The 'Feminine Revolution in Mining': A Critique

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This paper presents an analysis of media reports of Australian women in mine management. It argues that a dominant storyline in the texts is one of gender change; in fact, a 'feminine revolution' is said to have occurred in the mining industry and corporate Australia more generally. Despite this celebratory and transformative discourse the female mine managers interviewed in the media texts seek to distance themselves from women/female identity/femininity and take up a script of gender neutrality. It is demonstrated however, that this script is saturated with the assumptions and definitions of managerial masculinity.

Introduction

In their examination of constructions of the female soldier in the British media Woodward and Winter (2007, P.101) posit that discourses are fundamental to understanding gender inequality at work for they define the spaces that men and women can occupy and the possibilities for them in these spaces. In an earlier textual analysis of discourses of gender in the agricultural media Morris and Evans (2001) made a similar promulgation asserting that meanings and assumptions about masculinity and femininity in the texts rationalize and reinforce asymmetrical gendered power relations in the farming sector. In this sense a discourse analysis of gendered subjectivities in media texts continues a 'close dialogue' between culture and economy revealing the connections between socio-cultural representations of gender and the material reality of ongoing gender inequality in employment (McDowell 2000, P.16).

In this paper we take up geographical arguments about the critical importance of discourse to gender relations at work through an analysis of constructions of women and mine management in the Australian business press in the period from 2006 to 2008. Women who have been appointed to managerial positions in mining are part of a 'new generation of mining women' who have entered the resources industry in recent years (Eveline & Booth 2002). Such women are consequently significantly different from the 'mining women' and 'mining wives' examined in previous feminist geographical scholarship (e.g., McDowell & Massey 1984; Gibson-Graham 1991; 1992; 1996).

We begin the paper with a brief overview of the theoretical framework of the study. To explicate our understanding of gender and discourse we turn to previous geographical studies which have explored femininities and masculinities as discursively produced, negotiated and resisted in the work-place. Following an outline of the methodology of the study we present the findings from our analysis. In doing so, we highlight the presence of a key 'storyline' or 'naturalized and conventional cultural narrative' underpinning each of the articles (Sondergaard 2002, P.191). This is a storyline which suggests that while the mining industry was once a masculinised sector this is no longer the case as discrimination and disadvantage have been transcended. There is consequently an 'undoing of gender' occurring within the field of mining management (Butler 2004). Indeed, there is said to be a 'feminine advantage' for women in mine management due to a range of naturally occurring attributes such as superior communication and interpersonal skills.[1] At the same time we reveal the ways in which the female mine managers seek to distance or dismiss their femininity and instead position themselves within discourses of gender neutrality.

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[1] Though women comprise 42% of the Australian workforce in total, in the mining industry they account for just 18% of the workforce (AusImm nd). At the same time, the highest discrepancy in Australia between the earnings of full-time male and female employees occurs in the mining industry (ABS 2009). The historical absence of women in senior management roles is highlighted in a recent extended study of BHP Billiton (Thompson & Macklin 2009) which claims that the corporation has been driven "exclusively" by men.

Gender, discourse and employment

While 'discourse' is a term that has been often used in disparate ways in the social sciences (O'Farrell 2005) Jaworski and Coupland (1999, P.3) note that one commonality appears in attempts to define the term: that is, all give emphasis to the notion of 'language in use'. Baxter (2003, P.46) writes that 'discourses are forms of knowledge – powerful sets of assumptions, explanations governing mainstream social and cultural practices'. What is highlighted in this definition is the critical relationship between discourse and power, and more specifically the capacity of discourse to open up as well as delimit certain behaviours and practices at specific historical moments. Importantly, not all discourses are equally powerful with some being marginal and others hegemonic (Weedon 1987).

