Identity, Women Managers and Social Change: Comparing Singapore and Britain

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Declaration

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ABSTRACT

This study concerns the examination of women managers' identities in Singapore and Britain, against a context of global, national and corporate change. Identities are multiple, shifting and ambivalent. They are ascribed through structures and cultures, but also subject to negotiation through women's agency. The thesis places empirical analysis of women managers' career stories within the context of social change and social theory on the nature of identity. The study explores how Singaporean and British women managers have discursively responded to wider change processes. 23 women managers in the financial sector in Singapore and Britain were interviewed for this purpose.

In the advanced market economies, dual career families have increasingly contracted out household work. Coupled with a consumer led society these changes have weakened the family. Furthermore, women managers, like their male counterparts have increasingly been constructed as individualised unencumbered workers. Despite these wider global changes, Part I of the thesis concludes that women managers continue to be constructed in organisations and in nation states as gendered subjects, as wives and mothers, as sexualised, as embodied and emotional.

Despite these similar gendered constructions for women, women managers are not responding in the *same* ways in both countries. Part II presents the analysis of the interviews and shows that government policies, histories and cultural discourses still largely influence the ways in which women's identities are constrained and constructed. Gender regimes in financial corporations in Singapore and Britain are differently constituted. Family identities as wives and mothers are experienced and voiced differently by women managers in Singapore and Britain. Different processes of individualization have differential effects on women managers in the two gender regimes. The implications of these findings for gender relations are explored in the conclusions.

PREFACE

My interest in women as managers has grown as a result of my longstanding day to day work with women in organisations over the last fifteen years. My previous work with women had been confined to community and voluntary groups until the 1980s, when I began to work as an organisational and training consultant at the Greater London Authority. This was the time at which equal opportunity policies were being introduced in the workplace in Britain. The initial concern of these policies was to promote under-represented groups (women, black and ethnic minorities, lesbian and gay and disabled) within public and private corporations. I worked over fifteen years on women's training and development programmes, coupled with action research to analyse barriers for their promotion and their development. During this time, I interviewed women, designed and facilitated career development programmes and advised large and small organisations. A list of my consultancy and research reports is provided in Appendix 1. The late 1980s and early 1990s saw the growing entry of women into management and my work shifted towards a greater emphasis on women as managers.

As I read the 'mainstream' literature on management and organisations, I began to realise that women's voices were absent. When I spoke to women they provided a different perspective on how they felt about organisations in which they worked, relative to the knowledge in management textbooks. In my interactions with women managers I was always aware of the contradiction in their situations. Women wanted to achieve promotion and were enthusiastic about reaching senior positions, but they also discussed at great length how they felt they were treated as *women* managers, compared to men who were perceived in a 'gender –neutral' way. Men were not 'men' managers; they were just managers. I asked myself, was this because women were new to management, in which case things would change, or was this because organisations reacted in this way to the presence of women generally? Was this ascription changing for senior women, for example? Was it because women themselves colluded with their subordination? These questions were to influence this research study and were expanded upon when I moved to Singapore.

In 1996 I moved to Singapore with my family for two years. I had left my work on women managers in Britain, finishing in fact, with an article I wrote jointly with Professor Angela Coyle on the effectiveness of management development courses for ethnic minority women managers in the NHS in Britain. When I arrived in Singapore, I naturally was interested in women, management and gender relations as I had been working in this field for the previous ten years. I had given up my work in Britain to go with my husband and children to Singapore and my main aim on arrival was to look for paid work.

My experience in facilitating development and training courses for women managers propelled me to go to the Singapore Institute for Management. I inquired if they ran programmes for women managers to which the answer was *"No, there is no need and no interest from women in Singapore – they are already successful"*. I offered to present a seminar on women in management as a recruiting drive for a possible course. This was accepted and the seminar advertised, but it did not go ahead because of a lack of participants. Only three women had registered interest. The seminar was cancelled. I then began to explore women managers' positions in Singapore by examining Census figures. Proportionally women were as well represented as 'managers' as their counterparts in Britain. In conversations with academics at the University of Singapore and at the Institute of Management I was assured that there were indeed numerous women who were in senior positions. Often people would list names to confirm women's presence in these positions. My interest was aroused. The expansion of the financial services sector in Singapore and the growing presence of women therein were reinforced in the press. On International Women's Day in 1997, a list of 100 top successful women appeared in The Straits Times, the Singapore national newspaper (see Appendix 2). Yet Singapore, as I was to find out, did not have any sex discrimination laws, and no equal opportunity policies. Gender discrimination was a non-issue in public discourse.

Government discourse constantly alluded to Singapore's difference from the West as its reasons for its economic success. The two factors most alluded to were its commitment to multi racialism and its distinctive 'Asian family values'. The influence of government policies and discourses as well as planned labour market restructuring was clearly critical in understanding the positioning of women managers in

Singapore. These insights helped me look afresh at the position of women managers in Britain. This struck me as a critically important aspect of comparative work: using insights for one country to re-look at the other.

Were women managers in Singapore and Britain ascribed different gendered identities in the two countries, I asked myself, and if that was the case, how did women themselves respond to these ascribed identities? I had been interested, in my work in Britain, in structures in organisations and social policies in and out of organisations which enabled women managers to participate in the labour market. The Singapore experience fuelled my curiosity. How could a *lack* of enabling structures and policies have achieved similar outcomes in the representation of women in management? I read articles about Singapore's success. Whilst in Singapore I attended seminars and was supported by Dr Nirmala PuruShotam at the University. Her book on disciplining 'race' and racial discourses in Singapore was to kindle my interest in discourses (Puru Shotam 1998). I then decided to interview Singaporean women about their career stories to explore further their own voices in discussing their positioning as women. On returning to Britain, I interviewed British managerial women in the financial sector, as I had in Singapore. My knowledge about Britain and Singapore and the transcripts of the interviews together with further reading, enabled me to refine my research questions and my interpretation of the interview data.

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Introduction

This introduction provides an overview of the key questions and hypotheses tested by my research; a brief introduction to the wider issues of social theory and social change raised by posing such questions and an overview of the contents of the thesis.

Content and hypothesis

This thesis explores women managers' identities and their relationship to social change in Singapore and Britain. How far does the entry of women into management in both countries change the way they are defined? To what extent then can women act and be like men, given these changes? Are they embodying the notion of the adult non gendered worker? Are women in Singapore and Britain responding to the consequences of global change in similar ways? Is there a growing individualisation of the identities of managerial women in the countries? Are there differences in how managerial women are responding both subjectively and behaviourally? How far are women in both countries able to use their agency to impact on the construction of their gendered identities in corporate cultures and in the family? And to what extent is identity constructed and constrained by governmental policy and discourse?

It is my hypothesis that **although women have been drawn into the managerial workforce in advanced market economies, where the logic of the 'modern market' is to construct both women and men as individualised, unencumbered workers, that, in fact, this paradigm is in conflict with the discursive construction of women as gendered subjects – as workers, as mothers, care givers –defining and limiting for women the parameters of work and family.** Furthermore, identities are multiple and changing and are structured through a variety of institutions such as the family, the workplace, the state and public life. Gender regimes give rise to differing patriarchies or gender relations and the process of individualisation has differential effects on women managers in different regimes.

Indeed, it is my contention that government policies, histories and cultural discourses still largely influence the ways in which women's identities are constrained and constructed.

In order to test such a hypothesis it is important to place the questions raised in the second paragraph within a wider context of social change and social theory and to test it through empirical research.

This thesis consists, therefore, of two parts.

Part 1 examines the changing nature of global labour markets and their impact on identity (Chapter 1); the theory and changing concepts of identity and women's identities (Chapter 2); the construction of women's identities in corporate management (Chapter 3) and existing gender regimes in Singapore and Britain (Chapter 4).

Part 2 consists of an outline of the methodology and findings from empirical research conducted in both countries of 23 women managers in the financial sector. The primary tool to interpret the interviews has been discourse analysis. The purpose is primarily to link how managerial women speak about their identities and to analyse the nature of the structural and cultural constraints in Singapore and Britain.

The conclusion draws the two parts together to show that empirical research supports the notion that women continue to be ascribed gendered managerial identities in corporate cultures and that the process of individualisation is affected by the different gender regimes in operation in the two countries.

Key issues

The thesis places empirical analysis within the context of social change and social theory on the nature of identity. It includes exploration of the following issues.

Social change

We are now, it is said, in a new era of post industrialism, the 'knowledge economy' or in the 'information society' (Castells 1996). As part of this process the labour market is being restructured and women are being rapidly drawn into the expanding service sectors across the world.

The context of social change in relationship to gender in the latter half of the twentieth century has been well documented by a range of authors. More specifically, it has been argued that the system of gender relations has been shifting from one based on women in the domestic sphere, to one in which women are increasingly represented in the 'public' sphere (Walby 1997).

A key aspect of this growing representation of women in the public 'visible' sphere has been the entry of women into management (Walby 1997; Castells 1996; Adler and Israeli 1994; Crompton and Sanderson 1990; Fagenson 1993; Davidson and Cooper 1992; Tanton 1994; Crompton 1997; Wirth 1998; Wirth 2001; Rubery et al 1999; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002).

Women, managers and social and organisational change

Within this context, the profiles of women managers, their patterns of work in the workplace and the family are dramatically changing on a national and global scale. The entry of large numbers of professional middle class women into high earning corporate life places them into work patterns which are similar to their male counterparts. These professional and managerial women are defined by their high incomes, full-time paid work in corporations and the full time contracting out of household, work and childcare. They are spending less time within the family and arguably more time at work.

Changes in organizational structures and processes, which appear to have reduced hierarchies, have raised new issues in our understanding of the vertical segregation of women. As managers in large corporations, women may be working in much flatter hierarchies. There is a growing discourse in management texts about the

'feminisation' of management. Furthermore, workplaces in the Western world have introduced a range of policies designed to promote equality between women and men in response to widespread equality legislation. All these changes may also be influenced by how corporations themselves view and construct women as workers. It will affect how women see themselves as managers.

Alongside the entry of women into management, there is a trend towards the growing polarisation of women in the global economy, based on inequalities between countries (Mitter 1986; Standing 1989; Acker 1990; Sassen 1996; Castells 1996; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002). It has been argued that the feminisation of migration has been a key reason for the success of Western middle class women and men. Women from poorer countries such as the Phillipines and Sri Lanka, for example, are travelling to richer countries to work in the caring of children and the elderly in rich families. These inequalities are also based on other axes of differentiation within countries (McDowell 1992; Walby 1997; Sassen 2002), between rich and poor, dominant majorities and minorities and between women as a group, as middle class, as working class and as migrants.

Gender relations and women's identities

As such these patterns beg a range of questions about gender relations and women's identities. How far does the entry of women into management positions change how they are defined? Are women managers embodying the notion of the adult gender neutral worker? For over a century in the Western world, women have been identified with the family (Marshall 1994). They have been seen as subordinated to men, doing *different* kinds of work. Men's work is usually valued more and accorded greater access to power and status than that of women (Crompton 1997). Women have normally been defined primarily in relation to the family and household, and men in relation to paid work in the public sphere (Walby 1990; Mcdowell 1992; Barrett and Mackintosh 1984; Oakley 1972).

The notion of identity has undergone major re thinking in the social sciences. The collapse of class as a 'master category', a central defining feature of society, and the production of a 'fixed identity', had been displaced with a plurality of centres.

Recent writings have argued that identities are not 'determined' or changed by class and the material world, but also produced and re-produced through the mass media and through language (du Gay 1997; Hall 1997). Recent theories stress that human beings are also *agents* of their worlds (Lash and Urry 1987; Giddens 1990; Beck 1992; du Gay 1996; Lash 1990; Bauman 1996; Bauman 1998; Bauman 2001; Beck and Beck Gernsheim 2002). In an uncertain risk laden world they have to act reflexively. Since stable ascribed groups can no longer be taken as given and there is no anchoring of identity in family, workplace or community any more, individuals have to 'make up' identity (Bauman 2001). In this way it is argued identities are individualised.

Gendered inequalities may be reproduced or changed through the actions of women themselves, as well as how women are spoken about, what kinds of ways they are represented, as changes in their material conditions. The category of 'woman' is no longer singular, but multiple, differentiated and conflicting between its different identifications. How do women themselves view the social changes and how far do they feel their own sense of self is changing? How far do they feel they can make an individual life of their own?

How is the sexual division of labour changing in the household and are women managers re-negotiating their responsibility for it? There is growing evidence of changing trends in family patterns, with higher rates of divorces, single parenthood, increased cohabitation and a drop in fertility rates in many countries of the world (Jagger and Wright 1999; Castells 1996; Somerville 2000; Beck and Beck Gernsheim 2002; Hochschild 2003).

Gender regimes

It has been argued that we live in a growing *integrated* international global economy. Arguments about whether global change is giving rise to homogenised consumer identities (Robins 1997) and/or similar political systems of liberal democracy (Fukuyama 1989) can be countered by the fact that global change has been uneven, contradictory and has thus had differential effects in different places. An alternative view is that different countries may give rise to different capitalisms (Gray 1998),

different 'gender orders' (Connell 1987) and different 'gender contracts' within countries (Pfau Effinger 1993).

There is little research on comparing women managers in the West with those in the East. There has been some interest in recent years in developing a global picture of where women managers are located (Davidson and Burke 2000; Adler and Israeli 1994). However, there has been less emphasis on comparing women managers in differing societies with some notable exceptions (see for example, Crompton and Birkelund 2000; Richardsen and Burke 2000; Hantrais 1990). There have also been studies which compare women professionals in different countries, for example, Pringle's work (1998) on women doctors in Britain and Australia. However, most cross national studies on women managers have taken place within the Western world comparing different countries in Europe or comparing Europe with the USA (see Davidson and Burke 2000).

Examining women's identities in two different 'gender regimes' (Connell 1987; 1995) enables us to test how far global change has similar or differential effects on the ways women managers are defined and how they define themselves.

Overview of chapters

Part 1

Chapter 1 explores the restructuring of the global economy, including labour market changes, changes in the nation state and the rise of a consumer society. These changes are explored in the context of the implications for managerial women's identities.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the sociological explanations for how women's identities have been defined, taking into consideration theories of late and post modernity. It charts the changing debates about the position of women in society and their relationship to paid work, the family and the institutions in wider society. It focuses primarily on current debates and explanations on identity in the light of the changes in social theory.

Chapter 3 explores the more specific ways in which changing corporate cultures structure women's identities. Organisations themselves have changed in response to global capitalism and their changing structures and cultures have implications for women's identities.

Chapter 4 examines the position of women in management in Singapore and Britain and the similarities and differences in government policy and discourse between Singapore and Britain. It links the discussion on social theory and social change to the empirical analysis contained within Part 2. It analyses how both countries have developed different gender regimes which may have different effects on the ways managerial women's identities are ascribed.

Part 2

Chapter 5 explores the methodologies used for the empirical analysis. It provides brief profiles of the women interviewed including information on: marital status, children, seniority, and how they describe their own ethnicity. It lays out the reasons for using discourse analysis and includes discussion about research values and assumptions in interpreting the field work.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 present the interpretation of the interviews, contrasting Singapore and Britain within each chapter. Each chapter draws on extensive quotes from the women interviewees.

Chapter 6 explores how Singaporean and British managerial women talk about their work identities, as managers in corporate life. It begins by examining how women discuss the managerial cultures of corporate organisations in Singapore and Britain. It interprets the 'gender regimes' in organisations in Singapore and Britain as being differently constituted and expressed in the two countries.

Chapter 7 explores women's talk about their identities as wives and mothers in the light of different levels of support found for domestic and child care work. As in Chapter 6 the thesis suggests that differences between the countries have an important

influence on how far women are able to (re) negotiate their primary identities as mothers and wives.

The reader will be accustomed to reading discussions about women's identities as paid workers and as wives and mothers. But social change and identity theories have also argued that there is a growing individualisation of professional women's identities in wider society. *Chapter 8* therefore examines the relationships between women's talk about meritocracy, ethnicity and class and the process of individualisation. It examines the differences that exist between Singapore in Britain and the significance of government policies and cultural discourse in continuing to ascribe social identities based on ethnicity, gender, class and marital status.

The Conclusion draws together the findings from the empirical analysis and links these to earlier discussions on social theory and social change. It demonstrates that although there has been an increasing 'visible' presence of women managers in our corporations across the world, these processes have not had a homogeneous effect on women's agency and their subjectivities in Singapore and Britain. Government policies, histories and cultural discourses still largely influence the ways in which women's identities are constrained and constructed.

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PART I

Chapter 1: Social change and women's roles

This chapter explores the ways in which the global economy has been restructured. I set out the changes in the labour market and the nation state, and discuss the rise of the consumer society. I argue that the 'knowledge' economy or 'information society' has led to both a professionalisation and a feminisation of the labour market, with a growing visibility of women as managers. I use this broad framework to explore the implications for managerial women's identities.

Global change and the economy

The last twenty or thirty years have been characterized by major social change across the world. We have witnessed the collapse of communism and the subsequent loss of confidence in Marxist theory (Lyotard 1984). The economic and technological changes have placed us in a new era of post industrialism or into an 'information society' (Castells 1996). Technological change has accelerated processes of communication globally; the restructuring of capitalism and the global movement of capital and labour have increased the inter dependence of nations.

The impact of technological change using digital electronic communication has had far reaching effects for financial markets and telecommunications. Information can be sent instantaneously across the world. Accurate up to date information on fashions, tastes, currencies become essential for corporate survival. Knowledge becomes a key commodity. Information itself becomes part of the production process, thus becoming linked to the culture of society in terms of the mass media, entertainment, art and politics. (Castells 1996).

The second parallel development to the 'information' revolution has been the complete reorganization of the global financial system and powers of financial co-

ordination (Harvey 1989). The development of new financial instruments and markets, the ability to have instantaneous currency transactions, the ability to transact about future debts and credit supply, thus collapsing time-future and time-present was made possible by electronic trading. $1.4 trillion are traded in the foreign exchange markets every day through the world's computer networks (Kundnani 1998). Most authors argue that this restricts the power of nation states to control economic and fiscal policy (Kundnani 1998; Harvey 1989, Gray 1998; Ohmae 1990; Hall Held and McGrew 1992).

It is argued there is a growing integrated international global economy, based on a 'free market'. This means a market free of constraints and regulation in relation to trade, labour and the movement of capital. A global interdependent economy is created and an increasing transnationalisation of economic and cultural life is the result (Robins 1997; Dicken 1998; Scott 1997).

On the other hand, others suggest that there is no causal homogenizing process. Castells (1996) argues that the international economy is not global yet since there are restrictions on currency and banking regulations and in the mobility of labour through immigration controls. In fact the world he argues consists of three major regions which are globally economically diversified : North American , European, and the Asian Pacific.

Others have suggested that the global change processes have had different effects in different places, depending on the new relationships between places and regions. While the centrality of nation states may have declined, cultural forms have become more diversified and nationalism and nation building have intensified (Clarke 2000). Furthermore, internal cultures, external migrations and histories within countries may give rise to different capitalisms (Gray 1998).

A further shift in the nature of present day capitalism has been a shift in the West particularly in industrial organization. Most authors refer to this shift as one moving from 'Fordism' - mass bureaucratically organized standardized production - to what is termed 'flexible accumulation' (Harvey 1989).

Accumulation refers to the profit made between the production process and consumption. The key point here is that this flexible accumulation has been made possible by the shift to small batch production, subcontracting, which itself relied on innovation and rapid information exchange. Fashions and tastes for products and services change week to week or month to month. This is only possible by flexibility in the movement of capital, in the exchange of information and knowledge, in the use of labour and in the transformation of the financial markets.

One of the key changes under a 'newer' capitalism has been the rapid participation across the world of women in the labour force. Global interdependence increases competition for markets and employers are pursuing lower labour costs and greater flexibility i.e. casual, temporary, part time work, available throughout the week, to meet the needs of our consumer societies (Acker 1992a; Standing 1989). There is a shifting gendered division of labour and the 'feminisation' of labour.

The world's paid work force is increasingly composed of women and the idea of a family wage for a single worker to support dependents is declining. Women's paid work is becoming more and more necessary for survival (Acker 1992a: 54) and for economic growth and consumerism.

Global change and the welfare state

The decline of the nation state has had effects on welfare. The Keynsian Welfare State had been set up in several countries in Europe, N. America and Australia after the Second World War as part of the 'mixed economy' (Esping Andersen 1990). It was premised on the aim of providing full employment in a relatively closed national economy. This was full time employment based on a male breadwinner, dependent wife and children (Land 1980).

The increasing emphasis making the public sector more 'flexible' and a growing concern about national competitiveness has had its effects on the welfare state. It has become more vulnerable and open to attack since the costs of welfare and how such systems contribute to economic performance are increasingly under the spotlight (Jessop 2000).

The decline of a class based redistributive politics has been replaced by a plurality of emerging identities that emphasize mutual respect and autonomy and an increasing concern with personal empowerment (Jessop 2000). These shifts are leading to more differentiated form of social policy and a restructuring of how welfare is organised and delivered. Across Europe, a mixed economy of welfare is apparent now with a shifting emphasis away from the state to private, voluntary and informal provision (Johnson 1998).

Even in countries which have not had a welfare state such as Singapore, there have been important economic and government policy changes which have affected the nature of welfare provision, for example the acceleration of privatisation in the late 1980s and 1990s (Pyle 1994).

Global change and the polarization of women

Global change has polarized differences between and within societies. The new internationalization of labour has taken an intensely gendered form. Inequalities between richer countries and developing countries have hastened the global division of women's work. Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2002) for example, have argued that the first world takes on the role of the old fashioned 'man' in the family, pampered, unable to clean, or find his socks, whilst poorer countries have taken on the role of the 'traditional woman'. This shift of the role of caring and domestic work from middle class women to poorer women indicates a possible shift in these women's identities. Women managers who succeed in the workplace in this context have strong pressures at work, and are pushed into acting in the way of a typical ambitious career man (Wajcman 1998). These themes are returned to in the research findings and in summarising the new research on women managers below.

Global change and consumer cultures

It has been argued that modern society had separated consumption from production (du Gay 1997; Fuat Firat and Dholakia 1998). Production was what 'men' did at work, whilst consumption took place outside of work, in the home and was associated with 'women'. Furthermore, production was considered critical because it contributed to economic growth and was linked to surplus value. Consumption on the other hand, was considered as non productive and selfish. It did not create surplus value and thus did not contribute to economic growth. For the middle class, success was defined in terms of owning their own home and working to furnish it. Work in the earlier post War decades started to lose its importance. The home was a haven, a creative project, and the aim of paid work (Lasch 1977; Fuat Firat and Dholakia 1998).

It has been argued that global change however blurred the relationship between production and consumption (du Gay 1997) although some would disagree, for example, Glucksmann (1990; 1995; 2000). She argues that we need to reconceptualise 'work' by considering the total social organization of labour (TSOL) including labour in the casual informal economy such as voluntary work, exchange of child care and so on and that transformations in both domestic and market economies in the inter war years and the associated gender allocation of labour between sectors highlighted the coming together of production and consumption. They were already interdependent and thus affected by each other. Despite these disagreements, changes in consumption may not have made *men* more responsible for or equally share caring and cleaning work, paid or unpaid.

As style and demands change rapidly in a new world of flexible production, there is increasing instability in 'jobs for life'. A growing workforce works on contracted labour for specific lengths of time and place. This has created risk and uncertainty in our daily life. (Beck 1992) The traditional ascription of identity for a 'male breadwinner worker' wife and dependent children has all but disappeared (du Gay 1997).

The growth of consumption has increased the desire of both women and men to earn more and consume more. This is particularly marked with middle class dual career families who are using the market for a wide range of consumer commodities and lifestyles, many of which used to be created in the household (Hochshild 2003).

Tens of millions of women are now in the workforce who were not before. Time pressures and the need to find rapid ways of spending 'quality time at home' propel the expansion of consumer experiences (Hochschild 2003), particularly for high earning professionals. As the free market grows, and the nation state declines, consumers become the 'individual' in a consumer culture, rather than a citizen in a political society (Fuat Firat and Dholakia 1998). More and more creative tasks performed in the home are transferred to external society. Domestic work and caring tasks are split up into fragments, contracted out and commercialised. As middle class wives and mothers undertake less and less activities directly, the family is put into competition with the market and the family weakens even more, having major effects on managerial women's identities as wives and mothers. At the same time women's work remains gendered. It may be commercialized, or have become more casual, but it is still women's work.

Some have argued that the participation of women in the labour market and in management particularly have had profound effects on family and gender relations, leading to a crisis in patriarchy, or as Castells (1997) calls it 'the end of patriarchalism'. This 'crisis', argues Castells, can be said to be occurring throughout most of the world and is defined by

> "*the weakening of a model of family based on the stable exercise of authority /domination over the whole family by the adult male head of the family*" (Castells 1997:138).

Changes in family forms are signified by: increasing divorce and separation; increasing frequency of marital crises; the rise of different kinds of households other than a 'nuclear family; and the ability of women to increasingly control their reproduction.(Castells 1997)

However, on the other hand it is argued that people continue to adhere to the idea of a typical family of a couple and children. It is posited that despite the discontinuities in the changing nature of households, some continuity also exists, particularly in the ways in which people are still attached to ideas of couples with dependent children living in the same household. For example, 73% of people in private households in

the UK in 1996 lived in families headed by a married couple. 80% of dependent children lived with their married parents. Continuity in family life is still maintained by extended kinship networks, even though they do not live in the same household. (Jagger and Wright 1999)

The equity in household tasks between women and men has changed very little. Men are still not doing their equal share of domestic work and childcare (Wajcman 1998; Hochschild 1989; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002; Hocshchild 2003). Household relations may have changed somewhat, but more for those women in paid employment than for those who are full time housewives (Walby 1990)

Women who carry out paid work do less domestic labour than their full-time housewife counterparts. However, these 'family' jobs are now increasingly being undertaken amongst the middle classes as subcontracted labour, viz the employment of an army of servants who service the middle classes (Gregson and Lowe 1994; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002). It is still women who co-ordinate this work and it is poor, often immigrant, women who continue to do this work.

Consequences of global change for women

The impact of global change has had several effects on the position of women in the public and private spheres. The free market has led to a decline in the centrality of the nation state and subsequent cutbacks in state welfare. On the one hand, there has been a decline in the idea of the male breadwinner with dependent wife and children. On the other hand, there is a shift away from state provision of welfare toward private, voluntary and informal provision. And it is women who continue to be identified with caring and welfare work.

Women may have gained in one sphere, but have lost out on another. Unemployment is no longer considered 'acceptable' if you are healthy. There is a push for all potential economically active people to participate in the labour market. The growth of the service sector has altered the composition of the workforce, with increasing feminisation. At the same time work is becoming increasingly precarious and unstable, as fashions and tastes change and labour and capital become increasingly

rapidly mobile. Thus women have been entering the labor market and are becoming economically independent in some jobs, but they have entered the labour market under precarious, unstable conditions.

The entry of women into management has polarized further the differences between women within and between countries. The new change in this development is that women managers in dual career couples are directly doing less and less childcare and domestic work. Their primary identities as wives and mothers appear to have weakened. On the other hand it is still women, but women from poorer countries who are being increasingly identified with this work. Men are not doing any more.

The growth of consumer cultures has arguably blurred the relationship between private household consumption patterns and production in the public sphere. As professional elites are required to work longer and longer hours, more and more domestic and child care work is transferred out of the family and is commercialized. The family is put into competition with the market and there is a weakening of women managers' identities as wives and mothers. On the other hand women continue to take/be allocated responsibility for caring and cleaning. Within this contradiction, women make choices as to what is possible. One consequence is changing family forms, which have loosened the definitions of who we describe as 'family' or 'kin'. There is an increasing divorce rate, declining fertility rate cohabitation, and single people households. Managerial women have become less appendages of the family and more economically and socially independent. They are able to consider much more these days of 'having a life of ones own'.

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Chapter 2: Identities and social theory

This chapter begins by exploring the concept of identity in sociology and its changing definition in the light of changing social theory. The discussion explores the debates concerning the concept of identity and the ways in which it has been recently theorised. It argues that recent social theory establishes that identities are multiple, changing, ambivalent, conflicting and can be related to specific social contexts and changed through women and men's agency. It considers the issue of individualisation and argues that the concept of identity needs to be retained. Despite the fact that fragmentation may be a growing trend, continuities exist and new forms of identity may be based on life-style choices, sub-cultures and opinions contained within broader key identities based on such factors as nationality, age, ethnicity and gender.

Women, identity and changing social theory

Identity is a slippery concept and has been subject to much debate and revision in academia in recent years. Identity itself may have lost its earlier common sense meaning of a core of self, unchanging (from the Latin, 'idem' same, continuous). Currently, there is some agreement in sociology on the fact that identities are the interface between our subjective positions and social and cultural situations (S. Hall 1997, Woodward 1997; Connell 1995; du Gay 1997; Brah et al 1999). We use language and images- i.e. representation, and may identify with those images in particular contexts and in specific historical times. Thus we are changing, adapting, or looking to change how we are perceived, since identity construction is never 'perfect'. We derive our social identities from gender, nationality, ethnicity, class, community, sexuality, age i.e. from major structural and cultural factors. Identity is also relational – if you are father, you cannot also be a mother - identity relies on what it is not.

There is a two-way relationship between identities and inequalities. Unequal relationships are reproduced through structures and ideologies. The subordination of women is reproduced, for example, within the workplace and within the family, both

through the structured relegation of women to the private sphere and through ideas about a 'woman's place'. Social change does affect the construction and reproduction of these gendered inequalities. But the actions of individuals and groups may also challenge or collude with the status quo. In other words, the agency of women may affect the ways inequality is reproduced, maintained or changed. Identity, as the centrepiece for this research, is marked, therefore, by the collision of structure and agency (Bhavnani and Phoenix (1994): 6).

Clearly, women and men's agency in making change is limited by wider social and institutional structures processes and ideologies. The practices of social institutions and their discourses define women in particular ways and more specifically define women as managers in particular ways. Men, masculinity and male behaviour are often the reference points in defining women. Women are defined not only in relation to men, but also as wives, mothers, daughters, such that they are subordinate or dependent on men. Men on the other hand are not defined in relation to women, but in the context of the wider public sphere, in relation to work, colleagues etc.

> *Women are precisely defined never general representatives of humanity or all, people, but as specifically feminine and frequently sexual categories. ...being a man is an entitlement not to masculine attributes but to non-gendered subjectivity.*
>
> (Black and Coward 1981:83).

Identities are then relational and are dependent on the identity of other social groups, in this case, women being defined in relation to men and the other way round. Wider societal factors limit women's agency to act and define themselves in ways of their own choosing.

Essentialism or change?

Frequently identity has been marked by people claiming their social identity to be a fixed truth, either through shared history or a biological truth. (S.Hall 1996; Gilroy 1997).There has been much contestation in academia and elsewhere about what

constitutes differences between women and men and whether these differences in behaviour are based on biological and social 'fixed' differences or are subject to social construction and change. There are two strands to the debate on whether identities are 'fixed'. For example common sense and dominant discourse may emphasize the biological aspects of motherhood. This means motherhood is 'taken for granted' and there is an assumption this identity is natural or fixed. On the other hand, this essentialist view may take on a social form, not one based on biological difference.

Arguments in early sociology considered gender in relation to functionalism. Women and men are argued to play different socialised roles, because they are instrumental to service society's needs for production and reproduction (Parsons 1971). This perspective assumes an essentialist idea of what women and men do, unchanging and important for keeping society going, but not necessarily based on biology. Instead this perspective equates femininity with motherhood and with more particular characteristics, such as caring and passivity, which are socially undervalued (Saraga 1998). The unequal worth and work of women relative to men has been a strong factor in the way women have been defined.

These arguments about functionalism were critiqued on the basis that the theory could not account for social change or conflict. Furthermore, writings by feminists challenged the notion of fixed identities. They challenged the notion of the centrality of class to sociology and argued it that it was important to understand all the sites in which women's identities were ascribed (Wallace 1989; Walby 1990; 1997). They recognized the dynamic nature of change for women's identities and argued for changes in both paid work and the family. These writers insisted also on the central importance of the family as well as paid work, because of the need for capital to use the domestic labour of women. Women's unpaid work identities had been ignored. It was important for the family to be acknowledged as benefiting capital by providing a way in which women, for no wages, reproduce the next generation of workers (Weedon 1987).

These perspectives from second wave feminism, which have explained the position of women in the family as an effect of capitalism did acknowledge the fact that identities could and ought to change, albeit as a result of the dismantling of capitalism and class, a rather long term view. But the biological debate on identity re-emerged when these writers were criticised for not taking sufficient account of gender inequality as operating independently from capitalism. These criticisms were made by radical feminists, who saw gender as an elaborate system of male domination, which was at the basis of all social organisation. The term used to signify this universal system of male domination was **patriarchy.** Patriarchy in radical feminist discourse stresses the common oppression of all women without regard to history, culture, class or racial differences. It cannot be escaped except through the radical/revolutionary–feminist strategies of total withdrawal from the world of men controlling the technology of reproduction and separatism (Weedon 1987:9). Part of the process was to celebrate maternity or reproduction, for example, rather than have it devalued. Radical feminism has been influenced by a key text by Shulasmith Firestone, entitled *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970).

Sex and gender

This theoretical approach of radical feminism has been criticised for veering towards a biological essentialism, seeing women and men as biologically opposing entities. Distinctions were therefore made between the concept of sex as dealing with biological differences and 'gender' which was argued to be socially and culturally ascribed (Oakley 1972). These distinctions are still subject to contestation in more recent theory. One view suggests that ostensible biological differences in terms of the body are in fact socially constructed and that gender identities are really only social performances (Butler 1990). Another argues that social construction does have its limits and that we are subject to biology as well, since we cannot escape the fact that bodies give birth, age, get sick and die. Perhaps the important point here is that we cannot conceive of biological and social determination or one being more basic than the other. These two sides may involve a complex process of interaction and this interaction is socially and historically contingent. Biology may be inescapable but that does not mean it is not subject to change (Connell 1997).

The influence of post modernism has built further on the idea that all identities shift and are socially constructed. In fact an opposite theoretical look suggests that women and men are not 'innately' different, but occupy discursive subject positions in organizations which are thoroughly gendered. Butler (1990) has contested notions of gendered 'identities'. She has argued that all gender identities are marked by performances and there is no such thing as gender. The distinction between male and female, based as it is, on a heterosexist worldview is reproduced by people acting in gendered ways. It is these performances that need to be subverted in order to challenge the specific range of gender identities open to women and men. Gendered identities, I will argue, are not just about performance, which can be changed a little more easily, but are also about the way in which power is embedded in our societies. They are also implicated in the material aspects of identity, such as the kind of housing, education or benefits you may be entitled to. Butler's views have been challenged by Connell (1995) and Hearn (1992) on masculinity (see below)

Renewed interest in identity and social theory

The late 1980s and 1990s saw a renewed interest in the concept of identity. There were three reasons for its re-appearance. Firstly, the collapse of class as a 'master category', a central defining feature of society, and the production of a 'fixed identity', had been displaced with a plurality of centres. Class and therefore society had been 'dislocated' and this dislocation offered the possibility of new emerging identities (Laclau 1990). The theorising of post modernism, with its emphasis on difference and subjectivity re-opened the debate about the concept of identity and its associated meanings.

A second reason for the renewed interest in identity has taken place as a result of the 'turn to culture' (see Barrett 1991). Identities are not 'determined' or changed by class and the material world, but also produced and re-produced through the mass media and through language (du Gay 1997; Hall 1997). The influence of ideology and culture were to be important in how this developed. The writings of Saussure, Foucault and Derrida have made a substantial contribution to 'cultural studies' and to an increased understanding of the constitutive role of culture (signs, symbols) in the

social world (du Gay 1997), following work by Althusser on ideology and subjectivity (1969).

Subjectivity and the ways in which subjects are (re)produced has led to further writing on the relationship between the ascription of identity through culture and structure, and the conscious and unconscious thoughts and feelings about 'who we are'. The work of Stuart Hall (1997) on representation and how 'subjects' are recruited into (sexualised?) identities derives also in part from the work of Lacan and the influence of psychoanalysis.

Thirdly, an interest in identity has been fuelled by the analysis of global change and its effects on human beings. Recent writing in sociology has attempted to theorize how our late/ post modern societies has changed our understanding of society (Lash and Urry 1987; Giddens 1990; Beck 1992; du Gay 1996; Lash 1990; Bauman 1996; Bauman 1998; Bauman 2001; Beck and Beck Gernsheim 2002). Human beings have to act reflexively in an uncertain risk laden world. There is no anchoring of identity in family, workplace or community any more, so the argument goes, since all these institutions have been subject to massive social and technological change. The overpowering role of a consumer society and the uncertainty of the effects of change on individuals have focussed our attention onto individuals who have to 'make up' identity (Bauman 2001).

The decline of class and a stable social identity

Historical writings and debate on identity had been confined primarily to the discipline of psychology. In the past, there was an implication that identities were singular, fixed and perhaps related to a core of self (Woodward 1997). In later debates, it has been argued that we cannot think of identity as a static phenomenon. Both psychological and sociological writing on identity has suggested identity is subject to change and is socially constructed (Erikson 1950; 1975; Mead 1934; Berger 1966; Giddens 1991; S. Hall 1996; 1997; du Gay 1996; 1997; Laclau 1990; Woodward 1997; Bauman 1998).

Societal changes have contributed to later theorizing about identity. Economic political and technological global change has been far reaching. The decline of manufacturing and the loss of mainly 'male' working class jobs and the increasing presence of women in the service sector globally have reinforced the view that identities are subject to change (Castells 1996). Self-identification in modernity used to be a task of 'fitting in', a 'keeping up with the Joneses'; it was about conforming to social type (Bauman 2001). As Savage has argued, (1996) the working classes were the reference point against which other classes have been identified. The apparent decline of the working class came to be associated with the decline of class itself as a defining feature of society.

