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No Change from Within: Senior Women Managers' Response to Gendered Organizational Structures

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Abstract

The gendered nature of organizations has now been well-established by feminist researchers. In particular, the most senior levels of management have been identified as sites of hegemonic masculinity; the causes of which are complex, socially reproduced inter-relationships that are highly resistant to change. While it has been argued that these structures will become less problematic as more women enter the paid workforce and more move into senior management, in this paper we challenge this argument. Our recent research concerning women in the most senior ranks of management in the private sector in Australia suggests that while the majority of these women identify the need for change, they have not used their role in senior management as a means of challenging gendered structures. The implications of the findings are that it is invalid to assume that change will come about through increasing numbers of women in management. Other means of challenging gendered organizational structures must be implemented if quantifiable change is to come about.

Key words: women, management, organizations, gender equity

Introduction

While women's participation in the paid workforce is one of the most significant social changes over the past forty years, women have not made substantial inroads into the elite levels of corporate power – whether in senior management within organizations or on the boards of these companies. The gendered structures and practices operating within organizations result in qualitatively different career experiences and outcomes for women and men, with the most senior levels of management having been identified as sites of hegemonic masculinity (Cockburn, 1991; Connell, 1987; 1995). The causes of hegemonic masculinity are multi-factorial and manifest in a plethora of both individual and structural practices that have been highly resistant to change mechanisms, such as Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), affirmative action programs and quota systems instigated in various ways in different organizations over the past twenty-five years (Bacchi, 1996; Poiner & Wills, 1991). While it has been argued that these gendered structures will become less problematic as more women enter the paid workforce and more move into senior management (Still, 1993; cf Wajcman, 1999), in this paper we challenge the assumptions underpinning this argument.

Drawing on research carried out by the authors in two independent studies we consider the claim that as more women enter the ranks of senior management, the gendered nature of organizations will be challenged. The first study we draw on focuses on women in senior management within private sector companies in Australia and the second study involves women on the boards of publicly-listed companies in Australia. The assumption that more women in senior management will automatically bring about a more inclusive

organization environment is not being evidenced in these women's self-reporting of their role responsibilities. Our analyses of the data from these two studies lead us to conclude that a significant majority of these women are not committed to bringing about organizational change that would facilitate the entry of more women into senior management. While these women espouse their commitment to equal opportunities, they have not transformed this into their role responsibilities. These women have not used their role in senior management as a means of challenging the gendered structures. The implication of these findings is that the assumption that changes to gendered structures will come about simply through increasing numbers of women in management is invalid. Rather, we argue that other strategies for change must be explored if organizations are to become more inclusive of women in senior management.

Women's under-representation in management

There have been a number of theories developed within the gender and management literature to explain women's lack of representation in management. In this section we summarily characterize the main thrust of these approaches to contextualise the empirical studies reported in this paper. The first approach can be characterised as a person-centred or gender-centred approach. This approach tends to focus on the role gender plays in determining an individual's preferences, abilities and skills and how this leads to differential outcomes for women and men in management positions. According to this approach, women are believed to be less likely to possess the skills, knowledge and abilities needed for management than their male counterparts. Virginia Schein's continued work in this field suggests that this perspective continues to pervade the

thinking of male managers, although women respondents have apparently become more open to women managers over time (Schein, 1973, 1994; Schein *et al*, 1996).

Another approach to explaining women's and men's differential representation in management relates to the nature of organization structures and can be labelled the structural approach. Kanter's work in the 1970s (Kanter, 1977) on the structures and processes determining vertical mobility within organizations was an important precursor to much of the gendered structural work that has been undertaken over the past three decades. In bringing into sharp relief women's experiences within organizations, Kanter's analysis focused on the significance of gender and sexuality within organizations. Women's positioning within organizations could be understood, Kanter argued, in terms of organizational structures and the clustering in low power jobs rather than simply an issue of sex. If there was a wider sharing of power within organizations, Kanter argued, women would not face as many problems in accessing management. While her work has been widely acknowledged as seminal, it has been critiqued for its failure to acknowledge the power inequalities inherent in gender relations (Wajcman, 1999).

The gendered structures of organizations are now well recognized due to the work of such writers as Acker (1990; 1998), Calas and Smircich (1992), Martin (1996), Connell (1987; 1995) and Collinson and Hearn (1996). These writers have been able to constitute a powerful critique of abstract, gender-neutral organisational theory for its failure to represent what actually happens in and between organisations.

