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## **The Care Ceiling in Higher Education**

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*Mostly not-employed mothers set the cultural standards for 'good' parenthood and 'good' education, while childless subjects set the standards in the world of work; [those] ... want to do both, will be measured by the standards set by those ... that are only into one of the spheres* (Bomert and Leinfellner, 2017:118, citing König, 2012: 193)

### **Introduction**

While care is conventionally framed as a gendered-female concern, and while women remain society's default informal and formers carers, neither the theory nor practice of care is the prerogative of women (Held 1996; Tronto 1993). Care is a non-normative necessity as life cannot persist without care (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017; Tronto 1993). The survival of humanity (Tronto 2013) and the natural environment (Haraway 2007) require us to re-think how we research the world in care terms.

Despite the salience of care as a political issue, academic debates about social justice, outside of feminist scholarship, do not generally define care relations (namely affective relations of love, care and solidarity) as key considerations (Lynch 2014) with Honneth's work (1995) being an exception. Yet it is vital to address care-related injustices, given the hegemony of capitalism as political-economic system (Wright 2010), and the fact that the ethics of capitalism are deeply antithetical to the ethics of care (Federici 2012; Fraser 2016).

The contradictions between doing caring and doing paid work are not confined to any one sector of society or of the economy (Folbre 1994; Tronto 2013), though they are particularly pertinent in higher education in an era of commercialisation where the anti-care ethic of capitalism has so successfully invaded research and teaching internationally (Cardozo 2017; Downing 2017; Slaughter and Leslie 1997). As the post-crisis austerity policies implemented in Ireland since 2008 have led to a rise in the corporatisation, commercialisation and managerialism of education generally, (Lynch, Grummell and Devine 2012) and in higher education in particular, (Holborow and O'Sullivan 2017), it is especially important to assess the impact of these on working, learning and caring relations.

The empirical research underpinning the paper is an attempt to do this, while also being an attempt to put thinking-with-care at the heart of educational research as proposed by Puig de la Bellacasa (2012, 2017). It shows how a care-related epistemological lens allows scholars to unveil hidden layers of inequality, not only in gender relations but also in work

relations more generally, especially in terms of their interface with love and/or care relations with family, colleagues and students.

The paper also contributes to on-going debates about the gendered and care-disinterested character of organisations, (Acker, 1990; Coser 1974) especially higher education organisations (Acker and Feuerverger 1996; Bagilhole and White 2011; Blackmore and Sachs 2007; Devine, Grummell and Lynch 2011; Grummell, Devine and Lynch 2009; Henderson and Moreau 2019; Lynch 2010; O'Connor and O'Hagan 2016). It investigates how the greedy logics of commercially-driven higher education crowd out space and time for care, be it of family members, students or even oneself. While this applies particularly to women, given the moral imperative on them to be the primary carers (Bubeck 1995; O'Brien 2007), it also applies to men albeit to a lesser degree (Dubois-Shaik and Fusulier 2017).

Most of the research on higher education focuses on those employed in academic or quasi-academic roles, our data shows however that the pressures to perform-at-all-costs also impacts on administrative and technical/service staff whose work is allied to targets and performance measures, especially in the university sector. The carelessness of academia is not just an issue for academics. The logic of carelessness (Lynch 2010) pervades higher education relations more generally.

### **Care, Women and the Academy**

We live within a gendered social order (Connell 1987) where the requirements of occupational success are defined by those in power, mostly but not exclusively men who are care commanders rather than care foot soldiers (Lynch, Lyons and Cantillon, 2009: 132-157). Given the biological and temporal reality of pregnancy and birth at crucial times in women's occupational and reproductive life, and the moral imperative on women to care (Bubeck, 1995; O'Brien, 2007), women cannot generally offer the 24/7 availability of the ideal academic or ideal professional (Benschop and Brouns 2003; Bomert and Leinfellner, 2017; Herschberg, et al. 2018); they are significantly less likely to be care-free (Acker and Dillabough 2007; Bailyn 2003; Probert 2005).

The impact of the gendered order on women in the academy is reflected in their drop-out rates from academic careers (ESF, 2009; Xie and Shauman, 2003), and in their lower occupational statuses not only as academics, but also as professional and support staff. Although women in Europe have consistently outperformed men academically, comprising 59% of all graduates in 2010, just 44% of lecturers, 37% of senior lecturers and 20% of professors are women (European Commission 2013: 6). In the UK, women hold only 39% of full-time academic positions, and just 36% of permanent full-time positions that involve both teaching and research (Locke, 2014: 12-13; 21).

