

## Opportunity or Exploitation: Women and Quality Assurance in Higher Education

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## **Opportunity or Exploitation? Women and Quality Assurance in Higher Education**

Professor Louise Morley

### **Abstract**

Based on interviews with 18 UK women academics and managers on quality and power in higher education, this article interrogates the impact of quality assurance discourses and practices on women in higher education. Micro-level analysis of the effects of audit and the evaluative state seem to suggest that hegemonic masculinities and gendered power relations are being reinforced by the emphasis on competition, targets, audit trails and performance (Morley, 2003a). Furthermore, pedagogic space for exploring social justice issues is closing with the emphasis on learning outcomes and student consumerism (Morley, 2003b). Yet women are also gaining new visibility as a consequence of the creation of a new cadre of quality managers. Quality assurance, as a regime of power, appears to offer both repressive and creative potential for women. This article will explore whether quality signs and practices are gendered and whether these represent opportunity or exploitation for women in the academy.

### **The Morality of Quality**

Quality assurance is a contradictory space. It is a regulatory, identity and entitlements project. It is represented as an emancipatory intervention, promising consumer

empowerment and customer care. The White Paper, 'The Future of Higher Education (DFES, 2003) places an emphasis on student choice driving up quality (p.11). There is a new moral economy, with a new type of campus citizenship required. Existing professional practices have been rendered fragile and academics and managers are now valued for their contribution to organisational performance, rather than for just their disciplinary or professional knowledge. Quality is also seen as a potent force of surveillance and normalisation (Morley, 2003a). Its introduction has reduced and regulated academic autonomy, while purporting to extend entitlements of a wider pool of stakeholders. It has relocated private, in-house matters to the public domain. The state has moved from being a provider to a regulator of public services.

There is an assumption that quality is a common professional ethic and is therefore indisputable. Yet quality assurance is a socially constructed domain of power. Particular signs of quality are valued and reproduced and these are ideologically and politically driven. However, the morality of quality often masks the economic underpinnings. As a discourse, quality wields the power to form and regulate through the imposition of its own terms. It is, to use Bernstein's theory, a form of symbolic control. Symbolic control is 'the means whereby consciousness, dispositions and desire are shaped and distributed through forms of communication which relay and legitimate a distribution of power and cultural categories' (Bernstein, 2001:23).

Workers in the academy have had to incorporate and internalise quality indicators for their professional and organisational survival. Quality assurance discursively carries the

threat and trace of the other within it. Resistance cannot be easily declared as it implies espousal of the other side of quality, that is – privilege, elitism, mystification of decision-making, unreliability, and shoddiness. Continuous improvement demands a self and organisation beratement that can demoralise and disempower. This has consequences for women as a group of employees already structurally disempowered by under-representation at senior levels.

Conversely, quality assurance is perceived by many as an essential component in the modernisation of public services. A polarisation that emerged in my study was the 'now and then' binary. Now, the bureaucracy is onerous, burdensome etc., but the past was a cauldron of secrecy and inefficiency. Quality assurance is strengthened by the repudiations it implies.

Quality, it appears, is accompanied by a series of losses and gains for women in the academy. Yet there is a marked lack of intertextuality between higher education studies and feminist theory. Feminist scholarship has had limited influence on thinking about quality assurance. The lack of conceptual apparatus to evaluate quality means that it continues to be represented as an example of a modernist, rationalist construction of the universal subject, whereby teachers, researchers, managers and learners are constructed as disembodied, cognitive, socially decontextualised entities.

This micro-level study is based on semi-structured interviews with 12 women in Britain's 'old' universities and 6 from 'new' or 'modern' universities. The sample includes 10

academics and 8 managers. The informants were chosen for their involvement in audit. Some managed or co-ordinated the entire organisation's preparations while others were involved at departmental, subject or course level. It is a gender theorised narrative of quality assurance. Views of women with a range of engagements in quality assurance were elicited. There were critics, product champions and those who occupied both positions simultaneously. Informants criticised, relayed and transmitted quality discourses. They normalised and disrupted dominant constructions of quality assurance in the academy. Some offered gender-sensitive interpretations while others described their experiences and feelings unmediated by analytical frameworks.

### **Quality and Equality**

Quality assurance precipitates change, but it is questionable whether it incorporates an understanding of equity. There are several arguments connecting quality and equality (Blackmore, 2000a and b). One argument relates to equity in terms of service delivery. Equity issues are not automatically performance indicators in quality audits in the UK. In taxonomies of effectiveness, the organisational world is presented as an orderly, rational surface, untainted by the mess and chaos of unequal power relations in which the lived world is constituted. When gender equity in higher education is included, it is invariably represented by quantitative signifiers of change. Whereas in current UK policy, participation of working class students has gained some attention, gender is not seen as a variable to be intersected with social class, as women now form the majority of undergraduates. In access debates, recognition of women's quantitative participation,

without consideration of vertical and horizontal distribution, is assumed to lead automatically to a redistribution of opportunities and entitlements.

Quality accolades do not necessarily coincide with equity achievements. Some of the most elite research organisations in Britain, with consistently high scores in the UK Research Assessment Exercises (RAE), also have the worst record on gender equity. Today, only 8.8 per cent of Cambridge professors and 9.5 per cent of Oxford professors are women compared to a national average of 13 per cent. (Personnel Division, 2004) and Information Officer, 2004)

Throughout the higher education sector, gender has played a role both in access and achievement. As far as students are concerned, Cambridge did not allow women graduates full status until 1947. The 'student experience' is highly gendered in these institutions, with more male students awarded first class honours degrees, despite homogeneous entry qualifications (Leman and Mann, 1999). McNabb et al (2002:481) found that 'although women students perform better on average than their male counterparts, they are significantly less likely to obtain a first class degree'.

