

# I see it all from both sides now

**[WORK]** Are you treated differently at work because of your gender? **Nicola Gill** talks to four people who've experienced both sides of the gender divide and feel they have the answer to that question

**B**efore becoming a psychotherapist, Michelle Bridge-  
man worked in venture  
capitalism. Used to the cut  
and thrust of high-level  
meetings and business dealings, she  
never had a problem giving confident  
opinions when the pressure was on.  
One particular meeting, about Japa-  
nese financial markets, stands out in  
her mind. During the discussion, a man  
nodded in Michelle's direction and  
asked her opinion. She was armed with  
a forthright, informed view, but just as  
she opened her mouth, another man  
cut in and answered for her.

Many women would feel angry and  
belittled in this situation. Some, as  
Michelle did, will fight fire with fire and

insist on being heard no matter how  
assertive they have to be. Others will  
swallow their anger, unsure whether  
what just happened occurred because  
they're women or because the cut-  
ter-in simply has no manners, regard-  
less of whose opinion they're hijacking.  
Most women in business (and in life)  
will have a thousand variations of these  
experiences. Yet often it's hard to be  
sure – is this happening because I lack

authority or because I'm a woman? Or  
am I being oversensitive and imagining  
condescension where there isn't any?  
Multiple studies have sought to  
establish whether the fabled, restricted  
headroom of the glass ceiling is the  
result of women's innate lack of appe-  
tite to get right to the top – that most of  
us are just too inherently 'nice' to get  
stuck in at the sharpest end of the  
greasy pole. Some studies have tried to  
isolate and evaluate whether it's envi-  
ronment that's hostile to women's  
greater career success, with non-child-  
friendly policies, working hours and  
entrenched sexist workplace attitudes  
being the suspected culprits. But  
no-one has really got to the bottom of  
it, as it's extremely tricky to isolate the

“I've learnt that  
the successful  
women I know don't  
act like men to enjoy  
personal power.”

