The Equality Policy Paradox: Gender Differences in How Managers Implement Gender Equality–Related Policies

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Abstract

Drawing on data from an ethnographic study of the introduction and implementation of a flexible work policy intended in part to improve gender equality at a STEM professional organization, I develop grounded theory on how managers' gender shapes their implementation of such initiatives. I identify an *equality policy paradox* in which women managers, who openly support gender equality, are more likely than men managers to limit the policy. This apparent contradiction between intentions and actions is reconciled through an interactional role-based mechanism. Specifically, in this setting women managers encounter barriers to developing technical expertise, client relations, and respected authority. They respond by engaging extensively with subordinates, which allows them to effectively manage by brokering information (as an alternative to technical and client-facing tasks) and cultivating cooperation (as an alternative to formal authority). The policy undermines these interdependent activities; reflecting this, women managers generally oppose it. Men managers tend not to experience these constraints, and they focus on technical and client-related tasks that are largely independent of subordinates. The policy maintains these activities; reflecting this, they implement it. By identifying the equality policy paradox and the mechanism underlying it, this study advances theory on managers' implementation of equality-related practices and policies as well as theory on gender and management.

Keywords: gender, managers, organizational change, practices and policies, role theory

Despite an increasing number of practices and policies aimed at reducing gender inequality, organizations still struggle to lessen the gaps in opportunities and outcomes between men and women employees (Chan and Anteby, 2016; Abraham, 2020; Padavic, Ely, and Reid, 2020). In recent years, scholars have turned their focus to managers' role in improving gender inequality, studying how managers can impact employees' experiences and outcomes through the implementation of relevant organizational changes (Castilla and Benard, 2010; Briscoe and Kellogg, 2011; Mun and Jung, 2018; Sharkey, Pontikes, and Hsu, 2022). Understanding whether, when, and how managers implement such policies remains an important question in the study of gender inequality.

Scholars have largely focused on how managers' own gender shapes their implementation of efforts to improve women subordinates' outcomes (Huffman, 2013). Two primary strands of theorizing exist in this research. First, some scholars draw on identity-related theories, arguing that women managers are more likely than men managers to implement policies that help women subordinates because they are members of the same in-group and have homophilous relations (Hultin and Szulkin, 1999; Huffman, Cohen, and Pearlman, 2010; Cohen and Broschak, 2013). Second, some scholars draw on value-related theories suggesting that women managers hold values (e.g., liberalism) more aligned with the amelioration of gender inequality and are therefore more likely to support relevant organizational initiatives (Briscoe and Joshi, 2017; Carnahan and Greenwood, 2018; Scarborough, Lambouths, and Holbrook, 2019). While these theories allow for possible exceptions to this general pattern of women supporting and men opposing—for instance, if women managers are in token positions and feel threatened by women subordinates (Abraham, 2017)—the general prediction is that women managers should support gender equality–related initiatives. Yet, actual findings are mixed (e.g.,

Dobbin, Kim, and Kalev, 2011; Maume, 2011; Joshi, Son, and Roh, 2015; Srivastava and Sherman, 2015), which suggests the presence of unaccounted-for mechanisms.

Notably, the relationship between managers' gender, policy implementation, and—importantly—managers' role performances has not been fully theorized. Existing research seems to assume that women and men managers carry out their roles similarly. However, we know from literature on gender, management, and leadership that there is gendered variation in how managers enact their roles (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and van Engen, 2003; Alvesson and Billing, 2009). Scholars have theorized that these differences reflect, at least in part, challenges that women face in the workplace (Ely, Ibarra, and Kolb, 2011; Brands and Fernandez-Mateo, 2017; Cardador, Hill, and Salles, 2022; Feldberg, 2022), including backlash for displaying male-typed behaviors or traits (Rudman and Glick, 2001; Brescoll, 2011) and going against the gender hierarchy by occupying managerial roles (Ridgeway, 2001). Yet, it is unclear how gender differences in managers' role performances ultimately impact their implementation of gender equality–related practices and policies. Unpacking this connection is important to develop our understanding of how managers shape gender equality in the workplace.

In this article, I draw on data from an ethnographic study of the introduction and implementation of a flexible work policy, designed in part to improve gender equality, at an organization of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) professionals. A long line of scholarship has established that women are often disadvantaged by organizations' expectations of rigid schedules and full-time availability (Acker, 1990; Beckman and Mazmanian, 2020), reflecting gender inequality in the division between home and family care (Bianchi et al., 2012; Daminger, 2019). Flexible work policies may help women manage work and home commitments, ultimately improving their organizational experiences and outcomes

(Kelly et al., 2010; Briscoe and Kellogg, 2011; Goldin, 2014; Pedulla and Thébaud, 2015). Recent scholarship has highlighted that, similar to other equality-related initiatives (Leslie, 2019), these policies have limits in their ability to address inequalities. For instance, prolonged and visible use of flexibility options can lead to negative career consequences (Williams, Blair-Loy, and Berdahl, 2013; Reid, 2015; Padavic, Ely, and Reid, 2020). Nonetheless, many women experience such policies as helpful in balancing work and family and, at a minimum, supporting their workforce retention (Stone, 2007; Blau and Kahn, 2013; Thébaud, 2015; Goldin and Katz, 2016).

I describe a case in this article that extant theory does not predict. I found that women and men managers differed in how they implemented a flexible work policy. As both value- and identity-related theories predict, women managers were more likely than men managers to articulate support for and commitment to the goal of gender equality, and they tended to support relevant workplace initiatives such as maternity leave and on-site childcare. Yet, women managers often *opposed* the flexible work policy and limited employees' use of it, while men managers often passively supported the policy and allowed subordinates to use it relatively freely. I refer to this apparent contradiction between managers' stated commitments to gender equality and their implementation of related organizational change efforts as the *equality policy paradox.* I find that to disentangle and reconcile this paradox, we need to understand how the initiative threatened to disrupt how women managers but not men managers carried out their roles, with this variation in role enactment reflecting gendered differences in managerial role constraints.

This study contributes to existing research by identifying an additional mechanism— beyond identity and values—that informs managers' implementation of initiatives aimed at

improving gender equality. This mechanism, which I label the interactional role mechanism, identifies how organizational and interactional processes shape how individuals perform the managerial role in gendered ways and, in turn, whether a given policy disrupts or maintains these actions. By surfacing the equality policy paradox, this study also highlights the importance of disentangling the relationship between managers' views of gender equality and their actual implementation of related initiatives. Women managers are neither "agents of change" nor "cogs in a machine" (Cohen and Huffman, 2007); rather, the nexus of commitments *and* constraints informs managers' policy enactment.

Managers' Impact on Practices and Policies Aimed at Addressing Gender Inequality

While organizational gender equality has improved somewhat over the past several decades, women still experience inequality in pay, promotions, and related outcomes (Joshi et al., 2015; Botello and Abraham, 2017). Scholars have turned their attention to how managers in particular may play a key role in improving gender inequality (e.g., Ashford et al., 1998; Phillips, 2005; Kelly et al., 2010; Castilla and Ranganathan, 2020). The focus on managers has been spurred by broader calls to bring managers back in to the study of inequality, as they hold key decision-making positions and therefore heavily shape employees' organizational experiences and outcomes (Reskin, 2003; Castilla, 2011).

Extant research has largely focused on how managers' gender relates to their implementation of initiatives that may improve gender equality (e.g., Gorman, 2005; Cohen and Huffman, 2007; Penner, Toro-Tulla, and Huffman, 2012). When theorizing how gender shapes managers' policy implementation, scholars tend to draw on two sets of theories and respective underlying mechanisms: the identity mechanism and the value mechanism. The identity

mechanism suggests that managers are likely to help gender-similar others, and therefore, women managers are more likely to implement policies and practices that aid women subordinates (e.g., Roth, 2004; Maume, 2011). Theorization of the identity mechanism is often rooted in homophily theory, which finds that individuals generally prefer to work with and help those of the same gender (Kanter, 1977; Ibarra, 1992; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook, 2001), or in social identity theory, which finds that individuals generally favor and advance the interests of in-group members (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Ely, 1994, 1995). Notably, a more nuanced reading of social identity theory suggests that women managers may try to distance themselves from women subordinates because the managers view (or expect others to view) women as relatively low status and therefore a threat to their own social standing (Duguid, 2011; Duguid, Lloyd, and Tolbert, 2012; Derks, Van Laar, and Ellemers, 2016; Abraham, 2017). However, the primary prediction of the identity mechanism is that, with the exception of the above-noted circumstances, women should be more likely than men to implement gender equality–related initiatives.

In recent years, scholars have looked more granularly at how gender shapes managers' policies and practices, drawing on theories suggesting that managers' personal values inform whether they implement organizational practices and policies (Desai, Chugh, and Brief, 2014; Briscoe and Joshi, 2017; Dang and Joshi, 2022). Researchers who posit a value mechanism tend to assert that women managers, like women more broadly (Greenberg and Mollick, 2017; Scarborough, Sin, and Risman, 2019), value gender equality more than men do (because of their personal experiences) and are therefore more likely to support related practices and policies (Dobbin, Kim, and Kalev, 2011; Carnahan and Greenwood, 2018). Recently, scholars (Chin, Hambrick, and Treviño, 2013; Gupta, Briscoe, and Hambrick, 2018) have pointed to two

relevant psychological mechanisms that connect managers' values to their actions: behavioral channeling, through which managers favor choices aligned with their personal values (England, 1967), and motivated cognition, through which individuals perceive instrumental merits in choices aligned with their values (Kunda, 1990; Jost et al., 2003).

But the empirical evidence is mixed as to whether women or men managers are more likely to implement gender equality–related practices and policies (e.g., Cohen, Broschak, and Haveman, 1998; Blair-Loy and Wharton, 2002; Stainback, Kleiner, and Skaggs, 2016). While the cases of women managers failing to support these initiatives could reflect the more nuanced reading of social identity theory described above (i.e., that many women managers perceive their status as threatened by other women's potential success), this seems unlikely to explain those cases in all settings, e.g., beyond those in which women are an extreme minority (Fernandez-Mateo and Kaplan, 2018). This suggests the need to consider unaccounted mechanisms that may contribute to gendered variation in managers' policy support (Carnahan and Greenwood, 2018), beyond the value- and identity-focused mechanisms highlighted in prior research. Indeed, in many cases scholars acknowledge that their (quantitative) data cannot comprehensively "disentangle the various sub-theories and mechanisms" that explain their findings (Penner, Toro-Tulla, and Huffman, 2012: 377; see also Abraham, 2017: 50).

While there are potentially multiple mechanisms not yet identified, one theoretical lacuna is particularly notable: the relationship between managers' gender, policy implementation, and their actual daily work activities (Srivastava and Sherman, 2015: 1803). This relationship is relevant because while gender equality–forwarding efforts often target women subordinates, they also generally indirectly impact managers, who often must implement these practices and policies and supervise the employees who enroll, participate, or otherwise engage with these

efforts. Therefore, such policies can potentially disrupt (Powell and Mainiero, 1999; den Dulk and de Ruijter, 2008; Poelmans and Beham, 2008) managers' daily actions. This lacuna is particularly notable given that, as extensive research has shown, women across all ranks face gendered challenges that affect their day-to-day experiences in organizations (e.g., Appold, Siengthai, and Kasarda, 1998; Joshi, 2014; Stroube, 2022). The implication is that even if a man and a woman manage similar units, their on-the-ground experiences—and perhaps, by extension, their implementation of equality-related policies—will likely differ because of the inequalities women face.

Gender and the Managerial Role

Scholars of gender and management have examined how the qualities associated with management and leadership are often male-typed (Schein and Davidson, 1993; Koenig et al., 2011). Women managers face backlash for their incongruity with a male-typed role (Eagly and Karau, 2002) and, by simply occupying a management position, going against the gender hierarchy (Rudman et al., 2012). At the same time, women managers also face career penalties when they act in more stereotypically masculine ways or manage in male-dominated contexts (Eagly, Makhijani, and Klonsky, 1992; Rudman and Phelan, 2008; Brescoll, 2011). Scholars note that the challenges women face influence their managerial actions, suggesting that documented gender differences in management-related behaviors (Eagly and Johnson, 1990; Ranganathan and Shivaram, 2021) arise because of biases, stereotypes, and other challenges that women face in the workplace and society at large (Hogue and Lord, 2007; Hoyt and Murphy, 2016; Vial, Napier, and Brescoll, 2016; Trzebiatowski, McCluney, and Hernandez, 2022). For instance, Feldberg (2022) identified that women supervisors in grocery stores, more often than

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men supervisors, might engage in public work to overcome stereotyped expectations that they are less competent managers. Cardador, Hill, and Salles (2022) similarly found that because women managers' authority is often not respected, they may engage in "status-leveling behaviors" with subordinate women, such as helping with tasks and making themselves more accessible than men managers.

