GENDERED MOTIVATION THEORY:
IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN IN ORGANIZATIONS

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Although Kanter’s analysis of tokenism suggested that a simple increase in the numbers of women managers might improve organizational life for all women, this does not seem to be the case. Despite the influx of women into managerial positions, many other women still struggle to achieve executive positions and countless others remain trapped in traditionally female jobs. In this paper, I argue that the gendered nature of the motivation theories that women managers use to understand and interpret their own and others’ behavior precludes a motivation to help others. Theories of work motivation are gendered in that the need for personal growth and self-development that they stress requires being separate from others. This premise is most explicit in Maslow’s needs hierarchy, but is also incorporated into a seemingly value-free approach such as Porter and Lawler’s version of expectancy theory which, in actuality, is based on Maslow’s hierarchy. Motivation theory thus extols the autonomous male self that denies relatedness rather than the female self-in-relation described by feminist theory. I describe how this belief in an autonomous self affects women’s perceptions of career success, and, most important, their perceptions of their obligation and ability to help other women. I conclude with a discussion of how a feminist understanding of the relationship between personal growth and connections with others provides a different perspective on one’s desire and ability to assist others.

Although Kanter’s (1977) analysis of tokenism suggested that a simple increase in the numbers of women managers would improve organizational life for all women, this does not seem to have been the case. Despite the influx of women into managerial positions in the last twenty-five years, many other women still struggle to achieve executive positions and countless others remain trapped in powerless and low-paying traditionally female jobs. What Kanter’s argument overlooked is that, in addition to having social support to resist the pressure to conform to male norms, the increasing numbers of women managers must be motivated to assist other women. In this paper, I argue that the gendered nature of the motivation theories that women (and men) managers use to understand and interpret their own and others’ behavior precludes a motivation to help others.

The basis for my argument that key theories of work motivation are gendered is that the need for personal growth and self-development that they stress requires being separate from others. A continuing need for connections with others is viewed as a lesser need than the need for individual autonomy and growth, a lesser need which, moreover, has the potential to threaten or hinder the development and satisfaction of the higher need. Motivation theory thus extols the autonomous
view, these relationships are limited and dispassionate. A self-actualizer's close connections with others are restricted to a spouse (of the opposite sex) with whom she or he has a long-term, monogamous relationship (Maslow, 1954, pp. 235-260) and a small circle of friends. This group is able to understand and accept the self-actualizer's need for privacy and desire for solitude, a need and desire that "normal" or "average" people find difficult to accept. The latter want a friendship that "is more clinging, more demanding, more desirous of reassurance, compliment, support, warmth and exclusiveness," and consequently consider the self-actualizer cold, snobbish and hostile (Maslow, 1954, p. 213). Despite this reaction, the self-actualizer "feels a basic underlying kinship with these creatures whom he [sic] must regard with, if not condescension, at least the knowledge that he can do many things better than they can, that he can see things that they cannot see, that the truth that is so clear to him is for most people veiled and hidden" (Maslow, 1954, pp. 217-218), and serves them by enlightening them about these truths.

This depersonalized view of others both follows from, and is a reflection of, the research which was the basis for Maslow's hierarchy (Cullen, 1994, 1997). These studies examined dominance behaviour in, first, monkeys and apes (Maslow, 1935, 1936a, 1936b, 1936c, 1940a, Maslow and Flanzbaum, 1936) and, second, college-age women (Maslow, 1937, 1939, 1940b, 1942). In both cases, dominance was defined as the ability of one individual to direct or inhibit the behaviour of a subordinate individual while at the same time being able to act on her or his own desires without deference to that subordinate (Maslow, 1936a, p. 263; Maslow, 1937, p. 405). In humans, dominance was established in a "face-to-face, man-to-man [sic] situation" through "strength of character," which was a reflection of the individual's sense of self-esteem (Maslow, 1937, pp. 406-407). Self-esteem, according to Maslow (1937, p. 407), was a consciousness of one's general superiority and a feeling that others should, and do, recognize this.

