Between a Rock and a Hard Place:
Exploring Women's Experience of Participation and Progress in Managerial Careers

Vincenza Priola

Aston Business School
Aston University
Aston Triangle
Birmingham
B4 7ET
United Kingdom
Tel. 0044(0)121 2043270
Email: C.Priola@aston.ac.uk

And

Matthew J. Brannan
School of Economic and Management Studies
Darwin Building
Keele University
Staffordshire
ST5 5BG
United Kingdom
Tel. 0044(0)1782 583610
Email: M.brannan@mngt.keele.ac.uk

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BIOGRAPHIES

Cinzia Priola is a Lecturer in Organisation Studies at Aston University in the UK. Previously she worked at Keele University. Her research interests and publications are in the fields of gender and organisation, managerial identities and gender, changes in the management and practices of Higher Education and team work.

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

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Abstract
Purpose
The growth of women in management has been argued to offer a route to reduce organizational and social inequality. This paper explores the careers and experiences of female managers from a variety of organisations operating in the West Midlands region of the UK.

Design/methodology/approach
This study is based on fifty-six interviews conducted with women managers within various sectors. The interviewees also completed pictorial careers maps, which along with interview recordings were analysed.

Findings
The key themes to emerge from this research centre upon the factors that draw women into management (which we term seductive elements) as well as some of the hindering practices that prevent women from progressing. Significantly we find that managerial careers are associated with gendered assumptions and practices (e.g. facilitating and developing people) which contribute to construct management (done by women) as bounded-up characteristically with 'feminized' behaviours.

Research limitations/implications (if applicable)
The research is based upon a relatively small sample that is multi-sectorial. Wider studies that increase population size, together with deeper studies that hold sectorial variables constant would further add weight to the findings presented here.

Practical implications (if applicable)
The paper draws attention to the 'lived reality' of doing management, which, we argue often, for women in particular involves the reconciliation of contradictions and conflicting pressures.

Originality/value
The paper is of value in giving voice to a selection of women managers by allowing them to reflect upon and explore their experience of management. The paper also documents the day-to-day reality of women's managerial careers that require the re-enactment and reproduction of stereotypical gender norms.

Keywords: gender, gendered practices, women in management, managerial identity, gender identities.

Introduction

Organizations have long been recognised as a key location for the production and reproduction of gender inequalities within society (Connell, 1987, 1990; Alvesson and Billing, 2002). A specifically important reason for this has been the observation that women tend to participate at lower organizational levels then men (Rubery and Fagan, 1995, Blackburn et al., 2001) and that their progress through organizational hierarchies is often inhibited in fundamentally structural ways (Acker, 1990). Attention, has been drawn, for example, to gender inequalities in terms of access through recruitment (Bygren and Kumlin, 2005), training (Dickens, 2001), reward (Rubery, 1995, Bertrand and Hallock, 2000), progression and promotion (Maume, 1999), appraisal (Wilson and Nutley, 2003), work structure and content (Milkman, 1987), whilst the relationship between organizational based inequalities and wider societal level inequality is similarly well documented (Dale, 1987). Recent changes in the nature, structure and composition of many organizations have, however, brought about opportunities for many women to enter into managerial careers that were previously overwhelmingly occupied by male employees. Whilst the specific confluence of historical and social factors that has led to increased female participation at managerial levels is beyond the scope of this paper, it must be noted that a deeper exploration of this trend reveals the heterogeneous nature of managerial careers. It is noteworthy to observe that the growth in participation appears to be limited to junior and middle levels and that women still do not achieve leading positions in the same proportion as men in either private or public organisations (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2005; Vinnicombe, 2000; Wood, 2008). The proportion of women in management is increasing at junior and middle levels, but the proportion of women in senior roles remains relatively small: around nine per cent of senior business managers (Labour Research, 2004).

Whilst the increase in female participation at managerial levels cannot, alone, be considered a remedy to gender inequality, theoretically at least, it does provide a mechanism for a possible reduction in social inequality. This paper seeks to explore this theoretical possibility through an empirical examination of women's experiences of managerial careers. It outlines the findings from a large study focusing on women's managerial careers and organisational experiences. Anecdotal evidence seems to highlight the persistent low presence of women in senior management in the UK as well as in Europe and the US. This is supported by a survey of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EOC, 2008) which reports that, although women's representation in Britain's 31,000 positions of power has increased in some areas (e.g. members of the House of Lord, directors of FTSE 100 companies, Vice-chancellors of Universities, top managers in the civil services), women still hold 11 per cent of FTSE 100 directorships and only 19.3 per cent of positions in parliament. In the UK, thirty-seven percent of companies do not employ women in management positions while the average European percentage is fifty (Vinnicombe, 2000). In addition, it has to be highlighted that a greater proportion of women are employed in professions than in corporate management and in female-dominated sectors than in male-dominated industries (The Women's Unit, 2001). These figures must be placed in the context of growing female labour market participation, which currently stands at forty-five percent of the total employment in the United Kingdom, the third highest employment rate in the European Union (Duffield, 2002).