Research on gender and management thus highlights the importance of considering how the constraints on women's actions might generate variance in the work that men and women managers actually perform. When we connect this to theory on managers' impact on gender equality–related practices and policies, the implication is that women and men managers may respond to these initiatives differently because of how they engage in their managerial roles. However, it remains unclear how these gender inequalities at the managerial level shape managers' implementation of efforts to address gender inequalities at the employee level. Unpacking this relationship is paramount if we are to further understand how managers can improve women's organizational experiences and outcomes.

I address this question by drawing on a grounded theoretical perspective rooted in interactional role theory, which has a basis in the broader interactionist tradition (Turner, 1962; Ickes and Knowles, 1982). Interactional role theory was developed in reaction to structural functional role theory, which emphasizes how individuals tend to conform to roles (Colomy and Brown, 1995). In contrast, interactional role theory emphasizes how the same role might be enacted in variable ways across individuals or time, reflecting the fact that people agentically and differentially interpret and modify prescribed role behaviors (Zurcher, 1983; Barley, 1996; Sandhu and Kulik, 2019) because, for instance, roles are vaguely specified (Stryker and Statham,

1985) or constructed idiosyncratically (Miner, 1987; Tan, 2015).[1] A particularly important point

of interactional role theory, implicit in modern organizational research and in the original strain

of sociological literature that underlies it, is that roles are relational. That is, a given role's

components (e.g., typical tasks) relate to other roles either directly or indirectly through inter-role

dependencies (Nadel, 1957; Barley, 1990) and are (re)negotiated in the flow of activity between

actors (Hall, 1987; Fondas and Stewart, 1994; Bechky, 2011). An implication of this is that

because a given role is connected to other roles, changes in one role might reverberate and

change other roles as well (Turner, 2001; Cohen, 2016; Wilmers, 2020).

Contemporary theory in the interactionist role tradition has acknowledged that individual

characteristics such as gender might be important in explaining variance in actors' role

experiences (Cohen, 2016; Cohen and Mahabadi, 2021), although gender has not been a direct

focus for much of this work.[2] Similarly, studies of women in management have often found that

women experience what the interactionist tradition would label as "role constraints." For

instance, Feldberg (2022) can be interpreted as highlighting variation in role enactment based on

women managers' expectations of others' stereotyped expectations of their managerial

performance (see also Chan and Anteby, 2016; Cardador, 2017; Doering and Thébaud, 2017).

This finding suggests that a more integrative theorization of the connection between interactional

role theory and gender in management might advance our understanding of the mechanisms

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[1] While interactional role theories have been criticized for lacking focus on structure, more-modern versions have taken structures more explicitly into account (Handel, 1979; Heiss, 1981; Barley and Bechky, 1994; Barley, 1996), and some authors have even refuted that this was ever a fair critique of the theory (e.g., Maines, 1977).

[2] To be clear, this literature and this article focus on the organizational (e.g., managerial) role, *not* the role of being a man or woman, which was conceptually developed in the mid-1900s but has since been largely critiqued (e.g., West and Zimmerman, 1987; Connell, 1995). Rather, these articles (and this article as well) tend to take a view consistent with contemporary research on gender and organizations, namely, of gender as the socially constructed (through systems of interactional and institutional practices) categorization of "women" and "men," which has meaningful consequences for hierarchy, power, and resources (Acker, 1990; Padavic and Reskin, 2002; Ely and Padavic, 2007; Ridgeway, 2011).

underlying how managers experience and respond to gender equality–related initiatives. But how exactly these theories relate to one another—and how this intersection potentially explains how managers' gender shapes policy implementation—remains unclear.

Methods

Research Setting

Data for this study come from STEMO, a professional services organization of STEM professionals.[3] Clients typically hired STEMO to develop a product or write a technical report. Typical projects included improving GPS technologies' accuracy and developing specialty solar panels. These projects generally took one to five years to develop and execute. Three to ten employees typically worked on each project, and each employee was generally assigned to three to six projects at a time. Senior employees and, in some cases, employees' managers assigned employees to particular projects and sub-tasks (e.g., literature review, research, report writing, administration). Employees' preferences for working on particular projects and tasks were sometimes considered in making assignments.

Many STEMO workers had advanced degrees in a STEM field, e.g., a master's in mechanical engineering. Employees' technical skills were highly valued, and developing relevant expertise could take over a decade. Employees' client connections were also highly valued because STEMO often engaged with repeat clients. Maintaining and developing customer connections was a multiyear process involving learning about clients' needs and interests, bringing in and completing multiple projects, and preserving good relations across time. Notably, employees' work tasks, such as analyzing data, performing a literature review, or writing a report

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[3] To maintain confidentiality, STEMO is a pseudonym, as are names of the flexible work policy and all individuals. In select cases, I have changed minor details (e.g., the gender of an employee's child) to preserve confidentiality.

section, could generally be performed relatively independently of coworkers and clients on a daily basis; employees could perform almost all work tasks outside of STEMO's facilities.

Roughly two-thirds of STEMO's employees were men. Nonetheless, the firm's employees considered it to be relatively women- and family-friendly because, for instance, it had on-site childcare. Roughly 80 percent of workers were White. Workers were grouped into 47 organizational units based on subject expertise (e.g., environmental science). Each unit had one manager, who supervised only that unit, and roughly 12 employees. Managers were generally promoted from within their unit after, on average, ten years. When selecting managers, more-senior STEMO managers considered a broad range of factors, including technical skills and connections to clients, as well as more-traditional managerial skills, such as organization and ability to support and develop employees. Once promoted, managers were formally tasked with overseeing a broad range of activities, including contracting new client work, helping subordinates on technical tasks, overseeing employees' project work, performing administrative work, and cultivating subordinates' professional development. However, STEMO was relatively decentralized, and managers were given a great deal of independence in determining how they engaged in these activities.

Introduction of Flex-It. Before the new flexibility policy, Flex-It, was rolled out, STEMO employees had less control over their schedules. Each weekday, they were expected to work at least eight hours between 6:30 a.m. and 6 p.m., and they were required to work during STEMO's core hours of 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Workers could not take breaks besides lunch and were required to work in person at the office at least three full days per week. Managers at STEMO generally enforced these rules.

In the two years before Flex-It's rollout, employees vocally denounced the rigidity of STEMO's work schedules. Many concerns came from women, who, like women in many organizations, tended to perform more family care than their male counterparts. They stated that STEMO's scheduling practices made it difficult to manage work and family responsibilities, as they could not work remotely when children were home from school because of illness or weather-related school closures, they spent time commuting to and from the office at the expense of family time, and they had difficulties dropping off and picking up children because of constrained work schedules. In response, senior managers assembled a committee of HR specialists, employees, and managers to develop Flex-It: a new opt-in flexible work policy designed to help employees manage work and life by increasing their control over when and where they worked (see Table 1). Under Flex-It, employees could work any time between 6 a.m. and 8 p.m. as long as they worked during STEMO's reduced core hours of 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday and worked at least 80 hours during each two-week pay period. Flex-It also allowed for the possibility of employees working at home when they wanted, as long as they worked in the office twice a week during core hours. While Flex-It was introduced and presented with gender-neutral language, women expressed more interest in using the policy, reflecting the fact that they seemed to disproportionally suffer negative consequences from STEMO's rigid schedules.

[Insert Table 1 here]

To enroll in Flex-It, employees were required to attend a half-hour training session and receive their manager's one-time approval. All managers were also required to attend one management-only training session. While managers were formally expected to fully implement Flex-It, they ultimately retained discretion over their units because STEMO was relatively

decentralized. One HR specialist involved in Flex-It's rollout noted, "We have over 40 managers at STEMO and how they manage these policies with their employees is really up to them. We don't police here."

Data Collection

Primarily through ethnographic observations and interviews of STEMO's employees and managers, I collected data for a total of 26 months, beginning six months before Flex-It's rollout. I intensified data collection one month before and seven months after Flex-It was officially adopted. I decreased my time in the field when I had gathered data across all 47 of STEMO's units and when individuals no longer reported changes in their experience of using Flex-It. I continued data collection for another 13 months to confirm that there were no additional changes in workers' experiences. The rollout and implementation of Flex-It took place before the COVID-19 pandemic, that is, in a more traditional flexibility setting.

To learn about Flex-It, I attended the Flex-It committee's monthly meetings both before and after the policy was rolled out. I interviewed all seven members of the committee. I observed the three Flex-It employee training sessions, the one Flex-It manager training session, the two Flex-It employee feedback sessions, and the one Flex-It manager feedback session. To learn how Flex-It related to employees' and managers' day-to-day experiences, I observed their daily work, including attending meetings, dropping by offices, chatting in the hallway, and eating lunch. I also attended STEMO-wide events such as trainings, town halls, community-of-practice research groups, goodbye parties, and the annual picnic. Additionally, I shadowed 22 employees and 12 managers for a full day each. In total, I observed STEMO workers on 146 days, for periods of time ranging from one to ten hours. During fieldwork, I also engaged in hundreds of informal conversations, talking to employees and managers about their work as well as their experiences

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with Flex-It. Across my fieldwork, I took detailed notes, often directly on my laptop. When I took paper notes, I typed them up the same day.

I also performed interviews with 107 individuals, roughly one-fifth of STEMO's workforce, in which I inquired about individuals' interpretations and experiences of Flex-It. I recruited interviewees initially by sending a STEMO-wide email. As I engaged in ethnographic observations, I met new workers and invited them to participate in interviews as well. In employee interviews, I asked broad questions about their experiences working at STEMO, whether they or others in their unit had enrolled in Flex-It, whether they talked to their manager about enrollment, and (if so) how that conversation unfolded. I asked detailed questions about their schedules and work–life experiences both before and after enrolling in Flex-It. To understand how they interacted daily with their manager, I asked what they talked to their manager about, how often they talked, and how they usually communicated with each other. In interviews with managers, I asked how they came to be managers; their approach to management; what they found challenging about their role; and when, why, and how they interacted with employees. I also asked how they experienced and interpreted Flex-It's introduction, rollout, and implementation. I interviewed some individuals two or more times to probe these themes more deeply and, because I was studying an organizational change, to hear how their experiences with Flex-It changed over time. In total, I performed 142 interviews—109 with employees and 33 with managers—typically lasting between 30 and 60 minutes.

To offer all STEMO members an opportunity to describe their experiences, I also worked with the Flex-It committee to send an organization-wide email before Flex-It was rolled out, in which I asked for feedback on individuals' experiences at STEMO in relation to work, work–family balance, and work schedules. Ten months after Flex-It rolled out, I sent out a similar

email, asking similar questions and also asking workers to reflect on their experiences with Flex-It. There were 270 responses; roughly 40 percent of STEMO's workers responded to one or both emails. I also reviewed a large amount of archival data from STEMO, including current and historical organizational charts, STEMO-wide newsletters and communications, and internal reports on STEMO's culture. Across these methods of data collection, individuals were generally interested in talking with me. Many explained that, as researchers themselves, they recognized the importance of research and wanted to participate in the study. Further, many expressed that they understood the importance of widespread participation in research, and this had partially motivated their own participation.

As described below, early in my data collection and analysis I noticed key differences in how STEMO's units experienced Flex-It's rollout. These early findings informed my subsequent data collection, and I intentionally focused on observing and interviewing individuals across STEMO's 47 units. For each unit, I triangulated (Mathison, 1988) by collecting data through observations, interviews, and/or responses to my STEMO-wide email. This allowed me to compare, for instance, descriptions of managers' approaches to their role with observations of their actions. Across these methods of data collection, findings were generally consistent. I attempted to reach theoretical saturation as I collected data (Small, 2009). For instance, when I began to notice that managers' gender was related to Flex-It's implementation, I gathered additional data on units with women managers, as they composed a smaller proportion of STEMO. As I reached saturation, I decreased the intensity of my data collection, performing fewer observations and interviews in units where my initial observations and interviews did not reveal anything new or different from units I had already studied more extensively. Further details regarding data collection appear in the Online Appendix.

Data Analysis

After each interview and observation session, I coded my data with inductively generated codes (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). My initial codes generally focused on workers' experiences of time and space both at work and at home, their understandings and experiences of STEMO's scheduling policies, and their broader experiences of working at STEMO. As I coded, I wrote memos analyzing emerging themes. Through this initial analysis, I noticed that managers played a key role in whether and how employees used Flex-It. Given this, I performed another round of data analysis focusing on how managers shaped employees' policy use. I noticed that some managers supported employees' Flex-It use and that their subordinates, particularly women, experienced improvements in managing work and family commitments. In contrast, other managers limited employees' use of the policy; their employees did not experience notable improvements in managing these commitments. For each unit, I classified the managers' policy implementation and their subordinates' experiences of Flex-It.

Through this coding, classifying, and sorting of data, I eventually noticed a gender pattern regarding which managers fully implemented versus limited Flex-It: while 27 of the 32 men managers (84 percent) fully implemented the policy, only 4 of the 15 women managers (27 percent) did so. This surprised me because many of the women managers expressed support for helping women employees succeed in the workplace, including but not limited to helping subordinates attend to and balance work and life commitments. In contrast, men managers rarely expressed these concerns. I later labeled this finding the *equality policy paradox*. With these initial findings in mind, I performed a more targeted analysis examining how gender shaped managers' experiences at STEMO generally and their Flex-It implementation specifically. I coded the data for managers' understandings of their roles, their day-to-day actions, and their

experiences regarding employees' schedules. Through this analysis, I eventually noticed that women and men managers tended to understand their roles differently and to engage in different sets of daily managerial actions. I then performed another round of data analysis focused on more clearly discerning these differences. Through this analysis, I developed a typology of how managers engaged in their role, which I later noticed corresponded with the concept of role performance (Goffman, 1959, 1961).

