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### Women workers: caring, sharing, enjoying their work - or just another gender stereotype?

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## Women workers: caring, sharing, enjoying their work – or just another gender stereotype?

Jane Bryson<sup>a\*</sup>, Jessie Wilson<sup>a</sup>, Geoff Plimmer<sup>a</sup>, Stephen Blumenfeld<sup>a</sup>, Noelle Donnelly<sup>a</sup>, Bryan Ku<sup>a</sup> and Bill Ryan<sup>b</sup>

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This article examines the responses of more than 10,000 unionised women and nearly 5000 unionised men, working in the New Zealand public sector, to a selection of questions in a workplace dynamics survey. The questions investigated in this article provide insights into women's levels of commitment and job satisfaction compared to those of men. It also reports on comparative experiences of cooperation, information sharing, recognition and managerial practices. The findings show that women and men do not differ significantly in terms of organisational commitment. However, women are more committed generally and enjoy their work more than men, but they report less favourably on experiences of cooperation and communication at work. Women, compared with men, also report experiencing less recognition. We discuss the possible meaning of these results and the potential implications for management and unions.

**Keywords:** public sector; women; commitment; job satisfaction; stereotypes

### Reflecting on working women's experiences

Although, of course, not all women are the same, as a generalisation it is often assumed that the experiences of working women are different from those of men. This article uses empirical evidence to examine the experiences of women and men at work in the public sector. In particular, it looks at commitment to and enjoyment of that work. The article proceeds by presenting themes from the literature reflecting on women at work and uses these to pose questions which are then explored in the sizeable data set generated by a recent nationwide survey of members of a large public-sector trade union.

The research literature on women at work has, over the last 40 years, been characterised by several lines of argument. One has been to fight for equal treatment and equal opportunity for women in the workplace. Another has been to highlight that women are different from men at work and that they have different ways of working. This, in turn, has led to more recent critiques which attempt to both do and undo gender in workplace analyses. These arguments have, in their different ways, sought to improve the situation of working women by exposing and reducing barriers, valuing difference and challenging the patriarchal norms embedded in social, economic and labour market institutions. However, there are also contradictions and tensions between these different lines of argument. We now briefly explore each line of argument and the contradictions that emerge among them.

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The range of research that grapples with the situation of working women reveals experiences of unfair discrimination, barriers to achievement at work and institutionalised paternalism that hamper women's progress. The goal of this theme in the literature has been to initially promote equality of treatment and subsequently to advocate equality of opportunity. This literature recognises the different demands placed on working women, particularly in relation to childcare or fulfilling of traditional gender roles in the home. On the one hand, there has been an acknowledgement of these demands and a fight for equal opportunity at work that caters for them (for instance, through access to parental leave and flexible work arrangements). On the other hand, there are arguments exposing these traditions as the social construction of a patriarchal society which should be changed. However, despite changes in legislation, employer behaviour and social norms, in many advanced economies, it is argued that women still tend to carry the responsibilities of balancing work and family caring duties (Conley et al. 2011; Donnelly et al. 2012; OECD 2013).

Approaching from a different angle is the literature which examines the way in which women work. Arguably, this focus started to gain pace with the recognition in psychological research that women speak 'in a different voice' and that extrapolating male views and experiences to all people is neither accurate nor useful (Gilligan 1982). The management literature in particular has long pondered women's styles of leading (Rosener 1990; Wajcman 1996; Sinclair 1998; Brigden 2013) and the barriers to women's advancement in management and governance. Rosener's (1990) exposition of the ways in which women lead is cited as an important change in the management research away from men's views to actively canvassing the perspectives of women (Bartram 2005). However, it potentially creates another gender stereotype of women as excitable, gentle, emotional and submissive and shifts the focus of attention from women being equal to men, towards women being different from men. Although this type of difference argument aided a reorientation to differentiated (not equal) treatment in order to ensure equal opportunity, it also reinforced certain stereotypes of women. Sinclair (1998) does not set out to take a position on gender and leadership styles, preferring to focus on leadership. She explores not the absence but rather the invisibility of women in leadership. She attributes this invisibility to how leadership is defined or recognised and indicates that men and women are perceived differently by others. Her research confirms that 'management and leadership are sex typed constructs' (25).

