

## GENDER REPRESENTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF MANAGERIAL SUCCESS

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### Introduction

With the entry of women into the labour market and the struggle for social equality, sexual discrimination should have disappeared, as men and women should have become more and more united by a certain model of society. However, the situation has not changed after so many years of social struggle and women are still in a marginal position (Arnal & Llario, 1992). As Amâncio (1989) states "Today's reality indicates (...) that the structural change brought about by the entry of women from different social classes into the various sectors of the labour market is not sufficient to alter the woman's role in the family nor does it necessarily give rise to a change in her social status" (p.33). As Blumberg (1984) also states, they form a labour force reserve which is particularly useful in moments of crisis, such as for instance in war times, after which one always witnesses the reinforcement of the reassertion of their 'natural vocation' for the family.

In the 60's, 17% of Portuguese women performed a professional activity. Today, this number is 46% and, in a few years, there will be more women than men in the labour market. But the power of these figures has not been sufficient to change labour market rules which are, like before, made to suit men. Portuguese women still show a high level of lack of instruction and

are outnumbered by men in decision-making jobs. Within the European Union, Portugal is one of the countries with the highest rate of women who work outside the home, but their presence is less significant in decision-making jobs and prestigious professions, whereas the percentage for women increases in areas with lower wages or which men have already abandoned.

The recent attention given to the participation of women in the labour market is partly due to their presence in traditionally male dominated areas (Arnal & Llario, 1992; Nicholson & West, 1988) and, in particular, in the case of Management. Nevertheless, even in such areas, women's wages are normally lower than men's, although their professional and academic training is higher in order to make up for gender associated discriminations and stereotypes (Arnal & Llario, 1992). As a prestigious position is linked to the presence of a great majority of men (Bartol & Bartol, 1975) and the highest levels are considered as having been made *masculine* (Powell, 1993), we seldom find women in jobs associated to political power or the business world (Pallarés, 1993). The access to high level jobs is much easier for men than for women, even when the former are less qualified. Women encounter the so-called *glass ceiling* which hinders their promotion (Davidson & Cooper, 1992). This *glass ceiling* represents all the invisible, but powerful barriers which make the careers of women who aim at leading positions difficult.

As Lipman-Blumen indicates and according to a research project carried out in organisational contexts, if (1) in the organisational everyday life the most active members are regarded as leaders; (2) men have more opportunities to act and speak and do so; (3) men's opinions are more effective and respected than women's who in turn entail negative or resistant responses; (4) male subordinates express more dissatisfaction than women towards leaders according to their sex; and finally (5) if the most important informal group is men's, then one can say that it is the organisational structure itself that works as a barrier to the acceptance of the leadership of women.

Nicholson and West (1988) come to the conclusion that women can be found in all areas of management but are less represented at the highest level, their management careers seem to mean higher sacrifices than for men, their training is of a higher standard and they occupy more specialised positions at any hierarchic level. They are aware of the problems they have to face, being *travellers in a world of men* (Marshall, 1984), and regard themselves as discriminated against by organisational policies.

Of course there are exceptions which occur in some categories (Apfelbaum, 1986), as is the case of charismatic leadership, succession leadership, leadership for scientific eminence and/or by election, but, taking them altogether, women who have attained leading positions due to such reasons, are still considered as exceptions both in people's perceptions and imagination rather than potential models. The media tend to be non neutral in relation to such women by stressing their exceptionality. As a result of this process, they do not become realistic models which are necessary and should be provided in order to create a new generation of women.

We mentioned above the so-called glass ceiling as representing the set of barriers which women aiming to ascend to leading positions have to face. Besides those already referred to and summarised in Lipman-Blumen's work, there is another important barrier formed by the number of stereotypes and stereotyped expectations in the organisational environment which reflect those of our society and work to the disadvantage of the woman as a leader.

Thus, one of the most important problems these women face seems to be the conflict between stereotyped expectations from them as women and stereotyped expectations from them as leaders. According to Schein (1975), there is no compatibility between the feminine stereotype and the manager stereotype. The male leader seems to be the normative leader. It is therefore these stereotyped expectations that seem to be responsible for the disparity in the access to leading positions.

