, any failure on the part of a female may be used as an argument against further female promotion.

Furthermore, tokens sometimes respond in ways that look like fear of success. Perhaps they hesitate in taking risks that could further their career for fear of alienating those around them who have had difficulty enough in accepting them in their current position. Fear of success has sometimes been considered as a personality or character trait of women (Epstein, 1981, p204). However, Kanter (1976) has maintained that it is a reaction to the social structural constraints of being a token.

Kanter (1977) proposes the theory of 'critical mass' where the proportion of women in professional positions has important consequences for how women are responded

to and perceived. According to Kanter, if women constitute less than 15 percent of a total workplace category or position, such as manager, they could be described as 'tokens' because they are 'symbols' of their group rather than individuals. She also suggests that organisational dynamics shift as the proportion of women increases. Token women experience increased performance pressures, greater isolation and exclusion from male groups, and greater distortion of their behaviour by others in order to fit them into pre-existing sexual stereotypes (Kanter cited in Boeker *et al.*, 1985, pp151-152).

The experience of being a token woman, according to Sheppard (1989), has two divergent expectations. Either of these expectations can be activated at the appropriate time and result in undermining the achievement or emphasising the failure of individuals who occupy a statistically infrequent status set. The first is that the individual will be like all other members of their gender or minority group. The second is that the individual is the rare exception, unlike all others who share the particularly problematic status. When a female executive is clearly doing a superior job, her performance is explained by the fact that she is unlike other women. Here, she is essentially defeminised. However, if she slips up in some way or loses her temper, she is seen as very much like all other women (i.e., highly emotional or hysterical). Hence, any behaviour that the executive woman displays is stereotyped leaving the individual woman with a 'damned if she does, and damned if she doesn't' feeling towards her actions as a manager.

The constant challenge to the identity of women managers could have the effect of developing feelings of ambivalence and alienation because of the constant emphasis on their self-image. Aspects such as speech and clothing along with sexualised bodily functions such as pregnancy and some sexualised social contexts such as 'a beer in the pub after work' were seen by the participants in the study to be used in a punitive way to control women within an organisational context. The combination of women's high visibility and the general perception that they need to work harder than men in the same context puts them at odds with their male colleagues and at the same time adds pressure to their working environment. These experiences translate directly

into heightened forms of personal stress for women generally in management positions (Sheppard, 1989, p154).

The exaggerated focus upon the female gender is an example of the sort of gendered practices that constrain women in the workplace. There are two problems with attempting to combat practices such as these. Firstly, the practices cannot be easily identified and, secondly, they cannot be formally challenged or legislated against. Therefore, the dominant 'masculinised' culture of organisations is difficult to counter with the current legislative initiatives of Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action.

Still (1993, pp76-77) describes the conundrum of dual stereotypical roles associated with women managers. On the one hand if they succeed at the 'male game' women are accused by their own gender of 'selling out to male rules' and becoming 'Queen Bees'. They are also castigated if they do not support women's issues and help other women achieve their goals and may be rejected by their own gender as not being 'real' women. On the other hand, if women managers become 'feminised' or, worse, 'radicalised' then they are rejected as being unsuitable as prospective recruits or candidates for promotion. The outcome of these two scenarios is that ambitious women either join the male culture as 'honorary males' (although their organisational membership remains in doubt), or they become one of the growing number of senior women who engage in 'corporate flight'.

The 'token' woman is also subject to status-levelling. This can be an upgrading of status, for example, the male nurse addressed as doctor, or a downgrading of status, as in the female executive referred to as secretary. Being in a situation where one has consistently to define one's status for others may well have demoralising psychological effects. Status levelling occurs most frequently when a woman in a management position is mistaken for someone in a sub-ordinate role. Whether or not this is the intent of all or some of the female executive's male colleagues, or simply the continuation of an informal pattern of interaction established long ago, its consequences are the same: the woman is made to feel inferior in comparison to her colleagues (Epstein, 1981, pp205-206). Marshall (1991, pp4-10) points out that many

of the women who leave organisations are the only woman (or one of a small number) at their level of the organisation and that the 'culture' of their organisation plays a large part in their leaving. Later in this chapter a discussion on the reasons women and men managers leave organisations will show the pre-eminence of an organisation's 'culture' in women's reasons for leaving.

### ***2.5: Structural Versus Individual Explanations***

In recognition of the complexity and diversity of research into women in management, researchers have categorised the existing research methods (Fagenson, 1990; Kanter, 1976; Tharenou & Conroy, 1994). Kanter (1976) grouped research on management women into three related theoretical models, the 'temperamental' approach, the 'role-related' approach, and the 'social structural' approach.