Part of this 'decentring' has taken place as a result of social movements in the 1960s, such as those of gay men and lesbians, women and civil rights (Rutherford 1990; Hall 1997). Feminist explanations for women's position and the debates about the nature of patriarchy as operating separately from class, pushed for an understanding of the specificities of gender and the particular position of women (Walby 1990).

Later arguments explored how social identities were intersected also by 'race' (Anthias and Yuval Davis 1992). In earlier writings, black feminists attempted to make links between their positions in the West, and women in the 'developing world'. They took issue with the invisibility of racism, for example, in explaining women's labour market positions and they also questioned more generally the assumption of white feminism in discussing women as a unitary category (Mama 1984, 1992; Carby 1982; Parmar 1982; hooks 1981). These criticisms questioned the nature of knowledge in the feminist episteme and led to writings on the nature and specificity of black women's experiences in fiction (e.g. Alice walker, Toni Morrison) and in fact. It was argued that feminism as a framework needed to question itself and the thought that it had generated (Hill Collins 1991). This was to challenge the homogeneity of the category of 'woman' and the idea of a unified identity (Moore 1994), rather these new identities were fractured identities based on inequalities of 'race', class, gender and age (Bradley 1996). The question of marital status has also become increasingly important as a category, because of the increased participation of married women with dependent children in the labour market (Halford Savage and Witz 1997). These new

multiple identities have been much discussed in relation to post modernism and difference.

Post modernism and difference

A set of writings from post modernists is broadly characterised by the view there is no objective social world, which exists outside of our pre-existing knowledge of, or discourse about it (Maynard 1994). There is thus much scepticism about the possibility of distinguishing between 'real' aspects of the social world, on the one hand, and the concepts, modes of understanding and meanings through which they are apprehended, on the other. Others authors, such as Giddens (1990) disagree, preferring to talk about late modernity, as marking these changes, but not accepting the view that there is no objective social world. Whichever way we term these changes, postmodernism or late modernity is locked into confrontation with modernist modes of thought, which are premised upon the search for grand theories and objectivity and the assumption of a unified rational subject. In contrast, postmodernism emphasises fragmentation, deconstruction and the idea of multiple selves (Maynard 1994: 15)

This position is thus about difference, subjectivity and identity. The category 'woman' as a unified subject has been questioned. The social construction of the world is argued to be historically and culturally specific; identities are never fixed, but fluid and changing involving a complex relationship between language, representation, material realities, political contexts and agency. Identities should no longer, it was argued, be based on binaries i.e. women and men, black and white, gay and straight (Derrida 1976). These categories themselves needed to be examined for their relationships to each other. They needed to be deconstructed, in order to examine the differences between and within each side of the binary (Woodward 1997). The argument that gendered identities are no longer based on binaries of men and women , but are intersected as well as being about differences within and between men and women has led to research which has categorized identities (such as middle class white women) more specifically.

The 'turn' to culture in social theory

The idea that identities were not fixed and subject to change was given further force because of the renewed interest in language and the role of culture in social theory. The structuralist linguists such as Ferdinand Saussure, argued we are not in any final sense the authors of the words we use, the statements that we make or the meanings we express. Saussure's theory of language argued that language signified meaning because it was subject to its own rules and methods within our cultures (S. Hall 1992b; Woodward 1997). Language he argued was a social system, which existed before us, and thus we cannot in any sense be its authors. A whole range of meanings embedded in our language and cultural systems activates these words we utter or write. Meanings arose because of the ways in which words were related to each other in the language code.

Post structuralists such as Derrida (1976) elaborated on Saussure, arguing that meaning can never be fixed, including the meaning of one's identity. It is always subject to the play of difference, because words carry echoes from other contexts, and are always subject to change. Speech and text alike cannot reveal the truth; they are all open to be 'deconstructed', a challenge to the ways in which they validate themselves.

The emphasis on material reality and social structures in sociology had previously relegated analysis of 'culture' to an inferior role. There was no empirical method in which one could verify or get to the truth of these kinds of analyses. With the questioning of the idea of 'one truth', the realm of language, image, text assumed a greater influence. But 'culture' was difficult to grasp as a concept. Culture was, after all' based on non-tangible signs, symbols, images, languages, beliefs (du Gay et al 1997). Recent years however, have seen an upsurge of what has been called 'the turn to culture'. This increasing emphasis on non-material signs and symbols was to have a major effect on theorizing identity in relation to gender. Together with the emergence

of the idea of multiple intersecting identities, writers sought to examine women and men in different contexts.

Arguments developed that there are in fact a variety of masculinities and femininities, and these all need to be deconstructed. Thus we have seen an increase of writing exploring the specific social construction of identities for mothers (Phoenix, Woollett and Lloyd 1991; Chodorow 1999 ; Woodward 1997), of secretaries (Pringle 1989) of working class women (Skeggs 1997) of a variety of ethnicities e.g Irish women (Hickman and Walter 1998) and Jewish women (Burman 1994); South Asian women (Brah 1992) middle class African Caribbean women (Essed 1996) and differing masculinities (Segal 1990; Connell 1987; 1995; Hearn 1992; Collinson and Hearn 1996).

The specificities and origins of womanhoods

The relationship between ascribed identities in differing situations has also begun to be explored. For example under colonialism, ideologies of white womanhood were constructed at the height of empire in the late nineteenth century. These ideologies were related to the impact of industrialisation and the growth of a middle class. Women were defined as respectable and good, if they did not do paid work. Ideologies of purity, respectability and high status, were accorded to wives who engaged in the day to day business of employing servants and managing a household. But this relationship of women to domesticity was less marked amongst working class women (Walby 1990).

The position of women as 'belonging in the household' in industrialisation was influenced by ideological and material reasons. There was a shift in the ideology of womanhood, primarily by the bourgeoisie, the new middle class who did not need another wage in the household (Davidoff 1992). The historical context of Empire and the perceived threats to white women's position in relation to black men and black women defined the positions of black and white women, middle class and working class. The influence of eugenics and the scientific discourses on the purity of the

'white race' helped to construct the femininity of white women, particularly middle class women (C. Hall 1992; Stoler 1997).

Gender regimes/gender contracts

Connell (1987; 1995) has brought together a theory on gender which links personal agency/life with social structures and ideologies. Human agency is contextualised within subjectivity in relation to discourses and structures, but this is changing and changeable according to particular social groupings at particular social moments. He argues gender relations are apparently intractable, but concrete practices and relationships can change. If we can identity the conflicts in gender relations, we can construct appropriate strategies.

Connell argues that identities are structured through a variety of institutions, family, workplace, the state and in public life in the street. These identities reinforce the sexual division of labour, but in different ways in different sites. They each have their own 'gender regimes' for maintaining male authority. However, they are not without resistance from human agents, either individually or collectively. These resistances may come about at the same time as massive changes, for example through the decline of manufacturing or changing technologies, and their effects on working class men. Cultural practices then become a site for struggle over identities of masculinities and femininities.

Other writings on women have for example explored comparative situations in differing countries to explain women's labour market patterns. Pfau-Effinger (1993) is interested in exploring differences in the amount of part time work carried out by women in two different countries, Germany and Finland. Each country she argues has its own 'gender contract'. These gender contracts are related to employers' actions, state provisions and country specific cultural norms and values. She considers the latter as critical for understanding her research. She describes the German model of the 'gender contract' as the 'male breadwinner marriage'. This 'marriage' has become

modernised as a result of the expansion of the service sector. Women do now work part time and both women and men actively support this socio-cultural consensus. In Finland, the gender contract is one based on what she terms an 'equalisation model'. Women there have the same orientation to the labour market as men. Within this context, women's agency becomes differently acted upon, such that women in Finland are less willing to put up with the second class status of part time work. She explains the development of these gender contracts as related to the rate of transition of both societies to industrialisation and the economic need for women in the labour market at the time.

Both Connell's and Pfau-Effinger's work are important contributions to understanding the relationship of agency to ascribed identities in differing social and historical contexts. They form an invaluable contribution to this comparative study. Connell is important for this research since he identifies social change as leading to contestation around identity. Furthermore, he opens up the possibility, like Cynthia Cockburn's detailed work in trades unions for example, of understanding how gendered identities are structured and responded to in specific historical and social contexts. It is possible therefore to use comparative research in different countries or situations to explore the different ways in which gendered identities are responding to social change.

Differing sites then give rise to differing patriarchies or gender relations. Work organisations and their corporate cultures also have become an important focus for understanding how they contributed to identity ascription for women managers (Kanter 1977, Acker 1990; Casey 1995). Gendered identities in organisations have been extensively recently researched, and are explored in Chapter 3 on corporate cultures.

The importance of agency in identity

Issues of fragmentation, change and subjectivity implied by post modernism has greatly affected social research on identity. Research on gendered identities in relation

to specific sites as well as historical and social contexts has become important. Examining differences between countries and types of work organisations, have suggested a new dynamism in understanding social identity.

An implication of these perspectives is that our sense of self is dynamically constituted and subject to change through differing institutional regimes of power. Differing sites such as work organizations, family, and education institutions could all differ in how gender relations were ascribed and constituted. Discussions on the gendering of organisations provide a good example of examining specific sites for different patriarchies.

> *At a social level, this perspective suggests that having a singular, coherent rational subjectivity is inadequate because the interplay between different institutional regimes of power continually reproduces a variety of subjectivities. It is argued that rather than social collectivites authoring self-identity through their intrinsic authentic claims, social collectivities are dependent upon the establishment of other social groups relationally to themselves. .... hence individuals are not the passive recipients or objects of structural processes. They are not such tabulae rasae to be injected with or even constructed with the ideology of the day, but are constructively engaged with the ideology of the day, but are constructively engaged in the securing of identities.*

(Rowbotham 1989:18 quoted in Brah Hickman Mac An Ghaill (1999) eds.: 4).

These perspectives then take us into the idea of an active forging of our identities in the light of various constraints. It makes explicit the issue of women as active agents.

Identification

But we are still left with the question of why we identify with some images/discourses than others? The ways in which individuals form their identities takes place through identification and originates in the writings of Freud and the concept of identification

(Woodward 1997). We can only experience our sense of self (our subjectivity) socially. Identification with someone else takes place through the representation of images, ideas and thoughts via language, or via other media of communication.

It has been argued by Lacan (Grosz 1989) that such identification is based on ambivalence from the beginning. For one's first identification normally begins with one's parents who are at the same time, both love objects and objects of rivalry. This ambivalence is grounded in fantasy, projection and idealisation. It is part of our unconscious, which has been repressed and is expressed through dreams or what are termed Freudian 'slips'. The unconscious follows its own system of thought and is structured like a language. The ambivalence so produced is based on splitting different parts of ourselves into masculine, feminine, good, bad etc. (Hall 1997; Rattansi 1994). We can only form our identities through representations of those who may be like ourselves, via language, images, film, and art. These identities position us as to who we are, but this *who we are* is always looking for the 'ideal', the perfect fit (Hall 1997). It is never final, never complete. It is dynamic and changing. At the same time, representation of women is all around us, limiting the ways in which we could describe ourselves.

The concept of identity

Identities then are multiple, changing, ambivalent, conflicting, related to specific social contexts and can be changed through women and men's agency. They are never fixed nor do they reach a certain destination, a final way of seeing oneself. They are these days thoroughly implicated with human agency and change.

This approach to understanding identity has of course raised other questions about its meaning. It may be subject to change and may involve a series of multiple identities based on social collectivities that change, stay the same, and/or cause conflicts for subjectivities according to our more specific situations.

These debates about the fragmented, changing nature of identities have however, also brought the very idea of 'identity' into question. If we have several identities and they change a great deal, should we retain the concept? If social identity does not mean

what we thought it meant, is it right to jettison it and replace it with something else? These questions are partly answered by recent theoretical writing about the processes of 'individualisation'. They raise questions about fragmentation taken to its logical extreme: individual and group differences which are changed and acted upon by 'selves' as new bases for forming identity. Have social collectivities ceased to be meaningful and been replaced by our consumer society? Or is it the case that they are no longer ascribed in a long term way? The next section considers these questions, which were themselves influenced by changing theoretical perspectives on agency and reflexivity.

Identity, reflexivity and individualisation

Feminism had argued in the 1960s that *'the personal is the political'*. Feminism also emphasised how women became aware of their bodies. The social construction of gender and the biological category of 'sex' both made people reflexively aware of their bodies.

Giddens (1990) continued this argument, stating the relationship of personal life to political and social issues was very important in understanding post modern notions of self identity. The way we see the self in late modernity, he argued is a reflexive project.

A person's identity is neither given nor simply a reaction to other people's perceptions, but consists of the capacity 'to keep a particular narrative going'. (Tucker 1998:186). The self becomes continuously reflexive, argues Giddens, in late modernity, weighing up risks, opportunities, for different strategies and so on. (Giddens 1990; Tucker 1998). Giddens talks about the ways in which time and space are separated, where there exist disembedding mechanisms, such as abstract systems (symbolic tokens and expert systems) which provide the drive for self reflexivity. He defines reflexivity as being aware of the choices and possibilities to engage with a new sense of self for the conditions created by our late modern age.

"The reflexivity of modernity extends into the core of the self. Put in another way, in the context of a post traditional order, the self becomes a reflexive

project. Transitions in individuals' lives have always demanded psychic reorganisation, something which was ritualised in traditional cultures in the shape of rites de passage. But in such cultures where things stayed more or less the same from generation to generation on the level of collectivity, the changed identity was clearly staked out – as when an individual moved from adolescence opt adulthood. In the settings of modernity by contrast the altered self has to be explored and constructed as apart of the reflexive process of connecting personal and social change. "

(Giddens 1991: 32-33)

Beck (1992 Risk Society) has argued along similar lines to Giddens. He writes of how we now live in a risk society, having moved out of a stable modernity based on production and distribution. Modernity was class based and positioned our identity along this axis. But uncertainty has now been created by new times. Organizational activity, social relations and technology are changing rapidly and creating risks for us. Lifestyles have changed because of the disintegration of communities, barriers to mobility and changes in traditions and rituals. We have moved from having ascribed and stable class status to a state when we are all actors trying to choose between a huge array of disparate social identities. These then have replaced class as our key ascribed identity into identities based on nationality, age, ethnicity and gender. Within these there are lifestyle choices, sub cultures and opinions which are there for us to choose.

Beck and Beck Gernsheim have elaborated on these themes in later works (Beck 1999; Beck and Beck Gernsheim 2002). They argue that we must take as our reference point the process of individualization. If seen in terms of a person's biography, we can see that the traditional rhythms of life are being broken up through global change in the family and the labour market. *" As a result, more people than ever before, are being forced to piece together their own biographies and fit in the components they need as best as they can. "* (Beck and Beck Gernsheim: 88). As education, labour markets and legislation change, so women increasingly become more aware of the possibility of autonomy and self sufficiency without a man. These changes can have contradictory effects. On the one hand, women are still identified

with family, because of their continuing responsibility for all things domestic. On the other hand, they are no longer an appendage to the family, but must increasingly come forward as individuals with their own interests and rights, plans and projects (Beck and Beck Gernsheim 2002 p. 90).

Bauman takes the idea of individualised identity even further, exploring what he terms 'liquid' identity. He argues that the current times of later modernity have shifted us from stable solid certainties such as jobs, personal relationships, leisure, marriage etc into a world of uncertainty and fragmentation. Everything in our world is shifting, episodic and not necessarily linked together. Nothing seems clear. Paths to an end no longer exist. The world is unstable and 'liquid' and we are encouraged to fall back on our own actions as individuals. The uncertainty created is thus a powerful individualising force. The decline of collectivity and the idea of a unified thinking and action have been replaced by an individualized consumer society. Power is hard to put your finger on – it exists in cyberspace and in electronic communication networks. He supports Beck's views on individualization, arguing that we are now being forced into positions where identity construction is a universalizing force, rather than public common interests.

The concept of reflexivity by the above authors has been important in putting the idea of agency back into social theory, and is particularly relevant in relation to identity and this research on managerial women. The issue of individualisation however raises debates about the very concept of social identities based on group collectivities as argued above. Furthermore the fragmentation of identities into smaller and smaller pieces begs questions about the continuing use of identity. In the light of the intersection of multiple changing identities, is it feasible to continue, for example, to use the category 'woman'? The debate certainly questions implicitly whether gendered identities still matter.

Counter to this, is an argument about continuities in how gender identities are ascribed, rather than a sole emphasis on discontinuities. Just because the category of 'woman' has become fragmented, the idea of gendered identities has not gone away. Not using the category woman ignores how gender and sex is intrinsic to the organisation of women's work and home lives and thus needs to be still used

(Wajcman 1998). Despite global change women still remain industrially, occupationally and vertically segregated, even if they have entered management. Women managers despite their paid labour market position still remain responsible for domestic work and child care (Wheelock 1990; Brannen and Moss 1991; Wajcman 1998). Men still do not share equally in household work despite the fact that both partners in a house may work full time (Hochschild 2003). Women managers still continue to be treated as 'women' managers because our corporations are gendered organizational cultures (Newman and Itzin 1995; Acker and van Houten 1992; Billing and Alvesson 1994). Women's unpaid work is still associated with them as women and is undervalued. Although these arguments about individualization and fragmentation are extremely persuasive, there is a contradiction in the idea of a linear progression towards individualization.

It is difficult to jettison the concept of a social identity or more specifically gender, i.e. 'women' and 'men' entirely. If we jettison women as a category, we must also jettison men as a category. But a focus on men illuminates power in society (Collinson and Hearn 1996; Connell 1987; 1995). According to Hall (1996), identity is a concept 'under erasure'. It no longer means what it used to mean. But until we have a better way of describing the ways in which our 'selves' identify with social collectivities and interact with them, it is argued here that it is better to continue to use the concept. Furthermore, in line with Beck's arguments, these processes of individualization may lead to newer forms of social identity, making it extremely difficult to ignore the concept entirely.

CONCLUSIONS

Implications of social theory and identity for this study

The concept of identity in social theory has undergone much change. A stable class based identity has declined with the decline of the centrality of class. But class may not have gone away, as a way of understanding identity. Material based classed conditions interact with the ways in which women and men are represented through culture and ideology. The mass media and language are key sites for understanding

discourses about identities. Identities are multiple, shifting, contradictory and subject to change depending on both structural and cultural constraints.

An example might be the best way of illustrating the perspective of multiple interacting identities. For example, if you live in a big expensive house in the centre of a well heeled area, you are more likely to be ascribed the identities, rich, educated, middle class, tax evading/law abiding. If you live on an inner city estate and are young and male, you may be ascribed identities of possible criminal, working class, respectable and/or hooligan.

Identities are also affected by the contexts in which subjects are 'interpellated' or recruited into identities. A middle class woman manager in Singapore may have more in common with middle class women in Britain, than working class women in Singapore. But she may position herself and be positioned differently once ethnicity, parenthood, age, and national identity are taken into consideration. She may also position herself differently, depending on the type of work organisation she works in and where she is located in the hierarchy. She may also position herself differently once we take specific country policies and contexts into account, such as support for child care, discourse about gender, historical development of industrialization, for example. She may also position herself differently depending on the type of household she lives and how the domestic division of labour is divided up. She could also be caught up in the ascription of key conflicting identities for women, and feel ambivalent about being both a mother and a full time paid worker.

The notion of identity as 'fixed' has therefore been questioned, particularly in the light of the meanings of words and texts theorized through post structuralism. Contradictions and ambivalence could be resolved, or not, through women's own actions. It is argued that we all make and remake multiple identities, and that these shift and change, and are shifted and are changed in differing contexts.

These implications for understanding the identities of women managers provide a theoretical framework for this study.

The corporations in this study, described in the next chapter, are both 'local' banks (local to the country) and international banks. These different types of organisations may affect women managers differently in Singapore and Britain. Government policies may be more important in the local ones than in the international ones, or they may have similar effects. For example, work life balance policies have been primarily introduced in Britain. They are in place but run counter to long - hours cultures of high earning professionals. These policies implicitly assume women will remain responsible for families and therefore will always have to balance career progression and family. Do these policies as symbols make a difference to women managers' subjectivities in different banks in Britain? In Britain women managers enter corporate cultures with competing discourses, conflicting pressures and implicit constraints legitimating their identities as wives and mothers and paid workers. Organisational change encourages the discourse of difference and equality, even though corporate cultures are re gendering and legitimating women managers as 'women' **and** 'managers'. Management is also attractive and provides a perfect way of obtaining self worth and influence. How do women cope with these contradictions?

In Singapore it is explicitly stated that women are mothers and wives and must do their duties to the country by working full time *and* being responsible for families. There are no work life policies introduced by employers to Singapore. The government has instead made available widespread support for domestic labour through the encouragement of maids from poorer countries. Does the lack of these policies further entrench women managers in Singapore as primarily wives and mothers? Since there have been no social policies which debate equality, it could be that women's social identities remain reinforced by both local and international corporate cultures. With hardly any feminist discourse in Singapore how do Singaporean women feel about their roles as wives and others? At the same time, global change and the relocation of multi national corporations in Singapore may bring in a more 'Western' style organisational culture and offer some challenge to the unifying identities of Singaporean Chinese women. This will be explored in the research findings.

The first two chapters on the empirical findings, therefore, will explore the changing identities and contradictions therein of women as managers and as wives and mothers.

The third chapter will consider the arguments on the processes of individualisation of identities in wider society. The reader will be accustomed to reading about women's identities as paid workers and as wives and mothers. But global change has raised contradictions about the ways in which professional women's identities are becoming 'individualized'. The third chapter on the empirical findings (Chapter 8) therefore uses the interviews with women in Singapore and Britain to examine how these processes of individualization affect women managers' subjectivities.

The variety of ways in which women respond to all these contradictory pressures in Singapore and Britain will be explored in the analysis of the interviews in this research. But first we must turn to understanding the theoretical context of women managers' identities in corporate cultures.

Identity, Women Managers and Social Change: Comparing Singapore and Britain

CHAPTER 3

Women's identities in corporate management

Introduction

This chapter concentrates on the changing relationship between work and family for women managers in changing corporations. It focuses on the processes of change, particularly the entry of women into management, and the effects on gendered identities. On the one hand women in increasing numbers are now in positions of visibility and authority in organizations, on the other they continue to be occupationally, industrially and vertically segregated. It explores some of the key themes relating to the nature of women in management and finds that gendered organizational cultures are remarkably resistant to change, despite widespread change within corporations.

Labour markets and organisational change

The rise of the service sector, the transformation of the financial markets, changes from Fordist systems of industrial production to flexible accumulation, have all increased consumerism. The feminisation of the workforce, with the decline of manufacturing and the male breadwinner model of work, has changed the composition and structure of large corporations. Women are increasingly being represented in management positions. Corporate restructuring, the delayering of organizations and the decline of the single long-term career are then common trends in capitalist economies (Castells 1996).

These changes are also related to the ways in which paid work has been re-organised. The distribution of labour has changed with a decline of routine, managerial, clerical and manual jobs. Differences have arisen between 'core' workers in the firm and the 'periphery'. (Casey 1995; Castells 1996). The former are characterized by having high levels of managerial and professional skills which received good material rewards in

order that continued commitment to the organization is ensured (Morgan 1999). Whilst women are gaining more management positions there is increasing polarization of women. Work for most people is becoming casualised and temporary and therefore precarious and uncertain. It is still women who form the bulk of the periphery, work characterized by being casual, temporary and part time. Thus in wider society existing gendered differences in power and inequality is being reproduced.

Women in management

There is a drive to be more people oriented in organizations, 'to feminize management' (Fondas 1997; Clarke and Newman 1997). Women managers are increasing their representation in corporations suggesting there is a challenge to male domination of these occupations. In the Fordist regimes of work, women's skills of 'caring ' for clients or supporting male bosses, were given low value (Davies 1995). The increasing stress on transformational leadership puts a greater emphasis on communication, network and partnership building, rather than command and control styles of management. Intimate and personal dimensions of senior managers' interactions with their employees have brought the 'personal' into management and organizations (Clarke and Newman op.cit.). These change processes suggests that work is more than 'doing a job' to comply with a contract. It brings together corporate goals with self realization goals (du Gay 1997). Similar changes in the composition of management have occurred in both Britain and Singapore as is demonstrated in the next chapter.

In both the USA and Britain, there has been a great deal of research and debate about the position of women in management (for an overview of research see recent volumes of research issues related to women in management i.e. Davidson and Burke 1994 ; Davidson and Burke 2000; also Adler and Israeli 1994). There has been much less work in SE Asia; however, recent analyses suggest this is a growing area of interest. (Chan and Lee 1994; Low Guat Tin 1993; Ong Fon Sim 1991; Lee et al 1999; Kim and Ling 2001).

The management jobs being taken up by women are often 'new' jobs and not jobs where women have replaced men. The decline of manufacturing industry in the West has disproportionately affected working class men across ethnicity. Women have taken up feminised jobs in the service sector and risen up the ranks in Europe and the USA. They are now servicing what has been called the 'service class' (see Chapter 2 (Crompton 1986; Crompton and Sanderson 1990; Savage and Witz 1992; Crompton 1997; Rubery et al 1999).

The growth of personal and business services accounts for much of the job creation for women across the world (Castells 1996). Women and men continue to be employed in differing occupational and industrial sectors. Women are over-represented in clerical and secretarial work, and sales and personal service occupations. Managerial occupations are also reproduced in gendered forms. Women managers are segregated by both industry and occupation. Nor have women managers overcome the gender pay gap which exists. Despite the entry of women into management, there still remains a glass ceiling for women to enter senior management positions.

The entry of women into management has been a mixed blessing. While women have become increasingly visible in large corporate organizations, labour market restructuring reinforces the identities of women as being unequal to men. Their segregation into specific managerial occupations, the enduring pay gap with men, as well as their minimal representation at senior level places them into unequal positions as they enter corporate organisations.

Key factors affecting women in management

What then are the factors then which might propel women into newer identities or hold them back within the changing workplace in both countries? Do women currently have different attitudes and aspirations to careers and senior management, that are different from men's? What part do change processes in organisations play in re- constructing gendered identities? Explanations emphasizing progressive change together with the re-

segregation in women's paid work as managers in corporations have brought forth new debates and resurrected old ones.

Key explanations have covered four themes. Firstly, individual (sex) differences between women and men in traits, career aspirations and educational levels continue to be debated and studied. Secondly, the theme of the salience of family life in the lives of women continues to attract study. The third theme concentrates on structures and processes in organisations which re-construct gendered identities, based on gender roles and stereotypes. The fourth explanation for women's re-segregation in management argues that the nature of organsations is gendered and that removing barriers and streamlining processes in organizations will not in themselves be adequate to change the *gender relations* of management. I examine each of them in turn.

Differences between women and men

Individual differences in attributes to be managers

Debates on 'difference' have been applied to women's aspirations, educational qualifications and commitment to careers, since it is argued they 'choose' to put their family responsibilities before their paid work ones (Becker 1985; Hakim 1996; see Wajcman 1998). It has also been argued in debates about 'the glass ceiling' that women may lack the necessary traits, education levels and behaviours to progress (Davidson and Cooper 1992).

The emphasis on consumers in our society has brought with it two things: a tendency to measure worth in financial terms and a growing individualisation. These issues were considered in Chapter 1. Paid work has increased significance for men and women's lives. The trend towards single living, later marriage and higher levels of separation and divorce than previously, make both women and men feel they want to have life of their own (Beck and Beck Gernsheim 2003; Howard and Tibballs 2003). This means they recognize they have to become financially independent. Seventy per cent of men and

women in a recent study said it was important 'to be in control of you life' (Future Foundation (2000) cited in Howard and Tibballs 2003).

In career terms, women who are middle managers recognise they have not attained the positions to which they aspire, but still remain optimistic about getting to senior level and think it is realistic (Wentling 2003). Furthermore, women managers are spending longer and longer hours at work, and thus we can assume are committed to pursuing a career (Hochschild 2003).

Authors of the term 'the glass ceiling' found no evidence for lack of educational qualifications (Morrison et al 1987). Recent work on women's educational qualifications shows they are interested in pursuing careers and aspire to obtain educational qualifications. This upgrading of educational qualifications by women over the last forty years has not been reflected in their career opportunities or pay (Apter 1993).

Gendered differences in leadership style

The argument about differences in women and men as managers has also been couched in terms of differences in management style between women and men. Do women bring different skills and qualities to leadership than men do? Increasing competition and global change has encouraged a great deal of analysis on how management needs to be more participative, involving, learning, instead of controlling, together with an emphasis on consensus decision making (Rosener 1990). More and more management is described in traditional feminine terms of sharing responsibility, not hierarchical and building networks – the feminisation of management (Bohl et al 1996; Fondas 1997; Vinkenburg et al 2000). As organizations 'de-layer' and become team oriented, it has been argued that future thinking organisations need to adopt relation oriented, nurturing and caring qualities. Management and business writing continues to debate this issue in newspapers, journals and the popular media.

There has been little support for arguments which ostensibly provide the legitimacy for the promotion of women into senior positions in past research studies. A study on managerial differences showed hardly any differences between women and men in traits, abilities, education and motivation (Powell 1988; 1993; Fagenson 1993; Alimo-Metcalfe 1994). More recent research also demonstrates that women and men do not show these differences in their approaches to management (Wajcman 1998). The most recent study done by Oshagbemi and Gill (2003), reviewed the leadership styles of men and women managers in the UK. Their study found that women managers delegate less than their male counterparts, but that there were no statistical differences between their directive, consultative and participative styles. Women also differed from men in only one aspect of leadership behaviour out of seven, namely inspirational motivation.

A broader review of gender and management styles, examined whether women and men did have differences in managerial style and effectiveness. It concluded there were no real differences in personal factors or behaviour, and that both women and men resemble a current management prototype (Vinkenburg et al 2000). Other writers have questioned the idea of 'feminine leadership' implying that discourse about such differences essentialises the identities of women and men managers (Billing and Alvesson 2000) and in fact leadership styles are as varied within the categories 'women' and 'men'. On the other hand, authors still argue that research has concentrated on self description in order to come to conclusions about women and men managers differences, and we need more research on what managers actually 'do' (Fondas 1997).

It is perhaps more revealing to ask why this discourse of difference has now taken this turn. Some argue that the discourse of women as being different, i.e. nurturing and caring, may provide the reasons to channel them into dealing with certain re-segregated work patterns of human resource management or in dealing with customers (Ferrario 1991). These are often dead end career tracks (Nichols 1993).

The prior obligation to family

The argument that women prioritise family life over work remains a contentious one. Evidence in Chapter 1 shows that women managers could not do all the domestic work and childcare as well as work full time in the labour market. The use of subcontracted labour for a range of cleaning and caring tasks was one way in which these tensions could be resolved. Men were not doing much more in domestic work and child care than if their partners were not in paid work. Women take responsibility for these tasks, even if they are not directly doing them. Apter argued in 1993 in her work on professional women, that work-family conflict was related to the social structures of work and family and it was always going to be difficult to combine motherhood and paid work. Women coped by going round the set patterns at home and work (Apter op.cit) Women appear to be changing their behaviour within these constraints, but men have lagged behind.

Changes in women's behaviour have not been recognized by corporations. Ideologies of motherhood still shape ideas of women in the workplace, as discussed so long ago by Brannen and Moss (1990) and Hochschild (1989). These ideologies left women to cope with both roles, and they ended up bearing the cost. They cut down the time for leisure activities, paid domestic help in the home, changed jobs, cut hours and postponed promotion. They were left with guilt, multiple responsibilities and most of the domestic work. The realities of the dual career lifestyle made women keep the two closely linked parts of their lives – motherhood and employment separate. This led to the rise of super mother or superwoman, who has to do both things, without sacrificing either.

The second shift (Hochschild 1989) can be highly stressful for women, working long hours in the 'new' organisation culture, showing commitment to paid work, and managing child rearing and running a household. This leads to a double standard adopted by organizations. Organisations view married men managers as an asset, with a stable support network at home, allowing him to give his undivided attention to work, but the married woman manager as a liability, not always committed to her work and likely to take time off at any moment to be with her family (Vinnicombe 2000; Vinnicombe and

Singh 2002). It is not surprising then women managers have taken this double standard of marriage and children into account in planning their careers, avoiding these responsibilities if possible. This experience of continued inequity may explain why women more than men in the UK are more likely to express the fact they do not believe in marriage, despite it being a practical solution in relation to childcare and finance. (Park et al 2001).

Another difference which may affect how corporate cultures construct women is national or labour policies. In recent years there has been growing emphasis on flexible working and the work/life balance. These discourses and policies may affect women managers in different ways. The long hours culture seems impossible to change. Furthermore, a recent review of how employers, from multi national corporations, regard women as workers showed little change in their perceptions of women's roles and responsibilities, despite the continued presence of women in full time paid work. Employers still held stereotyped views on older married women with children (Liu and Wilson 2001). It is thus not surprising to find that women find it difficult to even ask for flexibility in working times, because it confirms employers' expectations, that they may not be committed to work as their male counterparts.

The idea that employers need to embrace 'flexibility' to retain staff may mean less about employing organizations being flexible about, for example, working times, than having a flexible labour force that can be drawn on at short notice. Employers primary reasons for embracing flexibility has been about cost cutting in a competitive market, rather than an emphasis on retaining staff through good human resource management (Coyle 2003).

These differential changes by men and women leads to a double standard, whereby women are forced into making 'choices' about children, families, careers in traditional ways. Organisations then re-construct women, and **not men** as being more committed to their families or having to choose between career and family.

Organisations as sites for the construction of difference

These critiques of individual differences between women and men and the idea that women managers continue to prioritise family life over paid work implicitly assume that gendered identities are constructed *outside* of the workplace. These differences, it is implied, are brought into organizations. The idea that organisations themselves might construct these differences was to be an important breakthrough in understanding the experiences of women in management.

Organizational constraints on women were explored by Kanter, as early as 1977, through the examination of structures. She carried out a study on the position of women in corporations. She identified a variety of barriers to access for women's promotion within organizations. These included sponsorship networks for men, the ways in which promotion ladders advantage men, and how stereotypes impact on the kind of jobs that should be taken by men and by women. She argued that where there were few women in an organization, that is, less than twenty percent, then they would have problems. If however, they moved beyond this number, their problems would decrease. Kanter argued that power would replace sex. In other words, once women accessed positions of power, sex would be 'wiped out'. She regarded the boss secretary relation as a feudal relic, which in time would pass away in the modern bureaucracy (Savage and Witz 1992) Other research has followed the work of Kanter (1977).

Barriers for women in the workplace in the West, but also across the world, have now been thoroughly researched and strategies discussed to encourage women into more powerful positions (Davidson and Burke 1994; 2000; Tanton 1994; Wirth 1998; 2001; Catalyst 2000). Kanter argued that numbers (numbers of women), power and 'opportunity structure' (where women and men worked in the hierarchy) made a real difference to how women and men were valued. Research on the position of women in management and on structural inequalities within organizations took off. There was a focus on getting better representation of women in management, to facilitate cultural change in the 1980s and early 1990s. Much of women in management literature was concerned with representation of women in management positions. Analysing barriers

which prevented women from achieving top level jobs became an important aspect of this research (Billing and Alvesson 1994)). The research has also found a new lease of life with the developing arguments of the business case for employing women.

Gendered organisational cultures

The sexuality of organizations is a key feature of the work culture (see Schein 1975;1976; Hearn et al 1989; Cockburn 1991; Acker 1990; Connell 1987; Pringle 1989; Halford Savage and Witz 1997). The interpretations of a woman's behaviour by men and women are strongly linked to a woman's attractiveness, marital status and age.

Women suffer most from personal sexualised stereotyping i.e bag lady, iron lady, dragon princess and virgin (Maddock 1999). Family symbols at work are sexualized, since sexuality underpins power in bureaucracies (Pringle 1989). The sexuality of organisations has emerged as a form of post structuralism influenced by Foucault's work on the body and sexuality. Burrell, (1984) from a radical organisation perspective, had argued that the workplace had been constructed as desexualized, to formulate a rationality devoid of feeling or emotion. But Hearn and Parkin have argued that sexuality forms the basis of organisation, structuring all relations, whilst remaining unacknowledged. It is part of a 'booming silence' (1987). Sexuality structures women and men's relations in the workplace. Women become sexualised, and eroticized, whilst men control these constructions. Emotion is thoroughly implicated in the construction of women's work (Hochschild 2003). The way sexuality of organisation functions is not just in the realm of the discursive, but is invoked in the *reproductive* nature of women's bodies. This biological difference is then used to justify lower pay and status (Cockburn 1991; Adkins 1995; Halford et al 1997).

The turn to culture in organisations

The emphasis of gendered cultures as well as structure within organizations had been first debated in the 1980s. Gender it was argued has been part of the way in which modernity has helped to form particular types of organisations. It was embedded in cultures as well

as structures. Kanter's position had argued that equality and access for women in corporations would lead to changes in gender relations at work.

Other perspectives, influenced by Giddens and Foucault critiqued the way that organisations had developed in their entirety. Some argued that organizational theories themselves were gender blind. Acker, as early as 1974, had argued that the professions were gendered and reinforced through management styles. Deeply embedded is the culture of all employees being expected to conform to 'male' patterns of behaviour (Acker 1990). Davies (1995) explored the ways in which female professions did not encourage leadership skills but coping management styles. Links were made between how women were defined at home and at work. Women's occupations resembled women's domestic work and women's occupational segregation was maintained through ideology (Acker and Van Houten 1992). Women were required and expected to do 'domestic' duties at work (Coates 1997).

It was argued that informal 'cultures' as well as formal structures of organizations needed to be examined. Organisational cultures are defined in terms of shared symbols, languages and practices through which gender relations are reproduced and changed. These cultures themselves were imbued with notions of management as a male domain. They transmitted messages about a 'woman's place' through cultural messages about the value of women and men's work, about the gendered sexuality of the workplace and discourse about the subordinate status of women. The emphasis on 'numbers' or getting more women into management was criticised by Calas and Smiricich (1992) and by Gherardi (1992). Merely increasing the numbers may not make a difference to gender relations, because of the failure to concentrate on symbolic messages.

