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WOMEN IN THE ACADEMY :
A PROBLEMATIC ISSUE?

by Pat O'Connor

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Introduction

Over the past fifteen years assumptions that the Higher Educational system in Ireland is gender neutral have been challenged over and over again (e.g. Smyth, 1984; H.E.A.1987; Smyth, 1996). Nevertheless the popular view, fostered indeed by the educational institutions themselves, is that it is gender neutral - the to-day the experiences of boys and girls, of men and women within that system being depicted as more or less the same. This popular view receives a good deal of support from the fact that women now make up just half of all undergraduate and post graduate students in Higher Education nationally (Department of Equality and Law Reform, 1994A); just over half (53%) of the new undergraduate entrants in the University sector and under half (43%) of new entrants into the Non-University Higher Education sector (Clancy, 1995). However, a rather different picture emerges when one looks at the academic staff profile. There women make up roughly one in five of the (full time) academic staff in both the University (Smyth, 1996) and in the non-University Higher Education sector (Healy,1995). This chapter is concerned with drawing together the evidence which is available as regards the position of such staff, and locating it in an international context. The chapter will describe some of the explanations which have been put forward for this phenomenon; it will discuss the implications of this pattern and will identify various strategies which might be adopted to bring about changes in it.

The focus in this article is on academic women (i.e.those on the teaching staff) because these are seen as potential role models for the increasingly female student population. The position of other women within the Higher Education sector raises related issues about the nature and value of women's work (Smyth, 1996; Cullinane, 1996; O'Sullivan, 1996) These deserve attention in their own right. They are not however the focus of this chapter.

The Irish Academic Staff profile

Smyth (1984 & 1996) has been one of the very few academics who has been steadily concerned with this issue . Her most recent publication, drawn from returns from Personnel Departments in the Universities, showed that women made up 21% of the full time academic staff in 1993/94, and 4% of those at full Professorial level (see Table 1). These patterns varied between different Universities, with Dublin City University (at 29%) having the highest overall proportion of women on their academic staff, and Trinity College Dublin & University College Cork (at 8%) having the highest proportion of women at full Professorial level. It is worth noting that these figures may well overstate the presence of women, since it is clear from other sources that the returns made by the University of Limerick included some part time academic staff; with the proportion of women on the full time academic staff there in 1993/94 being 15%: (O' Connor, 1995A).

Table 1: Number of (full time) male and female academic staff in Irish Universities 1993-94, and women as a percentage of all staff and of those at Professorial level ¹.

| University | All Academic Staff | | | Professorial Level | | |
|-------------------|---------------------------|--------------|----------------|---------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| | Total N | Men N | Women N | %Women | Women N | %Women |
| D.C.U | 174 | 124 | 50 | 29% | 0 | 0% |
| Maynooth | 126 | 93 | 33 | 26% | 0 | 0% |
| U.L. | 253 | 203 | 50 | 20% | 0 | 0% |
| U.C.D. | 677 | 545 | 132 | 19% | 2 | 3% |
| U.C.C. | 370 | 285 | 85 | 23% | 4 | 8% |
| U.C.G. | 257 | 223 | 34 | 13% | 3 | 4% |
| T.C.D. | 475 | 372 | 103 | 22% | 5 | 8% |
| Total | 2332 | 1845 | 487 | 21% | 14 | 4% |

¹Smyth, 1996 :34 &36

Earlier work done by Smyth (1984) and by a working party set up by the Minister for Education (Higher Education Authority, 1987) had highlighted the under representation of women academics in Third Level education. The HEA study using data from both a postal survey of all women academics (and a matched sample of men) as well as statistical data received from the Universities and Third Level colleges, broadly duplicated the findings of the earlier study by Smyth (1984). Thus, the HEA study (1987) showed that women in the mid 80s made up under 15% of full time faculty in the Universities, and 18% in other designated Third Level institutions. Furthermore, it noted that at that time women overwhelmingly held junior posts, making up only 2% of those at full Professorial level. It was noted (Hayden, 1991) that this pattern had changed little by the late 1980s and this was attributed to the difficult economic circumstances at that time. However, despite the economic improvements in the 1990s, the pattern has changed little (Smyth, 1996). The proportion of women at Professorial level actually fell in the mid 1980s to 2% thereby creating the impression that things had improved. In fact the proportion of women who were at full Professorial level in 1993/94 was roughly the same as it was 20 years previously. Thus women made up 4 of those at full Professorial level in 1993/94 and 4.5% of those at this level in 1975/76(HEA, 1987 and Smyth 1996). Quite clearly then assumptions that this pattern is improving over time are very naive indeed.

Furthermore it is worth noting that the majority of women who were employed as full-time academic staff within the University sector even in 1993/94 were at Lecturer level or below, just as they were in 1983/84 (80% & 84% respectively: Smyth,1996). Indeed there was evidence that the representation of women at Assistant Lecturer level in 1993/94 was greater than it had been in 1983/84 (i.e. 39% of those at this level being women in 1993/94, as compared with 24% in 1983/84: Smyth, 1996). Smyth (1996) has also noted that the distribution of women across subject areas has not changed significantly over the period i.e.

women being still concentrated in the Humanities and Social Sciences areas, and being underrepresented in Engineering, Agriculture etc.

It is important to note that for the most part, attention in this paper is focused on women within the University sector. Internationally, as will be shown in the next section, insofar as a University and Non-University sector have been differentiated within the Higher Education area, women have tended to be concentrated in the latter. In Ireland however the proportion of women (at 19%) amongst the full time academic staff in the Regional Technical Colleges and in the Dublin Institute of Technology in 1993 was very similar to that in the University sector (Healy, 1995). This may reflect the fact that with the exception of the Colleges of Education, the Non-University sector has up to very recently indeed had a mainly "masculine" focus in its curriculum. However, there is evidence that the proportion of female academics is rising rapidly in this sector- reaching 24% in 1994/95 (Healy, 1995). However, as in the University sector women staff within the R.T.C. sector are disproportionately concentrated at the lower levels of the academic staff hierarchy (N.O.W. 1995:7; Burke, 1996) Overall then, in this sector, as in the University, the staff profile is very different to that which exists at student level (Clancy, 1995, N.O.W., 1995).

