
GENDER BIAS: HEROIC MASCULINITY IN CORPORATE INDIA

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Abstract: Heroic masculinity in organizational culture can be a formidable barrier for women in management. Given the fact that India has a predominantly patriarchal culture, one would expect a greater degree of bias against women in position. However, as more and more women join the corporate ranks overt bias disappears. Societal attitudes are slow to change and so subtle bias may still exist. This article analyses the bias of heroic masculinity in the top levels of India Inc. It is based on the structured interview of 105 top women executives in Chennai, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Gurgaon, Delhi and Mumbai. Results show that the bias is definitely on the decline but the subtle impact exists. Women executives themselves internalize it and exhibit it. The ways to overcome this bias as suggested by women executives is also presented.

Keywords: Gender Bias, Heroic Masculinity, India, Women Executives.

Introduction: The Indian woman is in the threshold of redefining herself. The emerging economy, not only affords many opportunities, but also changes social perceptions regarding her role in society, both of which can be to her advantage (Budhwar, Saini & Bhatnagar 2005). India is a land of paradoxes. It struggles with extremes - female infanticide and illiteracy on one hand; women presidents, and woman CEOs on the other hand. The feminine principle is worshipped as Goddess in India and yet the Indian woman is the victim of the abuses of an inherently patriarchal social system (Nath 2000). Interestingly, the paradoxical situation itself can be a redeeming factor. The contrast between her social realities stimulates the need for change, and the ambiguity of her position allows her to redefine herself without too much deference to the repressive images of her past (Bumiller 1991).

One arena in which the process of redefining and reclamation of power takes place is the organization. The wider socio-cultural beliefs, attitudes and conflicts play themselves out even in organizations and so they present an ideal set up to study the pattern in which gender biases arise, are faced and resolved. The women in corporations have to perforce come to an understanding about their identity, and status in the organization. They have to come to terms with their feminine and masculine self to effectively compete and succeed in an organization which has a predominance of masculine culture (Koprowski 1983). Masculinity in organizations in India is different from that of the west. The Hofstede studies classify India as a masculine culture, where people are assertive, achievement oriented and have distinct roles for men and women; but the impact of its ancient, non material culture moderates this behaviour. On the scale of 'collectivism' India scores 48, proving that social deference will be high in India (Hofstede 1980), (Ayala & Oshrit 2008). Both these findings indicate that women in India will face bias in a different way as compared to their counterparts in the west due to the unique combination of social and cultural factors. This paper focuses on how one such bias, namely 'Heroic masculinity' is perceived and dealt with in Indian corporate setting.

Gender biases are subtle, invasive and difficult to contend with. They are compared to a labyrinth of pressures that force executive women to opt out (Eagly & Carli 2007). Gender biases are complex because they are created by many factors like social and cultural attitudes, organizational culture, leadership values, and individual reactions to gender issues (Rosen & Jerdee 1974), (Miller 2009), (Castilla & Benard 2010). The benefits of 'diversity and inclusion' initiatives in organizations, in order to overcome these biases, and create a more conducive work environment are well researched and documented (Gupta 2009), (Singh & Narayan 2009), (Sircar 2009). However, increasing diversity by employing more women and promoting them is not the same as managing diversity. Diversity in practice needs a change in social mind set which happens over time. An organization can facilitate it, but cannot hasten it. Besides, excessive importance to women issues can not only seem cosmetic, but also become lopsided and defeat the overall purpose of gender equity. Positive and holistic change demands that the gender studies also focus on similarities and not only differences between genders to create a super ordinate culture that benefit both sexes (Metz & Simon 2008). This paper aims at considering solutions to the bias of 'heroic masculinity' in a bid to create a more gender friendly environment in Indian Corporate organizations.

Literature Survey: Conventional images of Heroic Masculinity include a 'man of action', a 'hero', 'a person in control' and instances of 'understated emotions'. This identity has the traits of aggressiveness, competitiveness, strength, autonomy, rationality and emotional detachment. The heroic man has to beat lesser men, and negate others by his achievement. The shadow side of this macho image is insecurity and an overbearing attitude towards others (Collinson 2003), (Billing & Alvesson 2000), (Holt & Thompson 2004). Organizations too have essentially had a masculine identity (Kanter 1977). This idealized image is the direct progeny of a patriarchal society, scientific management and division of labour (Jayal 2008), (Bowles 1993). The impact of this subtle image is that it marginalizes

women, alienates men from fulfilling relationships at work and home, encourages transaction styles of management, and compromises the quality of decision making in organizations (Billing & Alvesson 2000). Organizations become explicitly meritocratic and this further reinforces the exclusion of women (Castilla & Benard 2010). The masculine culture of the organization influences all the members of the organization but does greater damage to women. Stereotyping, bias due to role incongruity, tokenism, bias in promotions and pays, denial of power and position are due to the exclusionary attitude of masculine hegemony (Hoobler, Wayne & Lemmon 2009), (Schein 1978), (Johnson et al. 2008). Women executives find it difficult to access to information get advice from mentors and accumulate the necessary social capital which could account for their low visibility and their scarcity at the top levels (Kumra & Vinnicombe 2010).