The 'temperamental approach', popular in the USA in the 1970s, focuses upon the 'female' character and personality. Studies concerning female socialisation, gender roles and sex differences were categorised by Kanter as 'temperamental'. The assumption underlying this approach is that 'women differ from men in their character, temperament, attitudes, self-esteem, language, gestures, and interpersonal orientations, whether by nature, early socialisation, or accumulated learning as a result of coping with an inferior position' (Kanter, 1976, p283).

The effectiveness of the temperamental approach to the study of women in management is dubious because sound research exists questioning any significant differences between men and women, and the way they manage (Wajcman, 1996). However, the temperamental approach to researching women in management persists (Alimo-Metcalf, 1995; McLoughlin, 1992; Stanford *et al.*, 1995).

The temperamental approach tends to accept the dominant paradigms of management in organisations, which favour 'masculinist' ways of behaving, and subjects women to compensatory programs in an attempt to overcome any character defects impeding their effectiveness in terms of the dominant paradigm. This explanatory model has limitations due to its central focus upon the individual characteristics of women and not the contextual constraints that hierarchical organisations place upon them.

Therefore, although women may equip themselves to rise to the challenge of management roles, undergoing specific training and tailoring their personality to what they think is more 'management like', their opportunities may still be limited due to the stereotypical practices of gender and power relations.

The 'role-related' approach concerns the specific roles that women experience in their day to day lives. The sexual division of labour, especially within the family, is focused upon as a reason for occupational segregation. Kanter (1976, p285) describes this approach as a 'reflection or projection of basic male-female roles derived from the family'.

Research based on the role-related model is also inadequate for a number of reasons. Firstly, it diverts attention away from the practices of the workplace and directs them towards the limitations that the family division of labour places on the female and male roles, an area where workplace rules and policies can have little effect. Secondly, and similar to the temperamental approach, attention is focused around the individual's immediate surroundings, rather than focusing upon the larger social structure which may constrain the individual (Sheridan, 1997, p8.4).

Connell (1983) critiques role theory for ignoring the dynamics of power inequality that underpin most social relationships.

Role theory rests on a contradiction, that (the contradiction) between the recognition of social constraints, and an individualistic mode of theorising them - a mode that reads social processes as inter-individual transactions, and grounds them in individual wills. That the things which obscurely register in the role literature - class conflict in industry, revolt against sexual oppression, resistance to social control - might be collective problems, capable of solution only by the transformation of society, is a truth that it is, in effect, the business of role theory to conceal (Connell, 1983, p205).

Consequently, placing the emphasis on role attributes imbues any research design with a fundamental logic of circularity and is ineffective in highlighting the

appropriate mechanisms of social change required to address the social problem. Connell asks, how do we know that we have got the right expectations and sanctions for each particular role? Each person, according to role theory, has quite a number of positions, or role frames, and this is especially the case with management women. The multiplicity of role frames, of possible constructions of role, itself guarantees that there is no universal criterion of relevance. To establish the social construction of the role, we first have to postulate the role in its fullness. There is thus a fundamental logical circularity in role theory. This circularity, according to Connell, can only be escaped by shifting to another method of thinking about social relations, a historical method (Connell, 1983, pp203-204).

Strategies for change from models based upon role theory tend to focus too heavily upon family life and ignore the specific context of workplace. The occupational world is considered as homogeneous and the associated strategies for change too general because work and family situations are portrayed as undifferentiated.

Feminists Benhabib and Cornell (1987, pp12-13) also believe that the view that 'our roles are partly constitutive of the persons we are', or the situated vision of the self as member of a family and community, is problematic. Precisely because to be a biological female has always been interpreted in 'gendered' terms as dictating a certain psycho-sexual and cultural identity, the individual woman has always been 'situated' in a world of roles, expectations and social fantasies. Indeed, her individuality has been sacrificed to the 'constitutive definitions' of her identity as member of a family, as someone's daughter, someone's wife and someone's mother. The feminine subjects have disappeared behind their social and communal persona.

Consequently, the 'role-related' approach conceals both the power inequities preventing women from reaching a higher status, and the difficulties women are having with their identities at work. In Chapter Four I will outline the theoretical position that informs the research method for the study. The inclusion of historical and organisational contexts as well as individual experiences will be included to fully explain the social situation of senior management women.