Thus, depending on the individual's sense of self-esteem, other people, and connections with them, are either a source of frustration or of little consequence. People who have not satisfied their esteem needs, and hence are subordinate in interpersonal relationships, will be constrained in those relationships. Their behaviour will be inhibited by the more dominant person; they will be unable to freely choose and carry out any given course of action. People who have satisfied their esteem needs, and hence are dominant in interpersonal relationships, can essentially ignore the others in those interpersonal relationships. Their behaviour will not be inhibited by the less dominant person and they will be able to freely choose and carry out any given course of action. Only those who are free of the influence of others are then able to pursue the goal of self-actualization, a pursuit which leads to "greater, stronger and truer individualism" (Maslow, 1954, p. 149).
In the decade before expectancy theory's formulation, there was much discussion about the dangers of conformity in the workplace, as evidenced by the popularity of William Whyte's (1956) *The Organization Man* and David Riesman's (1950) *The Lonely Crowd*. In Whyte's view, the growth of large corporations meant that the Protestant Ethic of the "pursuit of individual salvation through hard work, thrift, and competitive struggle" (1956, p. 4) was being replaced by a "social ethic" of "a belief in the group as the source of creativity; a belief in ‘belongingness’ as the ultimate need of the individual; and a belief in the application of science to achieve the belongingness" (p. 7). For Riesman, the issue was the emergence of "other-directed" as opposed to "inner-directed" individuals. Earlier generations of Americans had conformed to the norms of society through the internalization of parental or adult authority, whereas the then current generation conformed to the pressures of peers (Riesman, 1950, p. v). The source of direction for "inner-directed" people was "implanted early in life by the[ir] elders and directed towards generalized but nonetheless inescapably destined goals" (p. 15), while "other-directed" people directly and indirectly relied on others for guidance. For them, the only constant in life was "the process of paying close attention to the signals from others" (p. 22).

The definition and measurement of role perceptions in expectancy theory directly reflects Whyte's and Riesman's concerns. Role perceptions are the types of effort an individual believes are necessary for effective job performance; these types of effort were assessed using traits classified as inner-directed or other-directed (Porter and Lawler, 1968, p. 25). Lower and middle level managers were asked to rank order these traits "in the order of their importance for success in your present management position" (p. 193). Contrary to Riesman's and Whyte's assertions, the managers who were rated as better performers (by either their superiors or themselves) had higher mean rankings for the inner-directed traits than for the other-directed traits (pp. 106-109).

The traits classified as inner-directed are "forceful, imaginative, independent, self-confident [and] decisive," while those classified as other-directed are "cooperative, adaptable, cautious, agreeable [and] tactful" (Porter & Lawler, 1968, p. 105). The oppositional nature of the two sets of adjectives reveals intriguing assumptions about individuals who are more or less concerned about their relationships with others. Being cooperative or agreeable precludes being self-confident or imaginative, while being independent precludes being tactful. Being independent means being forceful, while being cooperative means being cautious. One can be strong or concerned with others; one cannot be both.¹

Maslow's hierarchy enters into Porter and Lawler's theory in that his needs were used to determine which rewards for effective performance will be satisfying, valued and hence lead to greater future
produced only five such relationships. More specifically, the autonomy need produced five significant relationships, the social and self-actualization needs each produced three, the esteem need two and the security need none. However, Porter and Lawler (1968, p. 149) concluded that performance differences were more likely to be related to attitudes about the opportunity for personal growth and development, or the opportunity for independent thought and action, than to attitudes about the opportunity to form close relationships or the feelings of security one gets from the job. What this comment overlooks is that the social need had produced the same number of significant relationships as the need for self-actualization and that these two needs were therefore equivalent in terms of their relationship to performance. Thus, Porter and Lawler's findings might more accurately be described as showing that performance differences were more likely to be related to attitudes about the opportunities for independent thought and action, or with the opportunities to form close relationships and grow personally, than to attitudes concerned with the prestige of the job or the feeling of security one gets from that job.

As Kanter (1977) has observed, the uncertainties associated with managerial positions make explicit links between the types or levels of effort and effective work behaviour unclear. These uncertainties are intensified by expectancy theory’s definition of work effort as personal traits (such as self-confident and imaginative) and work outcomes as attitudes and feelings (such as a sense of self-fulfillment and personal growth and development). This stress on internal reactions to external realities deflects an examination of those external realities, let alone an examination of the actions that can be taken to change them. Under these circumstances, individuals can be encouraged to feel personal responsibility for their careers and discouraged from examining the organizational structures and practices that affect those careers. Consequently, expectancy theory, like other forms of cognitive psychology, is psychology as ideology, simultaneously reflecting what Sampson (1981, p. 731) refers to as both a true and a false consciousness, in that it reflects the reality of given group at a particular moment in time, but this reality may be a distortion that protects the interests of the powerful or maintains the status quo.

