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Glass Ceiling or Iron Cage: Women in UK Academia

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This paper reviews some of the literature on women's position in the academic workforce in the UK, and considers an informal study conducted by the author of 12 women academics. A central consideration is the relationship between women's quantitative under-representation in the academy and women academics' self-concept and consciousness of their own abilities.

Introduction

For several decades feminist writers and researchers have produced illuminating statistics and analyses of women's disadvantaged and marginalized position as lecturers in academia (Blackstone and Fulton 1975; Rendell 1984; Ramazanoglu 1987; AUT 1988–89).

Women's under-representation in senior positions, the concentration of women on part-time contracts and the creeping casualization of women's work (Aziz 1990) have become trade union campaigning issues. The Association of University Teachers (AUT) has produced statistics indicating that the share of academic women in universities has risen from 11% in 1980 to 16% in 1988 (AUT 1988–1989). The Universities Statistical record for 1988–89 gives the following percentages of women out of the total number of posts:

Professors	3%
Readers/Senior Lecturers	8%
Lecturers	21%
Research Staff	32%

(almost all on fixed-term contracts)

Research undertaken by the AUT indicates that:

- in all categories of staff women are concentrated in the lower-paid grades;
- fewer women than men are promoted;
- women are paid less than men on the same grade on a wage for age basis;
- the pay differential between women and men widens steadily as they get older.

The University and College Lecturers' Union, representing the 'new' universities, (former polytechnics and colleges), has recently put together an equal opportunities claim. They cite research findings compiled by the former Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council in December 1991. These reveal that women comprise 26% of academic staff in new universities and colleges, with 45% of them on the Lecturer grade, 26% on Senior Lecturer grade and only 17% on Principal Lecturer grade (Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Committee 1991). A further survey conducted by the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE) in 1993 confirmed this grade distribution and added that 31% of all female respondents in higher education either suspected or were sure that they had been denied promotion because of their gender (Polytechnics and Colleges National Negotiating Committee 1993).

Cann *et al.* (1991) point out that whilst the equity argument 'falls on deaf ears. . . . we also live in times when the efficiency argument needs to be constantly restated.' To have highly-qualified, expensively trained women concentrated on the lower grades constitutes poor resource management with considerable skill wastage. According to Alice Leonard (quoted in B. Brown 1989) the Deputy Legal Adviser at the Equal Opportunities Commission, 'The Commission receives a steady stream of complaints on promotions, particularly in higher education, and feels it is time employers reviewed their procedures and began to redress the sex imbalance' (Brown 1989, p. 16).

This quantitative data provides valuable information about the sexual division of labour in UK academia. Kanter (1977) believed that entry into the informal system of an organization, and hence across to power and opportunity, is determined by the relative number of men and women in the organization. Sh

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suggested that a critical mass of between 15–20% of the workforce is required to influence organizational change and remove women from their token status. Bagilhole (1993) applied Kanter's critical mass theory to her recent study of women academics, and predicted that by being in a small minority, women academics 'will encounter discrimination, performance pressures, and stereotyping due to their greater visibility and contrast with the majority.' (Bagilhole 1993, p. 263). One criticism of the critical mass theory is that it suggests an essentialist construction of women by implying that when they are in power, they will manage differently, and therefore positively influence organizational culture. A second criticism is the ecological view which maintains that organizations exist within a wider social context, and therefore reflect macro-level constructions of women.

Scope of the study

The collection of data is an essential step in developing an information base for strategic intervention (AUT 1988–89). But one criticism of quantitative research is that statistics are not contextualized and are subject to a range of interpretations. The group of whom they speak are rarely consulted for an explanation. In the case of women's under-representation, tension exists between agency and structural determinism. Or simplistic organizational solutions such as job sharing or crêche provision are viewed as strategies for enhancing women's participation in the workforce. Whilst all of these are important considerations, they are signifiers of women's subordinate position, rather than explanations or challenges. Asymmetrical distribution of opportunities is not a matter of chance or merit, but rather a feature of social structures. Women in academia are caught in an interaction between material circumstances and ideological forces that make the system so powerful (Collinson *et al.* 1990).