At this point, I noticed that gender differences in role performances seemed to reflect gender differences in role constraints: material, social, cultural, and symbolic limitations on how individuals can carry out a given role (Goffman, 1967; Nelsen and Barley, 1997). Another round of data analysis allowed me to better define these constraints, identify organizational processes supporting them, and classify managers' constraint-related experiences. I was also able to identify that while there was a gender difference in who experienced these constraints, there were exceptions to this general pattern, e.g., in the experiences of some racial minority men managers.

After this analysis, the question remained of how exactly differences in role constraints and performances related to managers' implementations of Flex-It. Through several iterations of data analysis, I eventually identified that Flex-It tended to threaten role performances enacted by women managers and that this was not the case for most men managers. Ultimately, I found that the equality policy paradox was explained by the following: women and men tended to have different managerial role constraints, and these constraints informed their role performances and, ultimately, their responses to Flex-It. This finding represents what I later labeled the "interactional role mechanism," a label I developed after reading accounts of interactional role

theory (Stryker and Statham, 1985; Turner, 2001) that seemed to broadly correspond to the mechanisms underlying my identified process.

Throughout my data analysis, I wrote extensive memos. I also performed a series of more targeted analyses, including whether managers' role performances existed on a continuum or in opposition, as well as whether there were subcategories within these broader categories or the possibility of a hybrid approach. These analyses ultimately supported the main argument I lay out in this article, by confirming the delineation of the two role performance categories I describe in detail below. I include details on these and other additional analyses in the Online Appendix.

The Equality Policy Paradox

At STEMO, I observed the equality policy paradox: women managers spoke of the importance of helping women subordinates but tended to oppose Flex-It and limit its implementation; men managers did not talk about helping women subordinates yet passively supported and fully implemented Flex-It. I first detail managers' commitments to gender equality and how their actions related to the flexible work policy often appeared contradictory given these commitments. I then unpack this paradox by describing how gender differences in managers' role constraints informed their role performances—that is, how they engaged in their managerial roles day-to-day—in ways that resulted in men managers often fully implementing Flex-It and women managers generally limiting its implementation. Finally, I highlight exceptions to this gendered pattern, including men's and women's diverse experiences as well as the way that underlying gendered constraints, rather than anything inherent to women, explain managers' varied implementations of Flex-It.

Commitments to Gender Equality

Women managers recognized that women employees at male-dominated STEMO often faced barriers to career advancement. While women managers noted several specific barriers, they tended to emphasize that attending to both work and home responsibilities was a challenge for many women subordinates, and they wanted to help these workers. Manager Tiffany tried to model for her employees, particularly women, that attending to both work and family was important and acceptable: "I'm trying to set a tone [in my unit] that work–family balance is okay." Manager Amy detailed how earlier in her career, when her children were younger, she had struggled to care for them while also maintaining her full-time position at STEMO: "I took care of my kids when they were younger. If they needed to come home sick from school, I was the one to get them. It was hard. So I understand what it's like to be a working mom and be in that position." She did not want her women subordinates to face similar difficulties, and she tried to help them find "solutions" to managing work and life demands. Notably, all of the women managers except one (who never had children) described having performed most of their children's care or split care equally with their husband when their children were younger. These women managers, like Amy, reported experiencing the difficulty of "juggling" children, home care, and work. In contrast, no men managers described performing the majority of their family's childcare, and only three reported splitting this work equally with a partner. They rarely expressed concern about the career difficulties facing women subordinates, including work–family challenges.

To help women subordinates address these challenges, women managers actively implemented various work–family policies—with the notable exception of Flex-It, as detailed below. For example, they encouraged women employees to take maternity leave. As manager

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Lori explained, "One summer I had three women in my unit pregnant." She helped them organize their work so they could easily transition to maternity leave. Lori stated pointedly, "There is never a question. You've got to take your time with your children. I'll help find people to cover your work." Similarly, these managers encouraged employees to use STEMO's on-site childcare center. Five had even served on the center's board. Another two helped set up a backup childcare program for employees. Women managers also organized a lactation room for nursing and breast pumping, as well as an annual speaker series on work–life balance and related women-in-STEM topics. Men managers rarely actively engaged in such efforts.

Yet, despite women managers' strong support of women employees in general and for helping them overcome work–family challenges in particular—and men managers' relative indifference—women managers were much less likely than men managers to fully implement Flex-It. As manager Tiffany explained, "Flex-It is concerning. . . . It's a problem." She did not allow her employees to use the policy freely but, rather, required them to ask her permission any time they wished to change their schedules. Similarly, manager Kathleen disliked Flex-It and limited her employees' use by telling them, "You need to get [my] approval every time you do something with Flex-It." None of her employees experienced notable improvements in their work–life management after Flex-It was introduced. In contrast, men managers tended to passively support and fully implement Flex-It. Manager Phillip flatly noted, "Flex-It is fine." He allowed his employees to use the policy freely. Similarly, manager Ryan told subordinates during a unit-wide meeting, "Flex-It now exists. Go check your inbox for an email with information." His employees enrolled and used the policy regularly. As I detail below, managers' gendered responses to Flex-It were not coincidental but, rather, reflected the ways in which managers' gender shaped how they engaged in their role day-to-day.

Organizational Gendering Processes

To understand how this equality policy paradox came about, I first highlight how organizational

processes shaped the constraints that men and women variably experienced when carrying out

the managerial role. First, gendered assignments of tasks (i.e., task segregation), which began

before individuals' promotions to manager, shaped men and women managers' development of

technical expertise and client relations. Second, gendered behavioral expectations (i.e.,

stereotypes), specifically, expectations of men as direct and assertive and of women as kind and

communal, shaped whether and how men and women managers' authority was respected.

Ultimately, women were more constrained than men in the ways they carried out their

managerial roles. Table 2 contains summaries and additional examples of these gender

differences in role constraints.

[Insert Table 2 here]

Men managers' typical experiences. *Technical expertise and client relations.* Earlier in

their careers, before their promotion to manager, men were typically assigned to more-technical

tasks than women were. For instance, before his promotion, Joe's manager asked him to perform

intensive research. Through this work, he learned additional technical skills, developed new and

advanced technologies, and more generally became recognized across STEMO and by clients as

someone with high levels of expert knowledge. Similarly, when Phillip was a junior employee,

his manager took him under his wing, and Phillip described him as a wonderful mentor and role

model: "He always went to bat for me." The manager assigned Phillip to a range of challenging

technical tasks, allowing Phillip to learn new skills and develop client connections.

These initial assignments to technical and client-facing work encouraged men to seek out

other similar tasks. Joe became entranced with technical work ("I love the technical stuff") and

sought more-complex projects, continuing to nurture his technical skills while also meeting a broad range of clients. After ten years, he reached the highest rank in STEMO's technical track. When his manager Peter retired, Joe applied to take his place since he was already running many of the unit's projects and knew most of its clients. Similarly, Phillip embraced technical work: "I saw some [technical work] opportunities and took them." He eventually opted to be "in charge of the biggest project in the unit, which was 50 to 60 percent of the unit's work." Through this project, he regularly engaged with and visited clients. When Phillip's mentor/manager retired, he applied to be manager because he was already bringing in so much of his unit's work: "This won't be a lot different." Stories like Phillip's, of men being mentored by a male manager and then promoted to manager themselves, were common.

Formal authority. After moving into managerial positions, men managers generally found that employees listened to and respected their suggestions and directions. This reflected, at least in part, the fact that employees seemed to view men's enactments of assertiveness and directness as expected and acceptable. During a development exercise led by an external trainer, employees were asked to "use archetypes to characterize individual managers"; the employees complimented men managers for "being forceful when he needs to be," "being able to step up and be forceful," and "having an authoritative voice." Men managers' directness and assertiveness were praised. During a project meeting, several employees discussed how a male manager and a male senior technical employee could both "command the room" with their "authoritative voices." For employees, the connection between masculine-typed behavior and authority was often taken for granted.

On a daily basis, respect for men managers' formal authority was reflected in the fact that employees generally accepted men managers' directions, requests, and suggestions. Similar to

other managers of professionals, these managers did not frequently order their employees to do particular tasks (Huising, 2014; Turco, 2016). But when they did, often in reaction to an upset client or unanticipated technical issue, employees generally listened. For instance, when a customer complained to manager Walter that his employees were working too slowly, Walter simply told them to work faster. They picked up their pace immediately. From the perspective of men managers, employees' deference manifested in the form of "smooth" day-to-day unit operations. Manager Edward, looking back over his 20-year managerial career, explained that he had had relatively few issues with employees: "There haven't been a lot of problematic incidents I have had to deal with." He told his employees what to do, and they listened: "You just explain the work clearly to them, and then just make sure it's completed within budget, blah blah blah." Edward described himself as "lucky" to have such cooperative employees. But across managers, it was not so much luck but, rather, managers' gender that seemed to explain whether employees were more or less deferential to their supervisors.

Women managers' typical experiences. *Technical expertise and client relations.* Earlier in their careers, instead of working on technical and client-facing tasks, women who later became managers were often assigned administrative and internal coordination–focused tasks. Before her promotion to manager, Tiffany was asked to organize her unit's client contracts. This task "took a lot of time" because it required her to interface with all employees in her unit who were in charge of various contracts, but it was not directly client-facing and did not develop her technical skills. As she related, "Before my promotion to manager, I was not on track to become a technical expert. I was not even doing anything related to my [research area] background [*laugh*]." Similarly, Rebecca described how before her promotion, she was asked by her manager to organize the "paper trail" for each employee in their unit. This required her to coordinate and

share information between employees, but it entailed little technical work and was not client-facing.

Over time, these gendered task assignments seemed to support women seeking out more internal brokering tasks, i.e., those that involved sharing information between employees. For instance, before her promotion to manager, Tiffany "took on" more internal project management work. When asked why she did this, she explained, "I'm just a people person. I like management and process, and I'm a generalist." For part of this work, Tiffany developed budgets, finalized contracts, and advised employees on how projects should be staffed. She noted, "I was bringing in subject matter experts." But she was not developing the skills to be a subject matter expert herself. Similarly, before her promotion, Rebecca "volunteered" to check in with her unit's project teams to see whether they needed any internal resources such as specialized task help. If help was needed, she would recommend another employee to perform the work, but she did not perform it herself. Nonetheless, when Rebecca's unit needed a new manager, senior managers noted that she was the obvious candidate because of her extensive local knowledge of the unit. Implicit in these examples is the fact that, while these women may have developed less technical expertise and client-facing work compared to men, they ultimately developed internal brokering–related skills that senior managers recognized as valuable and worthy of promotion. Therefore, while men were often groomed for managerial positions by their own male managers, women tended to develop broker-related skills relatively independently, and often they were promoted on the basis of these skills.

Formal authority. After becoming managers, women found that employees sometimes disregarded and disrespected their directions. This seemed to reflect, at least in part, employees' expectations of women to be agreeable and communal rather than commanding or assertive. In

the same training exercise described above, employees complimented women managers for passivity and docility. One, for instance, was praised for being "the quiet one who figures everything out." Another was commended for not dominating encounters with others, that is, "not speaking too much during meetings" (positively framed as being a good listener). Women managers were rarely complimented for being assertive. In another example, employee Janice expressed that women managers were "hard to work with" and often "disrespectful" of subordinates because they did not treat them more personally. Men managers were not criticized by Janice, or others, for similar behaviors.

While such direct, vocal, gendered attacks on women managers were rare, employees' disassociation of women with authority was reflected in these managers' everyday experiences of disrespect from subordinates. As manager Lisa explained, "I cannot make anyone do a single thing. They choose to do something or they do not do it. . . . My staff could ignore everything I say." When Lisa made direct requests to subordinates, they sometimes did not fulfill them. One day, she asked employee Seth to attend an important work meeting; he showed up late. Another time, Lisa asked three employees to quiet down during a meeting; they did not quiet down and instead talked over her. Similarly, manager Jennifer detailed how she struggled to get six specific employees to respect her directives: "Sometimes they don't even do the assignments I tell them to do." She asked subordinate Stanley to email a client a specific description of how STEMO would handle the client's project. He instead sent his own description. While such acts of disrespect constituted a minority of women managers' interactions with subordinates, these managers nonetheless came to view employee cooperation as something they could not assume but, rather, needed to actively and continuously cultivate. More generally, as I outline in the next

section, women and men managers' different experiences of role constraints informed in gendered ways how they performed their managerial role.

Role Performances

Gendered role constraints shaped how men and women managers engaged in their roles. Men managers tended to focus on technical and client-related tasks, while women managers tended to focus on engaging with subordinates. For both groups, managers viewed their role performances as effective means to accomplish their daily work. Table 3 contains summaries and additional examples of these gender differences in role performances.