While the above statistics focus on senior management, there is evidence that the proportion of women has recently increased at junior managerial levels with Hibbett (2003: 506) suggesting that ten percent of women are employed as managers compared with eighteen percent of men. In reviewing the status of women in management, Powell (2000) brings together the reasons for the increased proportion of women in junior managerial levels in recent years. Among the factors that he reports is the increased number of women being awarded university degrees in all disciplines in the US, Europe and in many other countries. The increased educational attainment and enhancement of academic credentials of women has subsequently accompanied an increased commitment to professional and managerial careers. Simultaneously, economic and legal developments (e.g. legislation on equal opportunities[i]) have benefited women's progression into managerial positions. Due to economic expansion, Western countries experienced a higher demand for labour in a period of declining labour supply (due to a decreasing fertility rate since the 1970s); this translates into more opportunities for educated women to enter newly created managerial jobs. The global shift from a manufacturing-based to an information and service-based economy, which values highly educated workers, with emotional or aesthetic skills (Hochschild, 1983; Bolton and Boyd, 2003; Witz et al., 2003) over manual skills, has also boosted the presence of women in junior and middle managerial levels. As Blackwell and Guinea-Martin (2005: 511) argue the expansion of the Service Sector has played a key role in the modest decline in occupational sex segregation witnessed between 1991 and 2001. However, although women are entering managerial positions in larger numbers, such increased number has not[ii] and will not address the gender bias in organisations. It is not simply a matter of time until the gap between women and men in management positions is closed (Powell and Graves, 2003); a change in cultural values and practices within organisations, as well as within society, is needed for women and men to achieve equality. Indeed previous research has highlighted the need to "document in greater detail the range of obstacles corporate cultures raise in the advancement of minority groups to senior positions as well as the difficulties individuals from these group encounter once they are selected for such appointment" (Wilson-Kovacs et al., 2006: 684). This viewpoint has strengthened in recent years, as it is documented by many organisational studies focusing on the links between organisational culture and discriminatory practices (e.g. Aaltio-Marjosola, 1994; Alvesson and Billing, 1997; Helms Mills and Mills, 2000; Mills, 2002; Liff and Ward, 2001).

In seeking to explore these trends in managerial employment, this paper gives voice to women employed in managerial grades through the facilitation of discussions about careers which focused mainly on personal, organisational, cultural and contextual aspects. Drawing on data from over fifty interviews with female managers working in the West Midlands region of the UK, the paper provides an insight into the managerial experiences of women from different social and cultural backgrounds and from different organisational sectors, size and levels. We believe that such heterogeneous group of participants provides a significant contribution for understanding a diversity of women's experiences of management when too often women's voices are suppressed or represented as *one*. The paper is organized as follows: firstly, we seek to outline the scope of managerial careers for female managers whilst documenting the enduringly seductive appeal that managerial opportunities seem to offer female employees (as well

as male ones); and secondly, we explore the extent to which female managerial participation is restricted to lower levels of the managerial hierarchy.

Our contribution, therefore, is to document the experiences of female managerial careers through an analysis of extensive interview data. The implications of the study can benefit organisations and support further research in the area which may focus on cultural issues which prevent women to further progress and on career developmental strategies specifically tailored to support women and open up high-visibility jobs. The paper focuses attention on the perceived seductive nature of managerial careers for many women, whilst simultaneously drawing attention to the lack of real opportunities and barriers for progress beyond junior levels. It emphasises the importance of exploring practices which, on the one hand, contribute to construct women's careers as gendered and, on the other, contribute to the embodiment of specific gendered identities within managerial jobs.

Gendered Work Practices

In recent decades there has been a shift from the analysis of differences in men and women's behaviour at work to an emphasis on gender as a social construction (e.g. Alvesson and Billing, 2002), 'the meaning, significance and consequences of which vary as a function of power differences' reflected across levels of an organisational hierarchy (Ely, 1995: 589). More recently greater emphasis has been placed on gendered processes and masculine and feminine organisational *practices* (e.g. Alvesson, 1998; Gherardi and Poggio, 2007). Poggio (2006) emphasises the importance of analysing gender as practice, thus focusing on activities as situated performances, which contribute to the construction of masculine and feminine identities and practices. She acknowledges the 'embodied nature of human activity', (p.233) and, quoting Butler, asserts that 'gender is always a doing' (saying is also considered a doing), a performance that 'constitutes a being and creates what it describes' (p.226).

This interactive approach to the production of gender allows for an understanding of how specific gender formations may be negotiated and redefined in the interactive practices where individuals engage in a process of reciprocal positioning (Gherardi and Poggio, 2001) in structurally gendered contexts. Martin (2003, 2006) makes a useful distinction between gendering practices (words, deeds and interpretations as nouns) and practising gender (saying, doing and interpreting as verbs/actions). Gendering practices are the repertoire of actions or behaviours available for doing gender (e.g. dress, language, expressions, interests), while practising gender refers to the 'literal saying or doing of gender' in time and space (p.258). Practising constitutes gender in social life. Martin suggests that people may practice gender in ways that do harm (albeit often with the best intentions) and that the dynamics associated with such actions often make people at work, particularly women, feel incompetent, devalued and exhausted. We feel that it is important to expose such non-reflexive practices in order to recognise them and learn how gender works in action.