" *a first level intervention to initiate change in inter- gender relationships in organisational contexts lies in understanding how discourse on sexual differences is conducted and the practices that sustain and subvert it are mobilised*"

(Gherardi 1992:235)

The author argues that gender symbolism – meanings, understandings, language –create different gender auras for organizations, sectors and occupations. They do not correspond just to numbers.

Think male think manager

Research on gendered cultures also helped to focus on management itself, and how it was defined and constructed. 'Think manager' think male' (Schein 1976) had seemed remarkably resistant to change for both women and men. For example, it was argued that the job of a manager was originally defined as masculine with men seeing themselves and being seen by promotion panels as more suited to it than women (Powell 1988). These arguments led to a focus on men as managers.

By focusing on women, the norm appeared to be non-gendered. Organizations and management had been written about for years as if they were gender neutral and objective, but in fact they are dominated by men and imbued with masculine imagery (Cockburn 1991; Gherardi 1995; Collinson and Hearn 1996; Ledwith and Colgan 1996; Collinson and Hearn 2000).

Studies have documented how the 'ideal manager' is a 'disembodied rational' figure and this fits with cultural images of masculinity in wider society (Acker 1990; 1992; Gherardi 1995). Femininity, on the other hand, is linked with emotion, sexuality and embodiment and as such appears out of place in organizations. Women are viewed as travellers in a foreign world (Marshall 1984; 1995). In the 1980s increasingly aggressive managerial practices came to characterize managerial practices. Qualities which emphasised heroic qualities of battle and struggle, swashbuckling entrepreneurs ruthless and brutal were important ways in which discourses on management were produced. (Collinson and Hearn 1996). In the 1990s sporting metaphors and sexual joking still characterized assumptions in total quality management, for example (Collinson and Hearn 1996). Presentational styles in management masked objective professional presentations by using sexist and racist jokes as 'ice breakers' (Cockburn 1991). Even if women see

leadership styles of managers as becoming more androgynous, recent studies,
unsurprisingly, continue to find that women and men still 'think manager, think male'
(Vinnicombe and Singh 2002; Powell et al 2002).

Women workers it was argued had in general been separated from the male culture of
organisations. The feminine gender identity at work had been suppressed or at best
marginalized (Davies 1990). Women managers especially were often required to exhibit
what is almost a male gender identity, and were habitually viewed as exceptions to
women in general (cf Hearn and Parkin 1991).

Changes in management structures and cultures

It has been argued that the re-structuring of organisations has also culturally as well as
structurally contained the limits to women managers' authority (Wajcman 1998).
Changes in organisations have led to an increase of women in management, but as has
been argued, this means organisations themselves have restructured and the '*types of
areas into which women have moved are those which tend to be barred from effective
organisational power*' (Savage and Witz 1992 :12). Thus as women enter management,
organizations themselves are reducing the authority of middle managers, with greater
power invested in technology and in senior positions (Casey 1995).

The restructuring of specific jobs and categories of jobs has also arguably reduced the
power of women and men middle managers. It has been generally accepted that
occupations themselves in particular cultures (such as in technology, finance) had
become de-occupationalised (Casey 1995) But these processes of cultural change by
managers invoke issues of 'team' and 'family' to mask increasingly subtle types of
corporate control of employees, not through rigid hierarchies and job types, but through
technology. These cultural change processes in the name of 'total quality management'
have produced discourses which suggest we need employees who are empowered, self
actualizing, multi skilled and good team workers (Casey 1995). Part of this debate has

included 'flexible' working, and the need for good team players, who are always learning new skills.

We can also argue these cultural change programmes are discursive devices to constitute new work identities (Casey 1995; du Gay 1997). They may not be about empowered self actualized individuals. They are perhaps temporary 'designer cultures' to replace the loss of collective, occupationally specific and class based forms of organization under industrialism. They have contradictions for employees, who find it difficult to resist these changes, since 'teams' and 'families' at work become part of individual's identities. They may not always be comfortable with these processes, but change only becomes possible at an individual level. There are sanctions against going too far in one's challenges against organisational change. These team and family structures reproduce paternalistic, patriarchal approaches to work. The flatter structures and team working are structured to produce loyalty and attachment, so that managers feel indebted to the organization, and experience a 'Protestant' work-linked guilt if they do not work hard and long hours (Casey 1995).

Women's subjectivity and agency

The move towards greater loyalty and commitment to paid work for women managers may be contradictory, and the long hours culture together with restrictions on authority and decision making may heighten the contradictions of the growing attachment of women managers to paid work.

Women may search for a social identity thorough work, because it gives them a structure, a routine in which to embed your self (Whitehead 2001). They may be seduced or attracted by issues of power, control and growing self worth in a management job (Whitehead op.cit.) But they are increasingly finding it stressful to organize their family lives.

In fact the long hours culture is viewed as a criteria of success in banking by women and men. Organisations view senior jobs as incompatible with active parenting roles. Women are still perceived by others as being unsuitable for senior positions, where a single minded approach to career and corporations is the male norm (Halford et al 1997; Liff and Ward 2001).

These contradictions suggest we need a deeper look at how women *themselves* respond to understanding organizations, the requirements of senior jobs and the options for their careers. Women make choices in their careers that interpret the organisational situation differently from men's. If they are repeatedly confronted with messages that they are unsuitable for senior jobs and that every woman should have children, the ways in which they make decisions about their careers becomes explicable. Women might have entered middle management, but if they want jobs in senior positions, '*then to paraphrase Schein, the situation could be described as think female managers, think childless superwoman*' (Liff and Ward 2001:32).

These actions by women brings us back to a re focus on women's agency and decision making in the light of how they understand how organisations work. The arguments about structure and culture in the majority of the studies on women in management have not addressed enough, women's agency *and* structural and cultural change. Pringle's work in the late 1980s enabled us to have a better understanding of how organizations structure the position of women, the impact on women's subjectivity and their agency. In accordance with post structuralist theorizing, she argued these identities were conflicting and contradictory, culturally drawn and specific to particular occupations. In her book *Secretaries Talk* (1989), the secretary was not the boss, but her identity was constructed in relation to *him,* the boss. Pringle argued that the secretary was critical in defining the position of women in white-collar work. The work of a secretary was interpreted not so much about what she did, or even her job description, but how she was represented. She was perceived as an office wife, who was loyal and trusting, and sexualised. For example, she was often portrayed sitting on the boss's knee. Organisations are not asexual, but rather, sexuality underpins bureaucratic control. Power is relational and always in a state

of flux – it cannot be read from structural positions, but is always changing. These changes are based on the possibility of resistance and of women and men's agency. Sexuality is not just about coercive power of men over women, since there is a positive side to heterosexuality (Pringle 1989 op.cit.).

The interaction of women's subjectivity, agency and male cultures was also further researched in work on women managers (Itzin C and Newman J 1995; Ledwith and Colgan 1996; Maddock 1999). Women's room to manoeuvre and instigate change as managers, as well as collude with their subordination was informed by their *understanding* of organizational constraints. Their subjectivities also provided a better understanding of how *they* felt, presented themselves and made decisions.

Chapter 1 discussed Hochschild's findings on women managers who worked in corporate cultures in the USA. Interviews she carried out at a large corporation with women and men revealed that men and women executives were spending longer and longer hours at work, leaving less and less time with the family. When they did return home, they found it even harder to spend time with their children who demanded more time from them. This forced them to try and escape these tensions and spend even more time at work, exacerbating their 'time bind'. In this time bind scenario, middle class women were more likely to spend less time with their families and sub contract even more tasks to the 'market'. "Home became work and work became home". Women are now approaching their family lives at home with strict time schedules of efficiency which mimic the workplace (Hochschild 2003). Work is increasingly becoming all serving with leisure facilities on site, social groupings for support and fun, restaurants and so on, whilst family life becomes more and more of a burden.

The articulation of women's agency and gendered organizational cultures is also apparent in the research on the felt *experience* of women in management. Several studies in the West generally showed that women managers reported they had to work twice as hard to be recognised for their contribution. In Britain, many studies of women managers reported that they felt excluded from men's networks of the golf club or the pub

(Vinnicombe 2000). Women did not feel information was shared, they felt their career paths remained blocked (Morrison and Glinow 1990; Powell 1993;Davidson and Burke 1992; Davidson and Burke 1994). In Singapore, although social policies have aided, to some extent, the recruitment and retention of women in the labour market, studies on women managers show they felt they had to work harder than men for promotion and sensed hostility in the workplace culture if they were seen as single-mindedly pursuing their careers (Low Guat Tin 1993; Abdullah 1993; Ong Fon Sim 1991). They reported that it was at least twice as difficult for them to succeed in male dominated professions, and the pressure to outperform men was very strong in order to progress. Mistakes in their work were attributed to their construction as *women*. Women in another study were perceived by men as 'deviant'; women themselves felt that a 'gender curtain' had been put up in workplaces to prevent women getting on (Abdullah 1993).

On the other hand, women's responses to the politics of organizational cultures are not uniform, predictable or static (Maddock 1999). Women's levels of political awareness, their involvement in feminist politics and their social background clearly influence how they respond. If they are 'gender blind', they may approach their experience in one way, whereas if they are extremely gender conscious they may engage in strategies of resistance (Ledwith and Colgan 1996; Marshall 1995). They may create women's networks or work to renegotiate their conflicting identities as female and senior managers, but these strategies may be both reproducing and transgressing gendered positions (Fournier and Kelemen 2001).

These subjectivities and understandings have also been further explored in women's relationship to management to highlight the fact that women are acting differently and this might be contingent on the type of organization, the sector and their own motivations and backgrounds. Alimo Metclafe's research, for example, has shown that women managers were motivated by organisational goals rather then by promotion in the public sector. She argued that many women were focussed on change and transformation as much as career. Maddock (1999) has shown that gender cultures influence the manner in which women were selected, judged, appraised and assessed. Women themselves

therefore, she says feel there is no choice but to collude with these assessments. It becomes a rather schizophrenic world for women managers, where they feel unable to be themselves, yet they also are unable to object to the stereotypic definitions of them as a group.

Another approach to understanding how women deal with conflicting messages about them as managers has been shown in Whitehead's work, who has argued that women managers involvement in the workplace is also based on bringing feelings of control to the fore. Management is seductive and creates an ontological security for some women (Whitehead 2001). On the other hand Marshall's work has shown how some women deal with organizational cultures, which are not of their own making. They leave workplaces rather than stay and fight, despite the fact they are committed to careers and the ambitions of paid work (Marshall 1995).

The focus on agency and context has also illuminated the fact that that some women managers could become 'transforming' as managers in the public sector (Maddock 1999). Both in Maddock's work and in Metcalfe's research, women referred to the desired qualities of managers and wanted to emphasise different ways of working rather than relying on traditional ways of leading (Alimo Metcalfe 1994). Following the seminal work of Pringle (1989) resistances by women were limited by understanding what was possible. It was not within individual women's efforts to overcome 'male' responses. Social change requires more than relational and individual effort; it also requires an engagement with change processes by those who share tactics and views. A change in gender stereotypes is dependent on renegotiated relationships among many people, which is discussed and debated (Maddock 1999). Agency is then not about *individuals* making change, but could also be about the creation of new forms of collectivized change. Women's consciousness has changed, and there is a greater attachment to individualization, but we need to wait and monitor what collective possibilities lie ahead.

Perhaps resistance on an individual basis could also only be based on women's protests in much smaller ways. Turner (1990) argued that women were capable of manipulating the

trivia of work processes to fashion minor triumphs in their personal narratives of resistance to their incarceration within the organization. The study gives an example of a woman saying about her boss: *I often let his errors go out unchanged, why should I bother?* These small resistances allowed women to create a sense of identity, which could be preserved. Research also finds that women managers were more likely to use their female peers to support their careers, compared to men who did not use their peers in that way. But these choices and actions are not unified resistances and motivations. They are fragmented, differentiated by context, and constrained by the contradictions of women in management.

As argued earlier, corporate cultures have channeled some women into an idea that they have become 'like men' (Coates 1997; Wajcman 1998). But these apparent perceptions are also contradictory if one looks at women's agency. In Coates' study, women were found to have become less considerate of others in their lives and cared less about family responses, the longer they spent in the corporate culture. But they also became tougher with their partners in families when they did not help out in the domestic arena. The particular context, situation, the gender symbols and individual women's understanding are very important in understanding how women managers respond to the contradictory nature of their constraints.

CONCLUSIONS

There are a growing number of women in management. Women have entered jobs in the financial, personal services, and business sectors of the economies. These are new jobs and not jobs which replace men. Despite women becoming more visible and working fulltime in corporations, there is evidence of processes of re-segregation by sector, pay and occupation.

Women enter corporations on an unequal basis with men, and women's differences are *constructed* by organisations as inferior to men's. Organisational and wider societal attitudes to equality, self empowerment and processes of individualization do however

act in ways to individualize and so weaken group identities of women managers as primarily wives and mothers.

There is a strong argument that the family may be weakening, because of the commercialization of household tasks and child care, patterns of fulltime work by dual career couples and a growing attachment to the labour market. Women managers across the world may be developing greater attachments to their work organizations and weakening their identities as wives and mothers. With the decline of the nation-state and the expansion of the consumer society, the identities of women managers as *women* may be weakening in the global arena.

But corporate cultures also make a difference to how possible it is for women to feel comfortable and 'be what they would like to be' in organisations. Structural changes in organizations, which have broken down hierarchies and de-occupationalised, have an appearance of narrowing inequalities in corporations. But evidence shows these structural changes do not appear to have aided women's promotional prospects across the world. The discourses of the 'feminization of management' may have enabled women managers to find a greater attachment to their corporations. On the other hand, there have developed arguments that these cultural change programmes in organizations are new discursive ways of controlling employees, because of the loss of stable hierarchies, positions and jobs under industrial Fordist organizations.

Furthermore, research continues to show that corporations are gendered, and continue to construct woman as being primarily responsible for families and as inferior to men. Women managers enter organisations on a 'sexual contract'. Despite changes in women's behaviour and their commitments to careers, organisations continue to construct women and men managers as differently constituted. It is expected by corporations that women will not be as committed and loyal to the corporation as men and will put their family first. These constructions expand into other constructions of women in society, as being caring, sexualized, wifely, motherly, and so on. Family and sexualized identities for women become symbolized in paid work. If women do not show these 'family' qualities,

they are accused of acting like men and not showing their feminine side. Their behaviour is deemed 'unnatural'.

Identity, Women Managers and Social Change:
Comparing Singapore and Britain

CHAPTER 4   Women, management and gender regimes in Singapore and Britain

Introduction

This chapter explores the position of women in management in Singapore and Britain. It demonstrates that there are homogenising effects of global change if one compares the position of women in management positions in both countries. Both countries have had to respond to the demand for women's entry into management and the expansion of the service sector. Singapore, which up to thirty-five years ago was a poor agrarian economy, has managed to increase the representation of women into management very rapidly. It also has greater proportions of women in senior positions than Britain, once economic activity rates are examined.

However, this chapter also argues that analysis of these two societies demonstrates the different ways in which gender identities are differently ascribed and negotiated through differing socio-cultural consensuses or 'contracts' in Singapore and Britain. It examines how the two countries have evolved differing gender regimes or different gender contracts and shows that governments and past histories still create and reinforce specific ideas about groups and their positions in society, both through policy and discourse. These institutional structures and processes help reproduce managerial women's identities explored later and demonstrated by Part 2 of this thesis.

Women and management in Singapore and Britain today

Women are now entering management positions in Singapore and Britain in roughly equal proportions of between twenty to thirty per cent (Wirth 1998; 2001). Women's entry in both countries is largely in 'new' jobs, as described in the previous chapter. The

growth of personal and business services accounts for much of the job creation for women in Singapore and Britain. Women and men continue to be employed in differing occupational and industrial sectors in Britain and Singapore. These include clerical and secretarial work, and sales and personal service occupations.

Managerial occupations in Britain and Singapore are also reproduced in gendered forms. In Britain, men outnumbered women in nine out of eleven managerial sub groups. Women managers were segregated into jobs in financial institutions, working as office managers and health and social service managers (EOC 2002).

In Singapore, like Britain, most women managers are employed in the 'sunrise industries', such as commerce, finance, insurance and real estate and business services (over seventy per cent) and twenty three per cent are employed in manufacturing and personal services. Business and financial service sector jobs have grown in the last decade from thirteen per cent in 1990 to nineteen per cent in 2000 (Singapore's Census of Population 2000a) said to account for a large part of the increase of women into management.

In the banking sector, recent research shows that women managers constitute twenty four per cent of managers in the UK. Their representation in banking now stands at sixty two and a half per cent. Figures for Singapore in this global study were not available (Wirth 2001). A study in 1999, (Lee et al), found that Singaporean women managers in financial and business services comprised eighteen per cent of all managers, and as we have noted above, all women managers in Singapore are primarily segregated in the finance and business services sectors, as well as in the public sector.

Despite the entry of women into management, there still remains a glass ceiling for women to enter senior management positions. Women formed six per cent of the management population in the top echelon of wage earners in Singapore (Lee et al 1999). In Britain, amongst the FTSE 100 companies in the UK, women's share at director level was six per cent (EOC 2002). It is argued therefore, that percentages of senior women

managers are similar in Singapore and Britain. More importantly, men in both countries still overwhelmingly dominate senior management positions.

Women in both Singapore and Britain women have been availing themselves of educational opportunities at a rapid rate. In Britain, in 1999, fourteen per cent of women on average under the age of fifty had degrees, compared to sixteen per cent for men (The Millenium Papers 1999). Similar statistics are not available in Singapore, but the percentage of women in the workforce with tertiary qualifications rose from three per cent in 1980 to eleven and a half per cent in 1997, almost four times the number in under twenty years (Lee et al 1999). In both countries younger women as a whole are better educated than their male counterparts.

If we examine the similarities of the position of women managers in Singapore and Britain, we find that the entry of women into management has not equalized the gender pay gap. Pay differences are difficult to compare exactly, since statistics are kept differently. In Britain in 2001, women who were employed full-time as managers and officials earned £12.23 per hour on average, while their male counterparts earned £16.03, a gender pay gap of twenty four per cent (EOC 2001b). In Singapore, statistics on pay differences between women and men are not kept as a matter of course. The graduate Employment Surveys in 1989 and 1996 in Singapore showed that female graduates, despite possessing similar qualifications continued to draw salaries twenty five per cent lower than their male counterparts. A pay difference, which may vary between fifteen to twenty five per cent, continues to be present between women and men managers in both countries (EOC 2002; Lee et al 1999).

There are a growing number of dual income households in both countries despite the fact that women managers in Singapore and Britain find difficulties in carrying out the dual shift. In the UK, dual earner households now constitute forty eight per cent of households. Dual income households are also rising in Singapore with forty three per cent of all households being dual earner in 1999, compared to thirty five per cent in 1989. (Singapore's Second Periodic Report to the UN Committee 2001). But in both countries

it has remained difficult to do two shifts, particularly as past research showed that the idea of 'superwoman' took its toll.

Occupational commitment increased work family conflict for professional women in Singapore in the early 1990s (Aryee 1992). The problems associated with dual career couples included issues about role overload i.e. women taking on a greater share of the household responsibilities and childcare responsibilities simultaneously. Although the literature stresses that husbands also experience work-family conflict, if there is symmetry in their work and home involvement, it is women who experience this most intensely (Lee et al 1999)

Women managers in Singapore and Britain and family trends

These problems may explain the profile of women managers in both countries.
For example, women managers in Singapore are younger than their male counterparts; however the percentage of single people amongst women executives (26.2 per cent) was more than twice that among men (10.8 per cent) (Lee et al 1999:192). In Britain, women managers are more likely to be divorced single or separated, the percentage being twenty seven per cent compared to seven per cent of men (Wajcman 1998). In Singapore, the women executives who are single are more likely to be unmarried, whereas in Britain they are more likely to be a mixture of unmarried, divorced or separated. Singapore has lower rates of divorce and lower proportions of single women in comparison to Britain (see Chapter 2).

Senior women managers in Britain are more likely to have no children or no dependent children in their households compared to those in Singapore (Davidson and Burke 2000; British Institute of Management 1994). Women managers in both countries also have fewer children than other female members of the workforce. In Britain, two thirds of women managers do not have children, whilst over two thirds of men do have children living with them (Wajcman 1998). In Singapore married women managers comprise seventy four per cent of all women managers. Almost all had children, but had on

average two children compared to three for other women (Lee et al 1999). They also had children in their late twenties, rather than in their early or mid twenties as other women (Lee et al 1999).

Although then family trends in Singapore and Britain are in similar directions for women managers, there are also some interesting differences. The key difference between women managers in dual career couples in Singapore and Britain, is that married women managers in Singapore are more likely to have at least two children (Lee et al 1999), rather than avoid them altogether. This difference may be related to explicit dominant discourses about women's duty to their country to both reproduce and take care of children in Singapore, but a more inexplicit coded one in Britain about women's responsibilities to look after children as discussed later in this chapter.

In both countries, women managers are expected to work full time, since part time work is not offered in higher management positions (Hogarth et al 2000; Lee et al 1999). Interestingly enough, there is very little part time work in Singapore, in any case. In contrast to the UK, however, 'choosing' to do part or full time work is not really an option for employees in Singapore. Employers do not offer part time work and there is a cultural expectation that women who work, will work full time (see Chapter 1 and cf Pfau Effinger 1993). In 1997, the percentage of part time employees in Singapore was three point three per cent far below the twenty four per cent in the UK (Lee et al 1999).

The attitudes of employers, are, however, balanced by changing trends in wider society. There is a growing recognition by women and men in dual career couples in both countries that equity in domestic work is a just goal. These attitudes are more divergent between women and men in Singapore than in Britain. Fathers in both countries are now expected to care for their children more and there is an increasing recognition that societal attitudes towards equity in the household have changed in Singapore too (Lee et al 1999; Singapore's Second Periodic report to the UN 2001, Hogarth et al 2000; Park et al 2001). It is now acceptable for married women with children in employment in the UK to work full time and buy in childcare. In Singapore the government has made available

tax breaks on employing immigrant maids from the Phillipines and Sri Lanka, which, as argued in Chapter 2, has benefited middle class households.

Men in both countries appear to have little range in their roles, whereas women have adopted multiple roles. Men appear to be locked into a full time employment and provider role. This may be partly due to the fact that workplaces are slow to respond to the changing attitudes of both men and women towards work patterns, working less hours and desiring a greater work life balance. In the UK, despite predictions and statements of greater equity in the family, particularly amongst dual earner /career couples, (Rapaport and Rapaport 1971; Young and Wilmot 1975; Wheelock 1990; Gershuny, Goodwin and Jones 1994) this also does not appear to have led to actual changes in behaviour. As reported by Wajcman (1998), there has arisen a perception that the family is more egalitarian. However, she cites surveys that show widespread support for unfair divisions of labour. However, unfairness continues, because men's behaviour has been slow to change.

In Britain, only six per cent of men are employed part time, compared to over forty per cent of employed women. Childcare appears to remain the responsibility of women, even when the man is unemployed and the woman in employment. Less than thirty per cent of unemployed men with employed partners take the main responsibility for childcare, with around twenty five per cent leaving the main child care role to their partner. (Hogarth et al 2000). It is then women in both countries who have changed their behaviour and their attitudes.

In Singapore, the family and the associated gender roles have been constructed as different. Women and men have different roles in 'Asian family values' and these constructions are enforced in dominant discourse through government statements and policies as we shall explore later in this chapter. The government also has strong views on the social role of the mother and has even sought to control which women should give birth to more children. Studies carried out in 1976 and 1984 found that most working women believed non working women are better mothers, and that women should be able

to sacrifice their careers for a number of years to bring up their children properly (Lee et al 1999).

These studies are now quite old. The Singapore government, however, reported that attitudes there were changing as well, but more for women than for men. In 2000, a study by the National University of Singapore on family ideology found that whilst the majority of Singaporean women tended to be traditional in their perception of gender specific responsibilities and ideals, there has been a shift in views on women's responsibility for the domestic arena. Certainly the better-educated women were increasingly likely to prefer a more egalitarian role sharing relationship with their spouse. (Singapore's Second Periodic Report to the UN Committee 2001). [1] These attitudes however are also slowly changing for men. Recent data reported in the Lee et al study (1999) showed similar levels of 'work family conflict' in the scores of both husbands and wives in dual career families, perhaps indicating the changes in fathers attitudes towards family responsibilities. However, as the authors argue, Singaporean men are more career oriented than their wives were, and both men and women had still had fairly 'traditional' views of gender roles.

The idea then that women choose to prioritise family life in preference to career is clearly full of contradictions. On the one hand women and men in both countries are becoming increasingly attached to work as a result of wider global changes. Women's behaviour is itself changing to accommodate these attachments. On the other hand, despite corporate organisational change processes which appear to be more comfortable for women, country policies and discourses as well as organisational ones, maintain ideas of women's responsibilities for the family.

Government and social policy

As we have seen the Singapore government's discourse explicitly reinforces traditional gender roles of women and men and legitimates 'Asian family values', whereas Britain's

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[1] There are no ongoing annual surveys on Singapore Social Attitudes carried out by government; hence tracking changes in attitudes over the years in more difficult since the data is not available.

government stresses equality of the sexes in an individualized liberal meritocracy. These policies may have differential effects on women managers' subjectivities in each country and weaken their commitment to the family. It remains to be seen if this 'weakening' is occurring in both countries in this study. It is argued in this chapter and the interpretation of the field work that different gender 'contracts' operating in each country have differing constraints on the ascription of women's identities in the two countries.

Identity, the legal framework and the historical context

Britain played a key role in the first phases of industrialization in the early 20th century. The separation of home from paid work for middle class women happened under industrialization (Robotham 1989). After industrialization, middle class or better off women were absented from the public sphere and defined in relation to the family and rather than the wider society. This helped shape the definition of all women despite the fact that in reality working class women continued to carry out paid work. The bourgeois 'ideal' had become the norm for all women.

The development of first wave feminism sought to contest middle class women's position by arguing that women must have access to the public sphere, particularly in education and employment. The strategy was to benefit women who were middle class and wanting to enter the professions. In Britain, professional women's identities were therefore formed by moving away from the domestic sphere into the public sphere of education and social work(see Walby 1997; Apter 1993).

In Singapore, the ascribed identities of middle class women were not born out of a struggle for access to the public sphere. Middle class women were also not domestically defined in the early part of the century. In fact arguably there was no large 'middle class' as such in Singapore, since they were primarily immigrants from China trying to settle and make a life for themselves. Women began to arrive as immigrants in the 1930s.

The better off women in Singapore worked in the public sphere in the early part of the twentieth century as market traders, in crafts such as silk weaving, either independently or in shophouses with their business trader husbands. After the Second World War, one study states that professional women were expected to work after marriage (Wee 1996). Who these professional women were is not discussed or examined in the literature. Unlike British middle class women, these better off women were not defined solely in relation to domestic work. The single women lived in dormitories like the lone immigrant men, and sent money back to their families. A recent study argues that the women were known to be assertive and by no means were waiting to get married (Wee 1996).

In Singapore industrialization took place in the 1960s and 1970s. Singapore moved from an agrarian economy in the 1950s and 1960s to an industrialized economy in a matter of less than two decades.

Whereas the creation of the middle class professional woman took place over a century in Britain, fragmented by periods of appearance and disappearance from the labour market, in Singapore, professional and managerial women appeared in large numbers almost simultaneously as their economic activity rates increased. Whereas legislation and attitudes prohibiting married middle class women from paid work were a factor in British history, in Singapore, there has been no legislation or policy on married women and work until independence when they entered the labour market in the 1960s.

The impact of colonialism

The ways in which middle class women's identities were constructed in both countries are not just to do with gender and class positions, but they were also racialised. These identities were intimately connected with one another in both countries. In Singapore, the British had encouraged the special harnessing of the strengths of each of the 'races' in Singapore and the colonised immigrants came to adopt and reformulate these discourses of 'race'. (Purushotam 1998). The 'racial' characteristics of the peoples of Singapore were read with reference to the occupational niches that particular groups were to have a

penchant for, because of their numerical dominance in these occupations. Particular significance was accorded to 'hard working' 'economically / financially astute' Chinese peoples. The governing elite in constructing a Singaporean national identity used the harnessing of 'race' differences, particularly the identities and fertility of Chinese middle class women in supporting the nation (see below).

Britain's long oppressive and extensive colonial relationships in the Indian subcontinent and in the Caribbean formed the definition of British middle class women. In the later phases of colonialism and the onset of industrialization, white middle class women's identities became ascribed both in relation to colonised women and men and in relation to their white male counterparts with industrialisation (Stoler 1999). They were defined primarily in domestic terms to signify their dependence on men, their roles ascribed in relation to *managing* housekeeping and childcare, and keeping away from the dangers of the public sphere, particularly to prolong the 'purity' of the 'race'.

Singapore was never a colonial power, but a colony of Britain achieving its independence in 1965 as part of the Federation of Malaysia. After 123 years of British rule, a group of British educated Chinese origin men caught up in the nationalist tide sweeping Asia after the Pacific War won self government for the island. After splitting up from the Federation of Malaysian states in 1965, Lee Kwan Yew, a British educated barrister led this country to one of the most economically successful countries in the last thirty five years. It has a population of three million or so, but this is separated into three key main ethnic groups, (Chinese seventy five per cent, Malays fourteen per cent and Indians seven per cent), although these are divided by class and language from within (Sesser 1994). In line with opposition to colonialism and the desire to maintain cultural differences, the government has publicly reiterated and espoused the policy of multi-culturalism in a context of meritocracy. The building of national identity integrated publicly the issue of 'race' and culture.

Anti discrimination legislation and the labour market

The wide scale legislation against sex discrimination and for equal pay in Britain is an interesting contrast with Singapore. Singapore has been concerned in its development as an independent small nation, about the availability of a labour force and its desire to develop rapidly into a wealthy country. This rapid development has been made possible through imposed planning and a pragmatic approach to equality and not on developing legislative frameworks.

In Britain, education and health were freely accessible for all in the new Welfare State set up after the Second World War. Underlying the Welfare State were concepts of equality, social justice and fairness, albeit on the basis of class and poverty, rather than gender (see Lewis 2000). The model of the Welfare State was also based on the idea of the male breadwinner, with dependent wife and children. Women were regarded as dependent on men and inferior to them. This separation of the family from the labour market has been an important historical factor in Britain, an issue addressed later in this chapter.

Apart from the abolition of the marriage bar after the Second World War, key changes for women have been enacted through anti discrimination legislation in the **public sphere**. The Sex Discrimination Act 1975, The Equal Pay Act 1970, and the differing Race Relations Acts have all helped to create a climate where overt discrimination is illegitimate and accepted as such by the majority of large public and private sector organizations. There are legislative requirements for employers to not discriminate against pregnant women and there is the granting of maternity leave of at least six months after the birth of any baby. Various employment laws offer protection from unfair dismissal. Sexual harassment constitutes an offence under the Sex Discrimination Act.

The aftermath of colonialism in which Britain was accused of having destroyed indigenous cultures, led to an emphasis on multi-culturalism rather than gender as a key part of nation building (see below). Unlike Britain, Singapore has not had a welfare state and has not developed a similar separation of the family from the labour market in state policy. In Singapore, universal education for all was introduced in the 1960s, in the

aftermath of independence, to encourage the education of girls and boys and to foster economic growth. After some pressure for change, the government introduced equal pay for equal work for women and men in the Civil Service in the early 1960s. But this was not applicable anywhere else outside of the Civil Service. This is still the case today. Singapore, unlike Britain, is not a signatory to the United Nations conventions, which call for equality for the sexes in employment opportunities in remuneration and in discrimination in all its forms. There is no guarantee of equality in employment by either the constitution or in employment legislation. Article 12 of the Constitution protects people from discrimination in employment on the grounds of religion, race, descent or place of birth. Therefore there is no protection from *gender* biases in recruitment, access to training, promotion or pay. Legislation has been piecemeal and in response to economic as well as political conditions (Lazar 2001; Chan 2000; Lee et al 1999; Singapore Census of Population (2000a) ; Chan and Lee 1994).

Maternity leave in Singapore was introduced in 1985, under the Employment Act, when the government was concerned about dropping fertility rates. Maternity leave consists of 8 weeks leave in total. But the government was also concerned about utilizing all available labour at that time in the mid 1980s. So maternity leave was short in order to ensure women returned to work full time. Maternity leave is also only available for two children. After a third child, a woman has to individually negotiate maternity leave or lose her job. The government's concern about dropping fertility rates led to a further tax incentive for reproduction after a third child. After the second child, women who continued to give birth were rewarded. A tax incentive of $20,000 for third and fourth children was introduced (Lee et al 1999). This anomaly of encouraging women to have more children at the same time as encouraging them to participate full time in the labour market, is causing strain amongst women (Pyle 1994) and is discussed in the empirical research findings and in further detail below.

Equal access to tertiary education in Singapore is also not comprehensive. Since 1979, the Singapore government has restricted access of female students into medicine to one third of the intake, explained by the attrition rate of fifteen to twenty per cent for women

and a subsequent loss of investment for the government. The Minister involved in 1979 was quoted as arguing that the policy fitted in with women's multiple roles: *"firstly as a wife to husband; secondly as mother to her children; and thirdly to be on night call or to look after sick people. She will not have time to do even cooking"* (Lee et al 1999:49). Twenty years later in 1999, despite protests about the policy, the government continued to defend it by reference to almost twenty per cent of women doctors working part time, or who had left the profession, indicating this was a poor return on the investment in their education. In 1984, the government reversed a previous policy of equal access to all subjects in secondary school for girls and boys. Secondary school girls in 1984 were mandated to take a home economics course which would cover *"how to look after a baby, how to cook, what to watch out for when eating out and how to run a budget."* The girls were not permitted to take technical subjects; something forty per cent of them had chosen pre 1984. The rationale used was one where the Minister of State for Education said: *"girls should be girls, ..."* and thus be trained for their future roles *"as wives, mothers and workers."* (quoted in Lee et al 1999: 52).

In a discussion and protest on the need for equity between women and men civil servant's access to health care benefits, the Finance Ministry replied:

"we should be careful not to pursue doctrinaire symmetry in the roles of the two sexes. Many Western countries have, through unwise social and welfare policies unintentionally but irreversibly undermined the basic family unit of husband, wife and children. Their experience warns us of the dangers of even the most well intentioned government intervention to alter the natural balance and division of responsibility between the sexes, which has evolved over many generations. (Straits Times November 19 1993)"

Different goals in Singapore and Britain then are important contrasts in understanding the experience of women managers. But these goals have also been implemented by different means. Singapore's imposed 'authoritarian style' government can be contrasted with

Britain's tradition of a democratic liberal meritocracy. The contrast of contexts is between imposition of policy compared to a discourse of persuasion.

Voluntarism versus imposition

The specific legislative context around equality between the sexes in Britain aided the introduction of equal opportunity policies (EOPs) in Britain. Equal opportunities policies began in local government in the mid 1980s and moved into the private sector in the late 1980s and early 90s. The legislation provides a basic framework on anti discrimination, but it is backed up by voluntary Codes of Practice on employment. These policies, therefore are not mandatory, but voluntary. Underlying these policies were concepts of justice and fairness (Cassell 2000). They began to address issues of access to employment as well as issues relating to equal treatment at work for women. But organizations introduced these policies in piecemeal terms and there were great discrepancies in the embracement of these policies by organizations. However, where they were introduced, the majority of the policies led to changes in tackling bias in the recruitment and selection of employees, men and women, black and white. Some changes to employee relations practices were also put in place. These included extended leave, religious holiday's observance, job share, movement between full and part-time work and workplace nurseries (Cockburn 1991; Gibbon 1992; Coyle 1995; Davidson and Burke 2000). The emphasis on EOPs had been on removing organizational barriers of recruitment and retention in the workplace, rather than intervening in the family.

These polices have now suffered a demise and been replaced by policies on 'diversity', including overall policies on sex, race, religion, sexual orientation, disability and age. The legislation on sex equality has been widened to include equity in part time and full-time working conditions and paternity leave, as a result of European directives. A disappointment with the impact of equal opportunity policies and a failure to progress women (see Cockburn 1991; Wilson 1995) together with a backlash against equal opportunities policies has been argued as a key reason for their demise. (Faludi 1992; Cassell 2000). The changes in wider society, with recognition of the need for women in

an expanding service sector have also led to a change of discourse about needing women in the labour market. Demographic changes with a projected ageing population in Britain, and reduced fertility has led to a push towards a business case for the employment of women i.e. the need to utilize all sections of the labour market for competitive and business reasons, because there is going to be a shortage of white men in the future labour market (Punch and Pearce 2001). This 'difference' discourse, although seductive, has been questioned for carrying the risk of new stereotyping and ghettoisation of women into areas perceived as women's work (Cassell 2000).

In Britain, demographic changes including dropping fertility rates in Britain, together with a disappointment with equal opportunity policies, has caused a switch in policy emphases on 'equality' towards economic arguments for the employment and retention of women. Once again these have not been imposed, but encouraged through 'voluntarism', using a variety of means, but not through fiscal policies. The Equal Opportunities Commission has published literature on the employment of women and the cost efficiencies of such a step, and a national campaign entitled Opportunity 2000 was launched with the aim of addressing the business arguments for the employment of women (Davidson and Burke 1994; 2000). Concepts of equality as well as the economic benefits of difference then exist side by side; ideas of equality have not been totally replaced and women managers subjectivities are affected by both these concepts.

In Singapore, the government has used economic incentives and sanctions to obtain its outcomes. It has wanted women to remain in full time paid work as well as have more children. Instead of a voluntary persuading approach it has rewarded women who work full time with various tax incentives. Furthermore, the government has encouraged immigration of domestic labour from the Philippines and Sri Lanka, strictly on a specific job basis, allowing tax relief for full time working *mothers* in order to pay for maids. But families also have to pay a government levy in order to employ a maid. This levy has been increased over a period of years. Although tax relief for the employment of maids is available to married women who work full time, the levy acts as a sanction for those women on lower incomes (Yeoh and Huang 1998).