The ways in which discourses construct meanings and truths which shape and influence what can be said and done is clearly demonstrated in Bartram and Shobrook's (1998) study of women workers at Plymouth's Devonport Dockyard. The authors argue that the dominance and prevalence of discourses of masculinity in this workplace have resulted in gendered socio-spatial boundary marking as the environment of the docks and the work undertaken on the docks have been seen to be more legitimately masculine. From a poststructural perspective, 'we speak ourselves into existence within the terms of available discourse'; so for women dockyard employment has historically been limited to peripheral and non-industrial roles in clerical or cleaning employment (Davies 2000, P.62). Even as this has changed and women have taken up mainstream dockyard work females continue to be contained in areas where opportunities for overtime, danger-money and skill development are limited. As Wainwright (2007) demonstrates in her study of the construction of weavers and mill workers, this type of spatial segregation operates to constitute the space/s of the workplace in gendered terms so that we come to know and understand sites such as docks as masculine.

What becomes evident as Bartram and Shobrook (1998) trace discourses of gender over time is that discourses, including those that are hegemonic, are shifting and contingent and always therefore subject to change or contestation (Kendall & Wickham 1999). The changing nature of discourses of work and gender is revealed in a study of the Norwegian Forest Owner's Federation newsletter, *The Forest Owner* undertaken by Brandth and Haugen (1998; 2005a; 2005b). The authors undertake an exploration of gendered representations of farming at four historical moments from the 1970s to the present. They note the early privileging of discourses of physicality and strength in depictions of farming and the increasing destabilization of this discourse with the advent of computer technologies and the emergence of new imperatives for entrepreneurialism and business development. The fluidity of discourses, and more specifically the capacity for discourses to be resisted and contested, is also of concern to Liepins (1996; 1998; 2000) and Anderson (2008) in respective studies of the gendered discourses of the work of agriculture and entrepreneurship. In both of these occupational arenas women agricultural leaders and women diner owners are carving out new subject positions which challenge the masculinity of discursively constituted identities 'farm leader' and 'entrepreneur'. At the same time, the potency of hegemonic masculinity in these work spaces may continue to circumscribe the availability and engagement of new configurations of occupational femininity. Liepins (1998, P.384) writes, for example, of the emergence of the new feminine identity 'alternative agricultural activist' but also the 'woman as masculine' which means adopting the characteristics and practices associated with

masculinity. In a similar respect McDowell's (1997, P.207) study of senior women in London City Banks reveals that for one group of women success depends on emphasizing their difference from men while for another group of women the feminine subject position adopted is 'being an honorary man' (McDowell 1997, P.157). Like Anderson (2008), Liepins (1996; 1998; 2000) and McDowell (1997) our attention in this paper is also on the unstable and dynamic nature of discourse and the extent to which femininities are being reworked to create new subjectivities for women in employment.

Like women farmers, entrepreneurs and merchant bankers the 'female mine manager' operates in an environment which is highly masculinised (Lahiri-Dutt 2008). Further, as a manager she takes up an identity often viewed as synonymous with men and masculinity despite the fact that some in-roads have been made by women in management in contemporary Australia. (Collinson & Hearn 1994; McDowell 2001).[2] A critique of the discourses surrounding gender and mining thus opens up the opportunity to identify the extent to which women's presence in the boardroom of resource corporations is fracturing the normatively masculine discourses mobilizing around management and mining.

Methodology

Prior (2003, P.154) argues that in selecting texts for qualitative analysis 'purposeful, pragmatic sampling' can be justified. We were aware that the subjectivity of 'female mining manager' was a new one circulating in the press as it was associated with two key developments in 2007. These were the appointment of the first woman CEO of an Australian mining company and the naming of a female iron-ore owner-operator as Australia's first female billionaire. We therefore contained our search to the period 2006 to 2008. Also informing our sampling strategy was Rose's (2001) claim that audience is critical to discourse production. An audience that seemed to be particularly important was that of senior corporate leaders, including senior and aspiring corporate women leaders. Further to this we discounted daily business newspapers as we were seeking detailed and descriptive features or profiles rather than short item news reports. We thus narrowed our search to four national business magazines directed at a senior and and aspiring managerial market as evidenced by their production values, advertisements and content. Feature profiles on successful managers appear regularly in these publications in line with the intent of the magazines to offer a more in-depth and personal perspective on business. From this process we elicited five articles. While a sample of five may be considered small, McDowell (1997, P.193) has rightly observed that women appear very infrequently on the business pages.