In this study, I attempted to locate statistics within the authority of women's experiences, whilst also recognizing that all experience is mediated by a discourse. Women were asked to tell their stories and attempt to supply the qualitative detail behind the quantitative data. As with any qualitative research, acknowledgement needs to be made of how experience is socially constructed and how voices and texts are riven with ambiguity, contradiction and instability.

An aim is to explore the extent to which external, discriminatory factors influence women academics' self-concept and consciousness of their own abilities, and strategies employed to avoid the internalization of negative attitudes towards them. I have had to ensure that I do not add to existing oppression by using a pathological model and implying that women are operating sub-optimally. In the structure or agency debate, there is always a danger of reducing major structural inequalities and institutionalized oppression to the level of personalized distress. Women's 'failure' to gain promotion is frequently explained in terms of lack of confidence to put themselves forward, or fear of additional professional responsibilities and the exigencies of seniority. Even when formal opportunities for promotion do exist, women's understanding of informal discriminatory practices can lead to them assessing their realistic chances of advancement and deciding not to take advantage of opportunities ostensibly open to all.

One clear piece of institutional inequality is the fact that women are not being appointed or are appointed on lower grades on temporary contracts. The December 1991 survey of PCFC funded institutions disclosed that whilst 42% of new staff appointed to new universities were women, 49% were appointed on the lowest grades, compared to 39% of men (PCFC 1991). It was also discovered that more than twice as many men as women were appointed to the highest grades. Career breaks for child-bearing and child-rearing have traditionally been explanations for women's slower career progress (Sutherland 1985). In recent years, explanations have been sought in women's relationship with power and fears of authority (Young-Eisendrath and Wiedemann 1987). There has been a proliferation of Women into Management courses, many of which are based on an essentialist model of women's qualities and tendencies (Morley 1993a). Unless there is a clear analysis of patriarchal privilege, there is a risk of constructing women as a remedial group, with the emphasis on getting them into better shape in order to engage more effectively with existing structures. Collinson *et al.* (1990, p. 11) classifies this approach as 'powerblind' as it 'embodies an individualistic and meritocratic emphasis on the need to unshackle personal talent and ability without regard to irrelevant characteristics such as sex.'

In this study of 12 women, the research sample is used illustratively, with variables such as age, 'race', sexuality, career stage, academic discipline, social class background and organizational contexts. Three were black, nine white; five were lesbian, seven heterosexual; and four identified as working class in origin. Seven had childcare responsibilities. One was a professor, one a reader, two were senior lecturers and eight were lecturers (of which three were on fixed-term contracts).

Half the sample worked in Britain's 'old' universities. Some women defined themselves as feminists and analysed women academics' position in terms of power and patriarchy. They expressed a cynicism about reformist measures such as policies for equality, thus partly contradicting Sandra Acker's argument (1993, p. 147) that the typical rhetoric about women's place in the university derives from liberal feminism and requires other theoretical approaches drawn from socialist and radical feminism.

Whilst feminisms can be potent sources of resistance, and operate as clear paradigms for scholarship, consciousness within academia can lead to paradox and contradiction as feminists try to achieve recognition and status for the quality of their professional work, without being damaged or incorporated in the process (Walsh 1992). Women have been constituted within the dominant culture, and as such have been subjected to misinformation about themselves and other members of their group. Consequently, there are likely to be times when theory acquired in adult life does not adequately contradict some of the powerful messages received in early life. Valerie Walkerdine, a highly successful and acclaimed feminist academic, and one of the few women in the UK to have reached the professoriate writes '. . . the view I held of myself, one with which I had grappled for many years . . . was of the struggling little girl' (1990, p. xiii).