Financial aid to tackle domestic work has been counterbalanced by the government's policies on fertility rates in Singapore. Both the tax incentives to employ maids and tax incentives to reproduce for each subsequent child after the first are both in place and cause contradictions. A progressive per child tax relief of five, fifteen, twenty, or twenty five per cent is given to the first four children of working mothers who have obtained at least three General Certificates of education ordinary level passes or their equivalent in one sitting. Furthermore, the government initiated work related incentives for women in the Civil Service such as leave without pay for four years for the third child, optional part time employment for women with children below the age of six and off the record paid leave to attend to sick children.(Chan and Lee 1994).

The government has used targeting of middle class women in relation to fertility. The mid 1980s saw the plea by government for women to increase their fertility rates, when it was quickly realised it needed to maintain a plentiful supply of labour. From 1984 to 1987, Singapore's population policy is referred to as the 'eugenic phase', where the Prime Minister openly stated that the child's intelligence is inherited and what is more was related to the mother's intelligence. In inviting graduate mothers, Chinese mothers, to increase their fertility he introduced the following:

- Primary school registration was changed to favour better-educated mothers. This was changed in 1985 after complaints.
- Enhanced tax relief was introduced for the first three children of graduate mothers.
- A sterilisation cash incentive of $10,000 was introduced for women under thirty with no '0' (GCSE) levels, i.e. no formal educational qualifications, after the first or second child. This was to be in a household where the combined monthly income was less than s$1500. The birth of another child resulted in the repayment of that cash incentive.
- Delivery fees were restructured to favour wealthier families
- The Social development Unit, part of the Ministry for Community Affairs, was set up as a dating bureau to create opportunities for graduate men to meet graduate women. (Teo P and Yeoh B 1999).

The effective targeting of taxation policies to aid middle class Chinese women more than other women has been reinforced by encouraging young middle class graduates to meet and marry each other as the above policy shows.

As we can see then, Singapore's centralized economic focussed planning has imposed policies to enable women to participate or discourage women from participating in the labor market. The persuading tactics of the government of Singapore has used arguments both on the future effects of the crises in fertility rates and the current demand for women's labor. Thus it has created contradictions for women, torn between having more than two children and engaging full time in the labour market. Britain, on the other hand has developed voluntary approaches to policy changes in sex equality, but these policies are based primarily in the public sphere. The government of Britain has more recently switched the emphasis of its arguments for change from a 'moral anti discriminatory' approach to one based on economic arguments for change. These emphases exist side by side.

Child care

These contrasts of approaches to policy implementation can be clearly seen in state policies on child care in both countries. Large scale child care provision has long been debated as a factor constraining women's economic activity in the labor market. Whether women undertake paid work can be seen as a 'choice' which women make (Hakim 1996) or it can be argued that the choice only becomes real when large scale child care provision is available and accessible (Lewis 2000).

In Britain, once the formal barriers to women's participation in the labour market were removed through sex discrimination legislation, the state has done little to help working mothers with child care (Crompton 1997). Childcare provision in Britain is the worst in Europe, since so little is provided by the government or other public or private sector

organisations; Britain has the highest part time rates of employment for women, and women are expected to make their own arrangements for childcare. The net result is that

' working parents in Britain with children under three must rely entirely on either the private market or their social networks 'for childcare' (Moss 1991: 125 quoted in Crompton 1997 : 66).

The equal opportunity policies described above fit in with the ethos of the British attitude to childcare and state support for it. Public and private has been kept separate and governments have always been sensitive to ideas of the State taking over family responsibilities (Lewis 2000). The re-construction of a domesticated middle class women's identity at the onset of industrialization and height of Empire has influenced this separation of 'work' and home. It has been argued that governments have taken the view that adult men and women have the right to enter the labour market, but if they have children they have to make their own arrangements for child care (Lewis 2000). Public provision for child care has been primarily provided for those children 'at risk' fitting in with the Welfare State and equality in relation to class and poverty rather than in relation to gender more specifically. The contradictions for women managers in Britain arise out of the availability and demand for full time work for women, and the poor provision of child care. These contradictions become more sharply into focus, because the State in Britain is reluctant to intervene in the family, considering it a private matter. These contradictions limit the ways in which women managers subjectivities respond. Women view the lack of provision as a matter to be individually rather than collectively struggled with.

In Singapore, child care provision and state support for it was initiated in the late 1970s in the form of the 'foreign maid' scheme and in the late 1980s in the form of support for child care centres. These latter were introduced in response to economic needs and were used by and were most beneficial to higher earners. In 1987 the Singapore government embarked on an ambitious plan to encourage the establishment of childcare centres and upgrade existing ones. It encouraged the use of voids on housing estates to make child care facilities more locally accessible. In the early 1990s it introduced a $100 per month

childcare subsidy, increasing to $150 in 1998. Although this has been helpful for women working full time, the relatively lower costs of having a maid and paying the levy compared to the small amount of subsidy towards child care has primarily helped middle class high earners. The demand for childcare centres continues to outstrip supply. However the foreign maid scheme is widely used. Of all the households with maids in Singapore, women in white collar work comprised ninety three per cent of those households employing foreign maids (Lee et al 1999). Women thus may view this provision as directed at women as a group, because of extensive state support. Maids have responsibilities for shopping, cooking, cleaning, child care and any other domestic work. Their duties include serving at tables, working full days and evenings, with only Sundays off. Furthermore, child care centres and homework clubs do abound, all introduced and supported by the government in a matter of a few years.

The differences in child care support in both countries may reinforce the salience of the identities of women as mothers in Singapore, whereas in Britain, women managers who are able to pay for similar hours of contracted labour will exercise a slightly greater 'choice' because of the assumptions of individualized decision making. This might offer a greater possibility of exercising choice for high earning women either by paying for full time nannies, fast foods as well as homework and tutorial support. Or they may decide not to have children, delay marriage and concentrate on their career. The construction of a state reinforced group identity for women as mothers and wives in Singapore may heighten contradictions more sharply and lead to greater demands for collective change, but may not lead to the emerging of new forms of social identity. The processes of individualization for high earning women may be much slower.

Family discourse and the socio-cultural consensus

The introduction of the welfare state in Britain was primarily aimed at a male breadwinner. Women were viewed as dependent on men and responsible for children. The sexual division of labour was reinforced by the assumption that benefits would be paid for wives and children via the male head of household if needed (Lewis Gewirtz and

Clarke 2000; Clarke and Newman 1997, Land 1980). The welfare state is now being rolled back in Britain and family values are on the agenda of dominant discourse.

In Singapore, as we have seen earlier, there has been no coordinated and organised welfare state or benefits available to all. Policy has been piecemeal and pragmatic, whilst always legitimating patriarchal discourse via the State (Chan 1998). One author has termed it 'strategic egalitarianism' (Lazar 2001). References to Asian family values are numerous in dominant discourse, particularly in relation to national identity.

But as we have seen in Chapter 1 social change is around us: the changing nature of family forms, with increasing divorces rates, single parenthood, later marriage for women, the increase in cohabitation and fewer children in household where both parents work. These trends are particularly pointed in Britain, but also can be seen as similar trends in Singapore, although they are not as widespread as in Britain. In Britain, divorce rates are much higher, the extended family is more dispersed and the trend towards cohabitation is greater in comparison to Singapore. Both countries do have similar trends towards later marriage, reducing family size and the trend towards educated women remaining single for much longer.

Nuclear versus extended family

In Britain, the family, certainly amongst the middle classes is assumed to be the 'nuclear family'. Extended families might live nearby, but day to day care by extended family members is not as widespread as it was many years ago. Furthermore, support and help in the domestic sphere is class and ethnically based; middle class families have become more dispersed, and do not tend to live in similar local areas as working class or racialised families do. Full time sub-contracted help for cleaning and childcare is becoming increasingly popular with this class (Gregson and Lowe 1994). Arrangements for this are made by the women themselves, who perceive it as an exercise in their individual choice of arrangements, with little help from the State.

In Singapore, the relationship of women to the extended family and the use of their mothers and in-laws as additions to helping with care and household duties have made it easier for women to participate in full time work. The government has used the proximity of in laws and grandparents to their children to encourage the extended family's involvement in child care. It is clear that these grandparents are grandmothers. There is constant 'talk' of Asian family values to legitimize this focus on gendered roles. Official discourse in Singapore has encouraged women who work full time to utilise extended family networks to care for children. Discourse has been overt and explicit and consistent about women's primary responsibility for the family. The relief on the levy for employing maids, tax incentives for using childcare centres, paid leave for sick children are schemes only available to 'working wives', not 'housewives' and working fathers/husbands. (Lee et al 1999).

Family values discourse in the UK

Although both government s have legitimated women's responsibility for the family, dominant discourse has taken different forms and has different consequences. In Britain the discourse has not been as explicit as in Singapore about women's responsibilities to the family.

The 1997 New Labour government has attempted to 'neutralize' gender as an issue and used discourse that is inclusive. For example, the introduction of diversity policies has led to a discourse on 'family friendly' policies and 'work life' balance and 'flexible' working. The rationale, as in Singapore, is economic and the urgent need for women to remain in the labor market and be responsive to occupational and industrial restructuring is apparent. But the centrality of gender in this discourse is hidden. The hidden discourse and ideas of 'inclusion' are used to stress a meritocratic society based on no discrimination.

There is an attempt to hide the effects of the free market on growing inequalities. The rolling back of the welfare state and the increasing use of means-tested benefits has

encouraged the development of low wage, service sector jobs as well as high waged ones (Crompton 1997). The discourse on meritocracy is a direct result of the individualisation of society where established groups and roles are dramatically changing (Bauman 2001) and particularly relevant for the middle class.

In March 2000, the UK government launched its work-life balance campaign to challenge 'the long hours work culture'. There is talk about family friendly policies to help *parents* balance work and family life. The Employee Relations Act has raised the statutory floor regarding the rights of individual employees, relating to *parental* leave and the government's work-life balance campaign aims to raise the standard of practice even further on a voluntary basis (Hogarth et al 2000). There is no explicit focus on women and their assumed ascribed responsibilities for work life balance and 'flexibility'. But as we saw in Chapter 3, flexibility to balance working life with family still continues to be seen as the responsibility of women. Women in paid work find it almost impossible to ask their employers for a reduction in hours or time off for practical and emotional care for dependents or children.

The discourse on the family is revealing about re-imagining gendered roles. The Labour Party manifesto in 1997 emphasised a commitment to strengthening family life and the accompanying images reinforced the idea of the nuclear family, constituted through marriage (Jagger and Wright 1999). The fact is that family values remain a constitutive element in New Labour policy because of an attempt to constitute a new settlement with the hetero normative family with regard to welfare and the state. (Lewis 2000). More and more 'work' such as caring for the elderly or other dependents, being responsible for your children's reading, lack of truanting or being responsible for children under curfews or probations orders, have now become institutionalised as parental responsibility in legislation. In Glucksmann's terms, TSOL has changed, because unpaid labour has increased, and this remains the responsibility of women. The Child Support Agency was set up to ensure fathers became more financially responsible for their children rather than the State (See Jagger and Wright 1999). This situation is merely an extension of the

reforms started by Margaret Thatcher to reduce people's dependence on the 'nanny state'. They reinforce welfare to work policies.

Economic reasons are driving the government to intervene in the 'private' sphere, suggesting overlaps between the private and public sphere. The government's interventions however, do legitimate ideas of 'individual' 'choice' in the mix of welfare provision. Thus, those who have more money to contract out of this 'parental responsibility' have more of an opportunity to do so. But the contracting out of child care and domestic work in relation to shopping, cooking, caring, homework etc on a comprehensive scale by middle class high earners has begun to commercialize intimate life.(Hochschild 2003), and not led necessarily to a change in women's identities generally. It may heighten polarization between women.

In Britain, the relationship of national identity to gender and family is not explicitly linked. The government has emphasized 'individuals' not being *excluded* from a meritocratic society. Although there is group resistance to this from women's groups, disability groups and racialised groups, this has been a key government policy. There has been a growing discourse about social exclusion, although what exclusion means in this context is arguably exclusion from work. The Social Exclusion Unit in the Cabinet Office was established in 1997. Reports have been published on the homeless, truancy, the unemployed, on crime and on school exclusions among other matters. There has been an attempt to proceed as if all inequalities of race, class and gender are no longer serious sources of antagonism (Lewis 2000; R Bhavnani 2001). Social exclusion covers all these areas.

The examination of the different ways in which inequalities are produced and reproduced neutralises and de-politicises social policy. It de-genders and de-racialises political issues. So for example, 'wives and mothers' (from Beveridge and the Welfare State) become 'parents and carers' (Clarke and Newman 1997). Problems that originate externally such as the issue of racism, become problems that are defined as internal or that are located in specific areas such as the inner city, where ethnic minorities tend to be concentrated

(Lewis 2000). The terms of debate about the crisis in lone parents who are on benefits but 'ought to be at work' are a case in point. The discourse is really about single mothers on benefits.

The government's emphasis on the family and family values has also been *implicit* about the respective roles of women and men. The idealisation of the heterosexist nuclear family remains, because the diversity of family forms (lesbian/gay, single parents, single people, minority ethnic family forms etc) are excluded in official discourse about the family. The ideal of the heterosexual family form is universalised *"Indeed the crisis in the family... can be seen as no more than the 'gap' between the ideological construction of the family and the diverse realities of family life"* (Gittins 1993:viii quoted in Wright and Jagger 1999 :20-21). Some authors have argued that the continuity of marriage and the family has been stressed to the detriment of a variety of family forms and attitudes to the family in Europe. The construction of what is considered 'normal' as family life with all its roles and obligations is stressed despite major changes. Rather, the fact that younger women and men see themselves as 'having a life of one's own' and wanting to exercise autonomy, equality and independence, sometimes away from the family is ignored (Beck and Beck Gernsheim 2002).

In Singapore the discourse on family values began as a way of building a Singaporean national identity but was also a reaction to Western individualism. The construction of a culture of Singapore is promoted as neutral and communal and Asian, particularly in times of crisis. In the 1980s, Singapore feared the undesirable effects of the individualism of Westernisation and Islamic fundamentalism. The need to bind the family with nation would create a more integrated society economically and socially and thus protect Singaporean identity from *'alien influences'* (Quah 1990; Lazar 2001; Doran and Jose 2002). In the wake of global integration of the Singaporean economy, family ties were being loosened. The government used family values discourse, particularly women's roles in the family as insulation against 'damaging ' Western influences and the effects of rising affluence. Furthermore, as has been argued, this discourse allowed the government to position demands for women's rights as products of deculturation due to globalization,

rather than real demands from Singaporean women (Doran and Jose 2002). In 1989 President Wee Kim Wee outlined the government vision:

" *If we are not to lose our bearings, we should preserve our cultural heritage of each of our communities, and uphold certain common values, which capture the essence of being Singaporean. These core values include placing society above self, upholding family as a basic building block of society resolving major issues through consensus instead of contention, and stressing religious harmony and tolerance. We need to enshrine these fundamental ideas in a National Ideology. Such a formal statement will bond us together as Singaporeans, with our own distinct identity and destiny"* (quoted in Quah 1990: 1-2).

Family value discourse in Singapore

Singapore's policies and the rationale of its discourse are related to labour market supply issues. Women have been integral to centralised planning and the government has actively defined and redefined gendered roles and relations according to specific economic or social needs. The plea to women to curtail their fertility to participate in the labour market in the 1970s was changed in the 1980s to have more children and pleaded with women to continue to participate in the labour market, for the good of the country. Economic racialised and moral incentives were used to divide women to encourage their fertility. Chinese middle class women could have access to the economic incentives if they met equally intelligent graduates through state sponsored dating, organised by the Ministry of Community Development. It was Malay and Indian women who were 'soft' and not 'intelligent' – the target was a Chinese middle class woman. However, they could also have help in the form of tax breaks regarding maids; the construction of a 'good mother' was one who did her duty to her country by maintaining a hard work ethic, supporting her family and her children, as well as ageing dependents.

The ideas of family values and a kind of loyalty to the family together with economic imperatives of a small country make these constraints impossible to resist. The ways you

make choices somehow is 'naturalised', since the individual is secondary to the family community and nation. Gender and ethnicity are explicitly integral to Singaporean national identity. The integration of family life with gendered roles and responsibility and duty in the labour make the channeling hard to resist. Statements made about 'girls should be girls', the discriminatory attitudes towards quotas of women in medical schools and the opportunity to participate in technical subjects have all explicitly legitmised the idea that women should be responsible for children and domestic work. These constructed ascribed identities of women are also bound to the identities of men. The government of Singapore is overwhelmingly male, Chinese and socioeconomically and educationally privileged; it has been argued that the narratives of nation function to reproduce such representations – 'the ideal image of its fathers' (Heng and Devan 1997: 108).

When the Prime Minister called on the country's Chinese mothers to reproduce for the nation, he focussed on women because they chose mates of equal or superior academic importance to themselves; it was up to them to guarantee 'genetic purity'. (cf debate on white middle class women under colonialism Hall C 1992; Davidoff 1992). The ensuing discussion in the already censored press was entitled The Great Marriage Debate; women were being asked to do their *patriotic* duty by having more children. Men, according to many Cabinet Ministers, were already giving up their duty to do military service. The separate spheres of female, as reproducer and carer and male, as breadwinner and warrior were explicitly legitimised in discourse. The country needed to prevent decline by ensuring replacement of the population, the population that had been in that representation when the nation was born. These authors have designated this approach to nation and reproduction a 'state fatherhood', a patriarchy of the state. Thus women who might overtly resist their ascribed identities are not rebelling against their own identity ascription, but also that of their men, whose masculinity has been taken over by the government. If change is to come about, they have to challenge the very core of the Singaporean national identity.

This is interesting in comparison to Singapore, which has also had to reiterate its 'Asian' family values in the 1980s in order to ensure more and more work is carried out by the family. It has been argued that the pragmatic and ideological underlying reason for the continuing emphasis on the family since the 1980s particularly, was also based on the decline of welfare support and the need for families to look after their dependents themselves, with help from foreign domestic labour (Davidson 1997). The emphasis on family values to create a distinctive 'Asian' nation and 'prevent' Western influences were not the only reasons. In any case Singapore's government has remained consistent about the importance of the identities of women managers as wives, mothers *and* workers; but discourse over the last twenty five years on womens' primary responsibilities are seen to lie with family. In Britain competing discourses from a democratic tradition and a drive for individual responsibility keep open possibilities of individualized change. Women may perceive themselves as having a 'choice' *not* to be a mother or a wife, particularly if they can be economically independent.

Consequences for managerial women's identities

In Britain the creation of a middle class identity has had a long process which was steeped for many decades in the middle class or bourgeois woman's responsibility for all things domestic.

More recently Governments have emphasized women's equality with men, but primarily in the public sphere. Managerial women in Britain have been surrounded by a discourse which stresses 'being the same' as men, for example, the ability to have a career, reach great heights in the labor market and be equally represented as men in the visible public sphere, such as politics.

The state's reluctance to intervene in the private sphere and the emphasis on individual choice in domestic care arrangements leaves women with guilt and worry about how individually they can work out the balance in their lives. The struggle for equal rights, women's visibility in the public sphere and the emphasis on choice and individualism

has, unlike Singapore, created the possibility of a more heterogeneous identity ascription or 'more room to manoeuvre' for the middle class managerial woman. She can 'act' like a man' or show she can be different as a woman. These decisions come at a cost. Womens' choices have implications for their capacity to remain within organizations at a senior level, since wider society and workplaces do not acknowledge work-family conflict and there is a pressure to behave in the ways of men. However, a woman's economic independence encourages a greater possibility of *'a life of her own'*, (Beck and Beck Gernsheim 2002) which she can help shape. A 'gender neutral' and meritocratic discourse accelerates the greater individualisation of middle class women's identities in Britain.

In Singapore the managerial and middle class women's identity has been created rapidly and simultaneously. The workplace has no recorded history or legislation based on women's equity with men. Instead, economic and nation building goals have emphasized Asian family values based on the traditional separation of gendered roles and responsibilities. International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAW) argues in its report in 1999 that the government uses 'Asian values' as a discourse to defend its oppressive policies. The government contends that economic development must have precedence over civil and political rights, such as freedom of speech and the right to vote in free and fair elections. Women in Singapore are encouraged to feel Singaporean, Chinese and women all at the same time. Family, workplace, community and nation are integrated. Women's identities are more homogeneously ascribed. They are about being a good loyal middle class wife and mother who still puts her husband and children first, even though she is also a loyal full time employee. The discourse of meritocracy, dominant since independence was a reaction to colonialism which had privileged key groups over others. This discourse has encouraged notions of Singapore as a 'fair' society, free of discrimination. Women managers' unpaid work has been supported by the State, with no question however, that women remain responsible for it. The integration of these various identities and the discourse of meritocracy reinforces homogeneously women's responsibilities as mothers and wives. There appears to be less room to

maneuver out of this identity ascription despite economic independence and family changes.

This chapter has explored the ways in which government policies and discourses both legitimate the identities of women relative to men, but also provide differing constraints on their identities. It shows that different gender regimes affect women differently with women in Singapore more likely to have homogenously ascribed identities and women in Britain have greater levels of acceleration towards individualization.

Identity, Women Managers and Social Change: Comparing Singapore and Britain

Chapter 5: Methodological framework for empirical analysis

Lines of inquiry must be opened up around the relationship of subject and structure, culture and ideology, and myth and fact in the constitution of social reality, and the construction of and regulation of individual and collective identities, with an eye to identifying 'fault lines' in the social order. Only then can we begin to consider the possibility of transformation (Marshall 1994:92)

Introduction

This chapter provides the rationale for the kind of methodology used to explore the research questions outlined in the introduction and more specifically focuses on the methodology for conducting the empirical research contained within the next three chapters. Firstly, it considers the values used by the researcher in interpreting the data. Secondly, it explores issues relating to the use of qualitative and quantitative analysis. Thirdly, it discusses discourse analysis in relation to the research. And lastly, it provides information relating to the sample of women interviewed, the design of the questionnaire and the interviews, and the coding system used to group interview data for the presentation of findings.

Research and the researcher

Whilst the field work for the research was wholly qualitative, both quantitative and qualitative methods of research were used for the thesis. In carrying out the research, the researcher of this thesis drew upon feminist research which stresses that the researcher is also part of the social interaction in research and as such her/his values must be transparent. The values the researcher of this thesis brings to the study are informed by

her understanding of inequality across gender, class and ethnicity in our society and by an approach to research which is broadly feminist in its perspective.

Reinherz (1992) argues that feminism is not a research method, but a perspective, which may include a variety of feminist research methods. The perspective itself is also multiple, since there are many perspectives on feminist research. She emphasizes that one other tenet which feminist researchers do share is that women's lives are important. They are not considered an add-on, because of the belief that women are worth examining as individuals and as those whose lives are interwoven with other women. Feminist research then tries to make the study of women visible, whilst not presenting this agency as deviant (K Bhavnani 1995; Essed 1991). The researcher of this thesis used women managers' discourse not so much to analyse attitudes or study individual difference but to examine how far their talk illuminates an awareness of contradictions and suggests possible social change.

Reinherz argues that feminist research aims to create social change. The researcher of this thesis had more modest aims. Her objective was to demonstrate how contradictions in the talk of women managers in two different countries may illuminate how the representation of gender and other constraints such as class, ethnicity, marital status and age may be both similar and different. The thesis may *suggest* sites for change.

Some feminist researchers argue that research by feminists often makes a link between personal experience and intellectual experience (Reinherz 1992; Oakley 1972; Finch 1993; Mies 1993), quashing the view that research is value neutral, detached and objective. However, using personal experience in the context of a cross-cultural study could lead to accusations of 'ethnocentrism' (Reinherz 1992: 261).

The researcher of this thesis was fully aware that this needed to be avoided. She brought to the study her own previous research and work experience which has attempted to counter ethnocentrism. She has been working on issues of race and gender for many years, and is aware of the ways British society has perceived her and the 'other' as an

'exotic' 'passive' Indian origin woman. The researcher's perspective is also influenced by her own contribution as a middle class woman researcher of Indian origin, who has experienced being both an insider and an outsider in Britain as an immigrant and then as a British national and living in Singapore for almost two years where she was classified for entry as a dependent wife. In Singapore, Indians are a small minority and they are in an inferior role to the dominant Chinese. As a British Indian woman, the researcher of this thesis was placed in an ambiguous relationship to the interviewees in both Britain and Singapore. Her position as a middle class educated woman influenced the access the researcher of this thesis got to the women managers in Singapore, which is a highly achieving society. Her experience of living in Singapore society enabled her to observe at first hand an overtly publicised '*multi- cultural- family -values*' society in action and to question gender and ethnic identities not only in Singapore but through a different standpoint in relation to Britain.

These identities of the researcher of this thesis influenced the interaction with the women interviewees in both countries and the kind of data generated. In the analysis of the results the researcher of this thesis explores the ways her role as a researcher influenced the talk that was generated.

Qualitative and quantitative research

"The Age of the Scientific Revolution bred an obsession with measurement and objectification that in the modern era have become synonymous both with an exploitation of nature, and with the exploitation of women " (Oakley 1984: Preface)

Social research itself began by modelling itself on scientific research. Social surveys provide the key way in which social research was conducted, where statistical relationships between variables are described in relation to certain observation units or objects. (Alasuutari 1995 :7). Samples needed to be large enough to be representative of the population being studied. But the idea of neutral reflection, objectivity and conclusive empirical proof was subjected to two key critiques. Firstly within the natural sciences

itself, Kuhn (1970) among others argued that science itself could have no neutral language of observation and that one always had to draw on theoretical categories, which were socially situated. The second critique says that the language of science itself has suppressed fiction and suppressed subjectivity itself and that this discourse excluded other meanings. Foucault (1971) has argued that discourses of knowledge function to exclude other discourses, such that scientific positivism excludes literary language and knowledge.

Recent writing has attempted to refute the dualism of qualitative versus quantitative research (Oakley 2000; Pawson 1999). It is argued this dualism of opposing views need not be opposing at all, since they are methodological myths. Both approaches – qualitative and quantitative - may be relevant, because the approach chosen is dependent on the research questions. The methods are, after all, tools of enquiry and should be used according to context.

Pawson has grouped social research into four categories: ethnography, surveys, comparative research and evaluation research. The last one applies primarily to policy oriented research of which this study is not a part. The first three approaches are all incorporated into the thesis. This study adopts a principle of methodological pluralism (Pawson 1999: 30) despite the fact that the researcher of this thesis has an emotional attachment to being closer to the idea of feminist research, which has emphasised the qualitative approach. Feminists have pointed out many of the shortcomings of large scale survey data and the exclusion of women from an understanding of social reality in which women's voices and intentions have not been taken into consideration.

Before embarking on the empirical research, which adopted a qualitative approach, the researcher of this thesis examined broader patterns of women in management in both countries. This examination included quantitative data, using the survey method, as a secondary source, to uncover patterns in both societies, on for example, the attitudes towards gender, the rising numbers of dual career families and so on. This analysis helped formed the backbone for positing the empirical research questions.

The qualitative approach and field work

For the purposes of the field work, the qualitative approach was the most legitimate, because the approach to data collection and analysis:

"does not spring from numbers, either of organisations studied or of people interviewed. Rather it gains what authority it has from the depth of insight available. Qualitative research is able to answer questions that are not gained by quantitative research. It is better for seeing relationships, processes and contradictions "(Cockburn 1991: 4).

A qualitative approach to the field work could examine identities based on what the women themselves say, and generate understanding from the ways women speak about gender and identities, as well as what they don't say. Ethnographers believe that social action is intentional, and therefore we need to understand the reasons behind actions; for them qualitative research is the way in which we can get closer to this understanding. This approach was used to decide on interview methods.

Making Comparisons- Cross national research

The third category discussed by Pawson is comparative research, or cross cultural research. This includes understanding historical sociology, and searching for similarities and differences between cases. This approach was incorporated into the research method, by exploring similarities and differences between Singapore and Britain thorough histories of women in management and through their specific historical and cultural contexts.

One of the critiques of positivist approaches to research has been about the use of sex (or sometimes referred to as gender) as a variable, as a causal explanation. But of course as discussed in earlier chapters, this 'variable' is not fixed, but subject to change according to the historical and the gender context of a particular society (Crompton 2001). Post

structuralist thinking has encouraged a move away from material differences towards symbols and representation. Gender is argued to be performative and created by discourses rather than concrete reality. Women's identities therefore, have to be understood in context, and cross national research is important for understanding these changes.

To understand how women may re-negotiate their identities, the interpretation of their talk will be context specific in relation to each country. This study is interested in both similarity and difference, not by looking only for difference between Singapore and Britain, but in examining both overlaps **and** differences in the identities of women managers.

Discourse Analysis

There has been an explosion of interest in discourse analysis in social sciences in the last twenty years. Discourses implying the way knowledge and power are reproduced in all contexts, micro and macro, owes much to the writings of Michel Foucault, but also to the older tradition of feminists studying language. Discourse analysis, however, is a research method, but it is used, defined and adapted in a variety of different ways. It does not mean the same thing to researchers. It has been used in psychological research and in cultural and sociological studies. Its roots stem from a purely linguistic analysis, (see below) through social interaction and conversation analysis and ethno methodology (as in Atkinson and Heritage 1984) as well as semiotic, post structuralist varieties .

Discourse analysis is argued to be particularly attractive to feminists since in the study of discourse, language is viewed as an interactive activity and one concerned with producing socio-cultural knowledge and constituting a site for the construction of identities and subjectivities (Wilkinson and Kitzinger 1995). Our social identities are produced and reproduced through discourse and as such remain an important area for investigation. The interest in using language as a method for examining relationships of inequality, particularly from the perspective of feminists has recently received much

academic attention in the UK (Wodak 1997; Wilkinson and Kitzinger 1995;
Ramazanoglu 1993; Mcknay 1994; Frankenberg 1993). Language is not just a vehicle for
reflecting reality, but actively constructs that reality. The analysis of discourse as regards
ethnicity and racism has also received recent attention in the UK with work of van Dijk
(1993; 1999), Frankenberg (1993), Hewitt (1996) and Back (1994). The examination of
narrative interviews in Singapore has been used to examine notions of ethnicity and
'race' with particular reference to language (Purushotam 1998). There is less work within
Singapore on discourse in relation to gender or ethnicity.

Discourse analysis – the definition adopted in this thesis

Foucault has argued that discourse is part of the dynamics of power, which is located not
in macro structures and tangible material areas, but in our ideas through what we say,
how we say it and what we don't say. He further argues that the formation of what he
terms 'objects', or 'things' for example, the formation of a set of ideas, such as
psychopathology, medicine, religion and for the purposes of this thesis, a body of
knowledge about women and men, or the creation and reproduction of ideas of 'race' and
ethnicity, and so on takes place between groups. These include relationships between
institutions, economic processes and words. These relationships are not linear, nor
hierarchical, but the creation of knowledge itself is discourse. It is not about the link
between language and reality, but it creates reality, it is more than the signs, or the
symbols.

The implication for understanding discourse is then that one communicative act or text
cannot be seen as self contained, but as intertextual, since discourses are related and do
not have a so called objective beginning and end (Wodak 1997). Discourses are social
practices and can only be understood in social contexts; they include the integration of
verbal and non verbal language and *behaviour and action* (my *emphasis*) (Wodak 1997).

The following definition of discourse is taken as a starting point for this research:

Critical discourse analysis sees discourse - the use of language in speech and writing - as a form of social practice. Describing discourse as social practice implies a particular dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation, institution and social structure that frames it: the discursive event is shaped by them but it also shapes them. That is discourse is socially constituted, as well as socially conditioned - it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and social identities of and relationship between people and groups of people. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it.

(Wodak 1997: p.6)

The ways in which discourse may be reproducing or challenging the status quo is based on power. Power according to Foucault is limitless and productive and that it is coextensive with knowledge (Ramanzoglu 1993). There are many kinds of knowledge and there are many political struggles about the deployment of power and knowledge. There is therefore no single truth, but productions of different truths, which can be and are contested.

Discourse and human agency

Discourse has a range of subjective positions and functions. What therefore, does discourse imply about intentionality or human agency? Does Foucault's concept of discourse dissolve the agency of the human subject and replace it with a passive conception? Or is the human agent simply a tabula rasa? (Ransom 1993). There are opposing views to the idea of the passive human subject implied by Foucault. However, even though identity as such may be denied by Foucault, the idea of subject positions through discourse suggests an idea of agency. As Weedon argues: *Although the subject is socially constructed through discursive practices, she nonetheless exists as a thinking feeling and social subject and agent, capable of resistance and innovations produced out of the clash between contradictory subject positions and practices (Weedon 1987: 125 quoted in Ransom 1993).*

In other words, subjectivity is itself a site contested in discourse; for example, discursive constructions of the perfect mother/wife exist, but these can be challenged in different ways. Thus subjects are able to resist and act within the constraints of historical context. They can act as political agents.

Using discourse analysis as a research methodology

The research uses discourse analysis as a research methodology. Discourse analysis itself has been developed as a research methodology in its own right. As has been pointed out, the analysis of discourse does not mean researchers are searching for the attitudes behind the words, or the real meanings the speakers have intended; discourse analysis is interested in discourse as a thing in itself; it is interested in its construction and how it is tied to other meanings in society, but also its function (Wetherell and Potter 1993). Discourse gives rise to discursive formations, which are marked by the regularity of practice and their effects (Foucault 1971).

The analysis of discourse then is *"not concerned with hidden meanings, but to understand how they have appeared – what it means that they have appeared."* (Foucault 1971:109). For example, what functions does the talk by senior women serve in wider society; how is it resisted? What are the contradictions inherent in it? What does this talk tell us about the status quo and new sites for change? One way in which change may come about is through examining contradictions.

The approach of discourse analysis taken in this study will follow the method outlined by Wetherell and Potter (1993). In Stage 1 of their method, they argue we need to be clear about the research questions in relation to understanding the texts in their own right and ' *not as a secondary route to things beyond the text like attitudes, events or cognitive processes'.* Discourse analysis is also a highly labour intensive approach (Wetherell and Potter 1993), and time considerations must form part of the sample selection. A number of classic studies have used one text only and

"in these cases the value or generalisability of results depends on the reader assessing the importance and interest of the effect described and deciding whether it has vital consequences for the area of social life in which it emerges and possibly for other diverse areas." (Wetherell and Potter 1993: 161)

Their study involved the interviewing of 80 male and female interviewees in New Zealand, in order to discuss their attitudes to assimilation, multiculturalism and integration, and the ways in which Maori disadvantage were explained. This approach is considered important since they argue that if anti black attitudes are expressed in an atmosphere which supports egalitarianism, we have to search for the ways in which these discourses are expressed in a more coded manner. Thus interviews are analysed to place the contexts of their discussions in the social changes inherent in society. They examined themes which emerged in their interviews and located these themes to connect to wider societal issues and change. Here the expressions of interviewees cannot be put down solely to a misjudgement or problems of ignorance and information processing. They are not related to individual's intentions and motives, and their failings, rather to examine the place of their talk in legitimating certain discourses. If we can chart the fragmented and dilemmatic nature of everyday discourse, we can expose how stark the contradictions within it are. The contradictions inherent in these authors' study provide a useful practical approach to data analysis, but they do not adequately consider discourses as power relations. For this therefore, the researcher has also used the ideas and perspectives of Foucault.

Field work and interviews

It was decided to interview 12 women from Britain and 11 from Singapore about their career biography. The total number of women interviewed is 23. In discourse analysis studies samples can vary and there is no real natural boundary for arguing that the process of sampling is complete in this area. A number of classic texts have used one text only.

Although I took care to 'balance' the representativeness of the women across differing criteria. I am not aiming to generalise to other populations as one may do in quantitative studies. I am using the concept of theoretical sampling, such that the sample is not representative, but is accessed on the basis of theory (Denzin and Lincoln 1996).

It was decided to interview women managers, as senior as possible in the financial sector in both countries, with an attempt to access a range of women, including those married with young children or other dependents, single women with no children and with children. It was also decided to interview women from the dominant racial/ethnic group in each country, namely white in Britain and Chinese in Singapore. This is mainly for practical reasons, since senior women from minority ethnic groups are virtually absent in both countries. Where access to the Chief Executive was not possible, the next level down was chosen. If women were not identified in the top three or four tiers of an organisation a women from that organisation was not interviewed.

The reason for choosing the financial sector for this study was mainly due to the expansion of this sector over the last twenty years and the influx of women into this area of work. Further, their representation as managers in this sector has been rapid and they are represented in senior positions both in Singapore and Britain. In the banking sector, recent research shows that women managers constitute twenty four per cent of managers in the UK. Their representation in banking now stands at sixty two and a half per cent. Figures for Singapore in this global study were not available (Wirth 2001), in this study. A study in 1999, (Lee et al) found that women managers in financial and business services comprised eighteen per cent of all managers. Singapore has encouraged what it calls high value added industries in the financial and business sector. In the years from 1980 – 1994, this sector experienced the fastest growth whilst manufacturing recorded the smallest gains (Suat Kheng and Soek Lee 1996).

The Sample

Twenty three women managers altogether in the financial sector from the dominant ethnic group in each country were individually interviewed: 11 women in Singapore and 12 women in Britain, two of who worked on a job share. They were not all senior (i.e. at the top of the organisation, as Chief Executive, or the next tier down, Deputy Chief Executive, for example.). About two thirds were middle managers, i.e. in the third or fourth tier from the top of the organisation. All women were aged between thirty and fifty, but the majority were between thirty and forty. The grids for both countries below show the age, marital status, dependent children, position in their organisation and how women described their ethnicity. Half of the whole sample was married with young children. Only two were married without children in Britain. Only one woman was married in Singapore without children; the rest of the interviewees who were married all had children. There were three single women in Singapore and two single women in Britain amongst the interviewees. Three senior women (i.e. in the top two tiers of the organisation) in Britain had no children; three senior women in Singapore had no children. One woman in Singapore did not have a degree; four in the British sample did not. Two women in Britain did a job share, and one of these turned out to be a woman of Pakistani origin, who had recently arrived in Britain.