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[2] The Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (2009) notes that in 2009 29.8% of women were in management positions. However, the proportion of women in such positions differs significantly across industries. In mining women occupied 16.3% of managerial positions. Along with transport and construction this is one of the lowest levels of participation by women in leadership across 17 industry categories. The Agency also reported that in 2008 51% of ASX200 companies had no women directors (compared with 50.0% in 2006). Like women's representation in management, women's representation on boards is concentrated in particular industries. Insurance, retailing, banks, customer services, consumer durables and apparel and telecommunication services industry groups have over 15% of female board members (EOWWA 2009).

Importantly, the five feature articles we obtained represent very rich data, and it is richness, rather than 'the number of texts analysed' which is said to be particularly critical to discourse analysis (Tonkiss 1998, P.253). These articles, in addition, constitute a comprehensive 'body' of material directed at the audience identified above. Across the five articles, eight women in positions of management in the resource sector are described, pictured and interviewed. Specifically, the women featured, many of whom come from a geology background, held executive management positions such as chairman, chief executive officer and managing director, with one, Gina Rinehart, owner and chairman of a mining company.[3]

The discourse analysis involved the careful reading of the texts followed by coding and the clustering of codes as we identified patterns and commonalities as well as contradictions, disparities and absences (Rose 2001; Alvesson & Deetz 2000). While this process revealed the mobilisation and negotiation of multiple discursive strands, one central narrative across the texts was that the mining industry is undergoing a period of transformation and change or, as one writer argued, 'a feminine revolution'. It is to this narrative which we now turn.

The 'feminine revolution' in mining

All of the articles highlight the fact that mining is a spatial context traditionally gendered as masculine. It is an arena that has been dominated by men and one where masculine norms, practices and discourses have been privileged whether in the board room or in exploration or in extraction processes. In all of the articles examined a range of pictures draw attention to this historical legacy. Photographs accompanying the stories though they include images of the individual women in business attire, emphasise the mining landscape through focussing on open pits as well as some of the large technologies of contemporary mining such as haul and dump trucks, draglines and conveyer belts. Though class is an informing factor,[4] technologies have, of course, been traditionally viewed as broadly synonymous with notions of hegemonic masculinity (Cockburn 1985; Massey 1996). In the farming sector for example, the conflation between masculinity and technology has been illustrated via studies which have demonstrated the critical importance of the tractor as a boundary marker distinguishing between men and women's work (Brandth 1994; Pini 2005) along with literature recording the way in which the introduction of mechanisation into poultry and dairy farming reconfigured work traditionally constructed as 'feminine' to work constructed as the prerogative of men (Shortall 2000). The relationship between hegemonic masculinity and technology in and beyond farming is embedded in beliefs that suggest men are innately more technically competent than women and more naturally predisposed to using technology. Ultimately, as Saugeres (2002) argues technologies such as tractors are a critical symbolic and material resource for enacting the masculine identity of 'farmer'.

From its early history until the present mining has relied upon technologies, and, as in farming, such technologies have been crucial to denoting the masculine nature of mining as an occupation. In a study of women coal miners in Central Appalachia (1995; 2000; 2006) Tallichet draws on data from interviews as well as from participant observation to record the gender-typing of skills and jobs in the mine site and the important role played by technologies in this process. Women report

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[3] "Chairman" is the term used in the articles examined here.

[4] See Pini, Mayes and McDonald (forthcoming) and Pini, Price and McDonald (forthcoming) for a discussion of class relations in contemporary resource affected communities.

being passed over for positions which require the operational abilities with machinery in favour of men along with the fact that mechanical competence is a necessary precursor to promotion in mining. Like 'the farmer', the archetypal miner is not just 'competent and tough' (Tallichet 1997, P.34) but embodies such characteristics, in part, via his technological use and proficiency.