There is also an overwhelming body of evidence proving that there is a change in attitude in the west and in other nations too (Mostafa 2005), (White & Ozkanlı 2011). There increasing awareness of the need to integrate women into management (Gupta 2009), (Sircar 2009), (Singh & Narayan 2009). An alternative concept of feminine management has also been developed to serve the purpose of gender equity in a basic sense and create ethical organizations in a broader sense (Maier 1997). While these measures go a long way in mitigating the obvious and glaring effects of gender bias, a complete eradication is not achievable in the immediate future (Duehr 2006). Therefore women executives still contend with bias in a subtle form. They use coping strategies which actually reinforce the masculine culture (Miller 2004). Women executives may also internalize the negative belief and they underperform in masculine cultures (Bergeron, Block & Echtenkamp 2006). The subtle masculine culture not only marginalizes women but also affects men adversely (Metz & Simon 2008). Men and women prefer supportive organizations to competitive and masculine cultures in organizations (Catanzaro, Moore & Marshall 2010).

The present study examines the opinion of 105 women executives from Delhi, Gurgaon, Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad and Bangalore (major metropolitan cities in India) to know if 'Heroic masculinity' as a bias exists and if so, in what forms it is encountered by women executives. The results of this study not only allow a better understanding of this bias but will also add valuable knowledge to Gender studies in India.

Concept in the study: 'Heroic Masculinity' refers to a culture which emphasizes achievement over nurturance. It is a culture which measures capability in terms of quantitative measures (hours spent at work, mobility, visibility, profits made etc.) and ignores qualitative measures (team skills, communication, communal and prosocial activities). The word 'heroic' itself creates images of a lone fighter, achieving despite formidable odds; which is in keeping with the macho, individualistic image celebrated in masculine cultures.

This creates an atmosphere of competitiveness and aggression which is not conducive to women. The masculine culture also stereotypes women into a timid, submissive image and is intolerant to women who do not exhibit those qualities (Johnson et al. 2008), (Olsson 2000), (Eagly 2009), (Kanter 1977), (Billing & Alvesson 2000), (Collinson 2003) and (Holt & Thompson 2004).

Research methodology: Suitable to the topic under study, namely 'gender bias as heroic masculinity', the research methodology chosen is qualitative in nature. A gender construct is first prepared mapping the various factors that affect women executives and the biases are identified through an extensive literature survey. The gender construct, so prepared informs the making of the tools. A structured interview schedule is prepared with a description for every bias. Women executives from different parts of India are interviewed to make the study pan India. A total number of 105 women are interviewed. The sample consists of senior executives and can be classified as- upper middle category (Managers, Administrative executives and Senior managers) which is 19%; the top level (General managers, Associate Directors, and AVPs) which constitutes 26% of the executives; and the very top level (VPs, MDs, Country Heads, Global Heads, Directors, CFOs and CEOs) which is 55% of the total executives interviewed. The interviews are recorded and externally transcribed to prevent researcher bias. The responses are analyzed and presented in the form of a concept map.

Results: The responses of women executives regarding gender bias of 'heroic masculinity' in Indian corporations are classified under three categories. Those that say it exists and describe the forms in which they encounter it; those that say they never experience any discrimination from the organization and find the organizational culture pro women; and those that say it may exist in some organizations based on some individual factors. In terms of relative weight for each opinion, it is found that 60% of 105 executives who were interviewed feel that gender bias does not exist, 24% say it does and 16% say it could exist in some organizations based on specific factors. (Refer Table 1 and Fig 1)

Opinion about heroic masculinity	No.of Women executives	Percentage
Yes	25	24%
No	63	60%
Maybe	17	16%

Finally the women executives also suggest methods to

overcome the bias due to the masculine organizational culture. A bird's eye view of the results is presented in the diagram given below.