Five Singaporean women worked in 'local' Chinese banks, which were set up in the 1970s before the international banks came in. The banks have always employed Chinese-speaking employees, except for the lowest grades which are occupied by Malays. All the financial institutions in Britain had become international through mergers in the last twenty of so years. Most of the women worked in what were 'British' banks, but have become merged with international institutions.

The grids of the interviewees' main characteristics are shown in the attached tables for Singapore and Britain. Each woman was given a number and the letter indicating the country in which she lived. The findings chapters utilise the codes for individual women

when using direct quotes. I asked all women how they would describe their ethnic origin and recorded their own terminology in answering this question.

BRITISH INTERVIEWEES

Code	Bank Type	Level	M	Chil	Age	Ethnicity (self defined)	Education
B1	British/International	Mid 3-4	Y	1(aged 2)	31-40	Pakistani	BA Business studies MBA
B2	Brit- int recent	Senior 1-2	Y	2 (4 &7)	31-40	European white	BA French and Dutch MA Modern Dutch literature
B3	British/International	Mid/S 3-4	Y	1 (6mths	31-40	English	BA
B4	British/International recent	Mid/S 3-4	D	No	41-50	White, Anglo saxon Just English	NLP Practioners
B5	International	Senior 2	Y	No	31-40	White Caucasian	BA English Literature
B6	British/International recent	Mid /S 3-4	Y	No	31-40	White English	ACIB
B7	International	Mid/S 3-4	Y	2 (9 and 7)		Caucasian I Dunno British	BA
B8	International	Senior 1-2	Y	No	31-40	Anglo Saxon	BA and MA in Finance and 2 prof qual.
B9	British International- recent	Mid/S 3-4	Y	1 (2 yrs)	41-50	English, from the Midlands	A levels plus prof qual
B10	British — investment	Senior	Y	No	31-40	Liverpool	BA and MA Modern Languages
B11	British International	Mid to senior 2 level PT	Y	1 (und 5)	31-40	Just British	None
B12	British International	Mid/S 3-4 PT	Y	2 (und 5)	31-40	Caucasian, whatever	BA German and Russian plus 1 prof qual

SINGAPORE INTERVIEWEES

Name	Kind of bank	Level	M	Chil	Age	Ethnicity	Education
S1	Int/Brit origin	Most Senior	Y	1 (20 plus	41-50	Indonesian Chinese	Degree Economics
S2	Local Retail	Almos senior 1-2	Y	2 (6 & 4	31-40	Chinese	BA Biogenetics Diploma in International Business – unfinished
S3	Int/Brit origin	Mid/S 3	N	No	31-40	Chinese	BA Accounting MA Financial Accounting
S4	Int/Brit origin	Mid/S 3 –4	N	No	41-50	Chinese Singaporean	BA economics and Statistics MA Financial Management
S5	Int/Brit origin	Lower senior 3	Y	2 (9 & 11)	31-40	Chinese born and bred	BA Business Administration
S6	Local investnt	Mid 4	Y	1 (3)	31-40	Chinese	BA Accountancy
S7	Local investnt	Mid/S 3-4	Y	4 (13, 7, 5, 7 mths	31-40	Chinese, but a little westernised	BA Accounting
S8	Int/Brit origin	Senior 2	Y	No	41-50	Chinese	A Levels and Diploma in Banking
S9	Int/Eur	Senior Top	Y	1 3 yrs	31-40	Chinese	BA Economics and Accountancy MBA
S10	Local retail	Mid/S 7	Y	No	51-60	Chinese – no mixture, so I am purely Chinese	BA Economics Diploma Banking
S11	Local retail	Mid/S 6	Y	3 Und 10	31-40	Chinese	BA Accounting

NB Each woman was given a code number to prevent the interviewees being identified. The 'bank type' column describes bank as being national and/or international. The descriptions under level accurately reflect how women themselves described their positions in the hierarchy. Mid/S indicates middle to senior. Numbers below this describe the number of levels from the top of the hierarchy in that particular bank. The M indicates whether married, (Yes or No) and divorced (Y, N, D respectively). Prof qual is professional qualification. NLP is neuro-linguistic programming. Chil is numbers of children.

Pilot interviews

It was decided to carry out in depth interviews about the women's career stories. This is a key method used in qualitative research (Hakim 2000). In using the idea of a narrative or a career story, it made sense to explain that I was interested in women managers' career stories and how they spoke about them. It has been argued that everyday conversation reveals a richer variable discourse than one which is formalised and highly structured. The field work began by experimenting with a very open narrative interview as outlined by Purushotam (undated). This involved meeting an interviewee and asking them to talk about their career story and their influences. The process of the open narrative interview involved beginning with this open question and prompting only in relation to what the interviewee had already said. Silences were to be dealt with by prompting them to go on. The pilot was carried out with a middle ranking Chinese origin woman manager. The interview was difficult because of a number of pauses and an unwillingness by the participant to talk without interruption. In order to overcome some of the barriers identified by the pilot, it was decided to design an open ended semi-structured questionnaire as part of the research design, and not proceed with the narrative interview.

Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire began with factual information about education, ethnic origin, age, and level in hierarchy. The rest of the questionnaire consisted of

- the story of women's careers and the influences on their careers.
- the nature of their line managers
- their own style as managers
- their relationships at work, generally and more specifically with women, men and other minority groups;
- the organisational culture
- domestic helps and hindrances
- opinions of women and minority groups as managers in the context of the labour market
- their futures
- follow up questions.

Appendix 3 shows the full questionnaire.

Since the interview is a conversational encounter the transcriptions of the interviews are in full. I have recorded and analysed the interviewer's questions and prompts, as well as the respondents' questions and responses.

An introduction to the interview was designed which explained that the researcher wanted to understand not only the factual influences that had made a difference to women managers' stories about their careers, but that she also wanted to engage them in widening their stories with examples and opinions. She explained that she was interested in exploring social change for women managers through their 'talk'. Although the study was particularly concerned with identity, use of the term was consciously avoided. This

was due partly to the fact that the term identity is open to such wide interpretation. This was justified on the basis the women might interpret this word as 'personality'.

All the interviews were transcribed and the transcriber put in the hesitations, such as 'er' or silences/pauses. Each interview lasted anything from one and a half to two hours.

Analysis

The transcriptions were read through several times. The analysis went through several rounds of interpretation and re-interpretation (Seale 1998). The data in the interviews was only one part of the overall data that was collected and absorbed over this period including in-depth studies on the political and historical context of Singapore, the attendance of feminist organisation AWARE meetings and analysis of social policy and legislation. Coding of the transcripts commenced on the basis of the two key overarching identities for women managers: paid work and the family and thereafter various other themes and identities were discovered.

As I coded the themes in the interviews I became more aware of the fact that women's identities can also be differentiated by class, ethnic origin, and age and these articulate with the above identities. Women in Singapore also mentioned national and ethnic identity more than the British women. Wherever possible, I coded talk about these 'identities' in both sets of interviews. I wanted to ensure that these identities were not separate from paid work and family, and thought about integrating these themes in the findings chapters overall.

The first two chapters on findings are clearly identifiable and almost self evident: paid managerial work and family identities. The third chapter explores how far processes of individualisation were taking place in both Singapore and Britain.

Validity

The question of validity is a complex one for a study such as this. Qualitative interviewers were not initially very interested in matters of generalisability i.e. external validity (Schofield 1993) as it was impossible to generalise on the basis of representativeness. External validity had to be reconceptualised. Schofield (1993 op.cit.) demonstrates how some authors argue that the notion of fittingness i.e. analysing the degree to which the situation analysed matches other situations in which one is interested, ought to replace the notion of generalisability in qualitative research (Schofield p.206).This means supplying a large amount of information about the entity studied and the setting in which that entity is found.

Potter and Wetherell (1987) examine several aspects of validity (p.170). Firstly, they suggest that the claims a researcher makes must have coherence. How does the discourse produce certain effects? What function does it play? What patterns in the data give cause for certain broad conclusions? The coding mechanisms and observations on the transcripts have been used in similar ways across all the interviews in this study assuring that internal validity is present.

Secondly, Potter and Wetherell (1987: 170) argue that the orientation of participants gives support to validity more generally. If the researcher is able to observe what *they*, the participants see, rather than the researcher, as consistent and dissonant, then validity will be increased. In particular, the transcripts were reviewed on several occasions, looking for ways in which the women see the contradictions and consistencies and how aware they are of them.

Thirdly, Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggest that one very important way in which validity can be enhanced is to ask about the fruitfulness of the findings (p.171). Can the claims be used to generate new kinds of explanations? Can they be used to generate new ideas to old problems? This particular approach to validity ties in with Schofield's (1993)

arguments on targets of generalisability. She suggests that if we can examine *what is*, *what may he* and *what could he*, validity will be enhanced (pp 208-217). In the category of *what may he* she suggests seeking out sites in which one can study situations, which are likely to become more common with the passage of time (p.215). The study of identity amongst groups that have changed their marginalized and inferior status might provide fruitful possibilities for future research on the changing nature of identity formation and the agency of women managers.

Interpretation and the findings

The accounts outlined in the following three chapters illuminate how these women managers understand and make sense of their experiences of macro structures and ideologies and what this means for them and other women in these countries. Their accounts of managing career in organisations and their engagement in everyday relationships, whilst recounting themes in their career biographies within gendered organisational structures and wider societal responses, gives us a glimpse of how and when their resistances and collusions appear and in what form.

It locates their subjectivities in the wider social context – or rather, it tries to examine the relationship between ascribed identities and ways in which women negotiate these given identities. These accounts are not meant to show us *only* the differences between women in the post industrial West and women in the post industrial East; their analysis is an attempt to understand the relationships between the countries colonial histories through discourse as well as help us to understand the ways in which women make sense of the dominant discourses in their countries and how attached they are to them as women, as women from the dominant ethnic group and as paid and unpaid working women. It allows us to understand at a micro-level, processes of change and which sites are more amenable to change than others.

Identity, Women Managers and Social Change:

Comparing Singapore and Britain

Part II

Chapter 6: The field work findings: managerial identities

Introduction

This chapter aims to consider the ways in which women discuss their managerial identities. It begins with examining how women discuss the managerial cultures of corporate organisations in Singapore and Britain.

As we have seen in previous chapters, the gendered relations of management are not homogeneous across corporations or countries. Corporations have their own histories and the differences between Britain and Singapore highlight the strong influences of government discourses and specific country histories.

Differences in the gendered relations of management

How do women managers in the financial sector in Singapore and Britain use country specific discourses to understand their positioning in corporate cultures?

In Singapore, local 'Chinese' banks were set up in the 1970s before the international banks located there. The banks have always employed Chinese-speaking employees, except for the lowest grades which are occupied by Malays. These 'local' banks are arguably traditional bureaucratic institutions, and do not have the characteristics of the post Fordist organisations described in previous chapters. They exist side by side with international banks who located into Singapore in the 1980s.

In Britain, all the financial institutions had become international through mergers in the last twenty or so years. Most of the British women worked in what were 'British local'

banks, but these have now merged with international institutions. Almost all the women, apart from one were white English, from the dominant majority.

The three chapters on the findings all contain extensive quotes. On the whole, I have reproduced what the women say verbatim. A Singaporean grammatical construction may occasionally be apparent and I have left these constructions as they are. Where I want to make the meaning clear, I have slightly amended the quote.

The findings are discussed under three key headings: the construction of women as having a prior duty to the family over work; the discourses on differences between women and men; and sexuality and gender relations in both countries. As we have seen in earlier chapters these themes are critical for understanding the gendered relations of management and the construction of women's identities.

Integration of family and work, or separate spheres?

Chinese and international banking

In Singapore, there is a difference voiced in the women's accounts between the culture of 'local' Chinese owned banks and foreign or international banks. The emphasis of government discourse on the family and opposing gendered identities in Singapore are extended into the 'local' Chinese banks. This culture is also present in the international banks, but is less overt.

It can be argued these interpretations do not take into account the traditions of the British banking culture itself and the colonial influence on Singapore. A senior woman manager did allude to this tradition:

> *When I first came here, I must admit, 10 years ago, it was very colonial. I used to have... I thought this must be the greatest career mistake I've made joining ....,because I couldn't stand the colonialism Like for example, you address, like the person, in the ..../ (American bank) you just say,*

T.........(first name), you don't say Mrs who. You address the person and you call them by their name. But here, it is like to that position, like, dear chief executive. dear manager whatever, and then they sign, ... I don't know who send me this memo, which manager, and there are different managers. I mean I can't be bothered with things like that. Very British and all the way, like, little things, toilet — you have a special toilet only the chief executive can use, nobody else can use. I can't go here for lunch, I got to go all the way to the chief executive, (and ask) can I have your permission to use ..... it is so bureaucratic. S1

On the other hand these cultures could also be a mixture of Chinese patriarchy *and* the traditions of British banking culture.

Singaporean women in this study interpreted this corporate culture as Chinese. One older woman in the sample expressed the Chinese (expressed as 'local') banking culture as paternalistic; she had grown up with this culture over many years in a male dominated bank:

> *Well, in a local bank or a local organization, you may tend to be very paternalistic, it is up to the big boss* S10

A much younger woman who had not worked in a male dominated banking environment, unlike the woman above, described the local banking culture in a more explicit way:

> *Well, I must say that although here, they treat ladies slightly better than guys because guys here are quite gentlemanly, I would say. So, they will kind of give way to you just because you're a lady. Assuming I make a mistake and a guy manager makes the same mistake, the guy manager would probably get bombarded more than me because I'm a lady. I think there is a certain degree of, I wouldn't say, sex discrimination, its not really, its like, it's a lady, so you give them a little leeway.* S6

These aspects of subordination to the male are balanced by a sense that the speaker benefited from a system that also simultaneously disadvantaged her.

This finding is replicated by a large study carried out by Hills (1997), comparing Chinese origin women managers in Hong Kong with their counterparts in Britain. She argues that a more traditional ascription of women and men's differences in personalities and abilities - as in Hong Kong - means that women do not feel aggrieved if they do not experience the same equal treatment as men. This situation may well apply to Singapore, because of its dominant discourse on gendered identities. Women may accept this is how things are.

Guilt associated with putting work before family is easily resolved when as a middle/senior manager the same woman legitimates the idea that motherhood and wifely duties come first for women, before attending a work based training course:

But I understand ladies not giving up their weekends for training S6

A young married woman was very aware of the rules to be followed in such cultures:

I let him make the decision – because I don't want to be embarrassed not observing certain codes of conduct. S11

The cultures of local banks in Singapore are discussed by these women as if they were extensions of the middle class household. The terms 'ladies' or 'lady' were frequently used by the women, The adoption of markers of middle class femininity by Singapore Chinese women is similar to that constructed in Britain in the last two centuries and has been inscripted into Singaporean discourse through colonialism.

In explaining how femininity emerged as an ideal for white middle class women in the eighteenth century in Britain, Skeggs (1997) examines how conduct books and magazines encapsulated this 'sign' with the concept of 'lady', which equated conduct with

appearance and sexual propriety. Women in Singapore drew upon this image of a lady in their discourses. They also talked more openly than the women in Britain about their identities as mothers and wives in the workplace.

For the Singaporean Chinese women her woman hood was constructed very differently compared to Malay or Indian women in Singapore and these identities were integral to Singaporean national identity. In contrast to Singaporean Chinese men, Chinese women were family oriented. The conversation below highlights this point:

It is still very .... The way Singaporean view this role of ladies being more family-oriented that guys. S6

Reena: Do you think that that is Singaporean

At least for the Chinese. They feel that ladies should spend more time at home in looking after the family, that it is a lady's role. S6

There is no strong demarcation between the Chinese culture in local banks and a 'Western' culture in international banks. There is an overlap and these cultures exist side by side in the same organisation. For example, one woman recounted a story of how a male customer could not accept the fact she was a branch manageress. There are *'so few lady manageresses'*, she said (S5). But the Chinese banking cultures is not just an 'old fashioned culture' on the way out; it is reinforced by government discourses (Chapter 2). Old and new cultures can exist side by side in a 'modern' international bank, (see Halford et al 1997), but the focus may change to the newer culture, and this is interpreted by speakers as progressive. It is interesting that the speaker here refers to these attitudes as affecting the older generation:

He had to convince himself that yes, this is the branch manager. It took him quite a while. I can never forget that, especially his expression when he came into the room, he was like, he paused for a while. I don't thing there was anything wrong

with me other than I was a lady. And when I went to see my customers, especially
those older generation customers, they find it difficult to tell me their problems,
they find it difficult to actually request banking facilities and the only advantage I
can say, is that ninety per cent of my lunches I never got to pay. They still remain
the position that I shouldn't pay as a lady. So I had a very small expenses account
in my entertainment. S5.

It was hard for her to challenge this a great deal; she tried but felt that she could not
continue since the 'male pride' was at stake:

Reena: And do you ever challenge that?

I did. But up to a certain level, you know you shouldn't insist any more because
they have their pride. So I let go. Unless I make it very clear that this lunch is on
the bank. Don't talk about me, this lunch is on the bank, then occasionally yes,
but the majority of them wouldn't allow me to pay. But it took them a while to
trust me and believe that I could really help.S5

On the other hand, in contrast to local banks, the older woman above, who had worked in
a local bank all her life, expressed a strong feeling that international/US banks did
encourage less deferment to the man:

I don't know whether it is true or not but I find that European bosses or Western
bosses don't feel so threatened by their subordinates' ability. May be it is
changed now. I'm talking about maybe the last 10-15 years. S8

These apparently contradictory statements indicate that 'local' banks are subject to
change as a result of international investment and the movement of 'foreign' banks into
Singapore. These local banks exist side by side these days with what the women called
the 'performance' cultures of the American banks. Women acknowledged their
preference for the greater rapidity of promotion in these foreign banks and are choosing

to work in them. They admitted it was better because they were less likely to be subjected to the kind of explicit paternalism, described above. This break from family ideologies may be important in breaking women's links to family life as primary. Career identities thus might be strengthened in the future (see Chapter 7 on processes of individualisation).

Britain - Separating work from family

Many of the women managers in Britain however, maintained a fairly split identity with work and home life. This example from one woman who worked part time acknowledged that 'family' talk was avoided by women but not by men. It was clearly significant for the corporation that this woman manager worked part time and she felt apologetic about it:

> *Yes I mean, the men themselves do, you know, talk about their families a lot more. I mean I've always found it interesting that the women feel less free to do that, you know, the men will sit around and talk about the babies and what's going on at home, the women always feel, well in my experience of women managers, always feel a little bit you know, you've got to keep up this professionalism. I mean I find it very interesting that all the guys here have got pictures of the babies on their desk and I don't, you know, I have one in my filofax, but I don't have it on my desk and it's almost like I feel like I've got some ground to make up. B11.*

British women do not describe the cultures in the bank as family, or paternalistic cultures, but instead discuss the fact they have to actively bring their managerial/career identity into being at work, and separate it from their domestic lives. Motherhood, or wifehood, could not be discussed, because official discourse by government and employers suggests this identity conflicts with your work identity. For example, one woman who worked part time and had negotiated this job, after having children, did not feel free to talk publicly not only about her home life, but also about being part time! Another, who worked part time in middle to senior management position, mentioned how hard it was to admit to one's colleagues that you worked part time. She felt they would question her commitment to the job:

you don't tell people you're part-time by the way, you just say oh I won't be in the office until Monday now. B12

RB   *You mean you don't tell people within the bank or outside?*

Within the bank and outside until you know them better and they know you're capable because there is a stigma we feel, if you're part-time you're not committed, it's been said to my face by senior managers, you realise to show any commitment to the bank and that was in the risk area, one of the risk senior managers, you really have to show any commitment to the bank you have to be full-time B12

Here commitment is not only about a career of fulltime work, (see Crompton 1997; Halford et al 1997; Liff and Ward 2001; Evetts 1994; 2000), but the ways in which symbols about gendered differences are connected in discourse to issues like organisational loyalty (Billing and Alvesson 1994).

The severe constraints on women's behaviours in Britain, reinforced through discourses, are supported by Schein, who showed that women in 'male' cultures in the West were being assessed according to 'male' models (see Chapter 2). In 1975, women managers were selected and appraised on the basis of male characteristics (Schein 1975). In 1992, Schein and Mueller found the very same characteristics were being used in the 1990s (Schein and Mueller 1992). Later studies in the USA and Britain also continue to legitimate this idea (Vinnicombe and Singh 2002; Powell et al 2002). Both men and women continue to think that men tend to be better managers because they demonstrate 'male' responses and 'male' qualities: commitment and loyalty are signified by a single minded focus on the hours you spend in paid work.

The possibilities of acting as a non-gendered individual with family responsibilities appears impossible for British women, but more specifically women with children. New

status divisions may be opening up between childless women and married women with children (Halford et al 1997). Women who work part time do not feel able to discuss openly the fact that they do so. They feel unable to ask if they can spend more time with the family, despite government sanctioned work life balance policies.

Gender relations and Singapore banking

In contrast, the banking culture in Singapore was explicitly linked by women to their family identities. Although the descriptions of the culture in Singapore local banks varied, they depicted a family-run organisation, one where gender relations were based on ideas of 'ladies' and 'gentlemen' knowing their place. Gender relations in Singapore banking are symbolised by more explicit feminised and masculinised identities, where masculinity is power and authority. In contrast to other femininities, middle class femininity becomes the most passive and dependent, compared to working class and ethnicised femininity (Skeggs 1997). Most of the women were cognizant of this inequality between women and men of the same class, and one older interviewee (below) challenged many aspects of it. This inequality has been brought into sharper focus, since the location of regional headquarters of international banks in the 1980s.

In Singapore, acting like a 'lady' is explicitly encouraged and legitimated. Here, the explicit patriarchal culture brings with it the support for Gilligan's (1982) work on different values brought by women and men. The references to 'rules and conduct' were mentioned in relation to the explicit control exercised by men over women. In response to my question of what is Chinese culture, when mentioning it in relation to her bank, the older woman, mentioned above, who had worked for a long time in a local Chinese bank responded:

> *Always respect the elders. (Read **men**- my insertion)They don't question you, they don't ... the more recent ones, some are more vocal, and they will state their point of view. **But if they say the rules apply they will apply** (my emphasis. And they are very respectful of the seniors. And we are also in turn very respectful of our*

seniors. If my boss says something I will try to argue with him, give him one or two points. If he still insists, then I'd say you are the boss, you decide. So in that sense, there is respect for the elders and the seniors is very strong in the organization. S10

It could be argued that age and gender may give some women a greater sense of power as a woman, since the reference to seniority is seen as critical in this culture. On the other hand, the assumption of male authority in a family is implicit in this quote and the feminization of subordination is a key aspect of structuring gender relations, and has been a long standing legacy of banking culture.

In explaining the history of these banks the same woman above who was a manager in the early days of Singapore in the 1970s, challenged her responsibility in the job:

> *Because the only Chinese boss that I had which was in the late seventies, the only Chinese boss I had, bless his soul he has passed away no. I find it very hard to work with him because he wanted me to always refer to him. So when I go to meetings on his behalf he'd be upset with me that I made a decision at a meeting because he'd say to me, you should not, you should have come back to me. And I remember even at that young age, telling my boss, if that is the case, why don't you attend the meeting yourself? If you think I should not make decisions, you go to the meeting yourself because you know if I attend a meeting, I represent you, which means that I am able to make decisions for you.* S10

She continues:

> *And this organization, at that time, was run on a family-type of management. Of course, since then, it has changed. It has turned professional. But right through the whole thing, even throughout the development, there is a very strong paternalistic type of organization. They take care of you for everything. They are very good in welfare and fringe benefits. Just like it is very paternalistic, just as*

they are very Chinese in their thinking, all things being equal, still the male should have priority over the female. I suppose in the American organizations you do not have that paternalistic type. Some people like it that way because you don't have that hire and fire fear on your head. S10

Reena: You mean that as long as you're in ...

As long as you don't commit anything criminal, even negligence, if it is not too large to cause a loss to the bank, they would still endure (with) you. S10

In other words, you will be looked after in paid work if you do your 'duty' (i.e. know your place) for the organisation, even if you make major errors. Women feel some gain from this subordination.

Challenge to this is unlikely unless contradictions appear sharper. The same speaker repeated this point when explaining why she was not selected for an overseas placement:

As I say, it was very paternalistic, they felt that women must be protected, they cannot stand on their own, it is difficult to send them out in a foreign country, for them out in the wilderness to stand on their own, etc. That was their thinking. S10

Here the speaker is the oldest woman I interviewed; she had been one of the first women in management in the bank, and described how she challenged suggestions of taking jobs in administrative work, when she felt she had a different expertise, that of economics, which she had studied for her degree.

This extension of the bank culture from the middle class patriarchal household where ladies are ladies and are looked after by men still remains; these cultures construct and reconstruct women's dependence on men. The white Victorian middle class family comes to mind, arguably a projection of male fantasy (Skeggs 1997). The family relations are congruent with that in the workplace: *where there is such a congruence, sex power*

differentials outside the organisation act as a power multiplier, enhancing the authority of male superiors in the workplace. (Acker and Van Houten 1992:18).

Gender roles are more clearly defined in Singaporean dominant discourse and women are explicitly assumed to be the ones who take responsibility for children and household tasks. As a result, unlike Britain, home and work life is not separated and women feel 'freer' to assume their family identities at work. For some women this 'difference' discourse despite assuming naturalness, has its benefits.

British double standards?

The gender cultures in banking in Britain still influence the manner in which women are selected, judged, appraised and assessed. If women are being perceived as managers and *as women*, their collusion in not discussing family responsibilities openly, in contrast to men, becomes explicable. Compared to Singapore, women in Britain are left with greater conflicts about their family and paid work identities. Some understand these constraints. The double standards associated with assessing women are understood by this one woman, and provide a reason for understanding the separation of home and paid work:

> *As I've got more senior I think the negatives are the interpretation people place on behaviour is different for women, is different for women than me. So I think if I had the character that I have, and were male, people would describe me in different terms. So I think as a woman, I am regarded as aggressive, whereas as a man, I would be regarded as confident, if you see what I mean.*B3

Women may feel that if they discuss their domestic lives at work, this would disadvantage them further and may exacerbate the effects of these double standards. One woman in fact explained more clearly why she preferred to keep her home (and its associated ascriptions of how women are meant to be), and organisational life separate, whereas men felt freer to discuss these openly:

We used to sit and have a management meeting every morning to talk about
accounts that had gone out of order, and they both had young babies at the time,
and I used to go into this room and they'd always be talking about what a bad
night they had, and how many times the baby had woken up, and the fact that one
was teething, and the other one suggested, have you tried such and such? and all
this kind of thing, and it always amused me no end, because I always felt that this
was the kind of conversation you'd expect a woman to be having not a man.

I mean it was very refreshing and it was very new man and all that you know. I
mean, at one point, one of the chaps was even talking about breast feeding issues
and the problems she was having, latching on, and I found all of this highly
amusing at the time and I used to tease them no end, 'cos I wouldn't dream of
talking about those things at work. I mean I wouldn't dream about saying oh you
know my daughter woke up three times and I'm really tired, I just wouldn't,
because that would be, I'd just see that as, don't know, that somebody could use
that to add to the argument that well, of course you know your place is at home,
if you're that tired, you obviously can't do the job properly, but it's in my mind
it's probably not reality. B11.

Singapore – legitimising work and family

In contrast, in Singapore, several women talked about having open conversations about
children, boyfriends and husbands at work, which built stronger collective identities as
mothers in the workplace. Most of these conversations were with other women.

One young woman describes her informal relationship with her female boss:

She was one of my first bosses here, probably 15 years my senior. We talked
about almost everything, my lifestyle, she'd give advice on everything, even
boyfriends, marriage, whether you should spend your husband's money or keep
your own. Males never talk about that. I think depending on the guy bosses, I

think a lot of them are there on a pretty professional basis. Like, you probably know their wives. But you really don't sit down and have a heart-to-heart talk with them, stuff like that. S6

Here professionalism is equated with 'men' and emotions and relationships are kept out of the workplace, but the opposite is true for women. Other women described the conversations about home life at work with their women colleagues, legitimating the relationship between women and the domestic sphere. Even more discussed their home lives in detail in the interview (see Chapter 7), talking about how husbands had dissuaded or supported them from taking jobs, how tricky the children were, and whether their husband ever made them breakfast or changed a nappy!

In contrast British women's tales of domestic life were few and far between. The interview itself however, which asked about work and career, could also have been interpreted by women as pertaining to work in the public sphere. It is entirely possible that women managers in Britain have internalised these separations of paid work and domestic work and do not openly discuss their domestic lives in the context of the public sphere unless pressed.

The feminization of management and leadership styles

These contrasts between Singapore and British women in dealing with how gendered relations in management are experienced in corporate cultures leads to a further development of the sameness and difference debate. In Britain managerial women are encouraged to 'act like men', partly as a result of the equality discourse, which has been interpreted in Britain as women being the 'same' as men. In Singapore gendered differences are explicitly discussed and the *complementary* nature of women and men's skills and qualities are legitimated in corporate cultures.

Recently, as we have seen in earlier chapters, the difference discourse has (re-) emerged in Britain as well as Singapore. This is the argument that women bring difference in

career aspirations, educational qualifications and leadership styles. In Britain, women are told through equal opportunity policies, they must assimilate and strive to be indistinguishable from men (Cockburn 1991). Yet they are constructed as 'naturally different *"evoking the reproductive body- constructed as the kernel of difference within a shell of equality - as the ultimate justification of women's lower pay, status and opportunities"* (Halford et al 1997:27). How do women in Britain and Singapore understand these debates on difference and what do they make of them?

In Britain it could be argued that the 'difference' discourse in management texts gives women 'the permission' to explore a more hybrid way of operating, if they *understand* the ways organisations are gendered (see Ledwith and Colgan 1996 and Chapter 3). They could also become 'challenging' in their work content and style, because they were interested in pushing through social transformative change (Maddock 1999). What is interesting firstly is that some women in Britain acknowledge the gendered nature of organisations and are critical of them.

One woman senior manager in the investment arm of her bank was clear about the male style in corporate culture:

> *As I said there is more, almost more expectation here to conform to the more sort of masculine, macho style in corporate banking compared to other areas where I've worked.* B8

Another, a middle manager in an international retail bank understood the corporate culture, but wanted women's 'difference' to be equally respected.

> *I don't think that the maleness dominates, the male approach dominates, I don't think there's, it doesn't feel like there's that much understanding that women can perhaps have a different approach and that that could be equally valuable.* B4

These constraints are impossible to resolve. If women 'act like men' they will be ridiculed for not being a 'natural' woman. If they bring skills associated with women into management, they may not be promoted, since they will be construed as inferior to men.

In Britain, some women are aware of the pressure to adapt to male norms and their entrapment in male cultures. The schizophrenia of repressing your household identity encourages women to 'act like men'. One woman explains the outcomes for women:

I mean if I look back at the very few female managers that I knew going back in the bank they were all unmarried or divorced, they were all fairly hard, what you would call hard women, people didn't want to work for them, they were very aggressive and it was almost as if they felt that they had to compete on the same terms B11

In Singapore, some women also mention the male approach, but because of the more fixed family identities for Chinese women and the expectations of foreign/US banks, women may be allowed more leeway in feeling free to act as 'women', as well as acting as men, if they make it to senior positions. For example, the CEO of a bank, as a senior manager, found it a lot easier to challenge in a culture of an international bank:

The men take me as one of them, they are quite used to me in some sense, they treat me like one of the boys. Now they even become a bit rude, sometimes, in my presence and I will have to remind them, excuse me, and they say, sorry, sorry, ...we forgot your presence. Some of the things I take, but when it gets a bit out of line, not so nice so I will check them. They will listen, they are English gentlemen, they will. The Americans may not S1

It can be argued that having reached a senior position, this woman was able to influence the construction of her management style. Alternatively, it could be argued that she felt freer to use her construction as a Singaporean Chinese woman to challenge the 'foreign' ways of British men, and to remember their 'gentlemanly behaviour'. Discourses of

colonialism could also explain how she was 'hailed into' her Singaporean identity. But certain conflicts of how to behave remain, and this may be linked to her perception of how the American men are:

I never felt and I never let them feel as well that I'm a woman, so watch it. I never let them feel that way. I participated in their activities. I stay up drinking with them, sometimes I feel, oh my, I've got to sleep and they say, come on, and they say oh no- I choose to show that I am weaker than they are because I am a woman. I am weaker than they are in other senses, that's fine, but like this, I don't want to excuse myself just to let them know I am a woman. I drink with them sometimes till the early hours of the morning. S1

Women in both countries discuss the range of differences between women and men in more complex and conflicting ways than reflecting dominant discourse in parrot fashion. This is despite the fact that in Singapore gendered identities are ascribed as 'fixed'. Thus one woman from Singapore described how she felt certain occupations suited women:

For example, the work that I do is very accounting based, it has to do a lot with meeting people, and that is something that suits a lot of women. Women tend to be quite meticulous, quite hands-on in what they do, they are very, very detailed. So it suits very much what I do – credit. We have a flair also for getting along with clients, which is the interpersonal bit of it, so it suits us very well. The other job would actually be the hotel industry. S5

Masculinity and moving to the top

It has been argued that women become feminised by their occupations (Davies 1995), so it appears to make sense for her. However, she does go on to dismiss the idea that these identities do not change. Women do become 'masculinised' she says, by moving closer to the top:

Do you agree with me that women are more emotional people than men? I used to think a lot and I used to be a pretty emotional person. That's fine, no harm getting emotional, just take it, cut short the thing and run. And I think women at the top after a while they are not bothered by the emotional part of it anymore. Good or bad, they become less approachable, less personable, you tend to be very quick and short with people. Maybe they have to be that way. S5

Reena: Do you think men are less emotional and therefore they are quick and sharp anyway, if you know what I mean?

Men are less emotional when handling people. Women tend to be more emotional when handling people. Although as you get more to the top, you become less emotional anyway. S5

These interpretations are supported by research. A recent study carried out by Coates (1997) examined the effects of corporate culture on women. The survey asked if the corporate culture made women and men less caring, considerate and more cynical and tough. Women reported that the culture made them less caring, less emotional and tougher (Coates op. cit. : paras 6.3 and 6.4) In fact the research showed that as men went up the hierarchical ladder, they too felt constrained by the organisational context – they felt they had to get tougher as they went up the ladder, suggesting the adoption of a more hegemonic version of masculinity.

Thus there were a wide variation in the styles of management, but these were adapted to suit the effects of organisational contexts which were themselves highly gendered. This variation may be different for different women in different hierarchical positions. At the same time, in both countries, women's own subjectivity and experience of their world also allows them to interpret their own actions as attempting a more *hybrid* identity. They make their judgments based on an understanding of the constraints.

Hybrid identities?

In Singapore and the UK, senior women may be attempting to forge new 'hybrid' identities. But often they are between a rock and hard place. They could arguably be changing the way in which a profession practises its craft, as in women in medicine (Pringle 1998) or in senior management in local government (Maddock 1999). They may be changing in the light of understanding the narrow way in which power functions at the top. This understanding may encourage an empathy with other women.

One woman in Britain explained that the idea of 'being the same as' men was something that had to be resisted. Men also changed their behaviours in particular organisational contexts. The difference discourse in the new managerialism and organisational change in Brtiain makes some women feel more comfortable in their role:

> *Oh lots of it, yeah, there's lots of change, I mean it's not such a dirty word any more to talk about having your family and taking a break from your career than it used to be, it used to be you know, you're either a career person or you're not, if you're a career person you act like a man, you try and be a man in every shape and form, you know, you drink with them, you swear with them, you get drunk with them and you know your aggressive.......*

> *Now women, certainly in my industry, women don't feel that any more at all, they feel, we have things to bring to the party, we operate in a different way, there's no way we should try and be you because we're different, we're totally different, we can do the same things as you but we'll do it in a different way and in actual fact it's wonderful for you to have the mix of the male way of doing it plus the female way of doing it in a team. B11*

The conflicting ways of behaving by repressing aspects of your identity appears to have been resolved, with some relief by this speaker. But of course there are dangers with this comfort zone. One woman interpreted these differences as being almost essentialised:

Well I think women and men are different and I've got a boy and a girl and they are completely different even though they've been brought up exactly the same way. B2

She felt her management skills were enhanced because of her 'feminised' intuition:

but what I find is that most men find me much easier to talk to than they ever would a male manager, and I probably know far more about them and the way they tick and their emotions than probably any other manager has ever known about them B2

Looking out for other women

Some women gave me information about looking out for other women.
On woman in Singapore, felt that she took into consideration the fact that some mothers would want to pursue a career, whereas others would not. This view of course, might be related to the fact that she was not married and did not have children:

I normally ask all my staff to do an upward appraisal. I am very tough, I am very fair. I think most of them would respect my technical ability. They find it hard to keep pace, some of them, not all of them, some of them, I think they do appreciate because you know, you're managing different types of people, and I always tell them upfront, are you a very ambitious type who wants to go ahead or you the type who are quite happy with what I am?. I do have a lot of mothers, a few mothers working for me, who have got children, so their priority may not be career progression. Then we would work out a job that would be suitable for them. If they are really ambitious, then they would really go all the way out. S3

This young woman does not challenge how the concept of 'career' or ambition is defined; however, she is looking through a gender lens at her staff and thinking about appropriate

directions for them. She explicitly acknowledges the fact that it is women who care for their children. Her approach does not challenge the ascription of caring as a quality of women, but it does consider the sensitivity needed to manage mothers who may have varied expectations regarding paid work and career. However the overt way in which 'career' and ambition are implicit for fathers, but not mothers is a 'taken for granted' norm. This example of discourse on masculinity and femininity in relation to 'career' help us understand how the practices that sustain such notions are mobilized . On the other hand, she was not falling into an easy trap of stereotyping all mothers in Singapore as being less interested in their careers.