What is of interest is that the socio-cultural connection between men/masculinity and technology is interrupted in the texts via two photographs of equipment/machinery which also feature the women managers. . One article, for example, is introduced by a two page photograph of a woman mine manager surrounded by a range of prospecting equipment such as shovels, picks and sifting devices and with the headline 'Women strike the mother lode.' In another half page photograph a female mine manager is photographed with hands on her hips in hard hat and wearing the company shirt of all employees. Her image dominates the photograph while in the background the mine itself and the technologies of the mine are undersized and indistinct. The presence of women is thus seen to be overshadowing the masculine technology signalling a significant shift in the gender order.

The fracturing of the relationship between masculinity and mining is also emphasised in the texts through reference to rurality and nature. In both words and pictures we are reminded that mining occurs in spaces that are harsh, barren and often inhospitable. The statistics that are invoked to suggest the remoteness of mining are accentuated by aerial and long-range photographs which situate mine sites against a landscape which is as immense as it is barren. Embedded in this story of nature as wild and in need of discipline and control are dominant notions of masculinity and a positioning of 'women as "out of place" in the rural landscape' (Little 2002, P.67). However, the texts disrupt this reading positioning women 'in place' in this landscape by referring to the pleasures and enjoyment the women gain from what one writer refers to as 'outback work' and photographing the women relaxed and smiling against vast horizons.

On numerous occasions, the key message in the texts, that of a regendered mining industry, is one that is conveyed in much more overt terms. We are told by one writer that 'change is everywhere' in mining as more women are now entering professions such as geology and engineering. These women, it is suggested, will naturally progress into senior management positions so any change that is currently taking place will be accelerated in the near future. Another takes up this line of argument suggesting that what is occurring is a 'feminine revolution' as women now occupy a significant number of managerial posts in mining and are likely to take up further such posts in the near future. At its most extreme this discourse of women's visibility in mining is used to argue that there is a dramatic shift occurring (or one that has transpired) in corporate Australia. One journalist, for example, editorialises on Gina Reinhart as mine leader writing, 'It shows that women can mix it at the top end of Australian business, and that there should be no hurdles or impediments to them doing so.'

Women's presence in mining generally and mine management in particular is discernible according to the texts because women as a group are different from men. We are told they have a 'reputation for doing things differently'. Two of the ways in which the women mine managers are said to be 'different' is in their communication skills and approachability. The women are presented as active communicators, connecting with staff across the mine sites and in office environments seemingly unconcerned with hierarchy. These are responsive and accessible managers with high

level interpersonal skills. In one article, for example, a journalist accompanies one of the woman mine managers on a site visit to a remote mining operation and notes her willingness to engage with staff. This accessibility is marked on the body as the woman mine manager replaces the ubiquitous uniform of the manager, that is, the business suit, for 'jeans, work boots and untucked work shirt'. In two of the articles she is pictured in this attire alongside other images of her in business suits. Just as the business suit operates to project a particular corporeal self, that is, someone who is 'in control, rational' (Longhurst 2001, P.99), the latter outfit also works as a virile symbol of egalitarianism and authenticity.

In order to promulgate the discourse of a feminine revolution in mining the texts present men's dominance of the industry as an historical rather than contemporary phenomenon, and also, in the case of Reinhart, elide her position as mine owner as inherited from her father.   More specifically, these texts present discrimination and harassment as belonging to an increasingly distant past. For example, in one article a woman who graduated in geology in the 1970s and went on to senior executive positions is quoted as saying 'I wouldn't deny it was quite difficult in the early days'. Clearly, any battles she experiences as a female in mining belong to a period long ago rather than the early twenty-first century. This is reinforced as her comment is juxtaposed against a story of another female geologist and now mine manager who graduated in the late 1980s, and according to the text finds it 'relatively easy' being a 'female boss'. The way has been 'cleared' for younger women we are told and no barriers or obstacles to women's career progression in mining remain intact. Notwithstanding the remarks about 'early' challenges the narrative of gender change circulating in the texts presents the shift of moving from a masculinised to a feminised workspace as largely straightforward and unproblematic. Written out of the narrative is the contribution of feminism, the activism and commitment of generations of politically engaged feminist women and the considerable contestation and resistance to gender equity.

