



The State of Women in the Corporation

Corporate Romance—Leslie Aldridge Westoff

Sex in the Workplace—Barbara A. Gutek

The Organization Woman—Edith L. Highman

Feminine Leadership or How to Succeed in Business Without Being One of the Boys—Marilyn Loden

After more than forty years of women's migration to a central place in the work force, to what levels have they risen, and with what issues are they still grappling? The concerns are varied and so are the solutions, perceptions, and advice given to women in light of what's happened so far in boardrooms and plants. From career maneuvering to in-house romance to sexual harassment, the issues remain diverse and often, in their treatment, discrete.

These four books represent that divergence. They apply different theoretical frameworks even when they are practice oriented, and they address different problems of the same phenomenon. Modern strides aside, women are still the objects of systemic on-the-job discrimination and carry a unique occupational burden.

Corporate Romance focuses on the reality of men and women working together at equal levels. It's a case of familiarity breeding greater familiarity. Dealing specifically with mutual attraction between male and female executives, Westoff presents how individuals and their intraoffice affairs affect the organization and vice versa. Westoff clearly comes down on the side of our pinned-striped Romeos and Juliets. For

her, the romances bred by co-working are a fact of modern-day work life, and it's the organization that needs to look at its sometimes antiquated perceptions of handling them.

Moreover, men's attitudes must change. Although Westoff points out the potential, yet rarer occurrence of women using their sexuality to gain influence, it is men who, while paying lip service to sex equality in the corporation, treat women co-workers as less than colleagues. In turn, men translate their perceived superiority sexually.

As a resource of causes to the problem, however, don't look to *Corporate Romance*. Using the new co-ed dormitories of the late 1960s as a parallel, Westoff remarks that we then took for granted sex between students. Similarly, it's the fact that women have entered the boardrooms that there is now an organizational problem. "He [the pre-women's liberation exec.] occasionally had affairs, but they did not involve power and did not affect the functioning of the corporation." In the least, such an observation is either a glimpse into the obvious or like blaming your latest auto accident on owning a car.

Perhaps it's unfair to criticize the book for not being something it doesn't claim to be—an analysis of working women's problems. It addresses only a very particular audience—those who are or may become part of a corporate couple, who manage either the couple or the personnel function, or who must mitigate any damage to productivity and corporate power structures. And for that it's valuable. At the same time, however, while some may need a how-to on running their affairs in the corporation, recognize that the majority of working women are dealing with more basic conflicts.

The plight of the majority of women and the male/female situations in which they find themselves are the foci of Barbara Gutek's *Sex in the Workplace*. She points out that while there are greater numbers of women in the workforce, the vast majority of them are still in traditional, and traditionally lower-paying positions. While NOW's "59¢" button should now read "62¢," we're far from claiming that women wield their share of corporate power. There is only one woman CEO in the Fortune 500 (Katherine Graham of The Washington Post), and 95 percent of those same companies have no women in their senior management.

As subordinate, women are likely to experience sexual harassment and it's not likely to occur the other way around. Like Westoff, Gutek sees the potential organization problems inherent in attraction; however it is not only "a product of biological attraction." Sex causes two sets of problems in the corporation. The first are the tangible difficulties faced by personnel and managers when harassment occurs or is charged; the second, a cycle of harassment. As it continues, it perpetuates an environment in which it is condoned. That makes it more likely to occur again. According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, as Gutek points out, even an *atmosphere* of intimidation, which may include pin-ups and prevalent use of foul language, constitutes sexual harassment.

The heart of Gutek's book comes from a survey sampling of men and women in the Los Angeles area. Two findings are worthy of immediate note. First, women suffer more damage more by sex in the office than men. Further, "contrary to popular belief, women do not use sex at work nearly as frequently

as men do." More so than for men, a woman's job satisfaction and career advancement are at stake. The corporation in turn risks its level of productivity and its image.

Gutek finds the manifestation of sex discrimination rooted in "sex-role spillover—the carryover into the workplace of gender-based roles that are usually irrelevant or inappropriate." Expecting women to assist men, to make coffee at meetings, or provide a nurturing atmosphere, or expecting men to take the lead in mixed-sex groups, or to pick up the tab at a business meal with a female colleague are all perception based not on work, but on sex stereotypes.

Gutek's and Westoff's books differ in many ways, not the least of which is their respective purposes. As a practical guide to corporate romance Westoff's book is quite helpful and interesting reading. Gutek's book by design is a research study and takes a stronger theoretical approach.

Westoff does not, by far, criticize the office romance, but points out the dangers and how to spot them. It's survival information for both the organization and the individual. In exposing a serious malfunctioning of male/female attraction, Gutek, however, decries the importation of sex-roles, which are removed in theory from work duties, into the workplace.