A second argument relates to gendered employment regimes in the academy (Brooks and McKinnon, 2001). Universities can be amplification devices for gender inequalities. My research seems to suggest that quality assessment procedures appear to be reinforcing gendered divisions of labour in the academy (Morley, 2001; 2003a). At the risk of introducing crude binaries, there is some evidence that teaching quality is female-

dominated, while research quality is male-dominated (Morley, 2003a). This is evocative of the breast/ phallus distinction. The morality of quality can be profoundly gendered, with women heavily responsabilised for student-focused services, while men are frequently more connected to the thrusting power of international research and publication. Women's career ambitions can be more easily tied to domestic, rather than the worldly arenas. There has been some sex role spillover, with women's socialised patterns of caring getting appropriated by the teaching quality movement. The psychic economy involved in quality assessment is part of a gendered care chain. Lander (2000:136) believes that at the heart of quality is service to others. Pirsig (1974) also suggests that the notion of quality is deeply connected to caring because quality and caring are internal and external aspects of the same thing (Shields, 1999).

In relation to quality management of teaching and learning, some women in my study have moved away from the status of research activity and into the world that ties them to organisational development, new managerialism, presenteeism and responsabilisation (Morley 2001). So, while women are well represented as reviewers and managers of teaching quality, they are under-represented both as producers and reviewers of research quality. Leonard (2001: 17) points out how, in the 2001 RAE, fewer than one in four panel members and only one in seven of the panel chairs were women, and that the panels chaired by women were responsible for allocating less than 10 per cent of RAE funding. Furthermore, men are almost twice as likely to be entered in the RAE than women (Knights and Richards, 2003). The point about transparency in the appointment

of assessors has caused so much concern that it has been noted as a recommendation in the recent Roberts' Review of the Research Assessment Exercise (2003: 40).

The funding councils should monitor and report upon the gender balance of sub-panel members, sub-panel chairs, panel chairs, moderators and senior moderators.

A third argument relates to the possibilities for subversion or rearticulation. This suggests that the quality agenda can be appropriated to enhance the rights of less powerful groups e.g. students with dyslexia (Luke, 1997). In Britain, quality assessment of teaching and learning has been popular with the National Union of Students, as they believe that it has provided them with opportunities for influence and 'voice' (Morley, 2003b).

Marginalised groups have been brought under the auditing gaze. Externality has traditionally been an important driver for change for equity issues (Glazer, 1999). Luke (1997) argues that accountability measures, the 'institutional economies' of quality assurance, and the new contractualism can be harnessed for equity ends. Blackmore (1999: 47) also suggests that 'equity can be built into all contractual arrangements ... Top management commitment can be gained on the grounds that equity is more 'productive'.

A further question relates to the transformatory potential of higher education itself. This is a central aspiration in countries in transition such as South Africa (Cooper and Subotsky, 2001). In South Africa, higher education is seen to be a pivotal social institution and part of a rehabilitation process, raising consciousness and contributing to



changing professional and social practices. Without wishing to set up a fictional idyllic past, I believe that in Britain, sociology has been eclipsed by economics in education policy. Transformation sounds utopian and over-ambitious in a market economy and post-welfare arena. However, the university has sometimes been a site for the articulation of democratic and progressive values including feminism and anti-colonialism (Morley, 1999). In Bernstein's taxonomy of symbolic control (2001), the school system is coded as reproductive, while universities are perceived as 'shapers' i.e. they form and influence, rather than merely transmit received knowledge. Feminist scholarship has also indicated how social movements have impacted on the academy. Yet, there have been few feminist inquiries into quality assurance in higher education.

### **The Gendered Division of Labour**

The two quality accounting systems in Britain are contributing to polarised employment regimes. Men and women in the academy often appear to be on different career trajectories. Women are already disproportionately concentrated in areas and institutions with the lowest levels of research funding (Lafferty and Fleming, 2000). Women, in general, apply for fewer research grants than men (The Wellcome Trust, 1997).

The socially constructed indicators of career success reflect existing divisions of labour, with research at the top of the hierarchy. The quality movement could reinforce this.

In the UK, the Wellcome Trust and six of the UK's Research Councils commissioned an independent report from the National Centre for Social Research to analyse application

and award rates. Some 3090 academic staff from 44 HE institutions were surveyed between October 1999 and February 2000. Of the women questioned, 50 per cent had applied for research grants in the previous five years compared with 59 per cent of men. This work showed that women also made a smaller number of applications and were less likely to be the principal applicant; they sought lower levels of funding than their male counterparts, and generally applied for grants for shorter lengths of time. In addition, only 46 per cent of women applied to the Research Councils or the Wellcome Trust for their grants compared with 65 per cent of men (NCSR, 2000). Only 22 per cent of Economic and Social Research Council grants were allocated to women in 2002/3.

There is a vicious circle - women are too busy teaching or administrating, too junior, and too precariously employed to gain major research grants. They are then ineligible to apply for senior posts, as they have no major research grants. In addition to these structural barriers, there are attitudinal barriers. In Sweden, Wenneras and Wold (1997) found that eligibility criteria were gendered, and that women needed to be two and a half times more productive in terms of publications than their male counterparts to get the same rating for scientific competence. The networks between the successful male applicants and members of the panel caused such a scandal that the entire board was sacked!

