The Effects of Organizational Demographics and Social Identity on Relationships among Professional Women

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This paper examines the impact of women's proportional representation in the upper echelons of organizations on hierarchical and peer relationships among professional women at work. I propose that social identity is the principal mechanism through which the representation of women influences their relationships. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses of interview and questionnaire data are used to compare women's same-sex relationships in firms with relatively low and high proportions of senior women. Compared with women in firms with many senior women, women in firms with few senior women were less likely to experience common gender as a positive basis for identification with women, less likely to perceive senior women as role models with legitimate authority, more likely to perceive competition in relationships with women peers, and less likely to find support in these relationships. These results challenge person-centered views about the psychology of women's same-sex work relationships and suggest that social identity may link an organization's demographic composition with individuals' workplace experiences.

Changes in the demographic composition of the labor force are creating more opportunities than ever before for professional women to work with and for other women. If similarity on attributes such as sex makes communication easier and fosters relationships of trust and reciprocity, as some research suggests (Lincoln and Miller, 1979; McPherson and Smith-Lovin, 1987), then these relationships have the potential to provide women with an important source of emotional and instrumental support (Kram, 1986; Ibarra, 1992). Yet research investigating the quality of women's same-sex work relationships has yielded inconsistent results (for a review, see O'Leary, 1988). These studies support one of two competing stereotypes about women's relationships. According to one stereotype, women are insecure, overcontrolling, and unable to engage in team play (e.g., Hennig and Jardim, 1977; Briles, 1987; Madden, 1987); their relationships are therefore competitive and difficult. According to the other stereotype, women are relationship-oriented, nonhierarchical, and interested in sharing power and information (e.g., Helgesen, 1990; Rosener, 1990), which reinforces the notion of solidarity among women and portrays their relationships as mutually supportive. In light of these inconsistencies, further research is needed on work relationships among women and how they might contribute to women's career success.

Proponents of both views rely on women's sex-role socialization to explain the personality traits and behavior patterns they attribute to women, largely ignoring the sociocultural contexts within which women work. These accounts assume that role socializations based on sex are always activated and that they are activated in psychologically similar ways for all women (Wharton, 1992). In addition, researchers focusing on women's sex-role socialization compared with men's may attribute sex differences in patterns of relationships to dispositional differences between men's and women's orientations

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toward interpersonal relationships when social structural explanations may be more valid (Moore, 1990). These person-centered explanations reinforce constraining, often negative stereotypes about women and their capacity to work productively with one another (Kanter, 1977; Riger and Galligan, 1980; Keller and Moglen, 1987).

Two theoretical perspectives relevant to this topic that may be more promising than sex-role socialization are social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978, 1982) and organizational demography (Martin, 1985; Konrad and Gutek, 1987; Zimmer, 1988; Yoder, 1991). This paper unites work in these two areas and extends each to address questions about relationships among women at work. Social identity theory explicates how social structure informs the meaning people attach to their membership in identity groups, such as sex, and how this in turn shapes their social interactions with members of their own and other identity groups. Research on organizational demography investigates the disproportionate representation of some identity groups over others as an important factor in the social structure of the work environment that may influence these processes (Wharton, 1992). Taken together, these two perspectives offer a psychological account of how demographic structure influences the kinds of work relationships women establish with other women.

A widely documented finding in the social identity literature is that people prefer to interact with members of their own identity group than with members of other groups (Tajfel, 1982; Abrams and Hogg, 1990). This line of research has focused largely on situations in which in-group favoritism serves to enhance a person's positive self-image. This paper extends this research by exploring intragroup relationships in those situations in which clear and abiding status differences between groups create negative or ambivalent feelings in members of low-status groups about their group identity. Under these conditions, members of low-status groups are more likely to engage in self-enhancing strategies that undermine solidarity within their groups (Lambert et al., 1960; Tajfel, 1981). Work relationships among women thus are likely to be negatively affected when there are large status disparities between men and women.

While research on organizational demography provides the basis for operationalizing intergroup status differences and defining the organizational conditions that give rise to different group identity and interaction processes, this paper moves beyond traditional demographic research on status differences between men and women, such as work on women's representation in occupations, jobs, or work groups, to focus on women's differentiated representation across levels of the organization's hierarchy. Though some researchers interested in demographic processes have recognized that proportional representation in the upper echelons of organizations is important theoretically (Konrad and Gutek, 1987; Ridgeway, 1988; Pfeffer, 1989), few studies have examined its impact empirically, and none considers its impact on work relationships. According to this approach, if there are few women at higher organizational levels, gender may continue to be a negative status indicator

for women, despite balanced representation at lower organizational levels (Ridgeway, 1988). Women's proportional representation in senior positions of an organization may signal to junior women the extent to which positions of power are attainable by women. This helps to shape the meaning and significance women attach to being female in that organization which, in turn, may influence the nature and quality of their work relationships with other women.

This study examined the relationship between women's proportional representation in organizational positions of authority and the quality of hierarchical and peer relationships among professional women. I investigated these relationships from the perspective of women lawyers working as associates in law firms in which there was a low proportion of women partners (male-dominated firms) and in law firms in which there was a higher proportion of women partners (sex-integrated firms).

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Social and Gender Identity

Cognitive social psychologists developed social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978, 1982; Tajfel and Turner, 1985; Turner, 1987), which researchers have recently begun to apply to organizations (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Kramer, 1991; Tsui, Egan, and O'Reilly, 1992; Wharton, 1992). According to this perspective, "identity" represents "the location of a person in social space" (Gecas, Thomas, and Weigert, 1973: 477). Identity has two components: a personal component derived from idiosyncratic characteristics, such as personality and physical and intellectual traits, and a social component derived from salient group memberships, such as sex, race, class, and nationality (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). The social component of identity involves processes of self-categorization and attaching value to particular social categories (Pettigrew, 1986), such that "an individual's knowledge of his or her memberships in social groups together with the emotional significance of that knowledge" constitute social identity (Turner and Giles, 1981: 24). Social identity acquires meaning through comparison with other groups when status differences between groups are salient. How favorably a group member perceives his or her group compared with other relevant groups determines the adequacy of the person's social identity in that setting.

A basic assumption of social identity theory is that people have a need for and are therefore motivated to achieve and maintain a favorable self-image. When possible, people sustain this image by drawing intergroup comparisons that favor their own group over other groups, and they show a preference for in-group over out-group interactions. Here, the self-enhancement motive operates at the group level and promotes in-group solidarity, cooperation, and support (Hogg and Abrams, 1990).

Though social identity research has mostly been conducted in settings in which group members are able to sustain positive feelings toward their group, it has shown that when there are clear and abiding status differences between

groups, members of low-status groups find it difficult to maintain positive in-group distinctiveness and hence find in-group interactions less attractive (for a review, see Hinkle and Brown, 1990). Under these circumstances, members of low-status groups may engage in personal self-enhancing strategies. Williams and Giles (1978) have suggested that such people may actively dissociate from members of their group by attempting to distinguish themselves as exceptional or uncharacteristically worthy in comparison with other group members. When intergroup comparisons prove unsatisfactory, in-group rather than out-group members thus become the referents for self-enhancing comparisons. Under these circumstances, the self-enhancement motive threatens in-group solidarity, cooperation, and support (Williams and Giles, 1978).

Another aspect of social identity, which has implications for relationships among members of a group, is group identification. According to social identity theory, identification with a group is "a perceptual cognitive construct . . . not necessarily associated with any specific behaviors or affective states" but, rather, based in a sense of oneself as "psychologically intertwined with the fate of a group" (Ashforth and Mael, 1989: 21). Members' identification with their group is strong to the extent that they perceive their own capacity to succeed in any given setting as dependent on how well other group members are doing. Identification with the group involves an emotional investment in both the successes and failures of one's group (Ashforth and Mael, 1989) and positive, negative, or ambivalent feelings toward the group and its members, depending on whether group membership bodes well or poorly for one's well-being (Tajfel, 1981).

Women's gender identity is one aspect of their social identity and refers to the meaning women attach to their membership in the category "female." Based on the assumption, well-documented in the research literature, that our society accords men dominant status over women (Webster and Foschi, 1988), social identity theory posits that women construct their gender identity by drawing comparisons between their own group and men (Williams and Giles, 1978). Such comparisons strengthen women's identification with women by reinforcing a perception of their own individual fates as interdependent with the fate of women as a group. In settings in which women can perceive their group favorably relative to men, as when there is evidence of women's advancement, women's identifying with women will be a positive experience and can serve to strengthen relationships among them. In settings in which women perceive little basis for drawing favorable comparisons and, instead, view their sex as a liability, as when there is little evidence of women's advancement, women's identifying with other women will be a negative experience and may actually interfere with the development of constructive relationships among them.

