

**WOMEN WHO MANAGE.  
WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE AS MANAGERS IN  
CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN ORGANISATIONS:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE DISCOURSE OF MANAGEMENT  
AND ORGANISATIONS(S)**

**by**

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**A thesis  
submitted for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

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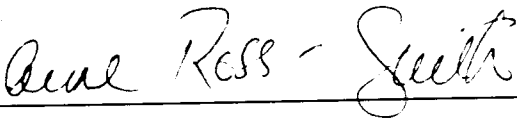
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This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of Management, Macquarie University. It represents the original work and contribution of the author except as acknowledged by general and specific references. I hereby certify that it has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Anne Ross-Smith", is written over a horizontal line.

Anne Ross-Smith  
May, 1999.

## Acknowledgments

This thesis borrows for its title from Melville Dalton's (1959) book '*Men who Manage*', now some thirty years old and still regularly cited as a seminal work in the field of organisations studies. I chose to title my thesis '*Women who manage*' out of due respect to Dalton's work - one of the first in the field to use ethnographic research, as does my thesis, to explore the complexities of organisational life. More importantly, however, I chose this title in order to acknowledge my gratitude to the women who participated in my research. It is their voice that I wanted to be heard in the thesis. My thanks, in particular, go to 'Paula' and 'Liz' and their colleagues at FinSec and EnviroCom.

As anyone who has done a PhD knows, it is a huge undertaking and much of it is a somewhat lonely and isolating experience. Along the way, however, many people provided me with support, advice and help and for this they deserve thanks. In particular I would like to thank my supervisor Elizabeth More. Others at Macquarie University who deserve my thanks are Robert Spillane, Kelly Callahan, Isobel Gavaskin and my fellow student, David Paul. At the University of Technology, Sydney where I have worked for much of the period of my candidature, I would particularly like to thank Bill Ticehurst, who first encouraged me to undertake a doctorate and who has since provided me with invaluable help and timely advice on my thesis. I would also like to thank all my academic colleagues in the School of Management, especially Jenny Onyx, Bob Kane, Mark Lyons, Graeme Sheather, the late Ray Martin and my fellow travellers down the seemingly never ending road to the completion of a doctorate, Guy Callender, Judy Johnston, Maureen Cleary and David Bubna-Litic. The support staff, both past and present, at the Kuring-gai campus of the School of Management - Bev McNeil, Kerry Levi, Elizabeth Hardman, Jenny Tompkins, Barbara van Es and Enid Cross have, in many different ways, helped me with my thesis. My thanks go, in particular, to Enid for her patience and professional expertise in helping me to format and edit the thesis.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates the managerial experience of senior women in contemporary Australian public and private sector organisations and explores the implications this investigation has in relation to the discourse of management and organisation(s).

The thesis proposes that although women have gained a presence in the ranks of senior management in the last twenty years, they continue to remain marginal to the discourse of management and organisation(s). The reason for this, it is argued, is because of the preoccupation this discourse has with conceptions of rationality and masculinity. This proposition is elaborated in the thesis by tracing the philosophical and sociological interpretations of reason and rationality from ancient Greek philosophy to its embodiment in the contemporary discourse of management and organisation(s).

Whether for biological, social or psychological reasons, it can be argued that men and women are 'different'. A further proposition, therefore, is that they will have a 'different' experience as managers. On the basis of this proposal, the thesis evaluates contemporary theories of gender and sexual difference, but stops short of defining 'difference' specifically with regard to women's experience as managers. Instead, it allows the empirical research to determine what it is that constitutes 'difference' in such a context.

The empirical component of the thesis seeks to develop an understanding of how senior women managers in contemporary Australian organisations both experience and interpret their experience in management. This is achieved by the use of two different, but complementary studies. Using an ethnographic/participant observation case study approach, the first of these investigates the day to day managerial activities, over time, of two senior women managers, one from the private and one from the public sector.

The second component of the empirical research involves a series of in depth interviews with forty senior women managers in Australian public and private sector organisations, together with a small number of interviews with their immediate superiors and subordinates, and observation, by the researcher, of their workplaces. The location of the empirical research in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, some twenty years or so after women started to enter the ranks of management in Australia, allows for a reflection on women's progress in management in this country during this period. It also allows for contemporary social and organisational conditions in Australia to be a consideration in evaluating the research participant's managerial experience. The thesis, therefore, links the empirical research findings to Australian literature and research on women and management, current social trends in this country, characteristics of the Australian business culture, Australian management and the Australian manager.

The research framework utilised in the thesis is informed by critical, feminist and postmodern approaches to organisational analysis. For this reason the Deetz (1994) schema, which defines organisational research from the perspective of four differing discursive spaces - *dialogic*, *critical*, *interpretive* and *normative* is utilised to locate the research orientation of the empirical studies. This schema recognises that overlap between the four discursive spaces is possible and thus can accommodate insights from each of the above mentioned approaches, as well as areas of overlap between them.

The principal research findings suggest, in summary, that women in senior management in Australia largely conform to the traditional (masculine) norms that are deeply embedded in the discourse of management and organisation(s) and in managerial practice, yet at the same time, they consider themselves to be 'different'. A feminist interpretation of Social Contract theory, together with a feminist analysis of Foucault's (1988) notion of an 'ethics'

of the self and the link between this notion and non essentialist feminist theory are used in the discussion of the empirical research findings to construct an interpretation of 'difference' as it applies to women's managerial experience.

The contribution to knowledge in the field of organisational analysis that the thesis seeks to make includes: adding new grounded empirical research which uses alternative approaches to organisational understanding; providing a comprehensive analysis of the philosophical and sociological underpinnings of the relationship between management, rationality and masculinity; providing a platform for future policy development and organisational practice; and adding a perspective on contemporary managerial practice and organisation conditions against which to gauge classical studies of managerial work and behaviour.

Finally, the thesis can also be seen to provide additional insights into recent critiques of essentialist feminist theory and the 'feminisation of management'/female advantage literature.



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