The exclusion of many women from research opportunities might account for why so many get incorporated into quality assurance procedures for teaching and learning. For some of them, this provides a welcome opportunity to be included and valued.

Involvement in quality management creates career opportunities for women, while simultaneously pushing them into a career pathway strongly associated with organisational housekeeping. A lecturer in this study discussed how focusing on students' needs instead of their own has caused a 'braking' on women's careers:

I'm in a department of 25 full-timers, of whom six are women. There's us four junior women who are between 31 and 41 and we're none of us promoted and something has really had a sort of braking influence on all of our careers. We've all come in as quite "hot" and quite "sharp" and quite energetic and we're not producing at the rate that we should, in a sense, although, you know, in another way I think, why the hell should we produce in that kind of way? But we've all been pushed into the convening classes, teaching classes, taking on pastoral care. All these things which, I mean I think are terribly, terribly important but you don't see the men getting pushed into them... It's absolutely all down to research and there is what I think is a very macho culture.

Signs of productivity are socially constructed. The informant describes herself and her women colleagues as being less productive because they are producing fewer texts while focusing on quality teaching. Their work has less value as they assume responsibility for the domestic labour of teaching and administration while their male colleagues are left to focus on research. In the discourse of research productivity, competitive individualism is rewarded. Henkel (2000:217) noted:

...staff, previously valued for their contribution to institutional and departmental reputations, could find themselves valued instead for shouldering teaching loads that would enable others to bring in research resources and make reputations.

Henkel does not gender this division of labour, whereas many of my informants did. Moralised collectivism was frequently positioned in opposition to aggressive self-interest. A lecturer argued that the extensive administrative preparations for quality audits and the accompanying preoccupation with teaching and learning, requires significant amounts of self-sacrifice which is profoundly gendered:

Often it's women that are doing an awful lot of the labour, and an awful lot of the work... and it seems to me if people are going to misbehave in terms of kind of their commitment to work in relation to all this, then they're more likely to be men than women.

Participation in the onerous preparations for audit is seen by some members of the academic community as an essential part of maintaining good social relations – or a form of moral credit. Some social groups are more easily able to 'sign off' from duties of care, or set clear boundaries of responsibility, than others. Bernstein (1996) observed that power both creates and legitimises boundaries. The material and symbolic resources of some members of the academy allow them to evade the pastoral and emotional labour

requirements demanded by the changing economy of higher education. A senior lecturer commented on how delegation can be a euphemism for 'dumping':

And one of the problems, as we all know in the academy, is that often it means that certain individuals construct their lives at the expense of others, and that is what happens in labour production in the academy, and I think that the QAA is one more formation which encourages that. It encourages people to dump on others, it encourages people to escape, and I can understand the escaping, and the getting out of it, and the leaving it to others, but when you actually are one of the others that it's left to...

Quality assurance requirements make greedy organisations even greedier (Currie et al., 2000). Data gathering invariably entails extra work for women. The preparation of documentation and audit trails consume women's time in a way that does not necessarily serve their long-term professional interests as a group or as a collective. Smith theorised the social division of labour as far back as 1987. She highlighted how women's invisible labour promotes men's authority. Davies (1996) also wrote about women's 'adjunct' roles whereby male professionals are kept aloof and elite by armies of women who deal with the clutter. Women often appear to occupy adjunct roles in quality management, that is, they are appointed as deputies to focus on the devilish details of assuring quality. This argument is evocative of the orientalist view that women in South East Asia are more

suiting to assembling electronic components etc., because of their dexterity. A senior academic registrar observed:

Within the senior management we have a pro-vice chancellor for teaching and learning, and she is the leading light when it comes to all things to do with enhancement and teaching, and pedagogy and all those sorts of things. ... she's also engaged in quality assurance. The vice-chancellor himself chairs the quality committee. Which is seen as an important thing to manage and be seen to be close to if you like. But his involvement with it is much less direct than the pro-vice chancellor for teaching and learning for example, he's obviously not got the time available to spend working through these things.

Vertical power relations, with a command orientation, are reinforced by audit. A senior lecturer also described how a male manager delegated and responsabilised her as a more junior woman. She entered the contract partly as a consequence of power relations, but also with the expectation of reciprocity. This important aspect of social capital was noticeably absent:

X's notion of taking over was to delegate everything and do nothing, and I then found myself reviewing the paperwork for something like sixty courses. And I then had to write to the people running the courses, they sent me their paperwork, which I had to audit. And I

audited it, and sent it back to X and said 'Look all of this stuff is missing, you're supposed to be in charge, you'd better get in touch with people. He didn't. It eventually came back to me, time was running out. I was given no extra time, I was given no administrative support. So I was auditing sixty courses on my own over the weekends.

Women's labour can be appropriated for campus citizenship as women's time is worth less. Despite European Union Directives on equal treatment on pay, there is a sizeable pay gap between men and women in higher education (see Bett, 1999). Analysis of data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency by the Association of University Teachers (AUT, 2001) shows that while women academics in the UK earned on average 15 per cent less than men in 1995, by 2000 the gap had widened to 16 per cent. This means that for every pound earned by a male academic, their female colleagues earn only 84 pence. Institutions at the top of the quality league tables also had higher gender pay gaps, with women at the London School of Economics, for example, earning 21 per cent less than their male counterparts.