If individuals are constituted by power relations, then there may be a socially constructed pre-feminist self that also engages with the power structures of dominant institutions. External realities, negative interactions and discursive practices within the institution can reactivate many women's sense of powerlessness and coagulate with internalized narratives. This residue of feelings, responses, inner voices is often referred to as internalized oppression (Pheterson 1986; Morley 1992). One feature kept surfacing in this study which appeared to span the commonalities and differences. That was the struggle to resist the incorporation, internalization and acceptance of prejudices against them within dominant institutions. Acknowledgement of ability was scarce. For example, women had to work hard to reject the feeling that their subordinate positions were objective evidence of their inferior abilities. In this sense, there is a constant process whereby external realities of organizational life engage with women's internalized oppression, i.e. all the hurts and misinformation one acquires by being a member of a group not valued by wider society. If one accepts the notion that women are constructed within the 'male gaze' (Walkerdine 1990, p. 148), there is the constant challenge *not* to see themselves as others see them, and not to measure self-worth by the treatment received.

The male-dominated nature of academia can operate a gatekeeping role to ensure that potential change agents, i.e. feminists, are not permitted entry. Celia Kitzinger describes the process involved in her entry into academia as a lesbian feminist psychologist:

> . . . after 112 applications during the last year of my PhD research and during the subsequent year of unemployment, I was eventually offered a temporary research fellowship in an education department. When that expired, another period of unemployment and 44 applications (both in this country and abroad) were necessary before I obtained a probationary lectureship in a polytechnic (Kitzinger, 1990a, p. 125).

Celia Kitzinger clearly had the 'critical distance' to keep going in the face of defeat and rejection. But it is difficult for members of oppressed groups not to blame themselves and give up when confronting such blatant discrimination.

Power, agency and organizational change

A tension exists between the male-dominated, hierarchical organizational structure of most institutions for higher education and feminist principles of collectivity and participation. Within the Women's Movement, the processes of organizing are themselves 'subject to critical appraisal and scrutiny' (H. Brown 1992, p. 9). Brown also argues that the conventional hierarchical, organizational structure of much of the academy lends itself to slowness in change and lack of opportunities for equality of influence in processes. The Ashridge Management College (1988, p. 37) also believes that there is good practical value in promoting less hierarchical forms of organization. They believe that 'Organizations in future will be . . . "flatter" and more fluid in structure, and more fast-moving.'

Whilst there are clearly articulated arguments against hierarchical structures from political and practical points of view, Peggy McIntosh (1985) explored the psychological effects and argues that hierarchical structures inevitably breed feelings of fraudulence and a sense of being an imposter among women and 'lower caste or minority men'. McIntosh maintains that 'people feel fraudulent especially when ascending in hierarchies in which by *societal definition* they do not belong at the top of the pyramid' (1985, p. 3).

Being trapped at the bottom of the pyramid can also result in feelings of frustration at being held back. Management practices might not create, but they can reinforce gender inequalities. Women in this study expressed widespread dissatisfaction with the quality of management in their organizations. It was described as 'gender insensitive', 'patriarchal', 'paternalistic', 'lacking in sophistication', 'crisis-driven', 'non-strategic', 'amateurish', 'disabling'. One comment was 'compared to other parts of the public sector, the NHS, for example, there is very little investment made in management training and development in higher education'. It is not uncommon for people to achieve senior management positions as a result of publication output, rather than skills in leadership, administration or facilitation of human resources.

For many women in this study, issues of power and powerlessness emerged not simply in relation to monolithic management structures in higher education, nor were grievances limited to issues of pay, promotion and tenure. Women maintained that subtle forms of discrimination and harassment occurred on an everyday basis. Gender insensitive management and cultural ethos meant that there was no safe place to question these practices, without fear of ridicule or recrimination. As a consequence, women had to contain negativity towards them. As external discriminatory messages collide with women's internalized narratives, confusion arises over the locus of responsibility, with women never completely certain their feelings or responses are justified. If protest is unsafe, another strategy is to desensitize oneself or 'numb-out'. This raises questions about where change has to take place — at institutional/organizational level, or in the process of cognitive restructuring and adjustment of women to fit in the existing framework.