In further reflecting on the 'early' days of the mining industry the female mine manager described as a 'pioneer' reflects:

> *There were only two ways you would be accepted in field posts in those days if you were the woman boss in the field. You were either the bossy bitch or the mother.*

In this quotation what is named and described are the ways in which hegemonic gendered discourses in masculinised work places have typically circumscribed very specific and often restrictive identities for women which may be 'familial or sexualised' (McDowell 1997, P.152) or masculinised as 'one of the lads' (Bartram & Shobrook 1998, P.63). What is being suggested, however, is that the 'regulatory regime of gender' as performed in the mining industry has fractured and shifted and new feminine subject positions are emerging which construct women in less reductive and restrained ways (Butler 1993, P.21). The constituent features of one such subject position, that of the 'female mine manager' are delineated below.

Gender neutrality and the female mine manager

While the authors of the texts highlight a message of the feminisation of management in mining, the women mine managers themselves typically seek to

obfuscate or dismiss their femininity. For example, as stated, the writers of the texts make much of what they deem to be women's intrinsic capacity for communication and relationships but this is not necessarily the view of the female mine managers. One reflects that she engages a more inclusive and forthright mode of management as this will produce better results for the corporation. Communication skills are thus not necessarily something she has intrinsically as a woman but something she has developed and enacted for instrumental purposes. Another agrees that she has well developed communication skills and the capacity for change but suggests that this is more a result of her father's army background and constant relocations throughout childhood.

More overt efforts to dismiss any connection to femininity/women/female occur when the women are asked about a national campaign to increase women's representation in the mining sector.[5] One asserts for example:

> *What I don't like, and what made me uncomfortable, was the whole (push) to promote women, especially in the mining industry. You don't want to be remembered for being a woman CEO: you want to be remembered for being a good CEO.*

The argument is not that gender change has already occurred in management (as may have been posited by the articles' authors), but that gender change in management is unnecessary if we have merit-based systems and individuals in positions of leadership perform appropriately. This view – that identities such as 'manager' and 'employee' or roles such as 'job' and 'role model' are gender neutral was enunciated by all female mine managers interviewed as the following indicate:

> *I'm not one of those women's champions. I just get on with my job and I happen to be a woman.*

> *What we're (herself and another women mine leader) more into is you just do your job. I was the first female director of the QERC but, in all honesty, until someone mentioned it to me it hadn't occurred to me. ..I see myself as a role model for people I work with rather than just women.*

While claiming that the identity of 'manager' or 'CEO' is gender neutral, traditional discourses of managerial masculinity infused descriptions of their management practice (Collinson & Hearn 1994). The women are presented as tough, determined, strong, rational, disciplined, ambitious, technically skilled, assertive, competitive and controlled. A similar contradiction can be seen in the photographs of the women mine managers in the dress codes of mine sites. In this uniform, the body is shaped, not as a woman, but as employee, worker or manager on the mine site. The feminine body seen in other pages wearing jewellery, high heels and skirt is now in 'work wear' and has long hair tied back under a hard hat. One may read this as the gender neutral working body and the lived reality of the women's claims of the irrelevance of gender. At the same time, the type of industrial clothing worn on the worksites is not a 'neutral' uniform. It arises rather from a long history of 'men's work' and continues

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[5] In 2006 the Office for Women and the Minerals Council of Australia commissioned a report on the recruitment and retention of women in the mining sector (Minerals Council Australia 2007). A key concern of the report was the skill shortage associated with the boom and the need for labour across the resources sector.

to operate as a vigorous signifier of masculinity. In this sense the 'revolution' is contained (not much has changed), while downplaying traditional signifiers of femininity—obvious jewellery, high heels, skirt—is offered as gender neutrality.