Gender is done in all interactions, in the workplace as well as in all aspects of social life. Gender, in fact, has vast impact not only on the ways in which work and organisations are practiced and experienced but also on the ways in which life outside of work is organised and experienced (Wharton, 2005). All roles we undertake embody

recognisable gender practices. In the workplace, jobs and positions are not dis-embodied, gender-free slots (Acker, 1990, 1998). Jobs are associated with culturally produced, known and accepted behaviours and practises viewed as either masculine or feminine. Jobs within the caring professions (e.g. nursing), for example, are associated with more feminine practices, whether they are actually performed by men or women. Management is generally associated with masculine discourses and practices (e.g. authoritarianism, competitivism, disciplinary, instrumentality, control) (Kerfoot and Knights, 1993, 1998), therefore the identity work that women undertake when working as managers may be conflictual, contradictory and may produce strain on one's performance (Priola, 2007).

Women's gender identity refers to the knowledge and meaning of their attachment to the categories 'female' and 'feminine'. According to Ely (1995) identification with the 'female' category can be associated with positive, negative or ambivalent feelings, depending on reciprocal positioning between men and women in a given setting. Processes of comparison and attribution, as they occur in organizations, help to shape women's gender identity at work. Therefore, an individual's sense of what it is to be feminine or masculine is in relation to, and is derived from, processes of production, consumption and reproduction of discourses of gender differences (Brewis et al. 1997; Gherardi, 1994).

For the purposes of this research we are interested in the gendered practices which impact upon women's participation and progression in managerial careers. In order to do this we feel it is valuable first to investigate what attracted the women in this study to management and, subsequently, to explore the practices (individual, social, organisational) which have the greatest influence in maintaining the current status quo. Following Bell and Nkomo's (1992: 239) framework for researching women managers, this study attempts to illuminate the complexities inherent in women manager's lives and will focus on understanding women's managerial identity, building on the biographical dimensions of their lives to create holistic portrayals of them and giving consideration to historical and cultural forces in the analysis of women manager's careers and experiences. "By presenting their 'selves' in the interviews, the interviewees reach far beyond the question of whether they are telling the truth or hiding something, and, in fact, speak out their cultural frames from within the organisational, interorganisational and even institutional realities they inhabit" (Aaltio, 2002).

Methodology
This study is based on fifty-six interviews conducted with women managers within various sectors and formed part of a larger multi-methods project looking at Women in Management in the West Midlands region of the UK (Gilbert et al., 2005)[iii]. The project was based on a survey of over 600 organisations operating in the West Midlands and aimed at gathering information on female ownership, directorship and senior management and the presence of policies and practices on flexible working, staff development and family-friendly initiatives. The interviews, upon which this study is based, formed the second phase of the research, which aimed at investigating the managerial experiences of local women, the specific personal, organisational and cultural barriers that may be holding them back and the factors that act as forces for their participation and progression into managerial careers. Participants to the interview

phase were initially selected by adding the following item to the questionnaire: 'As part of this research project we listen to stories of women careers. If you or any others in your organisation would be interested in further participation in this research please complete the following' information on name, position, telephone and email. Twenty-nine of the fifty-six women participants were contacted via this method (fifty-two per cent). The remaining were obtained by 'snowballing technique' (Bailey, 2001; Haynes, 2008) whereby they were referred through various contacts including the interviewees themselves. Women participants worked in public (thirty-four), private (nineteen) and voluntary (three) organisations of various sizes. All organisations operated in the West Midlands but were not necessarily regional establishments. Some were large national or multinational organisations. The participants were not selected to form a representative sample of a population because the aim was to gather information on women managerial experiences, for this reason we are dealing with a variety of profiles and biographies. The one-to-one interviews were conducted by two female researchers who were employed specifically for this project and were involved or had been involved in gender research and were knowledgeable of the gender literature. They were not involved in the analysis and writing of the final report, however had experience on academic interviewing and, throughout the project, worked alongside the rest of the research team, who met weekly to monitor progresses, updates, share difficulties and suggestions.

The interviewees occupied different roles within their organisations and the majority were at junior and middle management level, some (eight) were directors of their own company. Among the women who participated in the study, the majority worked for the public sector (sixty-one percent) and a high proportion of them were managers in more female-oriented sectors such as education (twenty-two) and health service (five)[iv]. The other public sector employees worked for the civil service and local authorities (six) and the police force (one). The managers in the private sector (thirty-four percent) worked in retail (eight), banking (one), construction and engineering (one), IT (one), business consultancies (four), film industry (one) and care homes (three).

