

# Book Reviews

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Nicolson, P. (2015). *Gender, power, and organisation: A psychological perspective on life at work* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge. 179 pp. \$36.39 (paperback). ISBN 9781848723238

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In her second edition of *Gender, Power, and Organisation*, Paula Nicolson skillfully illustrates how gender equality in the workplace has not improved much since her first edition was published in 1996. Nicolson combines interdisciplinary theories grounded in psychology, business, sociology, and other disciplines, with accessible examples, including everything from the resignation of Education Secretary Estelle Morris, to the gendered interactions of characters in *Family Guy*. She provides compelling evidence from studies across clinical, industrial-organizational, social, and developmental psychology as well as from her own work conducted with women in the medical workplace. Critiquing the model of women who sacrifice interpersonal connections with others to achieve isolated, individual success, Nicolson illustrates that despite the increase of one-woman success stories (e.g., Sheryl Sandberg), a handful of women achieving individual success does not equate with changed gender-power relations in the workplace.

This book could indeed serve as an informative and thought-provoking text for graduate student seminars in psychology, gender and women's studies, management, sociology, and leadership, as the author intended. Nicolson's accessible writing and incorporation of many relatable examples also make this book of interest to women in any one of the professional fields she discusses (e.g., management, law, academia, and medicine).

In her first few chapters, Nicolson covers topics such as gender socialization; controversy surrounding gender theories from Freud, Bem, and others; and gender-role spillover for women at work. She illustrates how patriarchal values heavily influence organizational culture making it seemingly problematic for the gender-socialized woman to be both successful and feminine. In other chapters, Nicolson discusses topics such as the role of motherhood, sexist coworker attitudes, old-boy networks, and the appointing by men of men similar to themselves to positions of power, and how these

contribute as barriers in the workplace. She then considers issues such as the insidious practices of sexual harassment, double binds enforced on women's sexuality, and the backlash women face for speaking out about unfair treatment. She concludes by discussing how women achieving the highest leadership positions often do so in isolation, through eschewing femininity.

A particular strength of the book is Nicolson's application of interdisciplinary theories to the study of gender, power, and the organization. She applies a material-discursive-intrapyschic approach in each chapter, considering physical context and biological materiality of bodies, the ways practices are inhibited by dominant structures, and the conscious and unconscious experience. Further, Nicolson frequently includes a consideration of the life span and systems theory in her analysis.

However, with the exception of hinting at women's experience of ageism and brief mentions of heterosexism, Nicolson's work could be improved by considering an intersectionality framework in the study of gender, power, and the organization. Intersectional perspectives consider how social identities are not mutually exclusive but together construct one's lived experience. Explicit considerations of how, for example, race and gender mutually constitute a woman's experience in the workplace would strengthen the work.

Despite this omission, Nicolson's book reflects high-caliber feminist scholarship. The second edition of this book comes at a critical time, when people are questioning if women are not yet already equal in the workplace. Nicolson achieves her aim of demonstrating that this is not the case and disrupts the notion of "the one successful woman" as sufficient counterevidence. Instead, *Gender, Power, and Organisation* illustrates both the overt and the covert sexism women face in the organization and urges women to support, train, promote, and mentor one another to help women one day achieve parity in leadership.

## Author Biography

**Kaitlin T. McCormick** is a dual-degree doctoral student in Psychology and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at The Pennsylvania State University and completed this review under the supervision of Dr. Stephanie A. Shields.