Organizational Demography

Demographic characteristics of organizations, such as race and sex segregation and group composition, help to shape

the meaning people attach to their identity group memberships at work (Wharton, 1992). This, in turn, structures people's relationships to their groups and, by extension, to members of their groups. While organizational demographics may thus be related to the nature and quality of work relationships among members of the same identity group, research linking organizational demographics to the development of work relationships has focused largely on interactions between members of different groups, such as relationships between men and women (e.g., Gutek and Morasch, 1982; South et al., 1982; Fairhurst and Snavely, 1983) and blacks and whites (Alderfer et al., 1983; Thomas and Alderfer, 1989). Kanter's (1977) analysis of the "queen bee syndrome" (Staines, Jayaratne, and Tavris, 1974) explicates the only direct theoretical link between an organization's demographic structure and the nature of work relationships between members of the same group. Queen bees are token women in traditionally male-dominated settings whom male colleagues reward for denigrating other women and for actively working to keep other women from joining them.

Kanter's focus on token status as the critical explanatory factor in these relationships constitutes an important theoretical shift from the person-centered explanations of socialization theorists. Building on Kanter's approach, others have argued that additional aspects of demography, such as a predominance of one group over others in organizational positions of authority, also deserve consideration (Gutek, 1985; Yoder, 1991). In particular, some researchers have speculated that white men's extreme overrepresentation in organizational positions of authority may have a negative impact on women and nonwhite subordinates (Konrad and Gutek, 1987; Ridgeway, 1988; Pfeffer, 1989). Ridgeway (1988) has suggested that the disproportionate representation of men over women in senior organizational positions may highlight for women their limited mobility and reinforce their lower status as women, even in work groups composed entirely of women. When this occurs, women form lower expectations for the positions women, and they as women, are likely to achieve in the organization. Hence the extent to which power differentials exist along sex lines may help to shape the meaning women attach to their membership in the category "female."

Hypotheses

Hierarchical relationships between women. A correlation between identity and hierarchical group membership, such that men tend to predominate in positions of authority while women tend to occupy more junior positions, may communicate to junior women that membership in their gender group is incompatible with membership in more powerful organizational groups. In these male-dominated organizations, senior women, as members of these two ostensibly incompatible groups, may present a dilemma for junior women as they assess their own prospects for promotion. To make sense of a woman's rise to the top, junior women may come to view the possibility of success as available only to women who shed their feminine identity and are not truly women because they act like men or who

have attained their positions of authority illegitimately. This tension may make it difficult for junior women to respect senior women and to use gender-based identification with them as a source of support, rendering the development of productive, developmental relationships with them unlikely. Identifying with senior women is a negative experience, since women's scarcity in senior positions bodes poorly for the fate of other women in the organization.

By contrast, when women perceive that the boundary to top positions is permeable, and it is credibly so, their gender identity is less likely to create problems, because they are less likely to perceive their sex as incompatible with success and promotion. Rather than presenting a dilemma, senior women in these sex-integrated organizations are likely to represent to junior women evidence of women's capacity to succeed, and identifying with women is likely to be a positive experience. Able to draw on shared gender, as well as benefit from differences in experience, knowledge, and skill, junior women are more likely to construct satisfying developmental relationships with their senior women counterparts.

According to this perspective, the relative presence or absence of senior women signals the compatibility between female gender and organizational success, making gender identification a more or less positive experience for junior women. This, in turn, has implications for women's hierarchical relationships. I expect that junior women in firms with few women in senior positions (i.e., male-dominated firms) will be more critical of senior women than will junior women in firms with a relatively high proportion of senior women (i.e., sex-integrated firms). More specifically,

Hypothesis 1a (H1a): Junior women in male-dominated firms will be less likely to identify with senior women as a source of validation and support than will junior women in sex-integrated firms.

Hypothesis 1b (H1b): Junior women in male-dominated firms will be less likely to view senior women's authority as legitimate than will junior women in sex-integrated firms.

Hypothesis 1c (H1c): Junior women in male-dominated firms will be less likely to view senior women as good role models than will junior women in sex-integrated firms.

Peer relationships among women. If women seeking to advance in the organization perceive their gender as a barrier to upward mobility—a barrier signaled by a scarcity of women in senior positions—they may perceive links to other women as detrimental to their careers and thus may attempt to create distance between themselves and their women peers. Kanter (1977) reported that the men in her study often initiated and reinforced this tendency by setting up invidious comparisons between women in which one was characterized as superior and the other as inferior, exaggerating traits in both cases. The "successful" woman, relieved to be so judged, was then reluctant to enter an alliance with the identified failure, for fear of jeopardizing her own acceptance. Instead, she had an interest in maintaining the distance by reinforcing the perceived differences in their capabilities (for example, by comparing herself favorably with the other in front of her senior colleagues). Such attempts to

maintain positive identity by differentiating oneself from fellow group members undermine solidarity within the subordinate group (Abrams and Hogg, 1990). In this situation, women identify with one another in that they perceive themselves as interdependent because one's evaluation is contingent on the other's, but it is a negative experience. Kanter predicted that with larger numbers of women, supportive alliances would be more likely to develop. This study tests whether that predicted outcome may also be contingent on the degree to which women are represented in positions of formal organizational authority.

It follows that when resources and opportunities are scarce for women, relationships between women may also be more competitive. Keller and Moglen (1987) have suggested that in these circumstances women tend to compare themselves with one another, rather than with men, in their assessments of whether and how they will make it to the top. A perception that only one or two women will succeed may promote rivalries among women, pitting them against one another. This observation is consistent with Broder's (1993) finding that female reviewers for the National Science Foundation's Economics Program were harsher critics of women's proposals than were male reviewers. She attributed her finding to the small percentage of women academics in economics, which may lead women to compete with one another for what they perceive to be a fixed number of "female slots." Again, this is a situation in which women identify with one another because they perceive their fates to be interdependent, but the experience is a negative one.

By contrast, women in firms with higher proportions of senior women may experience their working environment as more hospitable to women, and it may easier for them to identify with women peers as positive sources of support, rather than as competitors for limited resources. This leads to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2a (H2a): Junior women in male-dominated firms will characterize more of their relationships with women peers as competitive than will junior women in sex-integrated firms.

Hypothesis 2b (H2b): Junior women in male-dominated firms will characterize fewer of their relationships with women peers as supportive than will junior women in sex-integrated firms.

METHOD

Sample

The main criteria for selecting the organizational domain from which to draw a sample of participants for this research were (1) variability across organizations in the proportional distribution of women and men in senior positions and (2) comparability across organizations in hierarchical structure (i.e., what was a senior position in one was comparably senior in the other), overall size, type of work, and proportional distribution of women and men in junior positions. Law firms, with easily identifiable partners and associates and with status and job responsibilities relatively similar across firms for people in these positions, met these criteria. In addition, law firms have structures

similar to other organizations of professionals, including accounting firms, management consulting firms, and universities, in which up-or-out policies typically govern career paths and women encounter similar barriers to top positions (Chamberlain, 1988; Morrison and Von Glinow, 1990).

I identified eligible law firms from the 1987 *NALP Law Directory,* which presents demographic and other descriptive data for over 1,000 law firms in the U.S. In the top 251 U.S. law firms, the proportion of women partners averages 11.1 percent and ranges from zero (in one firm) to 23 percent (in two firms) (Epstein, 1993). I defined a sex-integrated firm operationally as one in which at least 15 percent of the partners were women, because using a higher percentage would have yielded an inadequate number of firms from which to select. I further restricted the pool of eligible firms to those with at least 40 attorneys, since smaller firms were likely to introduce more variability in firm culture (Epstein, 1993). In the geographic area from Boston to Washington, D. C. (the area to which limited finances confined my data collection), eight firms of sufficient size met the sex-integrated criterion. I randomly selected four firms from this group. Three of these firms were large, employing at least 100 attorneys, and one was about half this size. The proportion of women associates ranged from 38 percent to 47 percent. Their legal work varied but primarily involved litigation and corporate, real estate, and labor law.

To control for the potentially confounding effects of these firm characteristics, I created a procedure for matching male-dominated firms with the sex-integrated firms. My operational definition of a male-dominated firm depended on firm size: For the larger firms, the criterion was no more than 5 percent women partners; for the smaller firms, it was not more than two women partners (or somewhat more than 5 percent). Using a uniform criterion of 5 percent women partners proved too restrictive, because I could not find a firm to match the small sex-integrated firm. This would have required finding a small male-dominated firm with only one woman partner, and there was none. I thus expanded the criterion for inclusion in this category to include small firms with no more than two women partners, while retaining the 5-percent rule for the larger firms. There were 66 male-dominated firms of sufficient size (at least 40 attorneys). From this set I selected four firms, one to match each of the four sex-integrated firms in overall size, geographic location, ratio of male to female associates, and types of legal work.

Table 1 summarizes the sex composition of the eight firms in the study. In the pair of smaller firms, there are higher percentages of women partners than in the other firms. Consequently, I conducted parallel sets of statistical analyses, one on the full dataset and one that excluded this pair of firms. Analyses of this restricted sample replicated all the statistically significant findings from analyses of the full dataset, which are reported below.

Participants. The *Martindale-Hubble Law Directory* provided the names of the women associates in each of the firms,

Table 1

Percentage of Women in Firms

Matched pairs of firms*	Percent women in partnership		Percent women in associateship	
	Male-dominated	Sex-integrated	Male-dominated	Sex-integrated
A	.05	.15	.40	.38
B	.04	.18	.40	.40
C	.05	.16	.41	.47
D†	.11	.29	.50	.43

* Firms in pairs A, B, and C employed between 100 and 200 attorneys; the firms in pair D employed approximately 50 attorneys.

