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# In the land of becoming: the gendered experience of communication doctoral students

Katharine Sarikakis

## ABSTRACT

*This article investigates two aspects of the experience of communications graduate students. It examines their relations with their departments and the academic staff most close to their work (supervisors and mentors), and the existence and impact of other factors, such as age and dependants, on the duration of their studies. Despite the differences of the educational systems and socio-economic factors between countries, the findings show that the experience of the communications doctoral student is gender specific. To that a number of factors may play an important role such as academic environment and personal/private life commitments.*

## KEYWORDS

Ph.D. students, postgraduate students, doctoral, gender and higher education, mass communication faculty, international, women and the academe

## Introduction

Are the academics of the future subjected to gendered experiences? Educational institutional arrangements have not always proven to be equitable for women educators and scholars. Are current Ph.D. students' experiences also shaped in a fashion similar to that of established scholars? The aim of this paper is to present and discuss quantitative and qualitative findings of a pilot survey into the experiences of doctoral students in communication and media studies (CMS) departments in universities across the world. This paper argues that disadvantaging traditions in higher education (HE) institutions, combined with gendered experiences shaped in women's 'private' lives, undermine equal opportunity policies and values of equity.

## Reproduction of inequalities in higher education or '*Her sex is her only drawback*'<sup>1</sup>

Doctoral students experience specific organizational structures when beginning their doctoral studies at university. Educational institutions are organizations with their own work cultures, regulations and hierarchies. Organizational culture is about 'norms, rituals and values about appropriate work behavior ... in essence, culture can be found in participants' everyday work lives' (Staudt, 1998, p. 63). HE institutions, at least in the industrialized Western countries (and especially in the countries where the

respondents of this study work), share certain common organizational characteristics and missions. As Staudt notes, organizational cultures 'sustain themselves through recruiting and rewarding those who assimilate' (Staudt, 1998, p. 63). Institutions are formed according to specific formative arrangements that reflect specific ideological norms and practices. The exclusion<sup>2</sup> of women from education in general, and universities in particular, constituted such an ideological predisposition, firmly rooted in patriarchal values, with effects on the material (and symbolic) world of womankind and the academe. Women's exclusion from the production of knowledge has resulted in the construction of mono-dimensional symbolic forms (gendered language), that marginalize the female subject (Spender, 1982), promote particular epistemologies that treat a specific subject (white, heterosexual, middle-class male) as universal, claim 'purity' of observation and description and, thereby, disqualify other methods of intellectual inquiry (Harding, 1991; Haraway, 1991; Creedon, 1996). It has also produced the mono-gendered academe, dominated by patriarchal work cultures, research agendas, promotion processes and curricula (Wilson, 1997; Fox, 2001; Noble and Mears, 2000; White, 2001; Blätter-Mink, 2002; Gupta and Sharma, 2002). In Harding's words: '... the concepts of women and of knowledge - socially legitimated knowledge - had been constructed in opposition to each other in modern Western societies' (Harding, 1991, p. 106).

In the wider educational system, examples of gendered constructions are the 'feminization' of the teaching profession and under-representation in decision-making positions (see also Staudt, 1998; Blätter-Mink, 2002). Also, worldwide, two-thirds of all illiterate people are women, an estimated 565 million people (Staudt, 1998, p. 85). Girls comprise 60% of all children of schooling age without access to education (UNESCO, 1998). 'Women in most areas of the world still find it more difficult than men to gain access to education [...] the difference is most acute in the Arab countries, India and the rest of South Asia' (Sutcliffe, 2001, sect. 58). The link between literacy and HE is obvious, as 'access to tertiary level studies depends on the degree of literacy that individuals achieve' (Kontogiannopoulou-Polydorides and Zambeta, 1997, p. 93).

