Is Senior Management in Irish Universities male dominated? What are the implications? by Pat O’Connor- forthcoming, June, IJS, 2010

Abstract

Universities present themselves as gender-neutral meritocracies, concerned with the creation and transmission of scientific, objective knowledge. Yet such structures are overwhelmingly male dominated (Husu, 2001a). This article firstly outlines the gender profile of those in senior management in Irish universities; secondly explores the extent to which those in senior management see a gendered organisational culture or women themselves as ‘the problem’; and thirdly locates these patterns within a wider organisational and societal context. The qualitative data is derived from a purposive sample of 40 people in senior management (85 per cent response rate) from Presidential to Dean level; including academics and non-academics; men and women; and across a range of disciplines. It suggests that organisational culture is seen as homosocial, unemotional and conformist mainly but not exclusively by women; whereas men were more likely to focus on women as ‘the problem’. These trends reflect those in other studies (for example Currie and Thiele, 2001; Deem, 1999; Deem et al, 2008). Drawing on Grummell et al’s (2009) work, it suggests that homosociability is an important process in creating and maintaining these patterns. Furthermore, although the President is seen as having the power to affect the gender profile of senior management, there is ambivalence about him actually doing this. The extent to which other stakeholders seem likely to encourage this is also explored.

Introduction

Universities present themselves as gender-neutral meritocracies, concerned with the transmission and creation of scientific, objective knowledge. Halford (1992:172) early challenged Weber’s views of organisations as manned by depersonalised automatons and suggested that once we accept ‘that staff bring their personal interests into organisations and that these shape the way they discharge their functions, we must also accept that gendered perceptions, practices and attitudes will be present too’.
Indeed Oakley (2001) suggested that: ‘We know that whatever is represented as gender-neutral is likely to obscure the power relations of gender’. It is now widely accepted that universities are in fact gendered organisations (Brooks, 2001; Collinson and Hearn, 1996; Currie et al, 2002; Deem et al, 2008; Hearn, 2001). Such work has suggested that the barriers women face include those related to male definitions of merit; male dominated career paths, women’s embodiment and/or domestic responsibilities; a ‘chilly’ organisational culture premised on male life styles and priorities and a culture where senior positions are seen as ‘posts of confidence’ (Bond quoted by Brooks, 2001: 24). ‘Women’s under-representation in positions of power and prestige in academia appears to be a universal phenomenon’ (Husu, 2001a:39), with Morley (2005: 109) suggesting that this represented ‘both cultural misrecognition and material and intellectual oppression’.

Changing women’s position in universities requires changes to the gendered culture in universities as well as other kinds of change. For Hearn (2001) the most important aspect of this is ‘changing men and men’s position in universities and their cultures’. Men as he sees them are ‘a social category associated with hierarchy and power……Management is a social activity that is also clearly based on hierarchy and power…….Academia is a social institution that is also intimately associated with hierarchy and power’ (Hearn, 2001:70). In this situation ‘Women’s place’ is defined by men and it is a subordinate one. While ‘ignoring difference, acting as equal is often an important strategy for women…it leaves patriarchal cultures intact’ (Davies, 1995:37) and is inherently fragile since at any moment women’s status as honorary males may be withdrawn (Cockburn, 1991).

This article is concerned with firstly outlining the gender profile of those in senior management in Irish universities; secondly exploring the extent to which those in senior management see organisational culture or women themselves as ‘the problem’; and thirdly with locating these patterns within a wider organisational and societal context.
Methodology

No official data is available on the gender of those in senior management in Irish universities. This does not seem to be peculiar to Ireland (Woodfield and Kennie 2007) although in Sweden these figures are publicly available (Sveriges Statskalender, 2007: Goransson, 2008). Furthermore in Ireland data on the gender profile of faculty in universities have not been collected by the Higher Educational Authority (HEA) since 2004. In this paper data come from three sources: firstly HEA data on the gender profile of faculty up to 2004; secondly from web based research of the proportion of women in senior University management positions in a cross national study including Ireland; and thirdly from interview data on those at senior management level in Irish universities, undertaken as part of a cross national research study.

Senior Management was defined as those at Dean level or above, who were currently or who had been in senior management in the Irish University system in the past five years. A total of 40 people were identified in a purposive sample including roughly half of those on senior executive teams: including those at Presidential, Vice Presidential and Dean level; academics and non-academics; men and women; and including a range of disciplines across all seven universities funded by the State. Of the 40 people (15 women and 25 men) contacted, interviews were completed with 34 (13 women and 21 men)- an 85 per cent response rate. The majority of those interviewed were currently members of the most senior executive in their university or had been within the past five years.

