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Review of *Knowing Her Place: Positioning Women in Science* by Valerie Bevan and Caroline Gatrell

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REVIEW

This book explores why women scientists are less likely than men to become eminent in their profession. Drawing on interviews with 47 female and male scientists within health care, the authors identify the way in which women are allocated a 'place' – usually located at a distance from leading positions - within healthcare science professional and structural hierarchies. They show how male research leaders in science, both consciously and unconsciously, draw on notions of 'difference' and 'otherness' to position women in lower grades. Thus, women's place in science 'is still defined by expectations that they should support male colleagues, often at the expense of their own careers' (p. 2).

Valerie Bevan is an Honorary Teaching Fellow at Lancaster University Management School. She is a microbiologist who has worked in public sector organisations including the National Health Service where her main national and international contribution has been leading the development of standardized methods in diagnostic microbiology. Caroline Gatrell is Professor of Organisation Studies at the University of Liverpool Management School.

The book demonstrates how the most prestigious and creative research roles within healthcare science in the UK are reserved for male scientists. Consequently, science tends to define women's 'place' as accommodating, rather than leading. Where young women scientists demonstrate ability and ambition, they can be persuaded into administrative roles. Moreover, women are often sidelined early in their careers due to their potential for maternity.

The book examines subtle masculinities at work. Men were over-rated and supported other men, while treating women as though they were subordinate to them. The authors assert that 'Women appeared to be left with no alternative but to bear their place in the hierarchy and rarely challenged the behaviour and actions of their male bosses, even when the women didn't like what they experienced' (p. 72).

Moreover, women were excluded by men from decision-making groups such as senior management teams. As well, they found it difficult being heard and their views were not as highly regarded as those of men.

The book also indicates how subtle masculinities operate at home. Despite over 40 years of equal opportunities legislation in the UK, it argues that women's role remains that of mother and homemaker and men's is that of breadwinner. Such constructions, the authors argue, 'influence women's working lives and indicate some of the reasons why women have little control over their careers' (p.97). The married women interviewed mostly accommodated their husband's careers to avoid conflict, rather than negotiating with them. For these women, their home lives reflected their public lives where they knew their place and did not challenge the status quo. Interestingly, women who earned more than or as much as their partners appeared to hold more bargaining power and had more productive careers.

In a chapter entitled "Creative genius in science' the authors assert that women's potential for becoming brilliant scientists is not really taken into consideration by the masculine elite. Individual decision makers within institutions were crucial in controlling the career mobility of women and this book demonstrates, like van den Brink and Benschop's research (2014), that these decision makers play a role in gatekeeping and excluding women, so that even where women were ambitious and worked hard they were unlikely to be identified as high-flying scientists.

The chapter on M[o]therhood observes that women's potential for motherhood renders them other (or m[o]ther), once again placing them on the sidelines of science. It also creates particular challenges for women scientists. Some relate to the need to catch up with others who have not had a career break. Several interviewees did not want to highlight their situation when they were pregnant because it would draw attention to the obvious signs of being a woman; preferring to disregard or even hide their pregnancies. Moreover, returning to work part-time after the birth of the child or taking extended maternity leave 'seemed to signal to some bosses that they lacked commitment to science'. The book argues that shared parental leave can reduce discrimination against pregnant women if men as well as women get used to taking their entitlement.

The book is an engaging read and will appeal to a wide audience. While its focus is women scientists in health care, its findings resonate more broadly with much of the literature on the careers of women in STEM. It is therefore recommended to all those researchers and equity practitioners who are committed to improving the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in science.

REFERENCES:

Van den Brink, M. & Benschop, Y. (2014). Practicing Gender in Academic Networking: The role of gatekeepers in professorial recruitment. *Journal of Management Studies*, 51 (3), 460–492.