On the positive side, 55% of all students enrolled in higher education in New Zealand (Brooks, 1997, p. 67) and almost half of all entrants in British universities by 1990 were women (Brooks, 1997, p. 17). However, despite enormous changes in the numbers of female students in HE, there is subject segmentation and faculty segregation (Blätter-Mink, 2002; Kontogiannopoulou-Polydorides and Zambeta, 1997). Women tend to concentrate in certain fields (often characterized as 'soft'), such as humanities and social sciences and remain significantly under-represented in

applied sciences. The number of women pursuing doctoral studies is also considerably lower than men. In Italy, for example, there has been a steady decline in female registrations in Industrial Chemistry between 1992-99 (from 46% to 32.8%), while the numbers of female students on their first year in Engineering remained at 17% and 37% in natural sciences (Giacometti, 2002, p. 47). In the UK, in 1994, a mere 243 females studied for a Ph.D. across all disciplines, compared to the double number of males (557), accounting for only 30% of all doctorate students, while women studying toward a first degree accounted for over 51% of all students (HESA, 1996). In 2001, 55.5% of all UK students obtaining a first degree were women, but, again, despite an increase, the percentage of women with a Ph.D. qualification remained lower than that of men, at 41.6% of all Ph.D. students (HESA, 2002). In Greece, women outnumber men in registrations for first degree (62,000 women making over 56% of students), but only 2,400 of the 6,000 students studying sciences are women (NSSG, 1998). Yet, even in MCS courses, a profoundly female-dominated discipline with 79% female students, the proportion of women progressing into doctoral studies is extremely low. Only 6.5% of all Greek female graduates in MCS are Ph.D. holders. On the contrary, 10% of the tiny fraction of male graduates of MCS departments gain Ph.D.s (NSSG, 1998).

A wide range of feminist literature examines the gendered organization of the university sector (Spender, 1982; Acker and Piper, 1984; Sutherland, 1985; the Taking Liberties Collective, 1989; Cirkseña, 1996; Rush, 1996; Brooks, 1997; Collins et al., 1998). Creedon (1996, p. 192) refers to the 'infrasystem', a set of institutional values that 'determine an organization and its response to changes in its environment ... it is an effective system of controlling those who deviate too far from the norm', namely those who do not conform with expected gender roles. The system of promotion and tenure overemphasizes publication record (where men are more likely to have the networks and time to achieve) and undervalues teaching, administration and pastoral care (where women are more likely to be assigned). Not only are gendered conceptions of value reflected, but also reinforced, through the academe, by ignoring the everyday social inequalities imposed on women in terms of time, family responsibilities or different approaches to work.

Henry's (2003) historical account of the status of women in mass communication and journalism departments in the United States discusses the extent of discrimination in journalism curricula, textbook content and treatment of women in the faculty. Henry locates the sharp increase in women faculty in MCS in the 1970s and 1980s in the nexus of women's movements, the establishment and expansion of women's studies courses and the organization of women within the major professional association in

the country (Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication)<sup>3</sup>. Rush et al. (2003) point out that the progress made by the late 1980s has slowed down: although now women comprise 31% of MSC faculty, compared to 20.4% in 1987, the ratio<sup>4</sup> of 1:3/1:4 (one woman to three/four men) has hit the 'glass ceiling'. Hierarchy engrained in university organizational culture does not serve women's everyday lives (Ferguson, 1984). Neo-classical economic assumptions that individuals participate freely in the 'marketplace' and achieve higher positions through hard work and the ideology of 'merit' prevailing in organizational practices (Harding, 1998; Noble and Mears, 2000) overshadow the real causes of inequality in the academe. Traditional expectations about women's primary procreative roles force women, through withdrawal or lack of supporting mechanisms, to divide time and energy between the academe and dependants. The question of 'career or family' is clearly gender specific. White male culture that deems certain forms of behaviour and scholarship correct (Alfred, 1999, p. 115), feelings of isolation and 'the experience of conflict between being a woman and a scientist' (Gupta and Sharma, 2002, p. 904) are parts of the infrasystem, the working environment that female academics have to encounter in the 'ivory basement of the divided campus' (Benokraitis, 1998, p. 21). And it has a knock-on effect on the university experience of their female students.