[Insert Table 3 here]

Men managers' typical role performances. *Interpretation of role.* Men managers generally viewed their role as focused on performing technical tasks and managing clients. Manager Jim described himself as a "technical manager" rather than a "people manager" or even simply a "manager." He explained, "The technical project I led before becoming manager, I am still leading that. So oftentimes my day's focus really shifts towards that [technical work]." As a result, he noted, "I am really busy with my [technical] work, so I don't have time to babysit people." Similarly, when asked what he focused on as a manager, Edward indicated handling relationships with clients: "It is really important to keep track of all those relationships. That is the most important thing. They are our customers, and at the end of the day you want them to be happy."

This focus on technical and client-related work reflected the fact that men managers generally nurtured these skills before they were promoted. Manager Brad, for instance, still spent much of his time meeting with clients, developing connections that he had made years before he became a manager. He also continued to work on many of the same technical projects he had

worked on prior to his promotion. Men managers did not feel the need to engage with employees to cultivate cooperation, as their formal authority was already respected. Manager Jacob noted, "I don't need to go to my employees." When asked why, he explained that he knew subordinates would listen to him even if he did not engage with them regularly, adding, "I've never doubted my own authority or legitimacy."

Activities. Men managers engaged primarily in technical and client-related tasks each day. When asked about his activities as a manager, Joe explained that he focused on working with customers: "I do a lot of relationship building with clients." On a typical morning, he arrived at STEMO around 9 a.m. and would immediately meet with customers for approximately an hour. After this initial morning meeting, he often spent the rest of his workday either attending additional meetings with clients or preparing for these meetings. Clients and related technical work were his focus. Manager Phillip spent most of his days in his office at his computer doing technical work: "I am working in a technical area I've been very passionate about since a young age." He often focused on reading the academic literature in the area in which he was a "technical expert" and drawing on this knowledge to complete work for clients. Phillip also traveled to visit clients one or more times per month in order to develop additional work opportunities for his unit.

Role partners. Men managers tended to engage with clients, and when they were not engaged with these role partners, they often worked alone in their office. Manager Ryan, for instance, spent most of his workdays in back-to-back meetings with clients. As employee Connor noted, "Ryan is always in [technical] meetings and doing business development." These interactions with clients, as well as time spent alone in his office performing work for them, took up the bulk of his day. Similarly, manager Ronald often spent hours each day working on

technical tasks in his office, such as reading academic articles and writing research reports. This time was spent in solitude, away from employees. Subordinates reported that it felt like Ronald was "never in."

Time and space. Men managers tended to work at times and in places that fit with clients' schedules. Manager Arthur, for instance, emailed back and forth with a client to find a time to meet that suited the customer's schedule. Once the meeting was penciled in, he scheduled other activities—meetings with other clients, alone time performing technical work, lunch, filing paperwork, arrival and departure times from work—around the meeting. And when clients asked Arthur to visit their site, he often did. Similarly, manager Marvin's schedule was often determined by meetings with clients and blocks of time he carved out to prepare for these meetings, such as by performing technical work. He noted that where and when he worked did not depend heavily on his employees. He did not try to arrange in-person meetings with employees and was fine just emailing with them: "There is no active supervision that I do that requires me to be physically present with a [subordinate]." Men managers tended to work at times and in places that were rudimentarily shaped by clients but otherwise independent of others, including subordinates.

Women managers' typical role performances. *Interpretation of role.* Women managers generally viewed their role as helping and supporting subordinates. Jennifer explained, "My role is to make sure that people have the information and resources they need to do their job. . . . I try to find ways to make things work for them. Whether it is a purely morale thing or whatever kind of support that they need." She listed examples, including helping employees sign up for professional development courses, identifying internal work opportunities that fit their skill sets, and comforting an employee about the loss of a major client. Similarly, when asked

how she approached being a manager, Tiffany replied, "I'm here to give [my employees] the tools and the resources and the support that they need. [I tell them] come to me if you need help." Over the course of one day, she helped a junior employee figure out which projects fit her interests, aided four senior employees in staffing their technical projects, and gave three employees suggestions on how to budget their technical work. Tiffany noted, "My employees know their projects better than I do. So in that respect, I really am not very hands on [with technical and client work]." While she supported subordinates, she did not lead their technical work or directly manage their clients.

Notably, this employee-focused way of managing seemed to address the constraints these women faced. First, through helping and supporting employees, these managers drew upon the broker-related skills they had developed earlier in their careers. Prior to their promotion to manager, for instance, Jennifer and Tiffany had become well acquainted with their (now) subordinates' technical abilities, unit budgets, common training programs, and other internal resources and information. Second, through helping and supporting subordinates, women managers also subtly cultivated cooperation. Manager Cheryl explained that over time, she developed a "mutual respect" with employees, such that "typically if there is a problem with my employees' work, we have a conversation." Women managers often used the term "conversation" to denote a more collective form of developing cooperation, rather than ordering employees to carry out tasks.

Activities. Women managers often focused on activities that directly supported subordinates. Manager Lori explained that she tried to offer help to each of her employees one or more times each day, often when visiting their offices: "I'm always popping in on my staff. . . . I'll ask, 'How is work going? What challenges are you encountering? How can I help?'" Over

the course of one day, she helped one employee identify work that fit his research interests, prepared another to take on new work, and helped a third, Chase, think through whether to take on a new project from a client. Chase explained privately, "Lori wants to know, 'Am I hitting roadblocks?' She sees her role as helping me." Similarly, over the course of one day, Brenda dropped by her employee Carrie's office twice to help her plan an agenda for a visiting client. On the same day, Carrie also visited Brenda's office once to discuss the visit further, and the two exchanged multiple emails on the topic.

Role partners. As the previous section implied, women managers tended to engage with subordinates. Manager Amy explained that she devoted time each day to interacting with each of her employees: "My job is about talking to the people under me. . . . I do a lot of meeting with my staff. . . . I try to have face-to-face with my staff at least once a day." She would walk to her employees' offices and say hello if she did not run into them in the hall. Amy met with her subordinates so regularly that when Harold, an older employee who lived alone, did not come into work one morning at his usual arrival time, she immediately noticed: "I know him. He lives alone. This job is his life." Harold later called and told her he was in the hospital. Like Amy, manager Cheryl noted, "I like to be available and accessible to my staff." This meant taking time daily to talk with each subordinate, asking how their work was going and whether she could provide any help. Managers like Amy and Cheryl tended to focus primarily on interacting with their employees rather than meeting with clients or working alone.

Time and space. Women managers tended to support employees through frequent, spontaneous, synchronous, and in-person encounters. Manager Erica explained, "Each day, I poke my head into my employees' offices. . . . Even if [those interactions] are small and seem inconsequential, they are important." She noted that through such encounters, she could see

whether subordinates were facing any work-related difficulties and offer help as needed. Manager Erica's employee Alec similarly noted, "Erica will wander around and stop by everybody's office and just chat with everybody." She was present, available, and interactive. Women managers emphasized the importance of synchronous in-person interactions to help employees because such engagements allowed them to read body language, which in turn allowed them to better understand how their employees were feeling and how they could assist. As manager Lisa explained, "My employees should absolutely come talk to me in person. I don't want them to send me an email or call me when they are down the hall. I prefer to see the person. I can get a lot of information from their expression and their body language." Through reading body language in real time, Lisa could better understand how subordinates were feeling, judge whether they needed help immediately or later, and notice other subtle emotions that would be lost through email or the phone.

Flex-It Implementation

Managers' role performances informed how they responded to Flex-It. After the policy was introduced, men managers generally continued to focus on technical and client-facing work, and they allowed subordinates to use Flex-It at their own discretion. In contrast, women managers tended to experience Flex-It as threatening their ability to engage with employees, and they limited subordinates' policy use.

Men managers typically passively implement Flex-It. Men managers tended to passively support Flex-It, reflecting the fact that the policy did not interfere with their performance of technical and client-facing work. Manager Gerald explained, "I have employees who use Flex-It, and it's fine. Everything is basically the same for me as before." He still engaged primarily in technical tasks and meetings with clients, independently of subordinates. If

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employees needed to reach him, they could stop by his office or call him: "Even with Flex-It, when people have questions, they can call or come in and see me." Similarly, manager Samuel stated pointedly, "I have no concerns about Flex-It. There have been no challenges." While he now talked on the phone with subordinates more than he did previously ("I might now have people call into a meeting with me instead of coming in person"), he still could perform what he saw as his core work: technical and client-related tasks.

Accordingly, men managers generally allowed employees to enroll in Flex-It and use the policy freely. Regarding her use of Flex-It, employee Samantha noted, "My manager [Carl] doesn't care." Similarly, Monica stated that manager Jacob "didn't care" how she altered her schedule with the policy. While the policy benefited employees in various ways, it particularly helped caregivers, who were disproportionately women, in managing work and family commitments. Monica explained, "With Flex-It, I like being able to work at home if my kids need me. Like if they are sick or have the day off from school." Similarly, Courtney, who worked for manager Troy, explained that she was nervous about returning to work from maternity leave because she feared that STEMO's rigid schedules would make it difficult for her to care for her baby. Fortunately, Flex-It made attending to both family and work commitments possible: "Flex-It has been great for my family. For example, I often work from home, and I usually work an extra hour or so. Then I can work a half day every week and spend more time with my baby. . . . Flex-It helps a lot."

Workers appreciated men managers' support of Flex-It. Employee Robin praised manager Gerald for being "wide open" to her using Flex-It. Subordinate Jay explained that he appreciated his manager Phillip being "very understanding" when he wanted to use the policy. Employees' praise of men managers' support of Flex-It was notable because, more broadly,

workers tended to have mixed experiences with men managers. On the one hand, workers who independently reached out to and connected with these managers generally liked them. Employee Trevor, who regularly set up meetings with manager Donald, noted how helpful Donald could be: "He helps me, and bridges any [technical or client-related] connections or difficulties I'm having." On the other hand, those who did not proactively connect with these managers generally viewed them as distant and aloof. Employee Olivia also worked for manager Donald but found him to be uninvolved: "I have a manager with a management style that doesn't provide me with any support. He does not have a hands-on style. I am not super comfortable talking to him." Men employees often felt more comfortable and confident reaching out to and building connections with men managers, while women employees often felt less comfortable and did not reach out. This difference contributed to and reinforced the gendered technical and client skill gap at STEMO, as men managers continued to mentor men and not women.

Women managers typically limit implementation of Flex-It. Women managers tended to oppose Flex-It and limit its implementation. During the meeting when Flex-It was first introduced to managers, three women exclaimed that they did not want their employees using the policy. First Brenda stated, "We don't want to encourage the use of Flex-It." Rebecca then remarked, "We should be able to stop people from using it." Jennifer similarly asserted, "We need to be able to say no to employees using Flex-It." After the meeting, Kathleen complained directly to the Flex-It committee, arguing that the policy should not be rolled out. Women managers tended to oppose Flex-It because by allowing employees to work at a broader range of times and places, the policy made it more difficult for them to engage with subordinates. After manager Jennifer openly dissented at the management meeting, she privately elaborated on her concerns: "Flex-It takes time out of the day when you can more or less count on staff being

around to meet and talk. They can now work later in the evening, for instance." Jennifer's employees could work varied schedules with Flex-It, which meant that she could not as easily help, support, or otherwise engage with them. She added, "It could become a zoo in my unit. . . . Flex-It is making my job harder, and it's already hard enough." Her ability to manage effectively through close engagement with employees was threatened. Similarly, manager Rebecca elaborated on her dislike of Flex-It: "Reducing the hours people need to be here at STEMO is hard on managers like me . . . I need to check in with people." As Rebecca noted, working during all subordinates' schedules was not achievable: "I couldn't be available to talk and meet with 14 employees across 14 different schedules." And without being able to regularly engage with subordinates, she found it difficult to effectively perform her role: "I'm trying to have my unit produce a quality output. To do that, I need to stay in contact with my employees."

Some women managers prevented subordinates from using the new policy. Employee Joshua explained, "We have been heavily discouraged by [manager] Kathleen from using Flex-It. I don't know anyone in my unit using Flex-It in a meaningful way." Other managers allowed employees to use Flex-It only for select minor schedule changes with their explicit permission. Manager Pamela's employee Janice explained that she was allowed to use Flex-It only for small schedule changes, and she needed to ask Pamela in advance: "You need to let her know ahead of time, like a day before." Women managers' lack of support for Flex-It particularly negatively affected employees, often women, who had planned to use the policy to manage work and life. Megan, a single mother, had wanted to use Flex-It to help her care for her children. But when Megan wanted to go home early one Friday afternoon to spend more time with her daughters, Lisa said no. Megan's coworker Krystal recounted a near-identical experience when she wanted to leave work early to care for her granddaughter.

