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Abstract: This article is concerned with men and women's experience of elite positions and with the extent to which such positions are seen as places for women, so as to provide an insight into their commitment to continuing in them. Senior management in universities are elite positions in terms of income; those who occupy them are relatively powerful internally, although relatively powerless in relation to the state and the market. Drawing on a purposive study of those at the top three levels (i.e. presidential, vice-presidential, dean) in public universities, it finds little difference between men and women's perceptions of the advantages/disadvantages of these positions. However in a context where roughly four fifths of those in university senior management are men (O'Connor, 2014), at the level of organisational narratives and at the interactional level, gender differences persist. These differences are reflected in variation in commitment to continuing in senior management positions. (149 words)

Key Words: Good Jobs; women; senior management; universities; organisational culture; advantages/disadvantages; interactional level; places; elite

Introduction

Universities internationally are under pressure from neo-liberalism and other global processes and are undergoing considerable change. The centralisation of power internally, which is a feature of managerialism, is associated with greater external pressure and accountability. However senior managers, at least potentially, have power within their own organisations, and have a considerable impact on the lives of the staff they employ and the students who attend them. The position of senior managers can be regarded as an elite one, with many attractive characteristics, not least in terms of salary. Relatively little attention has been paid to senior managers' experience of these elite positions: a topic that seems particularly relevant in a context where they can be perceived as potentially occupying a

contradictory position. Thus as managers, they have power within their own organisations and are ultimately responsible for their shape and direction, while they ‘are also subordinate to powerful corporate interest groups in the business and industrial sector’ (Lynch, 1999:53). This article is also concerned with the extent to which such elite positions are seen as places for women, so as to provide an insight into their commitment to continuing in them.

The majority of those holding senior management positions are men. Within most organisations there are formal hierarchies of positional power predominantly occupied by men. Gender is thus typically highly conflated with organisational power, with universities being male dominated organisations. In Ireland, roughly four fifths of those in senior management positions in universities are men (O’Connor, 2014). A good deal of attention (albeit outside the mainstream) has been paid to the under-representation of women in senior positions in universities; to the structural and cultural barriers they experience in trying to access these positions and the difficulties they experience as holders of such positions (Fitzgerald, 2014; Coleman, 2011; Morley, 2013; Bagilhole and White, 2011; Shah and Shah, 2012). The situation of women in senior management positions has been seen as particularly fraught because of the construction of leadership as an appropriately masculine activity. The concept of organisational culture has been used to refer to a complicated fabric of management myths, values and practices that legitimise women’s positions at the lower levels of the hierarchy and portray managerial jobs as primarily masculine (Bagilhole 2002; Benschop and Brouns 2003; Deem *et al.*, 2008; Leathwood and Read 2009). Thus ‘management incorporates a male standard that positions women as out of place’ (Wajcman, 1998:2). The reality of the gendered organisational culture in universities has been widely documented by academics and accepted by policy making organisations (e.g. EU 2012; OECD 2012).

It has been suggested that ‘Organisational culture is a function of leadership’ (Parry, 1998: 93). Thus changing women’s position in universities requires changes to a gendered culture where ‘women’s place’ is defined by men and it is a subordinate one. Men, as Hearn (2001:70) sees it, 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’. Thus: ‘in simply going along with institutionalised features of the gender order, men perpetuate masculinism, a bias in favour of men’ (Yancey Martin, 2003: 360). Women choosing to enter male

dominated areas of employment ‘may perform femininity or resist such a performance’ (Mackenzie Davey 2008: 655) but their positioning is always relative to men, with a strong possibility that regardless of what they do, they will be seen as ‘Other’ (O’Connor and Goransson, 2014). Thus although that minority of women in senior management in universities occupy an elite position, which itself is contradictory, they experience a further contradiction in that, although they are members of an elite in terms of their occupational position, they are subordinate in terms of gender: ‘They are insiders to the organisational bureaucracy.....On the basis of their gender they are outsiders to the masculinist culture...’ (Fitzgerald, 2014:9).

