Constructing or Rejecting the Notion of the Other in University Management: The Cases of Ireland and Sweden

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**Abstract**

In this article we focus on gender stereotypes in West European university management by comparing two countries - Sweden and Ireland. In secular Sweden there are strong policies that are implemented at all political levels supported by the public discourse, while in Ireland such measures are few and the equality infrastructures and discourse have been weakened by the state since the 1990s. In most European countries there are very few women in top university management, but in recent years in Sweden women have come to dominate the Vice-Chancellor positions and each gender has between 40 and 50 per cent of the other leading positions. In Ireland there are no women in the equivalent to the Vice Chancellor position, and their percentage of other leading positions is between 13-25 per cent.

Drawing on interview data from senior ‘manager academics’ (Deem, 2003) in Irish and Swedish universities it emerges that in Sweden traditional gender stereotypes are not credible anymore-with senior manager-academics not seeing such stereotypes as mirroring reality. Thus, even if they acknowledge the existence of stereotypes and confess to knowing what the traditional views are (or rather used to be), they distance themselves from them. In Ireland traditional stereotypes still have more of a grip on managers.

These country differences are seen in the context of different gender orders in the respective countries. It seems that more areas are still gendered in Irish society in comparison with Sweden, and the gender order is stronger and more hierarchical. Thus modifying Powell et al’s (2002) conclusions, it appears that by actively recruiting women to leading positions in a societal context that supports feminist values, traditional stereotypes may be reduced. On the other hand in Ireland, gendered stereotypes in the absence of such a context, reflect and reinforce patterns that legitimate and valorise men’s and women’s position within hierarchical gendered structures.(307 words)

**Introduction**

In this paper we are concerned with the existence and content of gender stereotyping by senior manager-academics (Deem, 2003) in Irish and Swedish universities, in the context of fluid constructions of gender in these two countries. Sweden and Ireland are both similar and different. They are both affluent industrialized West European countries but with different historical traditions (such as religious values and views) as well as different traditions of gender equality arrangements and discourses.

Previous research has shown that what is seen as male and female varies very much. We regard gender as a social relation and identity which may change in time and space. What is regarded as female and male respectively in a certain society at a certain time will be expressed in symbols, in our ways of behaving, in institutional relations (such as the labour market and the state); in how we live our lives and conceive of ourselves in relation to others(Scott 1987). However the general principle is that stereotypically female activities are valued less than male ones no matter what they are. In addition the exact same task may be differently valued depending on whether it is done by a woman or a man (Lindgren 1985, Wikander 1988). But the difference in value may be greater in some cultures, periods, or contexts than in other ones. A task may also be transferred from women to men or the other way around – and will then change its status (Scott 1987, Wikander 1988, Göransson 1998, Hirdman 2001). The primary principle is that the connection between masculinity and superordination will always be preserved. [[1]](#footnote-2). If positions deteriorate and lose their favourable status, the proportion of men will decline.

It is suggested that gender is contextually determined and masculinity and femininity are not in any way univocal concepts (Connell 1987, Bengtsson 2001). Firstly, it is not possible to assume that conditions in Sweden or Ireland will be the same as in other countries (Holter 2003). These conditions affect the gender order just as they are in turn affected by the gender order. Secondly, these conditions vary over time, so that for instance there are generational differences. Thus gender is a dynamic concept with changing content (Landes 1988, Roper & Tosh 1991, Ekenstam 1998, Göransson 2000). Thirdly, gender varies between social classes and strata and between ethnic groups (for instance Sommestad 1992, 1993, Jordansson 1998, Milkman 1985, Carnes & Griffen 1990, Lindgren 2001(1992), Skeggs 1999, Wennerström 2003. see also Bourdieu 1999:66.).

Stereotypes are defined as ‘beliefs about the characteristics, attributes and behaviours of members of certain groups’ (Hilton and Von Hippel, 1996, p.240). They are a way of classifying people in terms of some kind of group membership and are commonly defined as “the fixed, narrow “pictures in our head”, generally resistant to easy change”.[[2]](#footnote-3) Gender stereotypes are “one-sided and exaggerated images of men and women which are deployed repeatedly in everyday life. They operate as a widely understood shorthand”.[[3]](#footnote-4) Sterotypes play an important part in affecting and legitimating the absence of women in senior positions in male dominated organisations and create potential difficulties for women in envisioning themselves in academic management roles (Powell et al, 2002; Van den Brink and Benschop, 2012). Women have frequently beein identified as Other – both in general terms and specifically in the academy (Acker, 1980). ‘When leadership is defined in masculine terms, the leaders who emerge are disproportionately men, regardless of the sex composition of the community of followers’ (Eagly, 2005:463). The existence of male gendered stereotypes encourages the definition of women as Other and constitutes another barrier to the utilisation of women’s leadership potential. Such stereotypes can be seen as part of the symbolic structure that reflects and reinforces men’s managerial position (Acker, 1990).

It has been argued that the gender orders in different countries, regions or organizations may differ in force (i.e. the degree of importance assigned to a man being very “masculine” or a woman very “feminine”); scope (i.e. the areas of collective life that are affected by the division of humanity into gender categories); and hierarchy (i.e. the extent to which they involve access to important resources and constitute not just “difference” horizontally, but “inequality” vertically: Thurén 2000). It will be suggested that variation in the endorsement of gender stereotypes provides an insight into the gender orders (Thuren 2000) in Ireland and Sweden

**Wider Societal Contexts**

In the World Values Survey Sweden is an outlier in comparison with the clusters of all other countries and even in comparison with the rest of Protestant Europe – a position due mainly to its secular values and the high value of gender equality. In the same survey Catholic Ireland is positioned as having more traditional values than most of the other English- speaking countries, but at the same time also highly valuing self-expression as opposed to survival values (Inglehart & Welzel 2005:63). In both countries legislation and regulations exist that aim at securing and furthering gender equality in society.

