

Practice Makes Perfect: Corporate Practices, Bureaucratization and the Idealized Gendered Self

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Through a feminist reading of post-structuralism (Weedon, 1993) – particularly Weedon's concepts of discourse, subjectivities, power and change – this paper explores the argument that the intersection of gender, power, and organizational realities has profound implications for our understanding of organizations (Witz & Savage, 1992).

The paper begins with a review of the "feminist interrogation of bureaucracy" (Witz and Savage, 1992), arguing that the debate has been invaluable in raising questions about the character of bureaucracy and its relationship to gendered subjectivities, but it has also to some extent obfuscated the issue by restricting the ability of feminists to assess whether one set of realities is any better than another. The paper contends that bureaucracy is a gendered discourse which, as with all discourses, changes over time with its relationship to a discursive field.

Through a case study of the development of British Airways (1919–1993) the paper attempts to show that the character of the organization changed over time, influencing, and being influenced by, various discourses of gender, race, class and organizational strategies. The term 'bureaucracy' is used to refer to a hierarchical, rule-bound organization but the paper tries to show that the structure alone is not much of a predictor of people's experiences of self. The paper concludes by suggesting three areas of further research: the changing relationship between (1) male-dominance and organizational realities; (2) organizational realities, gender discourses, and social change; and (3) organizational realities and gendered experiences.

BUREAUCRACY AND FEMINIST THEORY

The study of bureaucracy has been an enduring part of management theory since its inception. Over time the debate about the character and dynamics of bureaucracy has remained remarkably stable, with a gendered reading of the work of Weber (1948) serving as a focal point for theoretical developments and departures (cf. Selznick 1949; Lipsett 1950; Gouldner 1954; Merton 1968; Burns and Stalker 1961; Mintzberg 1979). Perhaps as a result of this narrow focus, research on bureaucracy has generated very few models or images of organization, leaving management theorists with little with which to differentiate one organization structure from another. In particular, studies of bureaucracy have had little to say, except in the broadest terms (e.g., latent versus manifest behaviour, goal displacement, impersonality, etc.) about the experience of 'people within bureaucracies'.

In recent years a growing body of feminist organizational scholarship has exposed the gendered nature of traditional studies of bureaucracy. Kanter's (1977) study of a US corporate bureaucracy, for instance, indicated that organizational hierarchies are male dominated and contribute to 'an opportunity structure' which discourages female employees from seeking promotion. Kanter (1977) went on to argue that the numerical absence of women from positions of power and their numerical concentration in the lower echelons of the organization become associated not only with women but with womanhood itself, and in that regard Kanter was pivotal in drawing attention to the impact of organizational structure on the social construction of gender. Her work has subsequently been criticised for ignoring the impact of 'pre-existing gendered relationships' on organizational structure (cf. Davies 1990; Witz and Savage 1992).

Burrell (1992) and Ferguson (1984) characterise bureaucracy as a discourse and, in different

ways, seek to explain the gendered nature of bureaucratic discourse. Burrell (1992), through analysis of the development of the Catholic Church, argues that a neglected aspect of the development of bureaucratic rationality is the process of "desexualization" – the purging of sexual relations and emotions from organizational life. Ferguson (1984), drawing upon interviews with participants of various "modern organizations" in the US, characterized bureaucracy as a male-dominated linguistic practice which reflected and maintained particular organizational structures and practices. She argues that the very character of bureaucratic rationality has served as a set of principles against which women have been judged unfavourably as potential members of the bureaucracy. A 'discourse of bureaucracy' – with its stress on rationality, objectivity, and impersonality, developed alongside a 'discourse of domesticity' – which stressed emotionality, subjectivity, and familial values. Historically, bureaucratic principles, in contrast to domestic principles, became associated with males and maleness and served to exclude women from the bureaucracies or to restrict them to the lower levels.

Pringle (1988; 1989) and Martin (1990) question the apparent gender-neutrality of the concept of bureaucracy itself. As Pringle (1988) argues,

while the rational-legal or bureaucratic form presents itself as gender-neutral, it actually constitutes a new kind of patriarchal structure. The apparent neutrality of rules and goals disguises the class and gender interests served by them. Weber's account of 'rationality' can be interpreted as a commentary on the construction of a particular kind of masculinity based on the exclusion of the personal, the sexual and the feminine from any definition of 'rationality' (quoted in Witz & Savage 1992:27).

Martin (1990) argues that Weber's concept of rationality is masculinist in its emphasis on logic, calculability, and the absence of emotionality.

Through an extensive study of the boss-secretary relationship in a number of Australian organizations, Pringle (1988; 1989) turns attention to the role of power and sexuality within bureaucracy. She argues that far from being desexualized (Burrell 1992) bureaucracy is saturated with sexuality, with the boss-secretary relationship serving as the supreme example, rather than the exception:

[T]he boss-secretary relation, rather than being out of step with modern bureaucratic structures, is the most visible aspect of a pattern of domination based on desire and sexuality. Far from being an exception, it vividly illustrates the workings of modern bureaucracies. Gender and sexuality are central not

only in the boss-secretary relation but in all workplace power relations (Pringle 1989: 159).

Hochschild (1983) and Tancred-Sheriff (1989) contest Weber's notion of bureaucracy as typically free from the 'tyranny of emotion'. Hochschild's (1983) study of US airline companies and collection agencies demonstrates that "emotional" work is a crucial requirement of some forms of bureaucratic work. Tancred-Sheriff (1989:48), focuses on the role of female clerical and sales staff who, occupying the "spaces between producer and consumer/client, employer and worker", act as an emotional (and sexual) buffer of control, mediating between the authority of management and the needs of the clients and other employees.

Witz and Savage's (1992) thorough-going summary takes issue with the 'sexuality of organization paradigm' inherent in much of the debate on feminism and bureaucracy. Their critique is rooted in a "gender paradigm" which argues that particular gender relations shape specific forms of organization and that, in turn, organizational processes have a crucial influence on how gender relations are understood:

One of our central arguments concerns the historical specificity of organizational forms and the fact that they are inevitably shaped by a wide variety of social forces, gender notably amongst them. Organizations are the embodiment of different forms of patriarchal power relations, which themselves set the stage for further conflicts, so that organizations are constantly changing in a fluid way (Witz & Savage, 1992: 57)

From this perspective Kanter's (1977) work is questioned for focusing on the gender of organizational participants rather than on the relationship between gender and organization, and for arguing that women can benefit from change *within* bureaucratic organizations; Ferguson's (1984) work is challenged for suggesting that bureaucracy and gender constitute different, rather than intertwined, layers of discourse, and for assuming that the different discourses reflect (essentialist) 'gendered-differentiated modes of social action'; and issue is taken with Pringle's (1988, 1989) focus on sexuality and the argument that 'sexual pleasure might be used to disrupt male rationality and to empower women':

[What] Pringle lose[s] sight of is that, if power is discursive, and if discourses about sexuality set the parameters of pleasure as they simultaneously constitute and regulate sexuality, then how is the pleasure of sexuality any *less* problematic than the power of sexuality? (Witz and Savage, 1992:29)

Witz and Savage (1992) are 'deeply suspicious'

of the development of a "sexuality paradigm" which, among other things, has tended to "naturalize" heterosexual relationships. They contend that the notion of sexuality is far from clear and is often conflated or confused with gender, and that the postmodernist perspective of many of those involved has led them to reject gender as an essentially modernist term.

