

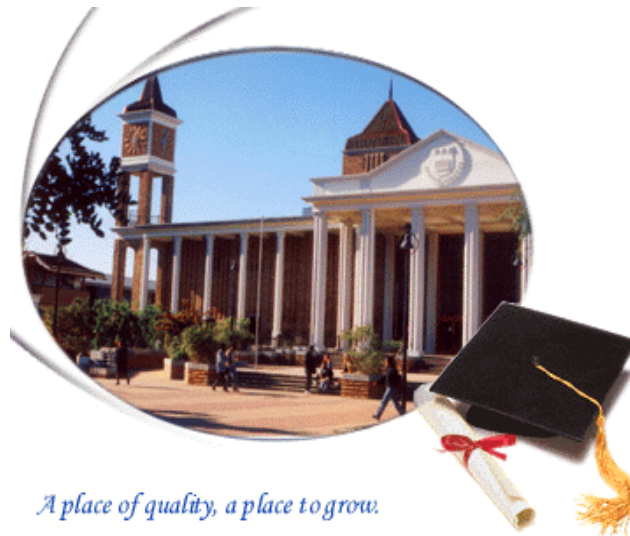
Research Paper

Men's attitudes and responses to the Gender Equity Strategy at South African Nylon Spinners Polymer Plant (2002 – 2004). Implications for an education and training intervention

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*Intercontinental Master in Adult Learning and Global Change
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In collaboration with the following Institutions:

*University of British Columbia, University of Linköping, University of Technology
Australia*

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Research Paper

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Declaration

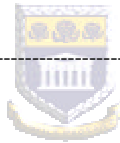
This research paper is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Magister Philosophiae Educationis in the Faculty of Education.

I certify that this paper is the result of my own work and where reference is made to the work of others, due acknowledgement has been given.

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Abstract

This study – men’s attitudes and responses to the Gender Equity Strategy at South African Nylon Spinners Polymer Plant (2002 – 2004): Implications for an education and training intervention – investigates the attitudes and responses of male employees to the implementation of the Gender Equity Strategy and consider the implementation for the development of a gender education and training intervention. The study investigates the initial resistance to the introduction and implementation of the Gender Equity Strategy at the Polymer Plant by male employees.

Methodologically, the study is a qualitative case study, which analyses the attitudes and responses of men as these pertain to the implementation of the Equity Strategy. Data for this study were collected through interviews and questionnaires. In addition, the researcher analysed historic documentation, such as reports and minutes of meetings, regarding the development of the gender equity strategy within the company, as well as artefacts such as pictures and graphics on the walls within the working environment including recreation areas.

In the interviews with the participants in this investigation, the prevalent hegemonic masculinity theme that emerged appeared to be the attitude of men towards women entering the work force. Whilst recognising that masculinity is a social construct, the study makes a distinction between hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinity (Cheng 1996:xii). Hegemonic masculinity assumes that physical power and strength are male characteristics, which are constructed in opposition to femininities and non-hegemonic masculinity. Conversely, non-hegemonic masculinity implies physical weakness and weakness in character that may be exhibited by both men and women (Cheng 1996).

Through an analysis of the data, specifically males’ responses to the gender equity strategy at SANS polymer plant, the following findings were arrived at:

- some men consciously encouraged and deliberately created barriers to prevent women from becoming full members of the working team by treating them as outsiders.

- A level of hostility and suspicion towards women remained present within the workplace as a strategy to conceal the perceived threat which men experienced due to the presence of women who were academically higher qualified than the men.
- sexual stereotyping such as women's lack of physical power or that women are supposed to perform caring roles in society was used by men as justification to treat women unequally.
- the male culture which was created over many years was a closed culture to women within the organization;
- The plant structure, in its design and machinery, maintained the centrality of physically strong men within this workplace since the work operations required physical power without the use of 'tools'.

The researcher shows in the study how hegemonic masculinity was expressed within the case study. In particular, as raised earlier, women were marginalised by men through claiming the work environment as a 'male territory'. Sexual jokes, innuendo and the use of obscene language were strategies used by men to construct and maintain the 'male environment'. The effects of 'hegemonic masculinity' resulted in a gendered culture that naturalised women's subordinate position, making it both invisible and normal to most men. The research helped to expose the dynamics of this subordination.

This study concludes with the recognition that any change strategy should be accompanied by an education and training intervention that orientates those affected by the change to why it is necessary to bring about the change. Accordingly, those affected by change should be provided with the reasons and objectives of the proposed changes. Such a training intervention should follow a model that encourages the learning of new knowledge as well as encourage unlearning of 'negative' values, attitudes and social behaviour.

ACRONYMS

EEA – Employment Equity Act

GES – Gender Employment Strategy

TC - Transformation Committee

SANS – South African Nylon Spinners

EES – Employment Equity Strategy

BPP – Bellville Polymer Plant

TA - Terephthalic acid

MEG - Mono ethylene glycol

DOL – Department of Labour

HDI - Bellville High Decitex Industrial Yarn Plant

LDI - Bellville Low Decitex Industrial Yarn Plant



Chapter 1

Introduction to the research

1.1 Introduction

This chapter distils and presents the principle issue of the research i.e. men's attitudes and responses to the implementation of a gender equity strategy at the South African Nylon Spinners (SANS) Bellville Polymer Plant (BPP). It also explains and motivates why SANS Bellville Polymer Plant is used for the case study through which the issue is investigated. Furthermore, this chapter highlights the context in which the study is undertaken to provide a background to this study.

The introductory chapter also provides the objectives of this investigation and identifies the theoretical perspectives that inform it.

This chapter concludes by highlighting the limitations of the study.

1.2 The aims of this study



The main concern of this study is to investigate and determine the perception, attitudes and responses of men working within the BPP to the implementation of the Gender Equity Strategy. Following an analysis of the findings, the study aims to recommend considerations for a gender education and training intervention that can contribute to a higher level of gender equity within the company.

1.3 The Case Study

SANS is situated in the Western Cape Province with an employee complement of about 1700. The company is structured around sales and marketing-led business units to ensure customer focus, while centralised manufacturing happens at its Bellville Plant in order to provide standardisation of its products. SANS consists of three manufacturing units: the Bellville High Decitex Industrial Yarn Plant (HDI), Bellville Low Decitex Industrial Yarn Plant (LDI) and the Bellville Polymer Plant (BPP). This

study took place on the Bellville Polymer Plant with a workforce of 137 people. Whilst women were working at the HDI and LDI plants, no women were employed at the BPP. The Bellville Polymer Plant was an exclusive male domain because it was assumed that men are physically stronger than women and, since the plant structure consists of heavy machinery and sophisticated processes that include the carrying of heavy objects and opening of valves requiring substantial physical power, women, it was deemed, would not be suitable for such an environment.

Justification for the above assumption argued that women's lack of physical strength will result in inefficiencies within the workplace. No special provision was made to accommodate women within the plant and accordingly, it can correctly be argued that the BPP has been designed predominantly for men.

With the introduction of the Employment Equity legislation (DoL, 1998) SANS was compelled by law to employ women at the plant. Accordingly, in 2002 four women were recruited and appointed at the Bellville Polymer Plant.

Approximately one month after the females were appointed, the male operators at the plant started to complain about the presence of the women within their teams. Three main issues motivated their complaint:

- The nature of the operator work at the Bellville plant is unsuitable for women since it entails heavy manual work and 'women are not physically strong enough to be expected to do the work of men'.
- Women should work within women's teams.
- The absence of separate ablution facilities for men and women intrude on the privacy of both men and women.

Whilst women, in general, were not physically as strong as some of the men, they were at least as strong as a few of the men in the teams. However, the differences in physical strength between men appeared not to have been an issue, but gender differences between men and women were. Accordingly, the assertion by the men that

the women are not sufficiently strong, in this instance, could be interpreted as a form and expression of sexism.

The appointment of women into a traditionally and exclusively male environment required some form of induction for both men and women. However, in the case of SANS Bellville Polymer Plant no induction or reorientation was initiated by SANS Bellville Polymer Plant. A key factor that encouraged the company to consider developing the gender equity strategy was the legislative requirement that women be employed on an equitable basis (DoL, 1998).