The official definition of gender equality taken by the Swedish parliament is that women and men should have the same power to shape their own lives and society. Thus, in addition to equality legislation, there are rules that 40 per cent of leading positions and in committees of various kinds in university management should be occupied by “the under-represented gender”. In Sweden in any election, it is necessary that candidates of both genders should always be nominated and the leaders of almost all political parties have officially defined themselves as feminists.[[4]](#footnote-5) This kind of state commitment is particularly important since university Vice Chancellors are ultimately appointed by the state. Gender equality values are deeply anchored in society and there is a dominant discourse that makes it impossible to express views to the contrary. In Sweden the similarity discourse has been dominating since the 1970s, when in an effort to equalize women’s and men’s life opportunities, new legislation introduced equal paid parental leave for men and women, individual taxation for husbands and wives, liberal abortion laws, and public day care for all children.

Women make up 47 per cent of the members in parliament. 81 per cent of the women and 88 per cent of the men are employed (2009), and one third of managers are women (25 per cent in the private sector and 62 per cent in the public sector) (SCB 2010). 86 per cent of all children 1 – 5 years of age are in public day care. But there is a strong horizontal gender division in the labour market that means that most people work in occupations that are dominated by their own gender. During the 1990s several traditionally male-dominated professions changed gender, and economics, law, medicine and theology are now dominated by women. University teachers as a group are one of the most gender-equal professions quantitatively, with 45 per cent being women (Högskoleverket, Stockholm, Rapport, 2011). However, vertical differences still exist.

The position in Ireland is in some ways very different. Thus despite the presence of equality legislation, the state has made no attempt to enforce its own regulation involving 40 per cent representation on state boards in the context of public universities. Indeed the Higher Educational Authority which has statutory responsibility for gender has not systematically collected gender data on the universities since 2004. Female representation in the parliament (Dail) has rarely exceeded 15 per cent. In an unprecedented move, a Fine Gael/Labour Government has introduced the Electoral (Amendment) Bill (2011) which proposes that unless 30 per cent of the electoral candidates put forward by a political party in the next general election are women, its funding from the state will be reduced by 50 per cent. It remains to be seen what effect this will have on the political representation of women if enacted. Parental Leave (unpaid) exists as does individual taxation, while access to abortion remains in a legal quagmire.

Women’s employment rate continued to rise between 2001 and 2007 (from 55 per cent to 61 per cent)-exceeding the 2010 EU target by 2007 (CSO 2011). However, both men’s and women’s employment rate started to fall in 2007 and that decline has continued with relatively little difference overall in the employment rate for men (65 per cent) and for women (56 per cent: CSO, 2011). Only 15 per cent of children are in formal child care (Saraceno 2011). Parents in Ireland pay up to 90 per cent of their child care costs in comparison to 33 per cent in Denmark and 20 per cent in Sweden (NYC1, 2010; see also Lynch and Lyons 2008). Gender equality is most apparent in access to education with women making up half of those in professional occupations and 30 per cent of those in managerial and administrative positions (CSO, 2011). Neo-liberal discourses valorising the market dominated in the Celtic Tiger era (late 1990s to 2008). During this period the political discourse was actively opposed to equality and an equality agenda was marginalised as the government weakened those structures involved in implementing or monitoring equality (O’Connor, 2008; Crowley, 2011). It is unthinkable that political parties in Ireland would define themselves as feminist.

The wider Irish societal discourse has for the most part remained committed to difference, rooted in essentialist views of men and women, and reflected in stereotypical patterns of educational and occupational choices. As in Sweden occupational segregation exists, although patterns have been changing, with women increasingly accessing areas that were predominantly male (such as, for example, law or medicine). Attempts have been made to resist this by changing the entrance criteria to medicine, with the explicit purpose of reducing the number of women being admitted.

**T**he difference in the Irish and Swedish contexts is reflected in and reinforced by the differences in the presence of women in senior management positions in the two university systems. Thus for example, whereas 58 per cent of those at rector/VC /presidential level are women in Sweden, there are no women at all at that level in Ireland (see Table 1). Thus two systems provide an interesting context for exploring the existence and content of gendered management stereotypes, and provide an insight into their gender orders (Thuren 2000)

**Table 1. Percentage of women in senior management positions at the universities.**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Sweden\* | Ireland\*\* |
| Vice-Chancellors/Presidents | 58 | 0 |
| Pro-Vice-Chancellors/Deputy Presidents | 50 | 14 |
| Vice Vice-Chancellors/Other Vice Presidents+ | 43 | 18 |
| University Directors/Adm Managers | 46 | 13 |
| Deans | 29 | 25 |

\*\* Figures for Sweden from the web (2011) include the 23 state-owned and three privately owned universities and college universities that offer PhD training; Figures for Ireland are taken from the web and include all seven public universities: \*Goransson, 2011:54 ; + In Ireland these include non-academics.