Recent scholarship examines women's styles alongside emergent theories of leadership such as relational, complexity and systemic leadership (Werhane & Painter-Morland 2011). Indeed, Uhl-Bien (2011) argues that complexity leadership theory is a 'feminine friendly' framework for the workplace as it combines the more masculine administrative leadership with both adaptive and enabling leadership which she cites as 'more satisfactory to the relational needs of women (connection, building, growing) while maintaining a sense of professionalism in femininity' (71). In a similar vein, Painter-Morland (2011: 144) cites the work of Gmür (2006) which found that most ideal traits for managers were associated with a male stereotype and only two with females: that of being adept at dealing with people and being cooperative. Instead, Painter-Morland advocates a more systemic approach to leadership in which all members of an organisation are encouraged to take responsibility, and recognises that there are many different ways to lead beyond gender stereotypes. Some see such an approach as an alternative to both male and female archetypes, enabling both to lead in more relational and contextually sensitive ways (Pless 2011). Pless argues that these behavioural differences are not innate, but rather socially constructed.

In large-scale survey research, Clark (1997), citing a range of researchers utilising British, American, Canadian and Dutch data, observed that even though usually women's jobs are much worse than men's, they consistently report higher job satisfaction scores than men. Clark investigates this paradox using a large-scale British data set. He confirms that the reason for this is that many women tend to expect less from their work than men do and thus are more satisfied with any given job. The exception to this are younger, higher educated, professional women whom he found to have similar levels of job satisfaction to their male counterparts. One could speculate that this shows gender archetypes are operating in nonprofessional roles but may be breaking down or being undone by those women who are accessing higher education and professional occupations.

Many have pursued the exploration of difference but, as indicated, its potential creation of another form of stereotype has been highlighted by some scholars. Reay and Ball (2000) argue that the feminist literature portraying women (and their ways of working) as different from men has resulted in a 'homogenised' view of women as 'nurturant, affiliative and good at interpersonal relationships' (145). They suggest that gendered identities are more varied and fluid depending on the context which shapes actions and perspectives. This is a view reinforced by those engaged in analyses which 'do' and 'undo' gender (Deutsch 2007; Kelan 2010). 'Doing' gender analyses, widely attributed to West and Zimmerman (1987), has highlighted the social construction of, and conformity to, gender norms. Their work differentiates between the sex category 'female' and the gender enactment of femininity, hence throwing into stark relief the influence of context on how gender is enacted.

Recent scholarship has critiqued this approach as encouraging a narrow focus on how differences between women and men are maintained in workplaces (Deutsch 2007; Kelan 2010; McDonald 2013). Because of this, 'doing' gender has been criticised for inadvertently encouraging conformity to these differences (Deutsch 2007) and thus constraining gender identities. Consequently, the notion of 'undoing' gender has entered the literature (Deutsch 2007; Kelan 2010; McDonald 2013; Nentwich & Kelan 2014), not only emphasising resistance to gender norms and the fluidity of gender identity, but also seeking to explore similarities between women and men as well as difference. Largely based on interview research, often in occupations dominated by one gender, this literature provides rich accounts of women's and men's thoughts about their gender identity at work. In particular, as mentioned, it looks at how women and men achieve sameness as well as difference and the challenging of gender norms (Deutsch 2007). Some women in the research discuss adopting the identity of their work role rather than their gender at work, thus becoming almost gender-neutral (Kelan 2010). Others, women and men in the nursing occupation, discuss adopting both female and male gender norms in how they go about their work (McDonald 2013). Nentwich and Kelan's (2014) recent topology of the topic highlights the institutional versus the interpersonal focus of empirical work and the confusion between the two in discussions.