The semi-structured interviews varied in length and were complemented by the use of biographical 'career maps' completed by the women themselves. During the interview session, in fact, participants were asked to identify and report on an A3 format paper the steps they had taken since leaving school, up to where they were now and where they were heading. In devising their maps, the interviewees were prompted not only by the researcher/interviewer but also by some questions organised into boxes at the four corners of the paper (see below). These questions focused on a list of key experiences and or people who may have helped to progress or may have hindered their career progression.

1. When were the times and occasions? What were the 'tools' you used… What were the ways… Who were the people… That helped you in your careers so far?	2. What were the times and occasions? What were the 'weapons'… What were the ways… Who were the people… That hindered you in your career so far?

3. Looking back, what/who would have/could have made a difference?	4. When would it/could it have made a difference?

The interview notes and the participants' 'career maps' were used in conjunction during the analysis and, simultaneously, for each participants, were examined for emerging discourses and themes. Data were analysed in a holistic manner following a discursive perspective (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Fairclough, 1992; Parker, 1992) which considers discourses as representing broad accounts that participants draw upon when talking about their career. Once themes were identified within each interview (including the career map), the following phase of the analysis consisted of a search for patterns in the data in the form of both consistencies and differences in the content of accounts.

Participation: Determination and Perseverance
In exploring women's routes into management, it emerged that education and self-determination are perceived to be at the core of a career in management. However, from an exploration of the literature and the statistics on women's education attainment, it appears that educational qualifications in business disciplines do not attract an equal proportion of women and men.

In the UK, approximately three-fifths of further and higher education students are female (UNESCO, 2002; HESA, 2006a)[v], and the proportion of students in business and administrative studies is the highest among all disciplines (13.4 per cent, HESA, 2006b). However, it seems that the proportion of women studying business compared to men, at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, is lower than other disciplines (e.g. medicine and subjects allied to medicine). Only around twenty-five percent of MBA students in the UK are women (The Guardian, 2006). The discussion of the reasons why fewer young women than men aspire and prepare for a career in business go beyond the aims of this paper. However, women's educational attainments (whatever the disciplinary background), which have generally increased (Duffield, 2002), act in their favour in sectors where routes to management are clearly delineated and where the majority of part-time workers are likely to be women (e.g. retail and service sectors). Steven (2000: 23) points out that people who require part-time work are usually 'limited in their choice of occupation by what is obtainable to fit in with the specific hours for which they are available'. The implication is that they may find themselves in jobs for which they are over-qualified or, for those previously in work (e.g. women who have taken a career break), their part-time job may be of lower status than their previous employment. When such women decide to take on a full-time position their qualifications and experiences may act as an advantage for them to move on to managerial positions. While this aspect may contribute to the explanation of an increasing proportion of women at junior managerial level, several other issues contribute to the lower proportion of women in senior levels. This study explores these issues from the women's perspectives.

From an initial examination of the interview data it appears that women's self determination to progress and succeed is fundamental to their career progression. The reading of the women's accounts of determination and perseverance, in spite of the

difficulties and obstacles they experienced, encouraged us to explore the many dimensions of their determination further. The research suggests complex motives and this section explores the issue further.

> I have always been very determined, my own drive and also my upbringing and family background have pushed me to achieve more and more. My aspirations are to better myself and progress forward at all times. Nothing has interfered with my career, including my children. My daughter was 9 days old when I went back to work. My firm wanted a 'fit to work' certificate from my doctor. When I went to my GP he said that in his 20 years of practice I was the first person he had to write a 'fit to work' certificate for (Louise: Director and owner of an engineering company).

The account above illustrates the cost of women's participation. It can be read as a testimony of strong determination, commitment and willingness to succeed in spite of any personal circumstances and, at the same time, as an emulation of the practices of male colleagues. She implicitly embraces the concept of 'sameness' which has however been rejected by many feminist writers (e.g. Liff and Wajcman, 1996) as considered unsustainable when implementing any measure to reduce gender inequalities. Louise seems to propose an ideal of management as a gender neutral activity, one in which men and women are equal in their expectations, but also one in which women are expected to have the same requirements as men (e.g. one week maternity leave, even though it is women who give birth to children). As Aaltio (2002) reports, women managers (particular in senior positions) differ in their lifestyles from many other women and generally this difference was highlighted in the interviews. They emphasise their professional role first and distance themselves from the fact that their femaleness would play a contribution to their career. By doing so they construct their managerial role as separate from their subject position of women (and mothers in the example above) outside of work, thus purporting a more gender-neutral managerial identity.

> Since I moved into the public sector as a consultant and project manager it has been a challenging work and, since joining three years ago, I have progressed onto two further roles. I am still developing skills in people management and strategic leadership but I've achieved respect from clients and colleagues (Rosemary: Project manager in a large public sector organisation).