Thus, it is clear that although it is twenty years since the passing of the Employment Equality legislation; and despite the concern by the HEA with this issue over the past ten years as reflected in the establishment of the Higher Education Equality Unit; and despite the gender balanced nature of the student profile at undergraduate and post graduate level, women remain very much under represented at academic staff level within Higher Education in general and the Irish University sector in particular. Women are virtually invisible at Professorial level being now in the same position there as there were in 1975/76. It will be shown that the under representation of women in the University sector and their position in that structure is not peculiar to Ireland, so cannot be explained in terms of idiosyncratic historical factors.

How typical is this pattern?

The typicality of this pattern can be assessed at several levels: firstly it can be compared with trends emerging amongst Primary and Secondary School teachers in Ireland; secondly, it can be compared with the trends emerging at University level in other countries, and thirdly, it can be located in the context of the trends emerging amongst a wider group of professional &/or managerial workers both inside and outside Ireland.

Firstly then it is not that women are generally underrepresented within the teaching area. Thus the representation of women amongst Primary teachers in Ireland is very different to that emerging at University level. Thus, in 1993, women made up 77% of the teachers at Primary level (Lynch, 1994) as compared with roughly one in five of those at University Level. However, at Primary Level, as indeed at University Level, there were clear gender differences as regards men's and women's possibility of promotion. At Primary Level women had a roughly one in ten chance of becoming a principal (i.e. 12% of women teachers at Primary Level were principals) while men had a roughly three to four times better chance (i.e. 41% of male Primary teachers were principals). Furthermore as the Second Report of the Third Joint Oireachtas Committee (1992) showed, this structural bias towards the appointment of men as principals was reflected in the fact that the average period between qualifying and first appointment as a principal was nine and a half years for women but five years for men.

As outlined in the previous section, these same patterns as regards the differential possibility of promotion for women and men were evident in the University sector. Thus, in 1993/94, Smyth (1996:35) showed that women had roughly one chance in thirty four of becoming a Professor (14/462 of the full time academic women being in this position in 1993/94), as compared with a one in six chance for the men (303/1817 of the men being in this position in 1993/94). Thus, quite clearly, although women made up the majority of the teachers at Primary level, and only a minority of those at University level, similar processes appear to be operating in the two sectors insofar as women had a very much smaller possibility than men

of moving to the top within both hierarchies. Within an Irish context, there has been a tendency to explain these patterns as reflecting peculiarly Irish phenomena (such as its late modernisation, the low level of married women's participation in paid employment etc.). In fact however the patterns which have been documented within the educational system do not appear to be peculiar to Ireland.

Acker (1994) noted that very similar patterns existed in the U.K. in 1991/92. Thus although women made up 22% of the full time academic staff, they constituted less than 5% of those at Professorial level- prompting her to observe: "The statistics confirm that a problem, indeed, exists" (1994:135). Indeed she noted that if one focused on faculty who taught and were expected to do research as part of their normal work (the 'traditional academics') women were even more underrepresented in U.K. Universities i.e. constituting only 16% of those academics.

As can be seen from Table 2, the picture is remarkably consistent across Europe. It is striking that Portugal is the country with the highest proportion of women in the University sector. Rubery and Fagan (1993:62) noted that women's share of university posts did not seem to be related to their participation in paid employment. In fact there was some evidence that the countries with the highest proportion of women in such posts in the University sector had a relatively low proportion of women in paid employment overall. Furthermore, they noted that improvements in general educational level, economic well being, increases in State intervention or in women's overall participation in paid employment within Higher Education or in Second Level did not appear to be associated with women's share of University posts.

It is clear from Table 2 that where a University & Non-University sector are differentiated, women are likely to constitute a much higher proportion of the academic staff within the non-university sector (e.g. in Spain). When University status was given to the Non-University sector (e.g. in the U.K. in 1992) the proportion of women rose. Thus, for example women made up 28% of the academic staff in the (re drawn) U.K. University sector, and just over 7%

of the Professorial staff (Brown, 1995; Ince, 1996). Between 1980 and 1989, the proportion of women Professors in the "old "Universities in the U.K. remained constant at 3%, rising slightly to 5.5% in 1993/94 (Brown, 1995).

Eurostat (1995) figures on the proportion of women teaching in Higher Education are described as incomplete and not directly comparable. However it was clear that there was a clear trend insofar as women typically constituted 20-30% of those in Higher Education establishments. Furthermore of the E.U.countries included in these Eurostat figures (viz Belgium, Germany, Netherlands, U.K., Ireland, Spain and Greece) the highest proportion of women teachers at Third Level was rather surprisingly in Greece- what one would regard as a relatively underdeveloped country.

Table 2 Proportion of women amongst academic staff within various countries in the Higher Education Sector².

| | | | |
|-------------|---------|----------------|-----------|
| Belgium | 1981 | University 17% | Other 43% |
| Germany | 1989 | University 2 | |
| Greece | 1986/87 | 27% | |
| Spain | 1988 | University 28% | Other 35% |
| France | 1989/90 | 27% | |
| Italy | 1991 | 27% | |
| Netherlands | 1990 | University 20% | |
| Portugal | 1986/87 | University 31% | |
| U.K. | 1989 | University 19% | Other 45% |

¹ Rubery & Fagan ,1993:63

Broadly similar patterns emerged in Stiver Lie & O' Leary's (1990) review of the position of academic women in Higher Education in a variety of countries including Turkey,

Netherlands, U.S.A., Norway, United Kingdom , West Germany, Jordan and Israel. Thus, they noted that of those countries, the one where women made up the highest proportion of academic staff

and the highest proportion of those in (full) Professorial posts was in Turkey (Table 3). In the late 1980s, women held 32% of the academic posts in the Turkish University sector and 20% of those at full Professorial level (Acar, 1990). Thus, it is clear that in 'modern' western countries, the University sector is overwhelmingly dominated by men (both numerically and hierarchically). The countries where women constitute the highest proportion of academics & for those at Professorial level being (paradoxically) the less developed countries, such as Turkey & Portugal.