In summary, feminist writers and others have discussed working women's differences (and more recently similarities) from men, in terms of the demands made upon them, their ways of working and their expectations of work. They have done this in order to seek true equality of opportunity and achievement while also resisting gender stereotypes. Nonetheless, women, via female gender norms, are frequently portrayed as carers, nurturers and relationship builders both in the home and at work (Gilligan 1982; Gremmen & Benschop 2011; Pless 2011; Uhl-Bien 2011). Often, too, they are shown as less powerful and undervalued but happier at work (Clark 1997). But does difference become a

stereotype as claimed by those who choose to ‘undo’ gender? What is women’s experience at work now, and is it significantly different from men’s?

What is often missing in discussions is how women (and men, as a comparator) experience the workplace, without prompting or reflection on gender. Hence, as workers who assign themselves to the female sex category (whom we shall refer to as women), how do their experiences equate or differ from those who assign themselves to the male sex category (whom we shall refer to as men)? We propose that themes in the literature broadly represent the female gender stereotype as caring, sharing and enjoying work. For example, from Gilligan’s (1982) first claim of women as caring and relational, many have followed that lead. Gremmen and Benschop (2011) note, as Reay and Ball (2000), that ‘proponents of the “difference” approach often conceive of women as “ontologically” different from men (e.g. more relationally oriented or more capable of caring and cooperation)’ (Gremmen & Benschop 2011: 172). Uhl-Bien (2011: 72) talks of ‘women’s needs for connection and meaning’ and Pless (2011) uses a study of the late Body Shop founder, Anita Roddick, as an exemplar of the female archetype of leadership displaying vision, caring and integrative ability, creating inclusion and connection. In the job satisfaction literature, moreover, we find large-scale surveys showing women as more happy with their work than men (Clark 1997).

Based on this, we pose a series of questions. Do women care more about sharing and communication? Are they more committed to their work and those they serve? Do they enjoy their work more?

## Method

This research uses data collected in a recent survey of all members of the Public Service Association (PSA), the largest public-sector trade union in New Zealand (Plimmer et al. 2013). The survey canvassed views on a range of issues relating to people’s working lives and the organisations where they worked. It covered organisations throughout New Zealand, including district health boards, local government bodies, community agencies, state sector and public service agencies.

An email was sent to 49,611 members of the PSA, inviting them to participate in the survey. Further invitations to participate were included in newsletters and other union communications. Participation in this survey was on a voluntary basis. Members without email access were offered alternative ways to participate. The online survey was open for completion for 3 weeks between 3 and 24 April 2013. A total of 15,726 responses were received, representing a response rate of 32%. The anonymity of respondents was ensured through the removal of identifying information from individual responses. Two follow-up reminders were sent to respondents with unique coded URL links.

## Measures

The survey was based on existing national and international scales and questionnaires. More than 100 questions were grouped in five sections exploring: (1) workplace organisation and direction, (2) workplace processes and management, (3) job experiences, (4) working conditions and (5) demographics. All measures, except for the demographics, used five-point Likert scales (e.g. 1 = strongly disagree through 5 = strongly agree) and all were reliable.

*Demographic variables*

A number of demographic variables were used in the data analysis. These were: age measured in years; managerial level measured as either (1) does not manage anyone, (2) supervisor or team leader, (3) senior manager or (4) executive managing senior managers; length of employment measured in number of years; education level measured as either (1) no qualifications, (2) secondary school, (3) post-secondary certificate, diploma, (4) degree or (5) postgraduate qualification; income level measured in NZ\$10,000 income bands, for example, (1) under NZ\$20,000 to (5) NZ\$50–60,000, (6) NZ\$60–70,000 to (11) NZ\$150,001 or more; occupational category measured using 12 categories based on the Australia and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO); ethnicity measured by the six standard ethnicity classifications from Statistics New Zealand and an open text box; and employment status measured via four options of permanent employee, fixed term contractor, invoice my time and hired through an agency. Gender was measured as female, male or own choice of words (very few people chose their own words). In the gender analysis provided in this article, we have focused on several key measures used in the survey.