Also clear in the three quotations cited above is a further claim to gender neutrality through the privileging of individualism. Even when women acknowledge that they may have experienced some difficulties as a female manager they are dismissive of any attempts to construct this as a pervasive problem embedded in organizational practices and structures. Instead they stress their own achievement in being appointed as a manager and emphasise their tenacity, ingenuity and intellect. Ultimately, as the following quotations illustrate, the message is that gender issues that exist can be addressed and surmounted by women managers and that the responsibility for this lies with individual women.

> *You don't sit back and complain, "Oh there's a glass ceiling we'll never get there." I think that it's better if you just understand okay things mightn't be fair in every aspect of this world. You know we've got to think that bit harder. We've got to work that bit harder and you know it's possible.*

> *Used to being the only woman in the room at business meetings, she believes women are under more pressure to prove themselves than men. "But once you've proven yourself, it's an equal playing field. I'm not a believer in the glass ceiling."*

These are important quotations as they are the only times the female managers suggest they may have faced differential or unfair treatment in the contemporary mining industry as a result of being women. Along with this acknowledgement, however, is the assertion that complaining about 'glass ceilings' is unproductive and self-indulgent and what is required is greater industry and intellect. Again, the issue is positioned as the individual responsibility of the female manager. This perspective is echoed in reported comments of male associates of the women managers. For example, asked about the relevance of gender a male board member says of his CEO, 'If you try to get one over her, she will screw you to the wall'. Another male colleague tells the journalist that 'She's had to learn to deal with coalmen. Quite frankly she's given out as good as she's got.' In both quotations we not only hear the discourse of individualism, we also hear male behaviour and masculinity offered as the standard bearer against which the woman manager is judged as competent and able. Like her male counterparts she is prized for being emotionally impenetrable, forceful and uncompromising (Whitehead 2002; Kerfoot & Knights 2002).

The contention that advancement to a managerial position is an individual matter not one connected to gender was made most strongly by the female mine managers in relation to work-family. Unsurprisingly, the articles revealed that the position of mine manager demands national and international travel as well as long working hours. However, this is not seen to be problematic for the women who assert that work-life balance can be achieved but requires a combination of commitment, flexibility and discipline. Notably these are characteristics seen to be necessary for the individual not for the organization. Thus, one CEO argues that she takes a 'disciplined approach to juggling work and family' ensuring she is home two nights a week by 6pm to put her five year old daughter to bed before working until 11.30pm. Like other women mine managers she not only assumes responsibility for managing the intrusion

of work into her family life, but also naturalizes such an intrusion and the culture of long working hours.

From the texts it is difficult to ascertain the factors that have influenced and shaped the female mine managers' decisions to take up discourses of individualism and moreover, gender neutrality.[6] Certainly, individualism rather than collectivism has been strongly promoted and widely engaged in the Australian mining sector in recent decades in relation to industrial relations (e.g. Peetz & Murray 2005; Timo 1997). Further, what Bagilhole (2000, P.13) names as 'the myth of individualism' is also extensively championed by organizational elites to legitimate their position and negate gender equity strategies. A more specific hint as to why the women interviewed appropriate a discourse of gender neutrality is offered in the texts in the one comment made which is suggestive of conventional discourses of femininity.. This is that her 'guilty pleasures' are "girlie TV shows" and thriller novels'. In offering this insight into herself, the woman manager laughs that her former mentor and boss instructed that this was something she should not disclose. What such advice suggests is that as a woman manager one doesn't want to be associated with feminine pursuits. There may be a risk of being seen as frivolous and trivial and not as someone to be taken seriously. This would suggest that there is a very high level of trepidation as well as surveillance surrounding the performance of femininity by female managers which may lead them to suppress feminine discourses for those that are gender neutral. Of course, it is also telling that the advice was ignored and seen as amusing. It may be that it is possible to invest in discourses of femininity in a very contained way and out of the organizational space, particularly if the woman manager appreciates the apparent irony of her being both leader and viewer/reader with feminised proclivities. Another alternative may be to read the disclosure as muted resistance to the 'feminine revolution' in mining as a transformation that simply legitimates 'the right to be the same as men' (Grosz 1990, P.340). Overall, irrespective of individual or systemic motivations for foregrounding a narrative of gender neutrality, the texts privilege a narrative of 'feminine revolution' as rupture to the (pre) existing order which at the same time is recuperated as 'non-gendered".