As institutions determine human behaviour by setting up predetermined codes of conduct (Berger and Luckman, 1966; Benokraitis, 1998; Ferguson, 1984), it is important to examine the conditions under which new faculty members work. The factors affecting career progress are not only limited to resources and interest in the subject matter. They are also professional guidance and support in the form of mentoring and academic advice. The significance of mentoring and supervision are well documented in studies of the relationship between mentoring and motivation and self-confidence, and are important in students' empowerment to seek better promotion later in their respective careers (Cramer et al., 2001; Benokraitis, 1998; Middlehurst, 1997; King, 1997). Lack of mentors and networks deprives students and especially women of the necessary encouragement required to put oneself forward for promotion (Todd and Bird, 2000; Eggleston Hackney and Bock, 2000). In their turn, today's research students will shape the cultures of education, research and knowledge of the academe of the future. As Staudt (1998, p. 85) emphasizes, higher education can have a long-term impact on students' commitment to community activism, social justice and civic engagement. In other words, education not only has an important role to play in one's professional development, it also affects the ways that people place themselves, in regard to human development and social justice.

Self-perception is important in the development of sense of 'belonging' in the department. Cramer et al. (2001) show the importance of mentors and supervisors as the immediate contact persons and role models in the institutional setting. The availability of role models and resources can affect the duration of studies, performance quality, socialization, networking and other informal activities that are significant for career development (Forster, 2001). These factors do not equally affect the academic lives of Ph.D.s. As Benokraitis (1998, p. 21) emphasizes, 'although many students sit in the same classrooms, read the same texts, take the same exams, and are taught by the same professors, they often receive substantially different educations, which can lead to substantially unequal futures'.

### **International pilot survey of gendered experiences during doctoral study**

This exploratory survey comprises a first attempt to map the experiences of CMS doctoral students at an international level. The survey sample cannot offer grand statements about the status of doctoral students around the world, but it can provide useful indications about the degree of genderedness embedded in HE institutions and, in particular, CMS departments. Questionnaires were sent to the Junior Scholars Network<sup>5</sup> (85 members). JSN members share access to information about conferences and publishing opportunities, are part of a network of peers, have some form of contact with the activities of the IAMCR<sup>6</sup> and access to a computer. Therefore, this particular group has certain advantages, in comparison to other students without access to computers or to information portals. The survey elicited a response from 30 women and 22 men from 11 different countries in 5 continents at a return rate of 60.5%.<sup>7</sup> The present study explores three main aspects of the doctoral life: formal work (doctorate), general guidance in the institution of HE, and a sense of belonging and self-perception that relate to integration in the institution.

The CMS Ph.D. student population is comprised of 42.3% male and 57.7% women respondents. The average Ph.D. student has predominantly a male supervisor<sup>8</sup> who is not reported to be particularly supportive and may have a female mentor.<sup>9</sup> In general s/he does not have a particular gender preference of mentors and supervisors because 'it doesn't matter' and because 'knowledge does not have a sex'. A variety of subjects are being researched, from cultural studies to political economy.<sup>10</sup> However, only 3 students out of 52 are currently working on gender-related or feminist epistemology topics.

### **Unbalanced supervision**

The relationship between the supervisor/advisor and the communications Ph.D. student can provide indications about

- the involvement of women faculty in advanced research supervision;
- the number or ratio of female and male faculty;
- possible influences of gender and research direction in the communication faculty; and
- the nature of relations developed with supervisors in terms of support, academic and other professional guidance.

The findings show that supervision is strongly gendered. Male students are mainly supervised by male faculty, by one (male) supervisor or, in the case of a team of supervisors, by an all-male team. Specifically, male supervisors direct 85% of male Ph.D. students; women supervise only 15% of male students. *Not a single male* Ph.D. student (0%) of those responding to the questionnaire is currently supervised by a team of both sexes. Overall, male staff currently supervises more than 71% of *all* Ph.D. students.

By contrast, more than one-third of women Ph.D.s have a female supervisor alone, while a further 6.9% have a team of both sexes. The rest, 62% of female Ph.D.s, are supervised by a man. In this survey, *only* female students were supervised by a team of supervisors of both sexes. As the data indicate, three-quarters of all available female supervisors are assigned to female students, compared to 51% of male supervisors. Thus, whereas male supervisors are evenly assigned to both male and female Ph.D. students, women faculty are disproportionately concentrated in supervision of female students.