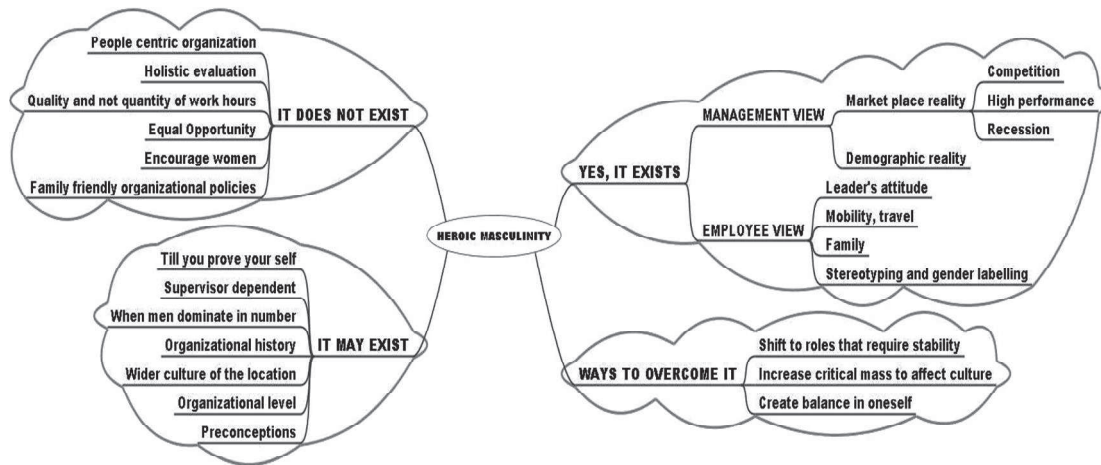


Fig 1 Concept map showing the responses of Executive Women to gender bias- Heroic masculinity

Heroic masculinity does not exist in Indian Corporate Organizations: More than half of the respondents (60%) say that they do not feel that their organization is predominantly masculine in culture. (01, 07, 32, 42 -"No I don't think the masculine culture exists"). They, in fact feel that the culture is conducive to career growth of women. (41- "I have always worked with men and I think my colleagues, my boss and everybody they have been quite sensitive to the issues"). (03- "...They encourage women a great deal"). They did not feel the need to compromise or feel coerced to do certain jobs either. (44- "I don't think just because you are a woman you are relegated to certain jobs or positions"). (86- "I have never had a situation where I was expected to do something which I was not ready to do as a woman"). The women executives outline many reasons for this.

- **Organizational policies are family friendly:** Organizations recognize the need to provide employees facilities which provide a better work life balance. This makes the general attitude more people centric. (13- " I am increasingly seeing more instances of situations where people are willing to give the employees that little bit of flexibility.") (14- "The culture itself is changed where you are no longer expected to be there from morning to night. If there is work obviously We in fact encourage people to finish their work and go home.")
- **Evaluation is holistic:** When performance appraisal is 360° and employees are rated on various parameters, the soft skills which are usually overlooked in masculine organizational cultures are noticed and recognized. So, holistic evaluations overcome bias of rating employees on results only. (50- "In organizations where both performance and behavior is measured and they also separate past

results from potential results, heroic masculinity is not really applicable").

- **Quality of work and not quantity is the criteria:** The focus on quality of work rather than quantity of time spent in the organization, allows women to reschedule their time. This flexibility allows a better balance between work and life. The 'long hours' expectation which is found in organizations with masculine culture is thus, overcome. (19- "Today's organizations do not look at how much time you have spent but they look at what is the quality work you have delivered. As long as you meet your targets, as long as you are able to deliver the way in which the organization expects work...time spent at work is not an issue"). (45- "In terms of competencies and strengths, and as a culture, the organization doesn't differentiate").
- **Equal Opportunities:** Women executives say that they do not perceive any discrimination based on gender either overtly or covertly. (02- "The work culture is not too demanding and it doesn't differentiate also. They always give equal opportunities to both men and women"). They do not feel the need to conform to a masculine style of management either. (104- "I have been in this organization for several years and I do not feel that I had to use an aggressive style or act contrary to my nature to get work done. I don't think I needed to push too much-in meetings or even otherwise. Politeness works and people respect you when you deal with them politely").
- **Organizations are people centric:** At the time of personal crisis, if the organization stands by its employees, it goes a long way in creating loyalty and commitment. Women executives describe their organizations and bosses as 'supportive' during personal crisis.

(67- "I can definitely give you instances from my own life, there was a period when I was totally out of active work because I was diagnosed with autoimmune disorder and I was hospitalized, I was in bed, immobile for two months, and at that time I was the only person handling the PMO role with about 80000 people for whom I was responsible. My boss said 'it is ok, don't worry about it, just get better, we will figure out, we will do something'").

(72- "The organization is not running for charity, but there is a lot of consideration, for example a person's wife was diagnosed with cancer in Mumbai, she didn't have any relatives in Mumbai, so he was given a transfer immediately to Chennai where they had support").