**Methodology and description of the sample**

The Irish and Swedish studies were undertaken as part of a wider cross national study (Bagilhole and White, 2011). The objectives were to analyse gender representation in university senior management in quantitative terms and to provide an in-depth qualitative analysis of senior managements’ perception of that experience **(**Neale and Ozkanli, 2011).Senior management was defined as those at dean level or above who are currently or who had been in senior management in public universities in the past five years. In the Irish study 40 people were identified in a purposive sample. Interviews were completed with 34 people (85 per cent response rate) although only the 23 senior ‘manager-academics’ are included in this paper. In the Swedish study 10 people at publicly-funded universities were identified in a purposive sample. All of these were manager-academics. Interviews were completed with all of these (100 per cent response rate).

The interview guide was devised as part of a larger study by the Women in Higher Education Management (WHEM) Network (Bagilhole and White, 2011). It included three sections: getting into and on in senior management; the dynamics of women and men working together in senior management teams, and perceptions of the broader management culture in universities. In the Irish study interviews varied in length from 40 minutes to 90 minutes with the majority being over an hour. All of the interviews were face to face and tape-recorded, with detailed verbatim notes being made during the interview. Following the interviews the tapes were replayed and any additional material was inserted in these verbatim recordings. The Swedish interviews varied in length from 45 minutes to two hours with the majority being about 90 minutes. They were face to face and tape-recorded, with the exception of one telephone interview. Supporting notes were taken. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and translated into English by the researcher. All the interviewing was conducted by the authors. In the interests of confidentiality interview numbers and gender identifiers alone are used (e.g. SWE or IRE, man/woman and number of interview), and features (such as level) that could identify those involved are obscured or omitted.

The researcher in each country selected major themes emerging from the data for analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994). Using local expertise and understanding in identifying such themes contrasts with other cross-national studies and adds to the validity of those themes which emerged cross-nationally. In this paper we focus particularly on replies to the questions about the existence of gendered management styles as well as other references to the similarity or difference between the genders, as indicators of the existence of gender stereotypes. It is impossible to know to what extent the dominant politically correct discourse may affect the responses. This is particularly likely to be a problem in Sweden, although it seems possible to suggest that this danger may be offset by the fact that there are two competing views.

In this paper we distinguish between those who reject the existence of gender stereotypes; those who consider that there are differences but connect them not with gender but with other factors (such as minority status, particular academic disciplines, or power positions); and those who identify the existence of gender stereotypes (whether defined in negative or positive terms).

***Absence of Gender Stereotypes***

It has been established that gender-neutral areas of activity have a wider scope in northern Europe, while more areas are gendered in southern Europe (Thuren, 2000). The fact that organizations are gendered is generally acknowledged in Sweden. Insofar as discussions about gender differences in management style exist they mainly concern business where there are few women in top positions. Swedish respondents in this senior management study had trouble defining a male leadership style. In the course of their answers it becomes clear that they do have a notion of what the stereotypes are. But they do not recognize them as something they have experienced. Reality in the universities has changed and women hold the majority of top positions, but the stereotypes linger. In Ireland on the other hand, there is a greater belief in the credibility of gender stereotypes-reinforced by the minority of women in such positions and by the wider patriarchal culture (O’Connor, 1998 and 2000)..

There was much hesitancy or downright rejection by the Swedish respondents of the existence of a gendered management style and hence gendered stereotypes. Respondents appeared to be more aware of literature in the area although less confident about whether the ‘acceptable’ view was that gender stereotypes did/did not exist. This might explain why many Swedish university managers had trouble understanding the question about gendered management styles: *‘There is no masculine leadership style’* (SWE woman 2); *‘I don’t have a definition of a male style…..*’ (SWE man 8).

*There are no differences between management styles of men and women. They do it the same way….. Leadership is mostly about listening. You must have big ears* (SWE woman 4).

*I couldn’t tell …it’s more that studies have shown that people expect different leadership styles…. This is very difficult to answe*r(SWE woman 1).

*I think there surely is a male style…….I don’t think we can say generally that women take it on … but it is possible that women managers…. have to have a male style or they would not succeed… I don’t have a definition of a male style…..* (SWE man 8).

Thus although this man started by declaring that there is a male style, as he talked on he became hesitant as to what this style was and whether there actually is such a thing. Very occasionally similar views were expressed by Irish respondents;

*The assumption is that there is a male management style, I don’t think I agree with that assumption, there are different ones but it is not appropriate to consider them gendered, those management styles are related to other dimensions* (IRE woman 2).

*I’m not quite sure what that means but assuming that means more aggressive assertive* (IRE man 19).

In generalwhere the Swedish respondents recognised that variation in management styles existed, they were particularly likely to suggest that such variation reflected personal characteristics: ‘*It depends on the individual’* (SWE man 3). Occasionally traditional stereotypes were recognised: ‘*A man is someone who can make decisions…..’* but those in her surroundings are not like that so that the conclusion was that it was *‘More to do with personality*’ (SWE woman 6).

The Swedish respondents also referred to different disciplinary cultures, rather than those related to gender (Snow 1954, Myrdal 2010). The perceived characteristics of these disciplines varied.However the key thing was that it was discipline rather than gender that accounted for the differences in management styles and such references were particularly likely to be made by Swedish respondents.

*I think that the differences between disciplines are greater than between the genders when it comes to how you are and how you lead. There are much more evident cultural differences, I think, between people from different disciplines than between the genders within one and the same discipline* (SWE man 3).

*Medicine and natural sciences are hierarchies. They have a tradition of a decision-process that is hierarchical…. They are also male-dominated. The more women, the more discussion there is. Social sciences and humanities are more critical, more reasoning*. (SWE woman 4).