At a first glance, an average of over three-quarters of all students would not place particular attention to the supervisor's gender, if they were called to choose. However, a closer look shows that although most male students (85% of them) state that gender 'does not matter', not a single response stated preference for a female supervisor. One-fourth of all female Ph.D. students would prefer a female supervisor, and approximately 7% would prefer a male supervisor (see Table 1). This compares with 15% of all male students who actively prefer a male supervisor. Students who replied that the gender of their supervisor does not matter, explain that 'compe-

Preferred sex	Male (Ph.D. students)	Female (Ph.D. students)	Total
<b>SUPERVISORS</b>			
Male	15.00	6.90	
Female	0.00	24.14	
Does not matter	85.00	68.97	
<b>MENTORS</b>			
Male	11.11	4.00	
Female	5.56	32.00	
Does not matter	83.33	64.00	

Table 1.

tence is more important than gender', they are 'interested in brains not sex' of the supervisor, they want 'someone to inspire' them and that 'academic experience and personality matters'.

Responses further differ on their reasons of selection. As mentioned above, men have stated a preference only for male supervisors. The universal 'avoidance' or 'rejection' of women academics as supervisors by male students may be indicative of old stereotypes still prominent in our days. Male students explain that working with a male supervisor is 'easy', creates a 'free atmosphere' and there is a 'natural affinity'. More women than men showed a preference for a same-sex supervisor. Their responses show that other factors appear to be significant. The reasons stated are: because (female) students 'work on a sensitive topic', 'women are more reliable and helpful' and there is a relation of 'collaboration not of competition' between them and because they 'would feel that the university is a place for women'.

Two interesting dimensions of a process of engendered education emerge. First, the fact that women still comprise less than one-third of faculty is visible to the female student. 'There is no evidence that recruitment of more women students has any impact on the representation of academic women' (Brooks, 1997, p. 129). In Germany, women comprised 29% of all academics in 1994 (Fröhlich and Holtz-Bacha, 1995), in Nigeria data from 1988 reveal a low 6.5% (Okunna, 1992). In the United Kingdom, post-1992 universities have 20% women in their ranks, as opposed to 14% at pre-1992 universities across all disciplines (Forster, 2001). In Italy, women are 28.8% of all academics (Giacometti, 2002), in Canada 18.8% (Acker, 1994). Women make 31% of all communication academics and 18% of full professors in the United States (Rush et al., 2003). In the United Kingdom, in 2000, women made 12% of full professors across all disciplines (THES, 2003). In Greece, women make up 25% of the total academic staff, while in all three CMS departments they are 38%, all concentrated at lower ranks. There are no female professors in Greek media departments (NSSG, 1998).

Second, the assignment of female supervisors is not proportionally equal to male and female Ph.D. students. This may be because women students feel more comfortable with women supervisors and/or because the topics chosen are closer to those of women's interests. There is no evidence to support the latter hypothesis in the current study, since only three topics were closely related to gender issues. Indeed, Fröhlich and Holtz-Bacha report that only 1% of all lectures available in German universities in the winter semester of 1994-95 dealt with gender issues (Gallagher, 1995). Another study in the Netherlands reveals similar patterns (Van Zoonen, 1989). These observations indicate a possible relationship between the courses taught and the research conducted at advanced postgraduate

level. The implications of this segregation expand to the career development of female staff. Women may be seen (by male administrators in particular) capable of supervising *only* women-centred research (or the 'odd women's topic') therefore, being denied supervision of other areas (in many cases these subject areas are seen more positively in a promotion application).<sup>11</sup>

A supportive supervisor is very important not only for the student's career, but also for fostering a feeling of belonging in the faculty and the academic community. The vast majority of the students (80% of males and 69% of females) stated that their supervisors are supportive. Male Ph.D. candidates with female supervisors felt more supported than those with male supervisors: 100% of male Ph.D. students with female advisors stated that their advisors are supportive, compared to 76.5% of those with male supervisors. Female Ph.D.s with supervisors of both sexes also responded unanimously (100%) that their supervisors are supportive. Only male students with male supervisors (5.9%) said that their supervisors are not supportive.