The concept of ‘organisational culture’ has been variously defined, although there is a common core to such definitions (Tierney, 1998). Drawing on Wicks and Bradshaw (2002:137), in this article it is defined as those ‘attitudes, values and assumptions... which become entrenched in the minds and practices of organisational participants’ and which plays an important part in concealing and legitimating gendered inequalities. Smircich (1983) distinguishes between culture as something an organisation ‘has’; and culture as something an organisation ‘is’, with the former definition implicitly suggesting that managers can change the organisational culture, while the latter focuses on day to day interactions which are less amenable to change by management. In problematising senior management as a place for women, attention is focused on organisational narratives and interactional perceptions (Wharton, 2012; Risman, 2004) and in particular, on how those occupying elite positions think they are perceived by colleagues, and the gender variation in this.

In summary, this article is concerned with men and women’s experience of elite positions and particularly their perceptions of their advantages/disadvantages; with the organisational culture and its impact on commitment to continuing in such positions. It was undertaken as part of a wider cross-national study ‘of women’s representation in, experience of and influence on senior management’ (Bagilhole and White, 2011: 1). There is thus an opportunity to explore the similarities and differences between the experiences of men and women in the Irish context, compared to others in similar positions cross-nationally (Riordan, 2011; Neale, 2011).

Methodology

The public university system in Ireland consists of seven universities. Roughly four fifths of those in senior management positions in Irish universities are men (O'Connor, 2014). In ways the Irish public university system can be seen as a bounded, relatively undifferentiated system, although Trinity College Dublin is the most prestigious and most long established university and the one whose structure contrasts most strongly with the rest. However, the small size and relatively low level of differentiation in the total pool enables them to be analysed collectively to a far greater extent than might be possible in a more structurally differentiated system.

The approach used is a critical realist one. Thus although it is accepted that there is a real world that exists independently of our perceptions, our understanding of this world is inevitably related to our positioning (Maxwell, 2012). Semi-structured qualitative interviews were used as the method of data collection. Such data can be regarded as constituting an edited story (Nilsen, 2008), although unlike more typical narrative studies (Hyvarinen, 2008), the priorities and interests of the researcher were reflected in the method of data collection. A semi-structured interview schedule was devised by the eight country Women in Higher Education Management Network (WHEM: Bagilhole and White, 2011). Ethical approval was sought and given in each national context.

Senior management was defined as those at dean level or above who had been in such a position in a public university within the previous five years. Such senior management teams varied in size and composition, although they all included a mix of academics and other professionals. The sample was a purposive one. A total of 40 people were identified, involving those at presidential, vice-presidential and dean level; including academics and other professionals; 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. All of the interviews took place in the interviewees' own office. All were tape recorded. They varied in length from 40 minutes to one hour 30 minutes, with the majority being over an hour. The tone of the interviews was very positive and typically very open. It was clear that for many of the respondents it was an enjoyable opportunity to reflect on their lives and the organisations they led. Detailed verbatim notes were made during the interview. Following the interviews, the tapes were replayed and transcribed.

The method of analysis was thematic, with themes being influenced both by the national and cross-national data, as well as by the literature in the area. Grounded theory (Glaser and Straus, 1967) was used in a context where, although the gendered nature of senior management positions has been extensively documented, particularly by gender theorists, less attention has been paid to the extent and nature of gender variation in the experiences of those in elite positions in gendered organisational contexts; and the differential impact of such experiences on men and women's commitment to continuing in them. It has been recognised that 'validity in interpretative social science is complicated by subjectivity' (Mabry, 2008: 221). However issues related to validity also arise in quantitative research, with Hammersley (2008: 51) noting that in assessing the validity of research findings: 'Judgement is always involved and this necessarily depends upon background knowledge and practical understanding'. In these terms, the author, at that time a member of a senior management team brought credibility and 'insider knowledge' to the collection and interpretation of the data.

Because of the small size of Ireland in general (4.6 million) and of the university sector in particular, to ensure that individuals were not identifiable, the sample was not disaggregated by level. Pseudonyms are also used to conceal the identity of the participants, although reflecting the face-to-face character of Irish society, fictitious names are used, with manager-academics being differentiated from other professionals by the use of the designation professor.

Good Jobs?

In assessing this, attention is focussed on senior managers' perceptions of the advantages/disadvantages of being in senior management. For the majority the former far exceeded the latter. At the level of advantages, among these senior managers, the university as a source of meaning featured prominently. Thus despite the fact that universities in Ireland are becoming increasingly managerialist, many of the senior managers referred to the university's 'noble purpose' (Professor Gerard Anderson); its 'national importance, institutional importance...a chance to think of the greater good' (Tony Noonan). The importance of the university's engagement with the local community was also occasionally mentioned by respondents (see Bargh *et al.*, 2000); as was its role in relation to the economy:

‘The higher education sector is vital to the national economy; life-long learning and all those issues; making a contribution to the country and the future well-being of the country’ (Thomas Hennessy). The power to influence the overall direction and shape of the university and to make a difference was widely valued by men and women in the cross-national study (Riordan, 2011).

