THE FACTORS AFFECTING WOMEN'S SUCCESS IN MUSEUM CAREERS: A DISCUSSION OF THE REASONS MORE WOMEN DO NOT REACH THE TOP, AND OF STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE THEIR FUTURE SUCCESS

Victoria Turner

MA in Museum Studies, 2001
Institute of Archaeology, University College London, 31-34 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PY, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

This dissertation discusses the factors affecting women's success in museum careers. It draws on information gathered from interviews with successful women, to supplement existing information and statistics. Women are less successful than men, for they are underrepresented in the top jobs, and have lower average earnings. This is the result of a series of factors which hinder their career progression. Some emanate from the organizational culture of museums, which is often conservative and male-dominated. Others result from the clash between fulfilling family responsibilities and living up to current expectations in the workplace. A final set of factors concerns the typical attitudes and behaviour of individuals: the effects of women's own self-limitation, and men's, often unconsciously, pejorative viewpoint. The strategies for overcoming these barriers have also been assessed. Organizations are implementing equal opportunities programmes, including provisions for flexible working; for individuals, awareness is crucial, as well as profiting from networks, mentors, training and career planning. These strategies, however, are currently sufficient to help only the most exceptional women reach the top. The remaining problems are associated with deep-seated social stereotypes, and it will take a concerted effort by those in high status positions to help greater numbers of women overcome them.

INTRODUCTION

This discussion aims to isolate the factors affecting women's success in museum careers. How shall we best tackle this issue? We shall begin with some definitions of success, and move onto a discussion of the current position of women in the sector, for we cannot engage with the question until we have established whether or not women are succeeding. We shall expect to find that women are not as successful as men: the issue is then most usefully broken down into two separate questions, based around two different types of factors. Firstly, there are those which have a negative effect on women's success: why are women not as successful? The second set of factors consists of those which could have a positive effect on women's success: how can women's future success be facilitated? The remainder of my discussion will therefore address these two related questions. First, though, it will be useful to set out the framework of my research methods.

Methodology

The issue was previously most usefully analyzed by Maggie Blake (Blake 1999), who conducted research in 1993. She looked at, as reasons why, the difficulty of combining caring for children and a career in museums, the attitudes of women, museums as conservative organizations, equal opportunities initiatives on the back burner and whether women want to become museum managers. She then considered the how part of my question. First, she asked whether the situation would change itself, with the growing numbers of women entering the profession, concluding that the entrenched attitudes of society also needed changing. She then outlined "positive strategies" to be adopted in the meantime: the extension of flexible working arrangements, training, support systems – role models, monitoring, networking and career planning – and positive action (ibid). These seem indeed to be the most significant factors, as confirmed by a survey of other relevant literature, and will accordingly be covered in my discussion, though I structure and address them differently.

Sources of Information and Statistics

These include specialist museum organizations and publications, notably, for the UK, the Museums Association (MA), which set up an Equal Opportunities Committee in 1989 (Roberts 1992) and published discussions of the issues in Museums Journal (MJ 1988; 1990). However, the MA has done little recent work on gender bias, and was unable to supply anything up-to-date. Nor were the unions I contacted, IPMS and FDA, useful sources of information. Women Heritage and Museums (WHAM), formed in 1984, aimed in part to "campaign for equal employment in museums and related fields through changes in work practice and policy" (WHAM 1998).

However, their focus seems to have been women's history, and the organization is no longer listed in Museums Yearbook (MA 2001). Current research and policy development mainly emanate from the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), which advises upon and monitors gender issues in general employment. Other organizations also play an advisory and developmental role, both governmental, notably the Cultural Heritage National Training Organization (CHNTO) and the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), and independent, such as Parents at Work, New Ways to Work, and The Industrial Society.

Interviews

Having found that much sector-specific information was out of date, and that there existed little consideration of positive models for women's success in UK museums, I decided to supplement the information from sources like those above with interviews with eight women. I deliberately focused on successful women, feeling it would be helpful to discover which factors have operated in their careers, and thus assess the success of suggested strategies. It must be carefully noted that as these women are therefore amongst the small proportion who reach the top, their experiences cannot be taken to be representative of all women working in museums. All either manage an organization or are departmental heads in larger institutions:

> Carolyn Abel, Curator, Grange Museum of Community History (Local Authority).
> Jane Carmichael, Director of Collections, Imperial War Museum (IWM) (National).
> Kathy Gee, Chief Executive, West Midlands Regional Museum Council (WMRMC), previously curator, Cookworthy Museum (Independent).
> Karen Knight, Director of the Sector and Professional Team, Resource, previously director, Reading Museums and Archive Service (Local Authority).
> Sally MacDonald, Manager, Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology (University), previously Principal Museum Officer, Croydon (Local Authority).
> Anna Southall, Director, National Museums and Galleries of Wales (NMGW), previously Senior Conservator, Tate (National).
> Kate Starling, Head of Curatorial Division, Museum of London (National/Local Authority).
> X, my final interviewee, decided to remain anonymous.

They were selected randomly, to avoid a biased view, from a list of women recently mentioned in Museums Journal or generally well known in the sector. I ensured, however, their experience covered all major types of museum, in case I might find sig-nificant differences between national, local authority, university and independent museums. The interviews all followed a similar structure, though some were conducted in person and others by telephone. I asked each woman to talk about her own career and the things she felt had affected it, and generally let the conversation flow, to avoid imposing my ideas. However, I prompted each woman to talk about each of the factors emerging from the literature, if she had not addressed them, thus permitting me to analyze the importance attributed to each factor and isolate common elements.

Definitions of Success

There are, of course, many individual women who would be considered by themselves and others to have succeeded in museum careers. Some will be in top jobs: high profile directors, curators and managers, successful in terms of level of responsibility, earnings and prestige. Others will be filling roles which satisfy different criteria of success, based on personal ambitions, which could relate, among other things, to visitor satisfaction, personal fulfilment, or peer recognition. Some might be best achieved in a position which, by more objective criteria, would not be considered to signify success. In considering the position of women overall, however, it is impossible to measure success by anything but the most objective criteria. So women will be viewed as succeeding if they are represented in the top jobs to a degree proportional with their numbers in the profession as a whole, and if they earn, on average, the same amount as men. It is time to discover whether or not these criteria are fulfilled.

The current position of women in the museum profession

We often have to look back to the late 1980s for finding specific information, but we can create a more useful picture by supplementing that with more recent information on general employment and some isolated aspects of museums.