In their various works, these writers have demonstrated how the gendered organisation of work – including the relative inequality of the income and status of women and men – is reinforced through organisational practices which perpetuate unequal divisions of labour between paid and unpaid work. Issues concerning how work is designed and communicated, evaluated, what opportunities are available to whom, are all based on gendered assumptions such that hierarchy and gender are clearly embedded in organization practices (Martin, 1996). As Calas and Smircich (1992; 248) note, such analyses allow us to ‘understand how normal organisational theorising can be regarded as normal in so far as we don’t question the gender orientation that sustains that “normality”.’

A third approach to explaining women’s low representation in management suggested by Fagenson (1993) is the ‘gender-organization-system’ (GOS) approach. This approach builds on aspects of the gender-centred and structural approaches outlined above by claiming that situations influence individual behaviour but that individuals also may differ from one another on the basis of gender. The GOS approach also includes two further assumptions about work:

‘a) An individual and his or her organization cannot be understood separate from the society (culture) in which he or she works, and (b) when the individual, the organization, or the system in which they are embedded changes, the other components change as well’ (Fagenson, 1993: 6).

Smith (1987: 78) has also recognized the exclusion of the 'standpoint of women' from a methodological and sociological viewpoint and characterized it as the common experience of women in the organization of social relations. The solution, according to Smith, is the consistent critique of those social relations that define women's exclusion and from that critique the definition of alternatives. Any process to change gendered organizational structures, therefore, requires not only the constant critique of those structures but the development of change mechanisms based on alternatives.

Change mechanisms based on alternatives to gender inequality in organizations are both internal and external in character (Burton, 1991). An example of an individually based internal type of change mechanism is a mentor system, whereas external mechanisms are Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and affirmative action policies. The purpose of empirically measuring the responses of senior management women to these types of change mechanisms was not to single them out as the only ones who could enact change in an organizational context but to gauge their input, as social actors in the culture of organizations, into the definition of alternatives to gendered organizational structures.

Despite the efforts of theories showing the complexity of structural and cultural dimensions of the gendered nature of organizations, in certain literature on women in management the one-dimensional argument is made that over time, as women enter the paid workforce in greater numbers, the problem of women's inequality will diminish. The assumption from this position is that a 'critical mass' of women will make the difference (Kanter, 1977). Implicit in this argument is the view of women as a potential

solution to the problems of inequality (Kolb & Williams, 1993) and that the responsibility for change rests on the shoulders of individuals. We argue that this position is problematic on two counts. First, bringing about change to gendered structures should not be seen as the sole responsibility of senior women within organizations. It should be the responsibility of all members of an organization and of society more generally. As Sinclair (1998: 153) notes 'discrimination is a very complex compound of direct and indirect effects, only one set of which is addressed by having a critical mass or greater representation of women'. Second, the assumption can be challenged when one considers the divided responses of senior management women to mechanisms for change to gender inequity in the two studies reported here.

Method

The research reported in the paper comes from two independent studies of women in senior management roles. Both studies included questions seeking respondents' views on the role they could play in addressing issues concerning women within the organization. The data from the first study (Study 1) forms part of a PhD thesis on senior management women and their views and experiences with gender equity in the workplace. The data from the second study (Study 2) is drawn from a survey of women on the boards of publicly-listed companies in Australia. Both studies involved survey questionnaires being mailed out to women involved in senior management in which respondents were not required to identify themselves. Triangulation, or testing one source of data against another, can provide a rich and complex analysis of social phenomena (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner and McCormack Steinmetz, 1991). The data generated from these two

studies are compared in this paper as their apparent convergence contributes to the persuasiveness of our argument that it is fallacious to assume that changes to gendered structures will come about as a result of more women gaining management positions.

Of the 1200 questionnaires mailed out in Study 1, 610 were returned, making an overall total response rate of 51%. This response rate is higher than the response rate of the majority of mail questionnaires and also higher than the acceptable limits to ensure the validity and reliability of the data (Miller, 1991: 155). The total useable number of questionnaires was 580 as 30 respondents did not fit the sampling criteria. For the purpose of comparability with the data in the Study 2 only the data related to senior management women employed in private sector organizations were analysed for this paper. The total number of responses from women in private sector organizations in Study 1 was 251.