Table 3 : Women's share of faculty positions in higher education (per cent)¹

| Women as a % | Israel (1983) | Jordan (1989) | Nether (1988) | Norway (1987) | Turkey (1989) | USA (1986) | U.K. (1987/8) | West Germ (1986) |
|--------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|------------------|
| Full Profs | 10 | 2 | 2 | 6 | 20 | 12 | 3 | 5 |
| % of all academic ranks | 12.5 | 15 | 18 | 19 | 32 | 26.9 82/83 | 19 | 15.5 |

¹ Stiver Lie O'Leary, 1990 : 24

The trends emerging in the U.S are not dissimilar. Thus for example women there made up 32.5% of all faculty with teaching duties in 1992, and 16% of those at full Professorial level (Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 1996, Sept:24) However, when attention was focused on the most prestigious universities, and on those holding full Professorships the proportion of women was very much smaller (Farley, 1990). Thus women held roughly 8% of such posts in the eight Ivy League Universities and what Farley calls the 'Big Ten'

Universities (e.g. Michigan State, Iowa, Ohio etc.). She specifically illustrated this pattern with reference to Cornell, where, at the end of the 1980s women made up only 7% of the full Professors. At the existing rate of change she estimated that in Cornell the staff profile would mirror that of the student profile in terms of gender balance by the year 3,000 A.D

These trends, although very surprising in terms of common sense assumptions about improvements in the position of women in Western "modernised" countries, are compatible with the trends emerging within the wider professional and technical area as a whole. Thus across the E.U. as a whole women make up roughly half (45%) of those in the professional and technical occupations (E.U. Commission Network, 1994). There is no relationship between the level of economic development and the proportion of women who hold such professional and technical occupations. Thus, women in 1990 occupied 64% of such positions in Denmark; 55% in Portugal and 47% in Ireland. These trends - both across the E.U. as a whole and in specific countries - are very different to those which emerge when attention is focused on the proportion of women at Managerial level (although there is considerable argument about how these positions should be defined). This trend has been interpreted as indicating that women are increasingly occupying positions of "expertise" (based on their educational levels) but that their access to positions of "authority" remains limited (Savage, 1992). Thus, it is clear that, in very different cultural contexts, women are under represented on the academic staff of Third Level Institutions, particularly in the University sector. The more prestigious the Higher Education sector, the lower the proportion of women overall, and in particular the lower the proportion of those at Professorial level. This pattern is in stark contrast to their prominence not only in Ireland, but across the E.U. in the lower status, less well paid Primary Level sector (Rubery & Fagan, 1993). However, even at Primary level, it is clear that the higher the position the greater the possibility that it will be held by a man (Durkan et al., 1995). Finally, and very surprisingly, there is some evidence to suggest that the processes which militate against women are less acute in less economically developed countries (such as Turkey or Portugal) where class as opposed to gender may be the key element in affecting women's position (and where the total pool of

highly educated individuals is in any event very small). **How can these patterns be explained?**

With a few notable exceptions (e.g. Smyth, 1984; Lynch, 1994) most of the Irish work which has documented these patterns has not attempted to explain them. Acker (1994) has noted that for example particularly in Britain, explanations of these trends has focused on issues related to socialisation; conflicting roles; wastage of talent and discrimination. Such explanations imply that the responsibility for changing the situation rests with the individual. Lynch (1994 :12) differentiated between what she called individualist explanations which blamed the victim; those which focused on the structure, organisational procedures and culture of the school and those which centred on what she called the "andro-centric nature of all social systems and structures in society" (Lynch, 1994:12). Within the context of individualistic explanations, she explored a number of sub-theories, such as, for example, the idea that women did not make good administrators; that they did not apply for jobs at senior level; that they lacked confidence in their own ability and that they already had multiple responsibilities for home and family and so were not interested in additional responsibilities in the paid employment area. It is possible to test the relevance of these explanations at least to some extent. The HEA study (1987) of men and women academics in the 1980s found that men at that time were slightly more likely than women to have a PhD; that they were likely to have a higher rate of publications and to be more likely to have applied for vacancies at every level. These patterns were not however replicated in McCarthy's (1996) study. In that study, focusing on one University, women were significantly more likely than men to apply for promotion, while they did not differ significantly in terms of their educational level, their level of aspiration, their number of publications or indeed their membership of professional bodies. If anything women were likely to score higher than men on each of these indicators. It is not clear to what extent these patterns might be replicated in studies across the entire University sector. Individualistic explanations derived a degree of implicit support at Primary School level from studies such as Kelleghan et al's (1985) which found that only 16% of female primary teachers who were in a position to apply for promotion intended to do so, as compared with 50% of the men. Similarly, there was