The number of women at different levels in the profession

Prince, working on the Museums Database Project, found that 87% of museum staff were male (Prince 1988; Prince and Higgins-McLaughlin 1987), but this is at odds with the 1993 findings of the Museum Training Institute (MTI), which noted an equal balance between men and women (Blake 1999). The latter finding is confirmed by 1999 figures from CHNTO, the successor to the MTI, noting, "there are almost equal numbers of males and females employed" (CHNTO 1999). Prince also found 80% of museum directors (90% in National Museums) were male (Prince 1988). Now, in the fourteen National Museums, there are twelve male directors, and two female, of whom one, Suzanna Taverne, fills the unusual second post of managing director at the British Museum (one post is vacant). This gives a figure of

TABLE 1: Other Community, Social and Personal Service Activities (SIC (1992) code O)

Occupation	Male Average Weekly Earnings	Female Average Weekly Earnings
Managers and administrators	£656.0	£472.3
Professional occupations	£428.7	£414.5
Clerical and Secretarial occupations	£299.2	£274.1
Personal and Protective Service occupations	£260.8	£205.4
Other occupations	£260.1	£202.8

(Figures taken from New Earnings Survey 2000)

86% male, not much of an improvement. As for directors in general, a snapshot figure of 61% male was given by looking at the gender of the most senior person in every tenth museum listed in Museums Yearbook (MA 2001), where this could be determined. This indicates a degree of improvement, but the perception is clearly that although women are well represented in the profession as a whole, they are not attaining the top jobs in a similar proportion: "when I took the directorship at Reading [1994], I was very aware, because I was told by colleagues, that I was one of very few women who made director post " (Knight 2001).

The level of women's pay

Prince found that "there is a strong tendency for [women] to be employed at lower salaries than their male counterparts" (Prince 1988). Women's low pay was confirmed by a survey of salaries in 1989.

Posts were ranked for assessment, and the top five ranks had a preponderance of men, whereas the bottom four had more women than men. In all but the lowest, men's median earnings exceeded women's by between 4 and 11%; the seven women directors earned a median of £12240, while the men earned £18587 (Shaw 1989). To bring this up-to-date, a lack of significant improvement is indicated by the New Earnings Survey 2000. Figures for museum work alone are unavailable, but those for the SIC code O,

"other community, social and personal service activities", incorporating museum activities (code 92.52) (National Statistics 2001), are indicative. The figures for which gender comparisons are available are presented in Table 1.

Clearly, women in all occupations within this industry still earn a lower average weekly wage than men. This reflects the figures for the general workforce, where women working full-time earn an average of 82% of male full-time workers' gross hourly earnings (EOC 2001a).

Job Segregation

This difference in pay, the underlying reasons for which we shall return to, may reflect women's concentration in certain jobs. We must therefore also determine whether women in museums predominate in certain departments as well as simply in the lower ranks. This has been found to be the case in general employment, reflecting stereotypical views of women's roles in society. For example, the perception of women's "caring nature" directs them towards occupations like nursing or teaching (Anker 1998): 86% of primary and nursery teachers are women (EOC 2001a).

Is such a concentration reflected in museums? I have used the regional figures from the 1999 CHNTO survey to produce a picture of gender by occupation (Table 2), for England alone, for which comparable

TABLE 2: Gender Breakdown by Occupation among English Survey Respondents

Occupation	Male part-time	Male full-time	Female part-time	Female full-time	% male	% female
Management and administration	584	1621	824	2270	42%	58%
Care and interpretation	609	1425	759	1480	48%	52%
Front-of-house and security	2033	2180	2951	1197	50%	50%
Marketing/PR/ Fund-raising	135	315	203	466	40%	60%
Technical and maintenance	542	1488	315	344	75%	25%
Multi-function	1351	2149	1753	2089	48%	52%

(Figures taken from CHNTO 1999)

TABLE 3: Gender Breakdown by Occupation among Scottish Survey Respondents

Occupation	M Part-time	M Full-time	M on STC	F Part-Time	F Full-time	F on STC	% M	% F
Management	30	122	2	29	104	3	53%	47%
Office/ Administration	10	10	1	53	52	7	16%	84%
Human Resources	3	12	0	9	8	0	47%	53%
Marketing/PR/ Fundraising	5	5	4	12	9	3	37%	63%
Development/ Education	4	7	2	13	19	2	28%	72%
Visitor Services	130	54	49	438	115	125	26%	74%
Conservation/ Technical	23	68	4	25	9	5	71%	30%
Maintenance/ Security	30	91	12	34	20	15	66%	34%

M = Male; F = Female; STC = Short Term Contract (Figures taken from CHNTO 1999)

figures were available. This would appear to confirm the National Summary conclusion that "considering gender purely by employment category suggests a fairly even distribution, with the notable exception of technical and maintenance, which is largely male dominated" (CHNTO 1999).

This is, however, at odds with the impressions of most people working in the sector, who variously note that education, collections management, marketing, personnel and clerical posts are dominated by women, whilst high-level management, as we have already seen, is dominated by men.

An examination of the figures for Scotland (Table 3), which are differently divided, provides a clear indication that the balance seen in England may be due to female-dominated categories having been grouped within wider categories, also likely to include male dominated areas: office/administration grouped with management; visitor services within security and front of house; education within care and interpretation. Comparisons are valid, as in the one category which is identical in both sets of figures, Marketing/PR/Fundraising, the findings are very similar, with women predominating.

The general impression that women are concentrated in certain areas seems to have been confirmed. This then, is the position of women in the sector today: although women are numerically well-represented overall, they are poorly represented in the top jobs, and are concentrated in certain areas of employment, which, in combination with other factors, results in their being paid less on average than men. Our objective criteria for success, clearly, have not been fulfilled, and so we will turn to an examination of the factors under the assumption that museum women are not, as a whole, enjoying the same success as men: "If I were to do an evaluation of where women are up to, I would say that we are not doing great. On paper, yes, but in actuality, no" (X 2001).

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS EMANATING FROM THE WORKPLACE

Museums – are they conservative organizations?

The first issue to address is whether the organizational culture of museums affects women's chances of success. The title question was Blake's, who found there were "conflicting views as to whether or not museum hierarchies have changed their underlying assumptions regarding the role women should play in the organization" (Blake 1999). This statement still seems to hold true. In some ways, the "men's club" perception of the governing bodies of museums is diminishing. The pressure on museums to operate as businesses has brought in people from outside their previously insular world to management positions, meaning the recruiters are now a more diverse set of people, with "much more exposure to different ideas and also to the legality of operating within the sphere of equal opportunities" (X 2001).

However, there remains a perception that some institutions continue to recruit in the image of their traditional board members (Carrington 2001; X 2001). Carrington quotes a male regional museum director: "It's clone appointing. [National museum] trustees simply don't know who they might go to outside their own circle. And as I don't come from the class that most of the trustees at the V&A come from, the conclusion I draw is that I would be at a disadvantage were I to have applied for that job" (Carrington 2001).

Where the applicant is also female, given the preponderance of male trustees, the disadvantage must be even greater.

National Museums

An examination of the backgrounds of the directors of national museums, particularly in London, swiftly confirms the impression (Who's Who 2001): as Carrington puts it, "there is the odd grammar school boy and red-brick alumnus among them, but on the whole public school, Oxbridge, and in the case of the art museums, the Courtauld Institute predominate" (Carrington 2001).