Heroic masculinity exists in Indian Corporate Organizations: Almost 24% of the women executives interviewed in the study feel that heroic masculinity does exist in Indian corporate organizations. (51- "I feel that the current cultural style in the organization is more macho"). (69- "It is there, that I totally agree"). They feel this exists despite efforts put by the management to actively address them. (18- "I think yes if you look at corporations in India, though they do talk about HR taking a lot of care of the people or having excellent HR policies in place, I would put them under that masculine culture"). The reasons for its existence are expressed from two perspectives- the management stance and the employee stance. The women executives look at the bias from a boss's point of view and this is called as the management stance, and when they look at it as an employee of the organization, at the receiving end of the bias, it is called as the employee stance.

The Management stance regarding heroic masculinity: Some women executives argue that the masculine culture is inevitable in organizations. They say that cut throat competition, the need for high performance and the need to survive through recession demand focus on results to the exclusion of everything else. They feel that the predominance of masculine values is necessary.

(31- "Times are changing now. What I saw, some 15 years back, was different. Now everybody is bottom line oriented, reduce staff, and reduce cost.... If you are working for companies which are kind of listed in public eye, there are various stake holders to satisfy and there is constant evaluation, then the pressure to deliver is much more. Then the culture automatically changes to a masculine orientation.)

(05- "I don't think the market play allows you to be otherwise. The values are gender agnostic, the market play determines how your organization is. If I am in the banking field, banking is a cut throat business, my organizational values, practices; beliefs have to be centered around what my competitive sphere is, because we are all in the business of return to shareholders. If I have to give a return to the shareholder, if I have to make money, my market place is my mantra, and my god, and my temple. What I have to do to be in the market place determines my attitude").

Other than the market place competition, the increased

population in India and the scarcity of commensurate opportunities creates a competitive situation. This attitude enters organizations too.

(15- "Also in India, if you specifically compare it with the US or UK, there are more number of people, there is more competition, and that culture comes into the organization as well. That is why the masculine culture will remain in the organization, unless the competition reduces".)

The recession has increased the focus on delivering results. This orientation naturally puts relational and communal issues out of immediate purview. This too can account for the masculine culture in organization.

(59- "After recession the heroic masculinity of organizations has increased and the importance of short term result has given greater importance than long term benefits and therefore performance becomes a greater issue").

Some executives feel that high performance creates a task oriented drive which may promote a masculine culture. (60- "It must exist in organizations. Performance should be given great deal of importance").

(15- "I seriously don't think so, because again it is the culture of the organization which promotes high performance and when you promote high performance it may create a masculine culture").

They feel that the choice of a man over a woman for a job does exist because women have greater responsibility at home. Some jobs require that the person be more available and there a man may be preferred to a woman. So competence alone cannot be the criteria.

(66- "What happens at the end of the day, this availability also matters, one is the performance, in performance deadlines are there and you have to anyway do it but the other thing is availability. The management can get into the thought process that a man is more available. So that is why the confidence level with men is a little bit higher. Especially, in the recruitment issue they may think twice before hiring a woman.")

The preference for men over women is subtle and may affect overt action but it will not be the only reason guiding the recruitment decision.

(20- "You can't stop people from thinking about it, but whether the thought translates into an action is a different thing. I mean if I am interviewing a girl who has just got married, I will also think that she is going to go on maternity leave, but am I not going to not recruit her only because she married. I don't think so.")

However, they were against special concessions on performance to women. (45- "I think it should be performance driven. Honestly, I am not comfortable if somebody is making concessions like- giving a 10% target to others and a 5 % target to a lady".)

The employee stance regarding heroic masculinity: The existence of heroic masculinity is confirmed by some of the women executives saying that it usually manifests in the areas of hours of work, and having family responsibilities.

(09- "I do agree that heroic masculinity exists. My boss used to tell me that you are leaving at 5:30, you are leaving at 6, but then I used to argue with him if the work is getting done and I am ensuring that my work is done within the target dates you have given me, then what is the issue? Over a period of time they do agree, if the quality of work is good.....")

(73- "Yes it is of course there". For example, in Accounts Department there was one vacancy I referred some female candidate. They were not so interested, because the job means extended hours of work and so they were refusing the woman!").

It is also expressed that though flexible hours are given, the nature of work is such that long hours are inevitable. (10- "What happens is that when you are trying to do a good job, the time factor becomes important. It is not that they are measuring the time, they are measuring the quality, but to deliver that quality, time is taken anyway. So you will find that the hours may be long, but it is not regimentalized. If a man has to work from morning 9 to evening 9 to deliver something, it is not possible for the woman to do it between 10-5, whether she gets the flexibility or not, so she has to work out the time issue for herself").

They identify stereotyping by leaders as the cause for the bias. The expectations and values of the leader create the culture more than other factors.

(11- "While I was working in ***** I did see this, very heavily male culture. We were specifically told to hire more male employees. My personal belief through all my experience is that the values that your leadership believes in usually would dictate whether the organization would have a masculine culture or not.")

