

VISIBILITY, GENDER, AND THE CAREERS OF WOMEN FACULTY IN AN INDIAN UNIVERSITY¹

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ABSTRACT. This paper highlights the process that creates inequalities in male and female career patterns and their unequal representation in positions of worth and authority in an Indian university. Based on a quantitative and a qualitative case study of gendered career patterns the paper shows how organisational and management practices discriminate against women. It contrasts the visibility of men linked to centers of power with that of women linked to constructions of passivity and shows how these social constructions impact on procedures for appointment, promotion and governance.

VISIBILITÉ, PARITÉ SEXUELLE ET CARRIÈRES POUR LES FEMMES DANS UNE UNIVERSITÉ EN INDE

RÉSUMÉ. Ce document fait ressortir le processus qui crée les inégalités entre les modèles de carrière masculins et féminins et leur représentation inégale dans les postes de prestige et d'autorité d'une université indienne. Fondé sur une étude de cas à la fois quantitative et qualitative et s'appuyant sur deux études de modèles de carrière selon le sexe, il montre comment les pratiques organisationnelles et de gestion sont discriminatoires envers les femmes. Il met en valeur le contraste entre la visibilité des hommes liés aux centres de pouvoir et la position des femmes ayant un profil passif et en déduit que ces structures sociales se répercutent sur les processus amenant aux nominations, aux promotions et aux postes de gestion publique.

This paper highlights inequalities in male and female career patterns and unequal representation in positions of worth and authority in Indian universities. The underlying premise of this paper is that organizational rules, regulations and procedures are not free of social and cultural constraints. They are permeated by gendered attitudes and values.

Scholars have begun to question the image of the university as a neutral space and have started to look at features of its bureaucratic organisation and the basic assumptions underlying organisational analyses (Trembley 1999). They explain the absence of women leaders and managers as being

closely interlinked with universities as gendered institutions (Brooks and Mackinnon 2001; Joyner and Preston 1998; Rosener 1990). The relationship between masculinity and management has been studied widely (David and Woodward 1998; Hearn 1998; Pritchard 1996). Feminist scholars have critiqued the traditional concept of leadership as being based on male experience. Blackmore (1999) argues that the concept of leadership has to be understood relative to power/gender/knowledge relations (1999, p. 17). According to Eggins, 'implicit cultural biases. . . often the barriers to a woman's appointment as a college president were not so much in her abilities and preparation as in the expectations and conceptual blinkers that prevented others from being able to see her capabilities as clues to leadership ability' (1997, p. xiv).

Over the past half century, the number of women has increased at all levels of education all over the world. However, despite higher levels of education, their qualifications do not translate into corresponding occupational choices and opportunities for positions of status and authority within the university (Brooks, 1997a). Referring to women's experience, it is generally noted that they either move very slowly or hardly ever to the top because they face a 'chilly climate' in the universities (Ramsay, 1995; Mukherjee, 2000; Joyner & Preston, 1998). Others have referred to the 'glass ceiling' that women face while moving up (David & Woodward, 1998). Barriers to women's promotion and moving up in the universities are well-known (Joyner & Preston, 1998; Brooks, 1997a; Shakeshaft, 1989; Ramsay, 1995). Men faculty tend to publish more than women (Smulders, 1997; Indiresan et al, 1995) either due to problems inherent in the academic structures (Brooks, 1997a) or because women cannot give time to professional development when they are discharging dual responsibilities at work and at home.

The reasons for this are complex. Feminist studies have highlighted the processes of power at work in universities and academic institutions. Although in many institutions there have been changes in managerial practices since the 1990s, Hearn (1998) shows that the management and organisation of knowledge has been historically monopolised by men and that universities do not 'naturally' challenge this. Many universities, 'are run according to hierarchical systems of organisation which are not consistent with the democratic and liberal ethic adopted by these institutions' (Ramazanoglu, 1987, p. 61). Often the general structural mechanisms in higher education represent a patriarchal organisational culture (Townley, 1993). Brooks explores the relationship between gender, power and the academy. She investigates the gap between the model of equality and academic fairness and the sexist reality of the academy. She also argues that 'there is an apparent contradiction between the liberal ideology and egalitarian aims of the academy, the reality of competitive academic careers in male-dominated hierarchies which leads to endemic sexism and racism in

defence of male privilege' (1987, p. 1). There is thus a need for studies that go beyond the unequal participation of women academics and the issues of unequal pay and promotional opportunities and which look at university structures, processes, and their ideological underpinnings (Morrison et al, 1992).