The questionnaire was devised by the nine country Women in Higher Education Management Network (WHEM). It included three sections: i) getting into and on in senior management; ii) doing senior management and iii) the structure and broader management culture in the universities. In this article the focus is particularly on organisational culture and processes, largely elicited by questions about what ‘women see as the barriers to promotion’; ‘Is there anything someone in your position could
do about the predominantly male management structure’; and ‘Does having women in senior management make a difference or not really? In terms of management decisions? What about to faculty? to students?’ The interviews varied in length from 40 minutes to 1 hour 30 minutes- with the majority of them being over an hour. All of the interviews were tape recorded, with detailed verbatim notes being made during the interview. Following the interviews the tapes were replayed and any additional material was inserted in these verbatim recordings. Thematic qualitative analysis was undertaken in the context of pre-existing concepts such as organisational culture as well as in terms of themes emerging from the literature.

In the interests of confidentiality pseudonyms are used and features that would identify those involved are obscured. Thus for example, all senior academic managers are referred to as Professor (the titles of all non-academic senior managers are omitted and they are simply referred to by their pseudonyms). The interviewees were initially contacted by email, with follow up contact being made at the secretarial level. All the interviews were done by the author. Some might have been aware of the author’s interest in gender issues, and this and/or my gender may have influenced their responses. It is impossible to explore the extent of this influence and/or the extent to which their responses were rhetorical.

**The Irish Context: Are Universities Male Dominated?**

Ireland has a population of 4.2 million (CSO, 2006) and seven public universities. In Ireland, as elsewhere (Bagilhole, 1993; Currie et al, 2002; Machado-Taylor et al, 2007; Grummell et al, 2008 and 2009; O’Connor, 2008a, 1999) the proportion of women faculty in the universities has increased over the past twenty five years, although they remain under-represented at professorial and senior management level. Husu (2001b: 177) suggests that metaphors such as those referring to the glass ceiling, to a ‘black hole’ or the leaky pipeline allow little room for an active agency: ‘the
metaphor is passive, deterministic and disempowering’. A similar criticism can be made of the most recent of these metaphors: the labyrinth (Eagly and Carli, 2007).

The most recent data from the HEA shows that 37 per cent of faculty in Irish universities are women (range 31 per cent-39 per cent). This is roughly similar to the EU 25 average and lower than Finland and the UK (both 41 per cent: EU, 2006). In Ireland that proportion has increased from 11 per cent in 1976- with the biggest increase occurring between 1993/94 and 2004 (from 20 per cent to 37 per cent). Figures for 2009 are available only for the University of Limerick and these show that the proportion of faculty who are women has increased to 41 percent; with women there making up 14 per cent of those at Professorial level. All of these figures exclude research only faculty and the latter are more likely to be men (O’Connor, 2008a).

In the UK, roughly one in five of the heads of institutions are not professors and it is possible that this percentage is even higher in the post 1992 universities which have a stronger focus on managerialism. In Ireland, it is widely assumed that Professorial status is a necessary pre-requisite for senior management positions. Thus overwhelmingly, when the respondents were asked about the barriers to promotion, they thought in academic rather than managerial terms. Before the Marriage Bar was lifted in Ireland in 1973 (O’Connor, 1998) women constituted five per cent of those at professorial level, and this has risen to 11 per cent. However, across the EU 25, the proportion of women at professorial level is higher than in Ireland (15 per cent versus 11 per cent); and the Irish proportion is half what it is in Finland and Portugal (EU, 2006). The differential between men and women’s chances of promotion to Professorial level in Ireland is one of the worst in Europe, with Irish men ‘being at least five times more likely than women to obtain a full professorship’ (EU, 2003). In the cross national web based study in 2007 (see Table 1), Ireland had the lowest proportion of women at Professorial and Associate Professorial level.
Table 1: Percentage of female professors/associate professors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Full Professor</th>
<th>Associate Professor</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland*</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Including the 7 universities supported by the State (excluding St Patrick’s Catholic University, Maynooth; the Colleges of Education; National College of Art and Design and Royal College of Surgeons Ireland): Source: Machado-Taylor et al, 2007

Managers are involved in ‘the creation of knowledges, both in the local sense of organisational and managerial knowledge, and in the broader, more pervasive, sense of knowledge in and of society—indeed, of what counts as knowledge’ (Hearn, 1999:125) in a context where ‘Most managers in most organisations are men’ (Collinson and Hearn, 1996:1). This pattern might be expected to persist in universities, given their particular role in the creation of knowledge.