Witz and Savage's (1992) otherwise valuable summary is problematic in three key regards. First, it is far from clear what a 'gender paradigm' entails: their notion of power relations rarely moves beyond the broad concept of "patriarchal" power or issues of subordination and domination, and is framed by a pessimism of female advancement within organizations; throughout the summary there is an implicit tendency to use the terms 'women' and 'men' in an unproblematic way and to limit discussion of gender to women.

Second, the dismissal of 'sexuality' through reference to a 'sexuality paradigm' is confusing and unhelpful. Witz and Savage's (1992) valid observations about confusions of the term sexuality are not enough to explain away the usefulness of a 'sexuality focus'. Certainly the concept of sexuality is contested (Hearn, Sheppard et al. 1989; Mills and Tancred 1992) but no less than that of gender itself (Acker 1992), and it is far from demonstrable that many within the 'sexuality of organizations' debate dismiss the issue of gender as modernist. In terms of the *dynamics* of power sexuality is arguably a key element in the gendering of organizations and the organizational construction of gender (Hearn and Parkin 1987), a fact recognized in an ironic way by Witz and Savage (1992) through their reference to a "deep suspicion" of a focus on sexuality. In contrast, Joan Acker (1992) develops a theory of gendered organizations which involves an inventory of gendered processes located in four analytically distinct aspects of the same reality: (a) the production of gender divisions; (b) the creation of symbols, images, and forms of consciousness; (c) the multitude of interactions that occur between individuals; and (d) the gendered social constructions of reality that form in the minds of individuals. Acker argues for short-term strategies aimed at transforming parts of large organizations from the inside while aiming at a long-term strategy for a fundamental reorganization of production and reproduction with new ways of organizing complex human activities.

Third, Witz and Savage's notion of bureaucracy is ultimately premised on an uncritical acceptance of Weber's notion of the ideal type. In the

argument that "bureaucracies [...] are shaped by specific struggles [which] lead to specific forms of gender configurations", Witz and Savage (1992:56) seem to imply that bureaucracy is a constant which changes in detail but not in form. Thus, for example, they do not comment on the fact that the various studies of bureaucracy that they cite involve varying forms of organization (e.g., the Catholic Church, a large private corporation, various sized public and private organizations, the Federal Civil Service), in various countries (England, France, Australia, the US), over different time periods (from the Middle Ages to the present). Whether intentioned or not, Witz and Savage (1992) bring into question the validity of bureaucracy as a useful concept for the study of organizational processes. They allude to the problem by arguing that "organizations are constantly changing in fluid ways", and that "in certain periods a certain organizational type [such as the 'classic' modern bureaucracy] may gain a certain fixity" (Witz and Savage 1992:57). The question then is, if organizations change do they nonetheless remain bureaucracies? When the classic modern bureaucracy eventually lost its fixity did it nonetheless remain a bureaucracy? Ultimately the question is, if bureaucracies are transformed how does the concept of bureaucracy help us to understand organizational processes and their relationship to gender?

BUREAUCRACY REVISITED

As a sociologist Weber's classic study of bureaucracy arose out of a concern to understand a complex set of social relations and action, including an attempt to grasp the interrelations of all institutional orders making up a social structure (Gerth and Mills, 1948). To that end, Weber was interested in authority relations, the structuring of organization, efficiency and the relationship between ways of thinking, organizational outcomes and personality (Mills and Simmons 1995). Through the method of the 'ideal type' Weber outlined a number of interrelationships that constituted bureaucracy at a particular point in time: although bureaucracies in some form or other have existed for hundreds of years Weber sought to explain the character, development, and significance of the modern bureaucracy, with its basis in rational-legal authority.

With the popularization of Weber's theory of bureaucracy has come a number of confusions and a diminution of Weber's broad sociological

agenda. It has, for example, 'often been mistakenly assumed that [Weber] provided a description of concrete bureaucracies rather than an abstract conceptual scheme' (Cosser and Rosenberg 1968:463). Another area of confusion is the notion of the 'ideal type' which has sometimes been taken to imply a value judgment. This latter confusion can be found within mainstream management theory in which the problem has been further compounded by the compression of Weber's theory into a narrow focus on the relationship between efficiency and structure. As Gerth and Mills (1948:59) explain it:

By using this term [ideal type], Weber ... Intended to bring to full awareness what social scientists and historians had been doing when they used words like 'the economic man,' 'feudalism,' 'Gothic versus Romanesque architecture,' or 'kingship' (sic). He felt that social scientists had the choice of using logically controlled and unambiguous conceptions, which are thus more removed from historical reality, or of using less precise concepts, which are more closely geared to the empirical world.

Some of these confusions have entered the feminist interrogation of bureaucracy. In some cases bureaucracy has been treated as a concrete, universal reality that represents a solidification of a particular (organizational) form of male dominance (Zimmeck 1992; Crompton and Le Feuvre 1992). In other cases bureaucracies are assumed (implicitly or explicitly) to be composed of the various ideal typical elements to be found in Weber's 'pure type of bureaucracy' (Ferguson, 1984).

At the level of broad statement, feminist theorists have been able to demonstrate that the 'bureaucratic ethos' is unfavourable to women. There is a problem, however, if we want to know whether *one* bureaucratic organization is the same as another, whether a bureaucratic organization changes over time and what are the specific outcomes for women (and men) as a result of different (or modified) realities. On the surface, the work of Crompton and Le Feuvre (1992) and Ramsay and Parker (1992) deal, respectively, with the issue of comparative analysis and of bureaucracies as differing organizational cultures. Yet in both cases there is acceptance of Weber's notion of the ideal type bureaucracy as a universal phenomena. Hence, despite evidence of differences in the employment patterns of French and British women Crompton and Le Feuvre (1992) are able to conclude that the fundamental gendered character of bureaucracy is the same across nation states. Ramsay and Parker (1992), acknowledge that 'gender oppression

takes unique forms within each organization according to their local histories, symbolic languages and sense of commitment or opposition' but they go on to dismiss "bureaucracy" in a general sense, arguing instead for a more gender-neutral "neo-bureaucracy".

It would seem that however hard we try to understand bureaucracy we are constantly coming up against the ghost of Weber. But what was Weber trying to do? To be sure, Weber did not invent 'bureaucracies' but he did invent a way of making sense of them. Unlike Foucault (1979) who sought to expose the discursive nature of all discourse, Weber not only described the elements which came together to form a discourse of bureaucracy he solidified the elements of the discourse by imposing his own framework (or ideal type) on the realities he was studying. Thus, to accept that Weber had managed to capture the essence, albeit its most abstract form, of a particular discourse over time is one thing. To believe that bureaucracy ever existed in its pure form or that it is a discourse that has not fundamentally changed over time is another thing.