The second source of data is drawn from a larger study concerning women's representation and experiences of boards, in which a survey of women board members was conducted (Sheridan, 2002). The sample was drawn from the public reports submitted to the Australia Stock Exchange (ASX). A survey was conducted of the women identified as board members of publicly-listed companies to explore their perceptions of the barriers women face in accessing directorships in Australia. Of the 239 board positions held by women in Australia, only 155 women held these positions as 34 women held more than one board position on public companies. A questionnaire was mailed to each of these 155 women at their company address. Of the 155 questionnaires

sent out, three (3) were returned by the Company Secretaries because the women had resigned their board positions, so the sample size was reduced to 152. Forty-seven (47) participants responded, representing a response rate of about 31%. Given that the cohort was women at the most senior levels of management and that the survey was mailed to the company address, this was a reasonable return rate from a mail survey to such a specific population (Miller, 1991).

Demographic information for the respondents in both studies can be seen in Table 1. This information provides some social contextualising of the respondents.

Survey questions

Study 1 included three forms of questioning: closed and open-ended questions as well as statements where respondents were asked to indicate their agreement/disagreement using a four-point scale. The closed and open-ended questions are:

- Do you think we should aim to have more women in decision-making positions in Australia? If yes, how?
- What do you think are the most persistent barriers remaining for women trying to gain powerful positions within organizations?
- Do you actively lobby senior executives at work, or implement programs yourself to increase female representation at the highest levels of your organization? If yes, how?
- Are you a member of any women's groups or organizations?
- Do you agree with the Affirmative Action legislation?

- Do you think a quota system should be put in place in the workplace to increase the number of women in senior management?

The statements that were measured against the four point scale are:

- Women are partly to blame for their under-representation in positions of power in Australia.
- White men should accept fewer opportunities so that others may have a chance to succeed.
- Women have less opportunity than men to get the experience for top jobs.
- Our society discriminates against women.

Study 2 included the following open and close-ended questions:

- Is the current composition of boards adequate? If not, what types of people did respondents believe would enhance the current profiles of boards?
- Why aren't more women on boards?
- What factors were important in their decision to become a director of a publicly-listed company?
- What are the benefits they have experienced as board members?
- What are their perceptions of others' expectations of them as women directors?

Respondents were able to check more than one response to these questions. While the close-ended questions defined options for the respondents to select from, space was

provided after each question inviting respondents to add any further comments. The responses to the questions in both studies are reported and discussed in the next section.

The methods used in both studies have specific limitations. Aspects related to any identity issues for individual senior management women and how these issues may have affected their response to other women in the workplace cannot be addressed with the data generated.

Results

Study 1

The first question reported from Study 1 attempted to ascertain the level of recognition, amongst the women surveyed, of the low levels of women in decision-making positions in Australia. As such, the question was establishing a benchmark for which the responses to further questions could be framed. The question asked, do you think we should aim to have more women in decision-making positions in Australia? If yes, how?

The responses showed that an overwhelming proportion (90.7%) of women supported an increase in the number of women in decision-making positions in Australia. Only 7.7% of women were undecided and only 1.6% of women answered no to this question. Clearly there was significant support from the respondents for women's representation in decision-making positions, whatever form those positions may take.

Respondents were asked the question, ‘what do you think are the most persistent barriers remaining for women trying to gain powerful positions within organizations?’ with seven multiple choice options derived from the previous qualitative research conducted (Rindfleish, 2000). Thirty nine per cent (39%) ranked the dual roles of mother/executive as the number one barrier to women’s progression into powerful positions, followed closely by the ‘old boys’ network’ as the most persistent barrier (32%). Other barriers identified as less important to the respondents were; a low female resource pool; women’s own feelings of inadequacy; male attitudes to career women; women’s lack of experience; and lastly, female attitudes to career women. These results showed that there was a recognition amongst the women surveyed that barriers to women’s progress into management do exist and also a willingness on the part of many to specifically identify those barriers. These women were not simply laying blame on the amorphous, and overused, term the ‘glass ceiling’. They were giving a form to the barriers women face.

However, even though the women surveyed generally agreed that more women were required in decision-making positions and that barriers did exist for women trying to get into positions of power, the majority did not agree with processes that might intervene in organizations to bring this about. When asked how an increase in the numbers of women in senior decision-making positions could be accomplished they responded to the options provided as outlined in Table 2 below.