Kanter's third category of research is the 'social structural' approach. Originating from organisational behaviour theory, Kanter's work 'Men and Women of the Corporation' (1977) provides one of the foremost studies of the 'social structural' type regarding women in management. Kanter proposes that, 'A number of structural and situational variables are more important determinants of the organisational behaviour of women (and men) than sex differences or global social roles' (Kanter, 1976, p287).

Other categorisation methods emerged after Kanter's initial categorisation of research into women in management. Tharenou and Conroy (1994) identified two main types of research. Firstly, research that concentrates upon the individual traits of management women ('person-centred approach') and secondly, research that concentrates upon the structural barriers preventing women from reaching management positions ('situation-centred approach'). According to Tharenou and Conroy both categories have advantages and disadvantages and should ideally be looked at as complementary rather than contradictory methods of viewing factors relating to women in management.

Both the 'temperamental' and 'role-related' approaches identified by Kanter can be categorised as 'person-centred' views of research and literature. That is, they are perspectives that focus upon the way an individual relates and reacts to the situation in which they find themselves. Kanter's third category, the 'social structural' approach, is most like the 'situation-centered' approach in that it focuses upon the nature of organisational structures and the organisation of work, rather than the nature or roles of women. The assumption implicit in the 'situation-centred' approach is that structural factors (or practices) will be more likely to change individual behaviour than vice-versa.

Kanter's method of empirical research lacks two important processes that intervene to exclude women from senior management levels of major corporations. First, an analysis of the power relations that emerge from the dominant ideology at senior management levels and from which women are generally excluded. And second, an incorporation of the affects of external social phenomena, such as economic

rationalism and corporate managerialism, that impact upon the way in which organisations operate.

Fagenson (1990) addresses these deficiencies when outlining the inherent biases of the different theoretical and methodological approaches to women in management research. Although agreeing that the 'person-centred' and 'situation-centred' approaches do exist, Fagenson adds another possible factor, the 'gender-organisation-system' (or GOS). The GOS perspective adds the dimension of the organisational context to the equation of factors that impinge on the progression of women into senior management positions.

The GOS approach includes such factors as the corporation's culture, history, ideology, policies, and structure. For example, the ability of women to gain executive positions may be effected by a past reverse discrimination lawsuit within a particular company, or an organisation's belief that individuals with military or combat experience should be promoted first (ideology), or a paternalistic culture that uses an individual's performance on the golf course rather than at work as the basis for promotion (culture and policy). The GOS perspective includes the influence of the social and institutional systems in which organisations are situated.

Relying upon the work of Martin *et al.*, (1983, p20), Fagenson points out that organisations function in a larger context in which 'societal inequities are enacted or constituted and reconstituted'. Fagenson is referring to the dialectical process between external and internal factors that effect organisations. The power differential between the sexes is concealed because of this dialectical process. Much of the literature and research on women in management does not engage with this dialectical process. In Chapter Four I will discuss how the power differentials between the sexes that mediate the relationship between individuals and organisations need to be incorporated into the theoretical position of the thesis.

Corse's (1990, p39) study, which measures the attitudes of men and women to pregnant managers, shows that a 'structural' or objective variable, such as pregnancy, can lead to direct forms of discrimination towards women managers through the lack

of confidence subordinates have in pregnant managers. Along with the direct discriminatory effect of the state of pregnancy on women managers, another interesting finding of the study was that both the men and women in the study reacted discriminatorily towards pregnant managers. Similarly, Kvande and Rasmussen's study (1995) into the differences between males and females opportunities as engineers in Norwegian companies, found that differences in organisational structures were the main explanatory factor for unequal opportunities between males and females.

An example of a more individual and normative approach to researching the barriers to women's advancement in management is that taken by Still (1992). Still explores a number of common conceptions about the reasons for the existence and perseverance of a glass ceiling from the perspective of women as individuals, issues such as the lack of qualifications and experience of women for executive positions, and their subsequent lack of vision and leadership skills. Still focuses upon women's individual qualifications to make the point that many women are not given the chances to be groomed for senior management positions (Still, 1992, p3).

Although Still does not claim to embed her writings within a specific theoretical framework, like other studies in the management field, her approach is heavily based upon the theory of socialisation and roles, which is why it lacks full explanatory power. As already discussed, sex-role theory has been criticised for conceptualising sexuality as the property of individuals as relatively unproblematic subjects, giving insufficient attention to power relations and being relatively a-historical.

Consequently, it is better able to analyse stability than change (Burrell & Hearn, 1989, p5).