In Indian universities, there is no apparent and formal division of labour along gender lines in teaching, research and administration. At a formal level there are commitments to equality. However in the latest year for which figures are available (1993) statistics show that women academics are a small minority (11.6%) of staff in Indian universities (Chanana, 2000). Some of the reasons for the non-appointment and slow career progression of women academic staff in Indian universities were the focus of the studies reported below.

The career paths of women faculty in Indian universities

The concept of 'visibility' (Ardener, 1989) is used to explore the career paths of men and women academics in a sample of Indian universities. Dube (1989) contends that in most social sciences women were invisible because their contributions were not recognised or they were 'absent, relegated or ignored.' This absence or 'invisibility' of women has to be seen in conjunction with their 'visibility' as passive beings or as objects of sexual desire (Ardener, 1989) in the advertisements for cars and cigarettes. Men, on the other hand, are visible in all spheres of life and this links to power and authority.

In examining gendered career paths this article draws on data from two small scale studies. The first conducted in the early 1990s, drew on questionnaires sent to faculty members sampled from eighteen universities in different states in India. The questionnaires had been developed on the basis of focus group discussions. Fifty nine women and fourteen men returned questionnaires (Indiresan, Chanana, & Rohini, 1995). The second is a case study based on the observations of the career paths on men and women staff in a single university and one department.

The first study indicated that more men (47.4%) than women (26.2%) were occupying leadership positions in posts that depended on open selection and recruitment rather than nomination. In the seven women's universities in the sample most of the academic leaders were women who had obtained posts by open selection. Women's universities provided more space and opportunities to women in leadership roles. In the other universities in the sample women only obtained leadership posts by rotation or seniority. The study indicated that in the sampled universities 73.77% women had become academic leaders through seniority or rotation compared to 52.63% men.

A majority of male respondents (53%) reported that they have reached the most significant position in their career as compared to 34 percent women. Starting at a lower level on the career ladder and frequent job changes may account for this. A significant proportion of women respondents (26%), but none of the men had started work in universities in lower grade positions such as teachers, assistant teachers, guest lecturers, and demonstrators. Frequent job changes were also a feature of women's career paths. University teaching in India is not a mobile job and yet 26.2% women as compared to 1 male respondent experienced interruptions in their career. Most women respondents (except one) were married and mentioned domestic and marriage related reasons, particularly a husband's job transfer, for these interruptions. This study therefore indicated significant constraints on the career paths of women academics.

To examine this further and to provide an in depth analysis of how these constraints worked at the organizational level the findings of the first study are supported by observations of the career profiles of women and men faculty in a case study university and specifically in one of its departments over a number of years. This is a residential university located in a metropolitan city in northern India. In the year 2000, there were just over 400 faculty members at this university of which women were a small proportion i.e., 18.57%. Their proportion was lowest as professors and highest as assistant professors, i.e., 13.44% professors; 25% associate professors and 40.57% assistant professors. This university has not yet had a woman vice-chancellor. Whenever a new vice-chancellor is appointed, he has to make several important appointments, for example, that of the Rector and the Dean of Students' Welfare. This university has not yet had a woman appointed to these positions.

Thus, a differentiation between men and women tends to begin with appointments. In one of the departments studied, most men faculty joined as associate professors, while women joined at a lower rank as assistant professors. Women faculty members were not under qualified for the job. All had doctorate degrees, a considerable amount of teaching and research experience, publications, and no interruptions in career for childbearing and child-rearing. Although all men had doctorates, not all of them had teaching and research experience or publications at the time of appointment.