*General commitment*

General commitment was measured using a new scale comprised of six items (Plimmer et al. 2013). The scale asks participants about their levels of commitment to their current job, team or division, organisation, occupation or profession, public services and to making a difference to society. Higher scores indicate higher levels of general commitment. The internal consistency of this scale for this sample was 0.84 using Cronbach's alpha.

*Organisational commitment*

A four-item organisational commitment measure was used. The scale probes the respondent's sense of loyalty and commitment, pride in the organisation, emotional attachment and extra effort for the organisation. This measure of organisation commitment is a part of the Voice Climate Survey (VCS) (Langford 2009), a survey that has been used in its standard form or with tailoring in nearly 200 projects, across more than 100 organisations, and with more than 250,000 employees. Langford's (2009) alpha for the organisational commitment measure is 0.88.

*Job satisfaction*

A three-item job satisfaction measure was used which tapped into work providing a sense of accomplishment, liking the kind of work one is doing and satisfaction with the job. This measure was also from the VCS and reported an alpha of 0.86 (Langford 2009).

At the individual item level, we examined the three items in the workplace cooperation measure (Langford 2009) and items from the Power, Information, Reward and Knowledge (PIRK) model (Vandenberg et al. 1999; Macky & Boxall 2009) relating to managerial relationships and recognition.

*Workplace cooperation*

This construct was measured using individual items from the cross-unit cooperation scale (Langford 2009). This scale is comprised of three items relating to communication across

the organisation, information sharing and cooperation. The alpha reported in the VCS is 0.83.

### *Managerial relationships*

Originally developed by Vandenberg et al. (1999) and replicated in New Zealand by Macky and Boxall (2009) with a reported alpha of 0.93, here we report on three items which examine how well management stays informed of employees' needs, seeks opinions and facilitates access to job-related training.

### *Recognition*

This construct was also from Macky and Boxall (2009), with a coefficient alpha of 0.90. Here, we report on three items in this construct examining the link between job performance and appraisal ratings, satisfaction with recognition for good work and likelihood of promotion for good work.

### *Questions to be explored*

Taking the questions posed at the end of the literature review, combined with the available measures in the survey, we have arrived at the four following questions for testing with the data set:

- (1) What is women's experience of workplace cooperation and managerial relationships compared with that of men?
- (2) Do women and men feel similarly recognised or rewarded?
- (3) Do women report higher levels of general commitment and organisational commitment than men? What predicts commitment? and
- (4) Do women enjoy their work more than men?

These questions test the feminine archetypes debated in the literature by authors from Gilligan (1982) through Reay and Ball (2000) and Werhane and Painter-Morland (2011). They also explore gender differentials in the experience of work which have previously been tested (Clark 1997).

### *Sample description*

Public services worldwide are known for their high levels of female employment (Conley et al. 2011), and New Zealand is no exception with about 57% of the state sector workforce reported as female (State Services Commission 2012). The PSA union reports 69% female membership (Industrial Relations Centre 2012). Our survey sample reflects this; almost 99% of the sample classified themselves as either female or male, with 68% of these respondents being female and 32% male.

The survey participants worked for more than 340 organisations represented by the PSA. The breakdown of these by organisational sector was as follows: 44.8% for public service agencies, 25.7% for district health boards, 12.3% for state sector agencies, 12.1% for local government bodies and 5.1% for a variety of community public service organisations.

The majority of participants were identified as New Zealand European (65.2%), followed by Māori (15.7%), other European (10%), Pacific peoples (6%), Asian (4.8%) and Middle Eastern, Latin American and African (1.1%). This composition broadly matches the New Zealand population, although the sample had slightly fewer Asian than the national average of 11.8% (Statistics New Zealand 2013).