The two women are anomalies: Suzanna Taverne fits in with an Oxford education, but is unusual in her Managing Director's post and her business background. Anna Southall is one of the exceptions in educational background, having attended East Anglia University, and is also unusual in being a conservator. However, while no-one would deny that merit played the key role in her appointment at NMGW, she herself mentions the support she received from her old boss, Nicholas Serota (Southall 2001).

Her other experiences are more encouraging, pointing to some diminution of the old-fashioned culture in the Nationals. Although she says the Tate, during her time there (1981-96), was still male-dominated, and she was the first woman to work in the conservation department as anything but a secretary, the impact she was able to make demonstrates that women can succeed within and even change the conservative patterns of working. For it has been pointed out to her that she transformed the department, making it much more sociable and people-oriented. In Wales, she has found many female executives, and thinks the New Welsh Assembly, the most female government in the world, is influential in raising the profile of equal opportunities issues (ibid).

Local Authority Museums

In the local authority sector, women seem to be better represented. For example, of the directors of Area Museum Councils (including the devolved areas of SEMS), five are men and eight women (MA 2001; SEMA 2001). Nonetheless, Kathy Gee, the second woman to head an AMC, suspects that previous contact with Peter Longman, then Director of the MGC, helped get her an interview for the post at WMRMC (Gee 2001): some connection with the traditional networks is still an advantage. Another factor influencing the work culture of many local authority museums is the fact that local authority councillors, whose meetings museum heads will have to attend, are still predominantly male: 73% of all councillors in 1997, and 71% of newly elected councillors in 1999 (EOC 2001a).

University Museums

University museums still seem to suffer from the same conservatism, and resultant masculine bias, as universities as a whole. UCL's Institute of Archaeology, for example, has only 33% women Lecturers, Senior Lecturers and Readers, and no women professors (Whitehouse 2001). The more general figures are worst for science, with women representing only 5.2% of professors and 25% of lecturers (Rothwell 2001). In university museums women tend to be correspondingly poorly represented, especially at curator level and above (MA 2001), and are perceived to suffer the effects of a dominant culture of male academics with old-fashioned ideas about women. Sally MacDonald, however, has had fairly positive experiences at UCL and thinks gender bias is less strong in university museums, where academic snobbery may be more of an issue (MacDonald 2001). This may still be more problematic for women, however, as we shall see: the need for prolonged study before progressing in the workplace can mean a greater clash with family formation.

Independent Museums

In independent museums, there is an impression of male dominance, manifested in the AIM, with a predominantly male membership and council (MacDonald 2001). Kathy Gee relates how she was annoyed by bias when invited as a member of AIM council to join a steering group at the Garrick Club, where women are only allowed in the private dining rooms. She became aware that she was a "token woman" when one of the men said how glad he was she had come, because the last time it was all men in suits (Gee 2001).

So there are lingering problems in all types of museum, often caused by the particular types of people who are in positions of power, resistant to change and surrounding themselves with people they are comfortable with: that is, with a certain type of man. The pressures museums are facing in the current climate are however promoting change, and there are some signs of improvement.

A Logarithmic Progression?

One such sign often mentioned is the sheer number of women who have been entering at the bottom of the profession over the last decades, considered to be bound to rise to the top in a "logarithmic progression" (Blake 1999; Starling 2001). Thus Sally MacDonald: "although there are still fairly few women, comparatively, at the top, it's changing from the bottom" (MacDonald 2001).

It seems to me that the number of women in the profession as a whole may well be having an effect on the culture of many museums as workplaces: it is much harder to treat women workers badly when they form a vast majority of your team. A consideration here, though, is the type of museum, for there is a tendency for jobs to reflect the sex stereotyping which is still in evidence in students' choice of subjects at university (EOC 2001a) (Table 4). The bias towards arts subjects in women and towards science subjects in men results in a greater number of women working in museums with an arts slant and comparatively few in science-based museums (Blake 1999; MacDonald 2001). Women in these latter are therefore still likely to be working in a male-dominated environment.

TABLE 4: Sex Stereotyping among First-Year Undergraduates (Selected Subjects) Great Britain 1998/99

Subject Area	Male Part-time	Male Full-time	Female Part-time	Female full-time	% Male	% Female
Physical Sciences	1.2	29.7	0.8	17.4	63%	37%
Computer Science	3.4	37.6	1.0	8.9	81%	19%
Engineering and Technology	6.9	64.2	0.5	11.4	86%	14%
Social, economic and political studies	1.9	30.0	3.2	42.9	41%	59%
Languages	1.0	16.0	2.3	41.1	28%	72%
Creative Arts and Design	1.0	30.0	1.9	42.7	41%	59%
Education	0.9	10.2	3.0	34.2	23%	77%

In thousands (Figures taken from EOC 2001a)

So the numbers of women in the lower ranks may be having at least some limited effect. They are not, however, progressing to the top to the expected extent: the number of women in the top jobs has failed to live up to past predictions of such a progression, which inspires considerable pessimism of the likelihood that it will occur in the future (Gee 2001; Blake 1999).

Equal Opportunities Policies

Making a Difference
A major factor in improving the overall gender balance and culture in organizations has been the valuable work achieved in promoting equal opportunities, since the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (SDA), and the formation of the EOC. Most organizations now have an equal opportunities policy and are compelled by law to treat male and female, married and unmarried, workers alike, following guidelines like the Code of Practice on Sex Discrimination (EOC 2000b). Broadly, this covers issues of recruitment, advertising vacancies, selection methods, promotion, transfer and training, terms of employment and benefits offered. It also discusses ways employers can promote equality of opportunity, with, for example, areas of positive action allowed for by the SDA, to redress the effects of previous inequalities, such as encouragement of applications and targeted training for the minority sex. Flexible working arrangements and provisions for leave and childcare, such as discussed in my next section, are also covered (ibid).

The experiences of the women I interviewed indicate that much has indeed been achieved. Their careers commenced between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s, and they therefore all benefited from the initiatives outlined above. All the organizations they work in have equal opportunities policies, and on the whole they feel that these are effectively put into practice, particularly in terms of gender. For example, Sally MacDonald says, "I've worked in local authorities, where there has been a lot of work on Equal Opportunities, and so [...] if men have thought things they haven't been able to say them" (MacDonald 2001). Equally Jane Carmichael says of IWM, "I think we've inherited from the Civil Service the ethos of being a good employer, who follows fair and equitable principles" (Carmichael 2001).

Neglecting Unequal Pay and Job Segregation
A weakness in many equal opportunities policies is, however, the inattention to pay inequalities (The Industrial Society 2001b) and this has been a recent priority of the EOC. Organizations are often confident that their pay systems are fair, without realizing that they are based upon value systems which assign more significance, and therefore greater remuneration, to jobs that are predominantly filled by men (EOC 2001b). An important shift in this respect is to the concept of "equal pay for equal worth", which can tackle the inequalities resultant upon job segregation (Gunderson 1994). It is difficult to discuss comparative salaries in the museum sector with precision, as only the most general information is publicly available, but the indications of a pay gap are set out in my introduction. Museums need to carry out regular equal pay reviews as recommended by the EOC (EOC 1997; EOC 2001c), to monitor the fairness of their pay systems.