Centuries of status injury and intellectual misrecognition mean that women themselves do not know their own worth. Furthermore, women have traditionally been expected to care as a consequence of their love and commitment. It appears difficult for some women to state boundaries or negotiate for better material remuneration as this contradicts gendered identities. Part of the traditional construct of mothering is to have no

boundaries, needs, and limits. Allowing oneself to be used up is a prerequisite of maternal care. Many women academics appear to negotiate a hybrid position between academic autonomy and the demands of compliance to traditional femininity. Some of my informants noted how women were being over-responsibilised with preparations for audits of teaching quality, whereas the more prestigious preparations for research assessment are undertaken by senior men. A philosophy lecturer commented on the gendered and generational aspects of audit:

Well my theory is that it's younger female members of staff that take it (teaching quality) on in the first instance... my impression is that research committees are made up of, primarily, male members of staff, and those who head research committees and those that put in RAE submissions. In my experience it's young female members, junior members of staff that pick up the initial work of SPR {Subject Provision Review}, not realising what quite a hell that they're getting in to.

In addition to the substantial bureaucratic requirements, there is an affective economy involved in quality assurance. A head of policy remarked that a key component of her job is to support colleagues emotionally who are going through audit:

One of the things I can offer people, is the sort of 'look there is life afterwards. It is all going to be all right, at the end of the day. At the



end of the day it's not life or death. You know there are more important things that are going on'. So I sort of get people to keep a sense of proportion about it. So I try and support them emotionally like that.

As with many regimes of power, this had both positive and negative effects. Negative in the sense that women were being pulled away from high status work, but positive in so far as it contributed to relationship-building in the academy- especially across academic and administrative boundaries. As such, it poses a challenge to academic solipcism and isolation. Another interpretation is that effective governance relies on social capital or the quality of relationships in the organisation (Szreter,2002). A key question is what relationship do these networks have to the subversion of power inequalities. Are they congregations of the powerless? Are they a form of coercive communication? (Habermas, 1987). A senior lecturer commented on the sense of comradeship and war effort experienced by women working together under stressful circumstances:

My colleagues were a couple of the administrators - women ... we spent two days in the base room, and we made sure things were in the boxes, and we were labelling the boxes, and we, our base room was opposite our archive room, so the three of us were running in and out of the base room, retrieving stuff to put in the boxes, you know the six examples of work and stuff like that. And actually that was the nicest, nicest day I had last year. Because we had coffee, and we had

chocolate biscuits, and it was just nice, and it was just fun, and we were just laughing. And were all... really stressed... and we just all had a laugh. ...you know, we were having a go at some of the men who were the leaders who were nowhere to be seen, and basically that was a real day of comradeship and affection... like being part of a community.

This story, apart from celebrating the connectedness of some women, reminds me of the image of an ivory basement (Benokraitis, 1998)!

### **Managing Women**

The history of higher education for women, black and working class people has often been portrayed as a bitter struggle that has had to be challenged via political and legal reform and policy interventions for change (Dyhouse, 1995; Mirza, 1998; Reay, 1998). While there has been some policy recognition that exclusion of groups from certain social locations has played an essential role in the process of bestowing symbolic and cultural capital, power in the academy is neither redistributed nor problematised (Fraser, 1997; Young, 1990, 1997). Entry nowadays into the academy either as a producer or consumer of academic services can simply inscribe under-represented groups in managerialist discourses (Blackmore, 2000 a and b).

The quality industry is expanding in the UK and elsewhere in a globalised political economy (Morley, 2003a). Quality management is seen by some feminists as inherently authoritarian and naively preoccupied with orthodoxies, and socially constructed and decontextualised indicators of worth. New managerialism is perceived as reinforcing 'macho' styles of leadership, as it is very outcome-oriented, with emphasis on targets, performance, and measurement (Brooks and MacKinnon 2001; Deem and Ozga, 2000; Ozga and Deem, 2000; Deem, 2003; De La Rey, 2001; Lafferty, and Fleming, 2000). A contradictory view also exists. Quality audits, particularly those focussing on teaching and learning, are seen as enabling women to enter the managerial elite in organisations, and sometimes help fulfil ideological and career aspirations concerned with influence and change agency.

The cultural association of managerial authority with masculinity can sometimes mean women managers have to struggle to gain legitimacy. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) is seen by some as strengthening their position as women managers. The authority of an external body adds the missing masculinity to their influence and leadership. A female Pro-Vice Chancellor in an old university commented on the leverage that quality has given her management:

In terms of the leadership of this university, it, of course, gives greater power to my arm. There is no question whatsoever about that I can get people to listen more carefully to the need, for example, to have some kind of accountability framework... it's strengthened my arm. That's

the difficulty we've got, you've got somebody like myself saying 'We do need these procedures, and the QAA has helped to allow me to be heard in an academic institution.'

Quality assurance is perceived as an ally by this informant as it can structurally empower the culturally disempowered. It has created discursive space for issues that she wishes to promote. The QAA, simultaneously visible and invisible, increases the asset base, capital and symbolic control of this woman manager.