The bias is expressed in the form of intolerance to powerful, firm and vocal women. They are often put down by labeling them as emotional or aggressive or unfeminine.

(100- "You also have a lot of people who are very supportive of women but if anyone of them were to actually have a woman boss they probably can't handle it").

(52- "They don't see that as a manager, are you capable of taking tough stand when it is called for and when you stand up for what you believe in. Many times in this organization itself I have been called aggressive but I don't think I am aggressive. I have invariably been called aggressive by men never by women".)

(87- "I have encountered this –“don't get emotional” statement from my boss even it is a rational statement, substantiated with facts!")

(100- "I think it exists. The acceptability quotient sometimes is low for various reasons, one of them being the stereotype of 'Oh! she is being aggressive'.")

(52- I went to Chicago for a project and the manager was asking my colleagues if I can cook, in what way it is that relevant to my job? I always used to think that it is biased a male who wants to see a woman in the kitchen. The fact that she is able to stand shoulder to shoulder with him is bothering him at some level.)

It is also felt that the bias is not propagated by men alone but by women bosses too.

(08- "I think it exists. I have worked in many organizations before and they all have the biases about staying long hours, I have encountered it. In some other organizations I have come across women bosses who actually had that kind of an attitude of not having other women in the team".)

Women bosses justify their action saying that jobs require toughness and firmness and most women are squeamish. One finds in their narrative an implication that women are suitable for people oriented jobs like customer service or HR.

(75- "The industry as a whole is male dominated, but if you look at the offices, there are a fair number of females because a lot of customer service is involved. My office is fully male, in fact I am looking at removing the females from my office because I think it requires a tremendous toughness inside you, and not many ladies are suited for it".)

Heroic masculinity may exist in Indian Corporate Organizations:

Some women executives do not categorically classify their response about the bias of 'heroic masculinity' but say that the bias exists under certain circumstances which can be circumvented or overcome in time. (85- "I think it exists everywhere in some degree...."). (56- "I have seen it in other organizations where there is so much of patriarchal attitude, but this organization is very woman friendly.") (12- "comparatively speaking.... yes, a woman has to prove herself at every stage).

(57- "I would say it is somewhat true. In manufacturing industries and investing banking you will find it, in retail and consumer you won't find it. So it does exist in parts and a lot depends on how the leader thinks about it and whether he/she is actually actively addressing it. We are hyper about D&I and so constantly we check on what is the percentage of women? What are you doing to make it more inclusive? Are we sensitizing hiring managers? Also are we broadening the base, today in our business there are spots in which you will find women and there are others you will not find them at all....")

Bias expresses itself in terms of expectations regarding the job, (34- "Long hours, travel, if you don't travel you are not good, if you are not aggressive you are not good") or they may be some preconceived notions about married women and their commitment to their work (34- "Don't take women of a certain age they will get married then they will go on maternity leave, then they will have issues with their kids"). Women executives make reference to the struggle involved in handling this bias (34- "To be heard itself she has to make serious effort").

16% of the 105 women interviewed feel that the bias exists due to specific factors like supervisor's attitude, organizational history, the wider culture of the place and the number of women in the organization. The bias reduces when women prove themselves and establish their standard of work in the organization.

- **Heroic masculinity is supervisor dependent**

The attitude of the supervisor is one of the main causes of heroic masculinity. Though it may exist in a broader sense in the organization, the attitude of the immediate boss is what will affect women specifically. (15- "It is very, very supervisor dependent. There are some supervisors who have the ability to look at the broader vision and not just focus on a limited performance"). (89- "I think that it is a person thing, but I think a woman does get affected").

The attitude of masculinity may come from women or men bosses. (08- "I had a lot of women bosses in my career and I think some of them have been extremely women friendly and some of them haven't, I think it is based on personality and not gender").

- **When men dominate in number heroic masculinity may increase:** In an 'all male' organization the attitudes are never challenged and hence they may become accepted and unconscious. These attitudes are perceived as bias by women and other minority groups.

(21- "Sometimes the organizational cultural can be masculine in nature. It could be so in places where you have a profusion of only males, where over a period of time you have denied entry to women, then yes, the culture could be masculine and a female coming into it would feel a little disoriented").

(101- "Minority will have some problem only that it is not intentional. It is because we (women) happened to be few in number and in organizations; time is a major constraint the 'long hours' bias may come. In this kind of industry they give importance to time and so the female employees are treated as a secondary choice. There is an opinion that they may not be able to spend that much time at the job.")

- **Organizational history:** The origin and evolution of the organization is one of the major determinants of organizational culture. The masculine attitude could be embedded in the history of the organization too.