In the Irish study, male manager-academics were particularly likely to refer to shaping the institution as an advantage: ‘it gives you the opportunity to shape things...to shape the direction of an institution’ (Professor Denis Tobin). There was no evidence to support Blackmore’s (1999) suggestion that women were ambivalent about positional power: ‘power, whether we like it or not, the capacity to make decisions and to effect change was a challenge, a challenge that I enjoyed’ (Professor Geraldine Maguire). For her ‘power was always a useful thing to have’ and like Klot’s (2004) respondents, it was not too much but too little of it that was frustrating: ‘Things I wanted to do, I couldn’t do’. Fitzgerald (2014: 113) also refers, albeit very briefly to the fact that in her study ‘for some women, playing the game is intensely pleasurable’. In the present study, women manager-academics were particularly likely to focus on the possibility of using positional power to open up opportunities for other people, reflecting a gendered orientation to power (Baker-Miller, 1986): ‘you identify good people, relatively junior, who are buzzing with ideas, and find a niche and give them small incentives to implement those ideas’ (Professor Cathy O’Riordan); ‘the opportunity and the task to try to access resources, to allow the really good people around the system to make their mark’ (Professor Sheila Furlong). This may reflect a construction of femininity in Ireland that is strongly relational (O’Connor 1998), with nurturing being important in legitimating women’s occupancy of positions of power, thus reducing the tension between leadership and gender roles (Eagly and Sczesny, 2009; Coleman, 2011).

One of the well-recognised appealing characteristics of a university as a knowledge-based institution is the intellectual calibre of the people who work there (Lindholm 2004). This was very frequently noted as an advantage by men and women in the Irish study as well as in the wider cross-national one (Riordan, 2011): ‘The university is a fabulous community to work in terms of how much it enriches your intellectual life. There are so many different, very bright, people that you get to meet and deal with’ (Professor Gerard Anderson)

The university as an institution has survived by alliances with other powerful institutional structures which have funded it. In an Irish context the main source of such funding is still the state. However, the senior managers (as in the Australian and Portuguese studies: O'Connor *et al.*, 2014) saw the difficulties of accessing sufficient resources for their own university as one of the main disadvantages of being in senior management: 'Attempting to manage on reduced resources...is difficult' (Professor Marie Walsh); 'Having lots of good ideas that I can't implement because of lack of resources' [is a disadvantage] (Professor Sean Murphy). Indeed, some referred to 'the huge lack of underfunding by the State' (Pauline Hanratty). The internal organisational structures were also seen as a disadvantage. Thus they referred to the difficulties created by a bureaucracy that attempted to be consensual: 'We are forever looking for consensus and end up not making decisions' (Peter Delaney); and to 'an almost Japanese management concept, it takes a long time to reach a decision' (Gerard Donnelly). Such concerns about internal decision making structures are not peculiar to Irish universities (O'Connor *et al.*, 2014). Frustration was also expressed with what was seen as the increasingly managerialist micro-management by structures such as the Higher Educational Authority, which interface between the universities and central government.

Lindholm (2004) noted that the ability to structure time was one of the key attractions of academic work. However, much of this autonomy is lost when academics assume senior management roles and they themselves become part of a 'Panoptical surveillance system' (Foucault, 1978: 201). That very system corrodes their control over their own time, and hence erodes their autonomy. Both men and women mentioned this loss of discretionary time: 'Now I have lost that, 95 per cent of it anyway' (Professor Joan Geraghty). Some noted that the higher you went, the less freedom in this sense you had, until 'you have no freedom at all ... you are committed every minute. Your life is not your own, utterly and completely' (Professor Kieran Naughton).