However, for some women, the move into quality management can often function to silence them. There is an imperative to moderate radical ideals and compromise values (Deem and Ozga, 2000). A pervasive theme in the literature on gender and organisations centres on the question of whether women in management can make a difference or are they incorporated into existing regimes of power? (David and Woodward, 1998; Eggins, 1997; Wyn et al., 2000). This study indicates that there are women who enjoy and benefit from involvement in quality procedures. They participate by consent rather than by coercion. Involvement in the management of quality can provide women with the opportunity to cast off the status of 'other' and demonstrate corporatism and their ability to make a difference in their organisation. Some disciplinary areas where women proliferate are losing status. Universities, influenced by globalisation, favour some disciplinary areas at the expense of others. Technologies, management and the hard sciences are seen as more relevant by students and governments than areas such as

women's studies (Currie and Thiele, 2001). A lecturer related how the quality industry is in the ascent compared to the descent of women's studies:

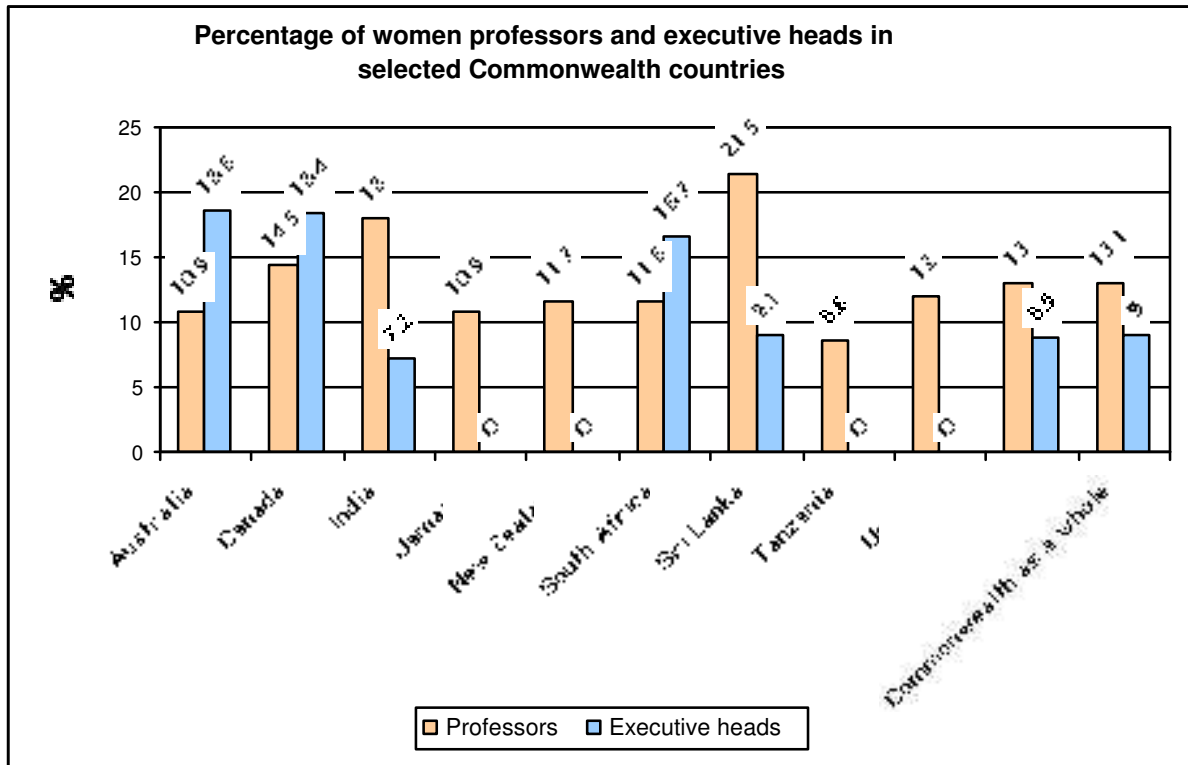
... for some women it's been, you know a career opportunity, and I suppose I can see that, and I certainly see some of my, particularly female, colleagues, because they seem to be really good at administration ... But again even that's like a double edged sword, I mean one of my very close friends and colleagues has got a promotion that now is much more of a kind of administrative role. She partly applied for that job because women's studies had been closed down at the institution where she worked.

It is questionable whether the quality industry in providing a new organisational space for women's influence in the academy, or whether it represents a form of exploitation of women's socialised patterns of responsibility. It could be argued that academic managers have been trapped into promoting a neoliberal economic agenda (Dominelli and Hoogvelt, 1996).

### **Globalising Inequality**

The devaluing of women is a globalised social norm in the academy. Furthermore, gender inequalities in higher education do not appear to map on to development indices

