

Review Of Management And Gender In Higher Education By Pat O'Connor, Manchester University Press, 2015

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The Irish Society Series of Manchester University Press is an exciting and useful series of overviews of key areas in Irish social, economic, cultural and political life. The current publication in the series is Pat O'Connor's (2014) book on 'Management and Gender in Higher Education' which examines the senior management structures of the Irish university sector. Of relevance to anyone with an interest in education and social policy at any level, its examination of gendered identities and prejudices is cogently argued and described.

The stated aim is 'to describe and explain the under-representation of women in senior management positions in universities' (p. 44). With women representing only one in five of senior managers at university level, issues examined include the centralization of and access to power and the organizational narratives and stereotypes embedded in the university workplace. Key to this examination is the inclusion of a content analysis of recent policy documents related to higher education in Ireland and Europe.

Outline of the book.

Chapter 1, 'The Big Picture', examines the structure of the university sector and current and on-going changes leading to the '*corporatization, commodification and marketization*' occurring in higher education (p.13). Chapter 2 interrogates the relationship between gender and power and outlines the key methodologies employed in the study; one; to quantitatively identify the numbers of women who are members of the senior management team in Irish universities and two; to qualitatively probe the 'lived experience' of those women at senior management level. Chapter 3 examines the instrumentality of education within the Irish context and highlights the state's prioritization of research in (limited areas) of science and technology which has meant that '*equality has not even been on [the] agenda*' (p.66) and '*in*

the area of gender what emerges is a striking lack of interest in the topic from the late 1990s until 2012' (p.66); all this despite rhetorical references to gender mainstreaming. Chapter 4 considers the culture of Irish senior management with negative comparisons being made to a gentleman's club or a medieval court, this in part attributed to the Universities Act (1997) which allows the appointment of presidents to run for ten years and which was referred to by respondents as giving the president virtually total power over the appointment of his senior managers, (there has never been a female president of an Irish university). Chapter 5 is tellingly entitled 'There is no problem; or, if there is, the problem is women'. Examining the visibility and legitimacy of gender inequalities, O'Connor considers the possibilities and limits of change. Specifically, this study found that men showed a lack of awareness of gender and gendered patterns and '*explanations were framed in terms of tradition and/or ...ideas of femininity revolving around care, cohesion and culture*' (p. 107). Chapter 5 ends with the stark assessment that '*there was no real commitment to fundamental change among senior managers in the present study*' (p. 108). Chapter 6, 'Think manager – think male', considers the prevalence of stereotypes in management structures and unpicks the accepted characteristics of a typical president. '*Both men and women noted that men had a greater sense of entitlement and that they were sensitive to the implications of directly challenging power*' (p. 126) with men's management style seen as aggressive while women's was seen as '*more people centred...holistic...and more concerned about the work itself than their own status*' (p. 126). Chapter 7 highlights the experience of being in senior management with respondents stating that colleagues' perceptions of them and their own perceptions of themselves were highly gendered. The Irish male manager focused on '*shaping the institution*' while his female counterpart was more likely to focus on '*the possibility of nurturing junior people*' (p. 145), thus dispelling the 'Queen Bee' theory i.e. that female managers fail to encourage and nurture lower ranking female colleagues. Chapter 8 connects key findings and looks to the future in higher education. O'Connor posits that the dire economic downturn of the recent past may paradoxically facilitate change within Irish universities, the first step of which is to make '*the gendered nature of ...power visible*' (p.163). She states that the symbolic and strategic power which is located in the universities, 'defining what counts as valued knowledge' but where, 'structures remain male dominated' are limiting the 'ability of Irish universities to respond to the very considerable challenges faced by Irish society' (p.163). This text makes a significant contribution to our understanding of gender and management in Irish universities. However a limiting factor of this author's approach is the methodological decision to only examine the seven universities in the Irish context. This exclusion of the IOTI sector, not to mention the plethora of private higher level educational institutions which are in

operation, points to an obvious next direction in the field of study of management and gender in Irish higher education. Establishing whether the one-in-five figure holds true when the locus of the research is broadened will be an important step. Of equal importance will be building on this work to explore the 'lived experience' of women in senior management in the broader higher education environment.

Of interest to all stakeholders in higher education, this book should also be read by education policy makers with a view to making positive changes to the higher education field which places gender equality to the forefront of future developments.

Reference

Meyers, C. (1986) *Teaching Students to Think Critically*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.