Rather than focus on the work environment, Edith L. Highman in *The Organization Woman* outlines through the results of interviews and surveys with career women, and women and men managers, how an individual woman can succeed in today's corporation. She analyzes the position of working women only as much as she guides the reader through what it takes to net that organizational position. *The Organization Woman* gathers the perceptions and realities of those women who've made it and the executives to whom they report. It covers a wide range of topics including dealing with superiors and subordinates, understanding organizational culture, making the most of opportunities, and handling specifically sexual issues. The last set is not related to ability or performance but nevertheless affects the way women gain success. Rather than offering advice flat out, Highman reports on the musings and experience she's culled from her interviews.

There is little in-depth analysis of the

dynamics of sexual politics in the office. Highman lets it suffice to say that sex and sexual overtones are inevitable when men and women work together. Her concern is not to change the status quo or lay blame for the sexual aggressiveness that women reported in both her book and Gutek's. Given the widespread sexual harassment at work, it's interesting that men and women in the large majority of Highman's research noted that a women's "playing up" her looks was either no advantage or a clear disadvantage, and the same was true of flirting in the office. Women seemed to notice other women's flirting more than men, and men, when they did, mostly resented it and saw it as possibly concealing incompetence.

At the same time, over half the women and at least half the men Highman heard from believe career women use verbal sexual innuendos in the office. Yet the great majority of respondents saw a real disadvantage in a woman's affair with her boss.

Highman strategically follows up her chapter on sexual abuse with one outlining women's legal rights in employment settings. Most often, in the wake of a corporate romance, if one party is asked to leave, it's the woman.

She's often the subordinate, seen as less valuable and more easily replaced. In fact, the women's supervisor, quite possibly her *paramour*, might suggest her timely departure from the ranks.

Lastly, one book seeks a change in organizations and demands that women take themselves, as women, seriously. *Feminine Leadership* is a guide for management women on the benefits of a "feminine" style at work. It is also a hopeful glimpse into the corporate future where blending "masculine" and "feminine" managerial styles will be the rule. Loden believes that women shouldn't change their natural [whether inherent or socially bred] style, but should develop it to benefit themselves and their organizations. "Women don't have to make themselves over in the image of men in order to succeed."

While Loden doesn't believe that all women manage or would manage one way and men another, as a group, women's style differs. It relies not only on rational data to make decisions, but on the personal feelings of those involved as well. So far, in corporate practice, the basic dominance of male corporate cultures, which hinge on competition and military models of victory,

leaves little room for the woman who wants no part of male cloning. And although women have tried to adapt, the statistics show that women are still not being considered for the top spots. That may be because CEOs want a successor like themselves, or because male superiors, responsible for promotion, are blind to women's talents because stereotypes are so strong.

Another example of Gutek's sex-role spillover—but it's encouraged. It's progressive, according to Loden, for women to bring traditionally sex-linked characteristics into the workplace. Traits that were once thought inappropriate, are now touted as maybe "the thing" American industry needs as a leadership boost. Their sources include "gender differences, early socialization, and the unique set of life experiences from early childhood on, which shape women's values, interests, and behavior as adults." As the recent women's movement was partly an answer to the ignored suffering of American housewives, an addition to the style of American management may be expected as a result of women managers' frustration with a forced fit into the male mold.

Edith Highman, however, is not as ready to advocate style change, at least not in the form of advice to women who want business success. For now, playing the current game is a prerequisite. Very few of the traits Highman suggests as valuable in climbing the ladder are those that fit in with "feminine" style: having a will to boss, being able to ask for what you want without begging, taking on responsibility, articulating and communicating well, motivating others, and risk-taking. In a very masculine example, Highman says fitting-in is crucial. "If duck hunting as a hobby is an essential to upward progress in a company headed by a duck-hunting fanatic who's likely to remain head for many years, then if you plan to stay and progress in the company you had better become a duck hunter. Otherwise change your plans and get a job elsewhere."

Should women work within the corporate system to change it from positions of power, or should they, remaining on the outside, seek to shift the paradigms of power to more "feminine" characteristics, thereby ridding the system of its dependence on domination and competition? Apparently we need contenders for equality on both the inside and outside. Does getting

ahead come only with being like the boys, or are women going to be respected for exhibiting different but equally valuable qualities in management. We'll probably know the answer once the solution is in place. Maybe that's Monday-morning quarterbacking, but often in important things, you only know how to get there once you arrive.

Corporate Romance, 246 pp. \$16.95.
Times Books, 201 E. 50th Street, New York, NY 10022.

Sex in the Workplace, 216 pp., references, index. \$19.95. Jossey-Bass, Inc. 433 California Street, Suite 1000, San Francisco, CA 94104.

The Organization Woman, 204 pp., references, bibliography, index, appendices. \$16.95 Human Sciences Press, 72 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10011.

Feminine Leadership, 306 pp., references, index. Times Books.
Available through the ASTD Publishing Program. Order Code: LOFL. \$16.00 ASTD national members. \$18.00 nonmembers. \$1.75 shipping and handling. Send prepaid orders to ASTD Publishing Service, P.O. Box 4856, Hampden Station, Baltimore, MD 21211.



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