Over half of the women with female supervisor and almost two-thirds of women with male supervisors are satisfied with the support they receive. Female Ph.D. students gave no negative responses, but more female than male students categorized their supervisors under 'medium supportive'. Less than half of female students with female supervisors, and one-third of those with male supervisors, said that their supervisors are generally supportive, but not as much as they would like them to be. The same was reported by 17.6% of male students with male supervisors.

As examples of support, students gave a variety of responses, according to the supervisor's gender and the student's perception of what constitutes 'support'. A female student supervised by both male and female tutor said, 'they read and comment on my writings fairly soon. That is the most important thing, to get comments. [She] informs me about conferences, seminars. The other [he] never does. This is a minus for him'. A 33-year-old female student talking about her male supervisor, whose support she describes as medium says, '... he reminds me of my project every now and then but gives too much other stuff to work on to realistically have time for it'. Another 38-year-old male student said about his female supervisor 'we exchange ideas ... she has invited me to present [a] paper in an international conference'. Quite different is the experience of this 32-year-old female student: '[my supervisor] supports my general ideas, but has no time at all for practical guidance. Reading my texts takes him ages. Apart from help with my thesis, he does not give me any other support, e.g. telling me about conferences, call for papers in journals'. A 42-year-old female student said that almost all of her supervisors are supportive (both

female and male) with the exception of 'this one male professor ... I found his behavior inappropriate in a "father knows best" kind of way'.

### **Being mentored**

The importance of mentors for the professional development of aspiring academics has been well documented in various studies. Gallagher's (1995) international study of the status of women in media industries worldwide emphasizes the role of mentoring in the professional development of women in the sector. Collins (1998, pp. 59-60) points out that women and ethnic-minority faculty are less likely to be mentored in making important connections but also learning the 'rules of the game'. As Collins (1998) reports, 63% of women and 71% of men who were employed by a highly select research institution have had a mentor. Carli (1998, p. 284) also emphasizes the uses of networking and informal mentoring in identifying gender discrimination and in promoting organized action against it. Whether formal or informal, mentoring and networking support is crucial, not only for the career development of junior academics and faculty but also influential in cognitive factors, such as motivation, self-confidence and feeling of belonging. The lack of mentors and role models is one of the five main structural barriers to equality in HE identified by Forster (2000, p. 318).<sup>12</sup> Cramer et al. (2001) extensively discuss the effects and types of mentoring for graduate students and junior faculty in the CMS departments of the United States. Increasing evidence shows that women's style of mentoring, which encourages relations based on equality and mutual support, is more helpful for women than hierarchy-based styles (Cramer et al., 2001; Eggleston Hackney and Bock, 2000).

Male students do not actively prefer women supervisors, but some of them prefer female mentors. Almost 67% of all Ph.D. students in this survey have mentors of either sex, in many cases even both (10%). The data indicate some improved distribution of men and women mentors to students compared to that of supervisors. Yet, gendered patterns appear too. Men are mentors for 35.7% of women and 28.5% of the men students. Women are mentors to 17% of female students. More female (14%) than male students (4.7%) have mentors of both sexes. There is still a significant 25% of the women and 43% of the men who are without a mentor.

Male students show some active preference for female mentors, although generally the trends remain considerably similar to the data on supervision. Again, although men and women state that mentors can be of any gender, only 6% of male students would like to have a female mentor compared to one-third of all female students (32%). In contrast, only 4% of female and 11% of male students preferred a male mentor. There was an expected decrease in the number of those stating no particular preference at 64% for women and 83% for men.

The data provide some positive feedback about the importance of women mentors, but some questions also arise. Mentoring is considered to be closer to women's roles as carers. It is not a formally accredited task. A mentor does not 'assess' or 'direct' the work of a student, so power relations can be alleviated. A mentor offers professional support and advice, quite often psychological support and even a listening ear. The 'care-giver' and non-threatening character of the role of mentor may be the reason why even men (albeit a small number) preferred a woman mentor.