Subordinates generally tended to appreciate and praise these women managers' employee-centric approach. Employee Joy explained about manager Pamela, "I like working with my boss, I think she's a fantastic mentor. I feel like I'm growing professionally and as a person. I'm finding my work rewarding. I'm getting good skills. . . . I like Pamela's general approach." Similarly, Clayton praised manager Jennifer, noting, "They say that good managers talk to everyone in their unit. Jennifer does that." Many of her subordinates viewed her as supportive, generous with her time, and genuinely invested in developing them. However, women managers' limiting of Flex-It weakened their relationships with some workers. Joshua, who was blocked from using Flex-It by manager Kathleen, expressed his frustration: "Why does she even care? My customer is in a different state, so it doesn't matter where I work. I could be in a house in California or a trailer in Wyoming. It doesn't matter as long as I have Wi-Fi. My customer doesn't care." Bothered by Kathleen limiting his use of Flex-It, Joshua's respect for her eroded; he began to disregard some of her requests. Similarly, employee Kendra explained, "It is not fair that I cannot use Flex-It." Annoyed, she began to disengage with and avoid manager Brenda in the hallways. Notably, employees' frustration with women managers limiting Flex-It and related disengagement from them reinforced these managers' need to help, support, and otherwise cultivate cooperation with workers.

Variations in Men and Women Managers' Experiences

So far, I have described the gendered patterns in men and women managers' role experiences and implementations of Flex-It. Because experiences of gender are multifaceted, here I examine the managers who did not follow these general patterns. In doing so, I demonstrate that individuals have varied gendered experiences, while also providing additional evidence that

gender differences in *role constraints*—rather than anything inherent to women—shaped managers' gendered responses to Flex-It.

Men managers who did not implement Flex-It. Five of the 32 men managers did not fully implement Flex-It. These men fell into two categories. First, three of the six men managers who identified as racial minorities experienced difficulties having their formal authority recognized and tended to focus on actively engaging with subordinates.[4] Manager Larry supervised a division in which roughly 80 percent of the employees were White men. They sometimes skipped unit meetings he had asked them to attend, which was a source of frustration and stress for him. Larry described, with exasperation, how one employee did not listen when asked to fill out basic administrative forms. After recounting the incident, Larry noted, "But it's not just that [one incident], it's things in general"—employees often did not respect his requests. Given this situation, Larry focused on engaging with subordinates, offering help and having "conversations" with them instead of giving direct orders. When Flex-It was rolled out, this subset of men managers found that the policy conflicted with their (constrained) role performances, and they limited employees' policy use.

Second, two men managers, Raymond and Roger, limited employees' use of Flex-It because administering the policy took away from their own time to do technical and client-related work, i.e., it interfered with their role performances. In particular, these two managers believed that subordinates needed to be available regularly to respond to clients and that Flex-It made subordinates' availability variable. Therefore, they interpreted Flex-It as requiring them to regularly coordinate employees' schedules to ensure that someone was always available to talk

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[4] I do not provide details on these men's specific racial identities to maintain confidentiality. Women who identified as minorities tended to have more difficult experiences at STEMO than did White women, but because there were so few women managers in this category, I also do not provide details, in order to maintain confidentiality.

to clients, taking time away from their own technical and client-facing work. To avoid this extra coordinating work, Roger and Raymond severely limited employees' use of Flex-It. As Roger stated, "An employee wanted to work shorter hours tomorrow using Flex-It. I told her no." Notably, six other units served the same customers as those of Raymond and Roger, and none of these units' managers believed such regular coverage was required. Raymond's and Roger's insistence on employee availability reflected their own interpretations of their unit's work rather than more broadly held understandings of what STEMO's work required.

Women managers who implemented Flex-It. Four of the 15 women managers supported and fully implemented Flex-It. Notably, these four women cultivated technical and client-related expertise and focused on related tasks in their daily managerial work. Barbara had over 60 published papers and five patents. She often met with clients, leveraging her technical expertise to bring new customers to STEMO. Similarly, Gail generally spent her time presenting to and meeting with clients. Her subordinates noted that she was often unavailable for one-on-one meetings with them to discuss topics such as their personal career development. While men managers passively supported Flex-It, these women managers tended to more actively encourage employees' policy use, reflecting their desire to help women employees. Regarding her support of Flex-It, Barbara noted, "I'm trying to encourage women that it is not either work or family. . . . There are ways to do both." She emailed her employees about the policy when it was first introduced, and she spoke of its benefits at a unit-wide meeting.

Discussion

In Figure 1, I develop an analytically generalizable model of whether and how the equality policy paradox is generated. As at STEMO, the paradox occurs when women are committed to

gender equality yet limit implementation *and* when men are relatively indifferent to gender equality yet implement the given policy. The box above the paradox shows that it comes about because of what I have labeled the interactional role mechanism: organizational gendering processes (potentially) constrain individuals' performances of managerial roles. At STEMO, compared to men managers, women managers typically were assigned more employee-centric tasks before promotion, and after promotion they faced greater expectations of warmth; they tended to engage in more hands-on supervision of subordinates, resulting in greater interdependence with subordinates. Men managers, in contrast, engaged in more technical and client-facing tasks before promotion, and after promotion their authority was more readily accepted by subordinates; compared to women managers, they tended to be more hands-off and acted relatively independent of subordinates. As shown in the model, if women managers' role performance is disrupted by the policy, they will limit implementation; if men managers' role performance is maintained by the policy, they will (passively) implement it. The equality policy paradox is observed when these two conditions hold, which is what occurred at STEMO. Following extant theory, we would expect women and men managers' gendered experiences in the organization to impact their own commitment to gender equality, and we would expect their policy implementation to affect the organization's gendering processes. The gray lines in Figure 1 show this process. The Online Appendix contains two substantiations of this figure, drawing on my data.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Two conditions support this paradox. First, men and women must carry out their managerial roles differently. Therefore, the paradox is more likely to occur in organizations with processes that more prominently (re)produce variation between women and men managers' daily

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role performances, such as in male-dominated organizations that often have greater task segregation. Second, the policy must negatively impact women managers' actions enough to motivate them to limit implementation, and it must not negatively impact men managers' actions enough to motivate them to oppose implementation. Because gender differences in managerial patterns of activity are not fixed across organizations, the relevant factor here is the relationship between a given policy and a given pattern of work activity. No one policy will always generate the paradox.

To illustrate this relationship in more depth, consider a common organizational context: a male-dominated technical organization in which women managers often act in employee-centric ways (reflecting role constraints) and men managers focus more on technical tasks (e.g., Cardador, 2017; Alegria, 2019). In this situation, the paradox will unfold if the policy disrupts employee-centric management but maintains technical management. An example of such a policy is a flexible work policy, as illustrated in this study. Another example is targeted recruitment that encourages managers to recruit women returning to the workforce after taking extended time off to care for children. Because women managers try to help their employees more than men managers do, a sudden influx of subordinates who need support to reskill will create an added burden on women managers; because men managers do not focus as much on helping their employees, they would not be as burdened. Policies that would *not* generate the paradox in this situation are those that maintain both employee- and technical-centric patterns of managerial activity (e.g., on-site childcare, employee-led resource groups), disrupt both patterns (e.g., requiring extensive documentation in relation to pay equity, lengthy anti-bias training), or maintain women managers' actions but disrupt men managers' actions (e.g., asking managers to meet regularly with their current women subordinates). In contrast, imagine a female-dominated

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organization in which subordinate-centric acts are more explicitly valued; in this case, both men and women may regularly engage in such acts (e.g., Martin, Knopoff, and Beckman, 1998), and thus the paradox is not likely to emerge in response to a given policy. For instance, both groups would limit the implementation of a return-to-work policy that undermined interdependent-oriented actions.

Contributions to Research on Managers' Role in Organizational Gender Inequality

By surfacing the equality policy paradox, this study contributes to literature on how managers impact policies related to organizational gender inequality. First, it enriches research on how managers' gender shapes their implementation of relevant organizational change efforts. Previous work has emphasized value (e.g., Dobbin, Kim, and Kalev, 2011; Scarborough, Lambouths, and Holbrook, 2019) and identity (e.g., Srivastava and Sherman, 2015; Abraham, 2017) mechanisms. In contrast, this study identifies the interactional role mechanism, which focuses on how policies may either maintain or disrupt managers' role performances. The interactional role mechanism problematizes the common assumptions in this line of research that (1) roles are carried out fairly consistently day-to-day across men and women managers and (2) policies primarily affect their target but not managers. This study emphasizes the importance of considering (1) how individuals vary in gendered ways regarding how roles are carried out and (2) how changes in policy reverberate to affect roles connected to the central target role. It suggests, for instance, that when women managers perform more scut work (Ranganathan and Shivaram, 2021), a policy that disrupts this work (e.g., requiring formal trainings to reduce gendered skill gaps; Ranganathan, 2018) may generate resistance even if it promotes the interests of subordinate women. By drawing attention to how a given policy affects others who are connected to the targets, this research contributes to a growing literature that calls for systematic

rethinking of the implementation of policies intended to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion because these policies often do not improve, and in some cases worsen, organizational inequality (e.g., Ely and Meyerson, 2010; Bourdeau, Ollier-Malaterre, and Houlfort, 2019; Leslie, 2019; Padavic, Ely, and Reid, 2020).

Importantly, by surfacing the equality policy paradox and the accompanying interactional role mechanism, this study also clarifies the relationship between managers' views of gender equality and their implementation of related initiatives. Historically, this line of work assumed that having more women managers improved gender equality for all women (e.g., Hultin and Szulkin, 2003; Reskin, 2003). More-recent research has highlighted the importance of disentangling managers' gender from their values (Carnahan and Greenwood, 2018). This study further differentiates managers' values and practical constraints. It shows that managers' support for gender equality is not sufficient to ensure they will implement gender equality–related efforts, as compatibility between the proposed effort and the managers' role performances is also necessary. Relatedly, through exploring the equality policy paradox, this study emphasizes the importance of considering the nexus between a given policy and the particular gendered organizations (Acker, 1990) in which managers are embedded. Women managers will not respond in a uniform way as suggested by the problematic term "Queen Bee" (see Fernandez-Mateo and Kaplan, 2018), and managers' responses are not explained solely by types of policies or organizations. Rather, policy implementation is affected by how the policy relates to the (gendered) managerial role constraints that are enacted in that particular context. By emphasizing this nexus, this study encourages researchers to think beyond whether women managers are "cogs in the machine" or "agents of change" (Cohen and Huffman, 2007; Stainback and Kwon,

2012) and, instead, to view managers' implementation of gender equality–related efforts as being situationally contingent.

Finally, this study makes a crucial theoretical and methodological point: it is important to study managers' grounded experiences to assess their interpretations of and responses to gender inequality and related policies and practices. Much of the identity- and value-related work in this vein involves quantitative studies of administrative data. While these studies are undoubtedly valuable, paying attention also to workers' grounded experiences will enrich our understanding of the complex relationship between work, roles, and organizations (Orr, 1996; Barley and Kunda, 2001; Bechky, 2006, 2011). Indeed, theorizing work and diversity separately is untenable because roles are always constructed and enacted in relation to gender, race, and other identity-related characteristics (Ashcraft, 2013; Chan and Anteby, 2016). This study highlights that grounded empiricism (Barley and Kunda, 2001) can help identify new mechanisms (Bartunek and Seo, 2002; Locke, 2011; Anteby and Bechky, 2016) regarding managers' support for versus resistance to gender equality–related efforts.

Contributions to Research on Gender and Management

By drawing on interactional role theory, this study demonstrates the importance of studying the challenges women managers face in relation to a broader "matrix of domination" (Collins, 1990: 18), as emphasized in feminist literature on organizations (e.g., Kleinman, 1996; Kleinman and Cabaniss, 2019). By invoking this concept, I mean to highlight two particular points: (1) the interconnections between women managers' and other actors' experiences of inequality and (2) the intersection of women managers' identities (i.e., gender, class) and their own (un)equal experiences. In this study, women managers were members of one group (managers) that has been historically powerful, while at the same time being members of a less powerful group

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(women). Changes in the role of employee (initiated by the flexible work policy) might have helped some women address work–family issues, but it exacerbated inequalities for women managers. While much gender and management research has considered systems of inequalities, this study's particular focus brings to light two related points.

First, this study adds to research on the "disappearing" and devaluing of women's labor. Fletcher (2001: 3), a seminal study in this line of research, highlighted how women's relationally focused actions and behaviors "get disappeared," that is, suppressed in impact and recognition because they conflict with organizationally valued masculine-linked images of a good worker. This pattern of women's labor being disappeared has been confirmed by more-recent research (e.g., Turco, 2010), including this study. My findings extend this line of research by showing that interconnections between different groups of women can make it extremely difficult to reverse the disappearing of women's actions. Scholars often argue that firms must actively attempt to recognize and value women's actions in order to reverse their disappearance. Yet, as this study shows, in a context in which women's actions were to some degree already valued (as illustrated by women's promotion to manager), a policy intended to more greatly value some women's actions (by helping them also manage care work) might undermine the labor of other women (managers). Theorizing about reversing the disappearance or devaluing of women's labor must account for the varying inequalities that different groups of women experience, because otherwise organizational actions aimed at valuing women's actions might help one group while harming another.