Research based upon role and socialisation theory and the individual model of change would focus upon outcomes related to women managers such as a lack of mobility, poor commitment to work, and lack of ambition. Contrary to these misconceptions, however, a study undertaken by Nicholson and West (1988) shows how women managers tend to be mobile and more radical in their job changes compared to men. The study found women with children made more rapid job changes and, as well as being highly motivated regarding success, they also scored high on dominance,

adjustment and need for growth. The assertion that women managers display poor commitment to work has been refuted by studies that have found women managers to be more committed to their careers, as opposed to family or home lives, than their male counterparts. (Lahtinen & Wilson, 1994; Powell *et al.*, 1985; Powell, 1993). Other studies have also found women managers to be more ambitious than their male counterparts (Davidson, 1994, p16; Nicholson & West, 1988).

Research on why women managers are leaving organisations uses the methods of the 'person-centred perspective' and at the same time exposes the assumptions inherent in sex stereotyping. Comparing the reasons men and women give for leaving organisations clearly reveals the structural constraints that impinge on management women.

## ***2.6: Why Women Leave Organisations***

The research and literature on the reasons why women leave organisations is an extension of the research and literature on the differences between men and women managers and the structural versus individual debate. This body of research attempts to explore the viability of the belief that women are a liability to organisations compared to men with regard to their traditional sex-role functions.

Chafetz's (1974) study of US employers, and women and men employees, found that turnover rates for women and men in similar occupations were equivalent. What distinguished the two groups was the purpose of the turnover. Men leave their jobs to move to different jobs providing greater promotional opportunities. Women are more likely to leave the market entirely to fulfil child-bearing and child-rearing responsibilities. The result for the employers are the same; they lose their investment in training the worker. However, the result for the employee is different. Men make occupational moves that enhance their promotional prospects and take advantage of their seniority, whereas women leave the market and lose seniority, disrupt promotion lines and return at a later date when their skills might be obsolete (Reinharz, 1992, pp76-77). However, studies undertaken many years later show that pregnancy and child-rearing are not the main reasons why women managers leave organisations. Rather it is dissatisfaction with career opportunities which prompts many women to

leave their positions (Brett & Stroh, 1994; Davidson & Cooper, 1992; Homans, 1987).

Naff (1995, p535) discovered that women also leave because of their *perceptions* of 'subjective' discrimination in the organisation as well as the obvious 'objective' barriers to their advancement. Naff found that work related experiences are the most important predictors of both types of perceptions. For example, working with more men than women increases the likelihood that women will believe they are discriminated against, and age plays a significant role in perceptions of personal discrimination. Moreover, subjective discrimination is found to have an impact on the career choices made by women. While such perceptions are positively related to the likelihood that a woman will apply for promotion within her agency, it is more likely that she will choose to leave her agency altogether.

Korabik and Rosin's (1995, p1) research on the differences between men and women's propensity to leave organisations explored the sex differences in managers' workplace experiences and affective responses to their jobs and the contribution of these variables to their propensity to leave organisations. They found that after controlling for differences in age and experience there were differences between male and female manager's marital status, number of children, income, perceptions of job demands, and met expectations. However, hierarchical regressions found no differences in the contribution of the variables to their intentions to leave. Position characteristics, commitment and satisfaction were important predictors of turnover intentions for both men and women. The results support 'situation-centred' rather than 'personality-centred' explanations for apparent sex differences in reasons for leaving organisations.

A related study by the same researchers (Korabik & Rosin, 1995) explores the impact of children on women managers' career behaviour and organisational commitment. The study showed that after controlling for differences in age, experience and work status, there were no differences in met expectations, turnover intentions, commitment, satisfaction, job characteristics, or perceptions of progress. However, women with children scored lower on job involvement and reported fewer work hours. The researchers concluded that while parenting demands may effect these

variables, they may not necessarily affect work-related attitudes, professional attainment, attachment to the job, or commitment to the organisation (Korabik & Rosin, 1995, p513).

Stroh, Brett and Reilly (1996) researched the differential rate of turnover of female and male managers finding that, contrary to the stereotype, female managers' intentions to leave were not predicted by their family structure (dual-earner status or number of children). Instead they found that women's intention to leave was affected by their perceptions of a lack of career opportunity in their current company and other traditional work-related predictors of turnover, such as job dissatisfaction and disloyalty to the current company. The study did not rule out the possibility that, in other contexts, female managers may leave their organisations for work and family reasons. However, in this study, females were leaving their organisations in higher proportions than males, and they were doing so for career-related concerns (Stroh *et al.*, 1996, p99).

