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The Sunday Times

December 31, 2006

Office queen bees hold back women's careers

ROGER DOBSON AND WILL IREDALE

FORGET "jobs for the boys". Women bosses are significantly more likely than men to discriminate against female employees, research has suggested.

The study found that when presented with applications for promotion, women were more likely than men to assess the female candidate as less qualified than the male one.

They were also prone to mark down women's prospects for promotion and to assess them as more controlling than men in their management style.

The findings, based on experiments carried out among more than 700 people, suggest that the "queen bee syndrome" of female rivalry in the workplace may sometimes be as important as sexism in holding back women's careers.

"Female and older participants showed more prejudice against the (idea of a) female leader than did male and younger participants," said Rocio Garcia-Retamero, a psychologist at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin and lead author of the report.

Garcia-Retamaro said the findings showed that many people adopted a stereotypical view that leadership was a masculine notion. "(This) leads to a bias against a female candidate's promotion to a leadership post," she said.

Nicola Horlick, the City financier nicknamed "Superwoman" for combining a demanding job with a large family, said some women looked on other women as a threat and preferred to surround themselves with men.

"It is called the 'queen bee syndrome'," she said. "I have seen women in managerial positions discriminating against other women, possibly because they like to be the only female manager or woman in the workplace."

Recent cases that have illustrated this problem include that of Helen

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Green, 36, a Deutsche Bank employee from London. In August she was awarded nearly £800,000 in damages after two years of bullying by four female colleagues that eventually led to a nervous breakdown.

The research, carried out by Garcia-Retamaro and her colleague Ester Lopez-Zafra, has just been published in the journal *Sex Roles*.

They used 705 participants living in southern Spain to evaluate the credentials of a male and female employee of a make-believe corporation who were proposed for promotion to a managerial position as a production supervisor.

After reading a description of the role and company, the participants were told to read each potential leader's CV and imagine their characteristics and likely success by evaluating them on several issues related to the job.

This included looking at the likelihood that the candidate would receive an increase in salary, whether they had the right skills and if they would win the acceptance of colleagues. They also assessed how likely they might be to receive promotion and were asked to take into account stereotypical traits of men and women such as sensitivity or aggression.

The study says: "Female participants had a stronger tendency than male participants to view the female candidates as less qualified than the male candidate . . . they also thought that the female candidate would fare worse in the future in her job than the male candidate."

It adds: "Female participants predicted that the male candidate would show a more laissez-faire leadership style than the female candidate would."

Katherine Rake, director of the Fawcett Society which campaigns for sexual equality, said stereotyping was more important than female rivalry in holding back women's careers: "Stereotypes about what is an appropriate role for women are still very strong in people's minds and there is still a cultural barrier to women making it into senior positions."

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