For there have clearly been cases of unequal pay in museums. In the USA in the 1970s, a male respondent to Susan Stitt's survey noted: "on several occasions during job interviews for director-level positions, I was told that they did not feel they could afford to hire me [...] because they could simply hire a woman for the same level position (with the same training and experience) at exactly half the salary that I would require" (Stitt 1975).

Use of structured pay scales in most museums is thought to indicate that the pay is now carefully linked to the job in question, regardless of who is doing it (Carmichael 2001). Unfortunately, there exists anecdotal evidence of men being appointed higher on pay scales than women colleagues in museums. This may in part be due to a greater willingness in men to argue for pay rises (EOC 2000a).

A brief consideration of job segregation in museums also raises concerns. For example, education, in which we noted women are heavily concentrated in museums and in general, is considered to be an undervalued and poorly paid sector (Lewin 1994). Could this not be a result of its historical connection with women? Is the increasing importance that is now accorded to museums' educational role, and the corresponding enlargement of the role of education departments (Paul 1994; Mandle 1994; Davis 1994), being reflected by an increase in pay for education staff? The status of collections management, another area which has been seen as stereotypically female (Pantykina 1991), is also interesting: only in recent years have the heads of collections management been given the same status as other heads of department. This, clearly, is a move in the right direction, and the rise in prominence of both education and collections management, as well as marketing and fundraising, is a factor likely to promote the success, in terms of pay, prestige and chances of promotion, of their predominantly female staff. On the other hand, it would be interesting to chart the salaries of specialist curators, as, with the increasing business-like orientation of museums, their status may be falling simultaneously with the rise in numbers of women amongst them.

The under-use of existing policies

Concerns also remain about whether policies are always being implemented and monitored in practice (Lloyd 1990). An important concept to avoid equal opportunities being sidelined is the need for "mainstreaming", described by the UN as "a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes" (ELP 2001).

Other problems will result from the behaviour of individuals, as will be discussed later: "where there are weaknesses in practice, it's in individual managers' applications of [the principles], because it's not altogether clear whether a manager's personal prejudices in some cases make it difficult for staff to do certain training courses, or take special leave" (Carmichael 2001).

It is, however, the organization's responsibility to regulate this. Interviewee X thinks the best answer is for the initiative to emanate from the very top (X 2001), which echoes EOC advice that a policy "must be seen to have the active support of management at the highest level" (EOC 2000b). Current equal opportunities legislation is also under-used because of the

difficulty of bringing a case to a tribunal, and the negative effects upon the individual's future career (The Industrial Society 2001b). Senior managers are also unfortunately often unwilling to discipline those responsible.

There is also a perception that when money is short, equal opportunities initiatives can be the first things to suffer (Porter 1990). Interviewee X also worries that equal opportunities issues have now "gone on the backburner", because the most obvious signs of discrimination have been tackled (X 2001). Unfortunately, the existence of a policy in an organization can be used to deflect awkward questions: it is easy for the organization to reply that it has not departed from its equal opportunities framework. The key problem is that the subtle forms of bias which have been instilled by dominant social structures have not yet been tackled: "there is clearly a need to break down the very strong gender stereotypes which exist around the world regarding the supposed capabilities, preferences and abilities of men and women" (Anker 1998).

This will be crucial in our discussion of women's family responsibilities in the next section. At their best, then, equal opportunities policies are a valuable tool to help women to succeed in museum careers, as elsewhere, and they have done a great deal to tackle the most obvious signs of discrimination. But the danger is that equal opportunities policies end up fulfilling a much less productive role, as a kind of placebo: achieving only an impression of action, but thereby reducing our energy in promoting reform of the enduring problems. Where this occurs, clearly it is detrimental to the future true success of women in the sector.

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL AND WORKPLACE NEEDS

The problems for parents working in museums

For any working person who wants to have children, there are difficulties to surmount. The problem, however, remains much more pressing for women, and is the most obvious cause of their disadvantaged situation in the workplace: "The reason why women still lose at work is simple: they have children. Of course men have children too, but it doesn't matter much – while for women, it matters a great deal. Taking time out of the labour market, deciding to work part-time and rushing home to care for a sick child all dent earning potential" (The Industrial Society 2001a). It is for this reason that I have devoted an entire section to the issue, especially as the nature of work in the museum sector can exacerbate the problems. Firstly, careers tend to begin comparatively late, because of the demand for high academic qualifications: in 1994, the MTI found that 40% of the workforce had a first and/or higher degree (MTI 1994). This often means that as soon as women have had time to gain experience and think of promotion, the time is reached for them to want to start a family,

leaving them lagging behind male colleagues (Blake 1999; Brown 1994). Secondly, museums often rely on their staff working long hours, beyond the usual working day, with frequent evening and weekend work. Whilst this can, potentially, aid flexibility, the high work ethic causes a substantial problem for women with families (MacDonald 2001). Finally, with limited jobs available, and no clear career progression, museum employees often find it necessary to move around the country in order to advance their career. This is clearly complicated where a family is involved, for employees of either sex (Carmichael 2001), but as women are still often considered as secondary earners, it will often be more difficult for them to institute a move, a major factor inhibiting women's career progression (Kolb in Taylor 1984).

Women deal with the problems in different ways. Three of the museum women I interviewed have no children, nor plan to have any, either by choice or by circumstance. Indeed, many women make the choice not to have a family because they place a higher priority on a successful career, and it serves to demonstrate the extent of the difficulties that they feel they cannot successfully combine the two. Those that do choose to combine parenthood and employment find themselves under considerable strain. Interviewee X, for example, thinks women commonly feel guilty that they have not done as well as they could, as a result of effectively trying to do two jobs at once (X 2001). Trying to be a perfect mother as well as fulfilling the demands of their job also results in many women suffering from "burn-out" and exhaustion (Taylor 1984). Women should not have to work twice as hard as men to reach as far, nor should they be content to take a second place to men in the workplace in order to have families. So, what are the chances of achieving this at present, and how might it be achieved in the future?

Equal Opportunities, Childcare and Flexible Working

We can set the situation in museums in the context of the equal opportunities legislation relevant to parents in any employment. The actual birth of a baby and its immediate aftermath is no longer the main problem, as 18 weeks with statutory maternity pay or allowance are provided for by law (Parents at Work 2001a). It is the period when children are young and need continuous care which is most problematic. Now, the majority of women go straight back to work after maternity leave: 2 in 3 women did so in 1996, compared with only 1 in 4 in 1979 (The Industrial Society 2001b). They are therefore heavily reliant on childcare: Anna Southall, for example, could not have coped without the live-in help she had while her children were young (Southall 2001). Unfortunately, for every 7 children under the age of 8, there was in 2000 only one place in a day nursery, out of school club, or with a child-minder (EOC 2001a). Moreover, "in Europe, the UK has the lowest levels of publicly funded childcare for the under threes, and one of the lowest levels for three to five year olds" (Fawcett Society 2001). So, without the money to pay for childcare, which in the museum sector where salaries are comparatively low will often have to rely on a partner's income, the problem is intensified.