### **Belonging where? Perceiving the faculty**

Integration into the institutions, to which doctoral candidates are affiliated, is one of the two factors identified as crucial to a successful graduate career and the development of an appropriate self-image<sup>13</sup> (Taylorson, 1984, p. 147). One of the important indicators of integration is the candidate's self-perception about their status within the department. Role models provide a Ph.D. student with the real-life example of the possibility of succeeding in the academe. This is particularly important for women and other historically excluded groups and may influence the way that students perceive their position in the world of the institution, the feeling of being part of and 'fitting in to' the academe.

Half of the women feel they are not quite a student, but neither quite a 'real' researcher. However, 37% of women report that their departments *treat them like students*. Two-thirds of male students (more than women) perceive themselves as being between a student and a researcher. However, one-third of male students say that their departments treat them as *members of staff*. The results of these two questions need further qualitative research to be thoroughly understood. However, combined with testimonies related to the relation of the student with their supervisor, the data indicate differences in men and women's experience. In this survey for example, not a single man has reported patronizing behaviour (not being listened to, being dismissed) from his supervisor whereas women have done so. Men may tend to overestimate their 'value', have positive experiences in the faculty or feel comfortable within a male-dominated academic environment, having plenty of role models to look up to. Women on the other hand, are more likely to underestimate their value, and/or be treated not with the same respect as their male colleagues. Whatever the cause, women Ph.D.s appear to feel less valued.

It is reasonable to argue that the presence of women academics in the department has an effect on female Ph.D. candidates' self-perception, in terms of making role models available, and balancing a male-dominated academic environment. One's identity is validated by one's environment; however, perceiving one's environment is also part of the process of integration (or lack of it). The survey sought to identify the ways that

women and men doctoral students perceive their institutional affiliations. In particular, Ph.D. candidates were asked about the number of female and male faculty in their respective departments.

Over one-third of all male students were not able to give the ratio, proportion or an approximate estimation of the numbers of the faculty members by gender (only 5% of the women were in the same position). Moreover, men are three times more likely than women to say that their faculties have equal numbers of male and female members. Male Ph.D. students tend to overestimate, or ignore, the ratio or number of women in their departments. Earlier classroom studies have shown that male students are less aware of gender, conceivably due to their non-subordinate positions. For example, Spender's classroom observations (1982) led her to conclude that 'equality' is measured according to the presence of men. The data reinforce the evidence that male students tend to perceive their, male-dominated, environment as fair or equal.

Women, on the other hand, are more perceptive of gender-related issues, perhaps due to their subordinate position and the impact of inequality on real-life experience. Although in a few cases, equal numbers are reported, professorial posts are male dominated. The reported ratio of women and men faculty remained 1:3 or 1:4. This is significant, firstly because the discipline of communication tends to attract a majority of female students at an undergraduate level and one would expect higher numbers of female professors. Secondly, despite research into, and measures against discrimination the ratio hardly improves. Latest data reveal, that in the United Kingdom very little has changed in academia, in terms of numbers and ranking, in the last ten years (Forster, 2000). This leads to the question of whether the measures taken, such as the opening up of HE for women, are adequate, sufficient or predominantly rhetorical. In the majority of countries examined, there is considerable lack of affirmative action policies or indeed any plan to address the problem of inequality (Gallagher, 1995).

To the question of whether Ph.D. students feel optimistic about their personal future and the future of the academe generally over half of both men and women stated that they feel optimistic. Not sure about their personal future are 39% of women, but only 15% of men. One-third of female students say that they are 'not optimistic' and almost a third of all male Ph.D. students say that they are 'not sure'. The reasons for optimism lie in the fact that 'education is open to more people than before and this is a positive thing with positive implications for the future of the academe'. However the data show that more women than men are not optimistic about their own future. Comparing the way students feel within their departments, it is interesting to note that the *same* proportion of women who feel optimistic about the future of the academe and their own, are those who see them-

selves as researchers. On the contrary, those women (more than one-third) who are not sure about their future, and are not optimistic about the academe, are the women who report that their departments treat them more like students than faculty members. A larger sample is needed to provide us with satisfactory answers about a possible correlation between these factors, as self-perception may influence one's view about the general condition of the academe and their place within it, and vice versa.