The majority believed that increasing opportunities for child care and the natural progression of time were the two most likely factors that would bring about an increase in

women in decision-making positions in Australia. They preferred these methods to the introduction of programs designed to challenge the structural barriers to women's advancement such as the introduction of quota systems or increasing affirmative action programs. As noted earlier, because the natural progression of time approach is underpinned by an assumption that the women entering senior positions will bring about change, these women's reluctance to implement structural change mechanisms shows a logical incongruity in the argument.

Insert Table 2 here

When asked whether they actively lobbied senior executives at work or implemented programs themselves to increase female representation at the highest levels of their organization the majority (62.5%) said no. The minority (37.5%) who said they were undertaking activities related to promoting women, cited activities based on individual or personal activities; that is, the internal mechanisms for change (Burton, 1991) and not systematic ongoing organizationally based programs. Of those who said they did lobby to get an increased representation of women in senior management, most said they did it by way of practical initiatives such as mentoring, creating flexible working arrangements, suggesting certain women be promoted or trained for promotion, and personally encouraging women.

In terms of their agreement with programs such as affirmative action or quota systems to increase the numbers of women in positions of power, the women surveyed were divided.

When asked if they agreed with the affirmative action legislation¹, 59.8% said they did and 40.2% said they did not. Their opposition to the introduction of a quota system to increase the numbers of women in management was more marked. Table 3 below shows that 57.6% never want to see a quota system introduced, 26.9% would agree to a quota system only if there were no improvements to the proportion of women in positions of power, 13.9% agree that a quota system should be put in place but with caveats and only 1.6% of women agreed that quota systems should be introduced without caveats.

Insert Table 3 here

The responses to the statements outlined in Table 4 below were somewhat contradictory. While the majority of women strongly agree (10.9%) or agree (54.7%) that women have less opportunity than men to get the experience for top jobs, they are almost equally divided on the question as to whether our society discriminates against them (46.5% disagreeing and 40.8% agreeing). At the same time they overwhelmingly (97.2%) reject the idea of white men accepting fewer opportunities so that others might succeed. Furthermore, the majority (63.9%) agree with the statement that women are partly to blame for their under-representation in positions of power. With respect to women's need to act collectively to address discrimination, the group were divided fairly evenly. Half believed that collective action was the only way to challenge discrimination and half did not.

¹ The Affirmative Action (The Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act 1986 was enacted in Australia to encourage employers to implement programs that would address gender inequality within their workplaces. In 1999, the legislation was changed to the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999.

Insert Table 4 here

The proportion of women who were members of women's groups was quite low (22.1%). The groups to which these women belonged were predominantly groups related to their respective professions or businesswomen's organizations.

Study 2

In Study 2, respondents were asked about the entire pool of current board members and whether the mix of professional experiences and backgrounds was, in their view, adequate. As such, this question was establishing a benchmark for which responses to following questions could be framed. Thirty per cent (30%) indicated they believed it was while 70% disagreed. Respondents claiming the pool was inadequate then indicated the types of people they believe should be included on boards. Fifty two per cent (52%) indicated there should be more women, 28% indicated they believed there should be more people with different ethnic or racial backgrounds and 13% suggested there should be more people who are not CEOs or Managing Directors and a further 11% thought there should be more people on boards who head small companies.

Respondents were asked to indicate why, in their opinion, there aren't more women directors of publicly-listed companies in Australia. The most common response (49%) was that companies are afraid to take on women who are not already on boards, closely

followed by the statement that companies don't know where to look for qualified women (45%). Forty per cent (40%) of respondents indicated they believed that companies don't think that women are qualified for board service. Thirty eight per cent (38%) indicated the reason for the poor representation of women on boards was because there are not enough qualified women for board service and that companies are not looking to put more women on boards. As such, these women, like those in Study 1, were identifying structural barriers to women's access. Fewer women pointed to an individual-centred basis to the problems of women's low representation on boards; only 17% indicated that qualified women are not making it known that they are interested in board service and only 9% suggested that qualified women are not interested in board service.

The respondents were asked whether they believed there is currently a sufficient pool of women from which to select for boards. Fifty five per cent (55%) believed there was, 21% disagreed and another 21% didn't know. That a majority of respondents believed there was a sufficient number of qualified women available for board service is consistent with their earlier responses that there appears to be impediments at the company level – structural barriers – to women's access to board positions.