The lack of internal discussion and debate about the aims and purposes of gender equity within SANS was one of the contributing factors why male operators resisted the GES. So from the introduction of the new strategy the conditions were already conducive for conflict. However, men used additional strategies to marginalise the women within their perceived 'male environment'. In what emerged as a community of practice, clear behaviour patterns began to emerge. Lave and Wenger make the interesting observation that each 'community of practice' develops norms and standards for their cultural interaction. These 'rules' of interaction are normally tacit and are only exhibited by members of the 'exclusive' community. Any new member, male or female, first needs to learn the culture and norms of the established community before they are accepted as full members of the community. (Lave and Wenger, 1999)

Notwithstanding the SANS management's commitment to bringing about greater gender equity within the company, the Bellville Polymer Plant lost all its women operators by December 2004. Reasons for women operators resigning at the Bellville Polymer Plant ranged from the inconvenience of shift work, which interfered with parental responsibilities such as childcare, and pregnancy, to women perceiving the social environment at the BPP as antagonistic to women employees. No mention was made of sexism or patriarchy. It was however obvious to management at the Bellville Polymer Plant that the resistance of the men to the women's participation within the workplace contributed to the female employees leaving.

This then prompted the study to investigate the perceptions, attitudes and responses of male workers towards the introduction and operationalisation of equity legislation at the textile manufacturing plant in the Western Cape Province. The findings of the investigation were analysed to ascertain the implications for the development of a gender sensitive education and training intervention.

1.4 Background to the Implementation of the gender equity at SANS

Before 1998 women had been marginalised within the formal economy. In response to the marginalisation of women and as a strategy to remedy the situation, the South African Parliament introduced the Employment Equity Act in 1998 that compelled companies to employ women, amongst others, on a more equitable basis. (DoL, 1998) Furthermore the Act (DoL, 1998) specifies timelines at which specific percentages of women ought to be employed within targeted position within companies. Any company not meeting the specified targets opens themselves to disciplinary action, which will include monetary fines (DoL, 1998).



To ensure compliance with the Employment Equity Act, SANS established a Transformation Committee (TC) in 1999. This committee consisted of representatives from the employer, employees and their represented trade unions. The primary task of the TC was to develop an Employment Equity Strategy (EES) for SANS. Since SANS initially delayed the development of their own equity strategy, it resulted in them fast tracking the process. Whilst shopstewards were consulted and co-opted onto the Transformation Committee (TC), no attempts were made to orientate shopfloor employees and advocate the purposes of the gender equity strategy that were about to be implemented at SANS.

Even though the company and the TC purport to have developed a GES for SANS, the researcher was unable to discern a clear strategy and/or plan from the documents generated through deliberations by the Transformation and Employment Equity meetings. This limitation makes it difficult to evaluate the SANS Gender Equity Strategy against criteria as specified by the Employment Equity ACT (DoL, 1998)

Notwithstanding the lack of a clear implementation plan, the TC recognised that employees needed physical strength to perform their tasks efficiently and accordingly resolved that all women applying for employment at the BPP be subjected to a physical strength test (Transformation Committee Meeting Minute, May 2000). It should be noted that this test exclusively targeted women and can thus be interpreted as a practice that facilitates gender inequality.

All women candidates who applied for employment at the Bellville Polymer Plant and who have completed the practical test 'failed' to meet the requirements of the test. Despite not meeting a key requirement set by the TC, the company went ahead and appointed four women at the Bellville Polymer Plant.

A key-motivating factor behind the appointment of the women was the numerical requirement set out by the Employment Equity Act.

1.5 Definitions of terms used



1.5.1 Employment Equity

Employment equity in this study refers to an organisational change-strategy deliberately designed to prevent and / or remedy discrimination within the workplace. The strategy includes the identification and removal of situational, cultural and institutional barriers, within the organization, which limit full equity. Furthermore, employment equity seeks to improve the numerical representation and occupational distribution of designated groups.

1.5.2 Gender

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles into which women and men are socialized. Gender roles are learnt and are changeable and may be culturally specific. Sex, i.e. male and female, on the other hand, is biologically determined.

1.5.3 Sexism

Sexism is a form of discrimination that is based on the assumption that one sex is superior to another, especially by men against women. It regards women as inherently inferior intellectually, psychologically, and physically to men.

1.5.4 Patriarchy

Patriarchy is the institutionalization of men as the leaders in society. Men are placed within the powerful positions in society with all the necessary decision-making powers. Patriarchy is a form of sexism that is facilitated by legislation, culture, traditions, schooling and religion.

1.5.5 Stereotyping

Stereotyping is the act of making negative or oversimplified social judgments about individuals or social groups based on assumptions or with insufficient information or knowledge.



1.6 Limitations this study

It was found, overall, that this research investigation exposed both the strengths and limitations to the subject at hand. Firstly, the quality design used in this study served, as a solid foundation in assessing the sensitive nature of sexism in the workplace. However there are a number of limitations within this study. This is a small-scale study the results of which may only be applicable within a particular context.

During the period of the study, changes such as the construction of special ablution facilities for women had been completed. However, the absence of these facilities at inception continued to influence men's attitudes towards women working at the Bellville Polymer Plant (BBP).

Another limitation of the study is that the researcher is a senior team member within the Human Resources Department, who is responsible for the education and training at the Plant. This may influence the responses of operators and managers.

In addition, this is a case study, which is a subjective form of enquiry. Conclusions that are arrived at by researchers are dependent on the nature and selection of data, which may differ from researcher to researcher. Case studies also give rise to a sense of 'false coherence' in that the researcher may impose 'a conceptual order upon empirical chaos' (Millar 1983: 121-122).

Recognising the above limitations, the researcher selected methods that would increase the overall validity and reliability of the study.

Furthermore, since this is a case study, the results of the findings may not be generalisable beyond the context of the investigation.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the case study. It highlighted the background to the study and provided the rationale for the study. Chapter 2 outlines the relevant literature, which forms the foundation of this study.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature that the researcher found relevant to the study.

2.2 The Masculine identity at Work

The literature in organisational studies has tacitly featured men, but not men as gendered (Cheng 1996: i). Cheng argues that masculinities are a kind of gender that is socially constructed (Cheng 1996) as opposed to sex, which is biologically determined.

In problematising the concept of masculinity, Cheng (1996: xii) argues that masculinity is often erroneously equated with the male sex. Sex, he contends is biologically determined, whilst masculinity is a socially constructed gender. He further elaborates that masculinity should be viewed as plural rather than singular, and as hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity refers to the dominant form of masculinity that assumes that physical power and strength are men characteristics, which is constructed in opposition to femininities and marginalised non-hegemonic masculinity which implies physical weakness and weakness in character. (Cheng 1996: xii- xiv).

The workplace, in the modern era, is one of the key spaces to express a person's social status and it may also be the space to receive intrinsic rewards such as self-expression and fulfilment. Accordingly, 'work enables a self-concept of being powerful, self reliant and competent' (Cheng 1996: xv, drawing on Gradman, 1994). Furthermore, frequently, work for the heterosexual male, particularly if he is "successful" (in hegemonic masculine terms), is a means to impress and "win" a mate. (1996: xv). Since hegemonic masculinity is constructed in relation to femininity (Connel, 1987), men constructing this form of masculinity need women to validate their identity (Cheng 1996: xv). Following Messerschmidt (1993), Cheng

(1996 p, xiv) maintains that the masculine identity is developed over time and might change depending on the social contexts.

He argues that:

...Men construct masculinities in specific social situations (although not in circumstances of their own choosing) in so doing; men reproduce (and sometimes change) social structure. ... Masculinity must be viewed as structured action, - what men do under constraints and varying degrees of power. (1996: xiv).

Accordingly, educational interventions may be designed to introduce alternative social understandings and practices. Male norms and practices in the workplace over-emphasise strength, independence, aggression, group solidarity, rationality as well as a top to bottom flow of information for decision-making processes (Pease and Velazquez, 1992: 342).