Second, this study adds to literature on gendered interdependencies in work. Research has demonstrated that women in general (Hochschild, 1983; Kolb, 1992) and women managers specifically (Cardador, 2017) do more interdependent work than men, exacerbating gender

inequalities in the workplace. Various dimensions of interdependencies have been identified, including emotional (Hochschild, 1983; Martin, Knopoff, and Beckman, 1998) and task (Fletcher, 2001) dimensions. This study identifies another dimension of interdependence—between manager and employee schedules—that may contribute to the inequalities women managers face. Relatedly, this study adds to a recent line of scholarship highlighting the varied ways in which women managers creatively respond to negative gendered expectations that threaten to harm women's careers. For instance, Cardador, Hill, and Salles (2022: 250) showed that women managers might experience "constrained use of authority to gain cooperation" from subordinates and, in response, engage in extra task helping; see Feldberg (2022) for another example. By elucidating and modeling how another set of constraints (technical and authority related) may support a particular set of actions (interdependent, people-focused management), this study helps to lay the foundation for a broader model or typology connecting varied gendered managerial constraints to differential role performances.

Contributions to Research on Flexible Work Policies

This study contributes to literature on flexible work policies in two ways. First, it expands our understanding of the "flexibility paradox"—why these policies often fail to be fully implemented despite their proliferation across organizations (Gonsalves, 2020: 1058)—by highlighting how gendered managerial role constraints inform such policy implementations. Previous literature has identified managers' expectations of employees' availability and commitment as a reason for policy failure (e.g., Perlow, 1998) and has assumed that if managers oppose these masculinized ideals, they will be more likely to implement flexible work policies. In contrast, this study moves beyond managers' articulated commitments to show that their differential implementation of flexible work policies also reflects gendered constraints in their own role performances. Thus,

broader structural inequalities must also be accounted for when we consider whether and how flexible work policies can be successfully implemented. This finding adds to the work of many other researchers who stress the importance of designing flexibility policies with awareness of the broader institutional conditions in which they are embedded (Kossek, Lewis, and Hammer, 2010; Perlow and Kelly, 2014). By surfacing the equality policy paradox, this study also provides an important methodological lesson: scholars should distinguish between supervisors' stated support (or not) for helping employees manage work and life demands and their realized implementation of flexible work policies, as articulated support does not necessarily imply policy implementation.

Second, this study demonstrates how flexible work policies affect managers' work experiences, a topic that has received less attention than such policies' effects on employees' experiences (e.g., Kossek, Lautsch, and Eaton, 2006; Allen et al., 2013). While previous work has shown that flexible work policies may conflict with employees' abilities to be *ideal* workers (Bailyn, 2006; Williams, Blair-Loy, and Berdahl, 2013; Reid, 2015), this study shows that these policies may make work difficult for *actual* managers. Relatedly, while prior research has focused on managers' role in flexible work policy implementation (e.g., Lamond, 2000; Errichiello and Pianese, 2016), this study emphasizes that it is also important to consider these initiatives' effects on managers' daily experiences, as there may be gender differences in whether and how managers experience negative effects. Finally, this study builds on research that suggests managers may limit flexible work policies that they see as disruptive. Previously, scholars have theorized that "disruption" refers to a policy preventing subordinates from completing their work (Powell and Mainiero, 1999; den Dulk and de Ruijter, 2008; Poelmans

and Beham, 2008). In contrast, this study finds that managers react—at least in some cases—to concerns about disruption of their own role performances.

Boundary Conditions, Limitations, and Future Directions

I have already detailed several boundary conditions regarding the model I developed from my data. Because my findings are based on a qualitative study of one organization, they have additional boundary conditions. One limitation is introduced by invoking role theory, which critics have noted is most relevant and applicable for studying more-immediate action (Connell, 1979). There is a continued need for research that considers in more depth the multifaceted connections between levels of analysis in how gender develops and is sustained. For instance, it seems likely that the gendered socialization of women and men during childhood supported women's enactment of more employee-centric managerial approaches. A practice theory lens would be one way to examine these interrelated phenomena (Poggio, 2006; Gherardi, 2018; Janssens and Steyaert, 2019). Additionally, I have intentionally labeled this paradox the *equality* policy paradox because it may apply to identities beyond gender. For instance, it seems plausible that policies to improve racial injustices with regard to X group would be opposed by managers of X group if these policies disrupt their daily work. Future research can expand the model I offer here to consider other identities, including intersectional identities (e.g., gender, class, and race); because there were so few racial minority managers in this setting, I cannot provide detailed insights on race while also protecting confidentiality.

This article focuses on a flexible work policy, and research has shown that managers often oppose these policies because they conflict with the ideal worker model of a fully available worker (Cech and Blair-Loy, 2014; Chung, 2020). In organizations with a very strong, entrenched ideal worker schema, all managers may refuse to implement policies that conflict

with this schema. (This was not the case at STEMO, which had adopted some degree of flexible work prior to Flex-It and was already considered relatively women- and family-friendly.) Considering ideal worker norms is important because this schema represents another mechanism, beyond interactional role, identity, and value mechanisms, that may generate managers' opposition to certain gender equality–related policies (particularly work–family policies). This point also highlights that in addition to the three mechanisms noted in this article and extant literature, other mechanisms (perhaps specific to certain subsets of policies) might be examined, unpacked, and incorporated into the generalizable model developed from this study.

Practical Implications

This study holds two key insights for managers and other organizational leaders. First, it shows that actors who design and adopt initiatives to improve gender equality must consider the broader system of inequalities in which those initiatives unfold. As the case of STEMO shows, well-intentioned policies implemented by generally well-intentioned, women- and family-friendly firms can have unintended, negative consequences if the *system* of relevant actors is not considered. Supporting conditions that facilitate flexibility in women's actions (e.g., through mentoring women early in their careers) might help women managers more straightforwardly implement relevant policies without needing to be highly concerned about such policies' negative implications for their own actions.

Second, while this research took place before the COVID-19 pandemic, it contains important lessons as organizations adopt or update flexible work policies in the pandemic's wake. Many organizations are considering permanently adopting remote work policies, raising the question of how organizational leaders can ensure that managers fully implement such organizational changes. This study suggests that when designing, adopting, or attempting to

institutionalize these policies, organizations must pay attention to how managers perform their

roles (e.g., how they interact with employees) and how inequalities inform these role

performances. Through careful analysis, organizational leaders may better assure the successful

implementation of flexible work policies.

Supplementary Material
Find the Online Appendix at
https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx#supplementary-materials

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Table 1. Work–Family Management at STEMO Before Flex-It Versus After Flex-It's Proposed Changes

	Before Flex-It	Flex-It's Proposed Changes
Summary	Employees have relatively less control over their schedules, making it more difficult to manage work and family commitments.	Employees have relatively greater control over their schedules, allowing for easier management of work and family commitments.
Work hours per day	Less control over number of work hours per day: Employees required to work at least eight hours each workday.	Greater control over number of work hours per day: Employees can select their number of work hours each workday, as long as they work (a) core hours and (b) 80 hours per two-week pay period.
Work time band	Smaller work time band and more core hours: Employees required to complete their eight hours of daily work between 6:30 a.m. and 6 p.m. on weekdays, and must work during core hours of 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. every weekday.	Larger work time band and fewer core hours: Employees can work between 6 a.m. and 8 p.m. on weekdays, and core hours are reduced to 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Monday to Thursday (and no longer include Friday).
Breaks	Fewer breaks: Employees are not allowed breaks (i.e., stopping work for more than ~15 minutes) besides lunch.	More breaks: Employees can take as many breaks as they like outside of core hours.
Location	Less control over location of work: Employees can work at home two days per week maximum.	Greater control over location of work: Employees can potentially work at home any time, as long as they work in office twice a week during core hours.

Table 2. Organizational Gendering Processes and Differences in Managers' Role Constraints

Men Managers: Relatively Unconstrained	Women Managers: Relatively Constrained
Technical expertise and client relations: More-developed technical skills and client relations, reflecting pre-promotion assignment to more technical and client-facing tasks	**Technical expertise and client relations:** Less-developed technical skills and client relations, reflecting pre-promotion assignment to more internal brokering–related tasks (i.e., exchanging information and resources among employees)
Example 1: Before his promotion to manager, Alan was described by a senior employee in his unit as "pushing the envelope with [specialty] technology and identifying many unique applications of it." Having performed some project work using these skills, he was eventually assigned to a very high-profile project that relied on this technology. He received international recognition for this work. Following this project, he was asked by his manager to join three other high-profile projects using related technologies. He enthusiastically accepted the invitation.	Example 1: Before her promotion to manager, Lori was assigned—and eventually volunteered for—project management tasks such as handling interpersonal disputes, assigning people to projects that fit their skill sets, and organizing team meetings. She explained, "I chose [to work on a] large project that had me using a lot of people skills to build a team." She also noted, "I went into management because I realized, I'm responsible for managing half of the unit, I might as well manage the whole unit." She added, "My managerial skills were much stronger than my technical skills before my promotion, and they still are."
Example 2: Earlier in his career, manager Ron had sought out and been assigned to several high-profile projects. The end result was that, even before his promotion, he had worked on projects that were "high-impact" and "high-visibility" and allowed him to develop his technical abilities. As a manager, he continued to nourish these skills through technical work. His subordinates described him as having expertise in four areas related to their unit's technical focus.	Example 2: Manager Amy explained, "Before my promotion [to manager], I was a [technical specialist], and then I took on some more managerial tasks. That's when I realized I hated what I was doing [i.e., technical work] but I loved being a manager, helping other people, mentoring them. . . . So when the manager position opened up, I jumped ship. I just couldn't stand doing [technical] work anymore. . . . I much prefer interacting with people . . ." As a manager, Amy received several awards for "her development and leadership of staff."
Formal authority: Often listened to and respected, reflecting employees' general acceptance of men being direct and assertive	**Formal authority:** Often disregarded and disrespected, reflecting employees' general expectations that women are kind and communal rather than direct and assertive
Example 1: No one questioned or tried to push back against what manager Alan said. Employee Teddy, for instance, found Alan was often out of touch: "He's not very involved in my project work on a day-to-day, month-to-month, or even year-to-year basis." However, when Alan gave Teddy suggestions, he often adjusted his actions accordingly. And when Teddy sent emails that included Alan, he always acknowledged his authority: "I put my manager on the top of the email list. Just to make him feel good about his position. I've got to recognize the hierarchy, right?"	Example 1: Two of manager Kathleen's employees separately explained how she came off as rude and demanding, rather than supportive, when giving them direct orders regarding their work (e.g., when to start it, how to tackle particular technical problems); they sometimes ignored her directions for this reason. While it was possible that Kathleen's advice was not always appropriate, her employees' (a) views of her giving of directions as rude and demanding and (b) decisions to ignore what she suggested were rarely observed when men managers provided poor advice.

Example 2: Many men managers viewed employee performance reviews as an annoyance because they took time away from technical and client-facing work. Manager Jacob complained that he was spending his entire week on reviews. Manager Jeremy explained that reviews were annoying because "they inevitably required working [more hours] over weekends." Men managers' subordinates often said that while they did not always agree with their managers' assessments of their performance—and sometimes pushed back—they nonetheless appreciated the direct feedback.

Example 2: Many women managers described employee review season as something they dreaded; subordinates often questioned the feedback they provided. Manager Amy explained, "It's never fun. . . . It's so difficult to deal with the ones who aren't performing well. I hate the confrontation during one-on-ones and that part of management." Confrontation seemed to be particularly difficult for her because, as she explained, employees would sometimes refuse to accept her judgments of their performance: "It's a huge challenge for me in my role as a manager." Some women managers' subordinates said that they did not like it when these managers provided such direct feedback.