Without subscribing to essentialist notions of femininity and female qualities, it is clear that many women fare very badly in traditionally masculine institutions, both in terms of external reward systems and in relation to the development of a consistent sense of self-worth. Cynthia Cockburn (1991, p. 65), has discovered in her research into equality in organizations, that 'men are found to be culturally active in creating an environment in which women don't flourish'. This is not automatically linked to external notions of career success. Some of the women involved in this study had achieved positions of power and responsibility within academia. But the path to the top had been so disempowering for them that they arrived angry and disconnected from any sense of achievement. Some saw their elevated positions as a 'repositioning of the site of struggle'. Mary Evans (1993) has recently described how she was forced to consider going to an industrial tribunal in order to gain entry to the professoriate. Lyn Yates (1993, p. 179) describes the concept of 'gender charity' in educational appointments, whereby 'they construct as token the women who are successful, and undermine their credibility'. Counter-hegemonic movements have attempted to deconstruct the concept of success, urging mistrust of any definition of success which does not consider the complex consequences of any one gain (Calás and Smircich 1991).

The AUT report (1991a) on pay for university professors testifies to this fact, as even when women do achieve professorial status, there are inequalities in pay between women and men. For example, only 3% of professors and 8% of senior staff in British Universities are women. Of these, women earn on average £1,900 per annum less than men. Discretionary pay and undeclared criteria provide opportunities for discrimination and unfairness which serve to demoralize women working in the profession. This poses questions about the potential for the transformation of power relationships within the academy. That is, for the empowerment of women — as a group — not merely on an individual basis which allows some women to 'make it'.

There is always a risk, when undertaking this type of inquiry, of positioning women as victims within the violating structures of omnipotent institutions. Equally, in trying to establish a common nexus of problems, there is a risk of attempting to universalize and taxonomize women's experiences. Black women have drawn attention to difference, diversity and location and have highlighted the partial, marginalizing approach of much of feminist theory (Amos and Parmar 1984; Brah 1991; Carby 1982; Hooks 1984; Lorde 1984). Whilst it is important to acknowledge the fact that the term 'woman' does not represent a single category of analysis, it is also argued that the terms used to describe difference such as gender, 'race' and class are in themselves too reductive of the complexity of social identities to be useful (Fraser and Nicholson 1990). Power is conflated, making it difficult to sort out what is happening as a result of gendered structures and what needs to be attributed to social class, 'race', ethnic background or nationality of the participants (Davis 1988). Whereas women do not share the same experiences in academia, Stanley (1990) argues that all women experience oppression. Within academia there is a weave of criss-crossing threads or matrices of discursive practices and a complexity of social identities. Women, as Harriet Farwell Adams (1983) believes, are at the interstices. Subordination

is systematic, structured, extensive, stable, with the ability to constantly reproduce itself.

One mechanism which exposes the asymmetrical nature of power relations and reproduces privilege is the appraisal scheme. In their survey of women's experiences of appraisal, the AUT (1991b) noted that the 'majority of appraisers will be white, middle-aged and successful'. But a meritocratic, gender-neutral ideology of individualistic striving is promoted. In this study, several women expressed frustration at the constant shift of focus in appraisal interviews, with achievements rapidly dismissed and perceived areas of weakness highlighted. Whereas the AUT has recently drawn attention to the gendered nature of a supposedly neutral process, in 1981, Marcia Lieberman issued the following advice to academic women:

> They will try to persuade you you are being denied tenure (or promotion, or reappointment) because of your deficiencies. The argument most certain to take you in is the one that speaks to your self-doubt, so they will tell you your publications are mediocre, your teaching weak. Don't believe it (Lieberman 1981, p. 3).

Issues of inclusion and exclusion

One message from this study is that many women have learned how to focus their energies to maximize creativity and personal satisfaction. Participation in the organizational structures and committees frequently led to frustration and exhaustion because it could only occur on an oppositional basis, whereas time spent on teaching and writing provided more effective outlets for creativity. For many women in this study, distancing themselves from the core of power was their only means of survival in what they perceived as hostile organizations. Rejecting what is perceived through the glass ceiling can be a successful strategy for resistance, but it also perpetuates male dominance, female alienation and separation between management process and quality of conditions for employees. Women are then caught in a paradoxical situation in which resistance reproduces discrimination.