References to disciplinary backgrounds did occasionally also occur amongst the Irish respondents,. Thus there was a suggestion that women who adopted “male” management styles were more likely to have *‘come up the hard way in an extremely male environment’* (IRE woman 13):*‘ In engineering perhaps women have to conform to male mores or expectations*…’ (IRE man 22)

Powell et al (2002: 190) found in their study of changes in managerial stereotypes over time, that despite a substantial increase in the proportion of women managers between the mid 1970s and the late 1990s, in the US good managers were still described in stereotypically male terms, although preferences for ‘an undifferentiated manager, or one low in both feminine and masculine characteristics’ increased over time. In the present study, possibly because of the greater availability of women in senior management positions in Sweden, and a widespread social acceptance of feminist goals, Swedish women were more willing to challenge the stereotypes by referring to people they knew themselves or by juxtaposing them with their own experiences. Thus when asked whether women adapt to male management styles a woman says:

*I am not so sure. There are many kinds of women and the odd one may do that. But there are also women like X and Y that I work with or who went before me that don’t. They don’t take on some kind of masculine way of being. My male colleague on the other hand is very soft. Of course I know that traditionally and conventionally there is a kind of stereotype for men and for women ... But when I look at my male colleagues not many fit into that. There are just as many women who are like that. It has more to do with personality. We are all different depending on how we were raised and what our experience is and so on. I have always had a problem with that kind of categorical thinking. Masculine – feminine* (SWE woman 6).

*I have had both a male and a female boss. But I could not say that it depends on the gender. They have been entirely, they are entirely different as persons, entirely different ways of working But there are certain qualities that I like about the person who is boss. The ability to structure their work. That I think is really important. Because the vaguer you are, the vaguer it gets for every step you go down in an organization. – And that will mess up things quite a lot* (SWE woman 2).

The view was also expressed that it is *power* rather than gender (Kanter 1993/1977) that is reflected in stereotypes of male gendered styles:

“*If men dominate, they say (the management culture) is male, but is it male?...If you take Margaret Thatcher, she was very male in her leadership, wasn’t she? If you get to the position she had, if you become Britain’s prime minister and stay there, then you are a person who can handle power, who likes to exert power and is able to sort of handle, manipulate people if you want to. You may call that male or female. But there is no woman who reaches that position in a female world either without having these qualities. - You are a power person so to speak when you get there. It has mostly been men who have had power and then it has been said that the way that most of them are or become or have to be in order to handle considerable power – that has been said to be male. But maybe it is the power rather than the gender that is characteristic (SWE man 3).*

So, exerting power demands that you have a certain competence and qualities, no matter what gender you have. But these qualities have traditionally been defined as male, since until recently people at the top of the hierarchy have usually been men.

Sinclair (1998: 153) found that in groups where there were only one or two women *‘women’s* *strategy is typically one of camouflage’*. There is a well-known tendency to see the person from the minority (in this case women) as a representative of their group, rather than an individual (Kanter 1993 (1977)). A further indicator of subalternity may be that women are much more aware of the men’s behaviour than vice versa (Freire 1972). Constituting a minority will also mean that you are defined by the majority more often than the other way around. Thus, for some of the respondents the key issue was not gender but the minority status that women in senior management found themselves in and this was occasionally referred to by the Irish respondents:

*I can understand if you are the only female in a Senior Management Team…. In order to fit in -not to adopt the maleness of that but to adapt the functioning of that management team* (IRL man 12 ).

Similar trends emerged amongst the Swedish respondents -‘*you have to be cocky’* (SWE woman 4), although for them these pressures particularly stemmed from (what happened to be) male dominated structures outside the university: ‘*You can be pressed into that’***.** For these respondents the key thing was that women were in a minority situation - and it was this rather than gendered stereotypes that was seen as crucial.

In summary then Swedish respondents were more likely to problematize the existence of gendered management stereotypes, by denying they existed; locating such differences in the context of personality or discipline; or seeing them as a reflection of power rather than gender. Only a minority of Irish respondents rejected the existence of gender stereotypes.

***Existence and content of male gender stereotypes***

In the Swedish power elite, women in male-dominated fields such as business were more similar to their male colleagues than women in the political or media elite. Thus it was concluded that women in male-dominated areas conform to the male majority, while the span of views is much wider in more gender-balanced areas or organizations (Wängnerud & Niklasson 2007). In both the Swedish and Irish interviews and amongst men and women, there were a sizeable number of references to a male stereotype in the university context: *“they spoke the language of the guys, they adopted male styles’* (IRL woman 5).

Halford et al (1997) propose what they call an *embedded* approach to gendered organization, which looks at organizations as socially situated practices. Ferguson (1984) saw bureaucracies as inherently masculine. In both perspectives however women have to develop a ‘male’ management style. Indeed one respondent went on to note that where women are less than 15 per cent, they feel the need to adopt male styles. In that context some respondents referred to the (male) gendered ethos of the organisation (and hence implicitly to a male stereotype):

*I suppose if in a university or unit they are all pushy then you can only survive as a woman by being pushy as well or they essentially beat you down* (IRL male 11)

‘*I suspect it would be difficult [for women] to survive in the general working practices of a male dominated establishment’* (IRE man 3).

References were made to what could be seen as characteristics that were more generally related to women’s position in society (such as lack of self -confidence; lack of experience in senior management) that made them particularly vulnerable to pressure to conform to the male dominated context:

*It largely depends on their own personality and level of confidence. Some of them take an unusually strong approach to certain matters, but if they are confident in their own abilities and their own management capabilities in my experience they don’t do that’* (IRL man 9).