Such practices can be understood by recognizing the manner in which hegemonic masculinity operates as a concept within organisational cultures. Hegemonic masculinity involves the construction and maintenance of power relations of social groups that have the potential to maintain and create organisational cultures, which keep women subordinated and marginalised (Pease and Velazquez, 1992: 342).

Strategies to establish power include the practice of imposing definitions to 'situations to set the terms in which events should and could be understood' (Donaldson 1991:1). Other practices may include agenda setting, gate keeping and the regulation of information flow (Pease and Velazquez, 1992: 342).

Hegemonic masculinity can be recognised through the 'systems of punishment, enforcement, and the division of labour (1992: 342). Connell suggests that hegemonic masculinity 'stabilizes a structure of dominance and oppression [for] gender as a whole' (Connell, 1990: 94). Furthermore, he concludes by stating that the combination of these practices allow for a systematic control of decision-making processes, which represents the means by which organisations can enforce policy statements including provisions, mandated by sexual legislation (1990:94).

Congruent with these arguments, Pease and Velazquez (1992) following Cockburn (1983) state that hegemonic masculinity can be realised in many forms beyond decision-making processes, including 'violent and aggressive resistance to women entering traditionally male dominated organisational cultures' (1992:342). Based on his studies, Cockburn argues that most men feel resentment towards women for having sustained careers (Cockburn 1983). One of the ways by which resentment is exhibited by men towards women co-workers is through open hostility toward women; denying the competence of women and allocating them social roles such as 'whores, lovers, mothers, or any role that allows them to treat women as traditional females rather than peers' (Pease and Velazquez, 1992:343). Failing to scare women away from the work place, men have developed various strategies to try and keep women out of some work spaces or to 'keep them in their place' once they have entered the organisation. (1992: 343)

Specific strategies used by men to 'keep women in their place' (Pease and Velazquez, 1992:343) include the following:

- Using sexual jokes, making sexually charged remarks and using obscene language;
- Trading obscene stories when some men gather;
- Expecting women to tolerate, join in and be prepared to tolerate in kind when sexual innuendo and jokes are used around them;
- Women must be prepared to engage in coarse jokes and teasing and accept the male-based informal structure of the organisation.

This investigation has used the above-mentioned categories to explore the extent to which men exclude women in the workplace. Starko argues in Pease and Velazquez that men's work environments are regarded as male territories and that the display of heterosexual interest could be seen as part of this territory. He further argues that the act by men to emphasise the 'womanness of their female co-workers' is another strategy through which women are marginalised within the workplace. (1992:343)

2.3 Women being marginalised due to their gender

2.3.1 Gender inequality in the workplace

According to Cheng (1996) the gender equality approach is concerned with how gender inequalities, based on specific roles, responsibilities and expectations of women, prevent their enjoyment of equal opportunities and treatment with men and how these can be addressed. Furthermore, he argues that the ultimate goal of gender equality is the real equality of men and women in society (Cheng 1996). If this argument of gender equality is taken to the workplace then women need to be included as agents of change, rather than being passive recipients of assistance.

Women also need to participate in the workplace side by side with men in order to promote change. Positive input is required from both sides, in order to effect the changes needed to achieve greater equality between men and women. Giving explicit attention to women's needs, interests and perspectives would be the key to success.



Sexual discrimination, as is evident in the study of SANS, still exists but its occurrence has been drastically reduced. Subtle discrimination is, however, still quite prevalent in the workplace. One finds that sexism runs rampant in every facet of our society. Slevin (undated), referring to sexism in society, uses a very interesting example when he says 'It even reached the Presidency a number of times and the Supreme Court'. Two prominent examples involve former US President Bill Clinton and the accusations made by Jennifer Flowers and Judge Thomas's alleged sexual remarks to Anita Hill. He argues further that although these were never a hundred percent proven cases of sexual harassment, they are sufficient enough to show that sexism reaches everywhere in our society' (Slevin undated). Consistent with prevailing sexist tendencies, women are not only exposed to abuse in the workplace, but also in broader society and at home.

According to Foley (2001), until recently organisational studies have neglected gender issues. He argues that this has been rectified by path-breaking studies by

Ferguson, (1984), Westwood, (1984), and Acker, (1990, 1992) and the papers collected by Savage & Witz, (1992) and Ledwith & Colgan. This feminist scholarship has developed the concept of patriarchy to explain the structured subordination of women in the workplace. Walby (1986, cited in Ledwith & Colgan, 1996: 7) defines patriarchy as a 'system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, exploit and oppress women' According to Millet (1977) and the Redstockings Manifesto (in Walby, 1970) patriarchal relations are to be found everywhere and not confined to particular spheres of social life. They further argue that every aspect of social life including the workplace, contributes to the maintenance of patriarchy. According to Walby (1986: 23) one can consider patriarchy as a mechanism of control over women.

2.3.2 Gender stereotyping in the workplace

The kind of gender stereotyping that this study found can indeed influence the way in which men and women are perceived in the workplace. Stereotyping is a process by which groups of people are given attributes based on insufficient knowledge and/or information, which are then generalised and assumed to apply to all members of the targeted group. The use of stereotyping as the basis for assessment of individuals can result in advantaging some whilst marginalising others, not because of individual ability or lack of it, but because of group membership. Gender stereotypes are still pervasive and widely shared. According to Cornelius (in Chetty, 1999), despite the evidence that there are no fundamental social differences between men and women, perceived beliefs persist about the tremendous social differences between men and women and how these differences impact on labour market outcomes.

According to Eagly (1986), gender prejudice is not in thinking that women are inferior, rather that women cannot do what they now seem to think they can do. He further argues gender prejudice is not an overall negative attitude toward women but an attitude held toward women in particular contexts. Hence, according to Eagly (1986), women tend to encounter prejudice when they move into masculine domains and roles. That is when there is the perception that they are 'unqualified' or 'they just don't know how to do it' or 'they simply don't have what it takes.' (Borgida, 2004: 2)

According to Sinclair (2000) researchers have ably demonstrated the pitfalls of conceptualising gender within a 'women in management' framework (2000:83). Sinclair describes her experiences of managing diversity and highlights her problems with this model where she sees 'diversity 'as an instrument that fosters the focus on the 'other' in the organisation and those that are deemed different in the dominant regime. Sinclair further argues that managing diversity ignores power – it takes existing power differentials as granted and it fails to recognise that changing the distribution of power is a prerequisite of any shift in gender relations (Sinclair, 2000: 86). She further states that diversity can be seen by dominant groups to be something to do with the other people and it requires considerable ingenuity to redirect this focus. The diversity program help males and females understand their 'power and privilege' (Sinclair, 2000:87). To do research and focus on masculinity is one thing, but teaching is another. This is the challenge: how are we going to unlearn something that was implanted historically through social and cultural interactions?

Adele Thomas and David Robertshaw (1999), referring to the implementation of the Employment Equity Act (1998) maintain that the 'hidden' barriers, such as not including all stakeholders in the process, may subtly sabotage the achievement of employment equity objectives. They note that some of these political barriers are discriminatory in nature and have 'become embedded in the workplace structures, policies, practices and culture' during the apartheid years. According to Thomas and Robertshaw, these hidden barriers manifest themselves in subtle and covert discrimination practices that lead to exclusion of individuals and groups of people.

Janet Spence (1999) echoes the point made by Thomas and Robertshaw, when she writes: 'the concept of equity in the workplace is based on the mythical notion of a level playing field'. Most efforts to ensure equity in the workplace have been procedural rather than substantive' (Spence, 1999: 1). Spence further suggest that ultimately it is not possible to legislate equity completely, but it is necessary to eliminate the barriers so that gender equity means not only equal access, but also equal ability to participate.

