

# Do Women Change Cultures?



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# Two Stories

- of 'Culture', 'Women' and 'Change'
  - Story 1 - Mining industry 1984-2004
  - Story 2: University sector 1990-2004
  
  - Do women change cultures?  
You be the Judge
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# Story One: Case of ADM

- 1984: Organisational planners- change mining culture
  - Avoid problems of ‘Pilbara mentality’ - so build ‘own’ culture - greenfields site - ‘skills extension’ - and no ‘mining town’
    - fly in fly out - ‘seagulls’
  - But no town = no women. Prediction? = low management control
  - Joined Bob Hawke’s Voluntary AA program ‘84-85. Result?  
We need to see just what affirmative action is about in terms of importance . . . having a large number of females has helped (the operation) because it has improved the behaviour of males. They're just your average peacock and it's amazing how they dress better, stay cleaner, behave more appropriately when there are females around. (The other planners and I) talked about it beforehand. . . very pragmatic reasons for it (male organisational planner).
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# “Keeping the boys happy”


## ● Successful ‘culture’ change?

- **Yes** from managers’ perspective:
    - less absenteeism, drunkenness, industrial disputes, much better staff retention - but only for males
  - **No** from women’s perspective:
    - Ceiling of 15% women, masculinist culture nurtured (sexual harassment, ‘dirty pictures’, no women’s toilets)
    - Taken for granted that the **important** workers were men
    - what did women do? No ‘**critical mass**’ (Kanter) so ‘**critical acts**’ (Dahlerup)
    - “**Groundwork video**” - won AA Agency Prize 1992
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# Do Women Change Cultures??

- What Culture?
  - Does our questioning assume:
    - one organisational culture?
    - a 'thing' organisations HAVE rather than ARE?
  - Linda Smircich - organisations don't own a culture that can be shaped or measured, they are *themselves* 'cultural productions'
  - - we try to measure culture - notoriously difficult - can we know if or when it's changed? - or for whom?
  - A central culture? - or a lot of cultural activity? - much of it centred around 'doing gender' (West and Zimmerman, 1990)
  - Q: Do men change culture?
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# Story Two: Case of UWA

- Woman at the helm - Prof. Fay Gale
    - Top Quality Review ranking, topped *Good Universities Guide*, 1997
    - From bottom to top of Equity Index:
      - ‘women spoke behind closed doors’ - sandstone
    - Women’s Leadership Programme, task of cultural change, 10th Anniversary 2004-5
    - Cultural audits: uproar, some new insights
    - Changes to promotion
    - 1996-97 Chairs AVCC - a first for women
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# Did She Change the Culture/s?

## Appreciated, distanced, effaced

- 'not like us': reinforces edifice of masculinism
    - She'd be right out there tacking way past anyone I ever saw until everyone else was steady up to the line. But it meant people never knew how much she did to make it happen (MS3)
  - feminist pretender (Sinclair, 1998): supportive but leave it to women
    - . . . a capacity I wish I had - she could make people think that what they were doing was their own idea. . . . accused of not showing leadership (MS1)
- Sub-text: 'of course she didn't change the culture - just a good catalyst' 'strategic opportunist' (MS 5)
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# Do Women Change Cultures?

- De Beauvoir (1949): ‘are there women, really?’
  - Gender not something we HAVE but something we DO - and maybe undo?
  - Gender as a verb (I.Young) ‘gender switching’ (Gherardi)
  - **Double Standard:** Value ‘feminine’ attributes, ‘add women & stir’
    - associated with domestic sphere, lack of power and lack of ‘true’ leadership capacity
    - Evidence men colonise relational capacities, bolster masculinist edifice
  - **Double Bind:** Change agent - women best?
    - ‘female advantage’, but most stuck in mid-levels
  - **Double Burden:** Groundbreaking pioneer
    - Tributes from many women, but also early disappointment
    - Respect from some men, but also antagonism
- ‘Doing gender’, like doing change, a multi-faceted cultural activity
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