Table 2: Percentage of women in senior management in public universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Rector/VC/President</th>
<th>Vice Rector/DVC/Deputy President</th>
<th>PVC/Pro-Rector/Other Vice Presidents</th>
<th>Dean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ireland+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Including the 7 universities supported by the State (excluding St Patrick’s Catholic University, Maynooth; the Colleges of Education; National College of Art and Design and Royal College of Surgeons Ireland): Source: Machado-Taylor et al, 2007

In the cross-national web based study, Ireland had the lowest percentage of women at University President (zero) and Dean (joint lowest with Turkey: see Table 2) with
women holding only 15 per cent of senior management positions in Irish universities. The interview data from the university senior management study found a broadly similar proportion i.e. 18 per cent (as compared to 15 per cent). The proportion of women in senior management also varied between Irish universities- from zero to 42 per cent.

In summary then Irish universities remain overwhelmingly male dominated at senior management and professoriate levels.

**Gendered Organisational Cultures: Limits of Change**

The concept of organisational culture has been used to refer to the existence and importance of a complicated fabric of management myths and values that legitimise women’s positions at the lower levels of the hierarchy and portray managerial jobs as primarily masculine (Deem, 2003; Bagilhole, 2002; O’Connor, 1996). Benshop and Brounds (2003:200) have suggested that ‘Gender is done in the distinct aspects of the organisational culture; in the symbols, images, rules and values’, with Acker (1998) suggesting that it reflected the wishes and needs of powerful men. Deem (2003) found that two thirds of the women manager-academics in her UK study claimed that women were treated differently to men in their universities. Furthermore, more than two thirds of the women manager-academics in that study, as compared with 44 per cent of their male counterparts, thought that gender had affected their careers. Morley (2005) noted how frequently a hostile organisational culture was referred to not only in the UK but right across the Commonwealth.

In looking at the organisational culture in such universities, attention will be focussed firstly on the characteristics of the culture as perceived mainly by women; and then on the depiction of women as ‘the problem’- a perspective mainly but not exclusively endorsed by men. It will be shown that in both cases there are, for the most part, strong similarities in the responses of these senior academics and non-academics.

*Homosocial, Unemotional, Conformist, Gender unaware Culture*
Currie and Thiele (2001) noted that women more often referred to structural factors as explanations for the absence of women in senior management, while men most often were in the denial category, as reflected in a perceived lack of importance of gender and/or suggestions that discrimination ‘doesn’t happen anymore’. Grummell et al (2008:5) also found that in their Irish study ‘There was a denial of gender inequality on a structural or institutional level’. Thornton (1989:126) has suggested that it is essentially unrealistic to ‘expect men, as the predominant institutional decision makers, to effect this revolution magnanimously on behalf of women’.

Currie and Thiele (2001) found that amongst their Australian and American respondents, male sociability was perceived, especially by women, as strong and exclusive and that women saw themselves ‘less well regarded’ simply because they were women. Indeed, their (2001:95) female respondents were twice as likely as their male counterparts to identify ‘systematic biases’ within Australian and American universities, characterising them as having ‘an unsupportive culture for women to inhabit’. Deem’s (1999:76) UK respondents also saw the culture as highly gendered, with collegiality simply being ‘a convenient cloak for forms of male sociability and patriarchal exclusion’. Thus Deem (1999:72 and 76) found that ‘men still prefer to work with men’ – referring to senior management as ‘a boys club’. Indeed it has long been recognised that men’s relationships with other men are a key factor in perpetuating male dominance (Hartmann, 1981). This phenomenon has been referred to in various terms including homosocial behaviour (Lipman Blumen, 1976); homosociality (Hearn, 2001) homosexual reproduction (Kanter, 1977) and homosocialibity (Witz and Savage, 1992; Husu, 2001a; Collinson and Hearn, 2005). A Swedish study of elites also found that academic elite women were substantially more likely than their male counterparts to think that ‘recruitment of female leaders is not a priority’; ‘and that ‘women applicants are passed over in employment’ (Goransson, 2008). In the present study pro-male attitudes of varying degrees of intensity were perceived, particularly by women:

‘Most of the men that I work with –the bottom line is that they would be much more comfortable to be working with men. They vaguely put up with you, accept that you have a right to be there- but if it was up to themselves, they are more comfortable around men’ (Professor Tina Mc Clelland)
‘Women are conscious that men are unconsciously misogynistic but men aren’t conscious of this’ (Pauline Hanratty)