#### **A matter of time: long, lacking and gendered**

Time is an important factor in pursuing a Ph.D. degree. The traditional academic reward system disadvantages women because it does not take into account the social pressures on women's time and energy. Research and publication, necessary activities for employment and career progression are time demanding. Numerous studies have addressed the double discrimination that academic women are subjected to (Sutherland, 1985; Scott and Porter, 1984; Chrisler, 1998; Forster, 2000). A doctorate is an intensive research process, requiring primarily a long-term commitment in terms of time and energy. An aspect that would shed light into these factors is the role of families, children and dependants in women Ph.D. candidates' lives and their impact on the duration of doctoral studies. The one significant parameter that was examined was that of the time needed for the completion of the Ph.D. The questionnaire asked the respondents to state their *estimated* time of completion. Then responses were taken into account and were compared to the stated *current* (at the time of responding) year into the graduate programme.

The highest single category is of male students (38%) who complete their Ph.D. degrees within four years. Another third finish within three years (an average minimum required time in many countries). Women need longer. While nearly one-third of the women finish within three years, the majority of women take longer with nearly 20% taking seven years to complete: women make up 71.4% of all students who need seven years for completion. Only 9% of men need seven years to reach completion. By the end of the fourth year nearly 70% of all male Ph.D. students will have completed, compared to just over half of all women students. The hypothesis here is that students completing within this period are relatively young and have no dependants or are not primarily responsible for caring for dependants. Indeed, half of all women who finish their degrees in three years are 21-25 years old, while the other half are women 26-30 years old. In this study, all women who are 51-60 years old have reported seven years as the time needed for their completions. Similarly, half of the 31-35-year-olds and *all* women who are 36-45 years old estimate a five-year period in which to complete. In comparison, data on men's age and duration are evenly spread across most categories. For example, of the men between 21-25 years old, one-third finishes in three years, one-third in four years and

another third in six years. Of those men completing within four years, 12.5% are 21-25 years old, half are 26-35 years old and 37.5% are 36-40 years old.

Only 12% of women with dependants manage to complete their studies within three years while 75% of the women students with dependants complete their studies within five to seven years. One-third (33%) of men with dependants finish within five to seven years. Of the women without dependants, 42% complete in three years. In this survey, all of the women in their seventh year of study had dependants. By contrast, balanced numbers of male Ph.D. students with and without dependants finish within 4 years (66% and 63%).

The existence of dependants in the lives of men does not seem to make a difference to the duration of their studies. Also, the later in life women commence their doctoral studies, the longer it takes them to complete. However, it appears that men have 'no age'. Compared to the fact that women with dependants also need longer time than men with dependants, it is obvious that both factors, age and family responsibilities (often coming with age), have a negative impact on female Ph.D. students' completion timeframe. This may have negative effects in the career prospects of women, if other factors are considered, such as age discrimination in the hiring process (Shen and Kleiner, 2001) and the longer periods that women take for progression through ranks in the academe (Todd and Bird, 2000).

### **Discussion**

A 'sexual division of labour' dominates the organizational structures of the academe, where women are concentrated in specific areas (e.g. only women students prefer women supervisors, the majority of students *have* male supervisors, women supervisors tend to be assigned to female students). Some of the tasks performed (mentoring) and research carried out (feminist or women-centred) by women remain marginalized and undervalued for career progression purposes. The implications of the dominance of a 'male culture' in communication departments are also reflected in the under-representation of gender issues in the curriculum and research topics carried out by Ph.D. students. Comparative European or international research on the link between the status of female faculty, the development of curricula, research design and research undertaken by future faculty (Ph.D. students) would provide valuable insights to the construction of knowledge in our universities.