evidence that at Second Level, 20% of the men, but only 3% of the women even aspired to the post of principal; and 16% of the men as compared with 5% of the women had actually applied for a principal ship (A.S.T.I, 1991). On the other hand however, such individualistic explanations were implicitly challenged by the fact that the proportion of women who had applied for a principal ship at Primary level changed dramatically over a short period of time—a period which coincided with a variety of initiatives taken by the Irish National Teacher's Organisation to promote gender equality through the endorsements of a policy on it (1984); the appointment of an Equality Officer (1985); an Equality Committee (1987); the taking of a number of successful cases to the Labour Court; the raising of the consciousness of their members through the provision of Gender Equality Modules in all I.N.T.O. training courses (I.N.T.O., 1991); and the distribution of both their own pamphlet "Why Don't You Apply for a Principal ship" and the Department of Education's E.C. Action Handbook on "How to Implement Gender Equality" (1990). Whether because of these initiatives or not it is clear that the proportion of women applicants for the post of principal changed dramatically over a short period of time (and has remained stable over the past couple of years). Thus whereas women made up 29% of the applicants for principal ships in 1983/84, they made up 51% in 1991/92 (Lynch, 1994:6/7). These patterns suggest that women's unwillingness to apply for promotion under certain circumstances may reflect their perception that they are unlikely to get the post and that as such possibilities change, so do patterns of application. Lynch (1994) has also shown that women's likelihood of being appointed also virtually doubled over that period, with women who did apply for promotion being more likely than men to be successful. Implicit in these trends is the idea that an explanation which focuses at an individual level is insufficient and that attention needs to be paid to other factors such as the structural characteristics of organisations, and particularly the procedures they use, and the culture that characterises them. It has been noted that information as regards the procedures which might effectively discriminate against women within the educational sector has not always been available. Thus, the Second Report of the Third Joint Oireachtas Committee on Women's Rights (1992:201) noted the difficulty of getting information on the gender composition of the selection boards in the educational arena. The T.U.I. (1990) study

however showed that the overwhelming majority of those respondents who had been interviewed for a post in the previous six years had been interviewed by a predominantly male interview board. The pattern of predominantly male interviewing boards also emerged in the HEA Report (1987) of women academics at Third level. Furthermore, McCarthy (1996) found that the majority of the (male & female) Lecturers surveyed indicated that both at their most recent interview, and at their interview at the beginning of their career, the interview board was all male. Indeed, the proportion indicating that it had consisted entirely of men was slightly higher at the most recent interview (69% V 56% respectively).

As Lynch (1994) has noted there has been no major study of discrimination in paid employment within the University sector in Ireland. Within the University sector, academic staff unionisation is weak and fragmented. This (and/or the predominantly male composition of the academic staff themselves) may not be unrelated to the fact that no study in this area has been undertaken by any of the unions in this sector. In the A.S.T.I. survey of Second Level teachers (1991), the majority of the teachers and of the principals interviewed thought that "being male was important in reality in obtaining a principal ship" (i.e. 86% and 80% respectively). Indeed the report concluded that: there was " a very widespread perception of gender bias" as regards all promotions (1991:19). The T.U.I. (1990) study of a random sample of union members who were teaching at Second or Third level in the V.E.C. sector also showed that although the women's level of education was significantly higher than their male counterparts, roughly three fifths of both the men and women thought that being a man was a positive factor in achieving promotion. In the Higher Education Authority study (1987) 60% of the women, but only 24% of the men believed that promotions were influenced by a candidates sex. In McCarthy's study (1996) women were significantly less likely than their male counterparts at Lecturer level to see senior colleagues as encouraging them to apply for a promotional post (although interestingly these trends were weaker and in the opposite direction in the case of Heads of Departments and Deans). Women were also more likely (in reply to an open ended question) to think that women did not have the same promotional opportunities as men (although the picture was less clear cut when they were asked a series of forced choice questions about whether gender was an advantage/disadvantage in seeking a

promotional post: see McCarthy, 1996). The documentary evidence of the distribution of women across the various Departments within the University also suggested that (with the exception of very male dominated areas such as Engineering) the under-representation of women within particular Departments and Colleges did not simply reflect patterns related to the gender stereotyping of subject choice. Rather, the organisational culture within particular Departments appeared to have an impact, this being created by the attitudes and practises of staff & the Heads of Departments within a context created by the Dean of the relevant College (O'Connor, 1995A). Thus only one of the four Departments which had the highest proportion of women was in what one could regard as a stereotypically female area viz. Languages and Cultural Studies. However two of these four Departments had the only two women Heads of Department within the University at that time. Furthermore, assumptions that these patterns were simply historical artefacts was challenged by documentary evidence showing that in that University, of the posts created at senior level, over the 1990-1994 period, 96% went to men (O'Connor, 1995A). It has been recognised that organisational culture is a subtle but an important barrier to women's promotion. Its significance has been noted in a wide variety of studies e.g. in inhibiting the promotion of women to Senior level within the British Civil Service (Walters, 1987), the American civil service (U.S. Merit Protections Board, 1992); in Ireland in the health boards (O'Connor, 1995B & 1996); in accountancy firms (Barker and Monks 1994), and in the civil service (Mahon, 1991). Indeed Mary Robinson, President of Ireland, in her address to the Council of Europe adverted to culture as one of the four key barriers to women's promotion (the others being cash, confidence and children: 1996). It is important to recognise that organisational culture is highly resistant, and may persist despite structural change (Pemberton, 1995), unless mechanisms are created whereby rewards and penalties are closely linked to reinforcing key elements which are conducive to changes in it. It has long been recognised that discrimination, especially indirect discrimination, is difficult to prove. The situation has not been helped by the fact that until very recently, the interpretation of the Employment Equality Act (1977) was such as to effectively legitimate many kinds of indirect discrimination (Fourth Report of the Fourth Joint Oireachtas Committee, 1996). Such

discrimination may be reflected not only in the acceptance of criteria which are disproportionately more likely to affect women rather than men, but also in the idea that men "need" promotion more; that they are more suited to management etc. It can be reflected in practices such as giving men greater administrative responsibilities or higher profile activities and then building this in as a requirement for promotion; in permitting men to skip steps on the career ladder but expecting women to complete each one, etc. Within this context it would not perhaps be surprising to find that the organisational culture of the Universities implicitly legitimated these practices. Halford (1992) has suggested that, if we accept that those in the hierarchy are not "depersonalised automatons", and that they bring their personal interests into organisations, and that these shape the way they discharge their functions, we must also accept that gendered perceptions practises and attitudes will be present too. Within the University sector, where in Ireland men make up just under 80% of the (full time) academic staff, and 96% of those at Professorial level, and where women are predominantly concentrated at the lower levels of the structure, it is inevitable that the male will be seen as the norm. Other evidence has shown that in similar sorts of male dominated structures (such as e.g. the British Civil Service) appointments at senior level are likely to favour those who are perceived as most likely to "fit in", to have the overall style which is most compatible with the organisation, and these are most likely to be men, particularly when the appointments are being made at Senior level (Walters, 1989).