There were occasional Swedish women who saw women as assuming male management styles and this was typically criticised: ‘*that is very tiresome, I think”* (SWE woman 5).

Women in male-dominated fields are often given the message that they need to conform to a masculine image of leadership (Eveline, 2004). Madden (2005:7) suggested that the ‘masculinised context so frequently found in higher education includes the assumption that effective leadership depends on status and power manifested through autocratic behaviour’. There were occasional suggestions in the Irish study that the leadership culture in universities was such a context, although such behaviour was not seen as peculiar to men:

*Academic institutions often have an aggressive style that easily crosses the line from assertiveness to bullying, you don’t just defend your position you assert yourself over someone. ..I have seen both women and men with aggressive management styles* (IRL man 3).

In Sweden stereotypical male management styles are mainly found in big business, if indeed they are found anywhere (Göransson 2004, 2007). However, the Irish men in particular referred to stereotypical views of men as aggressive, competitive. Typically when they reflected on what a male management style was, they referred to it as ‘*aggressive, assertive’* (IRL man 19); an ‘*aggressive approach, target driven approach’* (IRL man 21). A woman referred to the fact that at the early stage of her career she adopted a facilitative style of management, and that it was not effective so that as she went up the academic-managerial hierarchy: *“I did adopt male approaches; I was decisive and authoritative***” (**IRL woman 6). Very occasionally the Swedish respondents referred to a male management style involving:

*A person who can make decisions, who does not feel so much, does not talk so much, who is executive, perhaps even rude. There are such ideas. But I know what I mean when I say that he is not so very traditionally male, because he has a softer side (SWE woman 2 ).*

In general however aggressive behaviour was rarely mentioned, much less endorsed, in the Swedish interviews. Management styles in Sweden are typically more democratic and less authoritarian than in most other countries. Thus, more commonly insofar as a male style was referred to it was seen as characterised by a certain impersonality and a lack of regard for the human consequences of their actions (echoing Powell et al’s 2002 views about de-masculinized management styles);

*Men are more reticent and women more emotionally acting …. What is a male management style? Not listening to people …*( SWE woman 7).

*Unemotional, rational, distanced, They are often so unconcrete and stay on levels of principle* (SWE woman 5).

Connell (1995:82) suggested that although only a minority of men actively subordinate women, the majority benefit from ‘the patriarchal dividend’ in terms of honour prestige and the power to command. They also gain a material dividend’. Implicit in this is a greater cultural valuation of men and their activities reflected in a gendered culture of entitlement. Lewis et al (2002: 141) suggested that ‘entitlement is a concept used to denote a set of beliefs and feelings about rights and entitlements, or legitimate expectations based on what is perceived to be fair and equitable’. Some of the respondents effectively referred to such a gendered culture of entitlement reflecting a male stereotype:

*if I’m dealing with male colleagues I’m dealing with the fact that we are here to do a job and I’m dealing with the fact of that individual’s status, future and rank. If I’m dealing with women it’s much more likely to be dealing with the job in hand* (IRL man 18).

Men were seen as much more invested in their ideas and in their image in organisations and much less willing to accept authority or criticism:

*There is a sort of a competitive instinct in men. If they come up with an idea they have the ownership of it. They have to defend it at all costs, if it is changed or rejected it is a personal slight on them. Women are more open to criticism of their ideas and amendment of them in order to turn them into ideas that might work. They don’t call it ‘my idea’ as men do, women are more focused on making progress rather than defending their idea… Males are interested in looking good. With how they are perceived in the university. They are much more allergic to authority. They hate being told what to do, that their idea is off the wall***(**IRL man 7).

In some cases this gender difference in interactional styles was seen as reflecting men’s ‘bigger egos’ and was supported by the wider culture (O’Connor, 2000). In some cases this stereotype was based in their own experience of working with men in senior management:

*My experience of males in senior management is that they are territorial and it’s not only about space. There is a kind of jockeying for position that is more a male thing although obviously not all men…. men like to build little kingdoms, I don’t say that women don’t do it, but it’s less pervasive (IRL woman 13).*

It was striking that in a context where traditionally women’s career commitment has been problematized, both the Irish and the Swedish respondents suggested that men were stereotypically less committed to delivering job outputs than they were on enjoying the power or status related to that role:

*A lot of men are not so interested in doing the job - just being it. They want to be in it but not doing the job (IRL woman 15).*

*Men are allowed to be more negligent without anyone saying anything….. They can be more nonchalant, more careless, less prepared for a meeting. That is easier accepted. But I think it is changing. The younger women do not tolerate it, they will hiss and say: Now really! They are cockier and it is easier for them not to accept what large parts of the university world would accept* (SWE woman 6).

It is interesting that this Swedish respondent suggested that a benign attitude to men’s underperformance is changing, and this might well be seen as reflecting a reduction in what Connell (1995) called the patriarchal dividend. Women are generally seen by both men and women as working harder and more efficiently than men. Men are accused of being negligent, nonchalant and badly prepared. When men take on a position of trust they may well be counting on others to do the job, while they continue accumulating cultural capital (more valuable in their research career) by doing research. As long-standing monopolists of these power positions they may have developed a trust in their colleagues to cover for them or to protect them, at least smoothing things over. The ability to access resources to enable them to delegate to others can in turn be seen as a reflection of culturally legitimated patriarchal entitlement.