There have been far more men than women who have chaired the department studied. The working styles of men and women department chairs have been quite distinct. Women faculty (as chair) can be seen in the office during most of the day and provide on the spot supervision to the administrative staff. They spare very little time for professional development and networking. On the other hand, the men faculty (as chair) come to the department for the necessary minimum time to check the mail and to sign

official papers. They invest their time in professional development and networking. At the time of promotion it is visibility, which comes through networking, publications and professional development (in that order) that counts. Effective and efficient headship or administration and research guidance and supervision are not criteria in promotion. Women's careers thus tend to start at the lowest end, move up slowly, sometimes result in promotions against the odds but ultimately culminate with retirement on very low salaries.

Here are two profiles of a male and female academic in the same department at this university which illustrate this. The male faculty member was appointed, even though he had no prior experience of teaching in or interest in the subject specialization of the department. He hardly ever came to the department and undertook no research supervision. Teaching seemed to be only a secondary consideration. In other words, his contribution to the department's teaching and research programme was almost nil. However, he spent his time on publications and on making himself visible on the campus. In addition, he networked with scholars nationally and internationally.

The woman faculty member spent the whole day at work and carried a greater administrative load. She undertook the maximum research supervision, published extensively, and contributed regularly to teaching and establishing networks on the campus. But she did not network at the national and international level. She was visible in terms of what was expected of her job, but this was a form of visibility which appeared as passivity in the face of national and international demands. Thus, her visibility excluded her from power and from quick promotion.

At the university, there are a number of reasons for the lack of promotion of women academics. The problem of status dissonance affected the appointment and promotion of men and women faculty if they happened to be married couples. In the first decade or so after the establishment of this university a few married couples were appointed. In some cases both the husband and wife were in the same department and in others they joined different departments and schools. But in all cases, wives were appointed either at a rank equal to or a rank lower than that of the husband regardless of whether the wife joined before the husband. And the husband, even if he joined later than the wife and at the same rank, was promoted first.

Gendered career paths, while formally structured by promotion practices, owe much to informal networks and particular forms of visibility linked to power. As this is a residential university 'visibility' in informal settings is easy for men. They visit the vice-chancellor at his residence in the evening and go to all the seminars and conferences that he inaugurates on the campus. This ensures that he sees them and often invites them to his house for dinner. This process of networking is underway during and after office

hours. Informal visibility leads to formal recognition and appointment to important positions.

Women cannot participate in this informal social interaction because of strictly observed codes of sexual propriety and the damage that speculation about transgression can bring. Even after office hours networking is ruled out for single faculty women (not just the never married ones but also those who are divorced, separated and widowed with children) although married women can visit with their spouses. The nature of this form of social interaction inhibits women from visiting the homes and offices of men in authority. Men are visible in relation to centers of power while women are not. Visibility through networking and lobbying is crucial in the meritocratic form of institution represented by this university. In this context who visits whom during and after office hours matters. Files relating to application for leave, promotion, house allotment move faster, and decisions are taken in favour of those who are visible. Women are at a disadvantage because they cannot become visible in the manner described here.

In the constitution of committees, 'informal visibility' is converted to 'formal visibility' and power, which has a bearing on promotion. Some faculty members who are part of the informal network are appointed and nominated to important committees, like the Standing Committee on Admissions, the Campus Development Committee and the House Allotment Committee. Some of these are statutory; some are not. Yet all are important for power and status. The combination of visibility and the power to nominate ensure that very few women get representation to these committees. However, it is a common practice to give 'token' representation to women in some committees to make them visible, but on strictly controlled terms. Generally, a few women are popular for this purpose and every successive administration keeps them visible in these ways that underline a form of passivity.

This university's internal structures and practices produce gender differences in participation in routine activities. When meetings of the academic council and other important decision making bodies are scheduled in the afternoons, they go on till late in the evening. Crucial and controversial items are taken up last. But many women members have to go home to meet family demands and do not participate in these discussions. Although there are claims that these bodies are gender neutral, the form of organization has a differential gendered impact.

Thus, the organizational environment of the universities which appears the same for women and men is in fact unequal. Women's domestic responsibilities are ignored in fixing schedules for meetings or in providing child care support. But these same responsibilities are taken into consideration in selection procedures in academic institutions. The selection committees for

recruitment of academic positions often ask women candidates questions which have more to do with their social role as homemakers and much less to do with them as academics. Some questions asked are: If you are posted outstation, what will happen to the family and children or have you taken your husband's permission? Married men are not asked if their decision to take up a post would affect their family adversely.