An understanding of how male power operates through direct discrimination may also engender empathy with other women. A British woman who had experienced several instances of overt discrimination herself, including sexual harassment was strong enough to challenge her colleague when a woman applicant was not given a job in her team:

> *But this guy, it was like déjà vu, this was quite recently. I'd advertised for some network trainers for my team, this girl had applied, I'd invited her for an interview 'cos it was an excellent application and he phoned up and said I don't want her to get the job and his reason was she hadn't got the CIB..... he's talking to the wrong person here.*

> *I said you don't need that qualification in training. We do encourage people to take qualifications but they're different ones to training, and I understand and believe that qualifications are very important to the bank, but I don't think that's the case for this. And it went on, and he kept giving more and more excuses of why she shouldn't have this job. She got the job and I got personnel's backing to do it.* B4

The advantages of difference

Women who have decided that a 'male' type of career or a 'male culture' is not for them begin to see the advantages and benefits particularly in Singapore, where gendered roles are framed around difference:

I think there are advantages in being a woman. (Reena: Tell me what they are.) I find that I feel less for myself, I do not worry about failure. I think men tend to worry, they say, am I better than that guy? or if I am not as good...For me it doesn't affect me. You become a lot braver, because if you see that you dislike something, you could just voice it out. I have seen a lot of guys that would not, because it is politically incorrect to do so. And they are right it is politically incorrect. If you see something that is not right and if you bring it out, you know there will be consequences, which may not be favourable to yourself or it will affect their career. I think they put a lot of onus on their career; they have to make it, that kind of mentality S3

The 'difference' discourse allows women to feel freer to not 'play a 'game', particularly a game where they did not make the rules (Marshall 1984; 1995). And if you did make a career, the support for child care and domestic work in the form of mothers and maids was available in Singapore for the middle class. They could use 'servants' (see Chapter 2 on family changes) and one senior woman, the CEO, argued there were benefits to this 'choice':

One thing perhaps is that Singapore women have a lot of freedom, married or not married, a lot of help in the household, because they don't have to do work at home, so they can focus on their career, you asked me about my daughter and all that. So, because of that I was able to ... had I been in London, without help and having a child, I cannot, when you get home you've got to cook. Here, I don't cook, I can't cook. S1

The preservation of a different identity is also acknowledged by some of the women in discussing differences between male ways of behaving and female ways of behaving. But

this difference discourse with implicit notions of subordination is also amenable to be challenged if you are senior. Another senior woman manager, a CEO, in Singapore said she was able to say to her older Chinese secretary: not to 'call me a lady boss' in a European owned bank. She had been educated out of Singapore in the West and expressed how it felt to be a woman boss with her secretary:

> *As much as I try to be a human being, a boss, a person, it is quite difficult. I find that it is the same thing. I have certain friends ... they never listen to the women, but the male ... can just rush at them, scream at them and they take it, and not from a woman who is very nice. It's a bit of a mindset, the ageing mindset. It's harder to be a woman boss, you can't always be forceful, you're always like bitchy, I suppose, the woman equivalent of the adjectives are always quite awful. I take it harder. S9.*

The no win situation of woman boss with woman secretary is supported by Rosemary Pringle's work. Not only are women constructed as 'all powerful' or not powerful enough', but men's authority is taken for granted whilst women have to continually prove themselves. In Pringle's study the most effective strategies for exercising power for women were the non-coercive methods, charming people into acting voluntarily. The fact that women bosses may often be in a position with older women secretaries suggests a mother daughter relationship, but women bosses may resist being cast in the role of the daughter, *"the most powerless position of all"* (Pringle 1989:60), especially if they are young single and ambitious. The mother daughter relationship may convey the past, a sense of being trapped or stultified by your mother.

Sexuality

The ways in which gender relations are sexually defined are differently played out under the two differing contexts of Singapore and Britain. It was suggested earlier that work organisations are all imbued with sexuality and desire. The construction of gendered identities in workplaces is different in Singapore compared to Britain. Gendered

constructions are inextricably linked here with sexualised constructions. In Britain, women are more explicitly embodied, being defined by their body shape, hair and appearance and even their sexual availability. In Singapore, Chinese middle class women are 'ladies' and as such, are constructed as wives and mothers; an overt sexuality of sexual availability is not flaunted; it is therefore absent in the women's discourse. Middle class women are 'respectable' (see Skeggs 1997) with no hint of impropriety. These constructions are maintained through differing gender regimes in the workplace which have different histories.

In Singapore, the development of the gender regimes at work and in the household has different roots to Britain. The Chinese middle class 'lady' became an important marker of Asian family values in the building of the Singaporean national identity. As early as 1960, Singapore enacted the Women's Charter, which gave women protection against sexual offences and domestic violence; it laid the groundwork for equality in marriage, despite the dualisms of gendered identities. Sexual propriety, respectability and appearance inform this middle class Chinese femininity of 'ladies'; ladies are desexualised and sexuality is not 'flaunted'; it is repressed if you are a wife and mother; it is a mark of the respectability of being middle class and part of the dominant ethnicity.

Thus the sexualisation of women and their bodies and appearance is absent in the Singapore women's discourse. There were no stories about verbal comments, or even overt sexual harassment. In fact there were more interesting references to the type of masculinity demonstrated by Chinese men. It was men's quiet masculinity discussed in discourse, not women's. One young single woman takes a look at the Singaporeans generally, but she is really talking about the majority ethnic group, the Chinese:

I think on a professional basis it's different styles. Americans and the British tend to speak out much more, or people that have lived in the US tend to speak out much more like myself. The Indians are very vocal too. I think Singaporean Chinese tend to be a lot quieter, if you have a mixture of different people, unless they know that group very well. I went to secondary school here so I kind of know

what it is all about. You are not encouraged to show yourself, whereas if you compare with Canada, everything you do is show and tell. Here, it is you don't. You keep quiet and learn, go for exams, and do well. This is a foreigner's view of Singapore S3

Another woman echoed this idea that men are reserved:

Ladies are more chatty, guys are normally more reserved and they probably won't talk so much of their own personal things, more of work, work, and more work. Whereas I think sometimes your bosses would also want to hear other things other than work, sharing jokes. I think ladies are more free to share jokes. S6

She went to tell a story about two guys who did not communicate through words, but were hostile to each other and ended up staring at each other for hours. She felt it was related to the fact they did not show their hostility in front of women.

A senior woman CEO recounted an anecdote about how women in Singapore gave out a more outgoing personality than their male counterparts and was remarked upon by employers.

...the outgoing country manager asked me a very interesting thing, "........." (her name) what is it about Singapore, you know, how come all the women are .... very prosperous? .. they must work better than the men." "Who are you talking about?" I said, "your bank, your ....? He said, "yes". And I said, "who are you talking about – clerical level, officer level?". He said, "all levels". And I said, "hah, interesting. Interesting for a single person and an outsider to observe that. You were curious to know what could be the reason behind this. It is not the first time I heard this comment from a lot of people, even locals, even managers. They said, when they go for interviews, the young graduates, the ladies always shine

*better than the men, much more eager to get a job, whereas the men were much
more lethargic ". S1*

Men were considered quieter than the 'ladies' and not likely to express their masculinity
in an overt sexual or aggressive way in front of women. This interpretation is also
supported by my own felt experience living in Singapore. When I went out in the
evenings on my own, I would often pass a bar with men standing outside on the
pavement drinking. In Britain I would normally cross the road, to avoid stares or
comments.

In Singapore there was no overt 'threatening masculinity' and I often wondered how this
could be explained. In thinking about the government's authoritarianism, it became a
little clearer. The central planning of people's lives, the social engineering of the
government, regarding how families should live their lives, how they should look after
their children, how many children they should have, where they should live and work,
and who they should marry, are all ways in which the state has assumed control over
Singaporean citizens. Authors have termed the gendered differences in South East Asia
bewitching women, pious men (Ong and Peletz 1995). In fact the State in Singapore is
the 'father' or the patriarch resulting in a different type of masculinity and femininity
being expressed in the public sphere (Heng and Devan 1997).Fathers and mothers in
Chinese middle class families 'represent' hard work, efficiency, responsibility and
respectability. The construction of Chinese middle class women as exuding propriety and
symbolising family values is integrally bound up with the explicit construction of
gendered identities in the building of national identity.

Appearance

In Britain, if women managers want to ensure they are viewed as women, rather than as
'men' they are caught in a double bind, since dressing as 'feminised' and 'girly' serves to
attract attention to your body; not dressing very 'femininely' attracts other comments
about your sexuality. She is like a 'man'; she is hard. Or is she a lesbian?

One young married woman makes it clear that she does not want to look like a man nor a respectable mother/wife, but as a feminine 'girl':

In terms of my colleagues, I'm not a masculine female in the sense that I wear nail varnish and I've curly hair and I don't dress in tweeds, you know. I'm not that. I play. I am my feminine side. I allow it out and I enjoy being a girl and I like dressing up and I like make-up B2

Furthermore, she is aware it is a conscious deliberate strategy to reduce tension as she admits:

I would say that probably generates a fairly chivalrous response from the chaps around me so they tend to open doors for me and flirt a bit with me and so on and I treat that as all pretty good humoured stuff, so I don't make them feel uncomfortable in any way B2

One woman describes references to women's bodies as being fairly common in her workplace:

Oh I'm just trying to think really, well there's a girl who works for one of the consultants we deal with who is about 6 ft 4" and gorgeous and has legs up to her armpits, you know, I recall going into meetings with very senior people where you would say "blah blah blah dealt with, dur, dur, dur" and somebody would say "the unforgettable thing about her is her legs isn't it?" and I would say "that's a completely outrageous thing to say", well I wouldn't say, I would just laugh and G...... (name of man) and I would say "how outrageous" B3.

But you know it's like, and as I say you can see what I mean, it's not an offensive thing but there is plenty of that that goes on. B3

Harassment

One woman described her experience of sexual harassment:

RB   In all the jobs you've had at .... , is there anything that you feel that has been about the way people have treated you as a woman?

I can think of some times when I've had some horrible experiences, like when I worked in the branch, and the assistant manager put his hand down my shirt on my breast, that was pretty horrible but I mean it's not........ I mean these days you'd get done for that but years ago nobody even talked about it. B4

For her, sexual harassment can be tackled by legislation, but being judged on how you look remains:

I can remember going with my line manager to a meeting with some people in the IT area- that we're gonna introduce a new system, and I was going along to talk business, and this guy stands up, and he says, "oh I see you're recruiting to the usual standards then, usual high standard". He meant the way I looked. B4

Furthermore, being a manager did not mean you were immune from sexual gossip and innuendo. A senior woman explained she had been staying in a hotel with a male colleague on a business trip and other male colleagues had begun to whisper about whether she was having an affair:

You can do without this, you can do without the speculation about who you're sleeping with, it's not helpful, it's undermining B3

Yet this woman agreed it was quite common, but was not challenged by women.

Women's dependence

The third theme raised by the interviews in relation to sexuality is the issue of women's dependence on men for social interaction/drinks/parties. One woman, who used to travel in her job implied that society continues to define women as needing a man for many social occasions:

> *When I worked at S............I used to have to go to ....a couple of times a year*
> *to the .... (an event), that's where we picked up a lot of our business and it*
> *was always much harder as a woman, or perhaps this is my perception, but it*
> *always felt much harder as a woman to walk into a crowded bar, walk up to*
> *somebody and start a conversation whereas my male colleagues were very good*
> *at going in and just sort of, just talk about football or the match that was on the*
> *night before or something, it appears very easy..... Two issues, one going into a*
> *bar on your own, late at night, issue of how you get home afterwards and*
> *secondly, the issue of social dialogue.* B11

Women are seen as dependent on men and being on your own as a woman suggests sexual availability. With this is the 'added' fear of being out late at night *without* a man for protection. The continued construction of women both sexualised and weaker, i.e. needing to be with a man was extremely difficult to challenge on an individualised basis. Furthermore women felt excluded because of sporting talk or sexual innuendo (Cockburn 1991; Collinson and Hearn 1996)

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions of this chapter are interpreted on the basis of both the theoretical literature on the gendering of organisations and the discourses of the women in the interviews.

The subjectivities of managerial women in Singapore and Britain and the ways their identities are constructed through discourse supports wider theoretical work on the gendering of corporate organisational cultures.

But these 'gender regimes' in organisations in Singapore and Britain are differently constituted and expressed in the two countries. The corporate discourses in the banks articulate with government discourses and policies, together with historical processes and the traditions of the two countries.

In both Singapore and Britain, women in corporate cultures continue to be ascribed gendered managerial identities, despite working full time and mimicking male work patterns. But in Singapore, the historical influences of British colonialism, coupled with dominant discourses on 'natural ' differences between the sexes, explicitly construct Chinese middle class women as women workers, as wives and mothers both in the public *and* private spheres. Local banks and to some extent international banks legitimate these 'naturalised differences'. Women are 'ladies' and men are 'gentlemen'. They are not explicitly eroticised, but carry a respectable 'family values' label. Women are wives and mothers, and as such, protected by men and not sexually available. Although some conflicts between women's identities are beginning to show in the international banks, Singaporean women do not as yet experience major conflicts within their feminised identities, between work and family. The feminised identities are more unified and homogeneously ascribed across a range of sites. Some women also feel they gain from paternalistic subordination in the corporate culture.

In Britain, on the other hand, dominant discourses of equality with men are legitimated by corporate culture, but this equality, unlike Singapore, means acting in the same ways as men. The discussion of family responsibilities or acting 'like a woman' is constructed by corporations as separate from paid work and the corporate culture. Women thus respond by keeping their home and family lives separated in corporate discourses.

Acting like a man within a corporation suggests ambition and commitment. Some women do 'choose' this way, others do not, but they do so, often understanding the constraints. At the same time, women are still implicitly constructed by corporations in Britain as sexualised embodied emotional human beings. British managerial women, therefore, experience greater conflicts in their family and managerial identities, since the family identity is suppressed at work.

The emerging discourse of differences in management styles, suggesting that women bring differences to management has given managerial women some comfort in this conflict and they have attempted to experiment with hybrid ways of behaving. These hybrid ways of acting, however, are related to personal and situational contexts of the women concerned and the differing constraints operating in micro power situations. In Singapore, those women who recognise the limited ways in which power functions at the top also experiment with this hybridity, but possibly feel freer than their British counterparts, to experiment with these ways. This latter interpretation is hypothesised and not explicitly displayed in the data.

Identity, Women Managers and Social Change:

Comparing Singapore and Britain

Chapter 7: The fieldwork findings: Family and household identities

Wives and mothers

Introduction

This chapter discusses how managerial women's discourse in the interviews in this study represents the construction of women's identities as wives and mothers. As we have seen in earlier chapters family lives in Singapore and Britain are changing. Across Britain, there are increasing numbers of single occupancy households, increasing numbers of stepfamilies, a decline in fertility rates and higher divorce rates. For Singapore, there is a growing number of single households, and a slower, (relative to the UK), rising rate of divorce as well as fewer children in middle class dual career families. Dominant discourses in both countries have also seen a cry for a return, or a reinforcement of 'family values'. It was argued previously that this discourse on family values in Britain is partly caused by the decline of the welfare state.

This chapter explores how managerial women discuss these discourses and the contradictions inherent within them. The relationship between women and men in their domestic lives is differently constituted in Singapore and Britain. How far is this illustrated through what the women say about their domestic lives?

On the whole women in both countries spoke less about their household identities than about their paid work as managers. This may have been because the interview began by asking them to talk about their career stories. They could have assumed that this meant their paid work lives, rather than their household lives. There was more spontaneous discussion about families and how the women discussed being brought up in Singapore than in Britain. Family discourse was not absent in the discussions with British women managers, but it was shorter and given less time. It could be argued that there was a British 'reserve', particularly in relation to husbands: British women did not refer to how

their husbands spent their time unless specifically requested by the interviewer. These differences between the two countries could also be reflective of women's constraints in Britain on keeping their career and family lives separated, and keeping private about relationships. In Singapore, the fact the women were more expansive about domestic issues could be based on the fact that family identities are more explicitly legitimated at the workplace.

The domestic division of labour

Singapore – planning and stress

In Singapore, the contradictory pressures of government discourse urging middle class high achieving women to look after their families, have more than two children, for the good of the country, and continue to work full-time, has led to stress for women managers, which they have internalised. This stress is exacerbated by the 'high achievement' oriented society interested in wealth and consumerism.

Everything in Singapore as a country encourages efficient planning and organisation: the state rigidly plans everything, and the idea that the Chinese are hard working and organised, compared to the Malays and Indians goes deep into women's talk. The organisation of lives down to the last hours and minutes was apparent in many of the women's accounts. The telling of these 'overload' stories by women functions to allow women the feeling they are in control, and they have made a 'choice' to live in this way. It conforms to dominant discourse. In Britain as we shall see later, the women still have to be organised and planned, but the poor provision of child care and a lack of rigid state planning leads to much individualised agonising about the balance between children and paid work.

In Singapore, as we have seen the government has made tax concessions for employing maids who live in the household and provide basic childcare needs. . The relationship of women to the extended family and the use of their mothers and in-laws as additions to

helping with care and household duties have made it easier for women to participate in full time work. They can feel in control up to a point, but the strains are beginning to show where they feel unable to let off steam

One married woman, with two children describes her schedule:

It is unusual. I live with a set of in-laws which meant that I could leave my children with them when I go to work. But you also have conflicts, domestic conflicts and all that. But that has to be handled separately. But it is quite major challenge, because you have to grapple with the work place, you have to grapple with very young children from aged one to aged six, who fall sick, who call you in the office and he's having an asthmatic attack this morning, what do I do blah, blah, blah. You have to take time off to bring them to a paediatrician, etc. Then at six to ten pm its school work, and you double up as tuition teacher, and then you have to be a wife to your husband, and also inner space for yourself. So, it's a major task. I have colleagues who are married who have no children. I have colleagues who are women who have children who are older. So you have to battle all this. So it is actually very effective time management that you have to have. That's the answer. That's the only answer and mental strength. I mean the weekends, I have to schedule up nine to ten, what's the programme? ten to eleven what's the programme? How much can you achieve in two days or one-and-a-half day? S5

These statements have echoes of Hochschild's (1997) findings, referred to earlier, where the 'time bind' cuts in. Women appear to have no choice but to schedule tightly their home and leisure lives as if they were writing an implementation plan for work. Hochschild has argued this 'modern working mother' is portrayed in advertisements as resembling Frederick Taylor, the famed efficiency expert of modern industry. The Singapore government and its planning has been compared to the 'perfect bureaucracy' as defined by Weber; everything has its place and its time. Life patterns then conform to rigid government planning.

Another woman told of dropping her children off at her mother's house, having breakfast there, coming to work and then going back there after her work, where she is fed and the children bathed. She returns to her house to sleep. When asked if domestic issues had hindered her career progression, this same young woman replied:

> *I have not really thought about it. Well, I think not much. Unless it is my own choice that I want to really give up more time for my kid, I'd probably knock off at 6 o'clock when its time to go off. But currently, I guess probably it's because I've got good support at home. I know that my child is quite well taken care of at home. I've got a maid and I park them at my mum's place and my mum is still available to help me out, overseeing the kid, when I'm at work. I've got good support, I must tell you this, and everybody envies me. S6*

The woman above feels it is down to her to organise her and husband's lives so that her husband can enjoy his leisure. She is also less agonised about the situation because she also has her mother on hand to help:

> *So, like for me, a typical working day will be, wake up at my own place, lug my son and my maid and of course, my husband, drop my maid and my son at my mum's place, take breakfast at my mum's place, change at my mum's place, then come to work with my husband. And my husband is only two blocks away. We drive down. Well, at night, we'll make our way differently because my husband has a different programme. He's into archery, almost every night, he's at the P......... Road Archery. You'll see him there, he's there almost every night. So I'll make my way home. So when I go home, I take dinner at my mum's place and my husband will come back and we'll lug everybody back. I will take my bath at my mum's place too. So my own home is really like a hotel, so we just spend the night there from 10.00 pm to 7.00 am the next day S6.*

In Singapore it is the norm to work a six-day week, leaving little time for leisure. Women have to organise their life down to the last detail. That really leaves her no time for leisure, supporting Brannen and Moss (1991) work that women who are engaged in full time employment continue to take responsibility for domestic issues and thus sacrifice their own leisure and free time. On the other hand, she has the availability of full time live in maids and the presence of in-laws to support and help her. The subordination has a pay off. The discourse of being a 'good wife and mother' and a good Singaporean by contributing to economic growth through labour market participation inevitably leads to some stress, but this is buffered by the availability of domestic support and visible material gains. Stress might be the result but great conflicts between how to choose between home and work are not as agonising for Singaporean women as for British women.

Britain – the agonies of the balancing act

In Britain, women in banking management work a five-day week. Because of the lack of state planning with regard to child care, women are left to sort out the child care arrangements themselves instead of reliance on the availability of full time maids and in-laws, as in Singapore. As argued in earlier chapters, British child care is the worst in Europe and considered a private matter for individuals.

Clearly there is a good deal of organisation involved, but women responded in a more varied manner to organising their lives. One woman with two young children explained why she did *not* want to organise her home life. She explained how different her life was at home as 'mum'.

> *Mum is again a different animal, at work I'm very organised, at home I'm totally disorganised, I mean at work I know exactly what I'm gonna do in a day and at home I don't.* B2

Her approach to her work which is not all consuming allows her to relax and not organise herself at home:

I'm very laisser-faire, I don't like being organised, you know, I don't have a set routine, I don't like to say oh right, it's ten o'clock, we'll go swimming. It's eleven o'clock, we'll do so and so. I mean, because I do that at work, there's no way I'd want to do that at home. So we have very fluid weekends. Again it's many different aspects. I think most people are like that actually, they don't always let out their many sides though, but most people do have more than one personality. B2.

In Britain, unlike Singapore, the family amongst the middle classes is assumed to be the nuclear family. Extended families might live nearby, but day to day care by extended family members is not as widespread as it was many years ago. Furthermore, support and help in the domestic sphere is class and ethnically based; middle class families have become more dispersed, and live away from their parents (Gregson and Lowe 1994). They do not tend to live in similar local areas as working class or racialised families do. This reinforces the lack of state support and they feel they have to cope with child care on their own. Although there may be more variation in efficiency schedules, compared to Singapore, the lack of access to widespread child care provision together with a commitment to paid work can cause intense individual agonising over how to balance work and family.

One woman explains:

(My children are) ... three and four now and also childcare is a constant problem, well it's not a problem, it's just you're constantly weighing up, is it worth me working? I like working but I'm not doing it financially which people think, they say we're on a good salary, yes, but it costs me £70-£75 to walk out of the door just for nanny and I'm paying school fees because I live in, it's a vicious circle at the moment, I live in central London so I can work but because it's expensive, because it's central London I work to pay the mortgage, so people say,

well why don't you move out, yes but then I wouldn't see the children I wouldn't get childcare for, I mean it's a ten hour day for the nanny already B12

When asked if there was anything in her domestic life that had hindered her career, one woman with one child responded with how she would like more flexibility in collecting her children:

Reena : Are there any features in your domestic life that help or hinder your career?

Yeah, hinder, my husband works abroad a lot of the time so I, ... you know, childcare falls very heavily on my shoulders so there is the issue of you know, dropping off, collecting, having to walk out of meetings because I absolutely have to catch a train at half past four. So that's a big hindrance because there are times when I really would like to be flexible at that part of the day, the morning isn't the issue.

If my husband's around, he would drop off in the morning. When he's not, I have to come in, drop off and get to work. So I would rather quarter past eight to quarter past four, than quarter past nine to quarter past four, but the issue is the other end of the day, the end, so that's a big hindrance B11

The soul searching and frustration at the constraints may help her cope by arguing that career is not everything, but the agonising remains that her career has been hindered.

I suppose that depends on how you look at it. It's probably hindered the speed of my career to a certain extent in more ways than one. I mean partly because I have taken time out and stopped things for a while, but also because I personally don't have a single minded view on my career. There's more to life, you know, I don't allow work to be all consuming and probably, if I'd wanted to really fast track it and leg it all the way up the organisation, I probably would have had to work all

hours god sends, and he sent from here to there, and all the rest of it, and I don't
want that to happen any more. So I'm happy to go as far as my intellect and
whatever, capabilities, will take me, but not at any price no. So I think yes it
probably has hindered in some ways. But in other ways it's probably helped
insofar as I've got something that keeps me sane. I actually think it's positively
unhealthy that your work is your whole life, so I go home and I've got something
else to think about. B11

Certainly more talk about how much to see their children took place in the British
women's accounts of their careers. In Singapore the women did not discuss their guilt at
such length. One British woman told me a story at great length about whether her
children were happy with her nanny, but was already worrying about the next nanny.

My children don't resent me working, quite the contrary, they've never known
anything else, we have been very fortunate in that we had a nanny who stayed
with us for six years and who left on Friday, which was a bit sad really, but her
life had taken another call, she was now with a gentleman who lived up in North
London and we live in South London and she managed to do the journey for about
eighteen months from Enfield to Chiselhurst which was an hour every day on the
M25 (motorway) and she said, I always said I'll leave when Alex, my youngest,
goes to school, because this is too difficult for me and she duly did.

So we've started another one and let's hope she's fine but because they've had
strong continuity of care, and the nanny was very loving, expensive, but that's
another story, but loving to the children, they've been very happy, they're very
well adjusted and are happy healthy children. B2

Another British woman decided she wanted to see more of her children, but part-time
work with all its disadvantages was the only alternative:

And in terms of what I might go and do, I don't know, it would be nice to be in a situation where I could say, I certainly would like to be in a position where I had greater control of the hours. I mean I would love to work part-time, I have no desire to be in here at 8 in the morning and leaving here between 8-10 o'clock at night.

I try not to change it, I try not to change it, I think I keep saying this to them now but I can't see myself going back full-time, I just don't want to, I want to see the children, it isn't necessarily a full-time job, a 9-5 job, and I want to have some time with them and it's a psychological thing, I feel better that I see the children half the week. I see them four days and don't see them three days.

RB   Yeah I understand that.

And that barrier is a high one for me, and they keep saying now they're old enough, I don't know what they discuss with their friends. We don't want a nanny, I get this little chorus in the morning, which is fairly heartbreaking. B12

RB   Oh dear, it's difficult to handle isn't it, I mean.

Of course they'd rather have their mother, and also, I don't have parents around which people who do, say it's a real safety net, whereas we don't. Also to have two children is more of a barrier than one, whereas one child you can always foist on somebody for a couple of hours. To foist two, the potential for mayhem is far far greater. They're both boys, so it can get very busy. B12

Another woman wanted work to be placed in perspective in her life :

I mean some people are obsessed about work, I mean there are some people from foremen to workers ....I think that when I was younger the success in my career was a very important part of my own personal self esteem, but as I've got older

the things that are important to me in my life are different - they are the things

that give me a sense of personal value. B7

Another felt the same way:

I mean of course you spend so much time at work; you're not impervious to work.

You know if somebody was to make you feel small in a meeting, or tell you a piece

of work was rubbish, I mean, of course you'd internalise it, but in terms of taking

a step back from that, and thinking really, when push comes to shove, the things

that are really important to me are the quality of the friendships and the

relationships that I've built up over the years B9

Support for government discourse vs. negotiations with husbands

The agonising and conflict between thinking about child care and social lives can
disadvantage women's work patterns but it may have positive spin offs if they are forced
into negotiating domestic tasks with their husbands. The fact they have a career is
acknowledged in the women's discourse and negotiations can prove fruitful. One woman
had negotiated with her husband that they both did 4 days a week in paid work. She
admitted she did earn more than her husband. It helped her get the work life balance and
allowed her to:

Let me play in an area where I have that kind of confidence and experience so

that I can strike the right balance. So what I'm doing is working four days in the

office and my husband's working four days as well, he works for the T...........

Yeah, I mean I took a view, that I think our issue of principle was that it

would be bizzare to have a baby and then have this baby spend more time with

other people than he would spend with us, but on the other hand I didn't have any

big hang up about him having to be with m, as opposed to his father. This was a

kind of we-could-have-our-cake-and-eat-it-strategy, I suppose, you know, so we'd

see him at weekends which is two days. He has a day with D........., he has a day

with me, so that makes four days, he goes to nursery three days when he does lots of exciting things with other children, and comes home covered in paint, all the things we wouldn't do with him. B3

And I still earn a lot of money and I still do a job that I really enjoy which seems like a pretty good deal to me.

Reena: Does to me too...

I mean we had all sorts of concerns, I earn twice what my husband earns so the practical consideration was that if this didn't work and we had to cut corners then we would cut corners with his job and not mine, but I have no intention of working full time ever again.

*I think secretly everybody else would like to do it, even the men, anybody with children looks at me and says god, that's a really good arrangement.*B3

Work life balance had been negotiated but had 'little to do' with her corporation's support.

Another woman had had a child after many years of trying for one, but her husband did not earn as much as her and was happy to look after the daughter.

But I'm also extremely fortunate in that my husband's not career minded at all, so I had L........; she would be about a year old and I got an interview for this divisional manager's job in Birmingham. B9

Another woman who was childless, and worked in 'equal opportunities', and married to a manual worker was able to negotiate his involvement in childcare for the future:

And that is because it's still predominantly seen as the female that takes on the role of primary carer. I have to say that discussing it with my partner, we've

decided it's going to work the other way, in that we've already decided that if we

have a family, it's going to be him that looks after the child, and me that stays in

*the job, because we think our skills are better suited.*B6

This theme of equity or even a swapping of roles with regard to child care work also applied for a British woman about her career. One of the most senior women in the study who earned about the same as her husband (they had no children) explained how her employers had assumed she would be happy to take a job abroad and not worry about her partner's job, because '*they are so used to negotiating moves with men,*' who take their dependent wives along. Both of them however were concerned with the fact his earnings would drop and they discussed it, and in the end she turned the move down. She and her husband wanted to maintain an equity in the relationship:

It's funny, you know we've talked about it, and he said right, the first move that we

made abroad was based on my career, the next move can be on yours. So if I had

felt the job was right, and the location was right, we would have moved to

Singapore, because that was our agreement, but I wasn't going to tell the bank

*that.*B8

Where there is discourse around equity in marital relationships, coupled with higher economic power, women do negotiate to maintain that equity (Wheelock 1990); it would have been interesting to know if men as a rule would do the same. The following exchange suggests that men would not have been as explicitly acknowledging of their partner's caring for the children.

One woman with one child when asked if her husband was supportive was 'grateful' that her husband has swapped roles with her:

*No, as I said before, because he is the way he is with L........ (*child's name*) and*

you know the way he treats her, and the way he looks after her. That makes it very

very easy for me. If I had to worry about picking her up from nursery and

*dropping her off and if somebody rang, and said she was sick, and I had all that, I
would find my job that I do now very very difficult. So without any doubt, I value
that, 'cos I don't have any family locally or whatever, it's a very conscious
decision too.*

*When I took this job, we took a smaller mortgage so P....... (her husband) doesn't
have to work if he doesn't want to, you know, he's done contracting, he's got an
interview for a part-time job but it's not important, it's not critical financially that
he works and that's made it very easy for us really to settle, so that helps* B9

So it is women who subjectively experience the conflict. The availability of part time
work in Britain primarily taken by women means women feel themselves to be
responsible. I asked one woman with children about whether her domestic life had
hindered or helped her work:

*Not particularly apart from, as I say, the children, that's the main thing. But that
might be a mind set on my part - that I expect to take more of the burden than my
husband. He's a fairly modern man, but when push comes to shove, I feel I take on
more responsibility. My old fashioned approach* B12

For example, the issue of sharing pick up still fell on this one woman's shoulders. She
worked part time and earned less than her husband.

In Singapore, in contrast with Britain, there appeared to be more homogeneous responses
in discourse to the positioning of wives and mothers. Women did not discuss negotiations
based on equity with their husbands. On the other hand, they also expressed less intense
agonising over children and paid work. Firstly, it could be that there is no need, for all
this agonising, because of extensive child care and domestic support. Secondly, they may
feel these negotiations are not permitted, since opposing gender identities are integrated
into dominant discourse. As a result, contestation in gender relations in the household
may be lower than in Britain. As argued above, the long hours culture meant married
women with young children organised their lives sometimes down to the last hour in

Singapore at weekends. Others also told similar stories. Those with children had twinges of regret rather than intense conflict at the situation:

I spend time with my family and husband - less with my friends. S6

Women who work full time and manage the household inevitably put in more hours than their male counterparts and recognise it, but accept is almost as a given:

Those days that I'm working my husband will bring him, because my husband doesn't work on Saturdays. My husband got quite a relaxed job. In fact, I think I'm working harder than him. He knocks off 5.30 sharp. In terms of working, definitely, I'm working harder than him. S6

Another woman described the life style of her husband:

Sometimes he goes to work from 9 am to 3 pm. So he doesn't have to wake up earlier, sometimes he has his clients from overseas and has entertainment. He tries to help, but there is a problem with his schedule. So far we have managed to work out amicably. He's quite upset when I say, it's not fair, but we all have a choice. Frankly, I mean, I don't have to take it S7

This woman perceives it as a 'choice' she is making, but her gendered identity is assumed, and not on the agenda for negotiation, as in Britain. Women's careers, work lives and educational levels in Singapore are explicitly reinforced in families as less important than their husbands.

One woman explained how her husband implicitly suggested she needed to concentrate on being a wife and mother:

My husband keeps saying I gave my life to the company. S6

As I probed her more about whether her husband supports her in her stresses, she responded thus:

It can be both ways at different times. I think my husband is very supportive. He is also working so he understands the frustration I undergo sometimes. I have got to deal with difficult customers. Sometimes I guess I carry it a bit too far. For instance, lately there are a few difficult customers who demand this and that. And after handling them, you feel quite frustrated yourself, and you tend to carry this even back home. I guess in a way it may have affected my relationship with my husband. I'm reviewing this and trying not to bring back whatever frustrations or hiccups that I have from work back home. It is quite hard to do. And once a while it just comes back, he did notice the change in me, that I'm quite demanding now, and sometimes I just don't accept what he's got to say, and we tend to argue a bit. But I think I have to review that, and try and work things out with him.S6

She almost does not feel she has a right to complain about her stress or her work. She did not say whether her husband talked about his strains and stresses. But the fact she mentioned her ambivalence regarding the right to discuss her work stress with her husband already indicates that she has become too 'demanding', and is not concentrating on her primary identity as a wife and mother.

These primary identities are legitimated in women's talk about the importance of marriage, a theme reinforced by husbands and parents. Women should not be too 'high achieving'.

When asked about high achieving women, one woman made the comment below. Interestingly she interpreted my question of whether her husband supported her career as follows:

Well, I think, the question that you ask me does a husband mind? I think in China, too I think if I were married to a man who was probably less successful, he would

mind. It would be very difficult to find somebody who says I'm so proud of my wife who is better than I. I think it is probably more Asian. I don't know. I think in Singapore if you're so successful, I've been told, I don't think the guys would dare to chase you S2

A senior woman was telling me her story about her own career, and explained how important it was for women's prospects that they did not outdistance their husbands:

I wanted to go for my MBA during my time, my parents said, no, no, no. For Chinese girls, we're very happy that you've got a degree, you must have a degree, we don't want you to be too highly qualified or you can't get a husband after that they tell me. When I first graduated, in those days. ... You know Asian culture we were very serious. Whatever our parents say, we must do. My parents got me the job, actually, the banking job.S8

Yet another stressed how her mother had stopped her getting too qualified:

After graduation I came back, then I wanted to go to the States, because my two brothers were in the States. And I wanted to do an MBA. Then my mother stopped me, saying it was about time I settled down, find a boyfriend, get married and all that sort of thing S5

Another woman CEO told me how her husband responded to an offer to her for a job overseas, when she was younger:

My husband looked at me as if I got to be joking. You want a divorce now? My husband is a typical Chinese, TC, I call him. He said, you want to go to divorce court now? So, cannot, I didn't have the courage.S2

The same woman told a similar story about later in her career, but this time she negotiated returning to Singapore on a regular basis. The husband's response was similar:

So I went home and told my husband, that I've got a job in Hong Kong, a very good job. My husband said okay, I won't stand in your way, it's a good job but ... I told my husband, I even negotiated with the bank to send me back every month at the end of the month or whatever, to Singapore, at the bank's cost. Because my husband has got his own business. So a Chinese man never follows women - traditional Chinese men- and he is one of those. And he said well, good luck to you, maybe the first night when you come home, you won't find me home. I had to turn down the job S2

In describing how an employer many years previously was offering her an opportunity to gain experience abroad, another woman says:

So I took the choice – my medical grades were not good enough, but I could do engineering, I could do pharmacy. The whole field was still available to me, so I went, and all my aunties came to my mum, and said no, you shouldn't do that ,she will be a spinster, where are you going to find men to marry her?She will be over qualified, over educated. My mum was concerned and she said if you want to go to university, these are the things S8

All the above quotes from differing women, indicate the processes in train to encourage Sinagporean women to remember their primary performance as a 'good' wife. Contests and challenges about the role of mothers remains mostly absent unless you decide to not have children, relevant for two women in the Singaporean interviews

One women was single and felt she had made a rational choice about it (S8),another had negotiated childlessness with her husband; now she did the travelling, earned the higher income and he did the ironing and the shopping (S4). It was these two women who spoke about making conscious decisions, but only the second had taken on an identity that was not constructed as 'traditional feminine'. On the whole, however, comments about

outdistancing your husband were explicitly related and not mentioned in this manner by the British women, apart from one exception, given below.

In Britain women were a little more vocal when it came to supportive husbands and negotiating equity as described above. Of course the unsupportive ones were hardly mentioned, so it is easy to assume this is a line of upward progress and a stark comparison with Singapore. The absence of a discourse does not mean it is not a problem for the women; it may be repressed or part of a strategy of denial, because other benefits are gained (Beck and Beck Gernsheim 2002).