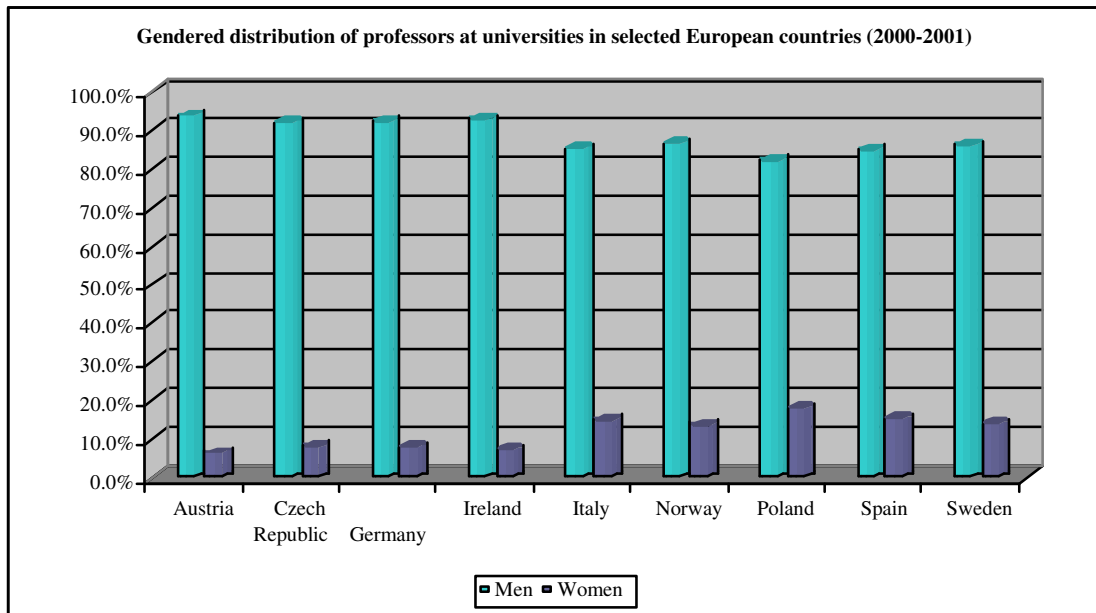
or gross national products. Data from high, low and middle-income countries across the Commonwealth show a remarkable similarity.



(Singh, 2002).

The statistics are similar for many European countries. Even those with sophisticated policies for equality still have low numbers of senior women in academic employment.

(see Husu, 2001).



Source: European Commission Directorate-General for Research (2003).

In the UK, there is still considerable horizontal segregation with a noticeable under-representation of women in science and technology (see Greenfield et al, 2002; Rees, 2002).

Debates continue about how the persistent inequalities can be challenged (Husu, 2001; Morley, 1999). One strategy is to make the academy more transparent. While attempts to promote transparency in appointment and promotion procedures originated in the 1980s as a consequence of equality movements, some of my informants felt that little had been achieved in the past. The economic pressure of the RAE, rather than moral or redistributive arguments associated with social justice, seemed to be creating leverage to appoint research active women. A senior lecturer argues that the quantitative

transparency and redistributive potential of the RAE allows 'research active' women to claim their right to promotion to senior positions.

... the RAE, I mean I know again this is not a normal view, but I know several female colleagues who were on the temporary treadmill forever. But then as soon as they had a lot of publications they started getting jobs immediately. Whereas before at an earlier stage of our careers, when we didn't have any publications, and everything was just down to sort of, you know, personal likes and dislikes at interviews, and all of a sudden we got jobs and were promoted very quickly. And I know a lot of people think the RAE disadvantages women...But I actually think that sometimes it is an advantage. Because places, I tend to think the more prestigious institutions are the ones with the most hidden snobbery, but they need to achieve good results in terms of the RAE like everybody else. If you've got a lot of research these days they tend to pick you even if you're not their type.

Wyn et al (2000) note how research productivity has a hidden curriculum too, with certain areas being perceived as outside the mainstream e.g. qualitative inquiries, feminist research, research on or by women.

Paradoxically, equity can be selectively invoked as a justification for a range of unreflective practices in the academy. The urgency of quality assurance audits can mean



a period of license in which anything goes if it serves the endpoint. A lecturer in an old university comments on how the rapid restructuring of the workforce for the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) in her university meant that all equal opportunities procedures were breached and paradoxically summoned to justify the breaches:

We appointed a research professor just before the RAE for obvious reasons as she'd got an awful lot on her CV. And it was a very, very, very controversial appointment because it was just given to her. There wasn't a short-list. There wasn't an advertisement. It was just given to her and she came in from another institution so it wasn't even an internal promotion. And at the time we had a big department meeting about it and I said, "We are an equal opportunities employer, we can't just have a shortlist of one." And a man in the department said, "But she's a woman, so where's the problem with equal opportunities?" ... And I think that's where, you know, when the RAE comes into contact with a macho departmental culture, you know, the macho departmental culture sort of subsumes the RAE for its own purposes.

In this analysis, audits reproduce and surface power inequalities. Equity is reduced to biological identity, with no attention paid to exclusionary structures, practices and procedures.

A senior lecturer notes how increasing transparency, as a consequence of a quality culture, can challenge discriminatory employment practices:

Earlier in my career, say ninety-two to ninety-six where, particularly in the old university cultures there wasn't as much pressure for accountability, but when choices were made. For example about things like whether to, you know, make temporary people permanent within the work situation. Quite often my perception was that permanent jobs were going to men, and usually public school educated men who were similar to people making the decisions. There was no pressure to show criteria, or to explain the decision, or any of these things. And in some senses I feel that I, and other women that I know actually, were sort of disadvantaged by that. I feel as my career has gone on that there has been more sort of pressure towards having sort of criteria, having to give good feedback, etc., etc.

This analysis suggests that there is a technology transfer from 'good' practice in teaching and learning to quality in employment practices. Quality is perceived as building fair institutions as its practices can expose flaws in procedure promoted by nepotism, patronage and gendered sponsorship. The quality movement's concern with transparency has its limits. The emphasis is on outputs, not on inputs or enablers. The declared agenda focuses on the student, not the employee experience. While quality audits interrogate

practices such as staff development and appraisal, they ignore procedures for promotion and recruitment. Quality assessment looks at the curriculum, but not the hidden curriculum and the informal subterranean practices that reinforce and construct gendered power relations. Informal procedures for career development abound globally, and are in breach of equality policies. In Onsongo's study of a Kenyan university (2000) 69 per cent of women and 92 per cent of men felt that they had been encouraged to apply for promotion. She found that 21.4 per cent of men applied for promotion even though they did not meet the criteria. In Finland, in spite of evolved policies and codes of practice for gender equity, a highly gendered invitational system for promotion exists (Husu, 2000).