Rosemary, above, emphasises the importance of skills in people management as well as in strategic leadership. In doing so she highlights the fundamental aspects of her job and constructs management as focused on the management of people rather than processes. This echoes the work of Whitley (1989), who argues that managerial skills, rather than being theoretically or process-specific are organizationally and inter-personally based. In addition, Rosemary acknowledges the significance of the respect of her colleagues and clients. Both aspects contribute to construct management as associated with relationship-orientation and thus with more feminine aspects, in sharp contrast to the first extract in which management was purported as totally masculine.

> My father influenced my career choice and my husband is the biggest driving force in my life … I am determined and worked and still work hard to grow my business further. I work with my husband and we share the work in both practices. I can only work because of my mother's support and the support of family friends who help with child-care (Anita: retail/professional service partner and managing director).

Anita, above, emphasises her determination as being associated with the support of her family. In her interview it emerged that her determination is constructed as a strength

enthused by the emotional support of her husband, with whom she manages the business, the influence of her father in her career choice and the help of her mother in looking after her children. This supports the research of Kan who argues that the presence of dependent children offers less of a barrier to 'work-centred women' who have a network of support, albeit that women whose careers are continuous, tend to be childless (Kan, 2007). Referring to such aspects as legitimising her determination, Anita presents a situation in which the men important in her life 'act like men' in a paternalistic sense (influencing, driving her), while her mother fulfil the stereotypical role of carer providing childcare for her children. In doing so she constructs her social context as simply (apparently free from contradictions) and traditionally gendered. However, Anita emphasises her determination as also being associated with discourses of entrepreneurialism and competitivism (the deside to further grow her business), *which* are associated with masculinity and masculine management (e.g. Alvesson, 1998; Kerfoot and Knight, 1998). She locates herself in a position different from that of her 'stereotypical' family by identifying her determination at the intersection between masculinity (entrepreneurial and driven) and femininity (in need of support).

Both Louise (first quote) and Shamila (below) construct determination as an inner drive to achieve success and 'better themselves'. For Shamila her progression up the managerial ladder is also determined by her sense of competition and her strength of mind in pursuing a career without her family's support.

> I work in IT, which is a male dominated industry, my family didn't supported me in my career choice, being Asian my family wanted me to become a professional. However although they have been a hindrance they are a support in my life. Being a female in the IT industry is a hindering factor to progress into a lead role. Earlier in my career when I needed more formal training I didn't find support from my company. It is difficult being a manager in such competitive environment. I want to demonstrate that one can keep a balance and do better. I pulled back from higher roles because they are based on competition and you are expected to give up your life. In my current role I want to show that there are different ways to achieve success (Shamila: IT manager in a large IT MNC).

Some women may be attracted to management by the promise of status and power to influence others and oneself. Others may be seduced by the wish to prove themselves and others that they can do better and achieve success in environments, which are traditionally male dominated and highly competitive (as Shamila above) or that may represent difficult challenges (as Mandy below). Shamila's aspiration is mirrored by Whitehead's (2001) analysis which suggests that many women may be seduced by management through a desire to change organisations into more relational and inclusive environment and or to prove themselves and others that there are different and better ways to manage. The woman above emphasises the lack of formal support and training she received by her masculine organisation as well as the masculine rules of career progression in IT. However, she does not want to follow these 'rules' and want to demonstrate different ways to manage, which are also based on the achievement of a more balanced work-life. Her ways of resisting masculine practices, however, have also included the choice of 'pulling back from higher roles' which may be also seen as a way to surrender to masculine practices rather than a proactive move to change. The challenges to succeed in traditionally male environments or independently, as an entrepreneur, provide high levels of risk as well as high levels of fulfilment when success is achieved.

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

For Mandy being able to 'lead', take decisions and have control of the processes which influence her job is fundamental. Her teaching job was seen as fitting in with her family requirements, however it did not fit in with her desire to be in control of her activities. She saw the option of being an entrepreneur and managing director as an opportunity to achieve a position of leadership, status and influence (being in control of the business processes and her subordinates). It is interesting to note that, considering her family commitments and her career break, Mandy sees the setting up of her own company as an easier route into management than seeking a managerial role as an employee. Such choice may be the result of the lack of flexibility associated to managerial positions. However it could also be the result of perceived difficulties in returning to work as a manager after a career break, with little existing support for women, particularly for Black and Ethnic Minority women (Mandy is from an Asian background).

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

> When I was at university I was quite political and I really believed in myself. Some of the teachers inspired me and were great role models. I did an MSc in a traditionally 'male' subject area and during my course I was one of few female students, it was a technical course. After that I progressed into a career in a traditionally male dominated sector working on temporary jobs. I never fit in, not only I was a woman, but also I was discriminated against for being educated. It was extremely demoralising and I lost my self-confidence, I needed to feel listened to. After a big crisis, I left that career and went to Tanzania to work in villages (Rosemary: Project manager in a large public sector organisation).