There was a sense that a long hour's culture existed: '12 hours a day and in at week-ends' (Professor Geraldine Maguire); 'you could just keep going' (Thomas Hennessy). Similar trends were identified in other countries, although it was recognised that ideas about 'appropriate' work life balance varies between individuals and that imbalances are not inevitably negative (Riordan, 2011). For the majority of both men and women in the Irish study, work/life imbalance was not seen as a problem, because of their life stage: 'if I was younger, a disadvantage would be that I would not see my family growing up. I would have

missed out. But...my children have grown up.’ (Professor Kieran Naughton). As in Hewlett and Buck Luce’s (2006) study, insofar as there was any reference to work-life balances it was most likely to be made by the men. This contrasts with the picture emerging in Fitzgerald’s (2014) study of women academic leaders in Australia and New Zealand. This is a major source of tension among academic senior managers in Australia (Bagilhole and White, 2011; O’Connor *et al.*, 2014; Fitzgerald, 2014): a pattern that was interpreted as reflecting the greater presence of managerialism in such contexts. In the Irish study, women occasionally also referred to long hours, but located this in the context of a wider range of work related pressures, or else saw it as an acceptable cost: ‘those kinds of pressures are part of the deal you sign up to’ (Jane Morrison); ‘increasing pressure on academics to do everything, publish, administer, PhDs... and then on top of that juggling home responsibility’ (Professor Eileen Greene). Stress was very rarely referred to by men or women. Some had adopted what they saw as effective strategies to limit the personal cost, including ‘being disciplined’ about it intruding on their home life; keeping time for things that were very personally important’ and scheduling family time at week-ends. In the present study, both men and women prioritised management, albeit sometimes regretfully over what they saw as their contribution to the key functions of the university (i.e. research and teaching). In the Irish study it was simply seen as an inevitable part of senior management.

Yet these women in senior management positions were more likely than their male counterparts to say that they were actually looking forward to a movement out of management in five years’ time: ‘hopefully I will return to being one of those privileged people who have quiet time for research, writing in my office or in the library somewhere’ (Professor Eileen Greene). The women also had more positive attitudes to making what in Ireland is a compulsory transition to retirement at 65 years: ‘I have done lots of things, happy to draw it to a close’ (Professor Ann Joyce). In contrast, for the male manager-academics, the thought of retirement was very daunting: ‘I am old and done now’ (Professor Kieran Naughton). For those who would not be of retirement age in five years’ time, as in Doherty and Manfredi’s (2010), the possibility of remaining in senior management (after their current assignment) was more likely to be entertained by men than by women: ‘I guess I might be still in senior management’ (Professor Niall Phelan). Women had greater difficulty articulating such a possibility, although they did so very occasionally: ‘that is quite difficult ... There are two obvious routes: I look for the president post or I go back to my first love, in a corner somewhere, reading and writing’, with the attraction of these options ‘changing on a

daily basis' (Professor Sheila Furlong). Thus although female manager-academics accepted and even valued the opportunity to occupy such positions, they saw them as temporary assignments, arguably reflecting their uneasy cultural positioning in them (see next section). However, since the women were frequently at a lower level than their male counterparts, it is possible that such attitudes also reflect their level in the organisation.

At the organisational level, the majority of the women in senior management embodied positions of resistance as 'tempered radicals' (Meyerson and Scully, 2011) in the sense that they were committed to the organisation, but highly critical of some aspects of its culture. Such a positioning has been seen as ambivalent, emotionally exhausting and involving considerable organisational pressure as regards co-option. However, it is also 'a unique source of vitality, learning and transformation' (Meyerson and Scully, 2011:200). There was evidence that although some of these women had paid a price for their attitudes (in terms of not being re-appointed or not moving further up the hierarchy), they valued the opportunities these positions offered, and enjoyed the authenticity and the challenges that stemmed from the complexity of their position, and the opportunities they offered as regards reducing the influence of stereotypes (Ridgeway, 2011; O'Connor and Carvalho, 2014; O'Connor and Goransson, 2014).

In summary university senior managers saw the perceived purpose of the university and the intellectual calibre of the people they worked as important sources of meaning and pleasure. In terms of disadvantages, the most common references were to the difficulties of getting funding and the management structures. Overwhelmingly both men and women prioritised management and saw its costs as acceptable, although women's commitment to these positions was time limited. Overall however, other than in this area there were few differences between men and women, implicitly suggesting the possibility of common ground which might be explored (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004): potentially reducing gender barriers but reinforcing elite ones.

Places for women?