This study indicated that many women were caught in the negative transfer loop of being made aware of the extent of their oppression in the academy, making efforts to organize for change and in so doing, exposed themselves to further oppression. Alienation was a result of perceived and real powerlessness. In her study of women academics in Northern Ireland, Celia Davies discovered a sense among academic women of 'not really understanding the system, of not belonging' (Davies 1993, p. 15). Many women in this study, too, were not participating in the political life of the academy as the experience was 'violating', 'humiliating' or just 'boring'. They felt that they were unlikely to influence outcomes, decisions, or organizational change. Questions arose as to how the myriad of practices, processes and attitudes that contribute to women's disempowerment in the academy could be effectively challenged. In the words of one interviewee, 'I go to union meetings and put myself forward for election onto boards and committees. I either don't get elected, or get elected on to wearing, time-consuming committees where I am treated with rudeness and contempt by male colleagues, or patronised, ignored and dismissed.'

The Carnegie Foundation (1990) conducted research on women academics in the USA. They discovered that whilst women make good 'campus citizens', and spend more time in service to their university than men, they still form a minority voice on important decision-making committees. As a consequence of under-representation in senior positions, the Carnegie Foundation highlighted the lack of opportunities for women to shape educational policies. This study noticed similar trends; in one university the influential senate had only five women members out of 103. Policy appears to be able to develop in the academy without feminist involvement as feminism is not a policy discourse. If policy is discourse, what is being constructed as the terms of the framework of higher education and what is being silenced?

Deconstructing difference

In terms of commonalities and differences between women, the statistics do not reveal the complexities of the matrix of inequalities. There is a risk of implying an artificial homogeneity. There are points of contact and of divergence. Social class, 'race' and sexuality were perceived as essential categories of analysis too. In the words of one interviewee,

> As a black women, nothing surprises me anymore . . . I am on a temporary, part-time contract in a poly with a clearly-stated equal opportunities policy. The course on which I teach attracts a lot of black students, and I am used as selling point . . . But if a fall in recruitment threatens, I am told by my

> head of department, who is a white woman, that my contract might not be renewed.

If power has a gender in the academy, it also has a 'race' and class. Black women interviewed believed that they were equally as oppressed by white women as by white men.

> We (black women) get tokenized and exploited by white women too . . . many of whom describe themselves as feminists. . . . I have lost count of how many times I have been asked to contribute to books and conferences at the eleventh hour, that is, when they've suddenly realised the 'black perspective' is missing.

Felly Nkweto Simmonds writes about the added pressures of being 'other' to mainstream white academia. '. . . in Britain, . . . the idea of a Black woman as an academic is simply too outrageous. We are watched (and watch ourselves) for gaps in our knowledge' (Simmonds, 1992, p. 52).

Whereas difference breeds suspicion, one of the effects of internalized oppression is that we often devalue those with whom we share commonalities. For example, distrust of women managers was very common in this study. Questions were raised about incorporation and whether feminists, i.e. those who continue to challenge patriarchy, continue to be disadvantaged. Contradiction exists between academic sisterhood and the competitive individualism of the New Right reinforced by institutional politics of academia. It was frequently noted in this study, that on the rare occasion when women do achieve senior status, they do not use their power to empower and enable other women, black or white. This produces a further double bind — women's success within existing structures is seen as an essential step to influence and change organizations, yet if women do succeed they do so on terms not of their own making and therefore implicitly adopt meritocratic ideologies. Val Walsh (1993, p. 14) believes that access to 'success' can fool oppressed people as 'it functions as an analgesic with amnesiac qualities'. She also maintains that women's ascent in the hierarchy cuts across development of a community of women and offers 'new opportunities for entrapment and betrayal' (Walsh 1993, p. 14). It would appear that few academic women receive the career and psycho-social benefits of mentorship from senior women, thus emphasizing the problematic nature of management's regulatory and controlling role in dominant organizations. In the fierce, tokenized environment of academic hierarchy, it is not in the career interests of senior women to carry special responsibility for other women's working lives. As one interviewee commented, 'It is unrealistic to believe that women can remain uncontaminated by the values and signifying practices of dominant culture. An analysis of the structures and practices which discriminate is often sadly lacking in women who have achieved.'