Recently, Greenhaus *et al.*, (1997) undertook research examining work and family influences on the decision to leave the field of public accounting. They found that overall, women were more likely than men to depart public accounting. However, contrary to prediction, the reason for the sex difference in departure rate was not because women experienced greater family pressures than men, but rather because women had less of a desire to be promoted to partner than men. Moreover, women and men left public accounting for similar reasons, which were more likely to be work related than family related. Research by Devanna (1993, p213) supports this finding and shows that 'more men than women reported that they had turned down a job and/or refused a geographic move because it was not in the best interests of their family'.

These studies show that women managers are just as committed to their workplace as male managers, and that they leave organisations for similar reasons to men. Their reasons for leaving are either a perceived or real reason related to career decisions rather than individual domestic circumstances.

## **2.7: Male Attitudes to Women Managers**

Apart from the perceived and real promotional barriers women face at work, the attitudes of male co-workers or subordinates are a limiting factor in their progress. As a critique of the male dominated 'culture' of organisations, Kanter (1977) developed the concept of 'homosociability' to define the type of managers within organisations. 'Homosociability' refers to the trust required between managers in order to reproduce a 'rational' bureaucracy which in turn leads to their need for colleagues from socially similar backgrounds.

Management becomes a closed circle in the absence of better, less exclusionary responses to uncertainty and communication pressures. Forces stemming from organisational situations help foster social homogeneity as a selection criterion for managers and promote social conformity as a standard for conduct. Concerned about giving up control and broadening discretion in the organisation, managers choose others that can be 'trusted'. And thus they reproduce themselves in kind. Women are occasionally included in the inner circle when they are a part of an organisation's ruling family, but more usually this system leaves women out, along with a range of other people with discrepant social characteristics (Kanter, 1977, p68).

The reproduction of a certain type of male at senior management levels of Australian organisations has produced an unconscious imagery of the male leader in the Australian psyche. Sinclair's (1998) recent research on the topic suggests ways in which this unconscious imagery reinforces traditional leadership styles that undermine gender equity in positions of power and status in Australian organisations.

Organisational psychologists Davidson and Cooper (1992, p95) believe a change in attitude towards women managers (and women generally) by males in the workplace is required before the gender balance in management will improve. However, recent research on the relationship between sex role stereotypes and requisite management characteristics in the USA reveals that although women are more likely to view management positions as less sex-typed today than they did in the 1970s males are not. Davidson and Cooper conclude from this research that more women are needed in management ranks for less sex-typed attitudes within management ranks to prevail.

The idea that a 'critical mass' of women is required in management ranks in order to improve conditions for women in management will be discussed later in this chapter.

Cohen *et al.*, (1978) undertook a study to explore the reactions of male subordinates to the sex-role congruency of immediate supervision. They found that for female supervision only, the more traditionally incongruent the situation, the more unfavourable were the reactions to women managers. This finding was true, however, only for subordinates' verbal comments and not for their task performance or written evaluation of the supervisor. The results of their study showed that the relationship between leader sex and subordinate reactions may be more complex and subtle than has been previously considered. Consequently, the results 'speak most directly to the reconciliation of conflicting messages with which females may be confronted as they assume more traditionally male-oriented roles in the future. Women, they assert, are likely, at least initially, to receive favourable performance evaluation and little acceptance' (Cohen *et al.*, 1978, p310).

A study, undertaken almost twenty years later, finds similar reactions from male managers to women managers. Heilman *et al.*, (1995) undertook research, using male managers as subjects, to determine whether traditional stereotypic discrepancies in the characterisations of women and men persist when they are depicted as managers. The male managers in the study viewed the characterisations of women on male stereotyped attributes more favourably when they were depicted as managers than when depicted in general terms. However, male managers still overwhelmingly characterised female managers more negatively than male managers. When depicted as managers, particularly successful managers, women were found to be characterised more negatively in interpersonal attributes than women typically are, and under some circumstances, more negatively than men (Heilman, *et al.*, 1995, p237). The results of this study show the strength and character of the stereotypical beliefs held by male managers about women managers.

The importance of male manager's views towards women as managers is critical because as Heilman *et al.*, (1995, p250) point out 'the vast majority of executive level personnel are men, and they have the power to make decisions about the careers of aspiring women managers'. They also point out there is some evidence mounted by

Brenner *et al.*, (1989). that, contrary to the findings about men, women no longer masculinely sex-type managerial jobs.