† The relatively higher proportions of women partners in pair D reflects the smaller size of the partnerships in these firms. In absolute numbers of women partners, the male-dominated firm in this pair was similar to the other male-dominated firms in the study, whereas the sex-integrated firm had fewer women partners than the other sex-integrated firms.

and I sent them an introductory letter describing the study and asking them to participate. I was able to reach 108 women (70 percent of those who received letters) by follow-up phone calls; only eight women (or 7 percent of those contacted) declined participation, citing lack of time as the primary reason. Most were enthusiastic about the prospect of participating in the study, and no known organizational dimension distinguished the women who declined to participate.

I randomly selected four women from each of the six large firms in the study and three women from each of the two smaller firms. This process yielded a total sample of 30 women attorneys working as associates in these firms: 15 in male-dominated firms and 15 in sex-integrated firms. All participants were white, but one also identified herself as Hispanic. Table 2 provides further information about the participants.

Table 2

Characteristics of Participants

Characteristics	Male-dominated firms	Sex-integrated firms
No. married	9	10
No. with at least one child	5	5
No. in corporate practice	4	1
No. in litigation	6	8
No. in other practice area	5	6
Mean age	32.0	32.3
Years of practice	4.9	5.0

Data Sources

Interviews. Following Kram and Isabella's (1985) method for studying peer relationships in career development, I conducted two in-depth, semistructured interviews with each participant. The first interview oriented participants to the study and was dedicated primarily to collecting personal history data and perceptions about the role, if any, gender played in their work lives. The second interview session was dedicated to collecting data on women's relationships with

their coworkers. At the start of this session, to focus the participant's attention on her significant relationships, I asked each participant to draw a diagram, or relational map, to represent graphically her relationships to significant coworkers. Significant relationships were those based on work or social ties without which her work life would be changed significantly, for better or worse. Diagrams could include people with whom she spent a significant amount of time, people who had a significant impact on her ability to do her job, and people who depended on her or on whom she depended for work-related or personal reasons. The diagram could include superiors, peers, and subordinates and identified each person's sex and organizational position. I used the remainder of the interview to explore the quality and nature of those relationships, focusing on issues of friendship, support, sexuality, conflict, and competition.

Each interview took between one and a half and two and a half hours to complete; thus I spent a total of four to five hours interviewing each participant. Each interview covered a standard set of questions, although I encouraged participants to raise questions and discuss a variety of additional, related topics as well. This interview format is both sufficiently structured to ensure that certain topics are covered and sufficiently flexible to allow the interviewee to focus on issues of particular importance to her (Kram and Isabella, 1985). The interviews took place off work premises (mostly in participants' homes) and were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

There were over 1,000 pages of transcribed interview data. I content analyzed these data for thematic categories, as described below, to transform them into quantitative variables. This enabled me to identify and examine systematically the constructs relevant to my hypotheses.

Questionnaires. I developed a questionnaire as a second source of data to corroborate findings from the interviews. The questionnaire items paralleled the thematic categories I used in the content analysis and thus served as alternative measures of the constructs in the hypotheses. These complementary methods produce more valid results than either method alone (Jick, 1979). I also included questionnaire items to measure other dimensions of women's relationships that participants discussed during their interviews but that hypotheses did not address directly. The items are listed in the third column of Appendix A.

Each item on the questionnaire was based on statements participants made during their interviews. This empathic approach to questionnaire development, in which items originate from participants' own statements, increases construct validity (Alderfer, 1968). Participants indicated their level of agreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

I mailed the questionnaire to each participant. Twenty-nine of the 30 participants completed and returned the survey. I made repeated efforts to obtain the questionnaire from the single remaining nonrespondent, but to no avail.

Reexamining her interview data revealed no apparent reason for her failure to return the questionnaire.

Operationalizations of Hierarchical Relationships

Content analysis. To do the content analysis of hierarchical relationships, I first collected all excerpts from the interviews in which participants made reference to women partners, either as individuals or as a group. Most of these excerpts came from responses to the questions, "What are the women partners in your firm like?" and "Do you think your experience at work would change if there were more (fewer) women in the partnership?" The hypotheses guided the thematic categories I developed to classify responses. When participants referred to concepts or described experiences using the same or closely similar terms to those I used in the formulation of a hypothesis, I was able to use those terms directly to define a thematic category. An example of this was participants' descriptions of women partners as good or poor role models. Other categories of experience about which I had hypotheses were broader and therefore required further refinement and operationalization based on interview responses. For example, I had a hypothesis about the legitimacy of women partners' authority, but I was uncertain as to whether this issue was salient and, if so, in what terms participants would frame it. Hence, I searched the data for excerpts that I thought addressed women partners' authority and, in this way, developed inductively the specific thematic categories to measure this construct. When participants explicitly discussed a particular theme in both positive and negative terms (for example, on the theme of women partners' competence, participants described both competent and incompetent women partners), I created separate categories to capture both aspects of the theme. Table 3 presents the final list of thematic categories, together with the criteria I developed for classifying responses. Appendix A contains representative excerpts from interviews as examples of responses in each category.

Two thematic categories operationalized women's gender-based identification with women partners as a source of validation and support (H1a): (1) statements referring to gender as a source of shared experience and mutual understanding and (2) statements criticizing women partners for acting too much like men. Three categories emerged to operationalize participants' perceptions of the legitimacy of women partners' authority (H1b): (1) statements that women partners were competent, (2) statements that they were incompetent, and (3) statements that they relied inappropriately on their sexuality to advance in the organization. Finally, there were two categories formulated directly from hypothesis 1c, concerning participants' assessments of women partners as role models: (1) statements describing women partners explicitly as good role models and (2) statements describing them explicitly as poor role models. I classified each participant according to whether or not she mentioned a particular theme at any point in her interviews when discussing any or all of the women partners in her firm.

Questionnaires. I then developed pairs of questionnaire items to tap perceptions of women partners on the themes

Table 3

Criteria for Classification into a Thematic Category

Thematic category	Types of statements
Characterizations of women partners*	
Gender as a source of shared experiences and understanding	Women partners are easier to talk to, have a relationship with, have intimate conversations with, or have conversations with about shared interests because they are women; women partners share generally the concerns of women.
Act like men	Women partners act like men, are masculine, or male-like; they are not feminine.
Competent	Women partners are competent, good at what they do, stars, or superstars.
Incompetent	Women partners are incompetent, not good, or subcompetent; or making certain women partners was a mistake. (This category does not include statements about women not being stars or superstars.)
Inappropriate expressions of sexuality	Women partners are inappropriately flirtatious with men, may have used their sexuality to advance in the firm or to impress male partners, have slept with male partners when they were associates, or pander to men in a sexual way.
Good role models	Women partners are good role models or behave in ways that associates admire or would like to emulate.
Poor role models	Women partners are not good role models or behave in ways that associates would not like to emulate.
Characterizations of peer relationships†	
Supportive	Explicit descriptions of a relationship with a woman associate as supportive (often in response to the question, "Is there anyone you go to for support?"); a general statement about women being supportive of one another, followed by a discussion of a particular relationship, implying that this is an example of a supportive relationship; statements about a relationship as one of friendship in which she confides in the person (perhaps in ways she cannot confide in others), shares experiences with the person because they are both women, or makes concerted efforts to give and receive support.
Distressed due to competitiveness	Explicit descriptions of a relationship as having involved, at one time or another, feelings of competitiveness that became problematic or difficult in some way for the relationship, e.g., she expresses anger or frustration with the person as a result of these feelings or feels undermined by the competitiveness.

* A participant was classified in a thematic category if her description of a woman partner, a subgroup of women partners, or women partners generally met the criteria listed. These categories were not mutually exclusive.
† A relationship was classified in a thematic category if the participant's description of the relationship met the criteria listed. These categories were not mutually exclusive.

developed for the content analysis. One item of each pair expresses the theme in positive terms, the other item expresses the theme in negative terms. I reverse-coded responses to one item in the pair and used the mean of the pair as the parallel measure of each thematic category.

I also included four additional pairs of items on the questionnaire to capture other dimensions on which participants characterized women partners. The content analysis did not reflect these dimensions, either because the hypotheses did not address them directly or because raters were unable to identify and classify such statements reliably. One such pair of items measured participants' perceptions of the image of women portrayed by women partners (positive or negative). I included these items to assess further women associates' evaluations of senior women as representatives of their social identity group. Other pairs of items included statements about women partners' personalities (difficult or pleasant), their helpfulness (helpful or not helpful), and their political power (powerful or powerless). I then computed the mean of all 18 items to serve as a single, more global measure of participants' attitudes toward women partners.

Operationalizations of Peer Relationships

Content analysis. I used a procedure similar to that above to analyze peer relationships. First, I reviewed the interview transcripts to identify and isolate all references to women associates. Participants provided more detail about specific relationships with women associates than they did about women partners and were more likely to discuss specific people rather than women associates as a group. Therefore, instead of classifying participants according to their characterizations of their women peers, I classified each relationship with a woman associate named on a participant's relational map. To facilitate this, I organized each participant's references to women associates by relationship.