Such attitudes are not peculiar to Ireland, and in Ireland as elsewhere, they are more likely to be expressed by women than men. Gherardi (1996) has suggested that this reflects a positioning of women as effectively ‘guests’ within a male world. She has also suggested that their position could become one of stigmatised marginality, in a context where they are simply not accepted as an equal. That kind of pattern emerged in the present study:

‘one thing you can never be in this job is one of the boys—... [there is]-a certain place that other male colleagues can go with regard to one another that you won’t go’ (Professor Joan Geraghty)

It was striking that even those women who said that they did not allow themselves to be undermined by this culture nevertheless referred to it:

‘you think are we in the 21st century or in the 18th. There is chauvinism to the Irish psyche..... men are becoming less clear, it was very simple for a while, you were the bread winner .... and everybody else was there to help you. Its not so simple anymore’. (Professor Shelia Furlong)

Harris et al (1998:142) found that in their Australian study, what were seen as the organisational attributes of success included those who ‘don’t rock the boat’ and who showed ‘a certain deference pattern’, while those who were not likely to be successful were those ‘who have spoken out against certain issues’ ‘if you speak up and you do things ….that are seen to be threatening, you don’t get ahead’. Professor Geraldine Maguire, also saw conformity as the dominant value in senior management. She reflected that she was ‘too questioning; too challenging, asking uncomfortable questions’. As she saw it her male senior management colleagues: ‘were quite frightened of me, scared of me in some senses’. Interestingly the word ‘frightening’ was also used by Husu’s Finnish respondents (2001a; see also Ozga and Walker, 1999) to refer to their male colleagues perception of them. The word is evocative of both women’s perceived power and yet their unacceptability. It is also evocative of Gherardi’s (1996:194 and 196) reference to the ‘outsider who does not understand and refuses to conform to local traditions, who asks embarrassing questions’:

‘Sometimes you can find yourself looking at things slightly differently. If you do that quite a lot, it can be a bit difficult. You can get pigeon-holed as the person who will always have a contrary view’ (Professor Eileen Greene)
Reservations about the extent to which tackling gender issues were salient amongst those at senior management was particularly likely to be expressed by women:

‘It would be nice to think that there is some consciousness of it, I’m not so sure that there is’ (Professor Joan Geraghty)

‘In relation to gender, I just wonder are they gender blind? they don’t see it as an issue’ (Professor Tina Mc Clelland)

Morley (1999:81 and 82) suggested that: ‘The academy, by privileging propositional knowledge, de-emphasises the emotional world. ‘Women’s ‘emotionality’ and ‘physicality’ are placed in binary opposition to men’s ‘rationality’’. Hey and Bradford (2004:697) also refer to the ‘antagonism of misogyny disguised as rational public discourse’. Whitehead (1998:209) drew attention to the ways that keeping ‘emotions under wraps’ was seen as important- reflecting the priority still attached to ‘the man/manager as the rational, controlled and logical agent’. Priola (2007: 32-33) found that even in university structures where women were managers ‘expressing feelings and emotions is perceived as weak and negative’. Such attitudes were also referred to in the present study:

‘you are supposed…. not to be outspoken on things you feel very strongly about. It is a very male domain’ (Professor Ann Joyce)

Deem (1999) also highlighted a perceived reluctance to engage in any kind of public discussion or debate; while Madden (2005:6) noted that ‘Direct language, disagreement….were less well received from women’. In the present study Professor Cathy O’Riordan referred to the importance of strategies such as ‘Not to talk too much; not to be emotional’. Other strategies that were identified included siding with the (male) power holder, setting up the outcome of meetings in advance and not disagreeing with (male) power holders in public.

Morley’s (1999:84 and 86) respondents saw the organisational culture in the academy as aggressive. Occasionally in the present study that culture was described as ‘strong, decisive... authoritative extremely male dominated... strongly authoritative, almost authoritarian’. Morley (1999: 4 and 88) also suggested that it seems improbable that the academy is ‘a violent place’ although in her study there were ‘many accounts of spite and bullying’. In only one case in the present study so real was the possibility of physical violence that it was officially recognised by a University:
'I was personally threatened.... I was experiencing bullying by people who had been on senior management. .....I was shouted at, screamed at, threatened' (Professor Cathy O'Riordan)

Occasionally explanations that focussed on the wider organisational culture were explicitly rejected. Thus, Paul Meaney suggested that ‘They [women] might perceive there to be male domination in the senior management team, which there isn’t’. However other men referred to the existence of male dominated procedures in academic promotion competitions that were inimical to ensuring gender balanced outcomes:

‘What appalled me was that I had to point it out to senior people, people who had been in senior management positions.... and who saw nothing wrong with all male boards’ (Professor Denis Tobin)

The effect on women of seeing that ‘all the senior positions in administration or the faculty are all men’ was occasionally referred to by men as well as women:

‘ these were male dominated environments so therefore some people were reluctant to put themselves forward. This was particularly true of senior female academics who felt that they had no chance going before such a male body ‘(Professor Denis Tobin)

‘They [women] don’t tend to go for them [these jobs] because they don’t feel that they are going to get it if there is a man going for it. ...that job is sewn up’ ( Pauline Hanratty)

There are costs, of course, for women in identifying such gendered processes- not least of which is the fact that women do not want to depict themselves as ‘victims of misfortune or injustice’ or open themselves up to the possibility of being professionally discredited or perceived as ungrateful (Husu, 2001a). A minority of women saw gender as irrelevant in the context of senior management or rejected the idea that there were gendered barriers:

‘other than those that are self inflicted. Anything that I have chosen to do , anything that I was qualified for and worked for I have always achieved.’ (Katherine Mc Elligott)

‘My experience has been that gender has never been an issue. Gender can be a correlate or a cause-sometimes people mistake that, confuse that inadvertently, sometimes for other reasons’ (Professor Marie Walsh)

Male non-academic senior executives who had entered the university sector recently, having worked in mixed gender teams in the private sector, appeared to be benignly but completely unreflective about gender. Thus some of them went on to ask refreshingly ‘unthinkable’ (Lukes, 2005) questions:
In summary then, there were strong suggestions, particularly but not exclusively by women of a gendered organisational culture- reflecting and reinforcing homosociability within senior management. Amongst the non-academics who had worked outside the University sector, there was a naïve lack of gender awareness that occasionally highlighted the unthinkable.

‘The Problem is Women…and their Attitudes and Priorities…..’
Morley (2005: 115) has noted that: ‘We need a theory of male privilege rather than female disadvantage’; with Blackmore (2002:437) referring to a ‘“glass escalator” that facilitates male academics (and managers) moving up higher and faster’. However, many of the senior managers in the present study, particularly men, referred to women’s own attitudes, which they saw as limiting possibilities as regards change. Such explanations have an element of validity, reflecting as they do ‘the psychological effects of living in a sexist society’ (Husu, 2001a: 38; see also Deem, 1999). To some extent this can be seen as effectively ‘blaming the victim’. However in so far as such attitudes reflect deeper constructions of femininity they can be seen as constituting cultural limits to the possibilities for change. Hannan et al. (1996) found that Irish girls were likely to have a lower level of self esteem than boys, while a lack of confidence was also identified by Grummell et al (2008). Both men and women in the present study referred to women’s feeling of not ‘being valued’ (Professor Garry Burke); ‘Women don’t think they are good enough. Maybe we need more validation of our work’ (Pauline Hanratty).

It has also been widely recognised that women are poor at marketing themselves and taking credit for their achievements- such patterns being seen as reflecting cross cultural norms surrounding modesty concerning individual achievements (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Yancey Martin, 1996: Bagilhole and Goode, 2001). In the present study women’s unwillingness to engage in self-promotion was referred to:

‘When you kick a goal, what do you do? You dance around and hug everyone. You make sure that everyone recognises that you scored a goal. You make
sure you sit at the bar and that everyone recognises that you scored a goal. Those that weren’t at the match you say I will buy you a drink. They [women] weren’t comfortable playing those games…. They did not market it’ (Professor Geraldine Maguire)

‘When anything successful happens, every man and his dog was involved, when they really weren’t’ (Pauline Hanratty)

Currie and Thiele (2001) referred to the fact that low profile, nurturing and housekeeping tasks were given to women, which did not facilitate their subsequent profiling. In this context the key question is the differential value that is attached to activities undertaken predominantly by men/women (see Thomas and Davies, 2002):

‘what is the work load; how is it measured; what do we value; what do we assign and how do we assign it. Women are given welfare and minding the student type roles, advisees and counselling. The dynamic, high profile, getting funding, creating buildings is seen as male and is given to the male so [they] build up their own profile…. Women are left with the nice ones. They are critically important but are not valued…. not THAT important really, not sexy, not going to get you ahead’ (Jane Morrisson)

A number of studies (Barker and Monks 1994; O’Connor 1995, 1998) have shown that women have a kind of organisational naivete:

‘women played dolls where there are no rules…. Promotion is a game.. They [women] did not see it as a game and they thought the rules were unfair’ (Professor Geraldine Maguire)

Accounts of men’s individualistic success co-exist with a patriarchal support system (Bagilhole and Goode, 2001). Thus women wanted ‘to achieve in their own right and through their ability’, but they suggested that this was ‘not just naive’, and that it reflected a ‘deep repugnance for academic politics (quoting Aisenberg and Harrington, 1988). In the present study, some men also stressed women’s greater passivity in terms of career planning and/or a lack of ambition in an increasingly managerialist context where undergraduate teaching was seen as low status work to be undertaken by ‘secondary, ‘solid troupers’, rather than academics at the cutting edge of knowledge production’ (Thomas and Davies, 2002: 388):

‘Males had planned… What they would need to do – how much funding, Ph.Ds, publications…where females seemed to just keep doing these things,[and thought that] I will at some point put it together and I will be promoted- much more passive’ (Professor Garry Burke)

‘Perhaps some women regard having achieved a teaching position in a university as having achieved their goal, whereas maybe some male colleagues will feel that maybe they want to move further up and that giving
too much attention to undergraduate teaching is not the way for upward mobility’ (Professor Anthony Donoghue)

Grummell et al (2008: 13) noted that in their study, women were more likely than men to have no children. In the present study, a number of the female interviewees (but no men) spontaneously referred to the fact that they had no children. For Acker (1998), as for Bailyn (2003) the gendered subculture in organisations ultimately rests on the fact that economic structures have priority over all other structures. This is ultimately premised on ‘the way masculinity is constructed as a care-less identity’ (Lynch and Lyons, 2008: 181). As a society, Ireland has not been very helpful in terms of facilitating child care (being ranked joint lowest with the UK in the EU in terms of child care supports and maternity leave: European Commission, 2004), although there have been recent improvements in paid maternity leave and in the availability of unpaid parental leave. Interestingly childcare was hardly mentioned at all as a problem in a Finnish study of academics (a subsidised universal child care system for all pre-school children exists there: Husu, 2001a). In the present study, since senior management positions were typically not accessed until early to mid 50s, the whole question of the difficulty of combining such positions with child care was arguably less acute than it might otherwise have been. It was also striking that in this study (as amongst Currie and Thiele’s 2001 Australian men) it was particularly men who thought it must be a barrier:

‘This is what is the barrier for women... family is a huge issue’ (Professor Kieran Naughton)

‘there are tensions there no doubt about that [but] women are coping with it pretty well... it may take them a bit longer to get there...’ (Professor Joan Geraghty)

In Deem’s (2003) study there was also a suggestion that the male academic managers were particularly likely to see women’s academic careers as negatively impacted on by child care. In Ireland an explanation that focuses simply on caring responsibilities sits uneasily with the fact that the proportion of women at senior academic level in Irish Institutes of Technology is twice what it is in the universities (O’Connor, M. 2007). Similar patterns have been identified in Further Education Colleges in the UK (Whitehead, 2001). In Ireland, women’s sensitivity to contextual factors was also shown by the fact that applications from women for educational management
positions at first level in the 1990s (Lynch, 1994; O’Connor, 1998) dramatically increased in the face of encouragement by the unions and Department of Education and Science—thus further implicitly challenging explanations which simply focus on caring responsibilities.

Overall then, much was made, particularly but not exclusively by men, of women’s lack of career planning, low self esteem, high valuation of caring, lack of career ambition, poor ability to market themselves and life style choices. Such explanations implicitly or explicitly define women as ‘the problem’ and so obviate the need to look at organisational culture and procedures in explaining these patterns.

**Locating these patterns in a Wider Context**

In looking at the wider context in which these patterns exist, attention will be focussed firstly on the organisational level and then on the wider stakeholder context, with particular attention to the Higher Educational Authority and to policies that potentially impact on the universities.

Irish universities are increasingly moving from what Robyn and Davies (2002:374) have called the ‘the autonomous and independent guild of dons’ characteristic of a collegial model to a more managerialist one. In Ireland, the structures and constituencies through which senior management is accessed are typically male dominated (whether the process is one of faculty election in a collegial structure; presidential appointment in a managerialist structure or a combination of these: O’Connor and White, 2009). In Ireland, academic appointments to senior executive positions typically involved assignments of responsibility to existing faculty for three to ten years: ‘It's cheaper for them not to go out’ (Professor Sheila Furlong). Furthermore there was:

‘a lack of any tradition of mobility between institutions...that by becoming a Dean here you might be a Vice President there’ [in another Irish University] (Professor Kieran Naughton)