Various explanatory frameworks for women's under-representation have been developed. A common theme is how women's domestic responsibilities and their ensuing lack of mobility restricts their participation and ascent in the professional domain (Coyle and Skinner, 1988). My problem with this theory is that it relies on normalised discursive framings of women in relation to their construction within the traditional family. All women are presumed to be heterosexual and living in conventional nuclear families. By emphasising the presumed bimodal character of women's lives, their marginalisation in male-dominated fields is guaranteed. This analysis offers a rational explanation for irrational prejudice. It also overlooks gendered micropolitics. A lecturer comments on how macho culture is relayed micropolitically via discriminatory interaction patterns. This provides sponsorship for men and discouragement and discomfort for women. She believed that junior female academics were fulfilling the terms of their open, declared contracts by providing quality services to students. Performing well within the accounting

system of teaching and learning did not appear to promote the women's career interests. However, some of her male colleagues were investing energy in networking and exclusionary informal relationships that ultimately took them higher in the organisational hierarchy:

It's very interesting the way it's done. It's not done upfront at all. It's done entirely through barbed comments and timed laughter in the bar basically. It took me ages to cotton on to this. For a couple of years I used to go down to where they all eat in the bar at lunchtime and hang out and think why am I hating this so much? Why is this so God-awful? And after a while I realised; a) no women go down, b) the culture is absolutely sexist in the extreme and also there's a huge kind of power wash going on in those informal meetings. So once I realised that I just stopped going and I felt better ever since, I must say. But there is something I think about us four young women in the department who are, we're all quietly, you know, plugging away at it but it just interests me very much that all the young men who came in at the same time as us – one's a senior lecturer, two are readers and one is applying for a senior lectureship and we've none of us even applied. And I think that must have something to do with the prevailing culture of the department, which has been reported and sort of like externally validated by these attempts at measuring our work.

Micropolitical relays of gendered power are notoriously difficult to capture. The same people operating distorted and sometimes discriminatory practices in relation to sponsorship and distribution of resources and opportunities are charged with the responsibility for maintaining transparency elsewhere in the academy.

### **The Affective Domain: Being judged and found wanting**

Symbolic control shapes desires and dispositions. There is an affective aspect or psychic economy to quality audits. Powerful feelings are activated e.g. shame, greed, guilt, fear, anger, desire, pride. Naming and shaming is a central part of quality assurance procedures throughout the public services in Britain. Shame is a regulator of norms. Writing in Finland, Mantyla (2000) argues that shame is one of the very central aspects of academic work. Becher (1989) argued that, in academia, reputation is the most highly prized commodity. Reputation has gendered associations. The lack of accountability of reviewers and the lack of a right to reply suggests that quality audits are a one-way gaze, reminiscent of pornographic objectification. The act of inspection itself is riven with the potential for shame and humiliation. Becoming visible via inspections opens up the possibility of exposure of the flawed and lacking self that many women believe is their academic identity. Shame is connected to the belief that there is an ideal to which one is inevitably inferior. The discourse of excellence is activating fears of mediocrity. Fear of exposure of intellectual fraudulence and being judged deficient was a major preoccupation with informants. A senior lecturer described the effects of power on her body and her certainty of a shameful and humiliating inspection outcome:

I had to leave at five thirty to go and pick up the QAA person to come and see me teach, and I was walking down the stairs with this person and I just felt sick in my stomach ... and I actually thought I was going to vomit. And I was walking down the stairs thinking '...I feel ill, I feel sick... It was fear, it was anxiety, it was the thought that they were only going to see a few of us teach, that we could let the whole lot down if something went wrong, if they didn't think that we were doing it well enough. And you felt that like the whole misery was on your own shoulders, because I knew that the MA, modular programme was, I'm supposed to be the programme director, and I'd made some good changes. But I also know that there were problems with it that I didn't need them to tell me. But I also felt that not only was my administrative capacity being, if you like, looked at, and that my colleagues would know, that you know, that if things were wrong that perhaps I hadn't done it properly. But also my teaching, I felt totally surveyed...So I actually felt that they were looking at me in an outrageous, but I wasn't even going to be able to look at them in that way. And you know only men had come.

The one-way gaze was exacerbated by this informant because all the Subject Reviewers were men. The acts of inspection and performance, as instruments of (gendered) power relations, surfaced feelings of sexist objectification. A key consideration is why certain

kinds of discourse produce ontological effects. The performative, according to Butler (1998:280), 'can be one of the ways in which discourse operationalizes power'. The emotional costs and the impact on motivation, creativity and productivity are rarely factored in to thinking about quality assurance procedures in higher education. A senior lecturer noted:

...it's the emotional cost. And I think that, I can't really talk about the emotional costs, for me it was prohibitive, for me it felt like my brain was going to burst, felt like I was going to die. I was just, when it finished, that first weekend, I felt like the world had ended and I didn't know what to do now, because it had been so intense, particularly for, say the last four weeks, and the last two weeks, going up to it, I was just in panic mode. So nothing can justify me feeling like that... nothing can justify doing that to other human beings, I'm sorry.