I then classified each relationship according to the dimensions about which I had formulated hypotheses: (1) distressed due to competitiveness, or not, and (2) serving a supportive function, or not. For competitiveness, the perceived source of competitiveness could have been the participant, the other woman, or both. The category did not include relationships simply reported as competitive, with no description or indication of negative affect associated with the competition. Support could be either personal or work-related. This category did not include relationships in which the support went only one way, i.e., a person may have gone to the respondent for support, but she did not seek the other person out for this purpose. Also not included were relationships described as primarily negative, even if the respondent did not explicitly address the issue of supportiveness. Appendix A presents representative excerpts from interviews as examples of relationships in each category.

Questionnaires. I then developed pairs of questionnaire items to measure peer relationships on these and other dimensions. These items are listed in the third column of Appendix A. Again, each pair of items expresses a theme in both positive and negative terms. Pairs of questionnaire items served as parallel measures of the degree to which women associates experienced distress in their relationships as a result of competitiveness and the degree to which they

experienced their peer relationships as supportive. As discussed above, the questionnaire also addressed several additional themes that were not included in the content analysis of the interview data. Pairs of items measured perceptions of women associates' competence and perceptions of women associates' expressions of sexuality at work. As revealed in the content analysis of women's hierarchical relationships, participants used these dimensions to explain how women had achieved positions of authority in their firms. To the extent that participants viewed their own capacity to succeed as linked to the success or failure of their women peers, it seemed that their assessments of their peers on these dimensions might provide further insight into these relationships. To examine the extent and nature of women's identification with their women peers further, I included another pair of items to measure perceptions of the image of women (positive or negative) their peers portray.

The mean of each pair of items yielded separate measures of competition, support, competence, sexuality, and image. I also combined responses to these 10 items into a single mean to serve as a global measure of attitudes toward women associates.

Reliability and Validity

Interrater reliability. The content analysis reported here was part of a larger analysis of the interview content. The larger analysis involved over 100 thematic categories developed within seven domains. This study focuses on two of the seven domains: references to women partners and relationships with women peers.[1] The large size of the complete data set and limits on my resources made it impossible to conduct interrater reliability analyses for all categories using all of the data. Hence, in accordance with standard practice, I sampled categories within domains as well as data to conduct these analyses.

The content analysis of participants' references to women partners involved seven thematic categories. The unit for categorization was the participant: She either did or did not mention a particular theme in her interviews when she was discussing any or all of the women partners in her firm. Therefore, I made a total of 210 decisions (30 participants × 7 categories) when I categorized participants' references to women partners. For the interrater reliability analysis, I randomly selected four of the seven categories (57 percent) on which to train a second coder. I then randomly selected one participant from each of the eight firms, or 27 percent of the sample, and presented the second coder with these participants' references to women partners. In this way, the second coder categorized a randomly selected subset of the data; this subset involved 32 categorization decisions, or 15 percent of the total. The second coder was blind both to the hypotheses and to the type of firm from which a participant was drawn. In our independent assessments of the data, we agreed on 29 of the 32 decisions, or 91 percent of these cases. There appeared to be no systematic differences between our categorizations of data as a function of either firm type or category.

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Ely (1989, 1990, 1992) presented analyses of data from the other domains developed in this research, including, for example, references to men partners and perceptions of how men and women are different.

The content analysis of participants' relationships with women peers involved two categories. The unit for categorization was the relationship. Participants reported on a total of 135 relationships. For the interrater reliability analysis, I trained a second coder on the two categories and presented him with a random sample of 18 relationships (nine from each type of firm), or 13 percent of the sample. Again, the second coder was blind both to the hypotheses and to the type of firm from which a relationship was drawn. In our independent assessments of the data, we agreed on all categorizations of relationships.

Interitem reliability. Interitem reliabilities of the 18-item scale designed to assess attitudes toward women partners and the 10-item scale designed to measure attitudes toward women associates were .91 and .90, respectively, as measured by Cronbach's alpha. As the high degree of interitem reliability for both scales suggests, the pairs of oppositely worded items in these scales are not independent of one another; nonetheless, it was important to examine item pairs separately to provide specific corroborating evidence for the results of the content analysis. As shown in Appendix B, all correlations between pairs of items were statistically significant, ranging from .38 to .61 ($p < .05$, one-tailed test).

Construct validity. I obtained evidence for the construct validity of measures by performing a series of correlation analyses in the spirit of Campbell and Fiske's (1959) classic multimethod-multitrait approach to construct validation. The criterion for validity is to show a significant correlation between alternative measures of the same construct. In this study, the content analysis of interview data and the questionnaire responses constituted two such methods. A second source of evidence for validity was to show a significant correlation between a construct measured as a content-analytic category and its oppositely worded questionnaire item. Because the two opposite constructs should be highly correlated, different measures of them should also be highly correlated. A table of these results is in Appendix B. Overall, the results show strong evidence for the construct validity of both the categorizations from the content analysis and the questionnaire items for the constructs used to test directly the hypotheses of this study. There was only one construct, perceptions of women partners as competent, for which there was no evidence of validity. This is because there was virtually no variability in this thematic category: All but one participant mentioned at some point in her interviews that a woman partner was competent.

Data Analysis

I used the data I collected in this study to examine the same phenomena from different methodological perspectives, in the spirit of triangulation (Webb et al., 1966; Jick, 1979). The content analysis and questionnaire responses served as alternative measures of the constructs relevant to my hypotheses. From these two methods, I was able to construct parallel statistical comparisons of women's relationships in male-dominated and sex-integrated firms. In

particular, to test hypotheses about hierarchical relationships, I performed generalized least squares (GLS) and logit regressions using mean questionnaire responses and dummy-coded variables from the content analysis, respectively, as the dependent variables. To correct for the potential problem of nonindependence of observations within firms, I used a block diagonal regression procedure (Judge et al., 1985) and logit regressions using an application of Huber's (1967) formula for maximum-likelihood estimation. The block diagonal regression procedure uses the intercorrelation among error terms within firms (rho) to produce a variance-covariance matrix of disturbances. The matrix contains the product of rho and the within-firm variance of residuals as the diagonal elements and the within-firm variance of residuals as the elements of the off-diagonal blocks. The Cholesky decomposition of the matrix produces the elements required for variable transformation. GLS regression analysis then provides the best linear unbiased estimate of the beta coefficient. I ignored rho estimates of less than .10 and, in these circumstances, assumed independent error terms across observations within firms (i.e., an intercorrelation of zero). Similarly, Huber's formula, as applied here, produced the appropriate coefficient estimators for the logit regressions. Each model contained firm type (coded 0 if male-dominated and 1 if sex-integrated) as the independent variable. I also used the block diagonal regression procedure to test hypotheses about peer relationships as a function of firm type. The dependent variables in these regressions were mean questionnaire responses and the number of relationships classified in a particular content-analytic category. Because all of the hypotheses were directional, I used one-tailed tests in the analyses.

Finally, neither the content analysis, which classifies experience into relatively broad categories, nor the questionnaire, which restricts experience to single, simple dimensions, was adequate to capture the nuance contained in people's own accounts. These accounts provide deeper insights into the psychological aspects of women's relationships. Hence, as part of this analysis, I also drew on excerpts from interviews and interpreted them directly to provide "a more complete, *holistic,* and contextual portrayal" of women's workplace relationships (Jick, 1979: 603). These excerpts serve to illustrate and further inform findings from the content and questionnaire analyses.

RESULTS

Hierarchical Relationships

I based hypotheses concerning women's hierarchical relationships on the notion that women in male-dominated firms may perceive a contradiction between being female and being successful in their firms. I had expected that this perceived contradiction would lead women to believe that success was available only to women who shed their feminine identity or who had attained their positions of authority illegitimately and, moreover, that these beliefs would compromise their ability to develop constructive relationships with the senior women in their firms.

Conversely, I had expected that in sex-integrated firms, the presence of a significant number of senior women would demonstrate to junior women that being female is not a barrier to success. I expected that this greater sex-integration at senior levels would create the conditions for more positive identification experiences, and hence more constructive relationships, between junior and senior women.

As expected, compared with participants in sex-integrated firms, those in male-dominated firms rated women partners more negatively on the 18-item scale designed to assess women's overall attitudes toward women partners. Results from separate analyses of interview themes and corresponding questionnaire items, shown in Tables 4 and 5, respectively, provide some support for each of the more specific hypotheses concerning women's hierarchical relationships. Table 6 summarizes the statistically significant results from these two data sources.

Table 4

Content Analysis of References to Women Partners by Women Associates in Male-dominated and Sex-integrated Firms*

Theme	Proportion of women who cited the theme: Male-dominated firms	Proportion of women who cited the theme: Sex-integrated firms	*t*
Gender as a source of shared experiences/understanding	.40	.80	2.40••
Act like men	.33	.13	−1.98••
Competent	.93	1.00†	.57
Incompetent	.27	.13	−.68
Inappropriate expressions of sexuality	.33	.07	−1.67•
Good role models	.20	.40	1.41•
Poor role models	.27	.00‡	−2.38••

• $p < .10$; •• $p < .05$; one-tailed tests.
* Dependent variable is a dummy variable; 1 designates participants who cited the theme, 0 designates those who did not.
† One observation set equal to .999 to produce variance required for calculating coefficient estimates.
‡ One observation set equal to .001 to produce variance required for calculating coefficient estimates.