### **Data analysis**

The data were analysed using the IBM SPSS Statistics Version 19 software package. Analyses of the data included: descriptive statistics (response rate, demographics, breakdown of women by sector and occupation); checks of data normality and homogeneity of variance to determine appropriate statistical tests; gender comparisons based on demographic differences; gender comparisons based on individual survey items and/or survey variables controlling for any demographic differences found to be significant; and regression analyses that examined how experiences of organisational communication, managerial relationships and job recognition predict commitment (general and organisational) and how the strength of these predictors differed between men and women.

## **Findings**

### **Demographics**

Gender comparisons on demographic characteristics show important differences between men and women responding to the survey. On average, the men in the sample were significantly older ( $M = 49.22$ ,  $SE = 11.37$ ) than women respondents ( $M = 47.61$ ,  $SE = 11.49$ ), where  $t(13,815) = -7.65$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ . Men held higher managerial positions than did women ( $\chi^2[3, N = 14,920] = 129$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ), were more educated ( $\chi^2[4, N = 14,917] = 97$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ), received a significantly higher wage ( $\chi^2[10, N = 15,316] = 1078$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ) and reported being employed for a significantly longer amount of time with their respective employers than did the women ( $\chi^2[3, N = 15,467] = 98$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ). There were also significant differences between women and men regarding the various occupational categories in which they located themselves ( $\chi^2[11, N = 15,211] = 1694$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ). A higher percentage of females were in clerical/administration (85%); contact or call centre (78%); managerial (54%); professional – including legal, finance, human resources (HR), information technology (IT) or policy analyst (57%); registered social, health or education professional (80.2%); and unregistered community or personal service worker (71.1%) roles. A greater percentage of men were employed in inspection/regulation (62%), machinery operator/driver (80%), labourer (57%), scientist (53%) and technician/trades worker (58%) roles. Furthermore, there were significantly more women represented across all the public service sectors ( $\chi^2[4, N = 14,251] = 614$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ) and in all of the various self-nominated ethnicity categories than men ( $\chi^2[5, N = 14,519] = 74$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ). However, there was no significant difference in the employment status (e.g. permanent versus contractor) of men and women.

### **Gender comparisons of work experiences**

We examined our data for gender differences on a selection of individual items and multi-item measures. At an item level, we analysed variables concerned with workplace

cooperation, managerial relationships and recognition. Multi-item measures reported levels of general commitment, organisational commitment and job satisfaction. In order to do this, the 10 demographic variables were analysed for the chosen continuous dependent variables using analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs). For these ANCOVAs, the variable of interest was gender and the covariates were the other demographic variables that differed significantly between men and women. The chosen covariates were age, managerial level, organisational sector, occupation, length of employment, income and education level.

The results indicate that, after controlling for other demographic variables, gender differences exist for the following survey items/scales in Table 1 (survey items used a five-point scale where 1 = strongly disagreed and 5 = strongly agreed).

Women were significantly less impressed than men with communication, information sharing and cooperation across the organisation. They also reported significantly less favourably on their experience of managerial relationships represented by management making an effort to get opinions and feelings of workers and management staying informed of employees' needs. The responses to 'my supervisor has helped me acquire additional job-related training when I needed it' also show that women report less favourably on this. However, the variable is only significant at the 0.1 alpha level,

Table 1. Marginal means of dependent variables by gender.

Variable	Women	Men	Type 3 tests of the effect of gender
<b>Workplace cooperation</b>			
There is good communication across all sections of this organisation	2.73	2.85	$F(1, 10,938) = 27.30, p < 0.0001$
Knowledge and information are shared throughout this organisation	2.96	3.08	$F(1, 10,930) = 28.18, p < 0.0001$
There is cooperation between different sections in this organisation	3.07	3.19	$F(1, 10,946) = 29.03, p < 0.0001$
<b>Managerial relationships</b>			
Management makes a sufficient effort to get the opinions and feelings of people who work here	3.04	3.12	$F(1, 10,917) = 10.71, p < 0.0001$
Management tends to stay informed of employee needs	3.03	3.12	$F(1, 10,898) = 14.44, p < 0.0001$
My supervisor has helped me acquire additional job-related training when I needed it	3.29	3.33	$F(1, 10,907) = 3.58, p = 0.059$
<b>Recognition</b>			
There is a strong link between how well I perform my job and the likelihood of receiving high performance appraisal ratings	2.92	2.92	$F(1, 10,859) = 0.05, p = 0.822$ (ns)
I am satisfied with the amount of recognition I receive when I do a good job	2.87	2.96	$F(1, 10,850) = 16.04, p < 0.0001$
If I perform my job well, I am likely to be promoted	2.38	2.43	$F(1, 10,850) = 5.44, p = 0.020$
<b>Job satisfaction</b>			
General commitment	4.11	4.01	$F(1, 10,827) = 31.31, p < 0.0001$
Organisational commitment	4.31	4.23	$F(1, 10,724) = 31.80, p < 0.0001$
	3.88	3.85	$F(1, 10,731) = 1.88, p = 0.170$ (ns)