According to Dr Lamont in a Wacra Newsletter (1997) gender workshops in the workplace focussed on examining the preparation of how to find topics and issues for

gender-related cases. She also indicated that her research focused on cultural differences, the kinds of data sources available for the cases at hand, and any problems (and their solutions) in constructing the case with the information at hand. (Wacra Newsletter, 1997)

According to Borgida (2004) a considerable body of theory and research in psychology and other social sciences on the nature and consequences of gender stereotyping has accumulated over the past several decades. Furthermore, he argues that experimental and non-experimental research, conducted by different investigators from different fields, using a variety of scientific methodologies and involving diverse respondent or subject populations studied in naturalistic and laboratory settings, provides the foundation for social framework testimony. Gender stereotyping and manifestations of gender prejudice are more likely under certain conditions.

Not all of the following conditions have been or have to be present in any given application of social framework testimony (Borgida, 2004):

- when the target person is isolated or only one of a few individuals in an otherwise homogeneous environment.
- when members of a previously excluded group move into an occupation that is non-traditional for their group.
- when the workplace is a sexualised environment.
- when individuating information about target individuals OR the
- evaluative criteria used in performance appraisals are ambiguous.

2.4 Socialisation and Gender

The biological differences between men and women are universal i.e. we are born male or female and this is clear due to the differences in our bodies.

The social learning theories propose that gender specific behaviour is not a result of biological factors but is learned from their environment through modelling and reinforcement of behaviour (Chetty 1999: 43).

Hence, if gender behaviours is socially constructed, it implies that it can be unlearned.

According to Chetty (1999), even though men and women are both parents, research indicates that the presence of a partner and children continues to affect the participation of men and women in paid work quite differently. Men and women share descriptions of 'typical' men and women, and both tend to describe men and women in terms of opposites, men typically being described as strong and active and women as weak and passive. Moreover, male traits tend to be valued more highly than female traits. Achievement orientation of men, for instance, tends to be valued more highly than the nurturing and affiliation typically ascribed to women. (Chetty, 1999)

According to Due Billing (2000), men have designed most workplaces for men and according to principles that accommodate traditional men who have supportive wives and well functioning families. There are still organisations like the Scandinavian Airlines that have changed little from this starting point; they see men solely as workers and not nurturing fathers, even when the larger society itself has become more equalitarian in terms of values and norms (Billing, 2000: 220).

Chetty (1999) states, the theory behind the notion that sex is biological and gender is socially constructed is ethnomethodological, which refers to the sense-making process that constructs a seemingly ready-made and meaningful social world. Furthermore, and according to Leiter in Cheng “practices of common sense reasoning and cognitive style through which we experience the social world as a factual object” (1996: xiii). The social constructionist theory proposes that the social behaviour of men and women is the function of the dominant ideologies operating within societies (Chetty 1999: 40). Certain practices is accepted in practice which symbolise how humans form ideas from which concepts are derived which promotes certain behaviour, in order for an individual to function appropriately in society. The individual and society form a reciprocal relationship in the establishment of a culture. Wentworth (in Chetty 1999) describes the relation succinctly in the following framework:

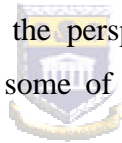
- The basic flow is from society to the individual
- Society has priority over the individual
- Societal cause is manifested in the personality during socialisation
- Individuals are products of society. That is, created and influenced by social structures

- The structure of society directs the actions of individuals and hence the course of history.

One of the few universal societal systems to be shared is the norm of gender differences. That is, we construct using the prevailing definition of society, what it means to be male or female (Chetty 1999:41). The attributions of male and female persona to an individual are in line with constructionist theory. The theory is a philosophy of learning founded on the premise that, by reflecting on our experiences, we construct our own understanding of the world we live in. Each of us generates our own rules and mental models, which we use to make sense of our experiences. Learning, therefore, is simply the process of adjusting our mental models to accommodate new experiences.

2.5 Gender education and training interventions in the workplace.

The focus of implementing an education and training strategy in the workplace should be on the advancement of individuals in the company through training and development. Teaching gender from the perspective of equal opportunity and the weaknesses of diversity rhetoric are some of the challenges that a change-strategy faces..



The requirement, according to Sinclair (2000), is to make masculinities visible to move the spectator from a conscious or unconscious belief that women are the problem, to a broader stance of seeing that dimensions of the problem lie in the way things are done, or indeed within an individual's approach to work and life (Jackson, 1990; Hearn, 1992 cited in Sinclair 2000:88).

The exclusion of women is recognised, as a symptom of deeper cultural problems meaning the organisation resists innovation, is insular and inflexible. Solutions are aimed at changing the existing culture and its leaders. (Sinclair 1994).

Farago and Skyrme (1995: 3-4), identify organisational barriers as a major contributor to organisations not transforming the existing culture in the organisation.

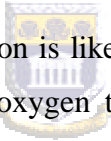
They identify the following organisational barriers that may prevent organisational transformation:

- *Lack of strong visionary leadership.*

Integrating the gender cultures in the new economy requires fundamental rethink on the part of everyone. In such situations leaders play a pivotal, advocacy role-as champions, coaches, mentors, designers and ‘stewards of the collective vision’ (Senge 1990: 34). Organisational leaders are therefore responsible for driving these gender changes.

- *Lack of workers participation*

Workers are not part of the process of creating or refining communication or the implementation of the GES. It is frequently said that people are the most important resource, yet seldom is this understood in terms of the communities through which individuals develop and share the capacity to create and assist change.

It may be concluded that an organisation is like a living organism, it needs oxygen to survive and therefore change is the  that keeps the organisation alive and vibrant. Lack of a changing culture can therefore lead to the demise of an organisation.

Laurie Mullins (1996) notes that despite the potential positive outcomes, change is often resisted at both individual and organisational level. Resistance to change appears to be a common phenomenon. ‘Resistance to change’, observes Mullins, ‘can take many forms and it is difficult to pinpoint the exact reasons for the resistance’ (1996: 732). He cites the main reasons for organisational resistance against change as:

maintaining stability; investment in additional resources; past contracts or agreements; threats to power or influence; insufficient information about the nature of change; fears of shift in power, changes to social structure and working conditions, conflicting commitment and fear of failure under changed conditions (Mullins, 1996).

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter discussed some of the literature, which has been used to develop the conceptual framework for the study. The next chapter will discuss the research process and presents the research methodology underpinning the process.



Chapter 3

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a rationale for the choice of methodology. This research is qualitative and based on analysis of document, artefacts and interview results. The study is conducted within the methodological frame of the case study.

3.2 Qualitative Case study

The case study was conducted within the qualitative paradigm. One of the major distinguishing characteristics of qualitative research is the fact that one attempts to understand people in terms of their own definitions of their world. The qualitative methodology, in terms of Beckers' distinction, focuses on the perspective of the insider rather than the outsider (1992: 277-278).

Qualitative methodology recognises that individual experiences are subjective since these experiences are influenced by the social, physical, cultural and political contexts of the individuals involved. However, this methodology facilitates the capturing of the complexities, richness and diversity of the lives of the subjects under investigation by describing what really goes on in their everyday lives. (Mouton 2001:195).

One of the strengths of the qualitative approach is that it gives the researcher insight into how social, environment and cultural contexts influence human behaviour.

3.3 The Critical Approach

The epistemological basis of this study is critical. The critical paradigm assumes' that social reality is historically constituted and that it is produced by people' (Hendricks, 2001: 46). Furthermore, the researcher is not a disinterested participant to the research. On the contrary, researchers bring to the research their social, cultural and ideological biases.

The researcher is a member of the human resource development team at the site under investigation. Accordingly, he is compelled to make a distinction between his day-to-day role and his role as the researcher. In the first instance, those being studied needed to be made aware of the purpose of the study as well as the role change of the researcher from the Human Resource Practitioner to the researcher role during the duration of the data-collection period. For this study, the researched were made aware of the purpose of the study and their permission was sought to become part of the study. During the interviews the interviewees were aware that the researcher acted in his role as the researcher. However, when the researcher was observing and recording artefacts within the workplace they might not have been aware of the role change from employee to researcher.