Research from Canada undertaken in 1993 amongst 354 public service managers of both sexes found that there were different reactions to female managers depending upon their percentage representation in management. Using four different ratios of female to male managers, 9% and 20%, (representing real proportions) 35% and 50%, (representing fictitious proportions) the research found that reactions to women managers were affected differently according to the different percentages. When the percentage of women managers reached 20%, attitudes toward them were more favourable than at 9%, but at the fictitious 50% they were less favourable and similar to those at 9%. The results suggest that 35% would be perceived as ideal by both male and female managers. The most favourable attitudes were found among women, as well as among the youngest managers, those who had graduated in humanities or administration, and those who had less seniority. Evaluations of the status of women managers and or their contribution to the culture of the organisation were also influenced by the different ratios of female to male managers (Rinfret & Lortie-Lussier, 1993, p465).

Three years later Rinfret and Lortie-Lussier (1996) conducted a similar study that compared the attitudes of university students with those of managers towards female managers. The objective of the study was to ascertain whether there were problems of validity or reliability in using students as research subjects as opposed to other groups within society. The results showed that there were significant differences between the two groups. The impact of numbers was significant for the managers only, with attitudes being more favourable at 20%, 35% and 45% than at 9%, suggesting a critical mass at a lower ratio than hypothesised by Kanter (1977). Managers and students also held different opinions about the status of women managers, their contribution to organisational culture, and their abilities in management. However, more favourable reactions were found generally among women, regardless of the group and amongst respondents who had been supervised by women (Rinfret & Lortie-Lussier, 1996, p262).

A comprehensive study on the benefits of the 'critical mass' theory has been undertaken by Ely (1995). The results show that sex roles are more stereotypical and

more problematic in firms with relatively low proportions of senior women. Another important finding was that the study supported a complex view of gender as an ongoing social construction, the meaning significance and consequences of which vary as a function of the power differences reflected in the sex composition across levels of an organisations hierarchy. Comparing the 'perceptions of self' held by women managers in male-dominated and sex-integrated organisations Ely developed typological characteristics of the different responses of women (Ely, 1995, p589).

These findings align themselves with findings from a similar study undertaken by Ezell *et al.*, (1981) where it was concluded that males with experience of female managers have more favourable attitudes towards them than men without such experience. Hence, according to Davidson (1994, p20) increasing the numbers of women managers, particularly in senior executive positions, undoubtedly has a positive influence on male colleagues' attitudes towards women managers.

Davidson (1994, p17) stresses the importance of examining attitudes towards women managers and women in general by males. Research from the UK highlights the differences in *perception* between men and women. While 74% of women 'strongly agreed' that women managers brought positive skills to the workplace, only one third of men believed this to be the case. Furthermore, nearly 20% of men maintained they would find it difficult to work for a woman. Among their reasons was the view that, in general, women do not make good managers, 'although they have much to offer in the workplace'.

In the USA, Brenner, *et al.*, (1989) and Schein, *et al.*, (1991) carried out 15 year follow-up studies on the relationship between sex-role stereotypes and requisite management characteristics. These surveys revealed that, unlike women in the 1970s, female managers and female management students today do not sex type the managerial position, but view women and men as equally likely to possess characteristics necessary for managerial success. However, male management students viewed the management position in the same way as today's US male managers and male managers in the 1970s. All three male groups believed that, compared with women, men were more likely to possess characteristics necessary for managerial success. These perceptions held by many men reproduce and reinforce the dominant male culture in many organisations (Davidson, 1994, p17-18).

From the Australian perspective Sinclair (1994) has undertaken in-depth interviews with 11 Australian male CEOs from large influential commercial organisations to ascertain their views on management women. Focusing upon the 'executive culture' as the major barrier to the progression of women into executive positions, Sinclair concludes that 'the executive culture can be re-conceptualised as the stage on which constructs of identity, masculinity and leadership are being established and asserted through traditional managerial scripts and masculine discourses' (Sinclair, 1994, p6).

A major finding in Sinclair's study of importance to this thesis is the clear description, by the executive males interviewed, of a strong masculine culture which takes two forms, 'an older patrician elitism and a more youthful locker room and larrikin-like boyishness' (Sinclair, 1994, p7). A significant outcome of Sinclair's research was that what began as a study with a focus on women and the reasons for their absence from the Australian executive culture, 'inexorably metamorphosed into an analysis of the values of a male-dominated environment' (Sinclair, 1994, p39).

The conclusions of the study do provide further reinforcement of Kanter's original findings. Sinclair shows how the hegemonic character of the socially constructed masculinity of the executive culture is witnessed in practices, such as the nebulous character of its exclusivity, that require emotional trials and tests of endurance for the successful 'hero' that are exclusively masculine.