Note: ns, non-significant.

indicating that the difference is not strong. On recognition, one variable showed a strongly significant gender difference in responses, with women significantly more likely to disagree that they were satisfied with the amount of recognition they receive when they do a good job. They also reported less favourably on 'If I perform my job well, I am likely to get promoted' but this was not a strong difference at only the 0.1 alpha level. There was no gender difference in the poor ratings on the link between performing well and receiving high-performance appraisal ratings.

Somewhat paradoxically, however, women recorded a significantly higher job satisfaction response than men. Women were also significantly more committed on the general commitment scale, but there was no significant gender difference in levels of organisational commitment.

### ***What predicts commitment of women versus men?***

Assuming that commitment may well be an outcome of experiences in the workplace, we decided to investigate further to determine whether any of these variables were significant influences. Regression analyses were run to compare the different predictive effects of communication factors, managerial relationships and recognition, on commitment in men versus women. Those demographic variables that differed significantly between men and women were controlled in step one of a linear regression model. Workplace cooperation, managerial relationships and recognition items were then added to the second step. These variables explained the most variance for organisational commitment, followed by general commitment.

For women and men, organisational commitment was most strongly predicted by the variable, 'There is good communication across all sections of this organisation'. However, general commitment was most strongly predicted for women by the variable, 'Management tends to stay informed of employee needs'. Furthermore, for men, general commitment was most strongly predicted by 'My supervisor has helped me acquire additional job-related training when I needed it'.

Hierarchical regression analysis was used for the prediction of performance outcomes (general commitment, organisational commitment), with the demographic variables (managerial level, organisational sector, occupation, employment length, income, education, age and ethnicity) entered as controls in the first step and the workplace cooperation, managerial relationships and recognition items entered in the second step. The accompanying variance inflation factor (VIF; range: 1.03–4.80) and tolerance (range: 0.21–0.98) statistics were within an acceptable range in all of the analyses.

### ***Organisational commitment***

The predictive model for organisational commitment explained 26% of the variance in the outcome measure for females ( $F(47, 7814) = 59.64, p < 0.0001$ ) and 27% for males ( $F(47, 3609) = 32.25, p < 0.0001$ ). For females, this was due to the block entry of workplace cooperation, managerial relationships and recognition variables in the second step ( $r^2 = 0.260$ ), specifically the influence of good communication ( $\beta = 0.11, p < 0.0001$ ) and cooperation across organisational sections ( $\beta = 0.10, p < 0.0001$ ). The demographic variables of managerial level, organisational sector, employment length and education remained significant predictors of organisational commitment in the second step.

Similarly, for males, more variance in organisational commitment was explained due to the block entry of workplace cooperation, managerial relationships and recognition

variables in the second step ( $r^2 = 0.268$ ), over and above demographics. As with women, the influence of good communication across organisational sections was significant ( $\beta = 0.12, p < 0.0001$ ). However, the influence of cooperation across organisational sections was less, albeit still significant ( $\beta = 0.06, p < 0.0001$ ). The demographic variables of managerial level, occupation, education and age remained significant in the second step.