Another interviewee noted how, in her department, success was attributed to personal qualities within a meritocratic system and so women who do succeed are perceived to have done so as a result of hard work or 'natural' brilliance, rather than as a result of class or race privilege.

> In the poly where I work, the head of department is a white woman with a lot of class privileges. She has a successful husband, a woman to clean her house and a woman to care for her children. Consequently, she has unlimited time to devote to her work . . . Her explanation for her success is her ability to work hard . . . That's her advice to other women, black or white, in the department who complain about unfair discrimination.

As Legge commented, 'If some women succeed, the illusion of equal opportunities is maintained as the unsuccessful may be portrayed as inadequate, rather than discriminated against. Furthermore, it is likely that the women who do succeed will be those whose participation is not immediately threatening to those in power and who are prepared to embrace the values of the group they have joined rather than those of the excluded (1987, p. 55).

Corporatism and hidden exigencies to enter into every aspect of organizational life are viewed as undeclared criteria for career success. Availability, visibility and accessibility of employees are still equated with output and efficiency. The 'war effort' mentality in the face of stringent economies in the sector brings its own rewards, and is discriminatory against women. As one interviewee observed,

> We have a 40% increase in students in our department, while staffing and accommodation are being reduced . . . The management solution was to tell us to teach more sessions and reschedule classes to take place in the evenings to ease the accommodation problem . . . Many of the male staff are able to do this and are gaining a lot of status by displaying such martryed co-operation . . . It is left to women to point out how unacceptable this is, and then we get labelled workshy.

On the contrary, rather than being 'workshy', many of the women interviewed showed a marked tendency to overwork — almost as

if to compensate for being in deficit, as women, in the first place. Female 'lack' is compensated for by selfless service of others. The current underfunded expansion of higher education in the UK, at a rate of 11%, is having an impact on women academics. On the one hand, the notion of increased participation in higher education could be seen as a liberatory measure to include more working class, black and female students. However, these students, once *in situ*, are more likely to make pastoral and academic demands on members of staff with whom they can identify. As Lynne Pearce (1992) points out '. . . what has become the most stressful part of our (women staff) jobs is coping with the demands of so many extra students on a one-to one basis . . . In our predominantly male-staffed arts and social science departments it was to be expected that the (predominantly female) students would seek us out.'

This nurturing role is reminiscent of an Italian feminist perspective of 'madre simbolica' — the symbolic mother — whose essentialist female qualities inspire trust (Milan Women's Bookstore Collective 1990). In both the UK and USA, there is a growing body of thought on feminist pedagogy for empowerment (Lather 1991; Hooks 1989; Ellsworth 1989; Morley 1991, 1992 and 1993b). The resulting democratization of learning and student-centred methodologies involve a highly labour intensive *modus operandi* for feminist academics. Celia Davies also noted how women academics tended to overwork as the 'university is a world of unstructured expectations' (Davies 1993, p. 11).

The time consuming nature of student empowerment, support and nurturance both locates women academics as different and reduces their time available for engagement with other organizational and academic practices. The heterosexist model of the nuclear family with its gender-specific roles and responsibilities appears to reproduce itself in the academic workplace. This overt gendered relation to power represents a hidden curriculum and does nothing to empower the increasing number of women students in higher education (Morley 1992 and 1993b).

Women are less threatening if they limit their efforts to student support and fulfil the stereotype of being less productive as a result of accumulating less human capital in preference for domestic responsibilities. One interviewee commented, 'As long as women restrict themselves to teaching and nurturing roles and are held back by pregnancy and childcare in their professional lives, they represent a limited threat. The danger arises when women are sufficiently able to clear their lives in order to more effectively compete with men.'

Another interviewee indicated,

> I know one shouldn't attempt to weight oppressions, but as a lesbian, I believe that heterosexual women in my university are more acceptable to the male hierarchy. . . . no matter how many children or domestic responsibilities they have . . . at least their sexuality is safe, recognizable and accounted for and can't spill out and subvert the system . . . or so they think.