(30- "It is very different from one organization to other. In multinationals for example there are a set of basic attitudes for work and they don't get changed by whims of one individual. They could change, but then it has taken them years to do it. A new multinational may have a different situation. In domestic companies in India, the biggest problem is that they are founder influenced because it is owned and run by founders. So if the founder is old fashioned or fixated about some idea then nothing can be changed in the company.)

- **Wider culture of the place, state or nation:** Expectations in an organization are to a great extent determined by the culture of its location. Larger societal attitudes filter into organizations. The increase in professionalism will reduce biased and provincial attitudes. (33- "In Calcutta it was more warm, people oriented, but in Bombay of course there is lot of professionalism. The State's culture

influences the work culture and expectations are defined within it").

What is perceived as bias is influenced by expectations of individuals. In many countries longer breaks for maternity are not expected by employees. But in India the role of a mother and motherhood is given importance and so women perceive bias if long maternity leaves are not given.

(36- "In Singapore for example, maternity is encouraged because the government encourages you to have more children and you would get a tax break if you have more kids. The way they approach is just that they will go out have their baby and they will come back. It is not made into a big issue, it is just those 3 months you are off and then you are incentivized to come back early, so it is a very matter of fact thing. In the West also it is quite matter of fact, but they have their kids a lot later in their 40s. So that is what I meant when I said initially a lot of people opt out in the Indian context because of the family angle. First there is a pressure to have the kid and then there is a pressure to bring up the kid and bring up the kid by your self. Most of my friends and it is really quite sad, recently we had a College reunion and I am the only one, (we had 13 girls in our class) who is pursuing a career. Everyone else has opted out at some point, so some of them opted out much earlier on, some of them under disguise of we are doing consulting, we are doing our own thing, but this flexibility at some level is an opt out. I don't know whether it was so much the office pressures and because the juggle that you have to do and the travel").

(88- "If I compare my experience In the previous organization (US culture) if you perform you are known, it is nothing like you are a woman or a man, but in the Japanese culture it really makes a difference, even before a woman speaks in the meeting she thinks twice").

- **Organizational level:** The women executives feel that the bias of heroic masculinity may be more in the middle levels than at top levels, since the need to deliver is higher and the executives are already recognized for their capability.

(84- "I think it is there to some extent and I think it exists more at the middle management level. I think when you reach the senior levels it is more performance driven and there is higher visibility, so those biases will be less").

- **Preconceptions:** There are preconceptions about women that can sometimes account for the low representation of women at the top.

(39- "There are no senior women on the Board. It is not because they feel that they cannot manage, it is because others feel that they that they will not have energy").

- **Till you prove yourself:** The biases are greater at middle level than at top level. Women executives expressed that rising in a career presupposes capability and visibility and so these biases are lesser at the top.

(85- "When people have seen you deliver and you already have got a certain level of credibility in the organization

then there are not so many questions asked, but I will be candid that yes, at mid levels, I think it does make a difference, people do try and stereotype people into saying these are people who leave early and may not be serious or she is a woman so she has things to do at home and she will only spend X hours, but I look at it this way that if you really are performing on your work you can just ignore some of this noise because in the long run people will see what you are delivering, so noise will keep happening I am not saying no, but you have to get over it".)

04-"I think it takes a while to establish yourself. In the initial phases, there might be inhibitions like I don't know whether she will take the load or will she be able to manage, but I think if you are able to prove yourself then it is ok. This could be true for a man or a woman...)

The proving of oneself is in a way a process of individuation and growth. However the executive women do admit it is harder for a woman as compared to a man.

(35- "You are treated well when you reach a certain level because it is not the environment in the organization or the rules and regulations, it is just that you have been successful and you know how to assert yourself and you have dealt with all kind of people, it is something which is inherent in you that you develop").

(66- "What I have seen and also experienced is that you have to prove yourself at least two times more than what a man will do, and you have to prove it many times, but once you have done that then it increases your acceptance in the organization").

Ways and means to resolve the bias: Women executives also say that the biases can be overcome. While some of the solutions they offer are a compromise at best, some are positive and proactive actions.

- **Shift to roles that require stability:** The compromise decision is to shift to roles which require less travel or demanding hours. While this may be a practical solution it cannot be generalized to suit everybody.

(04- "You might lose opportunities or you might be not considered for certain roles which expect you to travel a lot. I feel we should use that constraint for making it an opportunity like shifting to roles that need stability, where you need a person who should be there for a longer time to see things materialize and actually invest in terms of time...").

- **Increase number of women to shift culture:**

(99-"It is very difficult to typify an organization as having a male or a female culture. I think it depends on a whole lot of factors. There are organizations I know which are very male dominated in fact they don't even hire women. Change in policies will change culture. Hiring women will make a difference").