FEMINISM, BUREAUCRACY AND BRITISH AIRWAYS

In this paper I will be exploring one 'bureaucratic' organization over time. Through a study of British Airways I hope to illuminate not only the relationship between gender identity and organizational processes but also the problems of developing a feminist analysis of bureaucracy.

Drawing upon Weedon's (1993) theory, bureaucracy can be seen as a form of discourse which is subject to change over time, and gender can be viewed as a changing and contested form of subjectivity – a knowledge of which is to be understood within the confines of a particular discourse or set of discourses ("discursive field") i.e., "the meaning of gender is both socially produced and variable between different forms of discourse" (1993:22). Thus, a study of the relationship between gender and bureaucracy needs to take into account the historical specificity of any particular form of bureaucratic discourse and its impact on forms of gendered subjectivity (prevalent types of masculinities and femininities), and the contribution of located discursive factors to the way that certain subjectivities are understood.

Since its beginnings in 1919 British Airways has

gone through several key junctures, i.e., a concurrence of events in time in which a series of images, impressions and experiences come together, giving the appearance of a coherent whole that influences how an organization is understood (Mills, 1994a). Constructed from the fate of women within the company, those junctures can be characterized as the foundation years (1919–24), a period of consolidation and growth (1925–39), the war years (1940–45), post-war 'normalization' (1946–60), the 'eroticization' years (1960–75), professionalization (1975–90), and diversification (1990–).

The Foundation Years

Between 1919 and 1924 commercial aviation in Britain was in its infancy. Several airlines were founded during this period, including Aircraft Transport & Travel (AT&T), Handley Page Transport Company (HPT) and Instone Air Line. These airlines were small (employing less than 100 employees) yet structured along hierarchical lines. AT&T, for example, had several levels of hierarchy which including the parent company (AirCo) and its entrepreneurial owner, a Managing Director, a General Manager, a Chief Pilot, pilots, and other employees. At the level of the pilot the hierarchy was further differentiated by the use of military ranks and uniforms and the military background of the majority of employees helped to establish a regimented system of authority.

Organizationally, these companies – with their hierarchy, formal procedures, rules & regulations, and clearly defined ranks and offices – fit the standard contours of the bureaucratic organization but they were in fact a hybrid of entrepreneurship, large-scale business, and the military establishment. AT&T, HPT, and Instone, for example, were established by entrepreneurial owners of established private companies and run and piloted by men recruited from the war-time air and armed forces.

In these fledgling bureaucracies control was diffuse, with the day to day operations in the hands of managing directors and general managers, who exercised control through reference to a revised form of military rankings and legitimate authority; yet the operational staff and managers were linked by a camaraderie of war-time military associations which cut across simple, formal control. Piloting – the central task of the

organization – ensured that the pilots enjoyed a considerable degree of control over elements of the job and its organization. Coupled with the diffusion of power and an esprit de corps which cut across airline companies, the sheer amateur nature of the business contributed to an atmosphere that was not conducive to rigid insistence on rules and regulations: airports consisted of rows of huts on former military aerodromes, aeroplanes were converted air force bombers and, apart from recording their flying time for official records, pilots were not required to keep any records (Pudney, 1959). The informality of the operation is captured in the following quote:

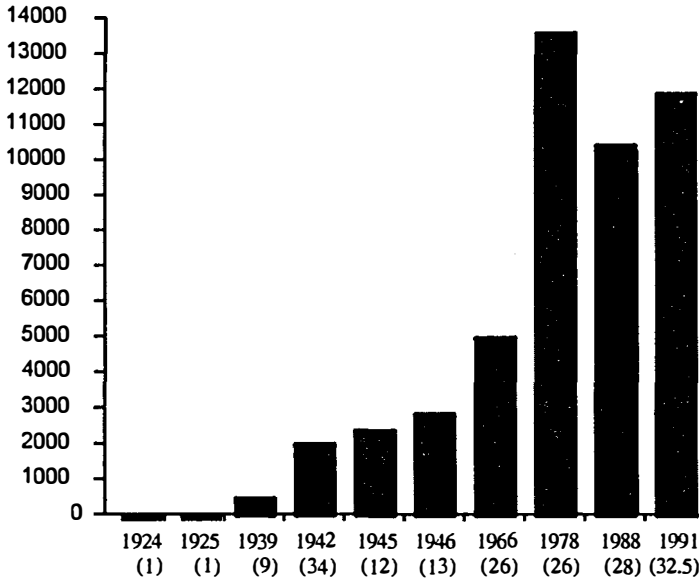
We took off at precisely 7.30 a.m. and made for Hounslow where, viewed from 300 feet, there was not a sign of life. Figuring that nobody had remembered to tell the Customs man he was supposed to be there to receive visitors, I decided to push on as we had no time to waste and fix my outward and inward clearance on the way back (Captain Jerry Shaw commenting on the inaugural flight of AT&T in 1919, quoted in Pudney, 1959:40).

The camaraderie, or esprit de corps, was almost certainly an important conduit for the development of a particular type of (heroic) masculinity in the early airlines, reinforced by the dangerous character of the job, wartime associations and a total absence of women; there were no female employees in British airlines until 1922 (Mills, 1994b). The hero pilot is the earliest subject to appear in the literature and histories of the airline companies and was consciously developed and fostered by those companies over the years (Mills, 1996b) through either extended references to military record or, as in the following quote, the precarious nature of commercial flying:

One of my early trips on the London-Paris route will always linger in my mind, and it is hardly surprising that it should do so, seeing that I made as many as seventeen forced landings . . . ; while by the time I neared the French capital it was so dark that I could not find the proper aerodrome and had to finish up eventually in a football field. Obstinate trouble with the petrol feed of my engines was the problem I was grappling with that day...[Captain Gordon P. Olley describing his early days with HPT, quoted in Pudney, 1959:50–1].

In the laying down of cultural rules (Mills and Murgatroyd 1991) the evolving masculine esprit de corps, with its associated symbolism (rank, uniform, converted aerodromes and bombers), was to influence future practices within the airline companies for years to come (Hampden-Turner 1990).

Table 1. The number (and percentage)* of females employed by British Airways and its predecessors, 1924–1991.



*Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Consolidation and Growth

In 1924 four airline companies merged to form Imperial Airways. In the following fifteen years the new company grew from two-hundred and fifty to over five thousand employees. Alongside growth came the development and institution of a myriad of rules and regulations, a standardization of equipment and operational procedures, a formalization of communication and command, and the establishment of a hierarchical system of control and career progression. In short, Imperial Airways developed along the lines of the classic bureaucracy (see Exhibit 1).