Widely recommended and adopted solutions to help reduce the need for childcare after a return to work include job-sharing, part-time work, flexible hours, compressed hours, V-time, term-time working, career breaks, sabbaticals, and working from home (New Ways to Work 2001a; Parents at Work 2001b; Ohren 1988), all of which depend on the employer's willingness to adapt to employees' needs. Whilst there is no clear right to demand flexible working hours at present, employers must be able to give good reason for refusing such a request, or there may be justification for a claim under the SDA (Parents at Work 2001b). The government has, however, announced that in 2003 legislation will give parents of young children the legal right to have such a request seriously considered (New Ways to Work 2001b).

Ideally, these arrangements should be able to be adopted without detriment to the parent's career progression, but in practice there is still a high risk that the chances of promotion and progression may be reduced. Related to this is the fact that availability of these options is often confined to the lower levels, in museums as elsewhere, with senior employees experiencing more resistance to flexible working, especially from childless colleagues (Abel 2001). Discriminatory attitudes towards women of child-bearing age also linger on, such as male line managers found to be "reluctant to promote women of childbearing age in case they became pregnant [...] Some line managers (both male and female) view women as less committed and reliable once they have a family" (EOC 2000a).

In museums, the curb that child-rearing still puts on women's careers is demonstrated by the experiences of my interviewees, despite their success in finding a way through. Those who have not had children felt their careers would not have been able to take the same path if they had – another woman, with only one child, says she found it "tough", and thinks she would not have been able to manage with another, despite always having worked in organizations which are flexible about time off (X 2001).

All three women with more than one child describe adjustments to their career path. The clearest demonstration is Sally MacDonald's move from Croydon Museums to the Petrie, a downward step in terms of level of responsibility, made largely as a result of having a second child. She relates: "I then got pregnant with my second child, and I thought, I simply can't handle this any more – I can't handle the level of working [...] The hours were very, very long [...] I made the point to them several times that whilst they had evening committee meetings [...] and while they had this really strong work ethic, they would inevitably attract fewer women" (MacDonald 2001).

Anna Southall also felt that while her children were young it was important to do a job which was "well within her capability" (Southall 2001), and therefore stayed at the Tate for fourteen years. She later realized what a risk this apparent stagnation had been for her career progression.

Unfortunately, then, the situation still obtains where parents caring for children cannot maintain the level of responsibility and challenge that they would otherwise undertake. As with general employment issues as described above, the promotion of equal opportunities has gone some way to help, with strategies that can help women out in the short term and enable more women to maintain their career. Notably, however, none of the women I interviewed had worked part-time or taken a break longer than their designated maternity leave. There are many surviving difficulties and drawbacks to the attempts to help. The real problem is that women are still the ones who take the greatest responsibility for childcare, and thus suffer the majority of these limitations, leaving them lagging behind male colleagues. Indeed, there are fears that the current measures, in being generally targeted at women, may "reinforce the general expectation that women are those responsible for their children's care" (Ledwith and Colgan 1996).

The need for a change in attitudes

Clearly, a crucial turning point would be reached if men began to share equally the burdens of childcare, so that women's salaries and careers would not have to bear the brunt. This will require a fundamental change in society's perceptions of women and men and their roles, if it is to be achieved: "When the phrases "career man" or "working father" have ceased to sound silly, when a man carrying a baby on a Tuesday afternoon is not gawped at, when breadwinning is not seen as a strand of the Y chromosome, women will have a shot at equal status in the office and boardroom. Not before" (The Industrial Society 2001a).

At present many are pessimistic about this ever coming about, although there are encouraging signs. Opportunity Now reports that "one of the main changes over the last decade has been that in many member organizations, flexible working opportunities are not only taken up by working mothers, but by men too" (Opportunity Now 2001).

Importantly, the afore-mentioned legislation giving a legal right to request flexible work-patterns will cover fathers as well as mothers. So also, men will become entitled to two weeks' paid paternity leave from 2003 (Parents at Work 2001a). A situation can be envisaged where men suffer equal limitations to women as a result of childcare: the division would begin to fall between parents and non-parents instead of men and women.

To achieve a more favourable outcome, where limitations on parents of either sex could eventually disappear, attitudes to arrangements to help parents bring children up need much improvement. At present, women "find that they are required to fit into a system which has already been structured by those who got there first- men- around a full-time, lifetime career of commitment and progression; a system predicated on expectations by and about men's work; a system of patriarchy" (Ledwith and Colgan 1996).

Current concepts of management and organizational culture must adapt so that successful working is no longer felt to require full-time commitment without external concerns – be they family, social life or other priorities – and can be measured by targets attained rather than putting in the hours (Blake 1999). This would benefit men, women, parents and non-parents, and the rise in interest in questions of "work-life balance" implies a trend in the right direction. Crucially for its viability, this scheme stresses the business case for facilitating flexible working for all employees: "flexibility in your employment practices can help you increase productivity, attract the skilled, experienced and motivated staff you need – and retain them in a competitive marketplace" (DfEE 2000).

In addition, for those parents who want to stop work entirely for the period their children are young, where financial circumstances permit, the concept of the career break needs rethinking (James 1988). Some organizations offer breaks of up to three years with a guaranteed return, but in practice, museums are often unable to do so, due to financial and staffing constraints. In reality, many women choose to leave their job and find another after the break: such a break tends to be viewed as a slack period, and women struggle to secure a good job on their return to employment. Karen Knight, whose museum career began after her children were at secondary school, relates how one interviewer "inferred that where I had been – that is, being a vicar's wife, bringing up children, wheeling and dealing in those terms – and those skills had nothing to do with the world I was about to enter" (Knight 2001).

She argues that in fact those skills are "key skills", and that a crucial step would be to view the break instead as a valuable period of development, as does James: "in managing their homes and families [women] bring to bear a range of skills in time management, financial control, emotional development, task organization and strategic thinking that are readily and easily transferable to the workplace" (James 1988). If this was widely recognized, then a three year break for children could be seen, not only more positively by employers, but even in terms of a personal development plan associated with the AMA. It is, in part, a question of "marketing": women returning to the job market need to present themselves more dynamically, and extol the value of their time off. Eventually, both women and men could see such a period as a valuable stage in both their personal and career development. Clearly, all this will require significant changes in men and women's attitudes, which we shall turn to in the next section.