A wide range of academic work concluded that the barriers women face in universities include those related to a 'chilly' organisational culture premised on male life styles and priorities and on a particular concept of the ideal academic, which Thornton (2013) calls

‘Benchmark Man’. Thus although the specific characteristics prescribed for ‘Benchmark Man’ may vary across time and space, the equation of the ideal academic with a stereotypical male construct does not change. In such contexts women by definition do not fit. Such phenomena are not peculiar to Ireland (Bagilhole and White, 2011; O’Connor, 2014; OECD 2012; Neale, 2011; Shah and Shah, 2012). Here attention is focused on two dimensions of this gendered organisational culture: organizational narratives and interactional perceptions.

Organisational narratives: Valuing of gender

Typically, men are more likely to deny the existence of gender, reflecting wider patterns of the invisibility of privileges to those who are privileged (Acker, 2006; Connell, 1987). The practice of gender and the creation and maintenance of gender inequalities may be unintentional, with men mobilising ‘masculinities without being conscious of doing so’ (Yancey Martin, 2006: 261). In any case, men were more likely to deny, and women more likely to identify gendered organisational cultures in academic environments as a systemic problem (Currie and Thiele, 2001; Grummell *et al.*, 2008; Kloot, 2004; Linehan *et al.*, 2011) with male professors in particular stressing that ‘there is no sex discrimination in university or academic life’ (Harris *et al.*, 1998:259). Similar patterns emerged in the present study. Thus, for example, Paul Meaney says that he has ‘never believed there is a glass ceiling... because I have not come across it’. The invisibility of gender to their male counterparts was referred to by women in the current study: ‘in relation to gender, I just wonder are they gender blind? They don’t see it as an issue’ (Professor Tina Mc Cleland); ‘You think are we in the twenty first century or in the eighteenth. There is chauvinism to the Irish psyche’ (Professor Sheila Furlong). The majority of the women in the present study identified ‘systematic biases’ within their universities, characterising them as having ‘an unsupportive culture for women to inhabit’: ‘Women are conscious that men are unconsciously misogynistic but men aren’t conscious of this’ (Pauline Hanratty). Naming a gendered organisational culture as such can be seen as a form of resistance (O’Connor 2001) and has similarities with contestation i.e. verbally challenging the existing rules and resources (Whitchurch, 2008).

Men’s relationships with other men are a key factor in creating/maintaining a culture of privilege and entitlement. For Hartmann (1981), men as men can hope to benefit, at least to some extent, from the status quo, so they have a vested interest in perpetuating male bonding

as well as in the marginalisation or subordination of women. There have been references to ‘the male ‘clubbiness’ of the culture’ (Kloot, 2004; see also Deem *et al*, 2008; Fitzgerald, 2014; Coleman, 2011). Similar patterns emerged in the present study, where women depicted senior management as: ‘a male club at the top level...very hard as a woman... It is a very male domain’ (Professor Ann Joyce). Pro-male attitudes of varying degrees of intensity were perceived by women in senior management: ‘the biggest thing really is that men are generally more comfortable working with men, communicating with men, being with men, understanding men’ (Claire Hartigan):

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. This is not a generational thing. Those most uncomfortable are seriously younger (Professor Tina Mc Cleland)

The differential value attached to activities undertaken predominantly by men/women has been seen as a core element in a gendered organisational culture (Ely and Meyerson, 2000; Lynch *et al.*, 2012). The women in the present study were aware of these gendered processes:

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).

As they saw it: ‘women tend to be dumped with stuff that the men don’t want to do... We are the ones who will tend to pick up stuff because the others are not doing it and because we know it needs to be done’ (Pauline Hanratty). Similar trends emerged in other studies (e.g. Kloot 2004; Krefting 2003; Carvalho and Santiago, 2010). For the most part references to discrimination by the men only occurred in the context of positive discrimination, which was depicted as ‘making allowances’ ‘the suspension of academic standards’ (John Keane). Thus the implicit suggestion was that no male privileging exists.