Data from Germany also suggests that academia is not especially child-friendly, for women: 75% of the female research fellows and 62% of the female professors in Germany had no children in 2006 (Bomert and Leinfellner 2017: 120). Female research fellows, as well as female professors, are more likely to remain childless than their male colleagues throughout their careers: 62% of the female compared with 33% of the male professoriate had no children in 2006 (ibid). In North America, academic women are less likely to have children

than other highly educated professional women (Reuter 2018:99, citing Mason, Wolfinger, & Goulden, 2013: 65)<sup>i</sup>.

### *Care and Gender: Irish higher education*

There is no national data in Ireland on how many female or male academics have children or how many women or men in other posts in the universities and other colleges of higher education have children. Neither do we know what, if any, care responsibilities they have outside of work for dependent children or adults. There is also no national data available on the care responsibilities of students; their relational lives are as invisible as those of staff. However, we do know there is a leaky pipeline for women as they move from more junior to more senior posts.

Although over half of university lecturers (51%), and third-level graduates (52%) are women, just 24% of senior professors and 30% of other senior professional, management and support staff are women in universities. The pattern is not dissimilar in the Institutes of Technology though the proportion of senior academic women is somewhat higher: 36% of Senior Lecturer (the most senior academic grade) are held by women; however, only 17% of the most senior professional, management and service staff are held by women in the Institutes (HEA 2018).

One of the dangers in assessing levels of inequality in organisations is focusing exclusively on permanent staff and/or only examining the promotional opportunities for more elite staff, such as academics. There is a need to look down as well as up the occupational ladder when assessing levels of inequality, especially gender inequality (O'Keefe and Courtois 2019). There are several hundred people employed in higher education who are part-time, temporary and/or on contract, at different levels and grades; they supply much of the hands-on labour in higher education (Cush 2016; O'Keefe and Courtois 2019). Of those employed as lecturers, 45% are not permanent and full-time in universities, while the same is true of 25% of those in the Institutes of Technology (Cush 2016). The great majority of research staff (an estimated 80%) are also temporary (Loxley 2014). And of those lecturing who are temporary and part-time, 61% are women in the universities and 55% in the Institutes (HEA 2018).

As 45% of those who are employed in Irish higher education are professional, management and support staff rather than academics, their gender profile also matters. The majority of those who are temporary and part-time, working as professional, management and support staff in the universities (74%) and the Institutes (73%), are women. Of those in the lowest earnings bracket among the part-time professional, management and support staff, 68% are women in the universities, and 88% in the institutes. The lower status and earnings of women holds also true of other recognised colleges of higher education (HEA 2018: 5-7).

### **The Study on Working, Learning and Caring**

This paper is based on a study of ten higher educational institutions in Ireland. The aim of the study was to investigate the impact of neoliberalism and related managerial policies on working, learning and caring<sup>ii</sup>. It examined the ways in which doing hands-on primary caring

interfaces with the expectations of the ideal worker in academic settings. While a major focus of the study was on academic staff, it also examined the experiences of professional, management and support staff as they were also subject to performance appraisal, albeit in different and less clearly defined ways to academics.

While the core research sites were two major universities and two large institutes of technology, the study also involved collecting and analysing equality policies and practices across six other higher education institutions<sup>iii</sup>, ten in total. Data on the colleges were obtained from college websites and printed reports and policies in the first instance. Having received permission from the heads of colleges, interviews were then arranged with strategically sampled employees across the colleges with the assistance of the HR managers. Those chosen for interview represented different types and grades of staff, and in the case of academics, different disciplines and statuses<sup>iv</sup>. In-depth semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 102 people<sup>v</sup> of whom 59% were women. All types of employees were sampled, senior management, professors/lecturers, researchers, IT/technicians, library staff, administrative staff, HR, and general service workers. Of the women interviewed, 43% (n=22) were employed as academics, compared with 23 (55%) of men. Almost 63% of the interviewees (sixty-four people, thirty-three women and thirty-one men), had some care responsibilities outside of employment.