There was scope for the respondents to add their own comments about why more women were not on public boards, which a number of them did. Their own words point to the tendency for like to promote like (Kanter, 1977), and as women are not seen to be 'like' those currently on boards, their opportunities are limited. As well, reference was made to the importance of networks in accessing board positions - a suggestion that it is who you

know, rather than what you know, that can influence board access. As such, there are parallels here with the respondents in Study 1 who pointed to the old boys' network as a persistent barrier for women trying to gain powerful positions within organizations.

'Directorships of public companies are very much given through the old boys network. It's a complete gravy train.. there's a pool of very capable women being wasted while a bunch of old farts who belong to the same old club hand out directorships like lollies to their mates. Many are on more boards than they could really contribute to.' (Respondent 14).

'Not part of the 'boys network' (Respondent 39).

'Many decision makers still 50 plus men who are more comfortable with appointing their mirror images' (Respondent 43)

Respondents were asked to indicate their beliefs about the characteristics that are most crucial in attaining a directorship. Three characteristics stood out from the responses as most important:

- a strong track record in one's own field or occupation (39%);
- business contacts (22%); and
- a good understanding of general business principles (22%).

Respondents were asked to think back to the first time they were approached to become a director for a publicly-listed company and how important various factors were to them in

accepting the offer. Respondents were directed to rate each of nine factors. Their ratings can be seen in Table 5.

Insert Table 5 here

While not all respondents did rate all the factors, the pattern to emerge from their responses suggested that the majority of women (66%) did not identify their decision to take on the board role as a means for them to bring to the board a sensitivity about issues affecting women. Twenty three per cent (23%) indicated that it was not very important while 43% said it was not at all important. Rather their decision was more likely to be influenced by their interest in the company, that they wanted to broaden their own skills and areas of expertise or they felt it would be personally satisfying to make a contribution to a corporate board.

The next relevant question asked respondents to rate the importance of the benefits they experienced as a board member. Once again, respondents were asked to respond to each factor. Their responses are presented in Table 6.

Insert Table 6 here

The great majority of women cited the personal benefits they gained as board members, particularly in terms of the opportunities it provided for them to participate in top-level strategic planning and decision-making, how it helped them broaden their general knowledge of business as well as develop new skills and areas of expertise. From the

open-ended parts for this question, the following responses highlight the benefits the majority of respondents valued:

'Challenges involved with considering, defining and implementing strategy and improving performance in an organisation' (Respondent 15).

'The challenge of setting vision; challenging management assumptions and acting in the best interests of shareholders' (Respondent 40)

A small minority (15%) cited the scope it gave them to increase board sensitivity to issues affecting women as a benefit.

Respondents were also asked to describe their thoughts about what issues are appropriate for boards to address and what role they as women directors should play and are expected to play in addressing six policy issues facing companies. See Table 7.

Insert Table 7 here

While there was general agreement among respondents about the appropriateness of boards addressing environmental issues and other social responsibility issues, the majority did not believe it was their responsibility as women directors to address these issues, nor was it expected of them as women directors. Respondents were more divided about the role boards should play in addressing the needs of women as consumers, or of additional women on boards, although a significant majority of respondents agreed boards should address issues of equal opportunity for high-performing women and

policies that enable employees to balance work and family needs. However fewer believed it was their responsibility as women directors to address these issues. Moreover the majority of women did not perceive it was expected of them as women directors to address the issues. As such, just as in Study 1, their responses undermine the assumption that more women on boards will challenge the gendered structures of organizations.

When queried as to whether they had initiated any of the above issues in general board meetings or committee meetings, 68% indicated they had, while 30% responded in the negative. With respect to the issues raised, 40% indicated their efforts had included equal opportunity for high-performing women, 34% initiated issues surrounding women as consumers, 32% nominated their efforts being in terms of policies that enable employees to balance work and family needs (e.g. dependent care, flexible work arrangements, parental leave), 30% initiated environmental issues and other social responsibility issues while 28% indicated they had raised matters concerning additional women on the board.

A further question was asked of respondents about whether they interacted with senior-level women at any of the companies at which they are a director. While 19% indicated there were no senior-level women at any of the publicly-listed companies of which they were a director, 26% indicated they did frequently, and a further 43% said they did occasionally.

Discussion of Results

While we are aware that the two studies are not directly comparable, because of the differences in their research designs, the results show interesting parallels that highlight the problems of assuming that more women entering senior management will automatically lead to change. Our findings that senior women are not acting to bring about change within their organizations is made more robust by the fact that the data to support our conclusions were drawn from two independent studies.