### **General commitment**

The workplace cooperation, managerial relationships and recognition variables predicted the least amount of variance for general commitment but were still significant for both women at 11% ( $F(47, 7808) = 32.93, p < 0.0001$ ) and men at 11% ( $F(47, 3595) = 16.61, p < 0.0001$ ). For women, management staying informed of employee needs was the strongest predictor ( $\beta = 0.08, p < 0.0001$ ).

In contrast, responses from men indicated that supervisor-led training was the strongest predictor of commitment ( $\beta = 0.13, p < 0.0001$ ). Managerial level, occupation, age and ethnicity remained significant predictors in the second step.

### **Discussion**

The survey data reveal a number of interesting contrasts between unionised women and men in public-sector workplaces. At the most basic level of demographic analysis, we find that the men are older, more senior, better educated, have longer tenure with their current employer and are higher paid. One could reasonably assume that all these factors are related, and they may also be related to the gendered nature of the occupational categories shown by the data. For management and for unions, these demographics serve as a reminder that there may be multiple barriers to women's advancement: from the types of occupations they are in and how these are regarded or valued, through to the opportunities available to them and their expectations of the workplace.

What is women's experience of workplace cooperation and managerial relationships compared with that of men? The findings show that both women and men were unimpressed with workplace cooperation (communication, information sharing and cooperation) in their organisations, but women rated it significantly much worse than men. Both women and men had mixed views of managerial relationships (management support for staff) but, once again, women rated it significantly lower than men. The most obvious explanation would be to assume that because the men in the sample were more senior and had longer tenure with their employer that they may be at a more privileged level for organisation communication or know the networks better. However, we controlled for these and other demographic factors in our testing; thus, the explanation is void. An alternative explanation is that women notice the lack of workplace cooperation and management support more than men do. Possibly, therefore, women want or expect more cooperation, information sharing and support. The corollary to this is that men do not notice or value these factors as highly as women. Indeed, Clark (1997) found gender differences in work values, with women valuing good relations with managers more highly than men who valued promotion prospects, pay and job security more highly. One limitation with our survey is that although we asked about quality of communication and cooperation, we have no way of knowing what types of communication were being thought of by respondents when answering these questions. Similarly, we did not canvass

the level of importance that respondents attached to these factors. These areas would benefit from more detailed research in the future.

Nonetheless, these findings have important implications for management and for union representatives. For managers, there is a challenge to improve workplace communication and cooperation through forums and mechanisms that encourage and reward such behaviour. Managers at all levels also need to examine their own behaviour in supporting staff. For unions, there is an opportunity to assist in making cooperation everyone's responsibility and to work with members and management in workplaces on ideas for improving communication.

Do women and men feel similarly recognised or rewarded? The findings show that both women and men gave low ratings to the recognition items. However, women were significantly less satisfied with the recognition received on doing a good job and the likelihood of being promoted if they perform well. Because other demographic variables such as occupation have been controlled for, we are left with this as a situation that is perceived more negatively by women than by men. This is a timely reminder to organisations to look at the different ways in which workers can receive some regular recognition of their efforts both formally and informally. Are performance management systems set up to facilitate the provision of recognition or are they more mechanical or punitive in operation? Are managers at all levels, through good workplace communication practices, giving regular feedback and recognition at the time things happen? Recent research in the Australian public sector showed variable practice and reinforced the need for organisations to attend to the overall performance appraisal experience such as regular feedback (Brown et al. 2010). They found that low-quality performance appraisal experiences negatively impact on job satisfaction and organisation commitment.