Currie and Thiele (2001) found that the proportion of men who denied gender inequality varied across countries. However, even within countries, individual men and women may, because of their own experiences or positioning, highlight their existence. In the present

study a small number of male manager-academics referred to particular aspects of the organisational culture (albeit not those related to management) as reflecting underlying attitudes that they saw as essentially unfair to women. Thus for example, although Professor Gerard Anderson said that he did not see any evidence of discrimination in the sense that he 'heard no one saying we are not going to have another women around or there or too many women around here', he had noticed that women were disproportionately involved with the administration of teaching: 'Teaching is the new housework'. Some men, particularly those who had formative experiences outside the Irish academic system saw the continued existence of a male dominated organisational culture as legally and morally unacceptable or as an embarrassing anachronism. Thus, Professor Larry Mc Donald thought that having women in senior management in universities: 'is right because it is right'. For others, the importance was rhetorical: 'one can point to the fact that one has lots of women in senior management' (Professor Michael Mc Grath). Men who had worked outside the Irish academic system were much more aware of gender and more willing to name it. Other professional managers who had entered the university sector recently, and who had worked in mixed gender groups in the private sector, appeared to be benignly unreflective about gender but went on to ask refreshingly 'unthinkable' (Lukes, 2005) questions, implicitly suggesting that they did not see women as having a 'negative symbolic coefficient' (Bourdieu, 2001: 93). Thus, for example, Mark Noonan said that, although he remembered that he had read an article about 'glass ceilings', which said that women needed supports to avail of opportunities: 'I don't know what these supports are, maybe I should know'. Some of them went on to ask refreshingly 'unthinkable' (Lukes, 2005) questions. Thus for example those who had come from the private sector and who retained a concern with profit noted: 'Where have you ever heard one of the universities come out and say the women's university as an angle on student recruitment?' (Timmy Collins). Thus, in this case managerialism led to the endorsement of a perspective that ignored the greater value typically attached to men's activities/arenas.

In summary gender inequalities in the organisational culture were visible to the majority of women senior managers. Men who had worked in higher educational institutions outside Ireland, or in the private sector, were more aware of the existence of gender inequalities than those who had not had such experiences.

Interactional Perceptions: Valuing of gender

Where individuals have multiple identities, the question arises as to which of these are activated in a particular context. Others' perceptions can be complicated by stereotypes: 'As individuals 'do' and 'accomplish' gender...they are assisted, directed and constrained by the ideology and practice of gendered institutions...that define forms of behaviour as gender appropriate or inappropriate' (Mihelich and Storrs, 2003:404; see also Deutsch, 2007; Ridgeway, 2011; Fitzgerald, 2014; Coleman, 2011). Whether gender as an ascriptive characteristic is visible and/or valued provides an indication of its differential significance in the interactional context of senior management.

The existence of a status hierarchy among men has been seen as characteristic of patriarchy (Hartmann, 1981). Women, despite their senior position, have no place in that hierarchy because of their gender. In that context women are positioned as 'supportive/submissive' or posing 'resistance and...disruptive of hegemonic masculinities' (Bird 2003:367). Many of the female manager-academics in the present study thought that they were seen in problematic terms by their male counterparts because of their gender. Thus Professor Geraldine Maguire reflected that she was seen by her male colleagues as 'too questioning; too challenging, asking uncomfortable questions' describing her male colleagues as 'quite frightened of me, scared of me in some senses'. Others referred to male colleagues perception of them as 'awkward...that irritating person down the hall' (Professor Eileen Greene); 'to my surprise, I was seen as quite formidable' (Professor Cathy O'Riordan); 'as one seriously intimidating individual who knows how to get her own way' (Katherine Mc Elligott). These comments indicate their perception by male colleagues as disruptive, confrontational, dissenting, and that, as such, these women frightened them. They have resonances with Kanter's (1993) description of the iron maiden archetype into which women in predominantly male organisations in the 1970s were thrust if they 'insisted on full rights in the group.... Displayed competence in a forthright manner'. The word 'frightening' was also used by Husu's Finnish respondents (2001:144). It is evocative of both women's perceived power and yet their unacceptability as equal players in what purport to be degendered organisations. Other studies have shown that when women do seek and gain leadership roles, and push aside the stereotypical gendered nurturing role, they are often perceived as being 'bossy' and domineering' (Coleman, 2011). Thus, although a small number of women were included in university senior management, as the women perceived it, there was a certain discomfort with

having them there. Yet their presence reflected presidential support, and in an increasingly managerialist system, overwhelmingly relied on presidential nomination (O'Connor, 2014). But their inclusion was on certain terms, and, there were limits to their acceptance because of their gender: '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).