As the study addressed many issues of inequality generally, and care and gender inequality particularly, only a small selection of these themes can be examined here. The remainder of the paper is divided into a discussion of five key care themes emerging from the data. The first section analyses the ways in which new managerial modes of governance impact on the cultural environment in higher education in terms of time use and productivity. The ways in which audits systems can be gamed, used as threats, and impact differentially on precarious workers is explored in the following section. A third section examines how a focus on outputs, measured in narrowly-defined numerical terms has perverse effects (Shore and Wright 2015) in care terms; it creates a culture of carelessness which is deeply gendered and is especially hostile to those work on contract and/or who are caring alone. This is followed by an analysis of the 'baby dilemma', for young women, when and if they will have children given that the 'stellar' candidate for most jobs is expected to be care-free. The gendered character of care work within the academy concludes the data analysis.

### **Neoliberalism: New Managerialism in the academy**

New managerial modes of monitoring and appraisal are the organisational tools of neoliberalism (Lynch and Grummell 2018). One of their primary objectives is the institutionalisation of market values and practices in organisational systems and processes (Clarke, Gewirtz & McLaughlin, 2000). The institutionalisation of performance appraisal practices whereby people are individually audited and rewarded for productivity on an ongoing basis is a signature feature of managerialism. As auditing is built on principles of financial accounting, what can be counted numerically and translated directly into a financial statement is what matters most; professional trust and judgement is displaced by formal auditing and inspections. When people are only rewarded for what can be measured this has 'perverse effects': it feeds the pursuit of self-interest in a totalising way (Shore and

Wright 2015). As there is no metric for good will and collegiality that will count in individualised appraisals, people are encouraged to be calculating and self-focused (Muller 2018).

*New Managerialism, time and productivity*

After the financial crisis of 2008, State funding for higher education in Ireland declined significantly leading to a loss of staff; however, student intake did not decline, rather, it increased by 25% (Cassells 2016: Figure 2 A1)<sup>vi</sup>. Given this, staff were and are under intense pressure to produce more with fewer resources. The intensification of work was, not surprisingly, a constant theme in the interviews, not just among academics but among other professional and support staff.

For academics to reach the gold standard required for employability, and subsequently for promotion, they need to work at weekends, in the evening, and sometimes during holidays. While the pressures to publish and work outside paid hours was, at times, self-imposed, and was resisted by some who disengaged with the process, most academics worked in the evenings, early mornings and/or weekends. Working without time boundaries was regarded as normal by both women and men:

*Sometimes it gets so chaotic that I give up trying, other times I make conscious efforts to say right, this a night off I'm going to meet some friends .... and not thinking at all about my work. But the work is at home with me, yeah, a lot of the work is at home with me.* (Female, part-time, contract lecturer, University (No. 5)

For those who were Head of School, there seemed to be no time boundaries:

*If I didn't stay here till seven or eight o'clock, I would have to do a couple of hours at home, during term time, yea, yea definitely ... I do at least sixty-five [hours a week] I'd say....* (Female Head of Department, Institute, No. 78)

With the development of social media and email, the boundaries between personal and professional life had become very blurred. The breaking of boundaries applied to professional staff as well as academics.

*So, yea, I would check emails every few hours just to make sure that I'm not missing anything, even if I'm on holidays ... So, no, it wouldn't be nine to five, you know .... if I got one from my boss [at night-time] ... I'd normally reply instantly ... And that could be Friday, Saturday, Holy Day, it doesn't matter...* (Male professional support Unit, Institute No 79)

Some heads of departments had worked out protocols regarding emails; they did not contact staff by email out of office hours. This was not the norm however:

*What I'd love to see is you know cultural change where a college, colleges would agree that ... there isn't an expectation that staff should be answering emails ... outside of hours [of work] ... that you're kind of checking emails ... at weekends.* (Male Lecturer, Institute, No. 34)

Systematic surveillance and appraisal, allied to insecurity for early-stage career academics and mandatory mobility (required to move to a new city or country every one or two years), meant that several younger staff expressed an instrumentalist attitude of career entrepreneurialism to their work:

*I'm going to be leaving, so I'm kind of, it's very instrumental, my relationship with [name of university]; it's like, get what I can out of it and do what I need to do [for my own career].* (Female postdoctoral scholar, University, No 92)

### **The Audit Culture and Caring: Precarity, Gaming and Threat**

Although the widespread use of metrics for performance appraisal coincided with cutbacks during the financial crisis, interviewees recognised that the audit 'logic' existed prior to this:

*...What happened with the recession was that a lot of this logic that had been going on for quite some time started becoming much more intensive. So, there had always been this, you know, publish or perish, for example, which was kind of a mantra for academics... But now it's not just that, now it's all sorts of metrics and constantly there's new metrics that try to measure ... your performance in different ways. And there's all these boxes now that people strategically need to think about and need to tick.* (Female Lecturer, University No 14).