3.4 Research Methods

For this study, data have been collected through interviews, literature and documentary reviews and the observation and analysis of artefacts. These methods generated data for the researcher to develop a specific theory that is sufficiently substantive to explain the phenomena under investigation. (Seale, 2004: 243)



3.4.1 Sample

Employees selected were operators that worked for the company for at least one year and had been in the employ of SANS between 2002 and 2004.

With guidance from the SANS management and supervisors, the researcher identified ten male employees who constituted the first sample. The sample was comprised of eight operators and two supervisors. In addition, the Recruitment Officer, who is responsible for the recruitment of the operators, the Human Resource Manager, who is responsible for gender equity, and one Team Leader made up the second sample. This sample provided data relevant to the process of assessing and selecting women for the operator and control-room functions; and provided data relevant to the gender equity strategy at SANS.

3.4.2 Interviews

Data for this study were collected using semi-structured interviews. This ensured that key questions were asked but also facilitated the pursuance of arguments and ideas with the interviewees. It further allowed the researcher to clarify answers when unsure. Semi-structured interviews are useful methods within a qualitative study since these give 'voice to the interviewee as well as recognises that the interviewer is an active participant in the research' (Rubin and Rubin 1995: 31). Semi-structured interviews were administered within a fairly open framework, which allowed for focused, conversational, two-way communication. The majority of questions were created during the interview, allowing both the interviewer and the person being interviewed the flexibility to probe for details or discuss issues.

The purpose of semi-structured interviews was to:

- obtain specific qualitative information from a sample of the population
- obtain general information relevant to specific issues, (ie: to probe for what is not known)
- gain a range of insights on specific issues



The researcher found that the semi-structured interview had major benefits in that:

- It is less intrusive to those being interviewed as it encourages two-way communication. Those being interviewed were allowed to ask the interviewer questions.
- The information obtained from the semi-structured interviews provided not just answers, but the reasons for the answers.
- Brief notes were recorded during the interviews, and immediately following the interview researcher elaborated upon the notes.
- The information was analysed at the end of each day of interviewing.

Being aware that the cultural norms, values and understanding of workers at the SANS plant might have gained 'taken for granted' status, the researcher made use of topical interviews which focused on subjects that the interviewer had chosen, involved more active questioning and rapid exchanges, and were more concerned with

matters of fact and less concerned with eliciting shades of meaning than cultural interviews are.

Much of the follow-up was done within rather than between the interviews. Furthermore, the individual topical interviews were more narrowly focused on a particular process, and were concerned with what happened, 'when' and 'why' were used to gain information from the conversational partners involved in the study. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and the resulting texts analyzed.

3.4.3 Documentary review

Documentation such as journal articles, newspaper and media reports, and information available on the Internet was collected and integrated with the data obtained in an attempt to add any other nuances that might reside in these sources.

The documentary sources were compared with data already gathered, and then added as new information to the present study where applicable. The data from all the available sources were utilized during the research process, integrated and collated, to conclude the data collection stage.



3.4.4 Analysing Artefacts

The researcher collected, observed and recorded other workplace "artefact on site" such as pictures and calendars on walls, magazines in the cafeteria and locker rooms in order to ascertain the nature of the environment men created as their work environment.

3.5 Conclusions

This chapter presented a critical approach for the choice of methodology, the data for the research as well as the research process. The next chapter constructs and examines the case study as well as describes and analyses the findings and comment on broader developments within the workplace

Chapter 4

Analysis of the findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses and examines the key findings of the research.

It specifically analyses men's attitudes and responses to the implementation of the gender equity strategy at SANS. The findings are used to propose an education and training intervention that would bring about greater gender awareness and equitable practices within the workplace.

4.2 A summary of the physical layout of the Bellville Polymer Plant

The physical layout and the manufacturing process at BPP impacts significantly on this study. The plant structure consists of heavy machinery and sophisticated processes that include the carrying of heavy objects and opening of valves requiring substantial physical power. No special equipment / machinery has been introduced to assist with the opening and closing of valves and the lifting of heavy equipment and raw materials. Accordingly, lack of physical strength results in inefficiencies within the workplace. It can therefore be argued that the BPP has been designed predominantly for men. When the company introduced its GES, no consideration to minimising the reliance on physical strength was given.

4.3 The development process leading to the GES

A key factor that encouraged the company to consider developing the gender equity strategy was the legislative requirement that women be employed on an equitable basis (DoL 1998). Failing to comply with the requirements of the Employment Equity Act would result in substantial penalties. Since SANS initially delayed the development of their own equity strategy, it resulted in them fast tracking the process. Whilst shop stewards were consulted and co-opted onto the Transformation Committee (TC) - whose task it was to develop the company gender equity strategy

and plan - no attempts were made to orientate and advocate the purposes of the gender equity strategy that was about to be implemented at SANS.

The lack of internal discussion and debate about the aims and purposes of gender equity within SANS was one of the contributing factors why male operators resisted the GES. So from the introduction of the new strategy the conditions were already conducive for conflict. However, men used additional strategies to marginalise the women within their perceived 'male environment'

4.4 Expressions of Hegemonic Masculinity at SANS

Exercising hegemonic masculinity (Pease and Velasquez, 1992) by male operators, at BPP was evident on a number of occasions in various contexts and situations. As was discussed earlier, hegemonic masculinity involves the construction and maintenance of power relations of social groups that have the potential to maintain and create organisational cultures, which keep women subordinated and marginalised (Pease and Velasquez, 1992:342)



4.4.1 Marginalisation of women in the workplace

Various strategies to marginalise women at the polymer plant of SANS were evident. In the first instance, male operators regarded the work environment as a 'male territory'. Accordingly, consistent with Starko's assertion, male operators made a point of emphasizing the 'women-ness' of their co-female workers. Sixty percent (60%) of the men interviewed 'expressed concern' that the efficiency of the plant might suffer if and when the women fell pregnant. By implication, male interviewees suggested that females are unreliable workers since they will frequently go on maternity or other leave.

For example the Production Team Leader made the following statement:

During pregnancies females are allowed three months maternity leave. However, the way the production teams are organised ensures that each operator fulfils specific tasks. No special arrangements are made for

absenteeism. Accordingly maternity and sick responsibility leave presents us with a huge problem...(Team leader 1, 04 April 05)

Some operators made the same point that:

Ladies need to work in a separate department but not in the operator team since this is not a place for ladies. The male operators were affected when ladies took off from work to deal with domestic issues. The men moaned because they had to work harder. Men don't stay out of work for such things. (Operator 1: 31 March 2005)

Twenty percent (20%) of male respondents complained that when women are menstruating they are unable to contribute fully to the required operations of the control room team. No consideration was given to the fact that menstruating is a natural phenomenon and a characteristic that defines the female sex.

Consistent with Itzin's assertion (2001), male operators made a point of emphasising 'women as physically weak and unsuitable for this job'. Ninety percent (90%) of the male respondents 'expressed concern' that the efficiency of the plant might suffer because they saw women as physically weak and unsuitable for this job. The examples they highlighted were the material handling area (Figure 1) where operators have to pick up the Terephthalic Shuttle, which has a mass of 40 kg, and move blending swing pipes from one area to another. In these examples the respondents insinuated that women are physically too weak to perform these tasks. No mention was made of male operators who were physically weaker who could not perform similar tasks.

Terephthalic Shuttle

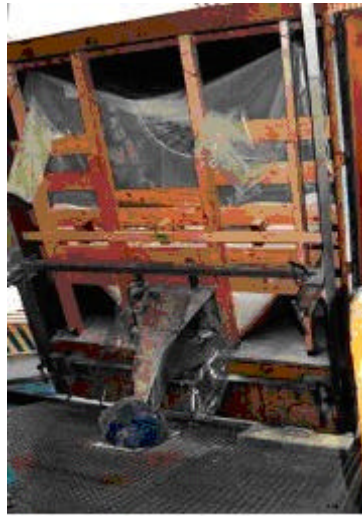


Fig 1

Furthermore, the casting floor posed similar challenges to women because operators had to open the flaps of the die plate to loosen bolts, which requires substantial physical strength **Fig 2a & 2b**. Accordingly, male operators felt aggrieved that they had to provide assistance to women even though both men and women operators were equally remunerated.