Although there has been a certain amount of research undertaken on the attitudes of male managers to female managers there has not been the same emphasis on measuring the attitudes of female managers to other female managers. For example, research has shown that there are a proportion of male CEOs in Australia that are happy to promote women in the workplace (Sinclair, 1994). However, it is not as clear whether the majority of women in positions of power in Australia will actively promote or assist other women.

## **2.8: Research On Women Managers**

Staines *et al.*, (1974) explored the views and attitudes of successful women in the USA whom they classified as 'countermilitants' or 'anti-feminists'. Their research identified a certain type of woman they described as a 'Queen Bee'. The Queen Bee

was a woman who displayed countermilitancy towards feminist concerns. This countermilitancy, according to Staines *et al.*, arose from these women's personal success within the system: both professional success (a high status job with good pay) and social success (popularity with men, attractiveness, a good marriage). The 'Queen Bee' has made it in the 'man's world' of work, while running a house and family with her left hand. The attitude of a Queen Bee is 'if I can do it without a whole movement to help me so can all those other women'. Women who display characteristics of the syndrome are described as competitive females who glory in their own success within the professional world at the expense of other women (Staines, *et al.*, 1974, p63).

Abramson (1975, p116) conducted research in the US amongst academics that revealed the extent of deference to the dominant system and values displayed by the 'token' number of women in management at that time. In this study it was found that women who had already gained prominence in management ranks tended to deny there was systemic discrimination against women. Abramson felt that the Queen Bee syndrome arose due to the fact that if successful women admitted there was systemic discrimination against other women in society this admission might undermine their own level of achievement.

Kanter's (1977) insights into the effects of the organisational setting on gender equity suggests that researchers should examine aspects such as the 'Queen Bee' syndrome for structural rather than gender origins. In a situation where numerical skewing makes the women executive a token, she is under group pressure to prove her loyalty to the majority by defining herself as an exception and turning against other women (Boeker *et al.*, 1985, p154). Kanter's concepts of 'homosociability' and 'critical mass' were taken up and developed further by researchers undertaking studies on women in management. However, Staines *et al.*, (1974) concept of the 'Queen Bee' was not explored empirically.

Marshall's (1984, 1995) research has generated the largest body of knowledge on individual management women and management women as a group. Undertaken in the UK, the research explores the lives, career paths and management styles of

women. In *Women Managers: Travellers in a Male World* (1984) Marshall explores the experiences of women managers in response to certain stereotypical ideas that had emerged from literature and research on women managers. Her findings were based upon a comparison between the philosophical basis of her readings and interviews with thirty women in two industries. Marshall explored whether women had management 'potential', the social values and power that could be described as particularly female, the 'places' for women in organisations, the history and future of their careers, their gender identity, and their lifestyle choices.

In *Women Managers Moving On* (1995) Marshall explores the social phenomenon of large numbers of women managers leaving organisations in the UK. The relevant experiences and issues are explored through a qualitative study of sixteen women who have reached middle or senior management and have paused to review their careers. Throughout the work Marshall explores the experiences of working in male-dominated cultures, of being change agents, of making decisions to leave, and formulating the next steps in their careers. The study utilises a historical biographical approach to the study of management women's careers that highlights the tenuous character of these careers and the personal dilemmas faced by management women. The study does not, however, explore the willingness of senior management women to assist other women, how they would go about assisting other women, or whether working in different types of organisations would affect their willingness to assist other women.

I extend Marshall's work by exploring the values and commitment of senior management women to the collective force of the women's movement, policies such as Affirmative Action and quota systems, and personal actions that would assist in increasing the numbers of women in senior management. I also compare the views of women working in the private sector compared to those working in the public sector in order to explore the content and extent of any differences.

Cox's (1996) work on exploring 'women's often uneasy relationship with leadership and power' draws on her experiences and observations, readings, interaction with people, information from television and radio over approximately half a century. The

major contributions of the work are that is contextually grounded in her expertise, experiences and beliefs, and has strong sociological leanings in that the theories discussed highlight a plurality in the exercise of power. The prescriptive suggestions at the end of the book are important practical resources for women attempting to develop leadership skills.

Sinclair's (1998) research is closely aligned with the topic of this thesis and was published after the primary data for this study had already been collected. The study analysed the responses of twelve women in executive roles. The three areas explored in the research were: the women's experience of an executive environment, their perceptions of their career and leadership role, and questions about their background, such as family and schooling. The findings from the study align themselves to some of the findings from this study and I will discuss the similarities at the pertinent places throughout the thesis.