The implicit assumption that the male is the norm can also be reflected in a certain institutional ambivalence about maternity leave. This was the perception of women academics in the mid 1980s.(Byrne and Keher Dillon, 1996). Their study showed that the majority of these women did not take advantage of their full statutory rights in relation to maternity leave. There was indeed a perception that if they were to do so it would negatively affect their careers. Thus the majority took on additional work before or after the birth and those that did not tended to curtail their maternity leave. Many continued to work while officially on maternity leave, with a sizeable minority planning their pregnancies to coincide with holiday periods so as to better ensure the smooth functioning of the organisation. It is possible but unlikely that these attitudes have changed.

The institutional ambivalence to maternity leave is simply the most obvious manifestation of the existence of a male as the norm in Universities. The related assumption that family responsibilities can explain women's absence from senior positions within the Universities is much more questionable. At a very fundamental level this is partly because women academics are significantly less likely than their male counterparts to be married and/or to have children (Acker, 1994; Mc Carthy, 1996). Furthermore as Acker (1994) has noted no clear relationship has emerged between marriage or parenthood and for example publishing productivity. It is certainly true however that the existence of structures, procedures and cultures which are premised on the assumption that an academic is male- with all that that implies in our culture- is not helpful as regards the integration or promotion of women within these structures.

Such attitudes may well reflect what Lynch has called the androcentric nature of the wider cultural context created by the State; the Church; the economic system etc. In so far as this is so, one would expect that attempts to change this situation would be limited. In this context it is worth noting that the Department of Education perceived its status as an equal opportunity employer as effectively precluding attempts to rectify the effects of past discrimination (Coolahan, 1994:118); while in its own review of its contribution to the promotion of equality (Dept of Education, 1992) it made no reference whatsoever to the fact that men predominated in the senior positions at each educational level and that they constituted the overwhelming majority of the academic staff within the University and indeed within the whole Third Level Sector. It is also worrying that despite the overt Government commitment to this issue the Equality Section in the new Universities Bill is extremely weak, although it does require Governing Authorities to ensure that "a statement of the policies of the university in respect of equality , including gender equality , in all activities of the University" is drafted within 12 months of the passing of the Act and that it is subsequently implemented (Universities Bill, 1997:28).

The Higher Education Authority both currently and under the new Universities Bill (1997) is responsible for facilitating and monitoring developments in the Equality area. It established (in 1989) and has since funded the Higher Education Equality Unit at University College Cork. The latter has stressed (Newsletter 1995 2:1) that an equal opportunities policy should include "an acknowledgement that inequalities exist" and a "detailed Positive Action Programme to actively promote equality in the institution". This is also stated in the Dept of Equality and Law Reform's Report (1994B) .The Minister of Equality and Law Reform described the under representation of women in the public sector as constituting a "grave and profoundly disturbing pattern of inequality" and in the Governments Manifesto on Equality (NESC, Jan 1995:8) indicated his commitment to ensuring that initiatives are taken 'to adopt equal opportunities policies and programmes and positive action measures for women'. He specifically noted that this had 'the full and unqualified support of all three parties in Government". These statements were reiterated in the Beijing Platform for Action Report (1995) . Furthermore, these statements have been underpinned by an E.U. legal requirement that all structural funds be gender proofed; and an E.U. decision that all Government Departments should indicate the probable impact of all government policies on women (Fourth Report of the Fourth Joint Committee on Women's Rights, 1996:26). Thus, quite clearly there is considerable support at Government and E.U. policy level for the promotion of gender equity. Indeed, it had been described as "one of the main aims of educational policy"(Department of Equality and Law Reform, 1994A:74) .

Nevertheless there is a remarkable consistency in the predominance of men within the Higher Educational arena internationally and specially within the University sector (Rubery & Fagan, 1993). These patterns exist within countries such as the USA which admitted women as students as early as 1833 and within higher educational institutions (such as Cornell University) which have historically been at the forefront in admitting women as students. It is suggested that these patterns reflect the (perceived) importance of these institutions as creators and transmitters of knowledge and as an important elements in underpinning patterns of authority. In this context it seems appropriate to see male dominance of these areas as patriarchal -defining patriarchy as a system of social structures and practises in which men

dominate, oppress and exploit women (Walby, 1990). Such an explanation is at a high level of abstraction and the reality of this male control can best be seen in the specific procedures and organisational culture which characterise these institutions within a particular society. Evidence that the highest proportion of women in Professorial posts was unrelated to the stage of economic development, or to the proportion of women in paid employment challenges naive assumptions that Irish patterns will change "naturally" or inevitably over time. Such assumptions are in any event questionable in view of the fact that the proportion of women at Professorial level in the 1990s in Ireland, having fallen in the 1980s, has now "risen" to its mid 1970s levels. The question however remains as to whether such patterns matter, the topic to which is addressed in the next section.