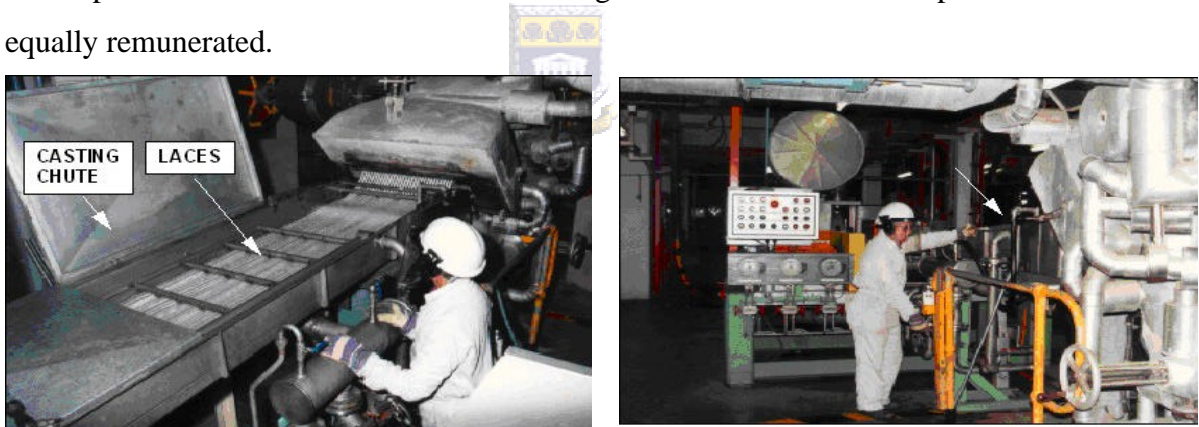


Figure 2 a & 2b

Another area highlighted by male operators was the services area where it was expected of operators to lift a 40kg stabiliser drums and make up titanium dioxide batches, which contained forty bags and weighed 25 kilograms per bag. There was consensus amongst the control room operators that the work in the polymer control room was not just about pressing buttons (Figure 3).

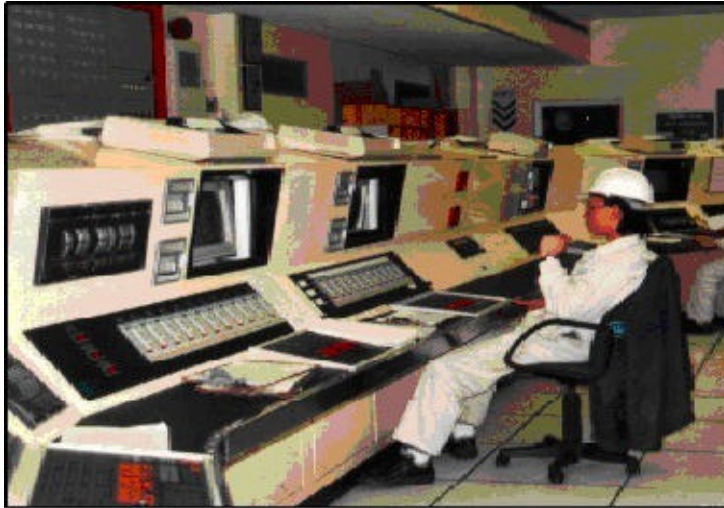


Figure 3

When problems arise outside it was the control operator's responsibility and a requirement of the job to turn the valves manually, which required physical strength. Occasionally operators were expected to clean the monomer filter pot, which required physical labour, and the females needed assistance to do this task.

While male employees might have had a legitimate complaint regarding the need for physical strength, their definition of the problem was erroneous since the BPP could have invested in tools to reduce the need for physical strength. Frequently, the male operators mistakenly highlighted 'gendered' roles as evidence that the specific work environment is not for women.

Consistent with Pease and Velasquez's, assertion men used various strategies 'to keep women in their place' (1992:343). Itzin who argues that 'women were subjected to sexual banter' makes a similar point. Attempts to act against these were generally unsuccessful, demonstrating the existence of an institutionalized sexist culture that defines 'women as being inferior to and less valuable than men' (2001, 49-51).

4.4.2 The use of sexual jokes and obscene language

Another strategy to marginalise women at the Bellville Polymer Plant was the use of sexual jokes and expecting women to join in when sexually charged innuendo and obscene language are used. Seventy percent (70%) of the male operators reported that they frequently use sexual jokes as part of the working culture at BPP. In cases where

sexual jokes were made in the presence of women operators, women felt offended and decided not to eat in the same place as the males. This was interpreted by male operators as a victory and a way to maintain the status quo. One of the respondents said that *'she either had to fit in or get out - no sympathy was shown towards the females'*. (Operator 2: 31 March 2005). These sentiments seem consistent with Pease, and Velasquez's who assert that the use of sexual jokes is one of the strategies used by men 'to keep women in their place' (1992:343). Similarly Itzin maintains that 'women [are] subjected to sexual banter' (2001: 49) in the workplace. He continues to argue that attempts to act against these kinds of behaviour are generally unsuccessful, demonstrating the existence of an institutionalized sexist culture that define 'women as being inferior to and less valuable than men' (2001: 51)

Regarding sexual innuendo, forty percent (40%) of the men interviewed confirm that remarks by men were not unusual. Frequently, male operators made these remarks in the presence of females. A remark that normally got male operators in a fit of laughter included the following: *'whole women ground beef just pop one out and give us some milk'*. (Operator 3: 31 March 2005). When remarks like these were made to women and in their presence, male operators expected women to tolerate and join in. This seems consistent with the Pease and Velazquez (1992) assertion that men expect women to 'tolerate in kind when sexual innuendo and jokes are used around them as a strategy to keep women in their place' (1992: 343).

At times men operators were even not aware of the strategy to marginalise women in the workplace. For example they argued that when these women were exposed to the sexual innuendo battering of the men, thirty percent (30%) indicated that the *'women did not mind or did not show that they minded because they said we could carry on with the jokes in their presence'*.

4.4.3 Maintaining the workplace as an exclusive male environment.

Some males showed their frustration and 'they used to swear at the females' (Operator 2: 31 March 2005). Another showed his frustration by expressing anger at

one of the women operators: *You are also a B2¹ and you should be able to do the work. ... You must do your work and see that you are at work*'. (Operator 4: 31 March 2005). In my view, this appeared to be another strategy to marginalise and exclude women, but it is also an exhibition of hegemonic masculinity. The response of the male operator below emphasises the desire to keep the working environment at BPP exclusively male:

the women that we employed were not up to standard. They were not prepared for what was coming. Investigate female's employment history because it seems that they had not experienced working shifts and it is really killing them.
(Operator 5: 04 April 2005)

Furthermore, another form of marginalisation observed was pictures and calendars on walls, magazines in the cafeteria and locker rooms, which featured semi naked and naked women. The nature of these pictures reinforced the men's power over the women and is consistent with 'male territory' to create an exclusive male domain.

Whilst the dominant tendency remained one of being exclusively male, some men operators did make a special effort to accommodate and invite women operators into the workplace. Thirty percent (30%) of the operators expressed respect for women members of the team in their presence. They made a special effort to change that language, which excluded women. The men felt they had to change to accommodate the women by refraining from the way they spoke in the past. An operator said that their *'attitudes were commendable because they did not have a problem'* with the presence of women in the teams (Operator 6: 31 March 2005).

Especially the more senior operators discouraged negative statements that targeted women. Similarly 20% of the male operators felt that females dealt ably with the sexual innuendo targeted at them. For example a male operator related an incident when a women operator was confronted by sexual innuendo she responded *'Are you man enough to do it'*. He further said that *'after some time the men tend to respected*

¹ B2 is the code indicating that the operator is competent to perform all functions in a specific are and are remunerated as such.

theses ladies (sic) and did not tell these sexual jokes in there presence. (Operator 7: 31 March 2005)

The above confirms that gender discrimination is maintained through the use of foul language and derogatory comments. Women entering the 'male work domain' were seen by men as intrusive. The idea that men might be threatened due to such non-traditional role adoption is understandable. The establishment of gender-defined roles have for centuries been the norm. The fact that stereotypes in general are extremely hard to change is exacerbated by the challenge of altering the 'unchanging dual role of men and women' (Chetty, 1999:42). The dual role for women being that of wife and mother and for men that of father and breadwinner.