Hartmann (1981:14) has suggested that a key element in the maintenance of patriarchy is the ‘interdependence and solidarity amongst men that enable them to dominate women’. This phenomenon has been referred to in various terms which are variants of homosociality (Lipman Blumen, 1976; Hearn, 2001; Kanter, 1977/1993;Witz and Savage, 1992; Husu, 2001; Collinson and Hearn, 2005; Blackmore et al, 2006). Witz and Savage (1992:16) suggest that ‘homosociality is often gendered as men (and other dominant groups) ‘effectively ‘clone’ themselves in their own image’ limiting access to ‘those of their own kind’ so that a ‘culture of sameness’ is prioritised (Grummell et al 2007; see also Gronn and Lacey 2006; Thornton, 1989). Such processes can be seen as underlying interaction between men at senior management level. In that context it was suggested that men handled their relationship with other men carefully so as to avoid confrontation – with the outcome of meetings being seen as being set up in advance (such a picture contrasting vividly with the stereotypical stress on male aggression and reflecting a kind of male deference and reliance on informal understanding rather than rules)

*There’s a lot more care in terms of not offending other male colleagues* (IRL woman 1)

*Men are less likely to cause a row, I think men tend to side with the person in charge of the committee, they tend to try to get away with negotiating outside [the Committee] (*IRL woman 4).

*I noticed that when I became dean, some men got confused since they were used to phoning straight to the dean and make deals about things. And they could not do that with me. I could not work that way. I referred them and said that this is the way we’ll do it, this issue has to be taken up there and there and there. We must do it by the book. But I noticed that there was such a culture, some sort of fraternal culture* (SWE woman 7).

Ferguson (1984) suggested that organizations are inherently masculinist so that even if women are moving into more senior positions, the organizations keep their masculinist underpinnings. This approach has been criticised because of the suggestion that the categories of men and women are too broad and universal in relation to the very diverse experiences of different men and women.

Ely and Padavic (2007) suggested that in the United States where men and women in senior management had similar management styles it may be that women who have gained access to senior positions have learnt ‘male’ styles - or that those who had such styles were selected by predominantly male bosses because of their perceived similarity to the dominant style (see also Sinclair, 1998). It has been suggested that stereotypes frequently used in the workplace are formed through observations of successful role models, those who have historically been male (ILO, 2007). :For some, women’s adoption of male management styles was seen as a regrettable reflection of the absence of women as role models in these positions or of female role models who were *‘more masculine than the* *men’* (reflecting and reproducing stereotypical behaviour):

*‘I think it’s unfortunate but maybe it’s inevitable because there are so few role models…., so many women have themselves been mentored [and are] following in the footsteps of men…. you have not seen somebody doing it before* (IRL woman 14**).**

‘Think manager - think male’ seems to be a global phenomenon, especially among males’ (Powell et al, 2002:180): *‘I think it is easier to accept a man in this position because you imagine a man* ( SWE woman 7). It was striking how few of the Irish respondents had any experience of working with a female boss. Amongst those who had such experiences, the men particularly were likely to suggest directly or indirectly that other people saw it as problematic.There were also suggestions of male discomfort with women in positions in senior positions - even occasionally in Sweden*:*

*There are some people who are very uncomfortable with having a woman in a senior role* (IRL woman 23).

*I think there are always men who have a problem working with women. I meet them everywhere* (SWE woman 2.)

However there were very occasional examples in the Irish study of those who did not see a woman boss as at all problematic: *‘ I did not think anything of it’* (IRL man 17*);*  *“both of these experiences were very positive”*(IRL woman 13).These comments were more positive and numerous amongst the Swedish respondents: ‘*It is great. I really enjoy it* (SWE woman 5); ‘*There is thoughtfulness and consideration for the staff. … The rector tries to put people on assignments that they like’* (SWE woman 4).

Collinson and Hearn (1996) have referred to what they call ‘the practical enactment of careerist masculinity- this contrasting with women’s poor ability to market themselves and to take credit for their achievements, such patterns reflecting cross-cultural norms surrounding female modesty concerning individual achievements (Eagly & Carli 2007; Yancey Martin 1996; Bagilhole & Goode 2001; Doherty & Manfredi 2006; Davies-Netzley 1998). This careerist concept was also seen as reflecting a male stereotype of self promotion:

*they always brag. I think that is so tiresome. They get a need to tell all the time how great they are and everybody that they know and where they have been positioned. They create their power by squirting out – and women become like that too. They change, they imitate men’s way of being’* (SWE woman 5).

In summary then, Irish respondents especially the men, are much more likely than the Swedish respondents to assume that male gendered management styles are aggressive and hence in that sense are much closer to male stereotype (particularly one involving hegemonoic masculinity: Connell, 1995). Swedish men and women know about this stereotype, but largely reject it pointing to their own experience. However Irish women are challenging a patriarchal sense of entitlement which underpins stereotypical male management styles - and this is also occasionally being done by Irish men.

***Existence and content of female stereotypes***

Eagly et al (2003:572) suggest that there is a certain ‘incongruity’ between leadership roles and female gender roles in Western countries: ‘People’s beliefs about leadership are thus more similar to their beliefs about men than women’. Thus as Ely and Padavic (2007) noted in these contexts ‘to act ‘masculine’ at work raises questions about their status as women; but to act ‘feminine’ disqualifies them from leadership’. For women this means that they are continually judged because of their gender: ‘her subject position is seen as feminine, thus soft, weak and emotional’ (Priola, 2007: 29). ‘Becoming more male than men’ has been recognised as being an issue for female senior academics (Mavin, 2006: 80). In such contexts the disjoint between leadership and gender roles was such that women’s behaviour as leaders was least offensive when it most closely conformed to their stereotypical gender role.