One woman spoke about the support from her husband, but actually gave very little away. I was probing her about the difficulties in progressing:

And is your partner supportive of your career?

Oh yeah, yes, yes, very much so.

Reena: And is there anything in your domestic life that you feel hinders your career?

No. B5

She did go on to say that she could not have been so successful if she had been a mother. This exchange is also illustrative of the point made earlier, where women were less expansive than in Singapore about their partners. More importantly, perhaps there is a growing recognition of the new status divisions being opened up between married women with children and those who are childless. The British woman mentioned above who had swapped roles with her husband did expand on his support in the domestic division of labour. She too described him as supportive:

*My husband undoubtedly helps my career in that he is incredibly supportive, he
has a tidy phobia, everything has to be tidy in the house which drives me
demented.B9*

Many other women explained they had supportive husbands. A middle to senior woman
in a retail bank branch told me:

*On the other side the help is that I have a very, a tremendously supportive
husband who's very keen to see me further my career if that's what I want to do or
equally if I wanted to give it all up and be at home he would be equally as
happy.B2*

Another woman who was childless responded thus:

*I've got the most fantastic supportive husband of 18 years.And I've always
enjoyed the rest of my family's complete support, so I'm just very lucky you know.
B10*

There was one British woman whose marriage had broken up who explained how her
husband resented her success:

*I have been married, my marriage broke up a couple of years ago, and one of the
reasons that it broke up was because my husband couldn't handle the fact that I
earn more money than hi, and that he resented me working late. I mean like
getting home at 7 o'clock was late.B4*

No other women in Britain explicitly mentioned men as threatened by women
outdistancing their husbands; it can be argued that it was present but not expressed. For
example, it would have been interesting to find out why a husband was not career
minded, or earning less or the same as women. The study's limitation is that husbands
and partners were not interviewed to see how their subjectivities were affected by

women's progress. Amongst British women there was an assumption of equity in women's discourse, but successful women were not mentioned as being a *threat* to marriage. It is entirely possible that women did not wish to mention their success. Those women who earned less than their husbands, avoided discussing their success in relation to them.

The implicit assumption in society as a whole is that women are and will be less publicly successful than men are, or will be. If they are *as* successful, or even more so, and voice this, they will be trangressing traditional notions of femininity. By keeping quiet, these absences in discourses may put pressure on men to accept this equity by both default and the possession of economic power. Alternatively, this absence does not mean the 'threat' to men has gone away. Conflicts in the household may be expressed in different ways, particularly if women do not feel they are gaining from the situation. This requires further research.

Cleaning

A second theme not discussed in discourse as much in Britain as in Singapore was cleaning. Cleaning was sub-contracted out, but how it was managed and what women felt about it was not discussed. It did not figure as part of their discourse on home life. Cleaning and household chores did not come up once in the British women interviews suggesting that successful British women do not now either consider it important, or do not wish to reveal what they may see as a private individual arrangement with an external source of help. If husbands had done this work, it would have been mentioned.

In Singapore, women however, did argue they gained from this naturalized femininity. They discussed housework because they could see the gains from not doing it themselves! They used cultural values and an oppositional (to the West) discourse to argue that women had it better in their country. The gender identities are reinforced by reference to an 'easier life'; having someone else to do your housework and look after your children was a protection against gender conflicts or unhappiness from your

husband. American colleagues 'had it hard' in comparison, and one woman expressed her sympathy for their plight.

When asked what had helped her in her career, one woman replied:

> *Having a good help at home –that certainly helps me with things. That has helped because if I look at these American colleagues I have, or colleagues that have to work – dealing with child care – babysitters – um- having to deal with ... ... banks you know –yeah it's worth it – because when you go home, you still have to vacuum the carpet – wash, do the dishwashers, and you have to do the laundry and you still have to iron your clothes and feed your kids and clean your and their mess. They will throw up every so often- I just look at these other friends of mine and say I just don't know how you can manage. She has three girls ... ... She has someone come in to clean the house like three times a week. But they don't do the laundry I don't think –and all the children go to child care and there are three of them –and it's the husband who has to come home and I said to her N........, (her name) "I don't want to be in your position, and number two, my husband does not want to be in J........s position." He comes home and he happily goes out with his friends and his drinking friends two or three times a week. Sometimes he takes up golf for the week end, and we can have a party at home because there is somebody else. I say I don't have to do that -- all that clearing up. My mother always said it was too much of a commitment for both of us. We can watch the children growing up so quickly – so we looked upon it with fond memories – our memories are not locked into dishwashing, vacuuming and cleaning up their diapers. My husband has never changed a diaper ever S2*

Reproduction and work

In Singapore, the separate spheres of female, as reproducer and carer and male, as breadwinner and warrior were thoroughly legitimised in discourse.

The country has needed to prevent decline by ensuring replacement of the population, the population that had been in that representation when the nation was born. Heng and Devan (1997:107) have designated this approach to nation and reproduction a 'state fatherhood', a patriarchy of the state (see Chapter 2). Thus women who might overtly resist their ascribed identities are not rebelling against their own identity ascription, but also that of their men, whose masculinity has been taken over by the government. If change is to come about, women will have to negotiate not only ascriptions of femininity but also simultaneously challenge the ways in which modern Singaporean national identity has been constructed. In fact women in Singapore largely accepted their positioning, sometimes even when contradictions were quite sharp as in the following exchange regarding anomalies on maternity leave:

> *Reena: So you had two months of maternity leave and that was it.*
> *Did you have help with your children?*

> *My mother was staying with me, and I had a Filipino maid. I had a very good Filipino maid, she stayed with me on the average seven to eight years. I had two maids each time, so if they stayed seven to eight years, you know, there'll be a stabilizing person. S7*

Although, as we have seen the Singapore government provides tax relief to women to have a third child, there is no obligation on companies to agree to maternity leave after a second child. Maternity leave is thus left to the discretion of employers.

One young woman was irritated enough for her to complain to government. It had been her savings for healthcare that ought to have been put towards her confinement. She is angry, but she returns to the discourse of choice and little challenge to her ascribed identity as a wife and mother first. After her third child I asked her:

> *Reena: And you took another two months out.*

No, I didn't. Because you see, these two months maternity leave is your entitlement that will stretch only to the second child. But the other company gave me two months' leave for my third child even though they are not obliged to.S7

For the second child there will be two months' maternity leave. Thereafter depending on the employee, women have to consider the balance between family commitments and the office. Whereas, men, I think, the consideration, even if you are married, looking after children and family would be on his wife. Is that a fair statement?S7

Reena: I just wonder what accounts for that. You're saying, I hope I've got it right, that women have got a choice?

They have a choice and they have to make a choice.S7

Reena: To leave an organization or stay ...... and men don't have to do that.

I think to a certain degree, yes, but the degree of responsibility, of balancing is not great.

Reena: Why is that?

I think it is the maternal instinct; you make sure that your children are looked after. And also how the organization perceives, if you are a working mother and a wife, and the important question, is will they give it to you, if they had to choose, even if your performance could be equal to that of your male colleagues if there was an overseas assignment, they would choose a male. On the basis that you have a family, it would not be fair. I must say that S7

The above exchange between the interviewee and myself was to encourage her to discuss the injustice of her position as a woman in being encouraged to have children yet not being compensated either through leave or finance as was her right. She was angry enough to have complained, but ultimately she is not prepared to consider her husband sharing in this anger or in the injustice of it – she has put it down to maternal instinct. She also places some blame on the employing organization. But the household identities and roles remain more accepted as natural than in Britain.

The cultural value of being responsible for all things domestic was a definite advantage, argued this same woman. Chinese women had power in the home; they could be matriarchs and be successful in their career; the conflicts and pressures could be put on the back burner, but was it not preferable to the West, where women were less successful in the public sphere?

In asking this woman what helped and hindered her career she responded:

That is a difficult question – Somebody asked me the other day – actually an American man asked me. He said "it must be difficult for you to rise to the top". I said "No" and he said: "don't you feel the discrimination as a woman?" and I said "no". He said "how come, especially in Asia, where it is very male chauvinistic?". I said, "It's true, it is very male chauvinistic, –but you look at Taiwan, there are very successful Chinese business women in Thailand, and in Hong Kong, and in China in Singapore".

I think in the Chinese environment – um –they don't say the women are weak – it's more like a woman's place is in the home, and you shouldn't expose yourself to other men. But they recognize their women should be strong in the home – not that you are the weaker sex, but you are better at something else. And in my grandmother's generation, it was possible to keep women in the home. But some of the women in the richer families – the traditional ones would say – "do you have to work?" It's not the ability – not wealth – they don't envy your

intelligence or anything – they may say if they are curtailed by their husbands
they admire your independence and your ability. So maybe that is the
background to it –if, in all the Chinese dominated countries, you find a lot of
women being represented –that is good S2

R. Interesting argument – what you are saying is that in Chinese culture women
are not treated as weak, they are treated as strong

Yes they are matriarchs they tend to have a matriarchal role. The husbands will
go out and you're supposed to take care of everything, like in Japan really. If you
really think about, it, in Japan –maybe it is condescending, because they think you
should be at home, - they run the family. The husband will give all their monthly
salary to their wife and take an allowance. And say you manage the household. So
I don't know how they have evolved that way,but what I told this other gentleman
is I'm still not sure whether it is the case, because I work for x bank or y bank
and they are supposed to be equal opportunity employers and they have a liberal
or very broadminded management if that is the reason, – whether if I worked in a
British bank it would be different I don't know. S2

R. Yes that's interesting; there are no equal opportunity policies in any of the
local banks

No No No it is not put into any of the constitution in this region. If you look at it
from an outsider coming here,.... all the Western women say, you know its not
fair, you do all the work and then your men can go and play. True, true. In that
sense, this society is really built for the male, but we have no constitution to say
that women can or cannot be promoted you know. We are all quite successful --so
there is a choice I think. Of course some industries are more male dominated, like
engineering or oil rigs or something – but in the service industries, women do
really well I think – .....And there are more politicians –more women politicians
than in the West if you think about it. S2

Here the ways in which the country's culture made choices collectively to promote women was seen as integral to how the South East Asian Chinese were; unlike Britain, where the speaker is unsure that the West is really committed to promoting women and giving them the backing for that role. Of course for Singapore, this speaker ignores the fact that the government of Singapore is overwhelmingly male, Chinese and socio-economically and educationally privileged; it has been argued that the narratives of nation function to reproduce such representations – 'the ideal image of its fathers'.(Heng and Devan 1997:108). But this is not perceived as an individual choice; the country has promoted women, in contrast to Britain where the country commitment may not be so strong.

Conclusions

Family identities as wives and mothers are experienced and voiced differently by women managers in Singapore and Britain. Singaporean women cope with pressure of the 'second shift', by responding as highly efficient managers in the home. They attend their workplaces on Saturday mornings, unlike British women managers, and so the planning hour by hour appears to make sense. British women cope with the ambivalences about balancing aspects of their career and home lives by agonising over these decisions, far more than Singaporean women. In Britain, the women's descriptions of childcare and domestic arrangements reflect much of the dominant discourse on the separation of home and work, the lack of widespread child care provision and an individualised approach to child care.

In Britain this agonising has its advantages and disadvantages. The conflict therein, although highly stressful, does lead to a more differentiated response to childcare and domestic duties. These are negotiated individually with partners. Women felt it was their responsibility to arrange the childcare etc, but there resulted a variety of responses. The agonising led to a greater pressure to negotiate with their husbands about how much to work, who should work, their salary differences and so on. There were at least three

women who earned more than their husbands, and many more who earned almost as much. Housework on the other hand, was not mentioned and it can be assumed that women continue to be quietly responsible for it (British Social Attitudes Survey 2003)

In Singapore, women managers did not 'cope' by re-negotiating their identities as wives and mothers and others or their responsibilities for household work. They accepted the differences in household identities almost as naturalised. They discussed at length the ways in which women had to curtail their public ambitions so that they did not out distance their future husbands. Where socialised differences were referred to, the discourse of Chinese culture was drawn upon to legitimate the advantages of a 'matriarchy' in the household. A wider variety of gender conflicts in the domestic division of labour therefore remain buffered. In Britain the individualised conflicts over child care which result from a lack of provision force women to renegotiate these responsibilities and a greater number of more overt conflicts are likely to be the consequence.

Identity, Women Managers and Social Change:
Comparing Singapore and Britain

Chapter 8: Discourses of meritocracy and the processes of individualisation

Introduction

This chapter is being written in response to the thesis of 'individualisation' outlined earlier in the thesis. It has been argued in recent writings that social identities are becoming 'individualised' as a result of global and social change. One way to explore the individualisation thesis, albeit in a limited way, is to compare the data from Singapore more directly with that in Britain. Are the processes of individualisation discussed earlier having similar or different consequences in Singapore and Britain?

The earlier findings from the field research and secondary sources have demonstrated that there are differing gender regimes operating in Singapore and Britain. This chapter uses the concept of different gender regimes to discuss how far the two different countries hasten or slow down the individualisation of identities for managerial middle class women.

As we have seen, recent writing on identity has questioned the continued ascription of social identity based on past group allegiances. Authors have argued instead for a concept which is becoming 'individualised' as a result of the decline in the centrality of class, the rise of consumerism, changing work patterns and the growth of dual earner families in wider society. One criteria in understanding the process of individualization is the issue of women *actively* seeking independence from men. As education, labour markets and legislation change, so women increasingly become more aware of the possibility of autonomy and self sufficiency without a man. Secondly, although 'race', class, skin colour, gender, ethnicity, age and disability continue to be important defining ascribed characteristics, Beck and Beck Gernsheim (2002) argue that the processes of individualization deprive these groups of essential social traits, both in terms of self understanding and in relation to other groups. They

lose their 'independent' identities (p.40). The assumption here is that groups begin to lose their boundaries, and become more fluid, as a redefinition begins.

The data is discussed around two key themes. The first is the notion of meritocracy, used by governments in Singapore and Britain. I use the concept to explore how women themselves perceive and talk about meritocracy in relation to their own careers. The second theme includes an examination of class and ethnicity in the women's talk to determine how far they continue to see 'groups' in terms of their essential social traits and define themselves and others with clear or more fluid boundaries.

Meritocracy

The discourse of meritocracy means different things to women in the two countries. In Singapore, women perceive their society as meritocratic, which has rewarded them for their effort. They have been the *recipients* of fair government practices. In Britain, women are more likely to be following Beck and Beck Gernscheim's thesis, that they themselves are being forced to piece together their lives as best as they can, so that they can *claim* their reward. Their talk represents more of an *active* agency in relation to their organisations and government.

The discourse of meritocracy serves a different function in Singapore compared to Britain and has had different consequences. In Singapore, the discourse is not so much about the processes of individual proactive effort, in organisations or outside, but a discourse that describes the fairness of Singaporean society and legitimates support for government policies (see Rahim 1998; Lyons 2000). This society has housed, educated and employed the whole population in the matter of thirty years. Women have gone from poor to wealthy in a short period of time. Not surprisingly, as women in Singapore support the government and its discourses.

Singapore: The discourse of meritocracy as a 'gift'

Meritocracy in Singapore is linked not only to the notion of a national identity, but its very use suggests the creation of an open society based on a status, achieved through

'ability and effort (merit) rather than ascribed on the basis of age, class, gender or other such particularistic or inherited advantages.' (Oxford Dictionary of Sociology 1998: 410).

This dominant discourse of meritocracy, constructed after colonisation , was prevalent in the Singaporean womens' accounts of their careers. In fact the issue of meritocracy is strongly supported in discourse and the women cite numerous examples of it in action.

One woman who had one child, felt a high degree of conflict and stress from her role as manager and wife and mother and even responded spontaneously to my opening gambit:

> *Reena: I really want to talk to you about your career, how you got to where you got to, how you did it...*
>
> *Through hard work! S6*

Later in the interview, S6 expanded on the naturalness of her promotion:

> *Reena: How did you get into where you are?*
>
> *Promotion by rank. After another year as...., I was promoted to......, which is quite natural, it still exists, a kind of a cohort, kind of a promotion.*
>
> *Reena: You didn't have to apply for it?*
>
> *No, in .....Bank, I just moved on. Normally they have certain guidelines. After a certain number of years, if you are above average or good, they will promote you. S6*

This woman worked in a 'local' investment bank. Her comments could be explained therefore by the fact that 'local' Chinese banks have traditional paternalistic hierarchical where individuals wait to be promoted. But several other women in

international banks reflected the idea that individual proactivity is not involved in planning your career. What is due to you by effort and achievement will come to you.

The discourse of meritocracy based on an active individualisation applies to women in the West, but does not appear to apply in Singapore[1].

The most senior women I interviewed in Singapore, a Chief Executive in an international bank was clear about this notion of meritocracy:

> *I always believe that you can fool some of the people some of the time but you can't fool all the people all the time. So, the reverse also is true. If you are good you're good, sooner or later you'd be recognized. I believe in that. All my promotions have really been through recognition by my bosses. It wasn't because I fight for it. I don't fight for my promotions* S1

She went on to emphasize that this was because the country itself had promoted fairness:

> *Singapore practices meritocracy. They have no biases and prejudices. It is based on your ability, your experience, so I don't see that.* (when asked about discrimination). *I never once in my career, whether it is in B..... or O..., or S...... (names of banks) I have never felt that because I am a woman that was why it happened. I never felt that way either promotion or bad incident, I've got a few bad incidents, I never felt that way* S1

Merit came up in many other women's discourses or fairness, sometimes in reference to a comparison with Malays and Indians, as the following examples show. The first is made by a woman over 40, who was in a middle to senior position in an international bank:

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[1] These discourses could also be explained by the Chinese attachment to fate; what will happen will happen. The low rate of insurance taken out by the Chinese in Singapore helps to add weight to this explanation.

Singapore is really by and large a very fair country that offers equal
opportunities to women. S4

Discourse about support for the country was extended into the workplace. Another
woman who also worked for an international bank, but was younger than the previous
speaker said:

> *I think the environment here is there is no sex discrimination, it is all on merit.*
> *And women over the years have done well especially in a foreign*
> *organization, they have made these opportunities available and promoted*
> *them into good positions S3*

She goes on:

> *If you have the policy for the job, you will be considered for the job regardless*
> *whether you are male or female S3.*

The first woman mentioned above who spoke about her hard work in her job
explained further about Singapore:

> *We have all grown up to be regarded as equal* -- (this particular interviewee
> named top women in banking following my question) -- *there is no*
> *discrimination in Singapore - maybe in India where the women are*
> *subservient to the men – no no there is no discrimination against Malays and*
> *Indians **if we all start at the same point**.* (my emphasis) S6.

Another woman who was explaining how she obtained promotion referred more
specifically to both recruitment into the 'local' bank and promotion within it:

> *(I).. grew with the bank – my cousin saw the job and got me here. I became*
> *Treasurer – the situation became vacant and the boss recommended me S11*

Another who worked in an international bank said of her promotions:

I would say that as you go higher into management positions, application for job is not the key. People who know you would ask if you are interested in this position. Or, if you wanted something then you would speak to a close circle of friends who would then check around. It is not something that you write in to apply. Not in a senior position S5

It has been argued that the government pursues a policy of pragmatic or 'strategic egalitarianism' i.e. the granting of equality to women , for example, contingent upon meeting clear economic and political goals (Lazar 2001). Implied in this concept of strategic egalitarianism as the author argues, is that only the political elite (overwhelmingly Chinese male and middle class) is in a position to decide whether, and to what extent, institutional equality may be granted. This granting of rights and opportunities to women in Singapore has led to some authors describing these rights as 'gifts' from the government. In this analysis, the 'gifts' are more useful to the giver than the receiver, entrenching the instrumentality in the concept of 'strategic egalitarianism'. The women managers talk on meritocracy above legitimates the idea that they are waiting to *receive* their promotions as 'gifts'.

Britain: The discourse of meritocracy as proactive individualisation

In Britain on the other hand, women described in detail how they felt they had *individually* taken control over their career paths. National or ethnic identity did not enter into their discourse. Occasionally they referred to family support.

The women in Britain talked more openly about taking action to renegotiate their career possibilities – many told stories of making strategic decisions about moving sideways, asking for opportunities, asking for a job even.

One very senior woman explained how she pleaded for a job:

I went to .... (name of company) to interview as fund manager and I went in and I was being interviewed, it was the third interview with the chairman of the company and, charming chap and we were sitting having a chat.

The phone rang so he picked up the phone   he went to answer the phone and
had a brief conversation. When he came back to the table he said, this is just a
nightmare, our marketing director died 3 months ago, we've got no marketing
director and I'm just taking these calls. So I stood up, knelt on the floor and
said make me the marketing director, this will be the best decision you've ever
made, please make me the marketing director and he did B10

One senior manager in human resources asked to be moved to a more stimulating job
(B8); another who had no degree went and got herself another qualification and went
to see many people in her organisation to ask them to consider her for a job outside
administration (B4).

One woman fearful of being placed in a troubleshooting temporary role instead of
staying in strategic planning even went so far as to threaten resignation over her
career prospects:

I just did not want to do that and there was quite a row to get me out of it, you
know, I said I would do it because it was the right thing to do and everybody
wanted me to do it but I didn't want to do it long term and that was the deal
and when at the end there was a kind of well we really need you to carry on
doing this, you know, I said I'll resign over this, I'm not doing this OK, you
know, I think I've been flexible in the interests of the organisation. B3

But these career moves were also acknowledged as not being similar to men's
patterns. In fact the proportion of the interview taken up by explaining their career
stories and many moves, joining male clubs, playing golf etc were all done in a
context of explaining the strategy for their careers, a strategy which many recognised
as gendered.

But I mean, I play golf a lot and I always say the last ten years I've been, you
know, playing golf in hospitality.... by and large last year I was the only 1 or 2
females in that kind of business environment, you're still very much the odd
banker I suppose.

RB   Is that OK?

That's good, doesn't bother me at all, I go and enjoy my golf I don't care [LAUGHS]they carry on do what they like, no actually it doesn't bother me at all but it's sad that there is only one woman (rest inaudible)B9

Another woman thought about the career structures in her bank and had made a deliberate decision to move sideways:

Something I was more interested in, something that was more of a challenge, something where the high graded jobs exist, also conversely something where, very few women that are interested and very few women succeed B11

Another woman decided she would turn down a management job, because it was offered too late and she had decided to apply for another one:

And I thought well I've got the background to this, I'm gonna go for it, so I applied for a job, got an interview,- got called in by my current management team and offered a management job if I stayed. No thank you - you couldn't do it before, you're not having me now. That's how I feel, how I took the chance. I got the job.B4

Women's career identities were stronger and appeared more stable, than appears from the women's accounts in Singapore, in that they mentioned plenty of stories where they individually took action themselves to further their careers.

The following quote is from a woman who was due to take maternity leave and wanted to ensure she was not demoted when she returned:

So I was pregnant at the time with my first child and I said I'm not coming back to IT and when I leave and have this baby I want to come back into a profit centre.
And there was a lot of resistance at the time because they said well you don't know anything about banking, you know and it's not something you can just

pick up overnight and I don't know what we could do with you and well we'll think about it.

So I said well you've got six months to think about it whilst I go off and have a baby. B2

Another felt she had had enough about being asked questions about her as a woman:

Instead I was asked how I would develop business when I was a woman and wouldn't be able to join the Rotary Club. I was asked how I would deal with a male customer who came in and said I'm not going to deal with you, you're a bloody woman.

And the nature of the questions were such that in the interview I actually turned round to them, I looked them straight in the eye and I smiled and I said, oh yes and this is the point where I'm supposed to tell you that I'm not married but it's not because of any sexuality issues, just haven't met the right person yet, and I'm not planning on having children in the foreseeable future but I'm not ruling it out completely, does that give you confidence? B8

A senior woman Chief Executive offered this observation on career success for women who had reached similar levels to top men:

One of the things that I've observed in my career is that men are very good at creating mythology and when you talk to the successful chief executive, you often find that they tell a story about themselves which is like this. If you go and ask their employees you get parts of it sort of regurgitated back to you and bits of story which reinforce their position in the company and create an image which is often quite far from the truth, or it might have been the truth at one particular point.

Women don't tend to do that in organisations, but the successful ones do seem to be so, for example, having worked for people like CG and N ... ... (well known successful women) who I was at school with, they have created these things for themselves but the really successful ones seem to do it and the not so successful ones don't create that myth. B10

The discourse of careers emphasises the need for proactivity in career development since careers themselves have been subject to much change. The decline of a 'job for life', the need to be multi skilled and flexible in work tasks has meant an end to a linear career progression through an organisation. Individuals are taking responsibility for their own careers and there has been a move towards self-development (Hirsh undated) Women managers have participated in the last fifteen years or so in women only management development programmes, which include not only management skills but also room to plan their careers and assess their skills (Tanton 1994). However in Britain, an understanding of legislation on sex discrimination *and* individual action on careers exists alongside a 'new' and competing discourse on meritocracy by the government, which has assumed that discrimination against women (as a whole group) does not matter much any more, in the sense of it being a problem. The New Labour government has 'neutralized' gender as an issue and used discourse that is inclusive. The centrality of gender in British discourse is hidden. The hidden discourse and ideas of 'inclusion' are implicit in stressing a meritocratic society based on no discrimination. The function of this British discourse is an attempt to hide the effects of the free market on growing inequalities. It is designed to 'do away' with the social identities of gender and class. In Singapore the discourse on meritocracy is designed to entrench social identities of class, ethnicity and gender.

The discourse on meritocracy in Britain is a direct result of the individualisation of society where established groups and roles (on the basis of class and gender) are dramatically changing (Bauman 2001). In Singapore, it is a direct effect of the imposition of policy and discourse constructed by the government to counter the individualism of the West.

Career pathways

This difference between a discourse of active agency and a discourse of a population *slotting* into certain niches is further evidenced in the ways in which women in both countries got their first jobs and the subjects that they studied. The samples are small and generalisations limited here, but the data may point to certain trends.

Certainly it is true to say that women in Singapore have entered the labour market and management almost simultaneously, with little time gap between participation in the labour market and representation in a variety of labour market positions. Full employment also means that the economy and the country needs women's labour.

As one woman put it:

I went to university at a time when jobs were available; the growth is quicker here, the jobs are available and it is easier to move into management S2

Another said:

Also, Singapore is very financially dominated, the financial sector. The other big one is the manufacturing but it is so widespread. A lot of us are in middle management today because we went to university at a time and where jobs are available. This was one big factor. So that's how we got into it. S5

One other woman explained why it may have been a little easier in Singapore than in other countries, such as Canada:

Maybe because the expansion is so quick, the growth in the industry is so quick that they don't have sufficient people to fill up those positions so it opens up a lot of opportunities for younger people to move up more quickly. Whereas in the United States and Canada the growth is not that big and those guys that are managers are still managers S3.

All the women in the Singapore sample, except one, had degrees in finance, accounting or economics. There was an *absence* of discourse amongst the younger women that they were *actively* making a career decision, when explaining their work in the banks. It seemed 'natural' they would do this. The opportunities had just become available.

In Britain, on the other hand, the majority of British women in this study had taken degrees in the arts – in languages or literature (see grid Chapter5: 103-106). British women felt they had a choice over their identities as managers, and/or mothers and/or wives and the option of engaging with all these three. But these 'choices' women made were acted upon individually, but also in the light of their gendered understanding of careers. In Britain, the economic change in the move to a service economy with an expanding financial sector has opened up opportunities for women managers. They viewed their positions implicitly as 'freedom of choice' and an individual's decision about their career.

In contrast Singapore managers had no objection within the Singaporean accounts to 'slotting in'. The rapid economic growth in Singapore, and the state corporatism which has housed, educated and employed everyone makes it difficult to resist the idea that certain jobs have been allotted to women but it will only be matter of time before it changes. The construction of a Singaporean identity has been explicitly constructed in relation to the West, as a former colony of Britain. It has constructed a seamless idea of Confucian culture which has always been 'better' than the liberal democracy of the West. This society in East Asia is one based on Confucian ideas of good government by *'honourable men (Junzi) who have a duty to do right for the people and who have the trust and respect of the population'* (my emphasis Rahim 1998:62). Moral education syllabuses have been re written and school textbooks amended mainly by scholars, ironically from the 'West'. These Asian values instil unquestioning reverence for higher authority, such as the State, teachers, scholars, parents and the family (Rahim 1998).

A woman manager who had worked in Canada went on to respond to my question about equality in the workplace in Canada:

I think for women, most people think there is more equality, more opportunities, I don't think so. Women graduated in Canada there, there is a very close group of people that they hang around with, most of the women left the workforce, some because of their marriage , and every time they did not come back ...And because of this phenomenon people, when they hire a new

*graduate, a lady graduate, they will think, five years on she'll have children
and she'll leave. So do I want to nurture her as much? So there's that the kind
of mentality, I find it very much stronger in North America, at least in the area
that I lived in. Most of the married women work full time. So, if they choose to
make it, if they have got good support at home, they will make it S3*

Another very senior woman, a Chief Executive, argued that British women made
decisions about their careers based on not being keen to return to work. She only adds
as an afterthought that the women in Singapore may work full time, because they
might have no choice:

*Just as an aside, I notice when I was working in the UK and I have a lot of
friends in UK that the women do stop working after they have children. They
are not eager to come back to work, that's my reading whereas here it is very
much the trend. Most of the women come back to the work force, I think,
eighty per cent of the mothers come back to the work force, and they come
back full-time, there is also no provision for part-time work at this type of
institutions. But certainly people don't stop right in the middle. I know sort of
some graduates from Cambridge, Oxford, they just stop and they think nothing
of it. Then I concluded, goodness, oh, they are more backward than us. Or
maybe because we don't really have a choice S9*

Singapore has no anti discrimination legislation against women (see Chapter 2),
because it does not need it, it argues. The central planning of an economically
successful society demonstrates this. More importantly the functions of the family
cannot be disrupted as has happened in the West:

*We should be careful not to pursue doctrinaire symmetry in the roles of the
two sexes. Many Western countries have through unwise social and welfare
policies unintentionally but irreversibly undermined the basic family unit of
husband, wife and children. Their experience warns us of the dangers of even
the most well intentioned government intervention to alter the natural balance
and division of responsibility between the sexes, which has evolved over many
generations* (Ministry of Finance 1999).

These discourses then construct and re-construct women's family identities as being totally different from men's. Counter to Beck and Beck Gernsheim, women may give the appearance of having 'a life of ones' own, because of their economic postioning, but Singapore government policies and discourses 'discipline' women (see Foucault 1977) into pre given categories, with little room for manoeuvre out of them. Their career pathways and positions are also disciplined.

Career and meritocratic discourses produced in the west, however, are the products of discourse produced from *within* the discourse of individualism. Skeggs (1997) argues that concepts of individualism legitimate powerful groups and deem other groups unworthy of the designation 'individual'. It is middle class white women who use the discourse of being an individual, and it is this discourse which enables them to do work on the self, for self mastery. Although their career identities have been constructed through class and 'race, these latter identities remain 'hidden' in discourses about careers. Each of these categories is viewed as a separate entity, but all are independently subject to change. In Singapore, these identities are integrally linked with one another and more likely to be seen as 'natural' and unchanging. I explore these ideas further in the next section.

Singapore and Britain: Boundaries of class and ethnicity

In Singapore the identities of class and ethnicity are explicit and overtly discussed. Issues of class and 'race' have been highly visible in government discourse.
These issues are integral to the placing of the three key ethnicised groups: Chinese, the dominant group, Indian and Malay. In Singapore women of different ethnicities and classes all *slot in* to existing categories.

Boundaries within Singaporean society are drawn through the inculcation of cultural values, such that the boundaries mark exclusions (Massey 1994); so for example, the ethnic groups are seen to be 'naturally' distinctive and need to be preserved that way. Even though these clear differences do not exist in everyday life, through a range of langauges and ethnicities, the following pictorial depiction of the groups in the 1994 National Day Parade is described by Purushotam (1998):

"The Chinese are represented in yellow ochre skin tones, with just a touch of pink that gives them a pleasant rosiness. The man will be dressed in trousers and a shirt, but the woman will be clothed in a cheongsam; her children have some varying items that are commonly identified as Chinese such as guazi'mao. The Malays are always warmly browned, and dressed up in appropriate clothes, viz. in baju kurong, with kain samping round the waist and songkok on the heads of the males, and slendang hanging down one shoulder of the females. The Indians are given a richer darker brown closer to milk chocolate; the woman invariably in a sari and bindhi between her eyebrows; the man quite often in a Sikh turban; the girl child in along silk skirt and the boy child in salwaar khameez. 'others' are one or two shades pinker than the Chinese, and in what would be described in everyday language as formal Western dress." (Purushotam 1998a quoted in Patrickson and O'Brien 2001: 201).

These government representations encourage the accepting of a stable social identity, counter to western individualism. These unchanging, unmerging 'cultures' are clearly defined, and conflict with everyday relationships. As Benjamin says:

"the constant reiteration of the Chinese –Malay – Indian- Eurasian categorisation in national censuses, in the reports of government departments concerned with social policy, and the schools put considerable pressure on people to see themselves as ethnically defined "(Benjamin 1976 quoted in Patrickson and O'Brien 2001 :202).

Usually this encourages Singaporeans to be overly interested in ethnic identity, particularly if you originate from other Asian countries; as Benjamin argues, the first thing a Singaporean wants to know from you is whether you are Chinese, Malay, Indian etc, placing other criteria for identity, such as education, class, age as secondary.

This ascription of ethnic and national identity was even a force in Singaporean women's initial responses to my interview. My Indian origin did confuse the Singaporean women and in the early chat for the interviews, I was frequently asked where I was from and what I was doing here. One woman in Singapore even identified a 'Bhavnani' she knew at school and wanted to know if I was related! I give a couple of examples of this specific interest below:

By the way, which nationality are you? S6

Reena: I'm born in India but I've lived in Britain since I was ten.

So, you're just here because your husband is posted here S6

Another began the interview with the following question:

Okay, let me give you my name card. Are you Singaporean? S2

Reena: No, I'm from London.

In Singapore, being able to tightly define oneself came easily to most of the participants. This is evidenced in the responses to my question about the women's ethnic origins.

When asked about how dominant women described their ethnicity in the UK and Singapore, there was less variation in the categories used by the women in Singapore. In fact the idea of Chinese being 'homogeneous' was accepted as read. Almost all the women described themselves as Chinese, others went further and said: 'Chinese - pure, Chinese born and bred, Chinese, but a little Westernised. One woman was almost apologetic that she could not define herself as Chinese only; there were plenty of caveats most specially the ones on language and religion. Of course the influence of British colonialism and the public espousing of a multi cultural policy in Singapore does reinforce a racialisation or ethnicisation of the 'Oriental other'. Perhaps the priority given to your ethnic identity is not so surprising. But it is both the priority given to ethnicity as well as clear cut boundaries around gendered roles which slow

down processes of individualization for Chinese managerial women. The following table reproduces women's self definitions about their ethnic origin:

Self definitions of ethnic origin by British and Singaporean women

BRITISH WOMEN   SINGAPOREAN WOMEN

BRITISH WOMEN	SINGAPOREAN WOMEN
Caucasian whatever.	Indonesian Chinese
Just British, yup	Chinese
Liverpool.	Chinese
White, I don't know, Anglo Saxon I suppose, just English, whatever, there's a bit of Scottish and Welsh thrown in and probably other things that I don't know about.	Chinese Singaporean
European, white.	Chinese born and bred
English	Chinese
Anglosaxon	Chinese, but a little westernised
White Caucasian.	Chinese
Caucasian, I dunno, British	Chinese
How I would describe [LAUGHS] suppose I'm from the Midlands originally, English from the Midlands and I've worked in Newcastle for 16 years so I suppose I'm Geordie really if you really want my true ethnic origin.	Chinese – no mixture, so I am purely Chinese
Pakistani	Chinese
White Anglo Saxon just English	

In Britain, women were hesitant and uncertain about discussing or clearly staking out their ethnicity. This is unsurprising since 'race' has been equated with ethnicity, yet the issue of the dominant ethnicity – English (or even Liverpudlian etc) and white - has received hardly any deconstruction in discourse, as the literature on whiteness argues (Cohen 1997; Phoenix 1997; Frankenberg 1997; Back 1996; Hewitt 1986). Whiteness is not regarded as a category. The ways in which women spoke about 'race' and ethnicity was in an embarrassed tone, partly because they could not mark themselves out as members of a dominant group, unless they could work out *who* they

were different from. Some women resorted to using old fashioned categorisations of 'races', such as Caucasian or Anglo Saxon. Two others explained they were Geordie or Liverpool. The use of 'European', 'white', 'English', 'British' reinforces other writing on whiteness.

In Singapore, on the other hand, the women spoke confidently and openly about their own 'race' and ethnicity. They were also able to describe the traits associated with theirs and the other two ethnic groups in very precise ways. The clear boundaries of ethnic identities were legitimated through national identity.

Construction of dominant ethnicity: Chinese

For example, many of the women in Singapore had travelled in the region and some had worked in Hong Kong and Indonesia and Malaysia. In describing how those cultures were different, they drew tighter boundaries around the Chinese culture, even though a lot of overlaps existed. In fact the Chinese in *Singapore* were seen to be family oriented, hard working, honest, efficient and unemotional – rational and wealthy.

> *I am a very Chinese person. I think the Asian culture is, you work, you make money, and hopefully by the time you're 60 you have a good life. So it is an honest living.*S1

For Singaporean Chinese women, their womanhood was constructed very differently compared to Malay or Indian women. It was also integral to Singaporean national identity. In contrast to Singaporean Chinese men, Chinese women were family oriented. The conversation below highlights this point:

> *It is still very .... The way Singaporean view this role of ladies being more family-oriented that guys.*

> *Reena: Do you think that that is Singaporean*

At least for the Chinese. They feel that ladies should spend more time at home in looking after the family, that it is a ladies' role. I think for Singaporean ladies, we are very stressed in the sense that we have to take care of career, we have to take care of the family, household, everything we do. The stress level is pretty high, very high S6

Chinese women were attached to the family, but also their careers and they experienced a great deal of stress by working very hard. The dominant view of Chinese-ness is this. If you are working class and Chinese and a woman, it is probable you are not regarded as a lady. Chinese-ness is also constructed in relation to the 'other' ethnic groups in Singapore. What is more, the groups are in a clear hierarchy, with Indians next and Malays at the bottom, and there is no denial of this hierarchy.