Those in senior management in Lynch *et al.*'s study, (2012: 143/144), also referred to not being accepted as 'one of the gang'; being 'positioned as 'other': the 'outsider who...asks embarrassing questions' (Gherardi, 1996: 194 and 196; see also Fitzgerald, 2014) with some of the women seeing their male colleagues as having a rather paternalistic view of them (see also Krefting 2003). In the present study there was also evidence of such patronizing attitudes. Thus Professor Sheila Furlong described her male colleagues' view of her as 'quite efficient, a little misguided. At times I'm told I give people too much air time' (i.e. she manages a couple of people by talking to them). Similarly although Pauline Hanratty was very clear that: 'I am totally equal to them' (i.e. male colleagues), as she saw it, this was not the way that some of them perceived her. Very occasionally women saw their male colleagues as perceiving them positively: 'in a positive light as a very able skilled...person. I think I am seen as politically astute, being able to manage the political situation...generally seen as supportive but also as challenging' (Clare Hartigan). The reference to political skills is interesting, and echoes an underlying perception of universities as highly political arenas, a perspective that many women see as problematic (O'Connor, 2014).

The depiction of women's relationships with each other as uniformly negative can be seen as a key mechanism of patriarchal control (O'Connor, 2002). However, there is evidence that high potential women are most likely to include women in their networks and to identify women as key sources of career related information and strategies; with women-dominated support systems providing encouragement, instrumental help and facilitating women's career development (Ibarra 1997; Mavin and Bryans 2002; Fitzgerald, 2014). On the other hand, Ely (1994) found that in organisations with few senior women, women were less likely to get support from other women. Thus, it appears that women's relationships with each other are affected by the gender profile of the organisation. In Ireland, despite the rapidity of cultural and social change (reflected in for example, dramatic increases in women's attainment of higher education; their participation in paid employment in general and as academic staff in

universities in particular) much of social life remains highly gender segregated, reflecting and reinforcing essentialist gender stereotypes. It was striking that overwhelmingly, the female senior managers in the present study saw other women's perception of them as positive: 'as ambitious, capable, fairly competent to get our point across at the big table if I have to; also seen as supportive of female colleagues' careers, and supportive of challenging a lot of the structures that have existed for years, and that women might not necessarily agree with' (Professor Eileen Greene); 'as a leader, somebody who has managed to get into a senior position and has done it while raising a family, and doing other things, and hence fairly useful as a role model' (Professor Joan Geraghty). Much more ambivalent, and in some cases hostile perceptions were perceived to exist between women in other countries in the cross-national study, including Sweden, New Zealand, and Turkey (Neale, 2011). This difference may reflect the segregated nature and essentialist construction of femininity still persisting in Irish society: one in which the negative evaluation of women by public patriarchy is not fully accepted, and alternative evaluations are created and maintained by women in female dominated contexts. Alternatively it may be that these women grew to adulthood during the 1960s-70s at a time when the second women's movement was at its height (Connolly, 2003; O'Connor, 1998). In any case, the majority of these female senior managers were strongly identified with other women; were very comfortable in all women groups and stressed the understanding they felt in such all women groups where: 'people automatically and intrinsically understand your female issues. In a predominantly male one, it depends on the man' (Jane Morrisson).

It has been suggested that: 'It is only those who can take for granted their place in the world, those who are already privileged, who can leave themselves and their identity out of the picture' (Yates, 2009:18). The men in this study had far more difficulty than the women in thinking about how they were perceived by their colleagues: 'I have not given that a lot of thought' (Tony Noonan); 'It's hard to know' (Professor Tommy Ryan). On reflection however, they were able to identify such perceptions. For most of them, their gender was invisible to their colleagues. A small number referred to what could be regarded as masculine qualities (whether present or desired: drawing on an implicitly tough, aggressive stereotype of masculinity): 'I think they probably see me as quite tough when it comes to taking difficult decisions, particularly in relation to people' (Professor Denis Tobin). Nevertheless, their colleagues perceived evaluations were typically seen as very positive. There were occasional rejections of other's perceptions, reflecting resistance to what were depicted as simplistic

criticisms: ‘some think that I sold out on research... somebody has to manage the place. I believe I am seen as being very effective: I make things happen’ (Professor Niall Phelan). Thus even in these cases they still saw others evaluation as positive.