Motivation theory thus extols perceptions of individual responsibility for autonomous self-development and these perceptions in turn affect, first, views of career success, and, second, the perceived ability to help others. For women, this is especially crucial because a focus on the issue of individual self-development occurs throughout the women in management literature. Although the advice that follows from this focus is contradictory, self-development still remains the ultimate key to career success. Women do not achieve success, it is argued, because they view a career as a personal goal known only to the woman herself (Hennig and Jardim, 1977), or career success as a sense of personal growth (Hardesty and Jacobs, 1987), rather than as movement up the
who does want to help others is also negatively affected by the perception that upward movement depends on the combination of self-development and luck. While she can serve as a mentor to more junior women who are self-confident and know what they want (and thus give them the good fortune of being noticed), she is unable to see what she might do for women in general. Indeed, ultimately the first step(s) must come from those other women, who must be sufficiently self-confident and knowledgeable about what they want for her to notice them.

What would enable her to see what she might do? One answer might lie in the preconditions Haskell (1985) suggests must exist before we will help those who are in distress, preconditions that he illustrated through the “case of the starving stranger.” At this very moment, we are all aware that, in the poorer countries in the world, people whom we do not know will starve to death in the next week. We also know that we have the money to fly to one of those countries, find one of those starving strangers and save her or his life. But we do not do so, even though our recognition that we could means that we are causally involved in that person’s death: since we could have prevented that death but did not do so, our inaction is one of its causes. Given this, why don’t we help the starving stranger?

Haskell argues that we take action in only a limited set of the (evil) events in which we know we are causally involved. That limited set is determined by four preconditions. First, we must believe that ethically we are required to help unknown others who are suffering. Second, we must believe that our failure to assist those others permits the evil that causes their suffering to continue. Third, we must see a specific set of actions that we can take that will alleviate the others’ suffering. Finally, these actions must be so familiar and easy and have such a certainty of effect that a failure to use them would be seen as intentional and deliberate. When these four conditions exist, we will see our inaction as a significant contributing cause of the stranger’s suffering and, as moral persons, will feel compelled to act.

A key concept in Haskell’s formulation is the specific set of actions that we can take, which, drawing from Gasking (1955), he calls “recipes.” Recipes are causal statements that specify the techniques for producing (or preventing) events. We see A as the cause of B when we can specify how we are able to produce something like B by doing something like A. Having this recipe is what produces a causal perception, and it is this causal perception that leads to an extension of our feelings of moral responsibility. Since we now know what to do, we must do it.

How does this apply to women in managerial positions? I will focus on a woman who wishes to help other women to achieve managerial positions, a woman who believes that, without
growth and self-fulfillment. As I have noted earlier, Maslow’s self-actualizer has impersonal relationships with most others. To the extent that there is a concern for others, that concern is for the generalized, as opposed to the concrete, other. Benhabib (1987, p.87) has argued that, in relating to the generalized other, we abstract from the individuality and concrete identity of the other, and focus on what we have in common, which is certain rights. The norms governing such relationships, the norms of formal equality and reciprocity, are institutional and public, and confirm in each of us the rights of humanity. We treat those others, and expect to be treated by them, with respect and dignity.

The moral responsibility that one feels for the generalized other is, in an organizational context, translated into the argument that the woman in a senior management position is an inspiration and role model for other women. She fulfills her moral obligation simply by “being there,” and thus demonstrating that it is possible to move upward. More proactively, she may meet her moral obligation by passing on what she perceives to be her “recipe” for success, thus giving others an equal opportunity to achieve the success that she has obtained. But because of the individualistic nature of her understanding of her own career success, that recipe will be either simplistic and rudimentary or complex but idiosyncratic. In either case, her recipe will be of little practical use to those she seeks to help.

In relating to the concrete other, on the other hand, we abstract from what constitutes our commonality (Benhabib, 1987, p.87). Here each of us is entitled to be recognized and confirmed as a concrete individualized being with specific needs, talents and capacities. The norms governing such relationships confirm not only the other's humanity, but also the other's individuality. They are the private, noninstitutional norms of friendship; we care for, and expect to be cared for by, those others.