Women executives make a case for diversity saying that women are more relational and less hierarchical and so they create more openness in the organizational culture. However they do admit that there are men executives who are open and there are women executives who are

biased.

(21- "One of the subtle differences is that women are nonhierarchical in the style of managing. In masculine cultures it is essentially as per protocol, where hierarchy matters the most and where you pull rank in your conversation and your engagement, but with a women manager I have seen the ability to connect to the last person in the lowest level without bringing in this hierarchy issue. So when you have more women I think that you would find the culture little more open and relaxed. I haven't worked in different organization to say this is more masculine, but within the same organization I can see business units, so units where it is essentially male dominated do have a very strong hierarchical culture which is completely built on the ranks and where there are more women you find a little more open and you have the whole thing about you know reaching out at people, engaging across lines that tends to happen a little more, but again I must tell you that I find men and women on both sides").

- **Use it to create balance in oneself:**

Some women feel that the heroic masculinity can be used to bring out the masculine facet in oneself. They do not look at it as a discriminating factor.

(27-" I feel the masculine culture is useful. You need to be a little more aggressive to get there, to be accepted in a man's world and that brings out a certain side or facet your personality which you thought never existed! So in that sense it is very fulfilling because you are more balanced and you also get the respect that you deserve, people look up to you").

- **Analysis of results and discussion:**

Analysis of the interviews reveals the following results - 60% of the sample of 105 women executives believes that the bias of heroic masculinity is not present in corporate India. They opine that family friendly policies, holistic evaluations, equal opportunities provided by the organizations make them people centric. They also say that quality of work is valued over quantity of hours spent in the organization.

24% of 105 women executives interviewed say they have encountered this bias but it is dependent on certain conditions like organizational history, number of women in the organization, organizational level and the wider culture of the place where the work place is located. They feel it is also supervisor dependent and that once a women executive proves herself and gains credibility, she is unlikely to encounter this bias.

16% of the sample says that the bias of heroic masculinity definitely exists. Some of them consider it from a management point of view and say that the increased competition and emphasis is bound to create a more masculine culture. The recession and the pressure of increased population seeking scarce jobs in India, also heighten this competition.

An industry wise analysis of the responses shows that the respondents who feel the bias does not exist are spread across industries (with the exception of shipping industry) evidencing that the bias of heroic masculinity is not experienced by majority of women, across industries, in India. Consultancy, Health, and Insurance sector report absolutely no bias. However the number of women executives interviewed from Insurance and Shipping industry is less than 3 and therefore any conclusion will be



Fig 2: Bar chart showing the opinions of women executives

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masculinity is not experienced by majority of women, across industries, in India. Consultancy, Health, and Insurance sector report absolutely no bias. However the number of women executives interviewed from Insurance and Shipping industry is less than 3 and therefore any conclusion will be unwarranted. The Banking, Finance and IT industry which are heavily dominated by women in India and have a fair number of executives at the very top levels, report the existence of bias to a moderate extent. This can be because the recession which has put a performance pressure on these industries, making them more bottom line oriented and less long term oriented. Table 2 and Fig 3

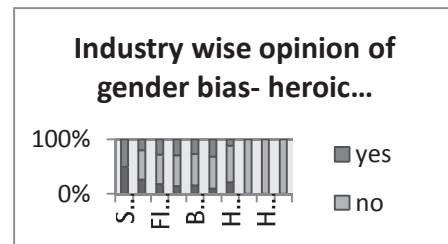


Fig 3: Industry wise response to the existence of 'Heroic Masculinity' as a bias

Foreign companies have their own organizational culture which is different from the culture in Indian companies. Women executives in India perceive that bias of heroic masculinity is greater in foreign companies (48% perceive bias due to heroic masculinity) as compared to (36%) Indian companies. 64% of the women categorically say it doesn't exist in Indian companies while only 52% say so in foreign companies. (Figure 4)

Response Of Women Executives				
Industry	Maybe	No	yes	Total
Banking	3	11	5	19
Consultancy	0	4	0	4
Finance	2	6	3	11
Health	0	4	0	4
Hospitality	2	6	1	9
Insurance	0	1	0	1
It	2	11	6	19
Manufacturing	4	8	3	15
Services	3	12	6	21
Shipping	1	0	1	2
Total	17	63	25	105

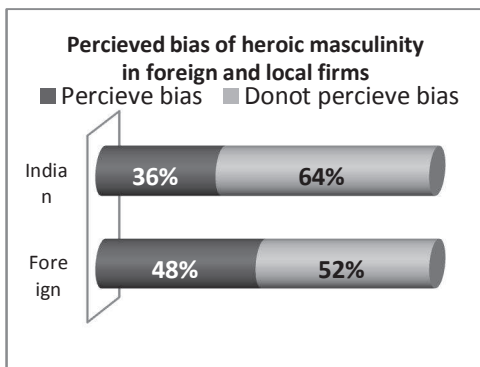


Fig 4: Perception of bias of heroic masculinity in local and foreign organizations