Conclusion

In the textual analysis presented in this paper we first identified the dominance of a discourse which suggests that gender change has occurred in the mining sector and management as barriers to inclusion have been removed or overcome and significant numbers of women have entered these traditionally masculinised domains. While the masculine hegemony of the mining industry is asserted in the texts it is presented as belonging to a distant past. Like all discourses, that of the feminine revolution in mining carries within it other discursive legacies. For example, it speaks to the broader and widely circulating discourse which posits that gender equity in employment (and beyond) is imminent or achieved (Connell 2006; Lewis 2006). It also intersects with commonly enunciated discourses about 'feminine management' which suggest that, as a group, women possess a number of naturally occurring traits and characteristics which are advantageous to modern organizations (e.g., Due Billing

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[6] Coming to such an understanding would require the type of interviews undertaken by Gibson-Graham (1996). As Morris and Evans (2001) suggest, one important trajectory such interviews could take is to examine how women view such representations of themselves, whether they see them as meaningful and whether they find them appealing and why.

& Alvesson 2000; Fondas 1997). In amplifying these discourses the narrative of a feminine revolution in mining could be seen as potentially transgressive, opening up space for women to imagine and assume managerial subjectivities which give emphasis to femininities and thus resist and rework the historical conflation between management and masculinity.

However, the types of subject position the women mine managers adopt are notable because they seek to neutralize their femininities. Like other women in highly masculinised occupational arenas reported in the literature the female mine manager works to degender herself disguising or dismissing her femininity (e.g. Sheppard 1989; Rutherford 2001; Kvande 1999). She seeks to achieve this by arguing that gender is irrelevant in the world of work/organizations/management and by drawing on purportedly gender neutral notions such as merit, professionalism and individualism. As McDowell (1997, P.140) explains this is highly problematic for women in non-traditional workplaces as they are visibly and inexorably 'marked as different from an idealized version of disembodied masculinity.' It is perhaps for this reason that there is a contradiction in the gender performance of the female mine manager as she simultaneously takes up normatively masculinised scripts of management to describe both the traits and practices of being a manager. Thus, while claiming gender neutrality she departs very little from hegemonic versions of the masculine managerial norm while leaving this norm intact and unmarked—yet somehow 'revolutionised'.

As stated, we can only speculate on the reasons for the discursive choices of the female mine managers. We can however, identify potential implications a dominant storyline of gender change may have for women in the mining sector. This is because 'within the rules of a discourse, it makes sense to say only certain things' and consequently some things are rendered 'unintellligible, outside the realm of possibility' (St Pierre 2000, P.485). Significantly, the dominant storyline of gender change renders it illegitimate for women to speak of inequities or discrimination and suggests that any continuing numerical difference in men and women's representation in leadership in the sector must be a related to female choice or a woman's individual shortcomings. Men are absented from any need to change their behaviour and proponents of gender initiatives are positioned as extreme and out-of-touch. In summary, the claimed 'feminine revolution in mining precludes the possibility of a feminist revolution while simultaneously further entrenching a 'progressive' ex-nominated hegemonic masculinity. It works here to actively diffuse the potentially revolutionary aspects of increasing numbers of women in positions of power because the 'feminine revolution' equates to the erasure of femininity and the continued positioning of hegemonic masculinity as central but invisible and unremarked.

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