That Imperial Airlines was to start life as a bureaucracy was due in large part to government intervention and the development of regulatory bodies through-out the aviation business. In 1923 a government committee (the Hambling Committee) concluded that existing airlines should merge to form a single airline capable of developing new and longer routes; the government was particularly interested in the political objective of uniting the Empire with a system of air routes, with the new airline acting as the government's 'chosen

instrument'. The new airline was to be subsidized for a period of ten years, assuring, for the first time, long-term employment for airline personnel and the prospect of a career in piloting and allied tasks.

The new company was headed by a Board of Directors consisting of a representative from each of the merged companies and two government representatives. The board, led by Sir Eric Geddes, was dominated by men who viewed aviation as a business venture rather than an adventure. Geddes, in particular, was 'concerned with attracting revenues and cutting down expenses to show that the business is a commercial success (Penrose, 1980:42). In many ways the character of the airline business was changing and this was to have its impact on the character of prominent forms of subjectivity.

Forms of Subjectivity: The development of bureaucratic rules, regulations, and structures undoubtedly had its impact on the way employees came to view themselves and others: at one level a sense of identity came from being part of the bureaucracy ("the company") itself, at another level identity was shaped by location within

EXHIBIT 1

Images of the Classic Bureaucracy

<i>Definitions of Catering Staff</i>	<i>Bureaucratizing Piloting</i>	<i>Imperial Airways. Female Office Staff Salaries.</i>		
Following the introduction of victualling clerks in the Catering Department, it has become necessary to distinguish the various grades of catering staff in order to prevent any misunderstanding.	[From the beginning] discipline was vigorously attempted. To ensure that pilots could not use 'lack of knowledge' to excuse misdemeanors they were issued with a printed <i>Pilot's Handbook and General Instructions 1924</i> giving Rules and Conditions of Service, International agreement, Aerodrome rules, Forced landing procedure, Custom requirements, AD 6 Wireless operation, Cargo regulations, Routes, and Duties of Air Superintendent. Smoking [was] suppressed in the offices...[and soon] the pilots found that they must abandon their motley civilian clothes and be outfitted in blue uniforms and peaked hat. To further enhance prestige the aircraft livery was standardized by painting all fuselages blue, with wings still silvered (Penrose 1980:41).	Scale "A"	Secretaries	£3.5.0 – £5.0.0
It has now been decided that:-		Scale "B"	Personal Stenos	£2.10.0– £4.0.0
(1) the term "Ground Services Steward" will be discontinued, and will be replaced by the term "victualling clerk".		Scale "C"	Pool or General Stenos, Snr.filing clerks, teleprinter operators, telephonists	£2.10.0– £3.10.0
(2) stewards acting as assistants to victualling clerks and other stewards employed on ground staff will be "Ground Stewards".		Scale "D"	Junior steno	£1.15.0– £2.10.0
(3) stewards employed in aircraft will be referred to as "Flight Stewards".		Scale "E"	Filing clerks, typists, jnr. clerks.	£1.5.0– £2.10.0
<i>Internal Imperial Airways memorandum, reported in Imperial Airways News, 43/8, 28 Oct. 1938.</i>		Scale "F"	Powers Accounting Staff	
			(1) Trainees	16.0– £1.15.0
			(2) Deputy Sect. leaders	£2. 0.0– £2.5.0
			(3) Section leaders	£2. 5.0– £2.10.0
			(4) Jnr Tabulation Op.	£2.12.6– £2.15.0
			(5) Snr Tabulation Op.	£3. 0.0– £3.10.0
			(6) Deputy Supervisor	£3.10.0– £4.10.0

Imperial Airways, Internal memorandum issued in August 1938 by the Staff Manager's Office.

the company (position, department, grade). The pilot, for example, was no longer the heroic flyer but the 'professional,' 'the company man', 'part of a professional team'. Throughout the era this theme was reinforced time and time again:

Pilot's Room

[Sitting] round you in the pilots' room are airman who were the friends and colleagues of early pilots

who flew in the era before our air-liners were organized scientifically – in those early days when every flight was apt to be an adventure...

No wonder that passengers traveling by Imperial Airways . . . say that the men who sit at the controls of the Company's air-liners inspire them with such a feeling of confidence...

These pilots do not care to talk about themselves. They prefer to talk about flying as a whole. They are concerned not with their own personal exploits. They desire to sink their own identity in the general progress of the movement they have at heart. It is their endeavor to convince the public, by the smooth

precision of their flying, that air travel has left the era of experiment far behind, and is now...a swift, dependable, ever-ready method for expediting the transport of passengers, mails, and freight. (*Imperial Airways Weekly News Bulletin*, 21, 11 Aug. 1936).

In the Control-Cabin of an Airliner the Work of the Captain and First Officer. Modern Wonders of Science and Mechanics

Science and mechanics have, between them, wrought wonders in the air...Scientists, designers, engineers, pilots! All of them combine, nowadays, in a splendid form of teamwork... (*Imperial Airways Weekly News Bulletin*, 24, 1 Sept. 1936).

By the mid-1930s the company had established its "own finishing school for Captain's and First Officers"¹ to ensure that pilots fit with the requirements of the company's bureaucratic culture. But bureaucracy alone does not account for the particular subjectivities of the pilot nor the absence of females from most of the airline's employment categories (Exhibit 2).

Gender. The developing bureaucratic rules of Imperial Airways were shaped by gendered extra-organizational rules (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991) and isomorphic practices (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Prior to the establishment of Imperial Airways, warfare and the restricted recruitment practices of the Royal Air Force (RAF) associated aviation – particularly flying – with forms of masculinity (see Mills, 1994b), and that association was reinforced through the male-only hiring practices and the corporate image-making of the commercial airlines.

Within Imperial Airways a series of rules directly and indirectly excluded women from a range of positions. Indirectly the national airline agreement establishing Imperial Airways effectively excluded women from three-quarters of the company's employ with a rule that 'all airline pilots and seventy-five percent of the ground personnel, whether administrative staff or mechanics, must be members of the RAF, the Reserve, or the new Auxiliary Air Force' (Penrose, 1980: 37)². Indeed, female employment at Imperial Airways was restricted to secretarial and other office duties (Exhibit 2). In a more direct fashion Imperial Airways was party to the rules of the *International Commission for Air Navigation* (ICAN) and the *Inter-*

national Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) which decreed that women be excluded from employment as flight crew members (Cadogan, 1992; Penrose, 1980)³.

Piloting at Imperial Airways was strictly a male profession with an underlying theme of masculinity, built on military rank and camaraderie, and developed through company images such as the 'company man' (as discussed above). When the association of piloting and masculinity was challenged⁴ a powerful discourse, referencing the biological determinants of sex, was evoked to characterise women as unstable and physiologically weak (see footnote 3).

In terms of stewarding, notions of propriety, decency, safety and customer sensibilities were referenced to exclude women. When, in 1928, Imperial Airways began to employ in-flight attendants it mimicked the practice, prominent throughout first-class rail and liner transportation, of using white-coated male "stewards". While, by this date, women were not in fact excluded from flight crews, other concerns served to reinforce the unquestioned male-only hiring policy. One concern was with assuring the public that flying was safe and the conviction that female attendants would weaken that image (Penrose, 1980: 44). Another concern was that female attendants would be unacceptable to a public who believed that it was not 'respectable' for a women to travel alone any distance⁵.