Positive gender identification. There was strong support for hypothesis 1a, that junior women in male-dominated firms would be less likely to identify with senior women as a source of validation and support than would women in sex-integrated firms. One indicator of such identification was whether or not participants reported feeling a bond of mutual understanding with women partners based on shared experiences as women. As expected, results from both the interview and questionnaire data showed that women in sex-integrated firms were more likely than their counterparts in male-dominated firms to report such feelings.

Participants in sex-integrated firms routinely attributed positive aspects of their relationships with women partners to their shared identity as women. One participant referred

Table 5

Mean Questionnaire Ratings of Attitudes toward Women Partners by Women Associates in Male-dominated and Sex-integrated Firms*

	Male-dominated firms Mean (s.d.)	Sex-integrated firms Mean (s.d.)	*t*
Attitudes toward women partners(18-item scale)	3.69 (.57)	4.05 (.30)	1.93•
Item pairs			
High/low identification based on gender	3.20 (.84)	3.64 (.79)	2.78••
Act like men/do not act like men	4.10 (.63)	4.14 (.72)	.17
Competent/incompetent	4.03 (.79)	4.45 (.39)	.99
Appropriately/inappropriately sexual	4.03 (.97)	4.62 (.49)	1.81•
Good/poor role models	3.47 (.79)	4.04 (.37)	2.46•
Portray positive/negative image of women	3.60 (.66)	4.32 (.32)	3.71•••
Personalities pleasant/ difficult	3.32 (.64)	3.86 (.41)	1.94•
Helpful/unhelpful	3.20 (.77)	3.32 (.70)	.44
Politically powerful/ powerless	3.57 (.96)	3.61 (.71)	.23

• $p < .05$; •• $p < .01$; ••• $p < .001$; one-tailed tests.
* A high score indicates an affectively positive rating on a 5-point Likert-type scale.

Table 6

Summary of Statistically Significant Findings: Hierarchical Relationships*

		Statistical evidence	
Theme	Direction	Interviews	Questionnaires
Gender as source of shared experiences/understandings with partners	SI > MD	+	+
Partners act like men	SI < MD	+	0
Partners inappropriately express sexuality	SI < MD	+	+
Partners good role models	SI > MD	+	+†
Partners poor role models	SI < MD	+	
Partners' personalities pleasant	SI > MD	NA	+
Partners portray positive image of women	SI > MD	NA	+
Overall positive view of partners	SI > MD	NA	+

* SI = Sex-integrated, MD = Male-dominated firms; + = Differences between firm types reached statistical significance at, minimally, $p < .10$; 0 = Differences between firm types were not statistically significant; NA = Statistical analysis not conducted because category was excluded from content analysis of interview data.
† Corresponding positive and negative thematic categories in interview data were combined into single mean response to pair of questionnaire items.

to the "identification factor" in her relationship with a woman partner: "We have times when we interact like women typically do when they're in a more social situation. Something strikes us as funny and we begin to giggle, to have a sort of telepathy that escapes the men in the room." Another said she had "a rapport with [a woman partner] because she was a woman" and, as a result, found her to be "very open, very supportive." Still another emphasized the empathy she felt from women partners who could identify with the experiences women encountered: The women partners "understand that when you send me out on a meeting alone, I'm as likely as not to be across the table from somebody who's 'dearing' me or something like that." Unlike their counterparts in male-dominated firms, these participants often stated that women partners went out of their way to assist the women associates in their firm:

> [The women partners] know more of what you're going through so when you are doing a good job [they will be] the ones who will be actively trying to foster your career. . . . [Among the women partners] there's more of a sense of, "Well, if this really is a good person then maybe the sources of support for a male associate are not available to her, so I have to be out front, and I have to do these things to make sure that she doesn't get lost in the shuffle."

Participants in male-dominated firms not only provided significantly fewer such accounts of their women partners; several expressed explicitly their disappointment and frustration with women partners for failing to meet their expectations in this regard. One participant described a woman partner in her firm as "just the opposite of why I described I like women. It doesn't seem to me that she's accessible at all as a person." Another said she expected "women partners to be nice to women because, gee, we're all in this together," and was sorely disappointed that this had not been the case in her firm.

As expected, the interview data showed that participants in male-dominated firms were more likely to criticize women partners for acting too much like men. One woman complained that the women partners in her firm were women "whose femaleness is not noticed" and who are "modeling more on men." Participants' perceptions of women partners in this regard contributed directly to their sense that they would receive little support from them. One participant explained: "The women who are going to become partners here are going to be women who act pretty much like men. They're not going to make things more tolerable for me, or change my chances of becoming partner." Items on the questionnaire designed to tap this theme did not yield significant results; however, consistent with the expectation that women in male-dominated firms will have problems with the way senior women behave as women, questionnaire data did show that these participants were more critical of the image of women their senior colleagues portrayed.

Legitimacy of authority. There was some support for hypothesis 1b, that women in male-dominated firms would be less likely than women in sex-integrated firms to view senior women's authority as legitimate. Although there were

no significant differences in either the interview or questionnaire data between women's perceptions of women partners' competence (a legitimate basis for authority), women in male-dominated firms were more likely in their interviews to describe women partners as having relied on sexual attraction as an illegitimate strategy for achieving success. Likewise, on the parallel questionnaire items there was a marginally significant difference (p = .053) showing that women in male-dominated firms were more critical of their women partners for using their sexuality instrumentally.

Participants' accounts of women partners are especially illustrative of the problems sexuality posed for women's hierarchical relationships in male-dominated firms. One woman described two of the women partners in her firm as "horrible examples" for junior women:

> [They are] very, very deferential to men. I don't like that. And maybe it's not true. I mean, they must be good lawyers to have made it, I'll grant them that. But their demeanor is just very flirtatious. One of them, everyone feels is a manipulative bitch who has no legal talent. . . . She's talked about all the time as having slept with numerous partners. It doesn't even matter if it's not true, if that's the way she's perceived, she's a bad role model.

This participant went on to describe the women partners in her firm as having "done it the wrong way . . . by pandering to men in a sort of base way." Similarly, another participant described one of the women partners in her firm as "a twitty little flirt" with a reputation for having "brown-nosed her way into her position . . . by using disgustingly typically feminine wiles." Junior women's focus on women partners' sexuality in their criticisms suggested that they did not perceive the status differences between them and women partners to be fully legitimate.

Unprompted, one participant summarized how the delegitimation of women's authority inhibited constructive hierarchical relationships between women. She observed that while there was some truth to the stereotype that women do not get along with one another at work, women's tenuous status within her firm was largely responsible for the problems they encountered in this regard:

> When someone is more advanced than you, enough so that you naturally take direction from them because of their superior experience, then you get along with them a lot better. So far [those people have] always been men. . . . So it's very unfair to say, "Well, women are always fighting with each other, they're not getting along with each other," when it's the nature of the situation that you're never dealing with a woman who is so firmly entrenched in her authority that you follow her lead with the same degree of deference that you would follow a man in that position. There just aren't any; there aren't enough of them. So, it's just terribly unfair.

Women partners as role models. As expected by hypothesis 1c, women in male-dominated firms were more likely in their interviews to criticize women partners for being poor role models, whereas those in sex-integrated firms

were more likely to praise them for being good role models. Questionnaire data provided corroborating evidence for this result: Women in male-dominated firms rated women partners less positively on the role-model dimension than did women in sex-integrated firms. Women's accounts sharply illustrate these differences. One woman in a male-dominated firm expressed it this way: "[The women partners are] just such lousy role models in one way or another. There's one who worked herself to death. And there's one who got there—it doesn't matter if it's not true, if that's the way she got there, she's a bad role model—her reputation is that she got there by laughing at all these guys' jokes and just submitting to that." And another woman in a male-dominated firm commented, "There are very few role models around here. Very few women partners that you could point to and say, 'Look, that could be me.' " By contrast, the comments of women in sex-integrated firms were more positive: "By and large, [the women partners] are really nice people—good role models, professional, stylish, friendly, down-to-earth, accessible, encouraging." And "Having a lot of senior women here affects all the women associates because they're such good role models and because they're such good standard bearers. Because of their success, we're perceived [by the men in the partnership] as having the ability to be successful."

Peer Relationships

I based hypotheses about women's peer relationships on the notion that a scarcity of women in senior positions may signal to women lower down in the organization that their gender is a liability. I expected that this would foster competitiveness among women and inhibit alliances of support. As expected, compared with participants in sex-integrated firms, those in male-dominated firms rated women associates more negatively on the 10-item scale designed to assess women's overall attitudes toward women associates. Interview data confirmed the specific hypotheses about these relationships: questionnaire data were consistent with the hypotheses, but did not directly support them. Tables 7 and 8, respectively, report these results. Table 9 summarizes the statistically significant results from these two data sources.