Ferguson (1984) argues that there is a feminine way of organizing based on a special feminine capacity for friendship. She views these gendered ways of organizing not as a biological but as a social process. For Connell (1987: 187) the construction of femininity is seen as being reflected in a ‘display of sociability rather than technical competence’; it ‘is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men and therefore emphasises dependency, nurturance, and compliance’ (Ely and Padavic, 2007: 1129).Madden (2005:5) also suggested that a context where competence and sociability were the two key dimensions for assessing ‘Others’, women were more likely to be depicted as sociable than competent. There were suggestions about what a feminised style of management might involve:

*Females typically would be more people-centric and would know the people in their departments and be also much more adept at understanding personalities* (IRL man 9).

*the female approach would be what is the end game. You don’t have to put numbers but have a feel for what it might be and we can work on that then* ( IRL man 21).

This is a common view in earlier feminist literature (for instance Sörensen 1982). In gender theory it has been suggested that as a result of their early socialisation and their mothering in later life and working in jobs where they handle people - women develop what is called a *care-rationality* (or *responsibility-rationality*) tending to consider how a decision will affect a third party (child, patient or customer), while men because of their tendency to have more mechanical jobs develop a *technical, limited rationality* oriented toward focusing on more technical control such as what happens when they push a button (Sörensen 1982, also Lindgren 1996**).**

In the Irish study, while very few had female bosses,most of those who said that they had worked with women at their own level tended to have positive stereotypical views of women. Thus they stressed that women were less likely to engage in status related formulaic conversations; more likely to be concerned with outcomes; more likely to be aware of the context and more likely to be particularly aware of the impact of their decisions on people and less likely to be bounded by convention in their search for solutions

*They have a different perspective, a low toleration of bullshit, cutting straight to the chase.. women are less tolerant of everyone having five minutes of their say so they can say what everyone might expect them to say, there is not so much posturing.. More of a willingness to embrace new ideas, to push the boat out, to do something different* (IRL woman 14).

Much was made of women’s tendency to look at the overall consequences of decisions, rather than simply focussing on the financial aspect:

*I think it is always important with women to look at the wider issues…. Men may come with very specific issues and they want to see those specific issues dealt with. Women may come with specific issues but take a broader context… you have a much better contextualization of where those specifics are emanating from (IRL man 12).*

*Women think outside the financial. That is a significant difference….we looked more at the impact of our decisions on people…..[in languages] ‘they basically could not see the point as to why they should meet their budget - they spoke in terms of the importance of pedagogical experience and if they had three lectures to one student they could not see why that was not appropriate if they did not have the budget* (IRL woman 5).

Powell et al (2002) noted that in their study that despite the increased stress on feminine characteristics as useful in a management context, management stereotypes did not involve a positive valuation of female stereotypes (see also Lewis 2011). Similarly, the female stereotype was not used or valued in the Swedish interviews. Indeed one respondent mused over the difference between the ‘twitterish’ image of a certain female big business leader and her obvious competence at her job. Thus in the Swedish study there is even less recognition of an existence of female styles and stereotypes than of male ones.

In a context where women feel that they must try to conform to a masculine style, women often feel the need to avoid any nurturing or caring behaviour for fear of being criticised as too ‘soft’ (Priola, 2007; & Rhode, 2003). However in an Irish context it was noted that with the increasing ‘feminisation’ of authority at second level, a female nurturing style had emerged amongst both men and women:

*‘ the principals are that bit less authoritarian in style and approach, I sense there is a greater quality of nurturance amongst female Principals but modern male Principals have those attributes increasingly as well’ (IRL man 017)*

In some cases the Irish respondents identified specific individuals who deviated from an implicit female stereotype. Thus for example, in a context where a weak personality and an inability to fight for resources were implicitly part of a female stereotype, they referred to named individual(s) as:

*- Generally quite strong people, able to fight their corner in some way better than their male counterparts, able to make their case for whatever they are arguing for* (IRE man 20).

*-Very formidable, terrified men around the college, what she wanted she got she had only one agenda -promotion of her students and her discipline. if you worked hard for her she would find scholarships for you she would go and tell the President that she needed an office for you she was one of the blue stocking generation. She protected* *you and she minded you* (IRE Woman 15).

However in contrast to their Swedish counterparts, these individual experiences ultimately did not undermine the gender stereotype.

Some men rejected women’s special emotional skills: *‘I know there is a certain notion that females are more empathic’* but he really does not subscribe to that (IRL man 20). Others referred to a kind of emotional intelligence that women were assumed to have – partly drawing on essentialist views of women and partly reflecting women’s greater likelihood of being outside the established power hierarchy.

*Women are more discerning…. See more than one side I would always like to have some women with me when assessing because of how easily men can be hoodwinked by other men* (IRL woman 6).

Implicit in this is the idea that men’s relationships with other men make it difficult for them to perceive their weaknesses and to take hard decisions, whereas women do not experience similar difficulties.