To return to Celia Kitzinger (1990b, p. 164), she identifies lesbian invisibility as a signifier of oppression. In contrast to the visibility of heterosexism which 'manifests itself in engagement and wedding rings, photographs of spouses and children on the desk. . . . In research and publications, dedications to 'my wife without whom . . .' Ironically, Celia's chapter on Lesbians in Academe is in a book where the feminist editors' Forward contains many positive comments about the support they had received from their husbands in the execution of their book.

Conforming with the dominant organizational culture has also been noted as a subtle form of discrimination against many academic women. One lecturer commented,

> I work in a provincial university . . . Family values dominate and spouses play an important role in career development . . . There is a dinner party circuit . . . As a lesbian, without a male escort . . . I am excluded from most of these extra-curricular activities, where the real agenda is to test for suitability for promotion.

Such visible power networks are alarming, but Stephen Knight (1984) and Barbara Rogers (1988) have disclosed that Freemasonry is rife in universities, a point also made by interviewees:

> I could never understand why it was so easy for so many mediocre men to gain ascendancy whilst so many talented women remain blocked and undermined . . . until I discovered that the university where I work is a registered Freemason Lodge.

> I don't wish to sound like someone who externalizes problems . . . but I have been here for 15 years . . . in spite of numerous publications, I have failed to gain a Readership . . . The Director is a leading light in Freemasonry and I am beginning to wonder if there is a connection.

Concern about masonic influence in the public sector has been aired in the national

press. A letter to *The Guardian* (7 July 1992) revealed the extent of activity in London alone and gave registered lodge numbers for both the University of London (2033) and the City University (7962).

As Cynthia Cockburn says (1991, p. 17), 'organizations are significant concentrations of power'. In terms of higher education this power is compounded with the responsibility for the creation and validation of knowledge. Discourses that create knowledge create reality as well (Hekman 1990, p. 33). Higher education plays a crucial role in shaping and reflecting the value systems of the professions, government and civil service. In preparing for citizenship and leadership, the academy has considerable political power. The under-representation of women in academic positions communicates powerful messages. As one interviewee indicated,

> Many people in positions of power in the UK today have, at some time, passed through the higher education system . . . If they are largely exposed to the values of the dominant group, and rarely exposed to counter-hegemonic concepts such as feminism, anti-racism . . ., the system of male dominance simply reproduces itself in *all* aspects of British society.

The 'men-only' ethos in higher education perpetuates the high status of the profession. This can create complex contradictions for women who have been allowed entry. Having been undervalued, disempowered and dismissed as non-reasoning beings, there is a need to provide a contradictory message, that is the intellectual, academic, rational woman. This involves entry into a nexus of class and patriarchal interests which symbolizes a type of Paradise Gained (Abbott 1988). Academics from working class backgrounds may, even after years of educational socialization carry the memory of class oppression and recognize the privileges they enjoy compared to other members of their class. One interviewee noted the intensity of her internalized, class-based narrative, 'I often ask myself, why I have chosen to locate myself in an élitist, class-ridden profession . . . But, somehow, after having been told as an individual and as a class, that we are stupid . . . I need the status and validation.'

Liz Stanley observes (1990, p. 68), working class people are not 'there' within academia as participants in the making of socialist knowledge, or subjects, but as 'others' to be studied and observed. My belief is that working class people are in academia but would consider it fraudulent to name themselves as such.

Rhyme or reason

By seeking to deny and contain anxiety, fear and anger, academia like many other social systems succeeds in exacerbating these feelings (Menzies 1970). Silence about emotional responses to oppression equals good behaviour, and pain, as many interviewees noted, is privatized into stress, illness, exhaustion. Sexism represents an additional workload for women. Carrying the burden of other people's negative attitudes appears to be having an effect on women's physical and emotional well-being. Once again, there is the double-bind. The Cartesian opposition between reason and the body has traditionally been used as justification to discriminate against women in employment. Walkerdine (1990, p. 33) describes how 'women's bodies became understood as incapacitated for reason . . . capacitated for reproduction of the species, not the production of knowledge'. If women's bodies begin to fail, this is further evidence of their unsuitability for academic life, rather than the result of attempting to contain a relentless series of discriminatory and exclusionary practices. However, if disembodiment is a precondition for women to enter the reasoning world of academia, the body can operate as a site of resistance. Women in this study challenged the idea of a separate non-culturally mediated body and demonstrated links between biology and organizational culture.