Table 7

Content Analysis of Peer Relationships Reported by Women in Male-dominated and Sex-integrated Firms*

	Male-dominated firms Mean (s.d.)	Sex-integrated firms Mean (s.d.)	*t*
Distressed due to competitiveness	.50 (.75)	.27 (.59)	−1.68•
Supportive	1.43 (1.16)	2.47 (1.68)	3.70••

• $p < .10$; •• $p < .001$; one-tailed tests.
* Dependent variable is the number of relationships that fell into the category.

Table 8

Mean Questionnaire Ratings of Attitudes toward Women Peers by Women Associates in Male-dominated and Sex-integrated Firms*

	Male-dominated firms Mean (s.d.)	Sex-integrated firms Mean (s.d.)	*t*
Attitudes toward women peers (10-item scale)	3.95 (.48)	4.15 (.29)	1.98•
Item pairs			
Supportive/unsupportive	4.00 (.53)	4.14 (.36)	.84
Distressful/nondistressful competition	3.93 (.60)	4.05 (.51)	.58
Competent/incompetent	4.15 (.61)	4.16 (.50)	.05
Appropriately/ inappropriately sexual	3.83 (.59)	4.32 (.54)	2.32•
Portray positive/negative image of women	3.83 (.67)	4.07 (.58)	1.73•

• $p < .05$; one-tailed tests.
* A high score indicates an affectively positive rating on a 5-point Likert-type scale.

Table 9

Summary of Statistically Significant Findings: Peer Relationships*

		Statistical evidence	
Theme	Direction	Interviews	Questionnaires
Relationships supportive	SI > MD	+	0
Relationships distressed due to competitiveness	SI < MD	+	0
Peers portray positive image of women	SI > MD	NA	+
Peers inappropriately express sexuality	SI < MD	NA	+
Overall positive view of peers	SI > MD	NA	+

* SI = Sex-integrated, MD = Male-dominated firms; + = Differences between firm types reached statistical significance at, minimally, $p < .10$; 0 = Differences between firm types were not statistically significant; NA = Statistical analysis not conducted because category was excluded from content analysis of interview data.

Competitiveness. Although women discussed on average the same number of peer relationships during their interviews (4.5 in both types of firms), participants in male-dominated firms characterized more of their relationships with women peers as competitive in ways that inhibited their ability to work together than did participants in sex-integrated firms, supporting hypothesis 2a. In their accounts of competition with other women, participants in male-dominated firms often focused on feelings of envy or jealousy. The following excerpts provide examples of this from three women:

> It's very complicated because some of it is very rational and you can identify what you have to do to get certain places, and some of it is just green-eyed monster stuff. Sometimes I just feel envious of her political connections, and I do these irrational things like wishing I could do everything she can do.

> With women, it's like being jealous over a man . . . [whereas] I feel that if I'm being competitive with a man, it's just good clean fun. I really want to kick his ass. I just don't feel that kind of malicious aspect to it that I do with [a woman].

[Competition with women has] more of a personal element [compared with men]. I'm jealous of her looks. . . . And she's very self-confident and I'm jealous about that also.

Another woman from a male-dominated firm offered the following description of competitiveness in one of her relationships with a woman associate who was slightly senior to her:

[Working with a woman] both helps and hurts. It cuts both ways. It helps because I think it makes her feel protective of me against the outside world. It becomes a sort of sisterly or familial relationship. The way it hurts is both of us say things to each other that we would never say to other lawyers in a similar situation. . . . There are just things that make the atmosphere tense. On the one hand, she uses me for ideas and she cultivates me thinking on my own. But then, when she wants to be the boss [because she has had more years of experience], she just wants me to turn it off. . . . And it's terrible. You feel like all of a sudden your dignity has been taken away from you. And that's a problem. She just doesn't like to give up that little power. And then I've hurt her feelings several times, too, because she's very sensitive about the fact that I'm bright and I'm her friend. She seems threatened by my intelligence or by the fact that I might be competent too.

According to this account, in order for each woman to express her competence, the other was required to give up a piece of herself: The respondent gave up dignity; her colleague had to give up power.

This account, like those above, suggests that women in male-dominated firms had difficulty perceiving their work accomplishments and competencies as independent of one another. In each, one's strengths (e.g., political connections, self-confidence, dignity, power) fostered in the other feelings of inadequacy or insecurity or, at the very least, a sense that there could be only one winner (as in a competition "over a man"). In male-dominated firms, this construction of competition as zero-sum was a consistent theme in women's more troubled accounts of competition. One participant attributed competitiveness among women directly to the law firm's promotion structure and to the fact that it had yielded few senior women: "It probably is more true in a law firm that has an up or out policy that women would have more problems with each other because there isn't that layer of senior women. . . . Your relationships with women are all people that are conceivably competitors." Others in male-dominated firms corroborated the view that limited access to senior positions may foster these kinds of competitive experiences:

It's a divide and conquer strategy on the part of men. . . . I can see it starting to happen in terms of the women who are thinking about how the men perceive them vis à vis the other women, and thinking that we can't all quite make it—that being a woman is going to be a factor in their decision, so what kind of woman do they want? It's very subtle. . . . And I'm very concerned about that because I think that means we're going to modify our own self-concepts and the way we treat each other. I'm not so sure that isn't going to be somewhat painful.

Two other participants described this dynamic in action. They had observed women being especially critical of other women and questioned whether this was a strategy they might be using to gain a comparative advantage:

She does little things to me that I think are not fair. She will jokingly sort of disparage me in front of the partner. . . . And she's laughing the whole time and I don't know if she's trying to sabotage me, or if she really doesn't know [what she's doing].

Some people say she destroys people whom she sees as a threat to her. . . . She's done things that subtly may be undermining so that [another woman and I] are less of a threat. [For example,] she has characterized [a woman peer] to the partners as "fru-fru"—too feminine, too emotional, organized but maybe not the highest caliber brain. . . . A little bit like she is too flirty.

Accounts from other women in male-dominated firms suggested that senior men sometimes fuel women's competitive feelings by drawing comparisons between them. When relating a particularly painful experience of competitiveness, one woman described an event in which a male partner criticized her publicly for being less "lady-like" than her female colleague. "He played us off one another," she explained. Another woman from a male-dominated firm described "a rivalry" between another woman and her, generated by their shared dependence on a male partner for whom they were both working. She criticized her coworker as a woman who "exudes a lot of sexuality" and resented the attention she received from this partner when she flirted with him.

The repeated references to sexuality in these excerpts—the comparison between competition with women and "being jealous over a man," the competitiveness generated from jealousy over another woman's looks, and the criticisms that other women associates are "too flirty" or too sexual—suggest the variety of ways in which issues of sexuality were a source of disturbance in peer relationships among women in male-dominated firms. Questionnaire results supported this observation: Women in male-dominated firms were more likely to criticize their women peers for expressing sexuality in inappropriate ways and were more critical of the image of women their peers portrayed than were women in sex-integrated firms.

By contrast, women in sex-integrated firms encountered fewer problems in their relationships with women peers. In particular, they were less likely to experience distress in their relationships as a result of competitive feelings. A story one woman told of an incident with a woman peer with whom she felt competitive exemplifies the way competition operated in these relationships. When she was a junior associate, a partner had assigned her to a project with another woman associate who was in her same class year, a situation that assigning partners try to avoid because associates in the same class tend to compete at the same time for partnership. Due to a previous, unrelated misunderstanding about the project, the assigning partner and the interviewee were angry with each other. Consequently, the partner interacted only with the other woman associate throughout the project. "So she was in the position of having to handle [giving me work assignments] without making me feel like she was giving me orders," the interviewee explained. They arrived at a tacit agreement that forestalled conflict. The interviewee was careful always to solicit direction so that her colleague did not have to give her

work assignments. In addition, each was careful to consult with the other throughout the project. Despite the discomfort they both felt, their shared understanding that the competitive situation was potentially divisive and unproductive led them to handle it so that it worked out well: "And she was good at handling the politics of the situation. She complained a lot about [the partner], which was something that was meant to make me feel better. So, we got it done. And she couldn't have done it alone at that level. But the two of us sort of advising each other could." These two women were able to divide the task and authorize each other to do their parts. In this way, the two were able to differentiate from one another, each bringing her own strengths to their task, without the emergence of envy or sense of loss evident in relationships among their counterparts in male-dominated firms.

A woman from another sex-integrated firm described a similar situation in which she and her friend were both eligible for early promotion to the same partnership slot. The interviewee was not chosen. The competitive feelings that ensued were channeled productively, however, into a win-win resolution. While this woman felt hurt at not being chosen and described feelings of competitiveness with her colleague, she was able to compare their strengths and weaknesses and the differences between them in the kinds of work they each preferred to do. On this basis, she was able to recognize, or at least rationalize, the decision as a just one. After her colleague was promoted, they worked together to gain an understanding of why the interviewee had not been chosen to fill the position. As a partner, her colleague was now privy to information that could help the interviewee understand and reverse the perceptions that had kept her from receiving the partnership offer. By sharing this information, her colleague made the interviewee's future candidacy for partnership much more viable.