The Metricisation of value was seen to create a less collegial and caring culture in the colleges:

*[There has] been quite a substantial change in the, the collegiality of the university ... ... Partially because it's grown and when you grow sometimes things that had been done informally can't be done informally anymore. Partially because of the changes at the top, the difference in perspective, .... difference in goals and what's valued* (Female, University, Senior Management postholder, also a professor, No 20)

The decline in collegiality was not confined to universities:

*I think that 10 years ago it would have been a lot more caring. We were very much a community... We had lots of different social outlets, we met at lunch time. The environment that we work in now has completely changed here. We're scheduled classes at lunch time so we can't meet each other ... people are also off site doing online stuff and you don't get to meet anyone. People don't know what's going on for you, haven't a clue...* (Male Lecturer, University, No 77)

Some, especially those who were familiar with the logistics of citations and publishing, knew that metrics could be managed and 'gamed':

*In [our Faculty] there would be quite a lot of cynicism about it, even though we'd probably look fairly good on paper... I've a great feeling that people are much smarter than any metric ... If you give people a metric, they will simply do whatever it is to optimise the metric.* (Male Lecturer, University sector, No. 18)

Though metrics served as a tool of performance appraisal, a way of governing and classifying people in work terms, their disciplinary power extended beyond that; they could and did have other 'perverse' effects (Shore and Wright 2015). They could and did lead to stress and illness:

*It was just a normal cold that was exacerbated I think by, you know, having to constantly perform. And then I had another, you know, an IRC application due, which I did on very short notice, ... you know, a lot of pressure, ... that doesn't necessarily have to make you sick, but I think it contributed to it [ongoing illness] (Female postdoctoral scholar, University, one-year postholder, No 15)*

Sometimes metrics operated in the shadows of organisational life, a background threat that could be called into play to discipline people for behaviour that was unrelated to their work performance. A lecturer who was involved in challenging the management on a number of issues explained how that worked:

*I know what my metrics are, I know what my workloads are, I don't miss anything, and I never miss anything because I know if I do, I'll be hammered ... And ... that's the way half the staff operate. It's, what we would call, the CYA mentality, you're covering your ass all the time because if you don't cover it you know you're exposed, and if you're exposed, they will jump on it. (Female Lecturer, middle management role, No 97)*

As metrics only measure what is countable, the good will, solidarity and collegiality that is fundamental to the running of any organisation cannot be assessed in their terms. Essential care work with students or colleagues could not and was not counted in formal appraisals. Neither did metrics assess the impact of family care responsibilities on work performance, not least because neither the care responsibilities of staff (nor students) were taken into account in a systematic way.

For those who knew how to play the career 'game', metrics were manageable, and could be even be gamed. But metrics also had a dark side; as they could not measure care, hands-on care for students and colleagues became second-class work. Metrics were also perceived as having an organisational power that hovered over staff. They had a shadow existence creating fears that they would be deployed by management to discipline people in unforeseen ways.

### **Carelessness as a cultural value in academia: gender matters**

The ideal-type academic remains a celibate monk-like scholar, a *childless* person (Bomert and Leinfellner 2017) '...with no interests or responsibilities outside of work' (Bailyn 2003: 141). She or he is what Thornton (2013) terms a Benchmark Man', a person unhindered by domestic or care responsibilities who can devote her/himself entirely to work without '... boundaries in time, space, energy or emotion' (Devine, Grummell and Lynch, 2011: 632). Good scholars are expected to be single-minded, prioritising their academic work above all else (Ward and Wolf-Wendel 2004: 237), especially in research-led universities (Fox, Fonseca and Bao 2011).