Sinclair's study varies from this study in a number of ways. Firstly, the research objective was to explore the leadership styles of senior management women. I have this as one aspect of my study but it is not the central research objective. Second, her research method is solely qualitative, exploring the meanings senior management give to their experiences as executives. My research incorporates both qualitative and quantitative research methods in order to confirm the findings from the qualitative data with a representative sample of senior management women and compares and contrasts the values, norms and beliefs of women working in the private and public sector.

Wajcman (1999) has undertaken the most recent study on women in management that aligns itself with the central topic of this thesis. The study is based upon 20 interviews and a survey of 324 men and women comparing and contrasting the responses between the two genders. The issues explored were whether women were managing differently to men, the 'feminine' dilemmas that women managers face, the domestic arrangements of women managers, and the contradictory nature of women's relationship to power. The theoretical paradigm upon which Wajcman bases her work is very similar to that applied in this thesis, however, there are major differences

in the research objectives of the two studies. Firstly, it is the central intention of this study to gauge the commitment and willingness of senior management women to methods of increasing the numbers of women in management, an issue that was not addressed in Wajcman's study. Secondly, a comparison between women in the private and public sectors is central to the research objectives in order to explore intervening variables that could be implicated in the large difference between the proportion of women in senior management in the private and public sector.

### **2.9: Summary**

The research undertaken on attitudes to female managers suggests that differences in management style between men and women are more perceptual than real and that male attitudes are positively affected by an experience of working with or for a female manager. However, as yet female managers have not gained the 'right to rule' due to the fact that a sizeable proportion of men and some women prefer to work for a male (Wajcman, 1996, p341). There are also problems of validity within the research in that most of the research that explores attitudes towards women managers uses males as subjects. Furthermore, much of the research does not explore the differences between women, particularly senior management women.

The literature and research review highlights the complexity and contradictory nature of the continuing debate on the differences between women and men in management. This has ramifications for the development of theory and research methods in the study of women managers. As Marshall points out, issues of importance in the study of gender differences change constantly.

As one apparently rational argument is discredited and I think I have reached firm ground, this gives way as the original argument is replaced by one equally plausible. In time, this reasoning too can be contested, but the ground shifts again, and another proposition takes its place (Marshall, 1984, p41).

This is partly due to the fact that any accurate and comprehensive study of gender relations must be historically and contextually grounded. However, the complexity involved in incorporating all of the pertinent individual and contextual features into a single study on gender inequity at management level is problematic. Consequently,

most studies focus on one type of organisation or upon one particular issue effecting women in management (such as why women leave organisations). Therefore, formulating a theoretical paradigm that could be used to develop a definitive research method to study women in the management context is only partially successful. With this caveat in mind I will be describing and critically assessing the usefulness of different theoretical perspectives in Chapter Four.

Sophisticated theoretical and methodological bases are required to explain the complex balance between the institutional, ideological and individual factors that maintain gender inequality within organisations. Much of the existing research and literature on women in management is prescriptive, voluntaristic and focused on the individual, therefore lacking in explanatory power. In the case of some literature, dependence upon the individual model of change based on role theory severely curtails the explanatory power of the analysis. Hence, questions must be asked about the adequacy of such theories in bringing about effective social change. Effective change to gender inequity needs to take into account both the ways in which gender is constructed and the uses of power in each organisation.

The literature and research on women in management highlight the particular 'culture' of an organisation, dominated by 'masculinised' norms, as the most recurrent theme in the barrier to women's advancement into senior management. However, a practical problem arises from the fact that the 'masculinised' culture of management is the predominant barrier to gender equity, that is, the specific practices that shape each organisation's culture are difficult to identify and difficult to counter. It is the contention of this thesis that senior management women occupy a status within society that would allow them to effect change in organisations that would assist in increasing the numbers of women at senior management levels. However, if a 'Queen Bee Syndrome' is found to exist amongst Australian senior management women these findings will offer a caveat to the belief that the women now beginning to reach management ranks will be strong advocates for advancing other women. The strategy of simply increasing senior management ranks with women would not immediately weaken the current male gender system if the type of women entering

management ranks intended to uphold the male gender-system. Therefore, the 'critical mass' thesis may not be the solution to the slow progress of women into positions of power and privilege.

As discussed in this chapter, there has been little research undertaken into the views of senior management women on gender equity in the workplace. Furthermore, what research has been undertaken does not explore the differences between senior management women on gender equity issues or the effects of whether they work in a private or public organisation. In the next chapter I will discuss a number of broad social factors related to changes that have occurred over the last twenty years that may impact upon the way in which senior management women value gender equity. The social context is an important precursor to the development of the theoretical paradigm in Chapter Four where I will discuss the theoretical position of the thesis and the ways in which the theory addresses the research objectives.