These stories exemplify the way competitiveness tended to operate in sex-integrated firms. In both incidents, women recognized the structural realities of competitiveness in their relationships with other women associates. Moreover, they seemed able to use this understanding to turn potentially threatening situations with other women, in which a zero-sum orientation might have been dysfunctional both for the relationship and for the work, into shared gain through mutual support, i.e., positive-sum outcomes.

Supportiveness. As hypothesized (H2b), women in male-dominated firms characterized fewer of their relationships with women peers as supportive than did women in sex-integrated firms. Data from the interviews presented above suggest that the nature of competition in male-dominated firms inhibited the development of supportive relationships among women in those firms, whereas the nature of competitiveness in sex-integrated firms did not.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This analysis demonstrates how structural features of a firm may affect the nature and quality of interpersonal

relationships at work, casting doubt on wholly person-centered explanations for the difficulties often observed in workplace relationships among women. This study shows, instead, that social identity plays a critical role.

Social Identity and Women's Hierarchical Relationships

The results of this study suggest that women partners as women were a matter of special interest and concern for interviewees regardless of their firm affiliation. In this sense, women appeared to identify with women partners on the basis of shared gender group membership. The nature of interviewees' interests and concern varied, however, according to the sex composition of their firm's partnership.

I had reasoned that a scarcity of women in senior positions may signal to women lower down in the organization that their gender is a liability, making it difficult for them to identify positively with senior women. Such problems would then interfere in the development of constructive, developmental relationships that could help to elevate more women in the firm. Results showed, as expected, that shared gender provided little basis for validation and support in firms that appeared to restrict women's access to those positions. As expected, women's criticisms of their senior colleagues centered on their credentials both as women and as partners: Women partners not only failed to be the kind of women on whom junior women could rely for support but failed as well to be the kind of partner whose authority junior women could respect. Not surprisingly, these women were less satisfied with the image of women their partners portrayed and found them difficult to emulate as role models. The negative associations with women's gender in these firms, communicated by the scarcity of women in senior positions, seemed to remove gender as a potentially positive basis for identification and relationship.

By contrast, in firms that appeared not to restrict women's access to senior positions, women were able to use their identification with women partners as a source of validation and support. Interviewees in these firms raised far fewer concerns about the legitimacy of women partners' authority and, instead, viewed the success of some women as a signal of the possibility of their own. For these associates, the entry of women into the partnership seemed to indicate that they too could become partners and that their sex per se would not pose a barrier. Thus perceived inconsistencies between one's identity as a woman, on the one hand, and success, on the other, were diminished for women in sex-integrated firms, which helped them establish constructive developmental relationships.

Social Identity and Women's Peer Relationships

The concept of social identity is also useful for understanding the link between the relative presence of women in senior positions and relationships among women lower down in the organization. In particular, the degree to which women were represented in senior positions influenced the nature of women's identification with other women. This, in turn, shaped how they experienced competition and support in relation to one another.

The most striking difference in women's accounts of their competitive experiences centered on whether they constructed competition as zero-sum or positive-sum. Zero-sum constructions made for more problematic encounters and were more evident in reports by women in male-dominated firms; positive-sum constructions generated more constructive outcomes and were more evident among women in sex-integrated firms. A related difference was the tendency of women in male-dominated firms to compare themselves directly with other women associates as a way of gauging their own success and relative opportunities for advancement. Women in sex-integrated firms did not show this tendency.

These findings resonate with clinical research that suggests that underlying these different constructions of competition may be differences in the way women identify with their women peers (Lindenbaum, 1987). As described above, identification in this context refers to women's sense of being "psychologically intertwined with the fate of [women as] a group" (Ashforth and Mael, 1989: 21). Identification can make empathy and support possible, as it did for interviewees and their women peers in sex-integrated firms. Women in male-dominated firms, however, may have perceived their fate to be too closely aligned with the group's, causing them to lose their sense of individual identity. Ironically, this situation may call for excessive efforts to differentiate oneself from others in the group. Such overidentification and overdifferentiation may explain women's dual tendency in male-dominated firms to construct other women's strength as evidence of their own weakness and, at the same time, to defend against this construction by denigrating other women. Hence, when group identification is a source of vulnerability, intragroup competition is a threatening experience.

By contrast, women in sex-integrated firms seemed able to use identification as a positive source of support in both their hierarchical and their peer relationships, and competition was constructive. According to Lindenbaum (1987: 203), this form of competition "requires two people, each of whom has a sufficiently separate identity to risk measuring her self against the separate identity of the other." Rather than feeling threatened by the strengths of their women colleagues, women in sex-integrated firms affirmed such strengths and, in the process, affirmed themselves.

The research presented here suggests that by shaping the relative value people attach to their group memberships, different demographic structures foster different manifestations of these identification processes. In male-dominated firms, women may perceive their gender group membership as less valued and become overly invested in the adequacy of other women as representatives of their group. The psychological boundary between self and group becomes blurred, leading women to take a hypercritical stance with one another and to differentiate themselves as better than their peers (Kanter, 1977). In sex-integrated firms, where promotion appears less tied to

gender group affiliation, identification processes are balanced by less pejorative assessments of difference. Women are able both to identify with other women and to draw on differences that are constructive to their relationship and their work. Consequently, women are better able to manage their competitive feelings in productive ways and build supportive relationships. These kinds of relationships are more likely to grow out of conditions that allow women to compete legitimately with one another for promotion—conditions structured in part by women's greater representation at senior levels.

Limitations of the Study

The statistical results showing relationships between the presence of women in senior positions and junior women's experiences in their firms are necessarily associational rather than causal. Consequently, it is unclear whether the presence of women in senior positions per se makes a difference in women's experiences or whether other factors in organizations' internal environments lead both to increased proportions of women partners and to more positive relationship experiences. The matching procedure used to select firms for this study diminishes the potentially confounding effects of some of these factors. This design feature, however, does not control for all possible confounds. For example, it may be that the men in senior positions, who promoted women in the first place, structured an environment conducive to success for women. They may have communicated a different set of messages to women which, in turn, structured their experiences more positively than those of women in firms with substantially fewer women in senior positions. More than likely, some interaction of these factors, together with demography's direct effects, contributed to differences in women's perceptions of their firms, their gender, and their relationships. Further research into the organizational contexts that yield differing numbers of women in senior positions, and that includes the perspectives of other groups within the organization, may help to clarify the processes involved.

Finally, the two data sources for this study did not always produce corroborating results. As shown in Tables 6 and 9, there were three exceptions: perceptions that women partners act like men, supportive relationships with women peers, and competitive relationships with women peers. For each of these constructs, analyses of the interview data produced statistically significant results that were not replicated in analyses of the questionnaire data. Though this may cast some doubt on the validity of these results, the interview data suggest that the failure to replicate across methods may say more about the phenomena under study than about validity. The failure to obtain significant differences in participants' questionnaire ratings of their peers on the dimension of competitiveness may reflect participants' reluctance to report on their surveys the kinds of feelings that surfaced in interviews. Interviewees were especially reluctant to identify competitiveness in their

relationships with women. They often prefaced such statements with phrases like, "I hate to admit it but . . . . Sometimes when I asked if there were anyone on their relational map with whom they felt competitive, they would answer, "no"; and yet, later in the interview they would describe particular events or circumstances in those relationships that even they labelled "competitive." In addition, women were sometimes reluctant to describe themselves as competitive in any particular relationship and, instead, would attribute competitiveness to the other party. My coding scheme explicitly paid no attention to whom women blamed for any particular competitive interchange. Yet if participants interpreted the questionnaire items as statements about their own level of competitiveness, they may have been motivated to underreport its incidence, despite having described a number of competitive experiences in their interviews. These interpretations are consistent with the notion that competition among women is taboo (Miner and Longino, 1987). Similarly, participants often discussed a feminist or ideological commitment to developing supportive relationships with women in their firms, and many participants described at least one woman associate in their firm to whom they went for support. The strength of even one such relationship, together with an ideological commitment to solidarity among women, may have prompted some participants in male-dominated firms to give higher ratings on the supportiveness dimension of the questionnaire. For these reasons, the correspondence between the number of relationships from the interview data that fell into a particular content-analytic category ("competitive" or "supportive") and the number a participant chose from the 1-to-5 scale on the questionnaire may have been relatively low. The fact that one of the two validity coefficients for both the competitiveness and supportiveness constructs was not significant supports these interpretations.

Implications for Theory and Practice

This study makes three theoretical contributions. First, it helps to clarify contradictory results and theories in previous research on women's relational versus competitive orientation with one another at work. While that research has tended to rely on women's socialization as a primary explanation, this study challenges these individual-level explanations by offering support for women's proportional representation in senior positions as a structural variable influencing their workplace relationships. The result is a more complex, contextual understanding of the impact of gender on women's organizational experiences.

Second, this study demonstrates the usefulness of social identity theory as a framework for understanding how demographic arrangements help people socially construct the meaning and consequences of their identity group memberships. This paper thus lays the groundwork for future research into the workplace experiences of members of other identity groups that have been traditionally underrepresented in positions of organizational authority, such as racial and ethnic minorities. In particular, these

results add to our understanding of the organizational conditions that may enhance or undermine in-group solidarity. In addition, although researchers have traditionally used social identity theory to understand competition between groups, this study shows that the theory is also useful for understanding competition within groups.