Such established role formation is unlikely to disappear without considerable conflict. Even though male operators were opposing to the employment of female operators in general they viewed the employment of women as beneficial in one way – women were performing the general housekeeping more thoroughly than their male counterparts. This once again emphasises the gendered role that women are expected to perform the caring roles which supposedly should no be expected of men.

The study also found that a relatively small percentage (30%) of male operators did defend women's right to be part of the operator teams. Perhaps this could be ascribed to non-hegemonic masculinity.

However, it should be noted that hegemonic masculinities do not only subordinate women but also other men (Connell 1995:78). Connell refers to those 'heterosexual men who do not live up to the dominant masculine ideal' in terms of physical abilities are frequently marginalised by other men. Specifically, 90% of the men interviewed 'expressed concern' that the nature of the work on this plant is physical and strenuous and their responses when researcher referred to physically weak men were:

I think there are some areas where the weaker men can still be utilized but they will not be able to do a complete job because of their limitations. (Operator 8: 04 April 2005)

There was consensus that those men who are not physically strong should not work at the Bellville polymer plant. Consistent with Cheng's (1996: xii-xiv) argument that non-hegemonic masculinity is exhibited through physical weakness and weakness in character, one respondent asserted:

Educated males are useless because they just want to sit behind a desk with a pen and some of them could not cope with the work. Yes 'weak' men working at this plant will also create barriers and become a burden to the other men. Put "them" in an area where they can cope with the work and pay them accordingly. (Operator 9: 04 April 2005)

An analysis of this concept clearly gives one the view that although the men are marginalized by the other men they are prepared to suggest special arrangements to accommodate the 'weaker' men but no special accommodation is made for women.

4.5 Fear of the unknown

While opposition to women is frequently interpreted exclusively as a case of gender discrimination, this study found instances where fear of the unknown propelled men to protect what they perceive to be their domain. Specifically, male operators reported that their initial thoughts when the women were employed at the plant were that of resistance and of having an uncomfortable feeling because they never had to deal with women in the workplace in the past. Their undeclared questions were:

- *How were these females going to deal with a group of men?*
- *Will we be able to see them as our colleagues?*
- *Can they deal with work problems?*

Some male operators felt that their freedom was intruded upon and they had to be careful in the way they spoke in the presence of females. The initial thoughts of men did not relate to issues of capacity in terms of job functions. Rather, it is how men in the workplace perceive women.

The possibility of sexual attraction between men and the new women recruits was another issue that terrified the male operators since they did not know how they would respond to the situation. To rationalise their fear pertaining to sexual attraction

between men and women in the workplace they argued that sexual attraction would affect the day-to-day operations of the operations team negatively. These were expressed in the following way:

Men are unable to control their emotions and this may lead to the temptation of adultery. Men will lose their jobs in terms of sexual harassment and adultery”. (Operator 10: 04 April 2005). Another operator expressed a similar concern: ‘... *men would develop relationships with women.* (Operator 2: 04 April 2005)

The above issue indicates that male operators did not necessarily view the female operators as professionals but rather as a threat to their weakness in controlling their sexual urges.

4.6 Competence of women

The females employed by the company had all matriculated and had additional qualifications linked to further studies, while the male operators, in general, did not even have matriculation certificates. So from an academic point of view women were, in general, better qualified, academically, to deal with the theoretical components related to the work but lacked practical competencies. It should be noted that the nature of the work in the control room is essentially theoretical and because of their academic ability some of the males felt that the control room is the best place for women.

Conversely, other male operators argued that although women were academically superior they were unable to deal effectively with actual problems competently. However, working in the control room is a higher graded job than the casting floor operator job. Hence placing women directly in the control room was viewed by some male operators as unfair since one normally reached the level of control room operator after gaining at least four years of experience in the different areas of the plant. There was a specific progression route that operators had to follow in order to gain access to the control room.

The criteria was as follow:

- They must have worked on the casting floor
- They should have been exposed to services area and
- Have specific numeracy and literacy competencies
- Have done some modules relating to Process Industry Principles

As for the women, this progression route was ignored because the production manager personally spoke to the casting floor team and supervisor and indicated to them that the females were exclusively employed for the control room and for greater things at a later stage. The supervisors emphasised this statement by saying 'women are clever and have the academic ability to handle the work in the control room'.

It could have been expected that by ignoring the progression route to become a control room operator would result in friction between the male and female operators. The company should have included in its gender equity plan a strategy to convince male operators why there is a need to fast track women operator within the company. This was especially important since some male operators felt that they deserved a chance before the women and showed their disgust by making bad remarks and even raised unofficial grievances. Others in the team rebelled against the idea emphasising the fact that although women operators were promoted '*they can't even work at the lower levels competently*' (Operator 2 04 April 2005). Some operators even accused the company of 'window dressing'. The team saw this as a barrier to their development and felt demoralised because of this phenomenon.

Even the supervisors were supporting the undeclared rebellion of the male operators. One supervisor remarked that he observed that the casting floor operators' morale was low and he felt that a particular male did not deserve to be overlooked for promotion because he made a lot of effort and met the requirements to be promoted to the control room. Contrary to the company's decision, he autonomously decided to develop the male and female operators simultaneously and sent both to the control room. This resulted in the control room becoming overpopulated and he was forced to decide whether the male or female would be removed from the control room.

After applying the criteria to appoint individuals to the control room and assessing the competences of the operators, at that time, the male operator was confirmed as the control room operator and the female was demoted to the casting floor. This was viewed as a victory for some male operators and a confirmation that male are unfairly treated if they do not have advocates within management. Notwithstanding the above, one of the supervisors indicated that because they were academically stronger than some of the males it was not all women operators that could not succeed. Indeed one female operator actually made a success of working as a control room operator.

Even though this female operator was competent, the male control room operators in this specific team did not accept her as a member of the team because they assumed that she would eventually supervise the team. Unfortunately, the issue could not be tested since this particular female operator became pregnant and because of her long leave of absence was removed from the control room after which she eventually resigned.

The issue of competence is crucial in the BPP and its management need to look at structured education and training interventions to deal with the attitudes of male operators. Furthermore management needs to consider and implement gender policies to deal with pregnancy, which was the determining factor for the females to be excluded from the control room and leave eventually.

4.7 Will the EEA succeed at the Bellville polymer plant?

The majority of the operators were of the opinion that the EEA will not work in the BPP. The females will, according to the male operators, never be able to do a full job, which means that women will never be able to work in all areas of the plant. Furthermore, if the company wants to implement the equity strategy they will need to consider introducing technology that reduces the reliance on physical strength. As one respondent says:

This plant has been built for men and if women want to be equal they need to be able to do a complete job. They need to think twice because I don't think they (women) will last. (Operator 1: 31 March 2005)

4.8 Lack of physical separate planning to accommodate women

The lack of special and separate ablution facilities created a barrier from the start for the implementation of the Employment Equity Strategy. This created at times uncomfortable feelings for men and women, which increased the feelings of resentment. Men felt that their private spaces were invaded by the presence of the women. This further clouded men and women's relationship beyond the physical spaces of the ablution facilities.

4.9 Implications for a gender adult education and training intervention.

Adult education and training are vital for developing equal opportunities throughout our society. If education and training systems do not challenge traditional stereotypes on the role of women and men in our society, those stereotypes, this study shows, will continue to have a damaging influence. Education and training also constitute some of the main instruments in today's changing world in helping people to face the challenges of increasing internationalisation and globalisation.



