



ITS ALL ABOUT PEOPLE

## Illequality

**By Stuart White**  
**Printed in the Sunday Standard**  
**Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> March 2011**

I was such a grumpy old meanie this week, I tell you! I have been sick and oh my goodness, I'm hopeless when I feel under the weather - about as useful as an ashtray on a motor bike. With a dose of flu which had, as its mates diarrhoea, nausea, stomach cramps, chills and sweats, I was a walking misery, no use to man nor beast and about as sociable as Ebenezer Scrooge! The women in my office assured me "It's a man thing". According to some "men aren't very good with illness and are all poor sufferers". I take exception to that. I was a champion sufferer and was quite incapacitated for two full days.

Thinking back I don't think my mother had a sick day in her 50-year career or needed to get a doctor's note whilst my father took to his sick bed often! The main reason is that in the world of pain, women hold the ultimate trump card - childbirth. Stereotypically we men might seem better equipped to grin and bear a ghastly range of injuries from all that historical hunter-gathering and playing soldiers, but compared to a pregnancy, all that pales into insignificance. Men can never experience what one website describes as "the height of human agony that takes place in hospital delivery rooms". What it failed to mention however is that a pregnant woman's body undergoes changes in the third trimester to prepare for labour pains and "during the last 18 days of pregnancy, a soon-to-be-mother's pain threshold elevates as pain-mitigating opioid receptors go on red alert and levels of pain-reducing hormones spike". I did my homework! My point? Maybe there is a reason we men are reduced to a sniffling, whimpering shadow of ourselves when ill - we are made differently and therefore act and experience things differently, pain being just one of those things. Where are our pain-reducing hormones when we really need them?

Executive Recruitment | Strategic Planning | Organisational Transformation | HR Outsourcing  
Management Assessment and Development | Training and Executive Coaching | Psychometric Testing

**HRMC**  
Management Consultants

[www.hrmc.co.bw](http://www.hrmc.co.bw)

Some might argue that these are just generalisations with no substance whatsoever but I don't think so. The reason we make generalisations about male and female behavior is because there is a certain amount of truth to them. We do have different make-ups and much of the differences seem to be hard-wired into us at birth. There have been a number of studies that have borne this out. One placed toddlers on the opposite side of a transparent barrier from their mothers. As a general rule, the male toddler would attack the barrier to try to get back to their mothers while the females generally just sat down and cried. Interestingly though, it appears that when we grow up and get sick there is a role reversal!

I am not saying that all men and all women act alike. While there are some rather broad generalisations, there are obviously going to be many exceptions. While some of our behaviour seems to be connected with our gender, much of it is also the result of environmental conditions. Let's take my father, for example. He loves sport. Anything with a ball and two individuals or groups competing and he can be captivated for hours.

The competition somehow appeals to his more aggressive and competitive side of his nature, making him a rather typical male. On the other hand he loves baking so when he isn't watching a soccer match or rugby world cup final, he dons an apron and gets into the kitchen to conjure up a batch of fairy cakes so delicate they would make Nigella Lawson's look like burnt biscuits. In this respect, he doesn't fit the stereotypical male model. In modern parlance you could say he's getting in touch with his feminine side, but so many of us don't conform precisely to the stereotype that it perhaps shows that we shouldn't trust those broad generalisations? As with all sweeping statements, there are going to be exceptions. So, while the categorising may help you understand the actions of a large group, it may not be so accurate in helping one to understand individual members in that group.

What I am getting at is this: If we are so different, generally, why are all workplace rules, expectations, etc identical for men and women, and how progressive are our Human Resources policies and procedures if they are not catering for this? Will this be the new wave for HR thinking? For the past 40 years we have worked so hard at de-sexing the workplace and promoting the equality cause that the only thing that separates men and woman nowadays seems to be maternity benefits (and even that's falling away in some countries) and workplace toilets. If we are so fundamentally different why don't we have different rules and be given different allowances? And quite clearly the most pressing of all of these is way more sick days per year for men. Women obviously have built-in immunity to all sorts of nasty viruses that can fell a grown man in his tracks, like the dreaded 'man 'flu', and we enjoy far more ill health and suffer worse and linger much longer than the girls. Where sickness is concerned, there's no doubt whatsoever that we are the weaker sex. We need more tea, sympathy, time and strong drugs to help us pull through and my sudden near-death attack this week was the classic case history in point.

Managing Director  
HRMC  
Phone: 395 1640  
<http://www.hrmc.co.bw/>

Executive Recruitment | Strategic Planning | Organisational Transformation | HR Outsourcing  
Management Assessment and Development | Training and Executive Coaching | Psychometric Testing

**HRMC**  
*Management Consultants*

[www.hrmc.co.bw](http://www.hrmc.co.bw)