When describing her male-dominated workplace, the manager above highlights the lack of emotional support ('I needed to feel listened to') when she needed it the most, as an inexperienced new starter. Nurturance and support have been associated with women, femininity and feminine management (see Kerfoot and Knight, 1993, 1998; Alvesson, 1998; Collinson and Hearn, 1996, 2001). Men have historically been associated with solidity, firmness, containment, order and stability, while women have been associated with change, passion, mood swings and fluidity (Linstead, 2000). As an inexperienced,

young graduate Rosemary's femininity clashed with the strongly masculine work environment she joined. It as been reported by many studies (e.g. Fletcher, 1999; McIlwee and Robinson, 1992; Martin, 2006) that stress, determined by the masculine culture of organisations, made the women anxious, resentful, depressed and disillusioned. Rosemary's experiences and career changes are dramatic examples of such cases (see her various quotes). As reported by Gherardi and Poggio (2007) 'the masculinity of male work is asserted, practised and theorised in order to discipline all those engaged in that work, both to defend the territory and to exclude discursive formations alternative to it'.

> My organisation and specifically my department is very male dominated, there is strong competition, a long hours culture, the work is really based on a male model. It is difficult if you are a woman, even more difficult if you have a family…. I am not attracted by more senior management roles, or is it a lack of confidence? But I fear it may be expected (Jill: manager in a public sector organisation).

While admitting that it is difficult for a woman working in a male dominated environment, Jill, above, recognises that it is much more difficult to cope with a masculine culture based on competition and long hours if you have children. She does not see herself progressing further and cannot explain whether this is a lack of interest or lack of confidence. She constructs her managerial identity and career as different from her company's expectations based on consistent progression, by doing so she is also resisting masculine articulations of management based on competition, instrumentality and purposive rationality (see also Collinson and Hearn, 1994, 1996). As seen above (Shamila in previous section), such modality of resistance may have counterproductive effects for women's careers if no more active change actions are taken to challenge the masculine culture. When asked for clarifications on what they referred to when they talked about 'male models', 'male domination', 'male systems', the women interviewed reported the experiences of competitive environments, the daily practices of visibility, the implicit expectations of working long hours (see the quote above), the lack of training (see Knoke and Ishio, 1998 for a fuller discussion), mentoring and support offered by superiors (see Shamila in the previous section, Suki, Fay and Robi below) and the low expectations demonstrated by their managers (see quote below). They attributed these factors to their gender. The impression of some of the interviewees was that their male managers believed that they were not totally committed to their careers, as it was implicit that they would leave in the future to have a family.

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

Associated with such masculine practices, there emerged in other cases further discriminatory dynamics associated with racism as well as gender discrimination. However, the literature on women and management has generally avoided any reference to race or ethnicity. As highlighted by Bhavnani and Coyle (2000) black and ethnic minority women fall into the gap between 'race' and 'gender'. They are invisible in texts and articles on 'race' and employment and on 'gender' and employment. However, as Bell and Nkomo (1992) contend the idea that theories based on the

experiences of white women managers are congruent with the experiences of women of colour have yet to be justified.

> Until 1994 I was a service manager in the health service, when I was promoted to that job there was not training available to support the post and it was a great challenge to learn staff management, budgets, policies implementations etc. As a black woman, I have experienced racism and people generally had low expectations of me. I have never received career guidance, it would have been useful and beneficial to have had support and guidance prior to leaving school and also in the initial stages of being in a supervisory position. However, self-motivation and strong family values have helped me in my career. My parents invested time in pushing me and placed no limits to what could be achieved. (Fay: project manager)

In addition to the lack of formal training to support the promotion to a managerial position, Fay highlights an experience of general low expectation from people around her (society?) and a lack of career guidance. While early career guidance has been reported by many of the women interviewed as a tool which could help women achieve a greater career focus, the experience of society's low expectation was conveyed generally by black and ethnic minority women (see also Robi below). The limited available research focusing on black and ethnic minority women and management found that, compared with white women, black and ethnic minority women continue to be under-represented in higher-grade employment (Bhavnani, 1994, 1996; Bhavnani and Coyle, 2000) and are marginalized even within government initiatives (e.g. The Strategic Framework for Women's Enterprise –UK) which generally treat women as homogeneous group, without acknowledging other diverse aspects such as race and class (Forson, 2006). British Labour Force Survey data reports that nine per cent of ethnic minority females in the UK are found in the category 'Professional, Manager, Employer, Employees and Managers in large establishments' compared to eleven per cent of white females (Davidson, 1997).

> Throughout my career path I have experienced racism, sexism and other obstacles such as harassment and bullying. It was very difficult to get encouragement and support. However, I have worked through these issues and have found an area of work which I am relatively happy with. My motivation came from my husband and my self-determination to better myself, otherwise there hasn't been much support from outside. (Robi: senior care manager in a public sector organisation).

Black and ethnic minority women have the additional barrier of racism to face; more than white women they experience a lack of opportunities to progress up the managerial ladder and are unable to progress in their careers as hoped (Nelson, 2004; Bell and Nkomo, 2001). Bhavnani and Coyle (2000: 225) suggest that 'black women on the whole are disadvantaged compared to white women in the labour market. They are less likely to become managers, are on lower grades within the same occupations, are more likely to do shift work, are more likely to be unemployed'. Also, black and ethnic minority women are more likely to work in the public sector than other groups and as managers, they are more likely to be self-employed owner-managers and to work in small firms where the label 'manager' may refer to different status and responsibility than in a large organisation (Bhavnani and Coyle, 2000).