Our data suggest that the care-free worker model was ingrained in systems of performance appraisal, especially for academics in universities, and increasingly in the Institutes. It was a challenge particularly for women. Women who live up to the highly macho-masculinised ideal of the totally devoted scholar, migrating from country to country, risk marginalizing their affective and relational lives, and often have to postpone indefinitely whether or not to have children (Stalford, 2005); the alternative option is to live with the responsibility of being a 'failure' in their own eyes and that of colleagues (Toffoletti and Starr 2016). For those women who stay in the academy, and try to manage care, the ideology of 'work-life balance' masks how workplace structures disregard their dual commitments. They are left to blame themselves for 'failing' to manage unreasonable work demands. They are given the option of taking courses in time management, or mindfulness and yoga to relieve stress. But the problem of overwork is not individual but structural and there is no legitimate language to name over-working for the structural problem that it is (Misra, Lundquist and Templer 2012)

### *The Stellar Candidate*

Academics, in the university sector especially, were keenly aware that to meet the standard of the ideal academic they would have to sacrifice much of life outside of work. The ideal academic was a care-free one:

*I mean the way the metrics ... are based on this kind of traditional notion of an academic who, who gave their life to the institution, who had no outside interests, who had no responsibilities elsewhere. ... There is what they call the **stellar candidate**, which is this impossible-to-meet standard if you have a work/life balance ... then everybody else is kind of the non-stellar because we can't meet the souped-up one because we're not able to give twenty-four/seven to the institution (Female Lecturer University No 97)*

Because the ideal academic was implicitly defined as a monk-like scholar, there were no time or place boundaries to the working day:

*I don't have a long evening [to myself] because I go home and I do ... my research, to keep that up. ... You do loads of work for free, ... you're just working like crazy and then at the end of the day you know, what rewards do you necessarily get? ... I mean there are massive sacrifices that you make (Female postdoctoral scholar University, No 39)*

Women and men who were older and nearer retirement age, and/or who had grown-up children did not feel such pressures. Senior men were most likely to say that they had '... plenty of leisure time ... because ... *'the kids are grown up and gone'* (Male Professor University, No. 7). Senior women and men also stated that they could resist pressures to be specific performance metrics:

*I suppose ... there are two distinct generations. So, people just entering ... the academy are under fierce pressure to ensure that they have a research record ... The pressure would be off some people like me. ... But I can really ... sympathise with*

*people who are on the way in, because it is ferocious.* (Female lecturer, University, No. 6)

### *Parenting Alone*

In the absence of secure affordable childcare, achieving a good balance between paid work and parenting, was a major challenge for all parents; however, it was quite overwhelming for those who were parenting alone, most of whom were women:

*I mean it is stretched all the time, you're rushing between here, there so, you know, I think that anybody – I don't know if that's just exclusive to me – I think any parent of small children is stretched finely* (Female lecturer, University, parenting alone, No 97)

Those parenting alone *and* on temporary contracts were the most pressurised. As contract staff, they felt they had '*...to be seen to be working harder and better than people who already have tenure*' (No. 56). As part-time staff they also felt disrespected (O'Keefe and Courtois 2019); lack of respect translated into a lack of care at work that impacted on their own ability to care

*I suppose I have been thinking about it a little.... how difficult it is to care effectually when the institution that you are working in does not care for you ...There are all of these pressures and yeah, ... it's difficult to care effectively...* (Female, lecturer, Institute, parenting alone, No 56)

Care dilemmas did not just arise for academic staff; those who held other professional or service roles also reported that work had to get priority as '*the job needs to be done, and the expectation is that you're here at work.*' regardless of care responsibilities. Unlike academics, other professionals were required to be in their offices or on site during working hours, they had little flexibility:

*It's an absolute nightmare and truthfully, because I have no family at all ... here.... if they're sick at all the crèche ring you and you're snookered. It's really, truthfully, it's so hard, very, very hard. ... I was naïve .... I didn't think it was going to be [like this] ... I had no idea the pressures on parents, until I became a parent...* (Female administrator, University, No 16).

With a focus on outputs and 'deliverables' most of those interviewed who had primary care responsibilities (and some of these involved care of other adults) found that their care lives were treated as secondary matters that should be deprioritised. While the greediness of work organisations is not new (Coser 1974), it has been exacerbated with the globalisation of corporations and the intensification of work (Burchielli, Bartram and Thanacoody 2008). Workers are increasingly expected to *become their work* so that '*jobs are no longer defined as something we do among other things, but what we are*' (emphasis in original) (Fleming 2014: 10). And higher education is no exception to this (Cannizzo, 2018; Gill 2009; Lorenz, 2012). One way of *becoming your work*, especially for women, seems to be to avoid having children. Children put your career as an academic at risk (Reuter 2018).