But how does one incorporate the private, concrete other norms of friendship into public organizational life? Code (1988, p. 32), after noting that enduring friendships manage to deal with shifts in the balance between independence and dependence, observes that “if one were not constrained by alleged ethical demands to separate oneself in one's public life from these [core, private] relationships and the responses they evoke, one might permit them to play a role in shaping one's public attitudes and responses as well.” She further proposes that we could think of the relationships that make up human lives as patterns of concentric circles, with the inner circles being the more intimate (private) ones, and the outer circles being the more formal (public) ones, and try to determine if outer circles work in analogous ways to the inner circles (Code, 1988, p. 32). Viewing our relationships this way would mean recognizing that our links with those
needs as well as the needs of the other. A sense of self-esteem comes from feeling that one is "a part of relationships and is taking care of those relationships" (Miller, 1991, p. 16), and that one is able "to understand" and "to be understood" (Surrey, 1991, p. 37), rather than from a sense of isolated superiority and prestige. Mutual psychological development occurs through "growth in connection" (Jordan et al, 1991), and these connections are seen as empowering rather than threatening.

The feminist concept of mutual growth in connection can be a significant contribution to organization theory in general, and motivation theory in particular. In an organization, while each individual may be responsible for performing a distinct and unique task, she or he has connections with many other individuals; the essence of the organization is these connections. In this context, it makes much more (psycho)logical sense to understand the basis for motivation as personal growth that occurs through a mutually beneficial connection with others, rather than as personal growth that occurs through detached superiority.

However, in making this argument, we need to be extremely careful about what we claim is the source of women’s greater concern with connection. The value of a concept of the self-in-relation that is developed by studying women’s friendships is that it reflects women’s experience, but does not reduce this experience to biology in the way that arguments for a mothering model or maternal thinking do. Using mothering as a model of connection with others, particularly in an organizational setting, merely replaces one form of superiority and elitism (paternalism) with another (maternalism). The mother-child relationship is not an egalitarian relationship, since the mother is more knowledgeable or competent than the child, and responsibility is not mutual, since the mother is responsible for the child’s welfare, but the child is not responsible for the mother’s welfare (Grimshaw, 1986, pp. 250-251).

Incorporating the feminist concept of the self-in-relation into organizational theory, however, must take into account Fletcher’s (1994) argument that doing this by using the rules of the traditional management discourse weakens the concept’s transformational power. Using relational skills to achieve instrumental ends, Fletcher contends, destroys the mutuality that is inherent in the concept of the self-in-relation. We may be able to find ways of retaining this mutuality by looking to examples or illustrations of what Sampson (1988) has called “ensembled individualism.” This is individualism in which there is a fluid boundary between the self and the other and power and control over a mature person’s actions lies in forces that include but go beyond the person. Sampson argues that, worldwide, this form of individualism is more prevalent than is the self-contained individualism of male western, most particularly American, culture. Yet
1. A similar set of comparisons occurs in one of the measures of “growth need strength” in the Job Diagnostic Survey questionnaire used in Hackman and Oldham's (1980, pp. 288-293) model of work redesign. In the section involving choosing a preferred job from two jobs with differing characteristics, the forced choice format of these items appears to assume either that it is not possible to have a job with both characteristics or that people would not wish to have such a job. For example, a job with pleasant people to work with must be rejected in favour of a job which requires making important decisions, and non-challenging or routine jobs must be rejected in favour of jobs where the individual is either isolated from others or among coworkers who are not very friendly. Finally, the choice between a “job which allows you to use your skills and abilities to the fullest extent” compared to “a job with very satisfying teamwork” (Hackman and Oldham, 1980, p. 293) apparently assumes that there are no skills or abilities involved in ensuring that teamwork is satisfying (an assumption that, if it is correct, would appear to negate the need for team training) or that one cannot fully exercise one's abilities in even a supportive group setting.

2. Haskell was attempting to provide an alternative explanation for the growth of humanitarian reform sentiment, most particularly the movement to abolish slavery, in Western Europe, England and North America after 1750. Since the development of humanitarianism sensibility had been linked to the rise of capitalism, the prevailing explanation was that these reforms served to advance the class interests of the new entrepreneurial class. Given the problems with this explanation, Haskell proposed that the rise of capitalism led to changes in perceptions or cognitive styles (1985, p. 342), specifically, changes in perceptions of causal connections which then led to changes in the conventions of moral responsibility. He further argued that it was this expansion of the boundaries of moral responsibility, through the preconditions that he delineates in the case of the starving stranger, that led to the development and growth of the abolitionist movements.

3. Applying these preconditions to the abolitionist movements, Haskell argued that capitalism presupposed and taught two interrelated lessons that are encompassed in the laws of contracts: first, that one must keep one’s promises and, second, that one must pay attention to the distant consequences of one’s actions. These lessons and laws provide individuals (and groups of individuals) with promises and mutually contingent recipes for producing desired actions. It was the development of these recipes for action that led to the perception that people could effectively solve broader social problems.

ENDNOTES
REFERENCES