However, measures to promote equality and democracy in Indian universities in response to the demands of the university teachers' union have helped women challenge this limited form of visibility. Until recently the head (chair) of a department and the Deans in all Indian universities were appointed till they retired. During the last few years, this position has become rotational, that is, it rotates among professors (in some cases among readers or associate professors too) by seniority for a period of 2-3 years. This had unexpected consequences for women faculty members. In a university department, men are generally senior because they were recruited earlier and, therefore, in the old system once they became the chair or head they stayed until retirement. Women who joined at lower end and at a later age had no chance of assuming charge of their departments. However, the new principle of rotation has made it possible for some women to become the chairs or heads of departments. Rotation of headship, thus, has played an important role in neutralizing some aspects of gender inequality.

Wrap up

This paper offers an example drawn from India of the process that ensures that women are denied equal opportunities of moving up within the university hierarchy. What is of interest is not only why so few women occupy positions of power, authority, status and responsibility in higher educational institutions but also the process by which this exclusion occurs. The paper has highlighted the social construction of visibility and the adaptation of the organisation to it. What is critical is the organizational culture and the processes that create gender differences in 'visibility' and adversely affect women's contribution to academia as well as the academic culture of an institution.

NOTE

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GENDER, EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT: BEYOND ACCESS

Background and project aims

Funded by the Department of International Development and jointly co-ordinated by Elaine Unterhalter of the Institute of Education, London and Sheila Aikman of Oxfam GB, the Gender, Education and Development: Beyond Access project was launched at a seminar in the House of Commons in the first week of April 2003 and will run until December 2005. It is linked to work for the Millennium Development Target for gender equity in education worldwide by 2005. While this target will certainly be missed the project is a chance to raise awareness of the scale of the problem and the strategies being taken to address it, and to enhance understandings and collaboration in work towards the Target. In summary, the project seeks to:

- Share new knowledge, critically examine practice and undertake new strategies for learning between policy-makers, NGOs, inter-government organisations, practitioners, academics, teachers and the general public.
- Investigate and build awareness through a series of seminars, a conference and a range of publications of debates and practical strategies in a range of different contexts that contribute to the delivery of gender equity in education.

Putting the aims into practice

The project aims to achieve the aims set out above through a variety of written and practical outputs, including a bi-monthly newsletter (Equals), books (academic and more practical guides), specialist journals, policy papers and a dynamic series of seminars and workshops. It is hoped each of the six 2-day events in this seminar series will exist as a springboard for networking and the development of practical strategies for overcoming gender inequalities in education. The seminar series has six crosscutting themes: rights and education; policy in practice; the politics of policy; HIV/AIDS and gender education; learning from practice and cross-sector dialogue.

Sept 2003	London	Curriculum for Gender Equality and Quality Basic Education
Feb 2004	Nairobi, Kenya	Pedagogy for Gender Equality And Quality Basic Educa tion
April 2004	Oxford, UK	Resources for Gender Equality and Quality Basic Education
June 2004	Norwich, UK	Developing Gender Equality in Adult Education
Oct 2004	Nigeria	Partnerships for Gender Equality and Education
Jan 2005	Dhaka (tbc)	Sustaining Quality Outcomes and Gender Equality in Education

New project website

The web is seen as a crucial means of communication for the project, due to its ability to link geographically disparate constituencies working on gender equitable education. A new website has been developed, hosted by www.girlseducation.org, a Partnership site run by the World Bank, DfID and Unicef. Together with resources already available on the site, the new Beyond Access site (accessed through the www.girlseducation.org homepage) aims to exist as a hub of information on gender, education and development, complete with:

- Practical resources (e.g. teachers' guides)
- A newsletter archive in 5 languages
- A live news and forthcoming events digest
- A virtual discussion forum hosting regular debates
- Information about and links to partner sites
- Downloadable research papers, policy briefs, bibliographies and other documents