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS DEPENDING UPON THE INDIVIDUAL

Attitude Problems

The historical and cultural context has been highly instrumental in determining the ways men and women behave and conceptualize themselves, which in women can be seen as "a product of the effects of oppression" (Simmons 1996). Women have been socialized in the dominant culture of patriarchy to think of themselves as the weaker sex, stereotypically caring, nurturing and gentle. Closely related is the division of female and male roles, with men being perceived as the "breadwinners" (EOC 2000a), while women look after the home, which has resulted in women de-prioritizing their own careers, and being concentrated in jobs fitting the stereotypes (Anker 1998; Ledwith and Colgan 1996.). Both women and men have absorbed this mindset, which makes it all the harder to break: we now turn to consider the common attitudes which result. We must beware of generalization: Karen Knight proposed a helpful notion, of typically "feminine" or "masculine" skills and traits (Knight 2001), which either sex may well possess. Crucially, we are not suggesting women and men are inherently different: we could aim to eliminate these differences, transforming the social structures which inculcate them. But in the meantime, there are certain typical attitudes women need beware of in themselves and men, and others on which they may capitalize.

Women's Internalized Barriers

"Are the last barriers to our success subtly internalized ones; that is, not the attitudes of others, but our own?" (Taylor 1984).

Women often lack confidence in their own abilities, tending to put themselves down and fail to take opportunities. Kathy Gee says that only recently does she "actually believe I deserve the credit that I get", and has caught herself making the mistake of feeling that she was never ready to take a challenging step (Gee 2001). This echoes Kendall Taylor: "too many of us come with our own limiting belief – "I'm not ready"" (Taylor 1984). Women also tend to care greatly about what others think of them (Carmichael 2001). This sensitivity to others' feelings can manifest itself in a desire for consensus, and an unwillingness to impose a solution or opinion: "in the group dynamics of meetings, the men's confidence that they're right will come out more. I will tend to suggest, or put forward an idea, rather than saying I think we should do this. The men tend to be more direct, and that works to their advantage" (ibid). These kinds of tendencies even affect the ways women talk, downplaying their own authority, and taking others' feelings into account (Tannen 1994). All this can make women seem to lack confidence, competence and authority, and can result in others getting the credit for their actions. Also commonly mentioned is women's lack of manage-ment and "politicking" skills, in comparison with men, who have traditionally felt a greater need to learn them (Taylor 1984). In addition, because these have for generations been male-dominated arenas, women may be at a disadvantage because they actually require more masculine patterns of thought. To quote Kate Starling: "I think a lot of women have more problems with the big strategic thing, because a lot of women hate, and I'm among them, politics, or politicking, and I think that's what holds them back. I think that this is still the problem, that in general politics is run in a male like way" (Starling 2001).

These feminine characteristics may then be hampering women's progress in the workplace, both by reducing their own desire to move higher in organizations, and by affecting the way they are perceived by those with the power to employ or promote them.

Men's Engrained Attitudes

The effects of gender stereotyping also, evidently, manifest themselves in the attitudes of many, though by no means all, men. Some of the women interviewed had come across numerous instances of these effects, occasionally deliberately revealed and intentionally hurtful, but much more frequently unintentional. One interviewee relates how the male group she works with do "that half-standing up thing" when she walks into a meeting (X 2001), which, on one level, is merely old-fashioned courtesy, but also disturbs her because it carries the "weaker sex agenda". She also describes men continually making sexist comments, particularly in interactions with the clerical staff, which effectively aim to "keep them in their place" (ibid). The same woman was asked at an interview how she would manage to get along with people who would feel threatened by the fact that she is a woman (ibid). For this sense that women at work pose a threat still exists in some men despite the numbers of women in the workforce. Anna Southall tells how she has constantly been aware of men who find it difficult to relate to women professionally, including a line manager who could only relate to women as "daughters or mistresses" (Southall 2001). Problems also occur with men outside the immediate work environment. Museum visitors may assume male junior colleagues to be senior (Abel 2001), or be surprised to find a young woman in charge (Gee 2001). Problems have also involved specialist groups, particularly with older members, as well as building contractors (MacDonald 2001). Clearly, these instances are much less problematic than those involving colleagues, but they still have an effect upon the woman's prestige and perceived effectiveness. Men can also effectively exclude women in meetings, again often unintentionally. Thus Jane Carmichael comments that "I think there is a certain sense in which the men at director level think they automatically understand each other, and that assumption is not necessarily there when the women are included" (Carmichael 2001).

The sense of a "club" to which women colleagues cannot truly belong is heightened where an exclusively male camaraderie is a significant factor in binding a group together. Thus Carolyn Abel notes "in an all-male environment, as a female, I think it has been difficult for some people [...] It's like a boy's club, a sort of laddishness comes out, and it's whether you play into that or not" (Abel 2001).

All these factors undermine women's power and influence in the workplace (Handy 1993).

A positive view

On the positive side, certain "feminine" traits could give women an advantage. There are differing viewpoints, as all these attitudinal issues are difficult to assess objectively. Women's stereotypical role as the nurturer, juggling concerns internal and external to the family, is often thought to have resulted in increased supportiveness and sensitivity, (Archambault 1994), better interpersonal and communication skills and ability to multi-task (Abel 2001; Knight 2001), and an entrepreneurial instinct (Orr-Cahall 1994). Others claim that women are in fact more task-oriented (Handy 1993, 103), and are therefore good consolidators (Starling 2001). The key point is that whichever of these characteristics individual women feel themselves to have, they should ensure they use them to the full, and thus give themselves a (much-needed) advantage over some, typically male, colleagues. So also, consensual management styles, which we noted above that women may tend to prefer because they do not like to impose solutions, are increasingly recommended. It is important to remember that women need not eliminate their feminine characteristics, in order to "play the game" like men. All women need do is beware that they do not fall into the typically feminine traps.

Notably, the successful women I interviewed all seem extremely self-aware, and have managed to overcome the pitfalls, either by personal character or through advice and deliberate effort. They have not, however, given up their individual characters to adapt to any prevailing cultures: they have found ways of working which suit their own personalities and seem to encompass many "feminine" characteristics. The majority noted confidence as a crucial factor for success (Carmichael 2001; Southall 2001; Starling 2001; X 2001) and a comment of Carolyn Abel's reveals that the lack of it can be overcome: "I'm not the most confident person in the world, but if something's wrong I'm afraid I have to say, and the way I tend to deal with it is think about it and form the arguments [...] And that way you actually earn yourself quite a lot of respect" (Abel 2001). We already noted Kathy Gee's overcoming of her "limiting belief" (Taylor 1984): other interviewees have also benefited from having the confidence to apply for jobs they instinctively thought out of their reach (Carmichael 2001; Southall 2001). Gee also relates how, in industry in the seventies, she dealt with being a young woman amongst "traditional big men in

suits" by dressing in a flamboyant velvet trouser suit, signifying that she was willing to play along with tradition to a certain extent, and yet preserved her own personality and identity (Gee 2001).

Later, when she was about to take the directorship at WMRMC, she discussed whether she would have to "change", and become "serious, grown-up, credible". Her friend advised her that all she need do was develop "another facet of [her] personality". This she thinks is an important concept: men adopt an artificial front in the workplace by, for example, dressing up in a suit, so there is no reason why a woman should not do the same, if it gives her an advantage. This means that at times she is prepared to use her "femaleness" to stand out, something which is echoed by many of my other interviewees. She mentions adopting striking modes of dress or presentation, as does Anna Southall (Gee 2001; Southall 2001). Others talk of profiting from the unexpectedness of being a woman, and using a degree of feminine manipulation (Knight 2001; Carmichael 2001).