Does it matter? Implicit in this question are a whole set of questions about the nature and importance of education; about femininity and masculinity; about "sameness" and "difference" (Liff and Wajckman, 1996), and about the role of the State in creating a social and cultural context where both men and women can thrive. It is impossible to discuss each of these issues in detail, and so a number of points will simply be made. Firstly, it has been noted that education is concerned with socialisation and selection. It has also been widely recognised that how this is construed varies at different times, and in different places. However, there would be little support to-day for Rousseau's idea that: *"The whole education of women ought to be relative to men. To please them, to be useful to them, to make themselves loved and honoured by them, to educate them when young, to care for them when grown, to counsel them and to make life sweet and agreeable to them."*

Martin, 1984 p.34 Nevertheless

it is arguable that these ideas, quaint though they sound in the context of education, in fact reflect many assumptions about adult women's responsibilities in our society. Equally, it is arguable that a concept of "conventional masculinity" (Connell, 1987:215) underpins many of our institutions, and that a key element in this is the perceived legitimacy of patriarchal power, such legitimacy being given by "nature or convention or even by the women themselves". It is also clear that the assumptions implicit in such discourses have been eroded by the scientific study of women's intellectual abilities and are further eroded by the

actual performances of boys and girls in school. Thus for example, it is not possible to maintain that girls are less intelligent than boys within a context where the evidence shows that they perform better than them in the most gender neutral examination system, viz. the public examination system (Lynch and Morgan, 1995; Hannan et al, 1996). Yet, at every level of the educational system, and to an increasing degree, girls experience is that men are disproportionately likely to be in positions of authority (as Principals in Primary Schools; as Heads at Second Level; as Lecturers and Professors within the University setting). Ironically despite the highly gendered nature of Irish society, within educational institutions (particularly at Second level), a conscious attempt has been made to challenge assumptions about gender stereotyping within texts, and to encourage girls to make non-traditional subject choices. The success of such initiatives is reflected in the fact that nationally, roughly half of both undergraduate and post graduate students in the University sector are women (Clancy,1995; Dept of Equality and Law Reform, 1994A). Furthermore, there is clear evidence of a breakdown in stereotypical subject choices at Third Level. Thus, of the full time undergraduate students entering Higher Education for the first time in 1991/92, women made up 61% of those doing medicine and 59% of those doing Law - areas that have traditionally been thought of as 'male' areas (Durkan et al, 1995). These patterns may partly of course reflect the increased reliance on 'points' as a factor influencing occupational choice; or they may reflect an acceptance by women of the value of what have traditionally been seen as 'male' career choices. One way or the other however, such choices undermine implicit assumptions that men's occupancy of positions of prestige or authority is due to their innate ability, or particular intellectual skills. The sharp difference between the gender profile of the staff and student body within the Higher Education area in general, and the University sector in particular raises interesting questions about the availability of role models for the women students, and the implications of their absence. The Hansard Society Commission (1990) having identified what they described as stereotypical and outmoded assumptions about women as amongst the key barriers to their promotion, went on to note that "it is wholly unacceptable that the centres of modern academic teaching and excellence in Britain should remain bastions of male power and privilege". American work has been

even more explicit in recognising these issues. It found that same sex role models were important in facilitating female students professional development (including their career orientation, their confidence and success: O' Leary & Mitchell, 1990). In Ireland, within the University sector, it is difficult to see how a situation where men constitute roughly 80% of the Academic staff and 96% of those at Professorial level can be conducive to the development of such qualities in young women. The under-representation of women in the University sector raises issues about the appropriateness of men (indeed, typically a group of men who are middle aged and middle class) creating and transmitting knowledge to a student body which consists equally of men and women, and one which is increasingly diverse in its social class background (Clancy, 1995A). It raises issues related to cultural imperialism, and indeed to colonialism. Up to very recently, a concern with the position of what were seen as "well heeled, articulate women" was seen as inappropriate. However, it has increasingly been recognised that coyness concerning women's possession of that power and authority reflects the persistence of a kind of colonial attitude to women which is not appropriate in terms of the needs of the society or the empowerment of women. Furthermore, it has been noted that if institutional effectiveness constitutes the appropriate measure against which social arrangements should be judged, the persistence of gender as a basis for the allocation of institutional position is not appropriate . The second important function of education is selection. Typically, this has been construed in a class sense, with education being seen as the mechanism through which class position is transmitted to children (e.g. Breen et al, 1990). Very little attention has been paid to the impact of gender in this situation, and in particular to the extent to which the general level of education is inversely related to the proportion of women in positions of power or authority within the educational area. This implicitly raises issues as regards the gender implications of rising levels of literacy and increasing levels of participation in Higher Education in general, and in the University sector in particular. It is clear that insofar as society has abandoned assumptions about the appropriate scope of women's lives, and has encouraged their education, there is an inherent tension in expecting to perpetuate patterns of authority which are based on traditional sources (such as gender). There are considerable dangers in

implicitly endorsing the perpetuation of patterns of authority within meritocratic institutions which cannot be legitimated on meritocratic grounds. Such patterns can be seen as implicitly encouraging a degree of cynicism, which is particularly unhelpful to the stability of the society. In this context it is worth noting that Ruane and Dobson (1990:225) concluded, based on their study of Irish academics that: *"correcting for objectifiable human capital and individual differences between male and female academics in Ireland, female academics are paid significantly less than male academics"*. Their evidence suggested that gender is associated with an "unexplained" difference of approximately 10% in the mean income of male and females which cannot be accounted for by specific attributes such as discipline, qualifications, research output etc. (Ruane & Dobson, 1990). Indeed, this pattern is not peculiar to academics. Thus Callan and Wren's (1994) work implicitly suggested that the qualifications and experience of women were such that one would expect them to have higher wages than their male counterparts. *"The fact that they do not actually earn higher wages on average shows, therefore, that discrimination could still be a problem in the younger age groups...The basic reason why non-married female employees would be expected to earn higher wages than their male counterparts is that they tend, on average, to have higher educational qualifications"*.