While the bureaucracy offered only limited and short-term employment opportunities for females it provided several career paths for men – especially in regard to flight crews. Here images of manhood – particularly the pilot and the steward – were developed and given prominence in the company practices, symbols and written materi-

³ In justifying a ban of women from flight crews ICAN cited 'medical advice' to claim that females were emotionally unstable and that their menstruation cycle prevented them from 'functioning efficiently as a pilot at all times of the month' (Cadogan, 1992: 73).

⁴ In 1924 Lady Heath, a prominent British aviator, attempted to obtain a commercial pilot licence but was turned down under the new ICAN and ICAO rules. She fought the case and rules banning female commercial pilots was rescinded in 1926 (Cadogan 1992:73). This had little effect on the informal rules of the airline companies; British Airways, for instance, did not employ female pilots until the late 1980s.

⁵ Discussions with Fred Huntley, M.B.E., British Airways Archivist and former British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC) employee (see also Hudson & Pettifer, 1979).

Sir Eric Geddes, *Imperial Airways Ltd. Report of Annual General Meeting, 1935*, pp.14–15.

² The RAF, the Reserve and the Auxiliary Air Force were male-only organizations.

EXHIBIT 2***Male and Female Occupations in Imperial Airways, 1924–39****1. Male-classified occupations.[115 categories]**

Accountant	Flying establishment officer	Public relations officer
Administrative assistant grade III	Foreign public relations	Radio mechanic
Aircraft inspector	Foreman	Radio officer
Assistant in buying dept.	Foreman's clerk	Radio servicing improver
Assistant Chief buyer	General establishment officer	Records clerk
Assistant Navigation Instructor	General manager	Requisition clerk
Assistant to ARP Officer	Ground engineer	Rigger
Assistant to General Establishment Officer	Head kitchen porter	Riviter Holdup
Assistant to maintenance engineer	House janitor and labourer	Sales assistant
Assistant to ticket stock	Improver	Section engineer
Auditor	Inspector	Senior Accounts Clerk
Barman	Instrument maker	Sheet mental worker
Booking clerk	Instructor	Shop boy
Boy	Instrument repairer	Shorthand typist
Bulletins clerk	Junior draughtsman	Signwriter
Cable messenger	Junior technical assistant	Spray painter
Captain	Junior post clerk	Sprayer
Carpenter	Junior Traffic Clerk	Station Officer
Cashier	Kitchen Porter	Steward
Catering manager	Labourer	Stock keeper
Chargehand storekeeper	Land line switchboard operator	Stoker
Clerical assistant	Launchman	Storekeeper
Clerk	Maintenance engineer	Storeman
Cloakroom & lift attendant	Marine officer	Stores clerk
Commissionaire	Messenger	Technical assistant
Communications officer	Messenger boy	Technical clerk
Correspondence clerk	Metal worker	Ticket issuing clerk
Cost clerk	Metal worker semi-skilled	Trainee
Cost investigation clerk	Motor mechanic	Upholsterer
Coxswain	Night teleprinter operator	Van boy
Divisional radio engineer	Night watchman	Van driver
Electrician	Office boy	Victualling clerk
Engineering establishment officer	Operations clerk	Wages clerk
Enquiry clerk	Painter	Watchman
First officer	Passenger clerk	Welder
Fitter	Porter	Wireless Operator
Fitters mate	Powers Accountant	Works foreman's clerk
Flight Clerk	Probationary Station Officer	Works welfare officer

2. Female-classified occupations[16 categories]

Copy typist	Librarian	Stenographer
Deputy Supervisor	Powers operator	Supervisor
Filling clerk	Secretary	Telephonist
Invoice clerk	Senior Powers operator	Teleprinter operator
Junior stenographer	Senior Section Leader	Touring representative
Lady Chef.		

3. Unclassified occupations [4 categories]

Journalist	Machinist	Typist
Junior Clerk		

Information compiled from internal company records and detailed reporting of recruitment in the company's internal newsletters and journals for the period 1924–39.

als. As might be expected in a developing bureaucracy, professionalism was to the fore in images of key employees. The pilot and the steward was presented as a professional, carrying out his duty as part of a well developed team. The professional images were due in part to the bureaucratization of the company but also in part to the airline's changing marketing strategy (Mills, 1996b).

In an earlier era the airline companies primarily marketed speed and safety – employing cabin boys and utilizing image of 'the heroic pilot'. The employment of cabin boys was, in large part, to assure the public that flying was safe for boys and thus grown men (Mills, 1996b), while the heroic pilot image was to reassure passengers that once in the air they were in safe hands. With the development of faster, larger, and 'safer' airplanes capable of long distances, Imperial Airways began to compete not only with the railway and cross-channel ferries but with the ocean-going liners. This encouraged a renewed focus on service, with Imperial Airways competing with the on-board steward service offered by first-class rail and ship. The notion of safety now became embedded in the broader notion of service and professionalism. A 1936 description of the steward indicates how the airline attempted to construct a particular view of reality and of the character of the steward:

The Air-Liner Stewards of Imperial Airways. Men On A New Calling. Serving Meals in Aircraft While In Flight.

The changed attitude of passengers towards flying is reflected in the way in which they regard catering up in the air. In the early days of the airways many passengers found themselves in a nervous and rather apprehensive frame of mind....They were too excited to eat anything like a normal meal. All they wanted...was a sandwich and something to drink.

That was in the days when aviation was still an adventure. Today, however, airway stewards work under entirely different conditions. People who fly nowadays do not look upon it as any kind of an adventure. They fly because they want to get quickly from one place to another. And while they are up in the air they expect the same comforts as would be provided by first-class surface transport...

The air-liner steward becomes a keen judge of character. His passengers are not only discriminating, but they include people of many different types and nationalities... The air-liner steward has to have all that deft artistry which is the hall-mark of the best kind of catering service...

Small, agile, quick-moving men are the stewards you see in the air-liners flying over Europe or along the Empire airways. For years, before taking to the air,

they have been gaining experience as stewards either on boats or trains. And all of them are proud of the new work they are doing up in the air.

People who fly are people who know the value of time, and they not only expect a first-class meal up in the air, but they also expect the service to be smart, swift, and in keeping with the speed slogan which is the watershed of every department of our airways today...

Every aspect of an aerial catering service is methodical – planned in advance to the smallest detail. An air-liner steward arrives on duty about an hour before the aircraft ... is scheduled to depart. He goes over to the well-equipped airport kitchens...Then [he] checks over his menu, arranges the contents of his buffet, and is ready to play his part in the smooth and efficient working of a modern air-line.