Grummell et al (2009: 335 and 333) suggested that through the selection process in Irish educational management, a definition of leadership is constructed in the context
of ‘local logics’ (‘the expectations, values and experiences of educational leaders and assessors’ and the character and ethos of the institution and its relationship with the community) and ‘homosociability’ (i.e. selecting leaders ‘with familiar qualities and characteristics to one’s self’. Grummell et al (2009) see the latter as having gender implications in a context where the traditional model of leadership is male. Similarly, Witz and Savage (1992:16) suggested that ‘homosociability is often gendered as men ‘effectively ‘clone’ themselves in their own image, guarding access to power and privilege to those who fit in, to those of their own kind.’ Bagilhole and Goode (2001) and Yancey Martin (1996) also suggested that such homosociability played a key role in the perpetuation of male dominance. Such patterns are not peculiar to Ireland with a similar process of ‘cloning’ being referred to in Australia, mediated by homosociability (Blackmore et al, 2006).

Overwhelmingly both the men and women in the present study thought that Presidents were very powerful, particularly in terms of the recruitment of those senior executives reporting to themselves. These positions were explicitly or implicitly filled ‘not by application, promotion, selection or election, but by the blessing of the President’ (Jane Morrison). Even where there was an internal competition it was stressed that: ‘The President is key’ (Thomas Hennessy); the President was: ‘Very powerful, very powerful. In a sense it is largely the President’s call’ (Professor Denis Tobin). However there was a good deal of ambivalence about the use of that power to create gender balance in the senior management team:

‘It is about signals and the signal at the moment is that Senior Management is male’ (Professor Gerard Anderson)

Even in the case of those who were seen as supportive, gender was seen very much as a residual issue:

‘I think he [President] is interested in equality issues... [but] I don’t think he would say to the Director of HR we need to get another woman on Senior Management’ (Professor Sheila Furlong)

‘it is important, all things being equal, that decisions that are at the margins they should go in the direction of gender balance’ (Professor Brendan Connolly)

There were a minority who saw no reason to encourage the presence of women in senior management. Thus, for John Keane, the question was ‘have we seen any
verifiable consequences’ of women’s access to management positions, implicitly suggesting that moves in this direction were not in women’s interest anyway: ‘Who can be the hardest task master? It can be other women’. For others the importance was rather limited and rhetorical: ‘one can point to the fact that one has lots of women in senior management’ (Professor Michael Mc Grath).

It was striking that in the present study most men and women at senior executive level put forward rationales for the inclusion of women in senior management. For some these rationales were related to their conception of the University as involving collegial representational structures and/or an opposition to managerialism:

‘We talk a lot about access for disabled, disadvantaged... and it is a bit strange when people don’t think [that] 50% of the people are men 50% are women, ... If you are a team player why would you not have women in the team?’ (Professor Niall Phelan)

‘There can be a kind of almost corporate type language that can creep into the discussions in Higher Education..., it wouldn’t be informed by principles of equality or equity’ (Professor Eileen Greene)

For others, the rationale for having women in senior management was ultimately rooted in an appreciation of the value of diversity in contributing to the making of ‘proper decisions in a balanced way’:

‘the combination [of men and women] is much more likely to lead to successful management practise than either by themselves ’ (Professor Sean Lenihan)

In other cases gender discrimination (Husu, 2001a; 334) was seen as ‘unethical behaviour’-with men who had formative experiences outside the Irish academic system in particular seeing the continued existence of a male dominated organisational culture as legally and morally unacceptable and/or as an embarrassing anachronism. Thus although Professor Larry Mc Donald saw the appointment of women at senior management level as making no difference to decision making in universities he felt that ‘it is right because it is right.’. Others spontaneously referred to ‘the very old fashioned approach to gender issues’ (Professor Denis Tobin); ‘universities have lagged behind. The voices and the language is mostly male still’ (Professor Eileen Greene). Occasional senior executives preferred working with women because ‘they had less ego’ (Professor Sean Lenihan)- such attitudes arguably
reflecting the perception of patriarchal privileging as problematic (Connell, 2005). For others it was simply seen as important in the provision of role models for female faculty and students:

‘There is no doubt that there are [glass] ceilings all over the place. They have to be corrected- [and to do this we] need role models.’ (Professor Garry Burke)

‘[it] is bound to have an influence on younger academics. They have to see people in these positions for them to think ‘I might do that’’ (Professor Eileen Greene)

Some senior executives presented themselves as well intentioned and frustrated by the absence of ‘suitable women’: ‘Its more through lack of opportunity and lack of potential candidates within the system than any design’ (Professor Denis Tobin).