### **To have or to not have children, that is the question, for women**

Although many women do not wish to have children, including academic women, whether this is always a choice is an open question. Academic institutions are premised on normative assumptions regarding work/care regimes of power and performance that are highly gendered and increasingly care-disregarding (Grummell, Devine and Lynch 2009; Pocock 2005). The responsibilised citizenship of the market-led academy commands women and men to give their work 100% of their time. Identities become index-linked to success at work and this frames who people think they are. For women, there is a tension ‘... between having children “as a real woman does” and not having them “because a real scholar doesn't.” (Reuter 2018: 99).

The women we interviewed, who wanted to have children, were mostly in their 30s. Yet, they felt that such a basic life choice was not compatible with academic work expectations, especially when on temporary one or two-year teaching or research contracts as there was no guaranteed maternity leave:

*I feel that, we both feel that, we shouldn't have any children until I have some security. Like obviously the post-doc there's no maternity leave options; it just finishes. ...I kind of feel that I couldn't really do that [have a child] until I got a job. And then you hear the stories of people who don't get jobs because they're young and female and likely to have a child. (Female, post-doc., 30s, University, No. 39)*

Young women sometimes opted out of postdoctoral positions due to the known expectation that they would not have children at that time.

*A colleague who had started work with us... left. She was very concerned because she'd just gotten married and she was looking to have kids and she wanted to see what the story with maternity leave was. When you're working on a two-year project, I mean especially if it's a yearlong [one], [you will] just be told not to bother getting it... (Male in 30s, University, postdoctoral scholar No. 89)*

Given that many women are doing postdoctoral studies in their child-bearing years, this is a considerable source of anxiety for some:

*I'm thirty-five now so it is something, you know, I have been thinking about, and we have been thinking about, and I think we would like to live with kids at some point....people say there is no right time ... but there are certain times that are worse than others... You know, it's a bit of a difficult situation ... a tough decision on our part... (Woman, 30s, one-year lecturing post, University No.15)*

For some, as recently published research shows, being successful comes at the cost of relational precarity for women especially (Ivancheva, Lynch and Keating 2018). They are left with a Hobson's choice: they can pursue jobs irrespective of location or relationships and thereby sacrifice their love-life for their work life, or they can have their relationships and love life at the price of their career as academics.

Dilemmas over caring/love relationships were exacerbated by the mobility requirements of academia. Both women and men spoke of how stressful it can be.

*I've been working on these projects in a sort of string of contracts I didn't know for how long it was going to be ... it was only a 12-month contract [initially]... it was very possible at the end of that 12 months I'd have to pack up and go somewhere else again ... Regardless of what department or discipline ... I think the biggest obstacle would be the lack of long-term security; it could really undermine your mental health.*  
(Male, University, Research Fellow, No. 69)

While mobility has always been a feature of academic life, it is no longer an option; it is an imperative, not just for postdoctoral experience but for conferencing and networking. But the prolonged and extensive geographical mobility that is required to become known internationally is especially difficult for those who are primary carers and/or mothers of young children (Henderson and Moreau 2019; Mason, Wolfinger and Goulden 2013). The 'good mother' and the 'successful academic' are not easily aligned (Raddon 2002) within the mobility imperative. And mobility is not just an issue for parents, as it also poses challenges for relations with partners and intimate others (Nikunen 2014).

### **The Gendered Character of Care**

Care and relational issues were not something that people felt comfortable raising at work. Maternity and parental leave policies were mediated by line managers and/or heads of department. How they responded to requests was often a matter of luck and happenstance, not of policy. This was a challenge for women in different roles:

*I think there are huge stresses for women around caring roles, whether it's children, children with disabilities ... whatever the caring role might be in your family.... But I think across this university that that is dealt with in a very ad hoc basis. ... If you have a good manager, you're in a very fortunate position. I don't think there is the sense that this should be an obligation as an employer, ... It's much more like "God I hope I'm heard favourably (Female, Senior Administrator, University No. 8)*

Sometimes the gender composition of departments made it difficult to raise care or gender issues as it was feared they would become personalised. Speaking of the Department where she undertook her PhD, a young female post-doctoral scholar noted that there were only two women who were faculty members there:

*So ... there's only ever one woman and it's just all men in [name of Department], men who have gone to male-only schools and then they're in a pretty much male-dominated department and really women are only in, you know, [more junior] administrative roles (Female, post-doctoral scholar, University, No. 39).*

Even those who believed they had been discriminated against on gender and care-related grounds, and who had permanent posts, did not feel it was worthwhile taking an equality case especially if they were sole carers (though this was the reason they had experienced problems in the first instance)

*I'm a sole carer. I can't afford to take on that level of stress and pressure as the sole carer of a small child... (Female lecturer, University, No 97)*

While dilemmas over having children and threats to intimate relationships were one source of concern, there were many other care-related dilemmas raised by staff, especially by women. Some of these concerns related to the care of students due to the cutbacks in support services in the austerity period.

### *Care of Students*

While colleges varied in their care culture, there was concern that the focus on metrics the college's marketability and financial returns took priority over the care of students. There was pressure to increase student intake for budgetary and reputational reasons, even if the resources were not there to support them:

*And we have master's and PhD students here and we don't have desks to give them. And you know I'm told the metrics for next year is this, you have to increase the post-grad numbers by such an amount. And I'd say great where are we going to put them... (Female, Senior Administrator, Institute, No. 65.)*

Although members of Senior Management Teams believed they were doing a really good job in caring for students:

*Yeah [this College] is very supportive of students, the students are very much at the heart of it all .... Well, I think to sum it up I would say that the staff and the students at [this College see it] as a community and more than just a workplace or just a place to study ... I think it's bringing working, caring, studying, all of that together ... We've come a long way in delivering that (Female, Senior Management Team, SMT member, Institute, No 74),*

this positive view of student care was not shared by frontline support staff in their own College:

*They've [senior management] never had to do it, so, they don't have to deal with the people; they just deal with paper, and metrics, and for them it's all about the numbers on the page, whereas for me it's not, it's all about the people... (Female, senior administrator, Institute of Technology, No. 65.)*

Lack of resources for student care was a concern raised by many staff, especially support staff. The pressures on universities to perform highly in rankings were seen as detrimental to students:

*... I don't think they are as focused on under-graduate education as maybe they should be. I think it's almost like the stepchild ... it's more of a nuisance than a focus [due to focus on rankings] (Female, University, Administrator, No 90).*

*... Basically their main thing is the rankings and the [Head of College], it's all he talks about; it's all he talks about at graduation, when he's not talking about buildings it's rankings, rankings, rankings... (Female, Lecturer, University No 98)*

The increased intake of students in the context of declining resources and staffing meant that academics did not have time to know students personally anymore and this impacted on caring:

*... You're giving less time [to students] with bigger groups so ... This was the first year, I don't know all the names of my students, before you did. And that's been eroded, and I think if you don't have that connection you know you're less likely to be motivated to care about that individual ... I don't necessarily see the institute supporting lecturers in maintaining that culture [of care] (Female Lecturer, Institute No 24)*

With or without austerity, care work was generally seen as women's work, implicitly if not explicitly:

*... Like the caring work that's involved in kind of looking after students, ... that falls to, to women much more so than I think it falls to men. .... I think the expectation, and it's very informal and it's very subtle... is that 'well you go deal with that sort of thing' [as a woman] (Female, lecturer, University, No 10)*

Not only were women expected to do 'pastoral care' of students, it was known at management level that this disadvantaged them in career terms; care of students was very time-consuming, but it did not count in the promotion metrics:

*I think more has been asked of them [women] in terms of the pastoral care in departments. And it's either asked of them or students gravitate to them and they feel obliged to help even though ... there's no benefit to them for having done so and a definite cost because their time is taken up doing things other than what is valued by the university [publications, citations and research funding]. (Female, Professor, Senior Management Team, University, No 20)*

## **Conclusion**

Claims that new managerialism offers new opportunities for women through loosening hierarchical structures and making organisations more meritocratic (Newman 1995) are not supported by international evidence. Our data confirm those of international studies, including the cross-European GARCIA project (2016)<sup>vii</sup> which found that the way universities evaluate and select people for appointment and promotion, implicitly impacts on the private lives of persons; their care life must take second place to the demands of the university. A care-free and childless profile is the ideal one for academic success and women are especially disadvantaged when this is the case (Bomert and Leinfellner, 2017; Dubois-Shaik and Fusulier 2017).