Study 1 showed that the overwhelming majority of senior women (90%) recognize that women do face barriers to accessing senior positions, and they go on to specifically identify those barriers. The barriers these women nominate are persistent social processes that are highly resistant to change over time and as such are structural. For instance, the top two barriers nominated by these women were the dual roles of mother/executive and the 'old boys network'. In Study 2, 52% of women board members believed there should be more women on boards and when asked about the barriers limiting women's access to board positions, they tended to identify structural barriers.

In Study 1 the women identify the mother/executive dual role as a barrier, and then nominate increasing child-care as a solution to the barrier. This result shows a congruence between the matching of a structural problem with a structural solution. However, in canvassing their other preferred solutions to structural barriers such as the 'old boys network', they elect for change to come about naturally over time. Unlike the congruence shown between their identification of the structural barrier of dual roles and

the structural solution of increased child care, there is no congruence between the identification of the 'old boys network' as a structural barrier and the solution of change coming about naturally over time. There is an obvious tension between the nature of the problem they identify and the appropriate solution to addressing the problem.

Both studies show that the women surveyed are prepared to defer to the natural change over time approach when it comes to challenging gendered organizational structures. Apart from the inappropriateness of such an approach to challenging the intractable structural character of the 'old boys' network' and the limitations of a reliance on a 'critical mass' (Sinclair 1998), their response becomes more problematic when compounded by their own stated actions to bring about change. The majority of the women in both studies are not actively promoting change themselves: they are not what Maddock (1999) calls 'challenging women'. The minority who do undertake activities that they believe assist other women, cite highly individualised activities that do not challenge hegemonic sites of masculinity such as 'old boys' networks'. These results beg the question, how can change come about over time if these key women are not enacting it? There appears to be a perceptual mismatch between the major barrier of the 'old boys' network', their solution of change occurring naturally over time, and their own role in that change process.

The other structural solutions to the barriers women face are not well supported by the women in Study 1. Generally, these women do not consider organizational interventions that engineer change, such as quota systems or affirmative action, as appropriate. Nor do

the majority of women personally identify with women's groups, either business groups or professional groups. Countering the barrier of the old boys' networks with collective action by women's networks could be a structural solution to that structural barrier, but the majority of these women choose not to participate in women's groups. The attitudinal questions in Study 1 showed that despite the fact that nearly 50% of them see the need for collective action to counter discrimination, only 22% personally involve themselves with women's groups. The majority of women in Study 2 did not see their role as a board member as a means to bring about change in the board's sensitivity to issues concerning women. While a majority of women in Study 2 agreed boards should address issues of equal opportunity for high-performing women and policies that enable employees to balance work and family needs, only a minority of respondents saw it as their responsibility as women directors to address these issues.

In Study 1, a minority of women said they were undertaking activities related to promoting women. However, these were individually based activities and not systematic, organizationally based programs. While we recognise that it is not realistic to impose an expectation that structural change is the responsibility of these women, it is important to reflect on these women's own accounts of the barriers facing women and their response to those barriers. They see the barriers as structural, but only a minority seek to address them and that minority choose individually based solutions. This perception of gender inequity and the change mechanisms required to address it, is very much premised on an inadequate assumption that individual actions can challenge social structures that have proved highly resistant to change over time. This position ignores the work by Acker

(1990, 1998), Cockburn (1991), and Connell (1987) that points to the very complex and tenacious nature of gender inequity. While a large number of women in both studies recognise the structural problems impacting on women's opportunities, only a small number identified, promoted, or were actively participating in appropriate structural solutions.

Conclusion

The comparison between the two studies shows there is a perceptual incongruence amongst senior management women in Australia to the causes of gendered organizational structures and the appropriate responses and activities that might counter those structures. The results do not imply that these women are to blame for the perceptual incongruence they display. In fact, due to the multi-factorial character of gendered organizational structures it may be an incongruence displayed by the majority of the population. However, because there is a conceptual gap between what these women believe are the barriers to change and the appropriate solutions and activities they offer to counter them, there is little chance that their current activities are assisting the process of change from within organizations. The implications of this for enhancing women's access to senior management are that if women (and men) in positions of power in organizations are not actively enacting change that challenges gendered organizational structures, organizational and government policies need to be more stringently applied if change is to come about. It is not sufficient to leave it to women in these senior management positions to bring about change; change must be enacted through all organizational

members and society more generally if we are to see any real challenges to the current gendered structures.