- An organizational level wise analysis of responses reveals that higher levels (very top include VPs, MDs, Country Heads, Global Heads, Directors, CFOs and CEOs) and top (General managers, Associate Directors, and AVPs) feel that heroic masculinity exists more than upper middle levels (Managers, Administrative executives and Senior managers). (See Figure 5) This could be because at higher levels the pressure of delivering performance increases and nurturing activities may be relegated. As expressed by the women executives, the impact of competition, market realities and recession promotes the masculine culture.

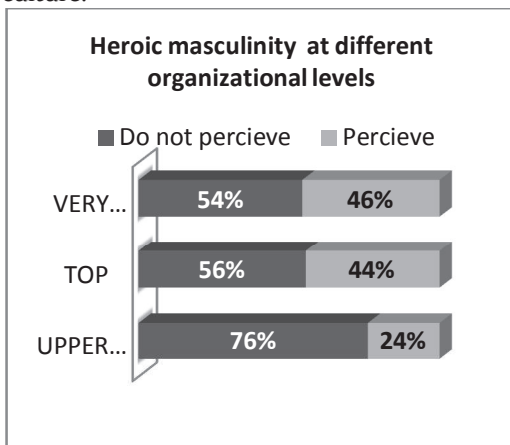


Fig 5: Organizational level wise distribution of responses of women executives regarding heroic masculinity

- The impact of the wider culture of the place enters the organizational culture too. The women executives working in north Indian states of Delhi and Gurgaon report greater bias than the south Indian states. Hyderabad, Bangalore and Chennai have the maximum women executives who categorically deny bias. Mumbai presents a mixed picture with 45% reporting bias and 55% reporting no bias of heroic masculinity.

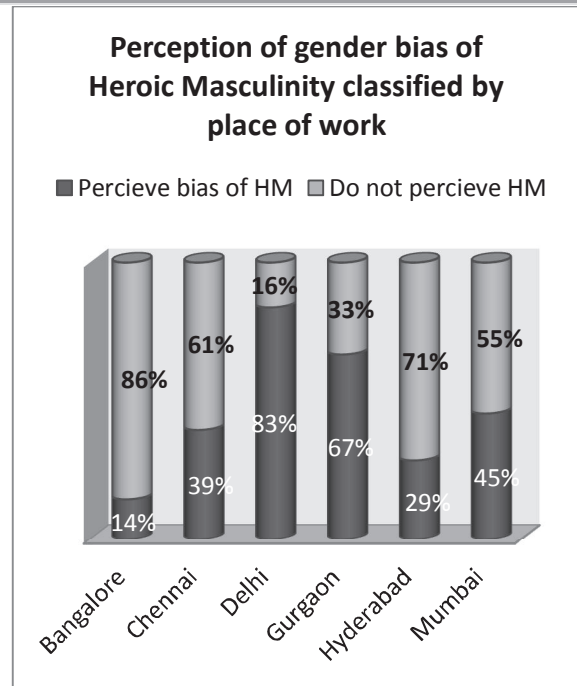


Fig 6: Perception of gender bias of heroic masculinity classified by places of work

Conclusion and suggestions: Heroic masculinity is definitely on the decline in the organizational culture of corporate India, however its impact is not by any means less (Sandhu & Mehta 2008). An androgynous culture presupposes a change in social mind set, a process which is likely to take much time (Metz 2009), (Koprowski 1983). Contrary to studies that say that the exclusionary bias of heroic masculinity is felt most by women executives at middle management and non managerial positions rather than top management, this study shows that women at top and very top level have to contend with it albeit subtly because it is affected by larger factors like the market competition, recession, social and cultural stereotyping which are not controllable (Dubno 1985), (Guillaume & Pochic 2009). The fact that Northern India is more biased as compared to the south is a finding useful for practitioners. The study focuses on the opinions of women executives in India and does not have sample of men executives to corroborate or refute its findings. Since men executives are not exempt from the effects of heroic masculinity in the organization, a study of their perspective is necessary for a holistic picture. A study of women who have opted out of the corporate career to pursue other careers like consultancy, entrepreneurial or in NGOs will provide a more graphic account of the biases. In conclusion it is said that the focus needs to be on an egalitarian culture which will provide a conducive atmosphere for both men and women in the organization. Awareness and communication are key to creating such a culture. The number of women at the top should be increased to achieve this more effectively (Galbraith 2010).

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