(*Imperial Airways Weekly News Bulletin*, 25, Sept. 8th, 1936)

In regard to the employment of women, Imperial Airways' hiring practices were a restrictive version of the broad practices of the time⁶. Middle-class women were employed by the company to take on the expanding clerical and secretarial work. These were usually young women who were expected to leave once they were married, but a number of widowed or never-married, older women were also employed. Between 1924 and 1939 the airline only hired women to twenty of its more than one-hundred and thirty-five categories of employment (Exhibit 2) and, while women constituted around 30% of the British labour force as a whole (Pugh, 1992), female employment, at its peak, constituted 9% of the Imperial Airways workforce.

Imperial Airways' corporate materials made few references to female employees, restricting information to the appointment, marriage, or departure of a female employee and her marital designation, i.e., Miss or Mrs. (See Mills, 1996a). It was almost exclusively through the classification of jobs that the issue of womanhood was raised in any sense:

Staff Vacancies Man for Establishment Department

Imperial Airways require a man for their Establishment (Staff) Department between 27 and 31 years

(*Imperial Airways Staff News*, 3/9, Jan. 20, 1939).

⁶ In the 1920s only 8.7% of married women were in paid employment, but an increasing number of middle-class women were gaining entry to new types of work, especially clerical and related work (Pugh, 1992: 92)

Staff Vacancies Clerical Grade III

This post is probably especially suitable for women.
(*Imperial Airways Staff News*, 32/9, Aug., 11, 1939).

Notions of efficiency, smoothness of operation, team work, skill, professionalism and career are constantly associated with men and male-typed occupations in Imperial Airways. Thus, indirectly, through a process of inference, these factors were seen as being male as opposed to female characteristics. The notion of female subjectivity was, in the face of silences, constructed out of comparison with male employees. In short, the ethos of bureaucracy was experienced differently by different people depending on how they were gendered.

Social class was another strand which influenced the functioning of Imperial Airways. The company, and its predecessors, tended to restrict recruitment to the upper and middle classes, a practice that was characteristic of government or quasi-government bureaucracies of the day (Zimmeck, 1992), with class identity being reinforced within organizational settings.

Race and ethnicity: the character of Imperial Airways' bureaucracy was also influenced by notions of race and ethnicity (Mills, 1995; 1996a). As its name attests, the company had imperial aspirations from the beginning⁷. In the late 1920s those aspirations were turned into reality with the development of long-range flying boats and the airline began services to the Middle East, Africa, India, the Far East and Australia. Drawing closely upon military and government colonial services, Imperial Airways began to establish a network of bases across the 'far flung points of the British Empire'. The practices and imagery that developed around the company's colonial development strengthen the gendered nature of the prominent subjectivities, and added a racial dimension.

The company only sent (white) male employees to establish bases in the colonies and this reinforced existing notions of the restricted place of women in the company, and contributed to a developing notion of racial character:

The women folk I met in my early days were mostly secretaries or junior clerks...I joined [Imperial Air-

ways] as a Commercial Trainee essentially for training for administration overseas. We did 18 months around the London and Croydon departments and 6 months to a year on European stations. After that we might be sent anywhere... [I] opened up a flying boat base. It was a case of being landed in a Leopard Moth on the sand beach with instructions "a flying boat station must be ready by 1st July 1937" — that was in two months... [On another occasion, Autumn 1938,] I had to close the station at Buriabu, Uganda and transfer all equipment etc by steamer to river mouth, transfer to river steamer up the Albert Nile to Nimule and by "road" to Juba, Sudan. There I set up a flying boat station at Rejaf on the Nile. To get to the river meant cutting through the bush, scrub and elephant grass...The labour was prisoners from the Juba goal with a prison warden to guard. The prisoners were very happy to do this chore! ...As you can imagine there were no women employees down the line (sic) ...
Letter to the author from retired Imperial Airways employee, Mr. G. Pett, December 13, 1993.

Colonial "out-posts" were run and staffed by white, male employees, and it is clear from the company's hiring practices and colonial reports that local (non-white) peoples were generally considered subsidiary to the organization and inferior to their British masters. Non-whites were only employed to do the most menial tasks and, as the following report indicates, they were depicted as superstitious, crooked, subordinate, stupid and primitive:

Some native labourers were quietly washing down the *City of Basra* under the watchful eye of the 'Baas' (Zulu foreman) when the actions of one Alexandra Sefuti (who was cleaning the fuselage close to the saloon door) aroused suspicion. On getting a closer view the 'Baas' discovered that Alexandra was busily scratching with his finger nails the jewels out of the crown in the Royal Mail sign. In response to a stentorian cry as to 'what he thought he was doing' Alexandra turned around and blushed . . . Prolonged cross examination elucidated the fact that all the members of the cleaning gang (who are descendants of King Setiwango) had drawn lots to see who should steal the jewels off the crown and it had fallen to Alexandra to perpetuate the crime. The latter having been suitably dealt with the 'Big White Baas' appeared and after sticking a piece of paper on the fuselage tore this off, and hey presto! left behind a brand new crown with marvelous glittering jewels, and was promptly awarded the first-class Order of Witch Doctors by the assembled multitude (*Imperial Airways Staff News*, 71, Apr.26, 1932).

In this presentation of colonial peoples as 'the Other' (Said, 1993) the image emerges of the white, male employee, in the guise of the "Big White Baas", as rational, honest, intelligent and modern.

Numerous reports from the "outposts" over the years reinforced the same points and contributed to the construction of subjectivities based on

⁷ One of the factors that contributed to the establishment of Imperial Airways was a government interest in uniting the British Empire with a system of air routes.

the notion of racial and national superiority (for a fuller discussion of this see Mills, 1995).

The development of Imperial Airways functioned in many ways as a classic bureaucracy but with several distinct differences – various rules, regulations and practices were framed by discourses of gender, class, race/ethnicity and the strategic actions of the company. Those discourses influenced and limited the frameworks through which employees could view themselves and others, contributing to limited subjectivities.

The War Years: The onset of the Second World War wrought many changes in the airline which, now merged with other smaller airlines, was renamed the British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC). At one level the bureaucracy was strengthened with a tightening of rules and regulations in line with wartime emergency measures. Yet, at another level, the bureaucratic ethos was undermined by the temporary release of numerous male employees for combat duties, a resultant large-scale growth of female employee numbers (Table 1), the employment of women in a range of tasks and levels previously associated with men, and a wartime camaraderie that linked male and female employees in a common war effort. The increase in female employment was part of a general wartime effort which encouraged women to join the workforce in increasing numbers.

The discourse of warfare contributed to changing discourses of gender, some of which were complementary and some which were contradictory. The war strengthened the association of masculinity with strength, protection, combat and associated roles (e.g., piloting, soldiering, etc.). It also strengthened the complimentary notion of “the domestic idyll” (Weeks 1989), which associated femininity with domesticity, home, and caring. But the war also encouraged contradictory trends by evoking images of equality and the value of women to the workforce. Both discourses found an echo within the practices and representations of B.O.A.C.