The data demonstrate that the higher education sector in Ireland, especially universities, are built around a model of the 'greedy institution' (Cosser 1974; Grant et al. 2000) where the dissociation of work and family lives is normalised (Kanter 1977). The devaluation of care is

experienced at the boundaries of family and paid work, but also in the work undertaken for the care of colleagues, students (Thornton 2013) and of the self (Gill 2009; Warren 2017).

The data also show that the academic field is characterised by a masculine habitus (Dany 2011) and that there is a care ceiling in place under which the devaluation and silencing of care, within and without the academy, disadvantages women particularly. While there are many factors, other than women's care work, that help explain why women are more lowly paid and in more junior posts than men *ceteris paribus*, notwithstanding this, the care-free model of the ideal professional and the ideal scholar contribute significantly to their subordinate positioning (Acker and Feuerverger 1996; Bagilhole and White 2011; Bailyn 2003; Blackmore and Sachs 2007; Ivancheva et al., 2018; O'Connor and O'Hagan 2016; Pocock 2005).

When what matters organisationally is assessed primarily in terms of audits and metrics, only what can be counted numerically matters. The use of metrics has a 'perverse effect' on organisational culture (Muller, 2018; Shore and Wright 2015); one of these perverse effects is the institutionalisation of carelessness (Lynch 2010). As care is a process, a disposition and a set of ethics, it is not measurable and does not contribute to good metrics. Those who do uncountable but essential hands-on care work, within and without work organisations, most of whom are women, are inevitably disadvantaged in this process (Metcalf, Scott, and Slaughter 2008). When intensive market-led productivity in academia is embedded in a wider neoconservative family policy culture that assumes that women are 'natural' family carers, this furthers positions women as less-than-ideal employees; they constitute a risk (O'Hagan et al. 2019: 128).

There is a neoliberal post-feminist idea of equality is at play in higher education where individualised entrepreneurship dressed up as academic freedom is highly rewarded. This is '*a new way of telling women that in order to be researchers they should be more like men. It is also a way of telling both men and women that they should not have family responsibilities*'... (Nikunen 2014: 132).

Care is a process and a disposition, it involves the work we do to 'maintain, continue and repair' the world (Tronto 1993). As it is not a product or 'deliverable', it cannot be counted. Yet care is not a luxury, it is a non-normative necessity as life itself cannot continue without care (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). Without a governing ethic of care in higher education, the ambition and self-interest of the few will over-ride the educational and research interests of the many. And, as the data in this paper demonstrates, the undermining of care has serious negative implications not only for women, but also for students, staff and for the culture of the organisation itself. This devaluation undermines the necessary care work required for good teaching and for producing knowledge that is caring of the natural world and humanity (Cardozo 2017; Downing 2017).

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<sup>i</sup> Unfortunately, comparative data for Ireland is not available at time of writing

<sup>ii</sup> see // [www.irc-equality.ie](http://www.irc-equality.ie)

<sup>iii</sup> Of the six, two were universities, two were institutes and the others were State recognised colleges of higher education.

<sup>iv</sup> The core study involved 102 in. Interview schedules were individually developed according to staff roles or functions in the colleges. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded and analyses, using Nvivo initially. They were subsequently crosschecked and analysed manually by the research team. Interviews varied considerably in length from 30 minutes to almost 2 hours.

<sup>v</sup> 85 of the interviewees were in the four main research colleges, and 17 in 6 other colleges. These 17 were strategically chosen for their knowledge of equality-related policies in their universities and colleges.

<sup>vi</sup> Figure A2.1 of the Cassells Report (2016) shows the drop in core State income to higher education for the period 2008-2015: government funding fell from 73 per cent of higher education income in 2008 to 52 per cent in 2015; this represents a drop of 21%. At the same time Figure A2.2 shows student intake increased by 25% to over 190,000 in 2015 from just over 150,000 in 2008. While student fees increased substantially over that time and now represents 22% of income compared with just under 5% in 2008, nonetheless, it does not compensate for the increased intake as higher education income overall declined from just over 1.9 billion in 2008 to 1.8 billion in 2015.

<sup>vii</sup> [http://garciaproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/GARCIA\\_report\\_wp1D1.pdf](http://garciaproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/GARCIA_report_wp1D1.pdf)