I know there are very little Malays who are professionals. You hardly get a handful of Malay bosses or managers. Why is that? I'm not sure. Somehow they don't make it. Have you met many Malay professionals ? I know of a Malay public accountant, there is another Malay manager in Coopers and his wife is a doctor, one of the rare breeds. You hardly see Malay professionals. Sometimes if you look across an organization, the concentration of Malays tend to be in the level of clerks and peons, office boys. S7

Reasons for their lack of success are put down to cultural traits, which are related to education, but the cultural traits are seen to account for the poorer performance in the labour market for Indians and Malays; working class poorer Chinese are not explicitly considered.

The dominance of the Chinese as middle class is reinforced by findings which demonstrate that the majority of Singaporeans (I assume Chinese) consider themselves middle class and this view is also shared by the State (Lyons 2000). An analysis of class in Singapore found that there was in fact no evidence of a concentration of people in the middle classes, thus disputing Singaporean's own self identification which is of course legitimated by government discourse (Lyons 2000:78). In fact class is almost invisible in all the discourse in the interviews; the

emphasis on multiculturalism in Singapore is a key site for the structuring of identities. Malay men, argues the following woman, work twice as hard because their wives don't!

> *Practically all our peons are Malays. Some of them have three or four children, I was asking them, wow, you got three , four children, does your wife work?. No. So I say, wow, must be quite tough. They are very frank people. You know, I have a second job. I ask, what do you do? You know, if you are a delivery boy you have a motorbike, whole day you are walking around, you have energy ... in the evenings I help my friend or double up as a security, so doing two or three jobs. But they are wonderful people, they love their children even with the little that they have, four or five children which is unheard of in the other races* S2

Where class is cross cut by gender or ethnicity, *"differences between groups are explained* with *reference to culture : (Men as heads of households, Confucian work ethic) or a pre existing income gap (National Service increments, remnants of racially discriminatory practices under colonialism). It is up to individuals and communities through education and 'hard work' to improve their education and social status* (Lyons 2000: 79).

Meritocratic discourse then is applied not just to individuals, but to groups and classes. Women's talk reveals their discussion about essential social traits which are linked to all three ethnic groups in Singapore. The ways in which Chineseness is constructed is to **not** be like the Indians and Malays. The Indians, unlike the Chinese are more outgoing and vocal, ideally destined to be lawyers. The Malays on the other hand are warm, frank, have a collectivity and a 'laid backness' that accounts for their lack of representation in management positions.

The following responses to my question about the management positions of Malays and Indians in the banks brought forth these responses:

> *There are no Malays in the banks – they are very frank people – they love their children, wonderful people* S8

Malays: there is a lack of urgency in things , but culturally very warm society S2

I guess it is linked to their education. If you look at the Chinese, the Chinese are more hard-working in their studies when compared to Malays and Indians. You hardly see any Malay top executives, so in that sense, I must say Chinese ladies are definitely out-performing the other races. The percentage of people, ladies who make it to university, Malay only a handful. Even in our course, accountancy, 400 over, less than 5 Malay ladies, Indians, also very few. S6

Of course the Chinese have the jobs because they are the dominant race and I would say the opportunities are equal for the Chinese women – but if you look at the Indians and Malays, I would say the Indians have the better opportunities. For management roles the Indians like a stress on education-there is some measurement, I think of material wealth –whereas Malays would take it a bit more laid back I would say- typically they don't make it to a management role typically - of course there will be exceptions –there is one area of service where Indian women are dominant it is the legal business S11

Britain

In Britain, there are less clear cut categories which define the social traits for the 'other' ethnicities. Women talk as if the situation is more fluid around differing groups, and that in time progress will be made.

One woman in explaining the lack of black and minority ethnic women in management in the UK uses culture as an explanation but recognises that boundaries of these cultures are fluid and subject to change:

Ethnic female is another debate again because of some of the cultural background, they go a certain way but once they get married it sort of tails off

quite rapidly so that's more the case in South East Asian communities perhaps than the black community, though there are very very few black managers in Midland of any sex, and again I think that's something to do with that cultural view of itself. B2

Once more, the following excerpt from a different British woman may also be hinting at cultural differences between women, but the speaker is aware that some individualized 'taking control' will change these boundaries:

Yeah, I mean if we look at women, I mean you've got positive action programmes like the Springboard Programme, I don't know if you've heard, yeah. And although not specifically aimed at ethnic minorities inevitably you will find that women from ethnic minorities will nominate themselves for those kinds of programmes and I think one of the biggest things that benefits them from going on that programme is skills with regard to assertiveness and skills with regard to, effectively, increasing your image and exposure. I think women generally are not particularly good in those area or they haven't been and I think when you get different cultures, different cultures have actually encouraged women to be completely the opposite to that, you know, to be very much in the background, so I think things like that can help women B6

Most however agreed there was an absence of South Asian and Caribbean groups at management level, but did not offer wider solutions in terms of discrimination. Unlike Singapore, however, they did suggest it would be a matter of time before they moved up the ranks. This was what had a made a difference for white women. However, they were not stating it as a matter of fact or 'fate'; they were lamenting it. Some women were also empathising with ethnic minority women's absence in management. The following statements are illustrative of these points:

Don't see them, don't see them, I mean in my job and my previous job I can't name a female manager of any ethnic minority, I mean that's not to say in London area that we haven't got them and that's sad in itself, I couldn't name one. B9

*I think in this country it is even tougher for somebody who is non-white. I still
think that B8*

*Ethnic I don't know, I think may be that's a time factor in that we've only
recently recruited large quantities of ethnic people and it takes a while for that
to filter up B6*

*I think it's changing, I do see it changing now and changing quite rapidly and
there's another thing that's quite visible in the Afro Carribean community is
that there's more and more Afro Carribean businesses starting up and I think
they're becoming, starting to take a view which is why do I have to be the bus
driver, you know I can make money, I can start my business B2*

*So if you compare that to gender effectively I would say that the, if you're
looking at ethnic origins, they're about in the same position as women were 10
years ago B3*

Conclusions

It was argued in Chapter 1 that global change and a decline of the ascription of stable
social identities has led to what some authors have termed the 'individualization' of
society. This concept was seen to be particularly apt for managerial women in the
global economy. However, the differing gender regimes in Singapore and Britain
create different processes of individualization with differential effects on women
managers in the two countries. These effects are represented in women's different
discourses on careers, and on the boundaries around class and ethnicity.

Although both countries use discourses of meritocracy in relation to achieving status
and higher graded jobs, Singaporean women are more likely to use the discourse of
meritocracy to legitimate their national identity and Singapore's economic success.
They see themselves as *recipients* in a fair society. If they demonstrate their 'ability'
they would be rewarded and promoted. The government in Singapore is centralized,
authoritarian, paternalistic and has imposed its policies in order to be economically
successful. It has justified its actions on the basis of the 'Asian way' or because of
'Asian family' values. But the implication of this approach has been to grant equality

to women on the basis of 'gift giving, contingent on economic and political success. Women thus reflect the fact they are the recipients of the 'gift' of careers and education, given to them by a ruling male elite. They have been slotted in to fulfill a wider goal. As such these gifts can be taken away or withdrawn if necessary. The attachment to careers for women in Singapore may therefore be weaker than it is in Britain.

In Britain women managers reflect in their discourses their strategic proactivity in relation to their careers. This discourse functions to emphasize the historic traditions of individualism.

These two different discourses in Singapore and Britain have differential effects on the individualisation process. In Britain the individualisation of managerial women's identities is hastened by a changing government discourse, moving away from sex discrimination to a 'gender neutral' discourse. There is an increasing emphasis on a meritocratic society and a re-emphasis on individualism in relation to women.

In Singapore, processes of individualisation are slowed down by government discourses. These government discourses are essentially about the complementarity of gendered roles, about women as wives and mothers, and about the 'Asian' way, (Rahim 1998) which the government argues are necessary to ensure a successful economy and country. The government or the ruling male political elite decide how and when to bestow the 'gift' of careers for women (Puru Shotam 1992).

The continued ascription of identities based on ethnicity and class are integrally linked to women's identities in Singapore. Essential social traits are linked to differing groups in the women's talk. Boundaries around social identities are rigid and appear unchanging. In Britain, on the other hand, the boundaries around class and gender appear more fluid and subject to change in the women's talk. These social identities appear to occupy separate social spaces and are not always linked to women's identities.

Identity, Women Managers and Social Change:

Comparing Singapore and Britain

CHAPTER 9: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Social context of study

I have argued that the consequences of global change over the last thirty years have had contradictory effects on women managers. The growth of the service sector has altered the composition of the workforce, with increasing feminization and the entry of women into management, particularly married women with dependent children. But women managers have entered jobs which are 'new' jobs and not jobs where they have replaced men. Management remains largely vertically segregated. Women in top jobs are more likely to be single, with no dependents. They may be forced into making hard choices about 'careers and promotion' *or* marrying and having children. At the same time, work is becoming increasingly precarious and unstable, as fashions and tastes change, and labour and capital become increasingly rapidly mobile. Thus women have been entering the labor market and are becoming economically independent in some jobs, but they have entered the labour market under precarious, unstable conditions. They continue to be constructed as *unequal* and as *women* as they enter management. These factors make their 'choices' about career and family lives more complex. They make the drive towards an individual 'life' of their own trickier.

Secondly, there has been a decline in the idea of the male breadwinner with dependent wife and children. In higher status jobs, there has been an increase in the number of 'dual career' families. Professional women are mimicking 'male' career patterns in the workplace. Child care and domestic work has been sub contracted out. Additionally, the growth of consumption has commercialised many household tasks, which previously would have been done by women. Women managers in dual career couples are thus doing less childcare and domestic work. Women's primary identities as wives and mothers appear to have weakened. The evidence from their behaviour suggests women managers have themselves weakened their bind with family.

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On the other hand, this domestic work remains gendered. The responsibility for domestic work has not been shared equally between women and men, despite changes in work patterns. The workers contracted for 'doing' child care and domestic work are still women, albeit immigrant and poor.

As we turn to the changes in corporations, contradictory effects for women as managers are also in evidence. On the one hand, organizations have restructured with flatter hierarchies, team based structures and an emphasis on individualized self development. There is a growing discourse in management texts on the importance of feminised leadership styles as critical for organizational success. Policies on work life balance and equal opportunity are encouraged for employers. On the other hand, there are parallel discourses that managers will work long hours, intensely symbolic of loyalty to jobs and organizations. Work life balance is discussed as a laudable aim in equal opportunity policies, but it is not offered to managers by employers, and women are reluctant to ask for this flexibility. Indeed, there are strong expectations that managers will *not* work part time, or have access to working flexible hours. Women managers continue to be viewed, like men in the workplace, as individualised unencumbered workers, with no family or domestic responsibilities.

The research in this thesis has compared the subjectivities and agency of women in management in Singapore and Britain against this background of global and corporate, structural and cultural change. My story has been concerned with examining the relationship of women's talk of their career stories, and their 'choices', to institutional structures and cultural discourses. More importantly, I have been interested in comparing the 'voices' of women managers in two advanced market economies, one in the West, and one in the East. Theoretically, I have been concerned with connecting these social relationships through new understandings on identity in social theory.

Beginning the empirical analysis

I began the field work analysis by comparing the representation of women as managers in both Singapore and Britain. The statistics demonstrated there were similarities in their representation in senior positions (6%) as well as in the expansion of their employment in 'new' jobs in the financial sector, particularly at middle management level. Women as managers in both countries in the financial sector largely work full time.

I have dug deeper into these ostensibly similar experiences by relating corporate, global as well as national discourses to transcribed interviews with 23 women managers in Singapore and Britain. Probing the ways women in management are responding to contradictory processes would illustrate how they were responding to these discourses, and the implications for their agency.

I have chosen discourse analysis because the approach allows a researcher to examine everyday social practices and how these connect to wider structures and cultures. Although I began with an approach designed to understand individual women's attitudes and intentions, I realised as I transcribed the interviews, that each of their accounts had a much broader relevance. The approach of discourse analysis enabled me to explore how women managers' discourses are constructed and what function they play in the construction of their identities. I became less interested in attitudes and intentions of the women on a personal basis. I wanted to examine discourses for their broader currency and how they related to national and corporate discourses. How have these discourses arisen? What does it mean that they are present? What does it mean if certain discourses are absent in one country and present in the other, or vice versa? What implications are there for women managers, their agency and their 'choices'?

Women managers reflect ambivalent gendered subjectivities

Firstly I have found that the contradictory processes in the labour market and within corporations are apparent in the women's 'talk' on career stories in both Singapore

and Britain. Although women work full time as managers, they want to be promoted. They appear to like their work and the influence and status it brings in wider society. But women managers in both countries are 'aware' they remain largely responsible for family responsibilities. They recognise they are constructed as gendered subjects in corporate cultures. They reflect in their discourses that they are constructed as emotional, embodied and sexualised, compared to men who are constructed as rational disembodied and de-sexualised. In other words, despite certain processes which construct all professional workers as non gendered, other processes in national and organisational cultures continue to construct gendered identities in traditionally opposing ways. Women voice all these constructions in their interviews in both Singapore and Britain.

Differences in women's gendered subjectivities: Singapore and Britain

The discourse analysis of the interviews also reveals interesting differences in the ways these gendered identities are ascribed in Singapore as compared to Britain and women's responses to these ascriptions. It has been argued for many years that women do not 'get on' in paid work, because they prioritise family life over paid work (see Chapter 3). This may or may not be true, but more importantly this may not be very useful as a perspective, since it does not suggest possibilities of change, nor can it address how women 'deal' with these wider ideologies which continually reproduce the binding of women with family. What has been useful in this research is to examine *how* women managers in two advanced market economies, but in two differing gender regimes, voice their responses to these ideologies. By examining these voices, it has been possible to understand the ways 'choices' become relatively more or less constrained.

For example, women in Singapore discussed corporate cultures in local Chinese banks as differently constituted, compared to British women. Singaporean women talked about paternalism and being 'looked after' in these cultures and 'giving way' to men. Decisions made about their restricted access to promotion were 'accepted' largely as related to their position as married women with domestic responsibilities. Their

discourses were suffused with concepts of 'ladies' and 'gentlemen', in the workplace, compared to British women who talked about 'women' and 'men'. In contrast, women in Britain discussed the ways they resolved to keep work *separated* from family. They did not openly discuss family responsibilities or referred to paternalism at work, as if it was assumed. Some women were openly critical of 'male' cultures and male domination. Some embraced women's differences in leadership styles. In fact these British women were being strategic in their 'choices' by keeping domestic and caring duties hidden in the workplace, so that they could be viewed on equal terms with men.

These contrasts suggest that women as managers do not experience work cultures in similar ways in the two different countries. These experiences have implications for how they feel able to act to resolve various contradictions. In Britain the women are uncomfortable with having to repress their family identities at work. They view with 'envy' the fact that men are able to discuss their family responsibilities at work without fearing the perception that men would be seen as lacking commitment to their jobs. In Singapore the women were more open about the differences between women and men in the workplace; they appeared to be more comfortable with these ascriptions of the complementarity in gendered 'roles'. They did not voice discomfort with being perceived as less committed to their workplace than men, because it was assumed they would prioritise family life over paid work.

Sexuality in the organisations in Singapore and Britain was also differently constituted. Women were sexualised and embodied in both countries, but women talked about these differently. For women managers in their late thirties or early forties in Britain, discourses constructed them as potentially sexually available, as 'looking' for men', as erotic, attractive or flirtable with. In Singapore, the discourses in organisations concerned women's sexual identities as wives and mothers, being dependent on men, and women's priorities to family life. Women managers were openly constructed as reproducers, as 'gossipers' about marriage, as 'ladies' acting with propriety. Discourse on sexual availability and attractiveness to men in the work culture was absent in the Singaporean women's accounts. Some British women were uncomfortable with these ascriptions of being sexually available, and found it difficult to challenge the ways in which they were viewed. They were uncertain whether to

challenge, or to laugh about it. Singaporean women, on the other hand, did not feel as uncomfortable about their ascribed sexuality in talking about women as wives and mothers; in fact many voices expressed at length that they were in favour of Chinese middle class women in Singapore being different from British women. They voiced the advantages in being constructed as being powerful in the home as matriarchs and in having widespread state support for their domestic work.

The discourses about family identities were also differently expressed. In Britain women voiced an agonising about decisions between family and work, about their 'juggling' with child care decisions. They felt torn between these two aspects of their lives, and were often involved in negotiations to change responsibilities in the household. Singaporean women did not feel as torn as the British women about these two aspects; in fact they voiced their discomfort and stress of trying to do everything in the short time available. For them it was about planning their lives at week ends to accommodate all their tasks. Choices were about 'planning'. They did not initiate discussions about gendered responsibilities in the household, and appeared to 'accept' their gendered ascriptions more than British women.

The 'acceptance' of these responsibilities as 'choices' they made were legitimated in their discourses by talk about how important family life was in Singapore and how it was very difficult to marry and have a family life if you outdistanced your future or present partner. Men were not mentioned as 'supportive' in their careers.

In contrast in Britain, women discussed their husbands as 'supportive' of their careers. There was no talk about outdistancing your partner. 'Choices' for them were about whether to have a different 'nanny' or how to organise their lives around childcare, whether to change their hours, whether to go for promotion and so on. There was also an absence of talk about cleaning and other domestic work in the British women's accounts; either they did not see it as relevant to an interview about their career stories, or they preferred to keep talk about their domestic and work lives separated, perhaps because it was marginal and of low status. There is not enough talk about 'supportive' or 'non supportive' husbands and partners in this study. British women mentioned the word several times, but did not expand on what it meant. They were reticent. Singaporean women did not use the word 'supportive' for their husbands. My

guess is that open discussion of 'supportiveness' and its meaning and interpretations in relation to men might create discomfort for women in *both* countries. Having such an open discussion suggests that there needs to be mutual and equal respect for each other's work 'choices'. These ideas need further investigation.

The meanings women attributed to 'meritocracy' were however expanded upon but differently interpreted in both countries. Although both countries used discourses of meritocracy in relation to achieving status and higher graded jobs, Singaporean women were more likely to use the discourse of meritocracy to support their country's 'fairness', after de-colonisation. The country was meritocratic, unlike under British colonialism, and you would be recognized and given rewards of promotion or money if you worked hard. Singaporean women saw themselves as *recipients* of a fair society, for which they were grateful.

In contrast, in Britain women managers talked actively about having to seek promotion, challenging job decisions, questioning recruitment approaches or sexist interview questions, and so on. They reflected in their discourses, not a sense of being recipients of rewards in a fair society, but one where individual proactivity in relation to careers was assumed to be the way you 'got on'. Talent was only recognized if you took control of what happened.

Interpretations of Findings

Various questions have arisen since I completed the empirical work, particularly in the interpretation of the findings. Why is vertical segregation so similar in both countries, then, when so many different histories and cultures are involved? Is there a core 'gender' identity which is remarkably resistant to change, across national cultures? Or in fact do gendered identities remain theorised as being fluid, multiple and ambivalent? Are the identities changing or are the strategies to challenge gendered relations changing? For example, Britain has a tradition of equal opportunity policies and sex discrimination legislation, whereas Singapore has never had any such laws or policies. Why are representations so similar in both countries given different

histories of women's access to management? How is women's agency in both countries affected by these differences?

These differently expressed subjectivities in Singapore and Britain are thus important to interpret further. I argue that the subjectivities of managerial women in Singapore and Britain and the ways their identities are constructed through discourse supports wider theoretical work on the gendering of corporate organisational cultures in both countries. In both Singapore and Britain, women in corporate cultures continue to be ascribed *gendered* managerial identities, despite working full time and mimicking male career patterns. But the corporate discourses in the banks articulate with government discourses and policies as well as with historical processes of the two countries, to produce *different gender regimes* in corporate cultures. Gender regimes in financial corporations in Singapore and Britain are thus differently constituted.

It can of course be argued that the financial sector itself has been massively restructured as a result of global change, and that these findings can be interpreted on the basis of corporate cultural change in this sector rather than national gender regimes. Work carried out in London in the 1990s has argued that global change affecting the financial sector has transformed social relations in this sector. Conventional ways of doing business through networks and personal contacts has led to an 'Americanisation', or meritocratisation of the financial sector (McDowell 1997: 3). Financiers began to typify the individualist attitudes and lifestyles from the 1980s in the City of London. All financial sector workers were thus perceived as individualised and women perceived to be equal with men. Women have entered this sector and gendered performances as well as gendered identities have changed, according to McDowell (1997). A range of masculinities and femininities in work situations have been found.

On the other hand, it can be argued that in Singapore, this 'Amercianisation' may have lagged behind the changes in the British financial sector. Why this may be so could be about the ways in which the Singapore government has utilised Asian family values as critical to Chinese Singaporean gendered identities. The processes towards individualisation are constrained by government discourse and history which has explicitly linked gendered identities to ethnicity, class and nation. As global

corporations increase their influence in Singapore, we might well see a greater individualised meritocratic style in this sector in future years, as the government becomes less restricting. It may be more sensible to state that government policies and discourses as well as histories *articulate* with corporate change to produce different gender regimes.

Effects of Gender Regimes

In current Singapore, the historical influences of British colonialism, coupled with dominant discourses on 'natural' differences between the sexes, explicitly construct Chinese middle class women as women workers, and as wives and mothers both in the public *and* private spheres. Local banks and to some extent international banks legitimate these 'naturalised differences'. Women are 'ladies' and men are 'gentlemen'. They are not explicitly eroticised, but carry a respectable 'family values' label. Women are wives and mothers, and as such, protected by men and not sexually available. Although some conflicts between women's identities are beginning to show in the international banks, Singaporean women do not as yet experience major conflicts within their feminised identities, between work and family. The feminised identities are more unified and homogeneously ascribed across a range of sites. Some women also feel they gain from paternalistic subordination in the corporate culture.

In Britain, on the other hand, dominant discourses of equality with men are legitimated by corporate cultures. But this equality, unlike Singapore, means acting in the same ways as men. The discussion of family responsibilities or acting 'like a woman' is constructed by corporations as separate from paid work and the corporate culture. Women thus respond by keeping their home and family lives separated in corporate discourses.

Acting like a man within a corporation suggests 'ambition' and commitment. Some women do 'choose' this way, others do not, but they do so, often understanding the constraints. These 'choices' appear to be creating new status divisions between women with children and those who remain childless.

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Gendered performances?

What is interesting about 'acting like a man' is that some women managers in both countries were experimenting with 'different' gendered performances (see Butler 1990 and Chapter 2). They may have utilised what have been called 'male' leadership styles, but this also begs the question as whether these are 'male' styles or ones senior leaders are expected to develop in any case. For example, women in Singapore and Britain did discuss 'looking out for other women' and 'bringing different things to the party' as well as being 'tough' in their decision making. Perhaps the discourses of 'difference' now present in both societies allow women 'permission' to operate in more 'hybrid' ways according to particular contexts. However there is not enough data in my findings to explore in detail how women are actually operating as managers, and how they negotiate their relationships at work. Research on the way in which senior women actually carry out their work compared to men is still to be carried out.

Implications for understanding 'identity'

The findings beg certain questions about the nature of 'identity' as theorised in Chapter 2. I have argued in earlier chapters that identities are multiple, shifting and ambivalent. The existence of singular 'core' identities has been rejected by recent theories; rather identities are arguably based on gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, age, martial status, nation, disability, which intersect and are subject to change.

The persistence of gendered subjectivities in both countries might suggest the intractability of gendered 'identity' as Connell has argued; it might even suggest the idea of a 'core' gendered identity. It seems to follow then that primarily concrete practice and relationships are open to change, rather than gendered identities (see Connell 1987; 1995). The question of a 'core' identity might remain with the idea of gender as performative, as we witness change. These deeper issues cannot be resolved in this thesis.

On the other hand, perhaps returning to understanding the ways in which 'male' power shifts and accommodates challenges to seemingly 'core' identities might be helpful. After all, McDowell's findings on gendered corporate identities in the financial sector show that women have entered this sector and gendered performances or gendered 'identities' have changed. But middle class men still retain their hold over power and status. The difference discourse within organisations and the 'feminised' approach to management (communications and social interaction constructed as 'feminised') has brought with it a way in which men have *co-opted* feminised versions of these approaches, and therefore retained their power (McDowell 1997 op.cit.). Perhaps then the idea of gendered opposing identities although subject to change and resistance reproduce themselves through wider structures and cultures of power. Alternatively, these findings may support the notion of a 'core' gendered identity ascribed and reinforced through structures and cultures, which then form the framework of constraints in 'performance' changes for women and men.

Closely or Loosely Articulating identities

But the attention to gender alone prevents us seeing how *closely* other identities intersect with gender to constrain or 'free up' choices for women. We perhaps need to explore concepts of *closely* or *loosely* articulating identities. For example, the continued ascription of identities based on Chinese ethnicity and class are integrally linked to gendered identities in Singapore. These represent what it means to be Singaporean. In Britain, women talk about gender, their white ethnicity and their class as separated categories, which are not necessarily bound up with each other in their subjectivities.

In Singapore, essential social traits are more clearly linked to differing groups in the women's talk. It is assumed these traits are 'fixed'. These traits have also been connected with national identity in government discourses. Women managers are 'bound' to be Singaporean Chinese *and* middle class, because they are efficient and hard working in paid work and in the family. Indian and Malay women in Singapore are mostly absent as managers, because they are 'warm' and are expected to prioritise family responsibilities, with Malays being more 'laid back', whilst Indians are able to make it to only certain professions i.e. they make 'good lawyers'

In Singapore, there was little variation in how women ethnically described themselves. They were either *Chinese* or *pure Chinese*. *Boundaries around these social identities are rigid and appear 'fixed'*. They are inextricably and explicitly linked as Chinese, Singaporean *middle class women. In their talk, women as* managers in Singapore link these identities together, and do not separate gender out as women do in Britain.

In Britain, although there were expressions of cultural constraints being responsible for women of colour lagging behind white women, it was also assumed these factors would change in time with effective government and corporate intervention. Discrimination against women of colour was also discussed by some women managers in Britain. The language of discrimination in everyday organizational discourse may partly explain these expressions. The boundaries around class and ethnicity appear more fluid in Britain relative to Singapore. Women in Britain described their ethnic identities in a variety of ways, including using regional identities, national identities, town identities as well as those related to whiteness, such as Anglo Saxon or Caucasian (see page 188). These social identities appear to occupy separate social spaces and are not always linked to their subjective experiences as women.

Using the homogenizing concept of 'women managers'

The findings also suggest that the use of the concept of 'women managers' may not mean the same thing in both countries. Women and men managers in Singapore appear to be constructed as feminised and masculinised in the workplace along the axis of being either 'ladies' or 'gentlemen'. Managers are also assumed to be Chinese and dominant discourse assumes everyone in Singapore is middle class. The concept of women managers does not mean the same thing as it does in Britain. In Britain women are represented as managers on the assumption of equality with men, or 'being the same as' *men* managers. But they fail to be treated as individuals as men managers are, and continue to be constructed as women, hence 'women managers'. In Singapore, managers are already feminised and masculinised, ethnicised and classed and it may be more important to talk about Chinese men and women in management

in Singapore. The concept of women managers cannot therefore be viewed as a homogeneous category, understood to mean the same thing in every national context.

Explanations

In all three chapters on the research findings, my contention that government policies and discourses, or country specific gender regimes, which include historical traditions, create different subjectivities for women managers, has been largely borne out. These policies, traditions and discourses constrain women managers' room to manoeuvre within their gendered identities in different ways. One key explanation for these differences is in the historical and cultural discourses in both countries. I discuss these below.

Historical and cultural regimes

In Britain, liberalism has developed as a key political philosophy over the last 250 years, asserting that we are all free and equal by virtue of our rights as citizens in a parliamentary democracy and our power to freely buy and sell our labour (Weedon 1987). The context of a liberal democratic capitalism, and a civil liberties culture forms part of the labour context of Britain. On the other hand, the role of the State as in the Great Transformation, has been to engineer the free market as a goal. Britain has developed a model of deregulated free markets in the last 150 years, based on state control of the inequalities the free market has helped to create (Gray 1998). These inequalities have resulted in social dislocation, a growing inequality between poor and rich, and significant moments of racial and ethnic tension.

Whereas in Britain and elsewhere, there has been immense social dislocation, exclusion, growing organized crime, in Singapore (and Malaysia) growth has been achieved without loss of social cohesion by a government which has rejected liberal democracy. In Singapore this city state has rejected the Western idea of modernity based on the Enlightenment, which stresses individual human rights and a market individualism. The relationship of the State to the market has a different history and cultural specificity (see Gray 1998). Historically Chinese origin peoples have had a long distrust of the State and stressed the family and kin and inheritance through the family with property, thus embedding market mechanisms in socially constructed

networks. Chinese origin business organizations are based on family firms/ or clans (jiazuquie) and cross sectoral business networks.

These differences have been used by governments to ascribe different identities to managerial women and thus different gender regimes. In Singapore the managerial and middle class women's identity has been created rapidly and simultaneously. The workplace has no recorded history or legislation based on women's equity with men. Instead, economic and nation building goals have emphasized Asian family values based on the traditional separation of gendered roles and responsibilities. The government contends that economic development must have precedence over civil and political rights, such as freedom of speech and the right to vote in free and fair elections.

In Singapore, family, workplace, community and nation are integrated. Women's identities are more homogeneously ascribed. They are about being a good loyal middle class wife and mother who still puts her husband and children first, even though she is also a loyal full time employee. The integration of these various identities and the discourse of meritocracy reinforce homogeneously women's responsibilities as mothers and wives. Therefore there appears to be less room to manoeuvre out of this identity ascription despite economic independence and family changes.

In Britain the creation of a middle class identity has had a longer process which was steeped for many decades in the middle class or bourgeois woman's responsibility for all things domestic. Governments have emphasized women's equality with men, but primarily in the public sphere. Managerial women in Britain have been surrounded by a discourse which stresses 'being the same' as men, for example, the ability to have a career, reach great heights in the labor market and be equally represented as men in the visible public sphere, such as politics. But the state's reluctance to intervene in the private sphere and the emphasis on individual choice in domestic care arrangements leaves women with guilt and worry about how individually they can work out the balance in their lives. The struggle for equal rights, women's visibility in the public sphere and the emphasis on choice and individualism has, unlike Singapore, created the possibility of a more heterogeneous identity ascription or 'more room to manoeuvre' at an individual level for the middle class managerial woman.

Implications for changing gendered identities

In the light of the above explanations for my findings, I would like to suggest that women in Singapore have a stronger possibility of acting collectively as women, but they will have to challenge at the same time, the boundaries of their national and ethnic identities. Contradictions in how these identities are ascribed may sharpen up as government responds to global and technological change. The contradictions involved in imposing centralised planning with a desire to be more fully competitive in the global economy are beginning to grow sharper. Singapore's government has set up a new commission to restructure the economy and re-consider how to make residents more entrepreneurial and creative. There is a focus on reviewing education and a possible opening up of the mass media (Financial Times 2002). These developments may exacerbate the contradictions for managerial women in Singapore and open up possibilities of collective change.

In Britain, gendered identities are only implicit in family and ethnic discourses. They are absent in discourses around national identity. There is growing gender 'neutrality' in relation to social policy. Dominant 'white' ethnicity is not *explicitly* discussed, nor is class. All these are subsumed under social exclusion. I think women may be able to challenge their gendered identities within the confines of dominant discourse, if the language of discrimination is present. Recent policies, however, have attempted to, neutralise 'gender'. The increasing availability of childcare, the arrival of immigrant domestic workers and the drive to encourage all to participate in specific work for the economy may make Britain converge more with Singapore.

But class and ethnicity and gender currently remain separated in official discourse, so that each aspect has to be challenged separately. Government discourses on boundaries around these identities are more fluid than in Singapore, and appear to have more potential to change quickly. Contradictions in how women are constructed and their own subjectivities will hasten the processes of individualisation for managerial women in Britain. The potential for collective change needs further research.

Future Research

The conclusions in this chapter do suggest avenues for future research in the light of the study's limitations. A more considered comparison between Singapore and *London*, rather than Britain, might have been more useful for this study. Both Singapore and Britain could arguably be termed post industrial societies. They have developed global cities, where major financial centres are located i.e. London and Singapore, which could easily be viewed as global city states. They both have global or regional transnational corporation headquarters located in their countries (Friedman 1995). This more focussed comparison might have enriched a better understanding of global cities and the growth of management in the financial sector.

I recognise that the study could also have been improved both in its methodology and its choice of interviewees. With regard to methodology, a better approach would have included longer and multiple interviews with the women so that a richer discourse could be obtained. Time constraints in Singapore limited this possibility. With hindsight, I recognise the advantages in using a matching exercise in my methodology, i.e. comparing senior women who had *similar* profiles of position, age, marital status and children with their counterparts in each country. A more direct matching comparison would have better illuminated both similarities and differences. The study is particularly limited because of my inability to link within the study women's managerial identities with their male partner's paid work identities. These interviews with wives and husbands would have enriched my explanations and allowed more sophisticated conclusions. For example, meanings (e.g. 'supportiveness') could have been compared in men's *and* women's discourses in both countries. Finally, examining in a more systematic way government and national discourses and relating these discourses to women's discourses would have strengthened my interpretations.

Future research in this area does need to take into consideration the linking of global national and corporate contexts to understand how women's subjectivities and agency at different levels are changing and responding to wider processes. Studies on women as managers need to take further what women and men actually do in paid work,

rather than be reliant on reported actions. These studies need to link domestic lives with paid working lives. A better insight into similarity, difference or a greater range of hybridity in observable behaviours might be the consequence. Finally, in this age of rapid global change, comparisons between differing countries remain a much neglected aspect of understanding gendered relations. The study's strength lies in comparing two similar market economies with differing gender regimes. More cross cultural comparisons on gendered identities will shed a greater light on gendered structures, cultures and subjectivities in management.

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Appendix 3

<div align="center">

WOMEN'S CAREER HISTORIES
Questionnaire
</div>

Personalised data - The information provided here will be regarded as strictly confidential
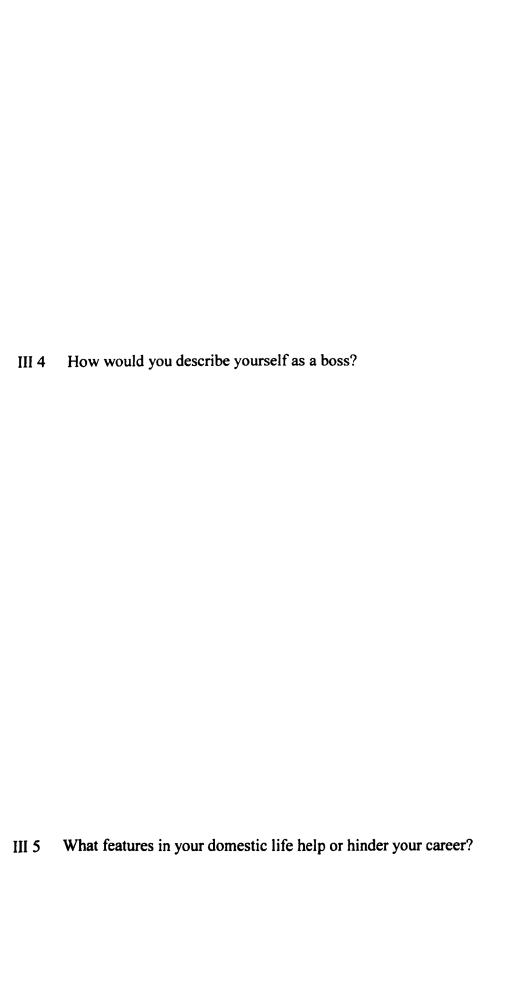
SECTION 1

I 1   Name

I 2   Organisation

I 3   Job Title; Main job duties:

I 4   Please describe your ethnic origin

I 5   Age range

    21-30   31-40   41-50   51 and above

I 6   How many levels of hierarchy are there between your post and that of the most senior paid officer in your organisation?

I am the most senior   1-2 levels   3-4 levels   5-6 levels

                      7 or more levels

I 7   How long in present job?

I 8   Please indicate your level of educational attainment :

A level   Bachelors degree   Postgraduate certificate/Diploma

Masters degree   Doctorate   Other

SECTION II

CAREER INFLUENCES

II 1   How did you make the move into management ?

II 2   Did you have a break in your career to have children or do something else?
How did it influence your progress?

II 3   What would have helped you further?

II 4   Is there anything about you being a woman that has affected how people treat you at work?

PRESENT CAREER

SECTION III

III 1   What do you see yourself doing in five years time?

III 2   Describe what it is like to work here (Prompt with feelings about atmosphere, colleagues, teams, management style; also how people of different ethnic origins work together)

III 3   What is the best/worst boss you have ever had? What made them like that?

III 4   How would you describe yourself as a boss?

III 5   What features in your domestic life help or hinder your career?

SECTION IV

GENERAL

IV 1   How would you describe the current management jobs taken by women and men in your organisation/more generally in the UK ? Are there any differences?

IV 2   How would your describe the current management jobs taken by different origins of women in your organisation/in the UK   - for example similarities and differences between white women and ethnic minority women?

IV 3   Are you aware of any barriers for women in management in your organisation?

IV 4   What helps women to get on? Are there any differences between the different 'racial' or ethnic groups ?

Is there anything else you wish to add?

SECTION V

GENERAL BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION (if missed)

II 1   Career history - Please give dates and work/jobs you have had - paid or unpaid

II 2   What influenced your moves from job to job? Please highlight helps and hindrances, wherever possible