> Two years ago, I entered my first academic post, I worked in an all-male staff team. . . . I was treated as a pollutant and guilty of spoiling the comfortable fraternal relations . . . These negative attitudes also influenced the way students and admin. staff treated me . . . The stress of being in this position made me ill almost every other week — a fact I had to hide for fear of provoking even more negativity towards me.

The idea of women as pollutants permeates much critical thinking about women's access to male-dominated organizations. Walsh (1992) points out that women embody sexuality in an environment devoted to its official suppression and exclusion. Farwell Adams (1983, p. 140) believes that men's 'pollution sanctions' become elevated and dignified by 'our stress and anger'. Women's 'emotionality' and 'physicality' are placed in binary opposition to men's 'rationality'. Men's denied irrationality becomes invested in 'woman'. Emotional maturity in the academy is often characterized by the absence of emotions, rather than in the skill of being able to recognize them and use them effectively.

Bordo (1992, p. 164) quotes from Bell Hooks (1990, p. 164) and believes that 'when we give expression in academic settings to those aspects of our identity forged in marginality, we may be seen as a "spectacle"'. Walkerdine (1990, p. 134) discovered in her research with girls and women that 'the discursive production of femininity as antithetical to masculine rationality' results in 'femininity' being 'equated with poor performance, even when the girl or woman in question is performing well'. As a consequence, men are invested with power and authority, not for any outstanding individual abilities or talents, but simply because they are representatives of the powerful group. Or, as one interviewee commented when she heard that a male colleague with fewer publications and qualifications had been promoted in favour of her — 'What do men have to do to be in the wrong, and what do women have to do to be in the right?'

The dominant paradigm is that women in academia represent the 'other'. Hysteria in opposition to reason and passion versus scholarliness. Whilst men can claim to represent at once the masculine and neutral principles, women can only represent femaleness — the 'other'. So if the world of academia is male, but coded as universal, any attempt to decode it can result in allegations of bias, bitterness, imbalance, hysteria.

To conclude

The image of the 'iron cage' in the title is taken from a quotation by feminist literary critics in relation to their observations about heroines caught in the process of change in Victorian novels: 'Tragedy, for many women characters, springs from the fact that consciousness must outpace the possibilities of action, that perception must pace within an iron cage' (Heilbrun and Stimpson, 1975, p. 68). The cage is an image of both security and entrapment. Women's engagement with any dominant organization creates a tension between balancing oppositional consciousness and resistance on the one hand, with the need to protect material and professional interests on the other. Equally, there is an imbalance between many women academics' consciousness and opportunities to challenge and change existing structures.

One advance academic women have over Victorian literary heroines is that discrimination is beginning to be known collectively, rather than individually. It would appear that women are moving from the silence of self-blame to more vociferous, systematic campaigns. Both for purposes of catharsis and consciousness-raising, women are beginning to share their autobiographies (Evans 1993), thus making it easier for other women to speak. Voicing internalized narratives activated by male-dominated organizations can go some way to challenging the pretense and divisions demanded by hierarchical systems. Women academics are also increasingly applying their intellectual, analytical understanding of patriarchy to their own experiences of occupational hierarchies. This process allows a re-reading of positions in academia and raises questions about how women can move outside theories/discourses in which they are inscribed. By deconstructing the processes of disempowerment, systems of reproducing oppression and domination are made more visible. Disillusion with liberal discourses of equality have led many women academics to demand a more radical discourse of difference. Diversity on the basis of race, social class and sexuality also needs to inform the basis of analysis, in order to avoid reproducing systems of domination among women.

This study demonstrates that whilst women are under-represented in organizational positions of power in the academy, there is a vast reservoir of consciousness and resources beneath the self constructed in the male gaze. But women's under-representation on decision-making structures has serious policy implications, as opportunities for influencing organizational discourses and practices remain limited. Teaching and writing were experienced by many as highly creative processes. The academy, like any other major organization, is riven with paradox and contradiction as both a source of oppression and location for exploring liberation and empowerment.

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