Those women (of all races) who could not fit in and adjust to the masculine environment have changed organisations and sectors and often opted for a more female-dominated sector. Among these, however, a few suggested that even in sectors such as

education and healthcare there were lower expectations and support for women and that the culture was still based on masculine values and practices.

> When I got my professional qualifications I moved into project management. I was a young female working with two older men. I felt used, I didn't like the position I was in, I couldn't get the respect I needed from both the team and the boss and I needed more emotional and professional support. I was feeling very isolated and stressed and started to experience panic attacks. For the second time in my career I felt that I needed to escape but this time rather than go abroad I changed career and sector … I don't think I can change the predominant consultant male model (Rosemary: Project manager in a large public sector organisation).

This extract (following from the first extract of this section) describes the development of a woman manager and her struggles in copying and adjusting to masculine practices. She moved on from a position of completely rejecting masculine work and management (as in the first extract) to an attempt to remain in management but through changing sector and the area of work. This echoes many of the conclusions reached by Hultin (2003), who argues that even in female-dominated occupations, women face worse internal promotion prospects then equally qualified men. After various changes, Rosemary now accepts that management is based on a masculine rational model, which she cannot change but that she can influence people and contribute to create an environment of mutual support and reciprocal respect.

Hierarchical structures of organisations provide some positions with more power than others. It is generally the case that most positions with substantial structural power are occupied by men. However, even in flatter structures such as the project management team referred by Rosemary above, men are endowed with more power, in this case granted by their greater experience, age and numerical majority. Such an example highlights that gender is practised at work within a power context (Martin, 2006) that often has dramatic effects for women.

Positioning Management: A Seductive Contradiction
Notwithstanding the questioning of the 'special' status of management (Grey, 1999) and the changing nature of managerial work (Tengbald, 2006), authors such as Whitehead (2001) have been keen to argue that management contains seductive elements which makes it an attractive career path. Women and men invest in the position of manager through a process of identity construction whereby they engage and assimilate discourses associated with the subject position of manager. According to Whitehead (2001: 94), 'the lure of management is … particularly acute for it contains certain seductive elements making it especially attractive as a site for identity investment'. The seductive aspects of management refer to the 'promise' of organisational power, the enticement of hierarchical status and the sense of potency which may come from overcoming and controlling oneself and others (Whitehead, 2001). Such attraction was evident in most women's responses. They all talked about the difficulties they experienced throughout their career and emphasised their strong determination to overcome them and achieve a position of influence.

Status and power exercise a strong attraction for most of the women but the ability to influence and control others, seems to be a stronger pull for the women below, who emphasise the possibility to 'facilitate people coming together strategically' (as in the

extract below), to be 'listened to' and to 'help people develop'. In investing in the subject position of manager, they both engage with discourses associated with the 'people management' aspect of the position. Most interviewees (with the exception of a few entrepreneurs), in fact, constructed management as associated with feminine discourses such as 'nurturing people', 'influencing people', but never as 'making decisions', 'solving problems' or 'determining processes' (generally seen as masculine managerial discourses).

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

In emphasising her influential position within her organisation, Anita, below, also highlights the status that she has achieved within her community through her job/profession and the benefits that it has brought to her family and friends.

> I find that in my position it is important to be able to have influence and help other people develop. I knew from earlier on that I wanted to work with people. … I have been in the profession for 12 years, I am well known in the community, through my profession I have helped family and friends. I think in the future I would like to be involved in teaching and supervising students preparing to enter the profession (Anita: retail/professional service partner and managing director).

The extracts above provide examples of how women tend to construct management as focused on feminine aspects of nurturing and supporting. By doing so they appear to be distancing themselves from the most recognised management practices of control and authoritarian decision-making, thus silencing the masculine. By identifying the feminine aspects of management they are also constructing their gender identities through difference. By cognitive and physical comparative activities 'men and women collude in the organisational construction of gender through a process of reciprocal positioning' in which male and female are perceived and positioned as alternative categories (Poggio, 2006: 228). This has important implications for women managers who attempt to minimise the contradictions and conflicts they may experience in constructing and re-constructing their identities from a masculine subject position. As a way of solving the conflict between management and control and decision-making on the one hand and support, nurturing and mentoring on the other, Anita sees herself moving towards teaching professional students later in her career while still remaining involved in her practice. Such choice appears to allow a more harmonious process of identity construction.

In order to achieve their positions most women interviewed had to overcome difficulties. Rosemary (below) experienced discrimination and lack of support, she changed directions many times and decided that she wanted to remain in a position of influence and have the respect of her clients and colleagues. As well as the power to influence others it emerged, from the interview with Rosemary, that the power to control herself and overcome her weaknesses exercised an equally strong attraction. The position of the manager as rational and self-controlled (masculine?) becomes even more seductive when experiencing the need for emotional support and emotional strength. Rosemary has left various managerial jobs but has 'always' returned to management,

possibly as a way to provide rational control of a life besieged by emotionality and uncertainty.