There was also evidence of a kind of paternalism, and a suggestion that being in senior management was ultimately not in women’s interests (Connell, 2005):

‘we have a number of good women doing a great job... but I wouldn’t want to pull them out of what they are doing... to pull them into the management area, even from their own career path point of view they are better off... doing their own research, publishing papers, getting money in, getting very well known in their own area’ (Professor Kieran Naughton)

This seemed to reflect a kind paternalistic ‘heroic masculinity’ (Kerfoot and Whitehead 1998:451) insofar as it purports to protect women while at the same time reflecting and maintaining men’s own positional power. In the present study, professorial status was overwhelmingly implicitly or explicitly seen as a necessary condition for accessing academic senior management. The effect of this is particularly acute in the Irish context where women’s chances of promotion to professorial level are roughly half what they are in Australia, Portugal or Finland. The fact that there were actual examples of men (but not women) being appointed at Presidential or Vice Presidential level who were not at Professorial level was completely ignored by the Irish interviewees.

In contrast to Australia (O’Connor and White, 2009) the state structures that interface with the universities have provided little support or encouragement for gender change at senior management level. The HEA (having closed the Access and Equality unit in University College Cork in 2002) and having failed to create any equality structure
since then, has recommended that universities develop equality action plans ‘which sets out explicit and challenging targets and timetables as well as the names of those responsible for delivery’ (HEA, 2004: 59). No action has been taken to monitor the implementation of this recommendation. The HEA has also failed to prioritise gender in its guidelines for Governance (HEA, 2007). Indeed in only one of the seven universities, does the percentage of women on Governing Authorities reach the state recommended 40 per cent level (range 23 per cent to 42 per cent: O’Connor, 2008a) making it unlikely that gender related issues will be raised in such fora.

The overall context of the Irish state has been described as patriarchal (O’Connor, 2008b). This, for example, was reflected in the absorption of the Department of Equality and Law Reform into the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in 1997 and in the imposition of a 42 per cent cut in the budget of the Equality Authority in 2008 (in a context where cuts of nine per cent were the norm). Furthermore neither the National Development Plan 2007-2013 (Government Publications, 2007) nor the National Women’s Strategy 2007-2016 (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2007) identify mechanisms to monitor or reverse the masculinisation of senior management in the universities. Other recent policies related to higher education (including the OECD report 2004) have not only ignored the issue of senior management, but have by and large ignored gender altogether (O’Connor, 2008a).

In summary then, the majority of the senior managers in the present study stressed the power of the President in the making of appointments at senior management level and saw him as having very considerable power as regards changing the gender profile there. However they were ambivalent about the use of such power. There was little evidence of other structures, processes or stakeholders that seemed likely to actually advance that agenda. Nevertheless, for various reasons, these senior managers
overwhelmingly saw the appointment of women to senior management as making a
difference.

**Summary and Conclusions**

The qualitative data in the present study draws on a purposive sample of 40 of those
in senior management in Irish universities, with a response rate of 85 per cent and
constituting roughly one in two of those in senior executive positions,. As in Currie
and Thiele’s (2001) study women more often referred to structural factors while men
were more often were in the ‘denial’ category. As seen particularly by the women, it
was an organisational culture where men were, for the most part, most comfortable
working with other men, and which was conformist, unemotional and gender
unaware. The men were much more likely to see women as the problem - focussing
on their lack of career planning; low self esteem; high valuation of caring, poor ability
to market themselves and life style choices. Nevertheless in the present study both
men and women for the most part strongly endorsed the appointment of women to
senior management: referring to the importance of role models, as well as evoking
issues around representation and diversity; personal preferences, moral or modern
standards. They also saw the President as very powerful in relation to the gender
profile of senior management, although they were ambivalent about him
implementing changes in this area. The majority of both men and women in the study
took for granted that women’s professorial status was a necessary condition for being
in senior academic executive positions. They ignored the fact that not all men in these
positions were at that level-and that since women only constitute 11 per cent of those
at professorial level, such a pre-requisite has gendered implications.

In Ireland less than one in five of those in senior management are women. In a context
where women make up almost 40 per cent of faculty and more than half of the
students, the gender disparities at professorial and senior management level are
striking. Both academic and non-academic women saw elements of homosociality if
not outright misogyny in the organisational culture. The degree to which the HEA or
the state are willing to tackle such phenomena in Ireland is problematic. It remains to be seen whether the academic leaders in the universities are up to this challenge.

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