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Review of *Man Made: Why So Few Women Are in Positions of Power* by Eva Tatchell and John Edmonds

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REVIEW

This book explores why government, business, institutions and so much of British life is dominated by men. It provides a good counter-argument to Sandberg's view that women in organisations should change, by arguing that society needs to be restructured so that work takes its place alongside other imperatives and is fashioned to balance the needs of both genders. It is a most engaging read that will appeal to a wide audience. Eva Tatchell is an expert on gender issues and an advisor to public authorities, while John Edmonds is a trade unionist and specialist on work organisation, was formerly General Secretary of the GMB union and has served as TUC president.

This is not an academic book. It is well written and accessible. It is based on interviews with over 100 successful women and a handful of men in the UK. The interviewees include parliamentarians, educationalists, trade unionists, business leaders, and those in the legal and medical professions.

The authors argue that British society is made man, fashioned by men for the convenience of men: "The way most organisations operate – the rigid hierarchy of power, command and control management, the long hours with the melding of work and male-orientated social activities, the expectation of a career uninterrupted by children or family duties and the definition of leadership with its multitude of sporting and military metaphors – has been designed to make men feel secure and is guaranteed to make most women feel uncomfortable".

The result is male domination of organisations. The statistics are stark: 80 per cent of the most powerful jobs in the UK are held by men and only 20 per cent by women. The authors set out to uncover the cultural and historical reasons for this imbalance. Despite expectations of change after the enactment of the Equal Pay Act and the Sex Discrimination Act, the Thatcher government of the 1980s was a time of high unemployment and great economic upheaval. The Labour government that came to power in 1997 was happy to address childcare issues and introduce tax credits that helped many women, but had no appetite to challenge male dominance in business and gave no particular priority to increasing the number of senior women in the public sector or in politics. Lord Davies, advising the government on how to increase the number of women who sit on boards of the UK's biggest companies, set a target of women to make 25 per cent of board membership by 2015, which was met. But there is no room for companies to congratulate themselves on this achievement. Increasing the number of women serving as non-executive directors on the boards of the largest companies will not in itself, Tatchell and Edmonds argue, make a large difference to who wields power in corporate Britain.

Chapter 3 – “Fashioned by Men” – examines the masculine work culture of men appointing men like themselves, non-executive directors being appointed informally, a strong sense of male entitlement, and the long hours work culture. It argues “moral and political courage is needed to jettison the remnants of that unworthy culture which continues to deliver unfair advantage to men and to deny equal opportunity to women” (p. 52).

The next chapter – “Fitting In” – describes how women have to work harder and prove themselves better than men in order to break in to the male domain, while the chapter on sexism and discrimination provides examples of overt sexism in the workplace that are truly shocking. These include a significant gender pay gap even for women in senior positions; women being promoted to support functions whereas men are found in important and high-status areas; women being patronized; being subjected to unwelcome sexual attention from work colleagues; sexual harassment and misogyny.

One of the book's most important chapters, “How Women are Seen”, focuses on the overwhelming importance of appearance for the women interviewed. Women felt pressure to be thin, not look sexy yet not look drab, and dress well. These observations resonate with the findings of Burkinshaw (2015) and Bagilhole and White (2011) that women's appearance is acutely observed and commented on by both men and women. The book also reports similar acute observation about how women behave in the workplace. They have to choose to behave as women are expected to behave, and then get overlooked for jobs. And despite holding down demanding jobs they still feel they have primary responsibility for home, husband and children. The book explores what it calls the “maternal wall” that many women experience. When they return to work after the birth of a child they often require flexibility. They also need to let go and encourage partners to play a bigger role in the upbringing of children. However, the book condemns the fact that women can still be forced to choose between a high-flying career and children.

Importantly, Tatchell and Edmonds' research reveals that few of the women interviewed had a pattern of linear career progression, typical of many men. Nevertheless, they used intelligence, imagination to make the most of their advantages, and great determination to overcome obstacles to their career.

The book demolishes the business case for diversity as failing to address fairness and equality in the workplace. The authors make a number of recommendations for reform in the workplace, as follows: for better enforcement of equality legislation; for a greater transparency in appointments and pay; for the introduction of quotas, targets and in-house equality programs to achieve a better balance of power in companies, public sector organisations and Parliament; and for the introduction of a scheme offering breaks to enable workers to retrain or to be extended to include maternity and paternity leave.

The final chapter, "Reports on the Demise of Feminism Have Been Greatly Exaggerated", is Eva's personal reflection of becoming a feminist and a review of feminism over the last 40 years. She is heartened by younger women whose feminism is very much based on action and focuses on single issues, even if not always connected to an underlying theory.

This book is highly recommended to anyone interested in how organisations might be changed to achieve fairness and equality.

REFERENCES

Bagilhole, B. and White K. (eds.) (2011). *Gender, Power and Management: a cross cultural analysis of Higher Education* Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke.

Burkinshaw, P. (2015). *Higher Education, Leadership and Women Vice Chancellors; fitting into communities of practice of masculinities*, Palgrave: Basingstoke.