Table 3. Gender Differences in Managers' Role Performances

Men Managers: Focus on Technical and Client-Related Activities	Women Managers: Focus on Engaging with Subordinates
Interpretation of role (reflecting role resources): Technical expert directly handling clients, reflecting developed technical and client-related skills as well as respected formal authority	**Interpretation of role (reflecting role constraints):** Helpful internal-facing broker, reflecting developed internal-brokering skills (rather than technical and client skills) and need to achieve cooperation (as formal authority cannot be taken for granted)
Example 1: When asked what he viewed as the focus of his managerial role, Marvin replied, "I've got to do a good job supervising my own [technical] projects." He noted that sometimes "projects become priorities" over subordinates. That is, Marvin focused on technical work rather than his employees. There was not enough time in a day, he explained, to do his project work well while also regularly interacting with all of his employees.	Example 1: Manager Lori explained, "I set the vision [for my employees] that I am a resource. . . . I can help them do their jobs. As a manager, you really need to be here for your staff." Her focus was on helping and supporting her staff, drawing on the "people skills" she had developed before her promotion (see the Table 2 example of Lori).
Example 2: Manager Scott explained, "I am a subject matter expert. That's what I'm here for." He had worked for years on a particular set of technical questions, and he wanted to leverage his expertise to help clients: "I say [to customers], 'call me any time.'" In contrast, he noted, "I try to be as hands off as I can [with subordinates]." Scott's employees respected his authority, listening to his requests. Given this, he had confidence that they would "work independently" well, and he did not feel the need to gently cajole their cooperation.	Example 2: Rebecca explained, "As a manager, my job is to remove obstacles for employees." She noted that she needed to be hands on and involved because her employees did not always straightforwardly listen to her requests and directions. This, she noted, was in direct contrast to the experience of a man manager whose unit was on the same floor as hers. While he was hands off and often traveled for work, she noted, she needed to be more involved because her employees would not necessarily listen to her otherwise.
Activities: Performing technical work and meeting with clients	**Activities:** Helping and supporting subordinates
Example 1: Manager Gerald spoke with enthusiasm about his devotion to identifying work opportunities with new clients: "I always put in time to get us some new work." This meant attending conferences to identify potential clients as well as visiting client sites. He also relished technical work: "I love working on getting a paper published. I actually really enjoy that." Gerald's typical workday entailed meeting with clients, reading academic literature, and writing up technical reports.	Example 1: Manager Amy stated, "As a manager, I try to be there for my staff, I try to help my staff." When her employees faced difficulties, Amy often constructively asked them, "How can we do this?" She would then work with them to brainstorm solutions and provide helpful information and resources as needed. She noted that she did not perform technical work for them directly—"I don't get involved in their [technical projects]"—but instead provided support to help them succeed.
Example 2: Manager Matt spent most of his time in meetings with clients—handling their pressing, immediate concerns—or working alone in his office. Employees joked that there was almost no point going by Matt's office, because usually he either (a) was not there because he was visiting a client or (b) would not answer his door because he was on the phone with a client.	Example 2: Manager Lisa explained, "I spend a lot of my time trying to figure out how to make it easier for my staff to do what they need to do. They don't need me to do their jobs. They know their jobs, they're the experts in their field. I just need to find a way to keep them happy and engaged, remove obstacles to get done what they need to get done, and help when they get stuck." In one typical example, she helped an employee improve her presentation skills by listening to her give a practice talk and providing feedback on how to improve.

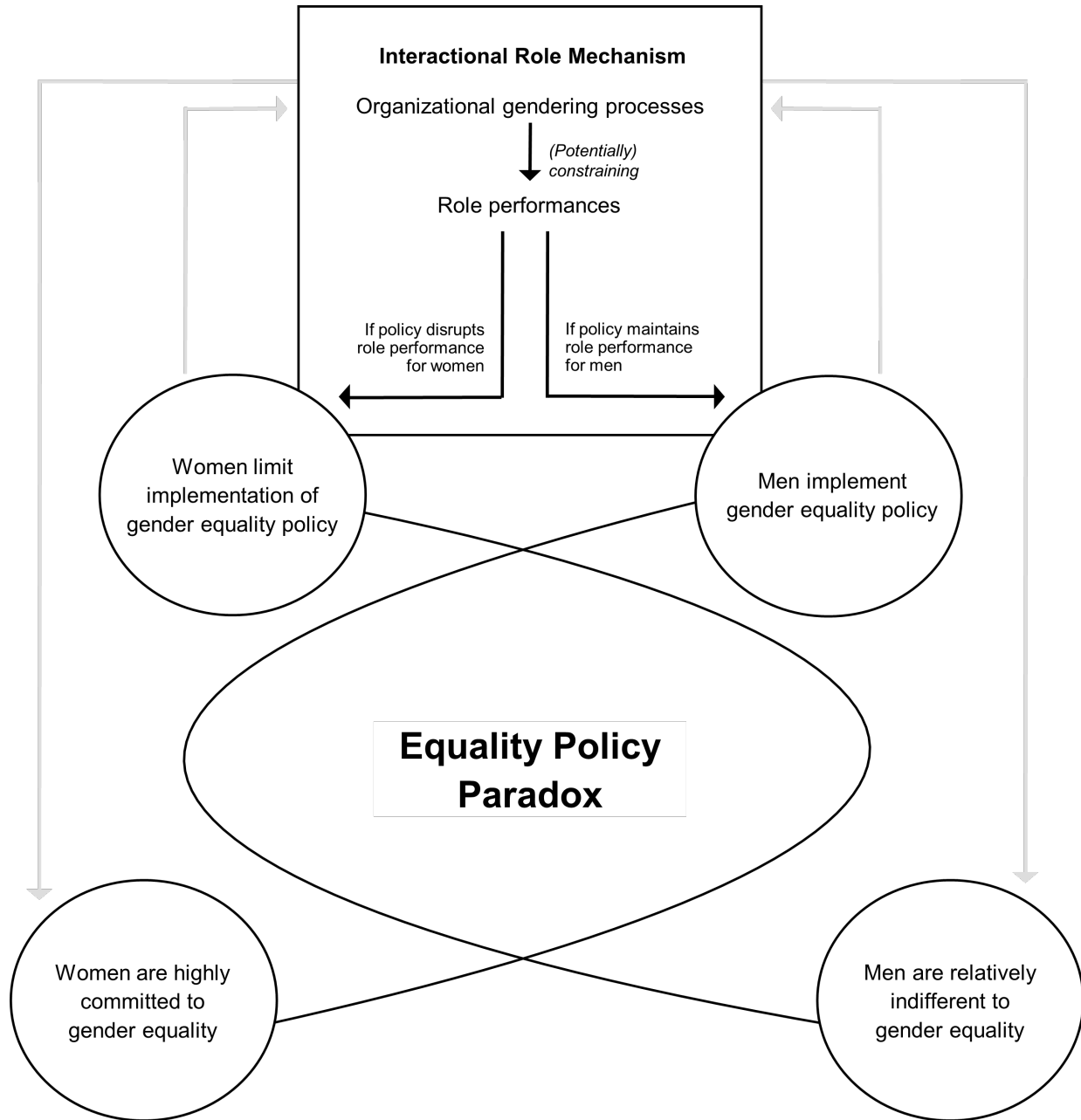|	
Role partners: Clients, no one (work alone)	**Role partners:** Subordinates
Example 1: Manager Carl was often meeting with clients. While senior employees in his division sometimes attended these meetings as well, his focus was on customers and responding to their needs. He told his employees, "Do what you need to do, and let me know if there's a problem." His subordinates often worked independently of him.	Example 1: Manager Pamela spoke to her subordinates regularly. As employee Joy said, "I talk to Pamela all the time. She has a very open-door policy." When chatting, the two would often discuss Joy's professional development, such as which sorts of projects could help Joy further develop her technical skills. Joy noted that she considered Pamela—with her constant, impactful involvement—to be a personal mentor.
Example 2: Manager Jack focused his time on meeting with clients and performing technical work for them, often alone, in his office. He was "very busy working on different tasks" related to these activities. This meant that, throughout the week, he would not spend much time interacting with subordinates. Employee Willie noted that he generally spoke with Jack only once a week when they ran into each other in the hallway. Subordinate Austin similarly stated, "There's not really that much interaction between Jack and I."	Example 2: While manager Kathleen occasionally met with clients or performed technical work privately, she focused on being available for interaction with subordinates. One way she did this was by taping a printed copy of her schedule to her office door at the start of each workday, so that employees could find her as needed. She also kept her electronic calendar updated. Employees could consult Kathleen's posted schedule and calendar to figure out when she was available.
Time and space: Dependent on clients, otherwise generally independent of others	**Time and space:** Frequent, spontaneous, synchronous, and in-person engagements with subordinates
Example 1: Manager Troy scheduled and attended meetings with clients, often trying to find times that worked well for their schedules. Otherwise, he worked largely independently of others, on his own tasks. He often worked in his office, alone and with the door shut. His employees were not always aware of when, or even if, Troy was available to talk with them.	Example 1: Manager Tiffany spoke of the importance of interacting frequently, spontaneously, synchronously, and face-to-face with employees. She worked with her door open to facilitate such interactions: "In general my door is open. . . . I would say 75 percent of the time it is open." When asked why she kept her door open, she explained that it made it easier to help employees: "I want to be open and accessible, let people pop their heads in."
Example 2: Manager Samuel was broadly indifferent to whether he met with employees face-to-face, talked with them on the phone, or exchanged emails with them. Explaining how he interacted with subordinates, he noted passively, "A lot of times we have phone meetings." Like many men managers—and in contrast to many women managers—Samuel did not mention concerns about reading body language or exchanging more sensitive or personal information when interacting with employees. He was decidedly neutral on whether communication took place face-to-face or not, preferring whatever was convenient.	Example 2: Manager Cheryl regularly interacted with subordinates in person. As Cheryl explained about one conversation she had with an employee, "That information we discussed [regarding an interpersonal issue] was too sensitive to write in email." Cheryl noted that she now more fully understood the employee's difficulties. Speaking in person, she was also able to provide tactful advice on how to handle the issue. Two common advantages of face-to-face encounters women managers highlighted were the abilities to help employees with sensitive issues and to read body language.

Figure 1. The Equality Policy Paradox*

Interactional Role Mechanism

Organizational gendering processes

(Potentially) constraining

Role performances

If policy disrupts role performance for women

If policy maintains role performance for men

Women limit implementation of gender equality policy

Men implement gender equality policy

Equality Policy Paradox

Women are highly committed to gender equality

Men are relatively indifferent to gender equality

* The parts of the model in black highlight the main relationships I discuss in the article, although additional connections and linkages are possible. Gray coloring represents concepts and components that are theorized more explicitly in extant literature, rather than the findings presented here.

ONLINE APPENDIX

This appendix provides details on more specific parts of my data collection and data analysis.

Details on Data Collection

Here I include details on my data collection across unit.

Table A1. Unit Details and Data Collection*

Across all units	Unit	Manager gender	Manager's constraints on role performance	Manager's role performance focus	Flex-It more fully implemented?	Observations of day-to-day activities	Informal conversations	Detailed interview accounts	Email responses
			Details			**Data Collection**			
↑ Interviews and observations of Flex-It committee. Observations of Flex-It trainings and feedback sessions. Archival data ↓	1	W	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Very extensive	Very extensive	10	3
	2	M	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Very extensive	Very extensive	9	10
	3	W	More	Subordinate	No	Very extensive	Very extensive	9	9
	4	W	More	Subordinate	No	Very extensive	Very extensive	8	6
	5	M	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Very extensive	Very extensive	8	14
	6	M	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Very extensive	Very extensive	5	18
	7	M	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Very extensive	Very extensive	5	9
	8	W	More	Subordinate	No	Very extensive	Very extensive	4	7
	9	W	More	Subordinate	No	Very extensive	Very extensive	3	14
	10	M	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Very extensive	Very extensive	3	2
	11	W	More	Subordinate	No	Very extensive	Very extensive	2	17
	12	M	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Very extensive	Extensive	9	0
	13	W	More	Subordinate	No	Very extensive	Extensive	5	13
	14	W	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Very extensive	Extensive	5	5
	15	W	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Very extensive	Extensive	5	3
	16	M	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Very extensive	Extensive	5	2
	17	M	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Very extensive	Extensive	5	2
	18	W	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Very extensive	Extensive	5	2
	19	M	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Very extensive	Extensive	5	1
	20	M	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Very extensive	Extensive	4	6
	21	M	More	Subordinate	No	Very extensive	Extensive	3	5
	22	M	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Very extensive	Extensive	1	8
	23	M	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Extensive	Very extensive	5	9
	24	M	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Extensive	Extensive	4	7
	25	W	More	Subordinate	No	Extensive	Extensive	3	6
	26	M	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Extensive	Extensive	3	5
	27	W	More	Subordinate	No	Extensive	Extensive	3	4
	28	M	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Extensive	Limited	5	9
	29	M	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Extensive	Limited	4	5
	30	M	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Extensive	Limited	1	6
	31	M	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Limited	Extensive	3	9
	32	M	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Limited	Extensive	3	3
	33	M	More	Subordinate	No	Limited	Extensive	2	2
	34	M	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Limited	Extensive	2	1
	35	W	More	Subordinate	No	Limited	Extensive	1	2
	36	M	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Limited	Limited	3	11
	37	M	Less	Tech/client	No	Limited	Limited	3	5
	38	M	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Limited	Limited	3	2
	39	W	More	Subordinate	No	Limited	Limited	2	6
	40	M	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Limited	Limited	2	5
	41	W	More	Subordinate	No	Limited	Limited	2	4
	42	M	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Limited	Limited	1	5
	43	M	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Limited	Limited	1	4
	44	M	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Limited	Limited	1	2
	45	M	More	Subordinate	No	Limited	Limited	1	2
	46	M	Less	Tech/client	Yes	Limited	Limited	1	0
	47	M	Less	Tech/client	No	Limited	Limited	1	0

Reaching Saturation Across Cases

* Very extensive observations are 18 hours or more, extensive are between 9 and 18 hours, and limited are between 1 and 9 hours. Some observations of units overlapped (e.g., annual picnic). Very extensive informal conversations are 20 or more, extensive are between 5 and 20, and limited are between 1 and 5. Total interview accounts (178) are greater than total interviews (142) because some workers had detailed insights on multiple units (e.g., because they sat close to or had work overlap with a second unit).