Overwhelmingly the men thought that there was no difference in the way they were seen by men and women. However, a minority of men thought that women saw them more positively than their male counterparts: ‘in this environment I am probably seen as a whinger rather than someone who gets things done. [My female colleagues] see me as someone who is trying to get things done, as someone who listens’ (Timmy Collins). The language that is used (‘whinger’) is stereotypically associated with women, and in this case it seems to reflect a discomfort with the wider gendered organisational culture, one which is not seen as valuing stereotypically female qualities. As Professor Gerard Anderson saw it, his colleagues’ perceptions of him either reflected an acceptance or a challenging of his position of power: and with female colleagues ‘the combative piece is not so obviously there’. A minority of men saw the perceptions of their female colleagues as more accurate, less challenging and more positive than those of their male colleagues. These men were also those who indicated some degree of discomfort with all male groups: seeing them as having ‘a slightly laddish feel’ (Professor Gerard Anderson), implicitly suggesting a discomfort with the dominant male culture, where the stereotypical managerial style was seen as one involving aggression (O’Connor and Gorannsson, 2014). Such men are potential allies in challenging dominant constructions of masculinity and hence in changing the organisational culture.

In summary women overwhelmingly saw their male colleagues’ perceptions of them as disruptive, frightening etc. thus underlining their suspect positioning in these senior management structures. The majority of the men saw both their male and female colleagues’ perceptions of them as positive. A minority of men saw their female colleagues’ perceptions as more positive than those of their male colleagues, reflecting a discomfort with a masculinist organisational culture.

Summary and Conclusions

This article is concerned with men and women’s experience of elite positions and with the extent to which such positions are seen as places for women. It is concerned with exploring

the existence of gender differentiated patterns in both areas and ultimately with their impact on a commitment to continuing in senior management. These issues are explored in the context of a study of senior management in public universities in Ireland. More specifically, it is concerned with two aspects of the experience of university senior management: firstly their perceptions of the advantages/disadvantages of being in senior management and gender variation in this; and secondly with gender variation in the organisational narratives and interpersonal perspectives of men and women occupying these positions, and its impact on commitment to continuing in these positions.

It shows that there is surprisingly little gender differences in these respondents experiences of the advantages and disadvantages of being in senior management. The levels of meaning and pleasure that these respondents identified as advantages of being in university senior management was striking, partly stemming from the perceived purpose of the university, and partly from the calibre of people working there. There was general consensus that limited resources for the university and the external and internal structures were disadvantages. The impact of senior management on academic activity and work-life balance was generally seen as an acceptable cost. Yet the women were more likely than their male counterparts to say that they were actually looking forward to a movement out of management in five years' time

In terms of organisational narratives, in this as in a range of other studies, men were more likely to deny the existence of gender while women were more likely to name it. At the interactional level the majority of women saw their gender as visible to their male colleagues and for the most part not in a positive way. On the other hand, the majority of them saw themselves as viewed positively by their female colleagues: a trend which did not emerge in other countries (Neale, 2011). Men had greater difficulty in thinking about how they were perceived, and overwhelmingly saw their gender as invisible (reflecting a well- recognised tendency for characteristics to be invisible to those in hegemonic positions). A minority of the men in this study thought that they were seen more positively by their female than their male colleagues. Such men can be seen as potential allies in challenging hegemonic male discourses and highlight the inadequacy of a binary construction of gender.

Women constitute roughly one fifth of those in university senior management and the majority in this study are effectively contesting such gendered structures. In addition, not all

men are supporting these structures. Pressure as regards gendered change is also supported by cross-national structures whose concern is with economic growth and who see the failure to address gender inequality as inhibiting that growth. Organisational narratives and interactional contexts involve possibilities and difficulties as regards ‘undoing gender’ (Deutsch, 2007). Ely and Myerson’s (2010) work has shown how organisations, under certain conditions, can do this. There is clear evidence of such transformations within private sector organisations (Huse, 2013). However, it is not yet clear to what extent these patterns can be transferred to universities, where the identification of a compelling corporate goal (such as company profit) related to gender diversity is more difficult to identify. However it is at least possible that they may be transferable, with appropriate leadership.

Pressures as regards gendered change are being supported by forces within the universities themselves as academic staff dissent from a neo-liberal and/or gendered agenda. The economic collapse and the increasing awareness of power and its partiality in Irish society may also facilitate change within Irish universities. Gendered processes and practices are supported, implicitly or explicitly, by the state structures that interface with universities. However the gendering of higher education is being challenged by international structures such as the EU and the OECD. These are increasingly aware of the extent to which future economic growth is related to the ability to use the skills and talents of women, the best educated of its citizens. Hence although being in senior management is attractive, it is still a gendered place, with uneasy resonances for women.

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