Although the conscious convictions about women and men have changed, stereotypes work in the form of implicit knowledge. Personal characteristics which are associated with most directing posts fit in with male stereotypes (type, aggressivity, competitiveness, ambitions, etc.). Individuals sexually typified as masculine may aspire to the highest levels of leadership, because the characteristics which are associated with the leading role are more in line with a masculine image (Pallarés, 1993; Powell & Butterfield, 1989). Men with their high status are expected to lead tasks and influence decisions, whereas women as a low status group are expected to carry out vicarious tasks (Falkenberg, 1990). The attributions of success also contribute to this situation. While a man's success is attributed to his skills, a woman's is attributed to hard work, luck or an easy task. A woman's failure will be attributed to lack of ability, whereas a man's failure will be attributed to bad luck, a difficult task or lack of effort.

However, some studies indicate that stereotypes only influence

sexual discrimination when little is known about women's potential and that the effect of stereotypes diminishes as information about their work increases (Terborg & Ilgen, 1975).

In view of these findings, it is our intention, to study the stereotyped expectations which are associated to men and women in different professional contexts, namely the traditionally male ones. The results we will present here belong to a larger ongoing project which is centered in the perceptions of managerial success. The same experimental design was replicated with three different groups of subjects: one group included subjects who were already integrated in the labour market, whereas the other two groups of subjects were students. Apart from the specific hypothesis to each experiment, we did not expect to find particularly large differences in the implicit theories used by the three groups of subjects to perceive managerial success.

## **Method**

### *Subjects*

750 subjects participated in this research. Subjects were divided into three major groups: secondary school students (123 female and 188 male, mean age= 17), university students (97 female and 140 male, mean age=21) and public servants in local administration (134 female and 64 male, mean age=37).

### *Design*

In each of the three experiments, subjects were run in group sessions and randomly assigned to each treatment condition of a 2x2x2x2 factorial design. The independent variables were sex of the subjects, sex of the actor, marital status of the actor (married and divorced) and the sector of activity (education and electronics).

### *Procedure*

The study was introduced as an investigation on impression formation. Subjects were asked to read one of the eight short descriptions of a manager in which the independent variables were manipulated. The last part of the

Table 1 - Factorial Analysis of the Traits

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
Affectionate.	.79095	.18582	.14667	.15754	.13534
Tender	.78437	.11084	.21014	.14724	.05371
Warm	.74517	.23786	.16468	.00878	.19138
Sensitive	.71304	.1732	.38654	.02721	.12256
Sentimental	.70498	.08250	.30645	.23356	.16201
Good mother	.69262	.11782	.16468	.10285	.0750
Attractive	.58759	.06286	.16142	.24282	.43026
Emotional	.57760	.09615	.25989	.20404	.13849
Elegant	.56817	.02058	.37898	.24841	.26588
Competent	.01949	.75334	.01462	.04910	.09247
Career-oriented	.06354	.69764	.11031	.16282	.13625
Fighter	.14631	.59435	.33786	.06193	.18438
Reliable	.38970	.58852	.03300	.07541	.05419
Self-confident	.23301	.58664	.45319	.05429	.10145
Courageous	.19845	.54129	.23984	.22082	.20417
Successful	.08458	.53703	.05893	.02107	.21203
Serious	.32659	.53190	.23846	.22303	.10018
Rational	.20702	.50808	.42785	.00215	.10644
Independent	.14972	.21587	.64306	.15004	.17194
Strong	.24405	.24418	.58074	.00600	.25098
Submissive	.32926	.09861	.12546	.65109	.14131
Authoritarian	.02841	.01970	.18135	.64348	.43163
Dominant	.00150	.27084	.30923	.61653	.21786
Dependent	.24731	.06997	.06581	.60251	.03575
Fragile	.31177	.14903	.31810	.41759	.19139
Curious	.32853	.23305	.25472	.37706	.23240
Audacious	.11289	.22246	.14671	.02898	.71969
Ambitious	.01154	.33365	.10054	.19506	.61129
With initiative	.15136	.39199	.30604	.16013	.41938
<b>% of variance</b>	<b>30.6</b>	<b>10.4</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>4.0</b>

The one-way analysis of variance (Scheffé test) performed on factor scores showed that scores of the public servants in the feminine expressiveness cluster (.35) are higher than secondary school subjects scores (-.07) and university students scores (-.20) ( $F(2,740)=15.00$   $p<.0001$ ). On the other hand, the cluster of masculine instrumentality in the organizational contexts was more highly evaluated by secondary school subjects (.11) than by university students (-.19) and public servants (.03) ( $F(2,740)=7.17$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Secondary school subjects also value the negative traits in interpersonal relations more highly (.30) than the other two groups of subjects (-.27 and -.19 respectively) ( $F(2,740)=18.971$   $p<.0001$ ). Finally university students value the masculine success-oriented traits more highly (.29) than secondary school students (-.14) and public servants (-.10) ( $F(2,740)=13.53$   $p<.0001$ ).