Oshagbemi and Gill (2003) found that in their study women were less likely than men to delegate (see last section). This may reflect the fact that women are less used to being in power and/or less able to access resources to enable them to delegate effectively. It could also be seen as reflecting female managers typically highly visible minority status or reflect the greater tendency for women to be hired as managers in a crisis situation (what Ryan and Haslem 2005 call the ‘glass cliff’). Sinclair (1998) found that in studies of Australian executives, an eye for detail was seen as more important than international experience to their success, although it can also be seen as indicative of micro-management. It was striking that in the Irish study one of the main perceived difference in men and women’s working styles was women’s greater attention to detail-something that the men were ambivalent about:

*- the women will be a little more pernickety, the small print, details, exceptions to the rule, men will mutter about it but will wave it away and move on, but women are a little more particular about the detail…*

*I have felt that if you go into a meeting and women are there you have to have all your brief read, you don't make it up as you go along* (IRE man 16 ).

In the latter case, it is not clear to what extent women in the Irish study were vigilant in monitoring his performance or to what extent his attitudes reflected a stereotypical fear of women (In a context where typically the mothers of men in their 50s and 60s were full-time in the home: O’Connor, 1998). From the Swedish women’s point of view men’s ability to access resources, and hence to delegate was important in lightening their effective workload:

*I take it seriously and they don’t….we are such solid girls….We take our assignments seriously and we do them so well. A guy can be head of a department and still do 50 per cent research because he requires that there be people to delegate to…..Women might be less good at demanding resources* (SWE woman 2)

*Women actually do their assignments. You can trust them to do so (*SWE woman 6)

As outlined in the last section, the Swedish respondents saw young women as unwilling to tolerate poor performance – an indicator of generational change in the gender order.

It has been suggested that women’s lack of support for each other and a tendency to non-solidarity within the group may also reflect women’s subaltern status (the Queen Bee syndrome: Mavin, 2008). This is also part of a traditional stereotypical notion about women (O’Connor, 1992). There was very little evidence of this in the interviews with many of the Irish respondents explicitly referring to the extent of support they received from other women and the extent to which they were seen as opening up opportunities for other women: ‘*they saw me paving the way’* (IRL woman 5). In the Swedish interviews it came out only as a stereotype that was denied (SWE woman 4).

Although ‘feminine’ styles of relating may be seen as morally superior, they are incompatible with control (Cancian 1986). Thus although a number of studies have shown that men were equally capable of intimate interaction, men preferred to interact intimately less often than women (O’Connor 2002). For some of those in the present study the most important stereotypical difference between working with women and men was women’s greater intimacy and in particular their ease with talking about their personal and family situations:

*You can have different conversations……there is a certain shorthand or short cut that you can get somewhere faster than with men…. with some men you can get to the same place, but with women you can get there much quicker* (IRE woman 23).

In summary then Irish respondents were more likely to identify and to value a female stereotype (one that did not disrupt the established power structure). Irish men were most likely to refer to negative aspects of it- such as attention to detail-such attitudes arguably reflecting wider control issues.

**Discussion, Summary and Conclusions**

Sweden and Ireland are in theory characterized by the same ambitions as regards gender equality. But Sweden is implementing equality policies rather strongly in practice, while in Ireland it is more a question of lip service. Swedish gender equality policy is rooted in strong public opinion and a long tradition of social equality ambitions in general. If you want to survive in politics you have to be pro-feminist. Gender equality values do not evoke a similar response in the Irish public or the Irish state (the most recent example of this being a 35 per cent cut in the Budget of the National Women’s Council-the national advocacy and policy advisory structure for women).

The Swedish respondents are aware that there is a general discourse in society about what the genders are like i.e. stereotypes. There are lingering gendered stereotypes that are not corroborated by the immediate experiences of respondents. Thus many of them are confused and seem to hesitate about identifying stereotypes. Some of them reject gender stereotypes in general, saying the differences that could reflect personality or academic discipline, not primarily gender. Some of them point out that they are aware of these stereotypes but then reject or qualify them, particularly in relation to their own experiences or their own immediate surrounding. Especially in Sweden there is also the argument that power, rather than gender is the key phenomenon. Informal structures are common among the men in power. Homosociality is seen as a key obstacle for women’s careers.

Using Thuren’s (2000) meta-concepts of scope, force and hierarchy we can compare the gender orders at a general level in the two countries. In Ireland the gender order has a larger scope, a stronger force and is more hierarchical than the gender order in Sweden (Thurén 2000). This means that larger areas in Irish society are gendered (male-coded or female-coded), and that in Ireland male-coded activities are much more valued than female-coded, while these aspects are much milder and less important in Sweden. This of course does not mean that there is no gender inequality or gender order in Sweden, but it is not nearly as important as in Ireland. However in Ireland female stereotypes are more highly valued-a pattern that reflects and reinforces the patriarchal nature of the society and its culture.

In Sweden gender stereotypes seem mostly to be a remnant of an earlier kind of attitude that in any case is unthinkable as an explanation for women’s position in academia. We have found that awareness of gender stereotypes is common, but we may also distinguish those who problematize or reject the stereotypes (or privileges) from those who seem more ambivalent or accepting of them. In Sweden the phenomenon of articulated feminist values and measures that both men and women relate to in the wider state and societal discourse is important in reflecting and reinforcing the very different patterns amongst university senior managers than amongst their Irish counterparts.

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1. This is easily observed in any statistical overview of occupations and of entrepreneurs. See also Göransson 1998, 2000, Wikander 1988. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. As coined by journalist Walter Lippman. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. As defined in the Oxford Dictionary of Sociology (Gordon Marshall, ed,) 1998. Oxford UP. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. All except the leaders of the very small parties of Christian Democrats and the Sweden Democrats. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)