Details on Data Analysis
Conceptualizing Managers' Role Performances
As I analyzed my data, I eventually began sorting and categorizing managers' actions. Initially, I simply focused on managers' approaches to their role more broadly, and I inductively developed a large number of subtypes of managerial action. I then combined and collapsed these subtypes based on conceptual overlap into three major categories: one focused on performing technical work, a second focused on customer relations, and a third focused on helping employees. However, as I honed in on how Flex-It related to these managerial approaches, it became clear that what mattered specifically was if Flex-It undermined managers' role performances. This, I realized, was similar in the first two categories, where managers worked relatively independently from subordinates on a day-to-day basis. In contrast, in the third category, managers intensely engaged with employees. I also realized through additional analysis that managers' involvement in the particular tasks constituting the first two categories of action (e.g., client versus technical) was not as starkly separate as I had originally thought, but rather, that the two categories often overlapped (e.g., because client work entails drawing on technical skills). For these reasons, I ultimately ended up with two categories of managerial role performance.

As described in the body of the paper and Table 3, I conceptualized these two categories of role performances along four dimensions: interpretations, actions, role partners, and time and space experiences. These dimensions—and by implication, the two overarching categories of management—represent categorical differences, and can neither be considered in direct opposition to one another nor viewed along a continuum. However, managers' *engagement* in one or another role performance could potentially be viewed as a continuum, with managers potentially engaging in one role performance or the other, or something in-between (by either switching back and forth between role performance types, or engaging in an in-between or hybrid role performance). While there was some variation in how extreme managers were on this continuum, ultimately in the case of STEMO, managers tended to engage consistently in one of the two role performances. That is, they did not regularly switch between role performances and there was no strong in between or hybrid category. This seems to reflect the gendered role constraints at STEMO, which generally led men and women to have different experiences of management (e.g., it was difficult for women—who had often faced task segregation—to become technical experts upon promotion to manager). It also seems to reflect the general tendency for individuals to engage in consistent role performances (Goffman, 1967). For instance, it would have been difficult for a manager to be fully involved in customer-facing work and then the next day, week, or month ignore customers in order to be more involved with employees; the manager would be letting down customers, and subordinates might be put off by such sudden, involved interactions. This being said, there were of course some circumstances in which managers drew on the other role performance category. In the next section, I describe two key contextual factors that shaped managers' role performances.

Alternative Explanations
There are several potential alternative explanations regarding the relationship between gender and managers' policy implementation that theoretically could explain the findings laid out above. In this section, I address these alternative explanations and explain why each does not seem to apply to this study of STEMO.

Managers' career trajectories and units. One possible alternative explanation is that women's and men's approaches to management differ because of underlying differences in career trajectories that are not directly connected to gender. However, there is no evidence that this was the case. For instance, regardless of gender, most managers joined STEMO as early to mid-career professionals who were then later internally promoted. Men and women managers had similar periods of time to promotion to manager, in the role of manager, in organizational tenure, and in formal training. A second possible alternative explanation is that women and men managers supervised units that varied systematically, which explained gender differences in outcomes. However, I found no evidence that this was the case. At STEMO, women and men managers supervised similar units in terms of the actual daily work performed by their employees (i.e., client-facing technical work), the total number of employees, and employees' level of expertise.

Managers' informal flexibility, protection of women subordinates, and views of Flex-It. Another possible explanation is that women managers allowed employees to have more informal flexibility before Flex-It, and this is why their employees used Flex-It less. There was, however, no evidence of such a difference. A related alternative explanation is that women managers anticipated that flexible work policies would harm women's careers (e.g., through flexibility stigma, Williams, Blair-Loy, and Berdahl, 2013), and these managers therefore limited women's policy use to protect them. There was also no evidence that this was the case. No woman manager voiced concerns about Flex-It harming women employees' careers, and women managers were consistent in their attempts to limit both men's and women's use of the policy. Finally, I considered whether men managers allowed employees to use Flex-It because the policy increased work hours, furthering commitment and availability, while women managers opposed it for this reason. I found no evidence for this explanation.

Substantiations of Figures
Here I include substantiations of Figure 1 to illustrate the model's generalizability. In Figure A1, I illustrate "typical" women and men managers at STEMO. In Figure A2, I show "atypical" women and men managers at STEMO, specifically women who overcame gendered constraints and men managers who were dependent on subordinates being available for clients (i.e., Raymond and Roger), as described in the "Variations" section of the finding.

References
Goffman, E.
1967   Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Interaction. Oxford: Aldine Publishing Company.

Williams, J. C., M. Blair-Loy, and J. L. Berdahl
2013   "Cultural schemas, social class, and the flexibility stigma." Journal of Social Issues, 69: 209–234.

Figure A1. Equality Policy Paradox for "Typical" Women and Men Managers at STEMO

Interactional Role Mechanism
Task segregation
Gendered warmth expectations

Constraining

Women managers: subordinate-centric
Men managers: subordinate-distant

Policy disrupts role performance for women

Policy maintains role performance for men

Women limit implementation of Flex-It

Men implement Flex-It

Equality Policy Paradox

Women are highly committed to gender equality

Men are relatively indifferent to gender equality
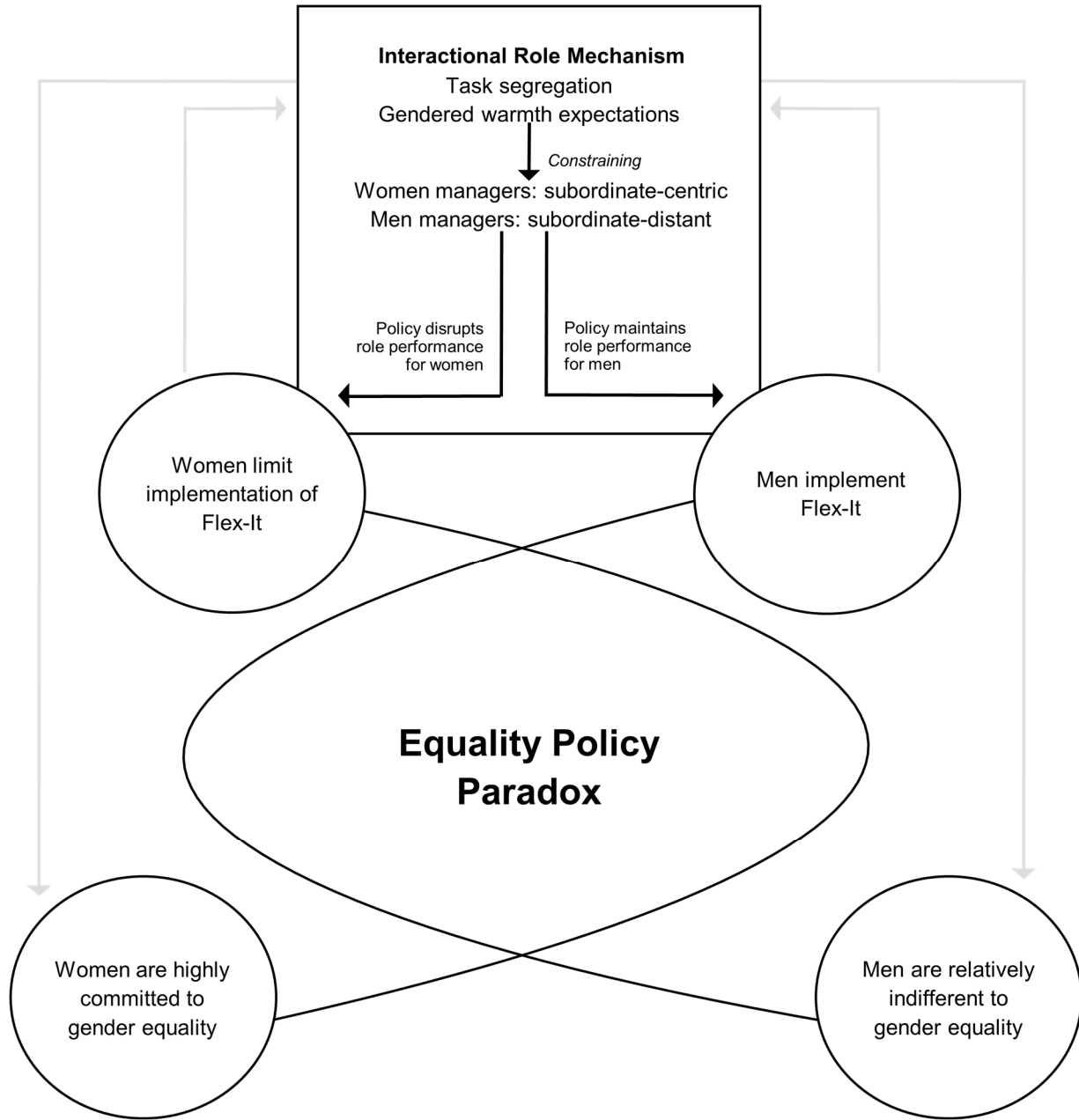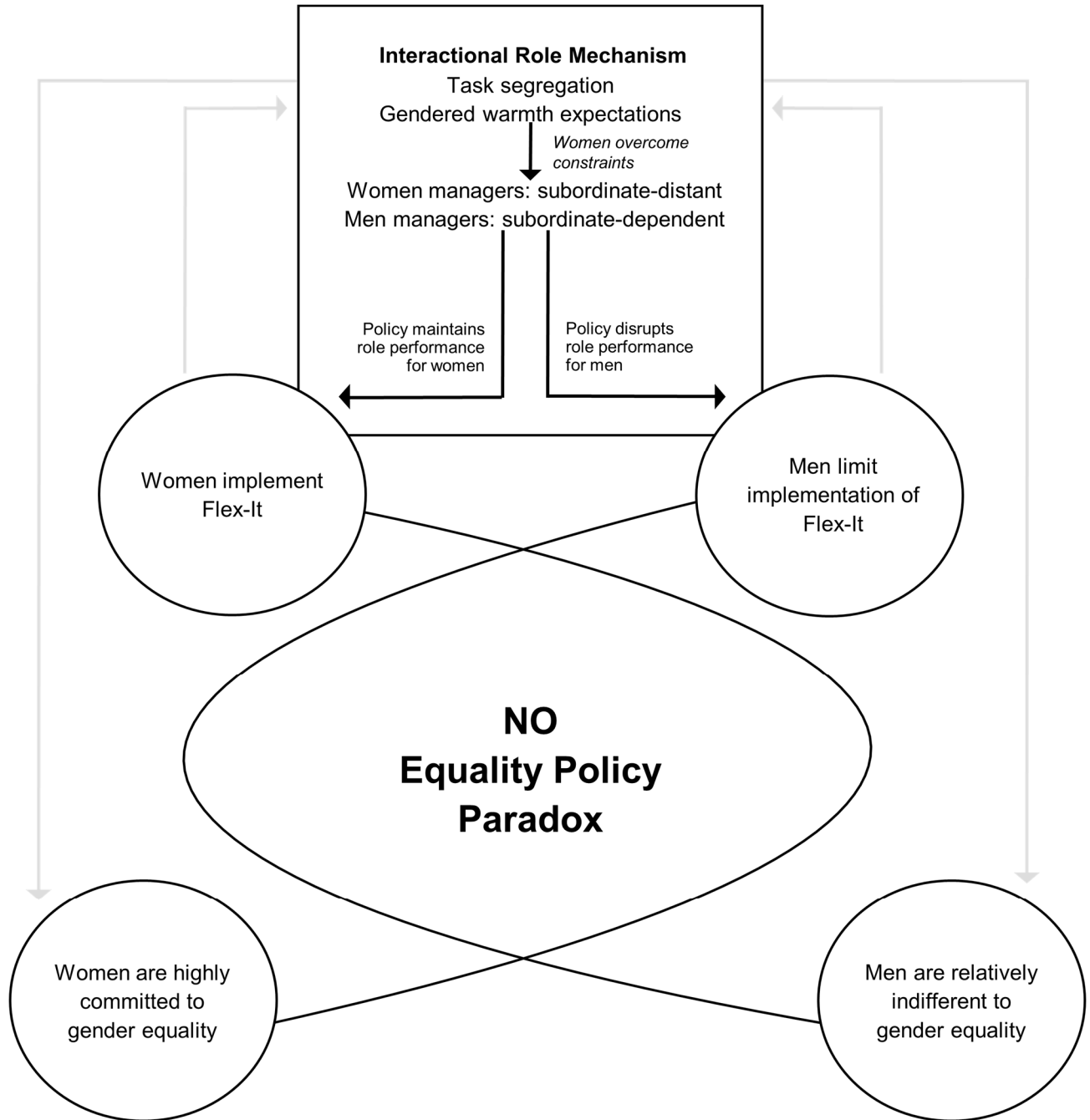
Figure A2. No Equality Policy Paradox for "Atypical" Women and Men Managers at STEMO

Note: Figure is focused on STEMO women managers who overcame gendered constraints and men managers who were dependent on subordinates being available for clients.