Another issue we must consider is the question of whether women are not going for the higher level or higher profile jobs out of choice: a choice which could be considered very sensible. Women may have different ambitions, and different ideas of success: "whereas to men, ambition is equated with higher pay, women define this more broadly to encompass career progression and having enriching and enjoyable work" (EOC 2000a). Differing ambitions may be equally valuable but allow for a different career path: Sally MacDonald notes that "some of the male museum directors I know of (though by no means all) are clearly strongly motivated by a desire to run a big museum [...] I cannot speak for other women, but this is not one of my aspirations. I am very ambitious, but the ambition is to do with being recognized for creativity in working with people and objects. For me, it's easier to get results in a smaller place" (Pers.comm, 19th July 2001).

Others point out that those who entered museum work out of a desire to work with objects and/or people will naturally be unwilling to move into the higher echelons where the work is more administrative and strategic (Starling 2001; Abel 2001): "we would rather remain frontline museologists specializing in a discipline than accept the new and difficult challenges inherent in a directorship" (Taylor 1984). This is related to the typical lack of interest in management and political skills noted above. It can be seen as a limitation, making women wrongly consider themselves as unsuited to the high level, high profile roles, but it can also be seen as a valid choice. Kathy Gee, for example, wonders whether women in fact have more "common sense", and ask themselves whether it is worth progressing higher up, while the stress levels are so high and so prohibitive to a life outside the museum (Gee 2001).

There is a sense, then, in which men can be seen to be limited too, in being under more pressure to earn as much as possible and progress as high as they can:

"I think it's actually more of a curb on men, than it is on women, their being pushed to go into the higher earning jobs" (Starling 2001)

Kate Starling thinks the pressure on men to earn is one of the reasons there are so many more women than men entering the profession now, as men are driven into higher paid sectors. What needs to happen, once again, is that the stereotypes be overturned and both men and women choose freely their employment, with no cultural or historical pressures in operation. An important factor named by several of the interviewees, importantly, was their family background, with strong female role models who had already departed from the traditional roles for women (MacDonald 2001; Gee 2001; Southall 2001). I would argue it is likely that each generation will suffer these attitudinal limitations to a lesser extent.

Practical ways to promote individual success

Individual women, then, can aid their own progression by maintaining awareness of the common traps and barriers, so they can confront them more easily. It is clearly not easy to change one's own character, or to challenge the beliefs of others. There do exist, however, some practical strategies which can help.

Training

First, taking advantage of training supplied under equal opportunities initiatives, and asking for it where it is not automatically available, is one way to overcome some of the above difficulties. The introduction of training focused on gender issues, including assertiveness training, within a general scheme to help people gain promotion, is something Anna Southall would like to achieve at NMGW (Southall 2001). It is also recommended by Opportunity Now, a business-led initiative to improve women's position in the workplace: "in male-dominated organizations in particular, women may benefit from specific women-only programmes which develop, say, assertiveness skills or influencing, persuasion and "political" skills" (Opportunity Now 2001).

The women I interviewed had drawn many benefits from training courses they had attended, many of which related to gaining the management skills we noted women often lack (Carmichael 2001; Gee 2001), and realizing they were ready for the next step up (Southall 2001). They also recommended that qualifications are crucial for success (Carmichael 2001; MacDonald 2001). This may be one reason for the high proportion of women on Museum Studies courses – such as at UCL, where an examination of the course lists for the last five years shows an average of only 27% men. What we must beware, however, is a situation where women need to be more highly qualified than men to attain the same jobs.

Mentoring and networks

Another useful concept for women is that of mentoring and networks, both to help develop management and political skills, and to build the kinds of useful contacts men have always profited from. All the successful women I discussed this with were able to name individuals they would count as mentors, and had found these contacts extremely valuable. Kate Starling specifically asked for a professional management mentor, and finds this the best way to obtain the management training she needs (Starling 2001), which is echoed by Anna Southall (Southall 2001). Others mention former bosses who gave them reassurance and prepared them for new roles (Abel 2001; Carmichael 2001); people who prompted them to take profitable risks (Gee 2001); role models who inspired them from afar (Knight 2001). Many of these were male, but strong women also provided positive role models (Gee 2001; MacDonald 2001).

Career Planning

An important issue is career planning, for anyone who wants to do well in the sector: "the assumption now is that if you want to get on you will make a point of developing your portable skills, your time management, man management, financial management [...] I think it's now very important that people take charge of their own career development and really see what they can gain from moving around" (Carmichael 2001). A major factor within this is visibility and involvement in the wider issues confronting the sector, both within and outside your own organization. A wider interest in the work of your own museum, looking outside your specific area of expertise, is often mentioned as crucial for reaching the top jobs (Carmichael 2001; Southall 2001; Starling 2001). Involvement in outside committee work, steering groups and museum representation helps keep you up to date with developments in the sector, which can enable you to enrich your organization, increasing your standing and chances of promotion, preventing you becoming isolated, and gaining you peer recognition (Carmichael 2001; MacDonald 2001). It is also another good way to develop networks which can be extremely useful in job applications (Carmichael 2001).

Words of advice

Finally, the most common advice given by the women I interviewed was that women should behave as though discrimination does not exist and be very surprised if bias is encountered. The majority of the women I interviewed felt that a major factor in their own success and avoidance of discrimination was their lack of sensitivity to the potential problems. The following comments reveal the common attitude:

"I am not someone who takes offence, so I've been fairly unaware of it. It has never wound me up, because it has never occurred to me that I couldn't win" (Gee 2001).

"I am frequently gender blind, and that is probably part of the reason it has turned out well for me [...] Don't get hung up on the gender issue – it is better just to presume you will be able to do whatever you want" (Southall 2001).

Clearly, a major factor in these women's success seems to be the fact that they are strong enough characters to "win through" (Knight 2001) unaffected by all the issues we have seen do still exist for women in museums.

CONCLUSION

Let us recapitulate women's situation. It seems that some of the factors which have historically hindered women's success are being adequately dealt with. These are the most obvious manifestations of bias, in recruitment, promotion, pay, and general treatment of the female workforce, which have been outlawed by legislation and tackled by the better-developed areas of equal opportunities programmes. The role of women, clearly, has developed enormously, and this has been reflected, in museums, by a massive increase in numbers of women at intake level. We might well agree that "there are actually very few problems for women lower down the organization" (MacDonald 2001). However, we must not allow this to produce complacency. The problem remains that women are not rising above this level in proportional numbers, and this is due to a series of issues which make it harder for them to do so. Family responsibilities are the single largest problem, once the level of responsibility is increased, as unfortunately it remains the case that many more women than men shoulder the burden of responsibility for the home. Women can also face negative attitudes in the workplace, especially where the organizational culture is most conservative, and even their own characteristics can tend to work against them.