On the one hand, almost all of the leading management positions remained in the hands of men and there was a firm resistance to the employment of female pilots and stewards (Mills, 1996b). The in-house newsletters continued to feature male employees, with images of warfare masculinity dominating the pages of the *BOAC Newsletter*: the Newsletter carried regular columns on “Awards For Gallantry” and “Roll of Honour”, along with other features, detailing the exploits of former male employees:

We continue to learn with pride of the distinguished part which our pilots now with the R.A.F are playing in the air war. (*BOAC Newsletter*, 8, Sept. 1940)

Various features, particularly in the early stages of the war, presented the new ranks of female employees as ‘back room girls’, substitutes for the ‘brave men at the front’:

Our Women At War

As many as 1,800 women are now employed by the Corporation. Some are doing jobs which women have never done before. Some are wearing uniforms, some work in mechanic's overalls, others in ordinary clothes. But just as the W.A.A.F. exists in order to help the R.A.F., so these 1,800 women are all working hard behind the scenes to help not only the men of the Merchant Air Service but also the R.A.F. and the Ministry of Aircraft Production....These are the women who have earned the title of “Back Room Girls”. It describes them well, and they deserve it. (*BOAC Newsletter*, June 29, 1942).

On the other hand, the new hiring practices of the airline meant that women were, for the first time, associated with positions of authority and professionalism and a range of ‘non-traditional’ jobs, including staff superintendents, traffic assistants, salaries accountants, ticket stock auditors, buyers, librarians, traffic clerks, architects, barrister, “draughtswomen”, transport drivers, factory workers, and “computers”, as well as the more traditional jobs of canteen workers and secretarial staff. At the social level a number of women were elected to leading positions in many of BOAC's friendly societies, welfare branches, and sports and social clubs. In 1943 Pauline Gower became the first woman to be appointed to the board of directors. Occasionally the *BOAC Newsletter* would report some of the changes, using an equity frame:

Traffic Assistants, male and female, look smart and business-like in their uniforms and create goodwill by the attention they show to passengers (*BOAC Newsletter*, July 30, 1942)

And from time to time, albeit to a much lesser extent than the coverage of males, the military activities of former female employees were reported:

Girls in Battledress

When the war called to Miss J. Applebee she put the cover on her typewriter in the Technical Development Branch and...joined the A.T.S. (Transport).

"There is not," she says, "much glamour about us when we are in our full kit! This, in addition to a respirator, water-bottle and tin hat, consists of a man's battledress, great coat and ground sheet... We drive lorries – up to 3 tons – all over the country... Driving for 14 or 15 hours at a stretch, with only two short breaks is, of course, tiring – but who minds that in warfare?"
[BOAC Newsletter, April 15, 1941].

Between 1939 and 1945 the exigency of warfare contributed to a set of organizational experiences in which manhood was constrained to a narrow field of masculinity (usually with combat associations), while womanhood was broadened to include a range of femininities – from the Mrs. Miniver image of the wife and mother stepping in to help out her men at the front (see Mills, 1996b); Rosie the Riveter – the hardworking, capable employee; Miss Applebee – dedicated, brave, and ready to do her bit for the war effort; to Mrs. Henderson, dedicated organizational manager and professional⁸.

Normalization to Eroticization (1945–75): This era has been dealt with at length elsewhere (Mills, 1997; Mills, 1996b). In essence B.O.A.C. experienced tremendous growth over the period and while the percentage of female employees fell sharply the absolute number continued to climb (Table 1): female employment was now 'a fact of life' and, for the first time, extended to the employment of female stewards. The company attempted to deal with the new reality by developing a policy of "desexualization" – particularly in regard to the employment of "stewards". The policy of desexualization was designed to present an image of male and female uniformity – (sex-less) professionals doing their duty with appropriate care and attention. That the policy failed was in part due to the fact that bureaucratization was premised on existing male images and titles (e.g., female "stewards" wore uniforms based on those worn by the male stewards), in part due to gendered work (e.g., male and female stewards carried out different duties) and social practices (e.g., the development of company 'beauty pageants') which undermined any claim to equity, and, in part, due to resistance by female stewards who insisted on changes to their organiza-

tional image in line with alternative images of femininity.

By 1960 the policy of desexualization had collapsed under the weight of a series of eroticized images and changes designed to 'sell' female 'beauty' and 'sexuality': while a 'standard' image of masculinity was the rising bureaucrat or professional – focused on skill, ability or experience, the standard image of femininity was of 'the beauty' – focused on bodily looks. So powerful was the discourse of eroticism within the airline (and throughout the industry) that it gave rise to the enduring image of 'the sexy stewardess'. B.O.A.C., in line with most other airlines, maintained the image of the sexy stewardess through a whole series of rules and practices (i.e., recruitment was restricted to women under thirty who conformed to a certain type of 'beauty'⁹; make-up and deportment were essential elements of female flight-attendant training; female flight attendants were grounded or required to leave the airline once they had reached their early thirties or if they married): in effect the bureaucracy functioned as a purveyor of gendered practices!

In terms of race and ethnicity the process of decolonization and the importation of immigrant labour was beginning to change the character of the airline (merged and renamed British Airways in 1974) but not its official images. West-Indian and Asian born immigrants were hired to many of the menial jobs in the company and were rarely featured in the in-house newsletters or public advertising materials (see Mills, 1995). British Airway's bureaucracy in the mid-1970s was premised on ethnocentric white male ways of viewing rationality.

From Professionalization to Diversification: Since 1975 a number of factors influenced the structuring of British Airways to give the company a different 'feel'. In 1981 Sir John King was appointed Chairman by the Thatcher Government to turn British Airways into a 'business' and prepare it for "privatization"; King, in turn, broke with tradition and brought in an industry outsider, Colin Marshall, as Chief Executive Officer. Marshall found British Airways to be a hybrid bureaucracy, influenced by RAF and civil service customs (Hampden-Turner, 1990). In his view the organization was top-heavy, overstaffed, and charac-

⁸ "Mrs. Miniver" is the name of a popular wartime movie; "Rosie the Riveter" was a name used in US wartime propaganda materials to recruit women to war work; Miss Applebee and Mrs. Henderson are the real names of women employees who were featured in the BOAC Newsletter and served as archetypes of the new womanhood.

⁹ "B.O.A.C. were looking for the well-bred young English girl. Somebody who would be a cross between a governess and a nanny...", Anita Hughes, BOAC stewardess, 1958–60, speaking on the B.B.C., *40 Minutes programme* – 'Suburbs in the Sky', directed by Christopher Petit, 1992

terized by a rule-bound, formalistic culture; a process that had been twenty-years in the making with the rapid growth of management services (Lansbury, 1978). What Marshall failed to notice was the middle-class, gendered, and ethnocentric aspects of the bureaucracy: of the management services staff, for example, three-quarters were drawn from the middle-classes, and eighty-six percent were men (Lansbury, 1978:72), very few, if any, were 'non-white'.

Under Marshall's leadership the airline experienced a series of structural changes, including 'downsizing' (staff numbers were reduced from 59,000 to 36,000), a 'flattening' of the hierarchy and a culture change programme designed to emphasize a new commitment to service. The new service emphasis was borrowed from Scandinavian Airlines System (SAS), and involved a training programme for all staff. The end product was to encourage employees to become service rather than rules oriented.