Third, this study extends the developing literature on organizational demography to include the impact of demographic composition across hierarchical levels of the organization by moving beyond the literature on tokenism to highlight the distribution of power within organizations as an important consideration in demographic research. Unexamined variability in groups' representation at senior organizational levels may explain Tsui, Egan, and O'Reilly's (1992) findings that women and minorities were generally unaffected by their demographic status in their work units.

This study also has practical implications. At the organizational level, removing barriers keeping women from top positions may go a long way toward easing the stresses and facilitating more productive working relationships for women lower down in the organization. In addition, once they are aware of identification processes and their effects, women themselves will be better able to manage their interpersonal relationships at work and develop the constructive alliances and mentoring relationships with women that allow them to realize their potential.

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APPENDIX A: Representative Excerpts from Interviews and Questionnaire Items

Hierarchical Relationships

Thematic category	Representative excerpts	Questionnaire items
1. Gender as a source of shared experiences and understanding	One of the main reasons I went into [my practice area] was because of [a particular woman partner] and I thought she was really terrific. And I had a rapport with her because she was a woman. . . . I think there is a warmer rapport where a woman heads a team than where a man does.	a. I feel a bond with women partners because of our shared experiences as women. b. I feel alienated from the women partners and that bothers me.

APPENDIX A (*continued*)

Thematic category	Representative excerpts	Questionnaire items
	Because [a woman partner] is a woman, I don't feel I can pull any punches with her. I mean, she knows what it's like to be a woman.	
2. Act like men	The couple of women who are successful partners are very different women. They've molded themselves to be like men. [They] have repressed a lot of their feminity. . . . It was my perception that they made themselves a lot more like the men they worked with than I am willing to make myself like the men I work with. There's this other [woman] partner who tends to be very tough and aggressive and is much more the type of person who you would say decided that the way to make partner is to be in some senses kind of male. That's just how she is. She is . . . not a particularly feminine person.	a. The women partners are (at least) as professional as their male counterparts, but at the same time, they do not mold themselves to be like men. b. I am critical of the women partners because they tend to act a lot like men.
3a. Competent	She's very smart. She's also calm in a kind of way that can really be a plus. Sort of a quiet confidence. She can manage to get herself heard when other people are screaming. The female partners there for the most part have a real good reputation. Totally competent.	a. The women partners are well respected for their professional competence.
3b. Incompetent	She is horrible; she is not a good manager. She can't set priorities. . . . I don't think she's that bright, to tell you the truth. She doesn't have a clue about what she's doing. Like when she has to take a deposition or something, she gives it to an associate. . . . It's so universally acknowledged that she doesn't have a clue what she's doing and that she's a bitch to boot.	b. The women partners have reputations for being incompetent.
4. Inappropriate expressions of sexuality	She's very coy. When she and I would brief [a male partner], she was always smiling, and you know, would kind of be demure at times when it suited her, etc. I would tend to come in and sit down and do the job. It was clear that [this male partner] responded to being caressed. The other woman partner is supposed to have had an affair with [a male partner] and I don't know how much my feelings toward her are colored by that.	a. The women partners deal with their sexuality in ways that I find are appropriate in a professional context. b. The women partners are too sexual in their interactions with the men in the firm.

APPENDIX A (*continued*)

Thematic category	Representative excerpts	Questionnaire items
5a. Good role model	My relationship with [a woman partner] is clearly hierarchical. She is a good role model. She's a terrific lawyer. She's very demanding, but not unnecessarily demanding. She demands good quality work. She is very sharp. I think I admire her. I would classify my relationship with her as more the traditional mentor-mentee. . . . She's very good about . . . really just being there as a resource person and as a role model.	a. The women partners are good role models for women associates.
5b. Poor role model	They're just such lousy role models in one way or another. The one who worked herself to death; and the one who got there—it doesn't even matter if it's not true—if that's the way she got there, she's a bad role model, and her reputation is that she got there by laughing at all these guys' jokes and just submitting to that. There are very few role models around here. Very few women partners that you could point to and say, "Look, that could be me."	b. The women partners are poor role models for the women associates.
6. Personality	NA	a. The women partners are personable and pleasant to work for. b. The women partners have personalities that make them difficult to work with.
7. Helpfulness	NA	a. The women partners have been particularly helpful to women associates. b. I am critical of the women partners because they *don't* go out of their way to help the women associates.
8. Political power	NA	a. The women partners are quite powerful when it comes to firm politics. b. The women partners seem to make very little effort to participate in the politics of the firm.
9. Image of women	NA	a. I feel good about the positive image women partners present. b. The women partners behave in ways that reflect poorly on women as a group.

APPENDIX A (*continued*)

Thematic category	Representative excerpts	Questionnaire items
Peer Relationships		
1. Supportive	[The relationship] purely developed at work. I met her right away. We were both in the same class. [We met] through social events and having lunch. We're both in Corporate, in different areas, but we discuss our problems like, "Can you believe so and so did this to me?" And occasionally I'll have a problem with a finance issue and she might have some sort of acquisition type issue, and we'll just discuss it generally. But it's more of a supportive relationship where you listen to the other one bitch, or tell them how they ought to approach so and so. The woman I feel closest to is L. L. sits next door to me and we have not worked closely together on any one project, though we certainly have consulted each other on projects. She's in my practice area. We bounce ideas off each other all the time, and we keep each other apprised of the progress of our projects and the garbage that's going on around the office. And that's really important. We're wonderful sources of information for each other.	a. The women with whom I work are very good at supporting each other, sharing work-related insights and information. b. I get the sense that women associates do very little to be supportive to each other.
2. Distressed due to competitiveness	This other woman every once in a while she comes into my office, sits down and tells me all her problems. I feel like she's taking me for a ride. I think it's manipulative. . . . I once told her a whole story that was not very favorable about me. But I don't do it anymore, because it's so rare that she does that. . . . I worry now that she talks to [this partner who never liked me very much]. It's not true that if you're doing OK and you're doing good work that no one can hurt you, because they can hurt you. And it's not that I have any real reason to believe that, but these little snarling matches that we've had, and the tears and the absolute frantic situations that we've been in make me feel like she resents me. . . . She just acts so desperate all the time. There is enough competition in our relationship that I'm not sure that I believe her when she tries to be supportive. . . . It's just that I don't know if [we] can receive support from each other because [we] are suspicious.	a. I work with other women in a productive and satisfying way without feelings of competition getting in the way. b. I find there is an undercurrent of competitiveness in my relationships with women associates which hinders our ability to work together.

APPENDIX A (*continued*)

Thematic category	Representative excerpts	Questionnaire items
3. Competence	NA	a. I feel that the women associates I have worked with are quite competent. b. I feel that the women I have worked with do not work hard and/or are not as competent as they should be.
4. Expressions of sexuality	NA	a. I feel that the women associates deal with their sexuality appropriately when relating to men in a professional context. b. I see women associates at my firm who behave in a manner that I think is too flirtatious.
5. Image of women	NA	a. The women associates in my firm present a positive image of women. b. I am concerned that other women associates in my firm present a negative image of professional women that may reflect poorly on me.

APPENDIX B: Reliability and Validity of Measures*

Construct	Validity Coefficients Correlation between category and rating: Same†	Validity Coefficients Correlation between category and rating: Opposite‡	Reliability Coefficients Correlation (and α) between ratings§
Women partners			
Gender as a source of shared experiences/ understandings	.34•	−.33•	−.44•• (.61)
Act like men	.32•	−.37•	−.44•• (.57)
Competent	.01	.14	−.61••• (.76)
Incompetent	.62•••	−.41••	
Inappropriate expressions of sexuality	.52••	−.17	−.52•• (.69)
Good role models	.07	−.34•	−.38•• (.51)
Poor role models	.54••	−.40••	
Image of women	NA	NA	−.54•• (.70)
Personality	NA	NA	−.62••• (.76)
Helpfulness	NA	NA	−.38•• (.51)
Political power	NA	NA	−.46•• (.62)
Women peers			
Relationships supportive	.24	−.37•	−.50•• (.66)
Relationships distressed due to competitiveness	.36•	−.24	−.45•• (.58)
Competence	NA	NA	−.61••• (.76)
Expressions of sexuality	NA	NA	−.59••• (.72)
Image of women	NA	NA	−.55••• (.66)

• $p < .05$; •• $p < .01$; ••• $p < .001$; one-tailed tests.

* Constructs measured as content-analytic categories were dummy-coded (1 = present, 0 = absent). Questionnaire ratings were reverse-coded when necessary so that a high rating indicates stronger agreement with the construct as a description.

† Correlation between the content-analytic category and the questionnaire rating on the item describing the same construct.

‡ Correlation between the content-analytic category and the questionnaire rating on the item describing the opposite construct or absence of the construct.

§ Correlation between questionnaire ratings on oppositely worded pairs of items; Cronbach's alpha in parentheses.