The enduring problems, it is evident, are those which are subtlest and most difficult to eradicate, resulting from deep-seated societal prejudices about the roles of men and women and the ways they should behave. Individuals can help themselves succeed by following the various strategies outlined above, things like training, career planning and networking, which were all counted as important by the successful women I interviewed, but these alone, I would argue, are insufficient to tackle the problems once and for all. Clearly it is impossible to outline a definitive route to success. The career paths of high profile men and women in museums and related fields show much variety: some have worked their way through one institution; others have moved between many high profile organizations; others started in small museums and moved on to larger ones; others began their careers in different sectors (Who's Who 2001). There are at first glance no differences between the backgrounds of the men and the women. Judging by my interviewees, however, something extra is still needed for women to reach the top. They tended to mention as a key factor excellence at the job, have worked extremely hard, and also seem to share a certain charisma and energy, even eccentricity (Gee 2001), which has been instrumental in winning them success. They are unusually confident and have

the ability to adapt to whatever working situation they find themselves in without losing their strong sense of their own identity. It is unsurprising if such exceptionally capable people have negotiated their careers without setbacks: for, despite the many isolated instances of discrimination which they mentioned in our conversations, most of these women did not consider themselves to have encountered significant bias.

There are several important issues to discuss at this point. Firstly, the extra efforts women may have to make to achieve, when they are still likely to be shouldering the burden at home, as well as trying to prove themselves in a dominant workplace culture which tends to value their skills less highly, can easily lead to exhaustion and "burn-out". It is noted that women have a tendency to try to be "super-women" and take too much upon themselves (Schmidt Campbell 1994; Taylor 1984): delegation and "to say no" (Abel 2001) are crucial lessons to learn. It is also important to remember that it is not helpful for the collective success of women if individuals succeed by driving themselves to the limit, rather than insisting on conditions which will enable them to succeed on just the same terms as men. Thus Jean Weber welcomed the emergence of women in museums "who have had it with the burn-out and the unrecognized achievements [...] They are not begging for opportunities for individual success, but are expecting to find workplace conditions that are conducive to efficient and satisfying teamwork. It is becoming common for women to be as demanding as men are about the basic safety nets for performing on the job" (Weber 1994).

This is linked to a growing concern, as numbers of women entering the profession increasingly outnumber men, about the "feminization" of the museum sector. Weber continues: "too often in the past men went elsewhere when faced with lack of professional stability in the field and women gratefully took their places" (ibid).

Women, stereotyped as secondary earners, have tended to count themselves lucky to have a job at all, and are therefore prepared to put up with lower salaries and less security than men. Does a sector like museums end up filled with women, because these happen to be common conditions? Or is the very reason the sector suffers these poor working conditions the fact that it is viewed as "women's work", and thus devalued (Cummins 1991)? We must beware that the growing number of women in the sector, a fact that seems to be in favour of women's success, does not end up having the opposite effect: removing the possibility of seeing museums as an arena for success at all. The profession as a whole currently needs advocates, in any case (Knight 2001): it is important that its status is maintained if it is to attract the best people, both male and female, and provide them with a secure and fulfilling career.

We ended the last section with the view that the best way for individual women to promote their own

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success is to remain deliberately blind to gender problems. This is, to begin with, a somewhat paradoxical standpoint, for it requires an assumption that there are no problems, whilst at the same time recognizing they might be encountered. It is clear that it has helped my interviewees in their own careers, and accordingly must be seen to have value as a short-term strategy to promote individual success. However, it seems to me that it is unhelpful in the long-term, for the collective success of women. I noted that the women I interviewed all seem to be particularly "strong" characters: what is worrying is that it is unsatisfactory if women are required to be exceptionally strong in the workplace. As interviewee X put it, "sexism definitely exists, and it is too bad that we have to act so strongly to counter it, rather than just acting normally" (X 2001).

I would suspect that it is women who are not so strong by nature who are much more aware of and hindered by the lingering problems. Such women are not well-equipped, by position or personality, to take action against them. What is needed, I would argue, is to increase awareness in those who have the power to make changes: those women and men who are high in their organizations. Strong successful women like those I interviewed are well-placed to lead the way. Then collective action might succeed in transforming the organizational culture, whereas at present a strategy for individual survival tends to leave those with the strength to promote change unaware of the extent of the problems suffered by those less equipped to cope with them.

What action can be recommended? Full use should be made of the existent procedures for redress against discrimination. Again, the key is for "strong" women in positions of influence to support their junior and more vulnerable colleagues and even take action on their behalf. They must not tolerate sexist behaviour, however subtle, for "sexism is like racism, in that every time you let an instance pass, you actually feed it" (X 2001).

They must overcome the current reluctance to take issue with problematic individuals, particularly individuals in high status positions: for this is, unfortunately, where they can do most harm. This is, of course, a difficult and sensitive matter, and non-antagonistic methods seem preferable: leadership by example may be the key (X 2001). Where softer methods do not take effect, however, confrontation must no longer be avoided. A climate must be developed in which women will no longer be reluctant to speak out for fear of jeopardizing their chances (Hicks 1985); dissuaded from taking valid cases to employment tribunals by fear of future unemployment; "paid off" to prevent upheaval. With the support, assistance and reassurance of senior colleagues, in their own organizations or elsewhere, this might become possible. To quote Ledwith and Colgan (1996): "key ingredients in the liberation of women and men in their organizations are women's and men's increasing awareness of gender politics combined with a willingness to actively challenge inequalities and work towards organizational transformation".

Clearly, it will not be easy to remove the lingering problems, by virtue of the fact that they are the most subtle and engrained. But we should not be satisfied until this has been achieved. This discussion has drawn on the experiences of women who have reached the top of the profession, and has used their observations and experiences, combined with literature and statistics on the issue, to determine what factors are still stopping women succeeding, and the possibilities for overcoming them. They provide ample proof that women are well equipped for leadership roles in museums. Their experiences have provided positive models to imitate and improve upon, and it is to be hoped that the strategies recommended will help more women succeed. To avoid giving a misleading picture I have constantly viewed these women as exceptional and tried to give a picture of the difficulties suffered by more typical women. However, clearly further study is needed of women at different levels in the museum profession, to verify the extent of the problem. It will be interesting to see the results of research currently being undertaken by the Museums Professionals Group into the experiences of graduates from Museum Studies courses in their first five years (Abel 2001), to find whether my interviewees were right in thinking gender issues are not a problem at the lower levels of the profession. An interesting study could also be made of women just below the "glass ceiling". At a more fundamental level, I would recommend that more statistical research be done into precise numbers of women at the different levels of the profession, in different departments and types of work, and into their salaries as compared with men.

I would conclude by reiterating, for the beginning of the 21st century, the words of Kinshasha Holman Conwill: "what's still fairly disappointing on the verge of the 21st century is that the structures, whether in the museum field or the rest of society, have not really changed as they really should have, particularly given all the struggle that has gone before. For society as a whole and for the museum field, until that really changes, I don't think we can declare victory" (Cassedy O'Donnell 1997).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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