> The first thing I can say about my career is that it has been varied and a bit of a roller-coaster. It seems that for years every time I've changed direction it has been like taking one step forward and two steps back. I have experienced periods of depression and loss of self-confidence along the way, but I've always come back (Rosemary: Project manager in a large public sector organisation).

Women's experiences of management have highlighted how gender identities influence the embodiment of specific values within the position of manager. In fact, while management is still perceived as masculine, at the same time, it is constructed by the women interviewed as masculine *and* feminine.

Conclusions
The interview data provide a useful discussion of a large sample of female managers by providing insights into the concept of managerial careers as being seductive for many female employees and by highlighting the difficulties to progress within masculine systems of work. The practical implications of our work are therefore to highlight the impact of such masculine cultures and the degree to which they restrict female participation in managerial careers. Moreover, when women do participate they draw upon existing masculine managerial discourses. This suggests a lack of alterative models of managerial participation and leadership, which is exasperated, by the lack of female managerial role models. This clearly suggests the need for an expansion of alternative models of management and here we think management education has the potential to play a significant role, together with the further deployment of gender mentoring arrangements which, although have not directly been explored in this study, have been reported as a contributory factor to women's managerial success (e.g. Davidson and Burke, 2000; Headlam-Wells, 2004; Priola, 2007; Vinnicombe and Singh, 2003).

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

The embodying of masculine characteristics as a means of progression supports existing frameworks such as that proposed by Knights and Kerfoot (1998) which offers a plausible account of the success of female senior managers by arguing that success

more often comes to those female managers who are able to adopt and display masculine characteristics. Furthermore, many female managers report a desire to exert organizational control and influence, which was seen as an important factor in understanding the enduring appeal of managerial careers. We argue that this can be understood as a desire to exercise control and autonomy of one's own career as much, if not more so, than wanting to exercise control over others. The rational, self controlled and autonomous managerial abstract was often contrasted with notions of irrational, emotional and social. This interpretation is supported by the espoused concern on behalf of female managers to offer leadership in terms of the development and support of others rather than in term of decision-making. In addition to the developmental and support discourses, management was also constructed around terms such as influence rather than authority and control.

The interview data presented here are used to give voice to women managers themselves and to explore the construction of management and managerial roles from their own perspectives. The study shows that, while management in general is perceived by the women interviewed as associated with masculine practices, their specific managerial subject position appears contradictorily masculine and feminine. In fact, while following masculine models of work they construct the managerial identity as associated with more feminine discourses (e.g. influence, support). We argued that such processes of identity construction might help women reducing the conflicts that they may experience in negotiating their managerial subject position and their subject position as women.

A key issue to emerge from this research is the way in which the masculine culture of organisations educes in women managers the experience of contradictory positioning (see also Gherardi, 1996). To preserve their feminine identities, they construct management as associated with feminine discourses. However, in positioning themselves as managers they resort to masculine behaviours mainly aimed at controlling the work environment (see also Gherardi, 1996; Prichard and Deem, 1999). It emerged from the study that such contrasting positions may elicit unpredictable behaviours and anxiety concerning one's competence, abilities and work relationships (e.g. Rosemary's career).

Alongside aspects of identity construction and contradictory positioning, the study highlights practical experiences of oppression and a general lack of organisational support. Many of the women interviewed denounced a structural problem within their organisations which did not provided formal training and developmental strategies to support their advancement. In addition to formal career guidance and support the issue of lack of emotional support associated to masculine cultures has also been raised. We feel that the embodiment of masculinity within the managerial role and the organisational culture leaves women little possibility of providing alternative models of managerial and organisational practices. In fact, it emerged in the study that the only forms of resistance acted by the women interviewed refereed to *withdrawal* by either changing organisation or moving to self employment or by rejecting opportunities of promotions. No proactive strategies for change have emerged, not because there is not the will to change but because in organisations there is not openness to alternative models.

We think that this study, by giving women managers a voice, can offer a contribution to organisations on ways in which they can support women's advancement. The more practical implications for how organisations and managerial training and education establishments may support women's participation and progression in management are reflected on women-specific career planning and development strategies, mentoring and less emphasis placed by organisations on 'face time' and inflexible discipline based on male models.

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[i] Although, as Liff and Wajcman argue (1996), such legislation is often predicated around unsustainable notions of 'sameness', rather than any real valuing of concepts of 'difference'.

[ii] Thirty years ago it was suggested that the increased participation of women in corporations would tackle the gender issue (Kanter, 1977).

[iii] The project was co-financed by the European Social Fund and the Learning and Skills Council (West Midlands), BC0503389.

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

[v] In 2005/06 approximately 55 per cent of undergraduate students were women (HESA, 2006b).