Do women enjoy their work more than men? Women in our sample reported higher levels of job satisfaction than men. Given their low ratings of other factors in the workplace such as cooperation, recognition and management support, this seems a surprising result until one recalls the items in the job satisfaction scale. The scale indicates women like the work they do, they get a sense of personal accomplishment from it and they are satisfied. It seems that satisfaction may derive from the intrinsic nature of the job rather than, or in spite of, any perceived inadequacies in organisational processes or management practices. Alternatively, Clark (1997) found that women, particularly in nonprofessional occupations, held lower expectations of their jobs and thus reported higher levels of job satisfaction than men. In addition, Clark found that women tend to report more favourably on intrinsic measures, while extrinsic measures held more appeal for men. As already noted, our job satisfaction scale measured intrinsic items and another possibility is that this led to a gender differential in responses, certainly something worth further research. Either way, the results reinforce the importance of the nature of the work that keeps people satisfied and engaged. For management and unions, this may extend to considering that changes to organisational policy and process can facilitate work or be an annoyance, but restructuring of jobs can change the nature of the work, thus potentially undermining satisfaction. Given job satisfaction is positively correlated with worker productivity, and negatively correlated with absenteeism (Clark 1997), it is an important consideration for unions and management. However, looking at societal level research shows that women globally report well-being and life satisfaction at higher average levels than men (Graham & Chattopadhyay 2012). Is this an indicator of powerful socially constructed gender norms, or lower expectations generally in life and work, or greater resilience of women? The explanation in both the life and work setting is worthy of further research.

Do women report higher levels of general commitment and organisational commitment than men? Women did report significantly higher levels of general commitment overall and on each scale item. However, women and men had equivalent ratings overall on the organisational commitment scale. The fact that the strongest predictor of organisational commitment for both women and men was good communication across all sectors of the organisation is further evidence that management should ensure that it is happening. Added to this, cooperation was also a predictor, although stronger for women than for men, signalling the importance of addressing all the workplace cooperation factors. Interestingly, general commitment (to job, profession or occupation, team and so forth) showed rather different predictors for women and men. For women, occupation was the strongest predictor which may reflect the proportion of those respondents in client- or consumer-facing roles. The secondary predictor, 'management staying informed of employee needs', seems to reflect an appreciation of more holistic management than the strongest predictor for men of supervisor assistance to get job-related training. These results may also relate to Clark's (1997) findings on work values in which men valued extrinsic factors such as promotion prospects and pay more highly, not dissimilar to valuing supervisor assistance to get job-related training and thus, one presumes, ultimately easier access to promotion and pay. In the same study, women valued intrinsic factors, such as good relations with managers and the actual work, more highly and these are very similar to our findings of the importance of occupation and management staying informed of employee needs. Both cases demonstrate the importance of manager and supervisor capability for the ongoing commitment of staff.

So, does the gender stereotype of women as caring, sharing and enjoying their work hold up when we look at nearly 16,000 New Zealand public-sector workers? Well, sort of, except that men report many similar things but significantly less boldly. That is to say, in terms of the direction of their responses (positive or negative), there were very few differences between men and women overall, except that women's responses were stronger. How do we explain these similarities? Is it that some organisational issues transcend gender? For instance, our research shows that workers, regardless of gender, felt more committed to an organisation in which there is good communication at all levels. Or, are these similarities a product of the institutional context shaping behaviour? For instance, Reay and Ball (2000) claimed that 1990s capitalism was not conducive to caring and sharing – is the same also true in the current era of the New Zealand public service? Are public services, under increasing performance pressure and resource constraint, restructuring and mechanical reporting that undermine workplace cooperation and manager support? These are all questions worthy of further research. Similarly, questions of work values and how important each aspect, such as communication and cooperation, is to each respondent rather than just their judgement on how well their organisation addresses the factor warrant further exploration.

Most importantly for women is the need for research to investigate occupational groups in which women may hold lower expectations of their jobs (even though they are profiling with good job satisfaction). It is these groups who may be most subject to gender archetypes which fuel the low expectations, the commitment and the satisfaction. Ironically, one may need to 'undo' gender in these groups in order to make women less satisfied with their situation and more demanding of better work conditions.

For unions, this research raises areas for consideration and action already alluded to in the preceding discussion. In particular, these concern continued vigilance over the multiple barriers to women's advancement and to women's awareness of such institutional, organisational and personal barriers (e.g. the impact of women's lower expectations of

their jobs and the impact on women's job satisfaction with public-sector restructuring which changes the nature of their jobs).

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