Callan & Wren, 1994:45& 46 These studies thus implicitly suggest that women's educational levels need to be higher in order to "compensate" for their gender; and that even despite such higher educational levels there is what one could describe as a further gender bonus for maleness. The internationality of men's control within the University sector (both numerically & hierarchically) strongly suggests that these institutions have been seen as a crucial area of patriarchal control not only by those in them, but by those in related social structures which are also controlled by men (the Church; the economic system etc.). It would be naive to suggest that bringing about change in such institutions is likely to be easy. In this context, it is important to recognise that many women who are predominantly at the lower levels of the academic hierarchy will be unwilling to raise these issues. This can be construed as implying that these issues do not matter to them. Alternatively, it is possible to suggest that in overwhelmingly male controlled structures the

dominant organisational culture will reflect and reinforce men's perspectives and interests. In other words the norm will be a male norm. Many women in this context may conclude that the implicit male organisational message is : *"you may find a place as long as you simulate the norm and hide your difference. We will know you are different and continue ultimately to treat you as different, but if you yourself specify your difference your claim to equality will be nil"* Cockburn,

1991:219. In this context it is perhaps not surprising to find that many women will feel most comfortable ignoring the gender dimension.

What can be done? Brown (1995) has usefully suggested that any attempt to bring about change must focus at three levels viz. at the level of *•"policy-the formal aspects of an organisation, its rules, regulations and structures; •people-the mix of individuals in the workforce, their skills, attributes, behaviours and training •processes-the 'way things are done here', the informal and cultural aspects of an organisation"*.

Brown, 1995:131 At the level of national policy, (as outlined earlier) it is clear that the government and the Higher Educational Authority are committed to ensuring that equal opportunity policies are drafted and positive action programmes endorsed by all educational institutions. This reflects the tenor of the Report of the Second Commission (1993:282) which recommended that

'there should be transparency in the appointment and promotions procedures in colleges with the inclusion of women on all interview boards...'. "Staff recruitment policy should also consider the importance of recruiting women to areas where they are under-represented" and "Equal Opportunities should be budgeted for in each Third Level College"

The Second Progress Report (Dept Of Equality and Law Reform,1996) noted that the Higher Education Authority is to be responsible for monitoring such policies and "for providing appropriate support at national level.". It noted that all Third Level institutions under the aegis of the H.E.A.were to be required to "publish policies to promote gender equality." These are to include "policies for the promotion of equal opportunities and associated action programmes" as well as those relating to "appropriate gender balance on all staff selection

boards" and "encouraging and facilitating women to apply for senior academic and administrative positions" (Dept of Equality and Law Reform, 1996:128).

Equal Opportunities policies typically include a general statement of aims and objectives; the identification of the person who is responsible for the creation of gender awareness, the articulation of targets, the implementation and the monitoring of the equality policy and related action plan and for the development and implementation of codes of practice in the area of recruitment, promotion, training and development, the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities etc. (see Burnett, 1995; Clune, 1996; O'Connor, 1995B). It has been widely recognised that attempts to bring about change in what are often highly resistant organisations require the appointment of a full time Equality Officer, preferably at Senior Management level-their role to include both a corporate policy and planning element as well as a role in the formulation of policies and targets at Department level, being available to advise individual faculty etc. Other structures which are necessary within the University area include an Equality Committee (typically put in place by Governing Body and reporting to it) to work with the Equality Officer and to put in place "Equal Opportunity policies, programmes and positive action measures for women" (Taylor, 1995). As implied by Brown (1995) the formulation of an equal opportunity policy, although important, is merely a beginning. In order for equal opportunities to become a reality, it is necessary, at the very least, to formulate an action plan. In 1994, 93% of educational institutions in the U.K. had formally adopted an equal opportunities policy; 37% had put in place action plans, while 28 had committed themselves to a more rigorous positive action programme (Brown, 1995). Such action plans are typically part of a positive strategy and include the identification of targets as regards staffing profiles and the composition of interview boards ; the provision of training targeted at increasing women's skills within, for example, managerial areas ; the encouragement of women to apply for posts especially at Senior level etc. Such measures are completely legal, and perfectly compatible with Government and E.U. policy. The Second Commission on the Status of Women (1993) noted that without such measures to address "imbalances arising from past discrimination", equal opportunity legislation will simply offer an "equal chance to become unequal".

Coolahan himself also noted that "in relation to gender balance on boards and at senior administrative levels, possibilities which should be considered include positive intervention programmes, positive discrimination and the establishment of quotas" (1994:119). Indeed within the Non-University Higher Education Sector, the establishment of gender quotas on State Boards has been used very effectively to increase women's participation in the decision making process. This kind of approach indeed has been recommended in the Third E.U. Action Programme (Fourth Report of the Fourth Joint Oireachtas Committee, 1994). Women's involvement at this level has begun to challenge assumptions that women are unable to be involved in decision making, and so has implicitly challenged stereotypical assumptions about their ability, as well as providing individual women with valuable experiences which would not otherwise be available to them. They are "the structural stuff which gives woman confidence" (O'Connor, 1996)

It is important to note that there is some evidence which suggests that internationally legislative measures as a whole have had little impact on gender equality (Whitehouse, 1992). However there is indirect support for the limited effectiveness of measures to deal with discrimination. Thus for example the proportion of women at Professorial level in Queen's University Belfast rose from 3 % (First Report, 1992) to 6%(Third Report, 1995) to 7 % (Times Higher, 1996:16). The proportion of women at Professorial level in the University of Ulster is even higher - at 11%. These trends arguably reflect greater vigilance as regards issues related to religious discrimination- the monitoring process to deal with this having (inadvertently) increased the proportion of women in Professorial positions. However it is arguably not insignificant that the 1996 Section 31 review at Queens University Belfast reverted to the 1989 practise of focusing exclusively on religion- thereby highlighting the need for constant vigilance in highlighting gender issues.

For the most part, it has been recognised that for equal opportunities policies to have any real effect it is necessary to have an examination of, and strategies to deal with what has been called the "organisational culture". Brown (1995) has seen this as referring to what she calls "the informal and cultural aspects of an organisation". Schein (1985:6) has focused on one

particular aspect viz: "the basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organisation, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic taken for granted fashion an organisation's view of itself and its environment". O' Connor (1996) has argued that these very beliefs and assumptions influence the very shape of the organisation as reflected in its Department & Faculty structures, as well as affecting the resources provided and the promotion opportunities available in various areas ("female" areas in organisations being typically less well resourced, with fewer if any career paths into top management).