A reader commented on the panoptic approach to observing teaching in Subject Review. She also noted the surreal nature of an observer being visible but asking for invisibility:

It was a case of turning up, sort of, early in the morning, not knowing whether you were going to be observed or not, so it was a sort of last minute thing. And I was actually observed during a tutorial which took place in our offices, which is a tight enough squeeze anyway. So

there was myself and eight students, and the assessor came and plonked himself right in the circle, and said 'Oh just ignore me I'm just here to observe and I won't say anything.' And then I think it just affected the group. So I thought it was quite difficult.

A lecturer commented that in her organisation fear was purposefully activated in order to motivate people into preparing for teaching quality assessment:

what the senior management team do is to visit at a certain point before the team are due, they organise trial runs. Their approach seems to be to terrify people in to proper action, and they do that through a, through various processes of sort of 'Oh we have to learn to play the game' but also 'You'll be humiliated if you don't.' And 'The university will suffer' sort of an economic argument. So there's sort of pressure in various ways. With them pressuring us really to take it on ourselves.

The discourse of excellence produces its own pressures and feelings of inadequacy. A reader commented on how peer competition is harnessed to enhance productivity:

Well I mean this department, because it's got the five star rating sort of thing, it feels like a spiralling pressure, because everybody is sort of almost, not exactly putting pressure on each other, but you just get a



sense that everybody is producing more and more, and more. So it's sort of spiralling upwards, the work.

The continuous improvement discourse is reminiscent of the cultural pressures on women in general to strive for perfection. It is like diets and exercise regimes. It impacts on desires and dispositions. It also echoes another regulatory force i.e. that of original sin. Women enter the academy as flawed and imperfect academics and they have to struggle to redeem themselves. Women's gender socialisation makes them particularly well-schooled players in quality assurance. A senior lecturer describes how she felt that she had to perform a particular type of femininity – one which contradicted her feminist sensitivities - to make herself more acceptable to the male Subject Reviewers:

I feel so ashamed of myself in what I'm going to say, they were all men who came to review... I just sort of felt sucked up in to that whole awful process, and that might say more about me than them, but I felt that it was a process that pushed you in that direction, and I felt un-pleased with myself, and soiled ... I bought a new dress to wear for the week, you know, I would never buy a new dress for anything. And I felt, and there was a bit of me that I thought, 'all right I'm going to dress for this, and in a sense it's me putting on a mask, and doing the QAA, and doing it for a week, and presenting my embodied self as QAAable'. And while I did that, because I felt that in a sense it was

like my armour... and I wore lipstick, I wore lipstick, and you know I don't wear makeup, or very rarely yeah?

Performativity, in this case, is highly gendered (see Butler, 1999; Saunderson, 2002). The language that this informant used was evocative of narratives of violence against women. Violence in organisations is often subtle and confusing (Hearn and Parkin, 2001). She felt 'soiled' by what she felt as the dishonesty and the invasiveness of the gendered performance. A senior lecturer comments on how the cyclical nature of quality audits is a form of domination as there is never time to recover from the buffeting. The images that she used evoked pain and powerlessness at the hands of a bigger force:

It's a bit like you know, you're in the sea and you're bobbing up and down, and a bloody great wave comes along and dumps you, and it's awful. The sand goes down the front of your swimming costume, all that sort of stuff, and you get grazes on your knees, and then you pick yourself up and you go out again, and then it's all right again, and then another bloody great wave is going to come and dump you, and it felt like, like that...

Women academics' precarious and predominantly junior positions in the academy make them more vulnerable to bullying, manipulation and compliance. While audit is experienced as a form of violence by some women, it is perceived as a welcome antidote to individualism by others. A senior lecturer speculates that women, especially young

women academics, are more supportive of quality assurance procedures than their male counterparts:

I do think also, that women of my age, I'm in my mid thirties, tend to be ... more pro the quality culture than the men of my age. A lot of my colleagues are very against it and feel that their job is just to research interestingly. And sometimes I do feel that the objections are pursued along the lines that this is a surveillance culture etc., etc. A lot of my experience is it's my male colleagues who say that, my younger male colleagues, and they just feel it's encroaching on their research time essentially, and they feel that their job as academics is to do research, and not to do the form filling ... I have quite a wide network of female, you know, academic friends my age, I don't know any of them actually, that are really hostile, and a lot of them work within feminism, but I would struggle to find many men of my age who are actually at all supportive of it.

These observations reinforce the gendered binaries of teaching/ research and compliance/resistance. In this analysis, participation in quality preparations can be a form of role entrapment. However, it would be erroneous to represent women academics in terms of victim or angel narratives and to ignore hierarchies and power relations among women. Equally, unitary or deterministic representations of women and men do not contribute to knowledge about the complexity and multiplicity of experiences (Thomas

and Davies, 2002). I would argue that we need a theory of privilege in higher education, rather than simply a focus on disadvantage.

Eagleton (1998) believes that we need a new understanding that takes into account the simultaneous experiences of pleasure, passion, constraint, and control in women's engagement with academic organisations. There is a constant struggle between structures and agency. The academy, like any other organisation is full of contradictions - structures are both fixed and volatile, enabling and restrictive. There are gendered sites of opportunity, modes of possibility and constraint. A tension in the audit culture is how women's interests are frequently subordinated to the larger goals of the organisation. Women's enhanced visibility as quality managers appears as a gain. However, short-term opportunities for individuals could lead to long-term constraints for women collectively if quality continues to override equality concerns in the academy.

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