Two separate versions of the academe are emerging in this study. They correspond to the contrasting realities of female and male students. Attention in considering further research should be turned to the factors

that determine these unequal realities. The factors are systemic and systematic: they are institutional/structural, interpersonal, social and economic. Across these four spheres, both advisors and students are subjected to realities that are gender related and have long-term effects. Research should concentrate on the effect of the gendered academe on the career choices of Ph.D. students, but also on the pedagogical and scholarly choices the new faculty makes. Gender-specific conditions involve time for the completion of the Ph.D., integration in the department and self-perception. This study offers some strong indications of gender inequity in a discipline that has often stood at the forefront of critical and progressive enquiry and which tends to recruit a vast majority of female students. Comparative national surveys at that level would be of immense value for a number of educational actors: the universities as institutions, policy-makers, students, researchers and, in general, the academic community and even practitioners. A planned international study exploring the issues discussed in this paper will generate data necessary for longitudinal statistical analysis.

Today, there are more studies that provide evidence on gender discrimination than otherwise. Action research could take into account these and other studies currently under way.<sup>14</sup> Recommendations for the democratization of organizational structures and the mainstreaming of gender issues have also been made in several studies (see for example Rush et al., 2003). At the heart of policy recommendations stands the belief that intentional or unintentional, overt or subtle sexism in the academe harm not only individuals but also educational cultures and even the very purpose of knowledge.

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#### NOTES

1 Quoted in June Handeland Lee, 'The Birth of a Notion', *Landmarks: Magazine of Northwest History and Preservation*, 3 (Fall 1984), insert, p. 3., cited in S. Henry (2003), *'But Where Are All the Women?': Our History*, (page numbers added by Henry). Henry discusses the case of Merze Marvin, who was proposed for the post of university teacher at the University of Washington's journalism department by Walter Williams, Dean of the School of Journalism at the University of Missouri in 1916 (the Dean of the Journalism Department at the University of Washington 'did not have the nerve' - quoted from the personal correspondence between the two men - to employ a woman).

2 The Harvard Law School is only just celebrating 50 years of women graduates!

3 In 1987, 4.4% of women respondents to a nationwide survey were full professors compared to 27.8% of males, while 39% of women were assistant professors compared to 27.8% of male respondents (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1988, p. 11 in Henry 2003: n.p.).

4 Also called the R3 hypothesis or ratio of Reinforced and Recurrent Residuum (R3). According to this hypothesis, Rush (1999) predicted that women in the communications industry and education will hit the 'glass ceiling' at a maximum expected ratio of 1:3, 1:4 (one woman to three men, one woman to four men). It refers to the places available to women, *after* most available male positions are secured.

5 The Junior Scholars Network is a network of communication scholars in their doctoral or early postdoctoral careers.

6 International Association of Mass Communication Researchers.

7 Australia, 3 respondents; Bangladesh, 8; Belgium, 6; Germany, 5; Greece, 7; Taiwan, 5; UK, 8; USA, 7; European other, 3.

8 The terms 'supervisor', 'advisor' and 'director of studies' are used interchangeably to refer to the academic supervision of the research carried out by the graduate student.

9 A 'mentor' is anyone other than the supervisor who may provide support, advice and guidance in career and often personal matters.

10 Reported research topics included (those in italics have a possible feminist and/or gender focus): new technologies; cultural identity; telecommunications; language; media systems; foreign and international news; public opinion; photography; *representations of domestic space*; multiculturalism and media; organizational communications; film policy; ethnicity and the media; apocalyptic themes in media; radio; identity and subculture; health communication; rural newspapers and community; media and multiculturalism; comic strip; journalism education; *communication and ageing*; uses of media in developing countries; *feminism, heterosexuality and media*; performance as cultural object.

11 I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

12 The other four being: (1) recruitment and selection policies; (2) career development and promotion policies; (3) appraisal systems; (4) institutional male power and the roles of women academics.

13 The other is integration with a student reference group.

14 For example, the international MAP survey [www.zanesville.ohiou.edu/icasurvey](http://www.zanesville.ohiou.edu/icasurvey) and the Future Faculty project in the UK.

### Biography

Katharine Sarikakis teaches international communications and media policy at Coventry University. Her research interests are European media policy and the politics of international organizations, gender and information society policies, education and literacy in IS. She is a member of the programme 'Preparing the Future Faculty' (USA) and is presently conducting a nationwide survey of Ph.D. students in communication and media studies in the United Kingdom.

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