Pemberton (1995) and Brown (1995) have argued that any attempt to bring about change in the position of women within organisations is doomed to failure unless an attempt is made to understand and to devise strategies to deal with this organisational culture. Thus, for example, Pemberton (1995) has argued that insofar as organisations are characterised by a "Power Culture", where advancement is dependent on patronage, the support of key powerful individuals is critical. Without it, the development of a policy is unlikely to produce results. Hence it is possible that the strategies to transform organisations will vary between and within universities.

In any case insofar as such institutions are concerned with effective management, it is important to ensure that time specific targets are set for the institution as a whole, and for specific Faculties and Departments, and that these are publicly monitored. Furthermore since Universities are overwhelmingly male dominated institutions, seminars/workshops specifically designed to challenge negative and stereotyped attitudes towards women (beginning at Senior Management level) have been found to be useful. Such initiatives are based on a recognition that in an environment where men are not used to working with women at senior level, unconscious bias, "slagging" etc. is inevitable, and leadership in tackling such issues must come from the highest level (O' Connor, 1996). It is arguable that in all cases there is a need for gender awareness to be a key criterion in making appointments at Senior level if there is to be any possibility of real change.

Responsibility for the achievement of gender targets needs to be clearly identified as a criterion for in assessing line management. Such initiatives need to be supported by clear

and comprehensive legal definitions of indirect discrimination and much more severe penalties for breaches in the area of discrimination, if only to encourage employers to avoid the possible financial costs of legal actions. The increasing sensitivity of both National and European law to these issues offers a useful stimulus to the avoidance not only of direct but also of indirect discrimination (Clarke, 1995; Fourth Report of the Fourth Joint Oireachtas Committee 1996). Typically neither employers nor employees will wish to initiate legal proceedings. However, the tenor of recent judgements (e.g. Nathan V Bailey Gibson EEA, 1996) and Enderby V Frenchay Health Authority (see Clarke, 1995) suggest that at National level and at the European Court of Justice, there is an increasing awareness of the need to reject what have been called "subtle and institutionalised forms of sex discrimination" (Fourth Report of the Fourth Joint Committee, 1996). Clarke has noted that the importance of such judgements has been heightened by the ruling of the European Court of Justice (in Marshall V Southampton and South-West Area Health Authority (No.2) 1993 IRLR 445: Clarke, 1995) that there is no financial limit to the compensation which can be awarded. Employers thus have a very real incentive to eliminate indirect discrimination. Inevitably perhaps, attempts to bring about change will provoke a backlash. This indeed may not even be perceived. This highlights the importance of vigilance in monitoring the issue. Such monitoring is arguably most likely to occur in so far as Women's Studies remains an active presence within the University Sector. It is salutary to recognise that more than ten years ago Smyth (1984) argued that Third Level institutions would not of their own accord take any steps to improve the situation, and suggested the need for some kind of positive action programme. Similarly Ni Charthaigh on behalf of the Women's Studies Association of Ireland also more than ten years ago, in a submission to the Curriculum and Examinations Board noted that: *"If the present serious under representation of women in authority structures is to be redressed, and women's access to power and resources, educationally speaking, increased, then far reaching positive action must be initiated and developed as a matter of urgency."*

1985:10 Such processes have barely have begun to be initiated within the Irish University sector Smyth(1996). The tenor of the Universities Bill (1997) suggests that yet

again the issues may not be faced. As has been noted by the Government itself, positive action is necessary if knowledge is not to continue to be produced and transmitted by men . In this context the role of the HEA is likely to be crucial and its ability to exert its influence likely to determine whether or not Irish Universities genuinely become more 'woman friendly'.

Conclusion This chapter has looked at the position of women academics in the Higher Education area, focusing particularly on the University sector. Such women are typically thought of as being very privileged. Indeed, there is absolutely no doubt that by comparison with other women, in terms of their income and working conditions, they are privileged. Even to-day, women constitute only roughly one in five of the (full-time) academic staff in Irish Universities. Furthermore, like their counterparts in the Primary Sector, they are overwhelmingly concentrated at the lower levels of the Academic hierarchy. Even more intriguingly, these trends are not unusual in "modern" Western societies. It sounds fairly modest to envisage a situation where, within Universities, students will be just as likely to see male or female academic staff whether at Lecturer or Professorial level. It reflects an assumption that the world of knowledge is important; that men and women have a contribution to make to that world, and that young women like young men need to have role models within that world. That modest vision is rooted in existing trends in occupational and educational areas. Within the educational area, half of that vision has already become a reality with women now making up roughly half of the undergraduate and postgraduate students within the Universities nationally (Clancy, 1995; Dept of Equality and Law Reform, 1994B). On the other hand current estimates suggest that without some kind of positive action, it will be at least 3,000 AD before the staff profile is broadly similar to this student profile(Farley, 1990). Such a "lead in" time hardly seems satisfactory. This chapter has challenged naive assumptions that this change is an "inevitable" "natural" development. It has highlighted the fact that, if anything, the evidence is in the exact opposite direction. It has suggested that these patterns may indicate that Universities are internationally seen as important elements in legitimating and underpinning "conventional masculinity". As such, their perceived importance as centres in maintaining a patriarchal

discourse cannot be underestimated. Processes maintaining their gender profile are thus arguably likely to exist at the level of organisational procedures and organisational culture, as well as in individual attitudes and practices. What evidence we have about the Irish system suggests the importance of these phenomena in perpetuating the under-representation of women within the University sector (and their the position of the lower levels of the hierarchy). The State, the E.U. and the rising levels of women's education constitute important elements in this situation in bringing about change although a great deal can be done by the institutions themselves, if they have the leadership to do so.

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