The changing service strategy in British Airways' had a dramatic impact on gendered subjectivities and was the result of several diverse factors. Many of the more overtly sexist practices within the industry were challenged and defeated by a coalition of unionized flight attendants, the activities of the renewed women's movement of the late 1960s (Nielsen, 1982; Hochschild, 1983), and the development of employment equity legislation. Many of the discriminatory rules (e.g., age and weight restrictions) were dropped during this period and the industry as a whole experienced a rise in the number of male stewards employed. This process was shaped and accelerated by the growth of mass tourism, the advent of jet travel, the 1973 oil embargo, and deregulation, all of which contributed to price wars and cost-cutting exercises, including speed-up of the work of the flight attendant, the (re)introduction of short-term (5–10 years) contracts; and the employment of a large number of part-time female employees (Mills, 1996b).

Coupled with a strategy to become 'the world's favourite airline', British Airways' culture-change shifted emphasis from the selling of overt sexuality to the selling of emotionality (Hochschild, 1983), and from an emphasis on the in-flight steward to an emphasis on front-line reservations' staff. Female flight attendants are still expected to 'display' a certain appearance but much of the overt sexuality has been shifted to the check-in operations "where it is cheaper to maintain and may have a greater impact, especially in crowded airports" (Gil 1990: 328). In many ways fe-

male ground staff are employed as 'adjunct labour' (Tancred-Sheriff, 1989), with their sexual appearance being utilized to smooth over problems between the customer and the airline:

Passengers checking in at the airport can't fail to have noticed the warmth of the welcome from the smiling BA girls behind the desks, and the freshness of their looks, their complexions smooth, their make-up alive with colour and gloss. If – heaven forbid – there should be a delay or baggage hold-up, the girls are all smiling efficiency and sympathy (BA in-house magazine, quoted in Simpson 1984: 221).

On the flight-deck the construction of sexuality has gone through several conflicting pressures and changes. At the start of Marshall's rule an advertising campaign imaged female flight attendants as "supergirl", a campaign which referenced professionalism but which framed it with the patriarchal notion of the 'caring woman', ministering to the needs of the male passenger. In the 1990s the combination of sexual attractiveness and professionalism is still being played out in the company's advertisements; one series of advertisements focuses on the face of a female flight attendant (using soft lighting and make-up) under the heading 'The most important instrument on our aeroplanes'. Yet another series of advertisements, showing a father measuring his child while his stay-home wife looks on, merges images of domesticity and bureaucracy in the suggestion that the home is an extension of the bureaucratic process.

The 1990s may well see an increase in contradictory imagery as the airline changes some of its well established practices. Since the late 1980s British Airways has begun to recruit and train female pilots and has publicly committed itself to an employment equity programme designed to increase the percentage of female and non-white managers employed by the company. Until very recently corporate materials failed to reflect the changing recruitment practices – in-depth reporting continued to focus on male managers, company advertisements featured only male pilots, features on women continued to focus on bodily beauty and appearance, and non-whites were rarely shown in anything but lower ranked positions (Mills, 1996a). A recent corporate campaign presents a new set of images which focus on uniformed staff and presents them as a diverse group of professionals (male and female, white and people of colour). In the meantime experiences and understandings of the bureaucracy continue to undergo changes and conflict which affect how employees come to under-

stand themselves as men and women, the form that their sexuality (masculine/feminine) takes, their sexual orientation, and the meaning of their skin colour and ethnic associations (Mills, 1996a; 1996b).

SUMMARY

The feminist debate about the relationship between organization and gender has, in large part, become enmeshed in a discussion over the nature of bureaucracy. The 'feminist interrogation of bureaucracy' (Witz & Savage, 1992) has been invaluable in raising questions about the character of bureaucracy and its relationship to gendered subjectivities, but it has also to some extent obfuscated the issue by restricting the ability of feminists to assess whether one set of realities is any better than another.

Inevitably, the heart of the debate has involved a dialogue with the ghost of Max Weber. This has involved various feminist 'readings' of Weber's theory of bureaucracy – ranging from approaches which accept Weber's essential approach but argue that he left gender out of account (Kanter 1977) through to rejection of the notion of bureaucracy as essentially gendered (Martin, 1990). This paper sides with the latter view and contends that Weber's notion of rationality captured a particular form of male-dominance *in time*. Weber was not describing a particular form of organization so much as a particular socializing trend – rationality – which was unifying much of social life, reducing human action to logical, calculable actions devoid of emotionality and mystery. That Weber was able to glimpse this 'reality' in what he called the ideal-typical bureaucracy is supported by what we know of patriarchies and bureaucracies at the turn of the twentieth century. However, if we accept that discourses are changed by their relationship to a discursive field then we should expect organizational realities to change, to be informed by different understandings, to provide different experiences for those involved.

Through a review of the development of British Airways I have attempted to show that the character of the organization has changed over time, influencing, and being influenced by, various discourses of gender, race, class and organizational strategies. I have constantly used the term 'bureaucracy' to refer to a hierarchical, rule-bound organization but I have tried to show that

the structure alone is not much of a predictor of people's experiences of self. A post-structuralist reading of British Airways suggests three main points for further research and debate: (1) *male-dominance and organizational realities*: do forms of male dominance vary across organizations or over time and what are the implications for the experienced realities of women? Clearly across time male-dominance has been a constant feature of British Airways. Yet it is also clear that the shape of that dominance – in terms of images of masculinity and femininity, power-holding, professionalization, career development, etc. – has changed over time and has implications for organizational experiences and images of self; (2) *organizational realities, gender discourses and social change*: to what extent do changing gendered discourses alter the way organizational realities are understood, i.e., to what extent has the discourse of organizing and of organization been altered by changing discourses of gender, and what are the implications for organizational change? Study of British Airways suggests that significant change can, as Kanter (1977) suggests, occur *within* organizations; that importance discourse about the respective character of men and women and their part in the organization can be changed. The study indicates that people can develop different worldviews of organization from the narrow, patriarchal view of bureaucracy envisioned by Weber. But the study, in line with Witz and Savage (1992), also suggests that organizational realities remain largely the outcome of (contested) male dominated realities or worldviews; (3) *organizational realities and gendered experiences*: to what extent is change within organizations progressive? The study of British Airways indicates that discrimination against women has continued but in changing ways and form, some of which might be classified as a step forward (e.g., the hiring of women pilots) and some of which is clearly a step backwards (e.g., the eroticization period). Certainly it would be simplistic to dismiss some of the changes as being of little or no advantage to women, or how the notion of womanhood is constructed. This paper agrees with the work of Acker (1992) in arguing that organizational discourse has a powerful impact on the notion of womanhood, manhood and sexual orientation and as such, feminists should be struggling to work for change within organizations but as a contribution to a long-term goal of transforming the activity of organizing.

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