Some examples of more stringent approaches to countering gendered organizational structures would be offering executives financial bonuses as a reward for enacting change policies and/or building activities related to challenging gendered organizational structures into their performance criteria. For instance, when hiring executives points could be given to applicants who show they have enacted activities and programs in previous positions that have successfully challenged gendered organizational structures. The sanctions for non-compliance with government policy related to gender equity also need to be reviewed in circumstances where there appears to be very little happening within organizations to counter the practices arising from hegemonic sites of masculinity. Further research could be undertaken to assist in developing structural programs to challenge gendered structures in organizations. Such research could gauge the specific levels of activity senior managers (both male and female) are undertaking in their organizations to counter gendered organizational structures. It could delineate between the structural and individual activities being undertaken and the relative importance of the intervention of organizational and governmental policy. The authors postulate that activities designed to counter the existing gendered organizational structures, both by individuals within, and policy measures outside of, Australian privately owned organizations are currently inadequate in challenging a social structure so highly resistant to change.

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Table 1: Demographic information for Studies 1 and 2

	Study 1		Study 2	
	No.	%	No	%
Age				
21-30	-		2	4
31-40	5	2	8	17
41-50	31	27	22	47
51-60	108	45	13	28
>61	63	26	1	2
Education				
High school	32	14	7	15
Graduate	121	51	13	28
Post Grad	84	35	18	38
Title				
CEO	14	6		
GM	79	32		
Director	104	41	47	100
Manager	23	9		
Other	31	12		

Table 2: How to increase the numbers of women in decision-making positions

Issue	%
By increasing child Care	42
It will come about naturally	36
By increasing AA programs	27
By introducing quota systems	4

Table 3: Need for quota system

Introduce Quota System	%
No, never	57.6
Only if no improvement	26.9
Yes, but with caveats	13.9
Yes definitely	1.6

Table 4: Attitudinal questions

Issues	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
Women have less opportunity than men to get the experience for top jobs?	10.9	54.7	31.2	2.8
Our society discriminates against women?	1.2	40.8	46.5	2
Women are partly to blame for their under-representation in positions of power in Australia	3.2	60.7	30	4.9
White men should accept fewer opportunities so that others may have a chance to succeed?	0.4	2.4	59.7	37.5
Only if women organise and work together can anything be done about discrimination	7.7	42.9	46.2	2.0

NB: Does not add up to 100% because some respondents marked in-between options

Table 5: Factors influencing decision to take up board position (%)

	Very important	Important	Not Very Important	Not at all Important
Wanted to learn about corporate governance	11	21	30	0
Interested in the company	57	26	6	4
Interested in the industry	40	11	13	11
Wanted to broaden my general knowledge of business	28	36	13	13
Wanted to broaden my skills and areas of expertise	43	34	9	4
Felt it was an honour	19	23	34	15
Felt it would be personally satisfying to make a contribution to a corporate board	30	47	9	6
Thought it would make me more effective in my own job or help me in my career	17	36	19	15
Felt I could contribute by bringing to the board a sensitivity about issues affecting women	6	13	23	43
Felt it would provide a substantial additional source of income	0	6	26	55

Table 6: Benefits experienced from board position (%)

	Important	Not very important	Not important	Does not apply
Increased my knowledge of corporate governance	60	19	13	2
Broadened my general knowledge of business	79	13	6	0
Gave me the opportunity to participate in top-level strategic planning and decision-making	83	15	0	0
Helped me develop new skills and areas of expertise	68	21	4	2
Gave me a sense of pride and prestige	30	40	28	0
Gave me personal satisfaction to make a contribution to a corporate board	55	26	15	2
Made me more effective in my own job or helped me to advance in my career	26	30	28	13
Expanded my range of professional contacts	34	38	21	4
Allowed me to increase board sensitivity to issues affecting women	15	17	38	28
Provided a substantial additional source of income	9	1	40	26

Table 7: Issues boards should address (%)

	I think this is an appropriate issue for boards to address		I feel it is my responsibility as a woman director to address this issue		I feel it is expected of me as a woman director to address this issue	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Environmental issues	96	0	21	64	7	81
Other social responsibility issues	89	4	26	60	13	72
Needs of women as consumers	60	34	38	49	28	57
Additional women on the board	68	26	36	51	21	66
Equal opportunity for high-performing women	79	15	60	28	32	53
Policies that enable employees to balance work and family needs (e.g. dependent care, flexible work arrangements, parental leave)	74	19	47	38	32	55

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