In an effort to end the domination of constructed hegemonic masculinity, one has to consider Schein's (1980) proposals as a training model targeting those resisting change. In this model he makes the following propositions:

- Any change involves learning something new, as well as unlearning patterns embedded in personalities and social relationships. The Adult learning intervention should communicate the organisation's commitment to achieving gender equity and enable to effectively understand, support and achieve equity and provide employees with the skills to work in or manage diverse work teams.
- For most adults, change challenges the existing attitudes, values and self-images of the individual and thus is initially painful and threatening. Accordingly, any educational intervention that intends changing the values and attitudes of adults should be introduced in a sensitive manner and should insure that all the fears of those impacted by the change are considered and dealt with adequately.

- Organisational change depends on individual change.

In order to make any of this work, people have to be trained to approach gender equity with a positive frame of mind and a motivation to seek payoffs; they must be able to "de-center", that is see things from others' points of view and make appropriate external attributions rather than blaming others for situations. Finally, they must be able to "recenter" - harness the different perspectives, ideas and approaches and develop a shared view of a situation or course of action and some broadly shared and accepted norms of behaviour

- Change involves several stages, all of which must be negotiated before a change can be said to have taken place.

Training makes people from non-traditional employee backgrounds feel that the organization is serious about developing them to their maximum potential because they are prepared to invest in them and in developing the people with whom they will work.

- Gender equity training takes many different forms.

Sensitization to gender equity is a key theme of training programs. In many cases this involves learning what the sex is about, the norms of behaviour that exist within a gender, the nuances of language and mannerisms and their meaning in various settings. Collaborative conflict resolution also forms a key part of training. People must be sensitive to the existence of conflict, even when it is not openly expressed since in certain cultures it is not appropriate to express conflict even when it is felt.

In order for SANS BPP plant to successfully implement change they will seriously need to consider the above.

4.10 Conclusion

In this chapter we identified specific attitudes and responses to the gender equity strategy implemented at the BPP. These were analysed to understand the implications for a gender education and training intervention. The researcher then continued to use the analysis to propose a framework for gender education and training that would be suitable for the specific environment. The next chapter makes a few concluding remarks.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusions of this study. It comments on the nature and relevance of the GES at the Bellville Polymer Plant and summarizes the attitudes and responses of male employees to the implementation of the GES. Furthermore, this chapter identifies further research possibilities emanating from the research.

5.2 Protecting the working space as 'male territory'

This study reveals that constructed gender roles are still entrenched within all layers of society - including the workplace. Since men historically benefited from their gendered roles they are not prepared to relinquish their privileges without a challenge. In the case of men working as operators at the BPP they used a number of strategies to show their dominant position at the Plant. These strategies include marginalisation of women through emphasising the women-ess of women by suggesting that women are not physically strong when compared to men or women need to perform caring jobs or women are unreliable workers because of their sex, e.g. pregnancy results in long leave of absence for women or when women menstruate they are less productive.

Furthermore, this study confirms that strategies such as using sexual innuendo and jokes were frequently used to make women feel unwelcome within the male environment. Those women who were prepared to tolerate these kinds of jokes and innuendo were expected to join in to become 'members' of the 'male team'. Some men consciously and deliberately created obstructions for women within the work place, which prevented women from becoming members of their exclusive group indeed women are deliberately treated as outsiders.

Even though women were 'tolerated' within the workplace, males remained suspicious and hostile towards women since the males felt threatened by the women who were, academically, more qualified.

5.3 Male anxiety to confront changes

Historically the BPP only employed men as operators. However, with the introduction to the GES women were employed for the first time. This resulted in men opposing women as colleagues from inception. Whilst opposition to women is frequently interpreted as a case of gender discrimination, this study found instances that fear of the unknown propelled men to protect what they perceive to be their domain.

Specifically, male operators reported that their initial thoughts when females were employed at the plant were that of resistance and of having an uncomfortable feeling because they never had to deal with women in the workplace in the past.

One of the issues that gave rise to anxiety was the possibility of sexual attraction between men and the new women. To rationalise their fear pertaining to sexual attraction between men and women in the workplace male operators argued that sexual attraction negatively affected productivity at the BPP. What became evident is that male operators view their female colleagues as a threat that may expose their weakness to control their sexual energies

5.4 Physical structure of the plant contributed to women's marginalisation

The physical structure of the BPP contributed in no small way to the marginalisation of women. In the first instance the plant structure consists of heavy machinery and sophisticated processes, which include the carrying of heavy objects and opening of valves. The plant is set out in a way that physical strength is required to function efficiently. However, this would not have been a barrier to women if the company invested in tools that could have assisted those that are physically weaker. However, this was not considered by the management, which resulted in men exploiting and emphasising the physical weakness of women as justification for reclaiming their space.

5.5 Lack of advocacy regarding Gender Equity

A key limitation during the introduction of the Gender Equity Strategy at BPP was that shop floor staff was not informed about the purposes, aims and objectives of the strategy. A number of male operators viewed the strategy as being essentially unfair to them and accordingly resisted the strategy. This signals the need for an educational intervention that inducts all staff regarding the purposes and aims of the gender equity strategy.

5.6 Future research possibilities

This study suggests that the introduction of a gender equity strategy needs to be accompanied by an education and training intervention that orientates and inducts all staff to the aims, objectives and purposes of such strategies. Accordingly, any future research should assess the effectiveness and relevance of the educational intervention.



5.7 The Change Process

Men, as the SANS male employees demonstrate, have consistently resisted legislation that attempts to equalise status and opportunities of women in the workplace. This resistance can be conceptualised within a framework that recognises hegemonic masculinity whereby men attempt to systematically control, dominate, and keep women in their place within the existing organisational culture. However, it can be argued that workplaces and other organisations where men congregate provide suitable environments to challenge men's sexist attitudes and practices in both the workplace and beyond. Men are more likely to change if they are encouraged by their male peers and provided with appropriate role models. One of the facts of patriarchy is that men are more willing to listen to other men.

One of the important findings of this study is that any change project takes place in a wider context and that it has a history and a pre-history, and takes place within a particular changing economic, political and cultural context. The SANS gender equity


strategy initiative took place between 2000 -2004. In SANS racial discrimination was considered more important than gender or disability discrimination. SANS' equal opportunity employment policy therefore needs to be reworked, to take greater account of the gender equity component. SANS needs to implement a formal action program with specified objectives and outcomes, a recruitment and selection manual as well as a program to re-educate management and gain its commitment to gender equity. These advances will no doubt be hard won within a shifting and often hostile institutional and social context.



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Appendix A Questionnaire

List of Interview Questions for Process Operators

1. When SANS started to employ women at the Bellville plant, what were your immediate thoughts.
2. Have your views changed over time? Explain
3. How did the work culture change at the Bellville site due to the presence of women at the plant?
4. Frequently, male colleagues would make sexually charged jokes in the presence of women colleagues.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Strongly Agree



Give a motivation for you choice

6. To be equal, women must tolerate and join in when sexual innuendo and jokes are used around them.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Strongly Agree

Give a motivation for you choice

8. The nature of work at this plant is highly physical and women do not have the required strength to do this work.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Strongly Agree

Give a motivation for you choice

9. All women who were employed at the Bellville plant left. What do you think are some of the reasons for women leaving?

10. When this female was moved to the control room how did you feel?

11. Do you think EEA will work on this plant?



Appendix B

Questions for Supervisors

1. Explain why when females were moved into the control room the normal progression route was ignored.
2. What would you identify as the main barriers to males and females working together? How do you think these can be overcome?
3. In light of the new South Africa and the new dispensation do you feel the implementation of gender equity in Bellville plant is a success or failure?
4. What is the nature of conversation people discuss during break times?



Appendix C

HR Manager

1. How did the company prepare you for the employment equity strategy?
Considering the gender equity strategy and being knowledgeable about the act, what do you see as the difficulties within the EEA?
2. Judging by your experience of the implementation of the gender strategy do you think EEA is worth pursuing at SANS.

Appendix D

Recruitment officer

What is the process that you used to recruit female operators? Who deals with the assessment criteria? Who informs them that they entering a male domain.



Appendix E

Production team leader

What process has been put in place to accommodate female operators?