Table 2 presents the factorial solution obtained for the 14 causes. 4 factors with eigenvalues higher than 1 and explaining 58% of the total variance

**Table 2 - Factorial Analysis of the Causes**

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Individual effort	.77416	.07309	.07383	-.12709
Devotion to the firm	.74616	.14445	-.03652	-.13636
Professional competence	.68679	.08340	.05403	-.18740
Level of self-confidence	.66698	.14825	.10595	.17006
Achievement motivation	.62442	.07186	-.02130	.37854
Good professional networks	.18550	.76269	.06986	.02166
Good personal contacts with the firm owners	.04122	.70581	.02142	.32706
Long time in service	-.09726	.65736	.24518	-.06417
Task facility	.21893	.55662	-.01201	.08169
Emotional control	.28414	.41407	-.04583	.19963
Family support	.06443	.06708	.92480	.06201
Family setting	.07550	.11993	.91771	.01977
Luck in life	-.02151	.08012	.02216	.80203
Kinship ties with the firm owners	-.09157	.17983	.05599	.71345
<b>% of explained variance</b>	<b>23.9</b>	<b>14.5</b>	<b>11.6</b>	<b>8</b>

were extracted. This factorial organization reveals a dimension of internal attributions (factor 1), a dimension of relational and organizational attributions (factor 2), two attributions related to the family context (factor 3) and two external attributions (factor 4).

The one-way analysis of variance showed that public servants use more relational and organizational attributions (.17) to explain managerial success than university students (-.10) and secondary school students (.04) ( $F(2,740)=3.812, p<.023$ ), whereas secondary school students use more attributions related to the family context (.10) than university students (.03) and public servants (-.12) ( $F(2,740)=4.375, p<.013$ ).

### Discussion

Contrary to our expectations results show significant differences between the three groups of subjects in the stereotypical perceptions and attributions of managerial success. First of all the group of public servants associates feminine traits and explanations related to interpersonal and organizational relations with success. This result may be explained by the higher number of women than men in this group of subjects and also by the large number of women in Portuguese public administration. The implicit theory underlying these results enhances relational skills in managerial success.

On the other hand, the youngest group of students associates both masculine instrumental traits and negative interpersonal traits with managerial success and, for these subjects, family support is also related to success. These results may indicate that for young subjects, the adult world and professional success, in particular, require the loss of interpersonal skills. If our interpretation is correct than this implicit theory may function as a barrier for the identification of young girls with models of managerial success.

Furthermore, university students show a strongly success-oriented implicit theory as they explain success through internal attributions based in competence and also perceive successful managers through masculine instrumental traits. According to these results the university context may contribute to enhance an internal orientation for success.

However these interpretations are only tentative as we have not analyzed all the potentialities of our data in this paper, in particular possible interaction effects of the subjects group and the sex of the subjects.

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description, which was common to all experimental conditions, mentioned the firm's increasing success since the actor had taken over the management position. After reading the short description subjects were requested to further describe the actor with a list of traits and estimate the adequacy of a number of causes for the actor's occupational success.

### *The Dependent Variables*

In order to describe the actor, subjects received a list of 29 traits in alphabetical order, followed by 5 point scales (5=this characteristic fits the person very well and 1=does not fit at all). The list of traits included 9 masculine and 9 feminine traits, according to the consensual classifications obtained in a previous study (Amâncio,1989). The other 11 traits included some that had not been consensually classified as either masculine or feminine, as well as other characteristics that were related with the family role and the occupational role. In order to explain the actor's success subjects received 14 causes in alphabetical order, which included causes pertaining to the family context, the classical causes of luck, task facility, effort and capacity. Causes were followed by 5 point scales (5=this cause contributed very much to the actor's actual position and 1=did not contribute at all).

### **Results**

The data treatment of these three experiments evidenced a complex set of results. For the purpose of this meeting we will only present significant differences between the three groups of subjects in the factor scores of the factorial solutions obtained for each sub-set of the dependent variables (traits and attributions).

Table 1 presents the factorial solution obtained for the 29 stereotypical traits. 5 factors with eigenvalues higher than 1 and explaining 55.4% of the total variance were extracted. According to these results traits are organized in a cluster of feminine expressiveness ( factor 1), a cluster of masculine instrumentality in the organizational contexts (factor 2), two masculine traits related to authonomy (factor 3), a cluster of negative traits in interpersonal relations (factor 4) and three masculine success-oriented traits (factor 5).