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## **Women in Managerial Positions in Greek Education: Evidence of Inequality**

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### **Abstract**

This article deals with the under-representation of women in managerial positions in Greece. While substantial progress has been made in terms of the legal framework that ensures equal rights to both men and women in the country, evidence shows that there are barriers that inhibit women from pursuing and taking such positions, resulting to covert discrimination. This occurs despite the dominance of women in Greek education. We regard that kind of discrimination as a democratic deficit; it contradicts the notion of "democratic citizenship." Although we do not

advocate a quota system, we stand for implementation of basic democratic principles, which could prevent such discrimination.

## Introduction

The dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has brought once again the issue of citizenship to the front of socio-political arguments. The failure, within the context of globalization, of both social-democratic "statism" and Thatcherite free-market economies to resolve burning issues such as unemployment and social exclusion, has led to the reconsideration of the "Civil Society" and the post-modern "Citizen" (Cohen & Arato, 1992). Traditionally, citizenship has been considered to have two principal dimensions: the *civic*, concerned primarily with the fundamental freedoms of speech, thought and religion, and the *political*, concerned with participation in political developments and the right to vote and be elected (Marshall, 1995, Tilly, 1995).

However, the realization that crucial decisions about the development of postmodern globalized societies are made without the actual participation of the citizens and that large sectors of these societies are excluded from fundamental social rights has sensitized citizens to the issues of participation and exclusion. Thus, another dimension has been added to the concept of "citizenship," namely, the *social dimension*. It includes fundamental social rights such as access to health, work, welfare and participation in decision-making mechanisms. These rights, when exercised on an equal basis by all members of the society, are now considered to be at the heart of democracy. Recent developments in Seattle, Gothenburg and Genoa illustrate the reaction caused when parts of the (globalized) society feel deprived of the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes.

Arguably, access to the rights that constitute the social dimension of citizenship has not been gained simultaneously by both men and women; indeed, it has been considered a "male-privilege" for many societies. For many years, liberal democracy had built the notion of "citizenship" using male stereotypes as a basis (James, 1996, Walby, 1994, Kavounidi, 1998). Issues such as occupational choice and access to various professions, participation in decision-making positions at work or in other aspects of social life, promotion criteria, are traditionally not only determined by personal preference and psychological motives, but also related to historical, sociopolitical, ideological and cultural mechanisms. According to researchers, these mechanisms have been gender biased, at least to a certain extent. (Kassimati, 1989, Eliou, 1993, Vassilou – Papageorgiou, 1995, Kaltsogia-Tournavitou, 1997). In other words, women have not had equal access to these rights. Undoubtedly, however, research and analysis of such phenomena of inequality and their origins pose substantial difficulties and certainly go beyond the scope of the research reported here.

In this article, we focus on the observed under-representation of women in decision making mechanisms of the Greek educational system, and more specifically in school management. We attempt to identify the reasons behind that phenomenon, which we consider a clear example of the limited development of the *social dimension of citizenship* in Greece. The data used for this research were provided by the Greek Ministry of Education and have been analyzed by the authors.

## Women in the Greek Labor Market

Consider the general picture of Greek labor market and the position of women in it. According to 1996 statistics, the workforce in Greece is about 4.3 million persons, of which 2.6 million are men (60%) and 1.6 million are women (40%). The percentage of women in high-ranking positions, however, does not match the above overall distribution. Only one of the political-parties has a woman as a leader (the Greek Communist Party), while only 5.6% of the Members of Parliament (MPs) and 16% of the Euro-MPs are women. Women in governmental positions have never exceeded 12%. Furthermore, although 36% of the people working in the media are women, only 10% are in managerial positions. To put it plainly, women are not proportionally represented in high-ranking, prestigious positions. According to Damoulianou (1998), despite the fact that for more than 15 years there are more women than men studying in the Greek Universities, this predominance of women in higher education is not reflected in the labor market, where inequality is observable in quantitative as well as qualitative terms. The above examples are just quantitative evidence that inequality persists in the Greek society and institutions, as in other Western European countries.

According to Eurobarometer (1998), within the EU, the level of female participation in positions of "high responsibility" is considerably low. The reasons according to the same source include following:

- Lack of time, due to family responsibilities;
- The working environment is male-dominated and does not "trust" women;
- Women are not "ready to fight" for their careers;
- Women do not always possess the necessary psychological characteristics to cope with the pressures of such a male-dominated environment;
- Women are "not interested" in such positions.

While the above are said to be typical of all the EU countries, they are definitely valid for Greece, as relevant studies have shown. In the following paragraphs, we hope to demonstrate that the profession of education evidences clearly the validity of the above argument. What is noteworthy is that the domain of education is **not** male dominated in Greece, as it is shown in the following paragraphs.

## Women in Education

It has been suggested by numerous researchers and by statistical data, that in most developed countries women are over-represented in pre-primary and primary education as well as in general secondary education as opposed to technical and vocational secondary education. (Wilson, 1997). In Greece, the same pattern is evidenced as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Women in Greek Education (1997-1998)**

	<b>Number of Teachers</b>	<b>Number of Women</b>	<b>Percentage of Women</b>
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		<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Teachers</b>
Nursing Schools	8,785	8,604	97.9
Primary Education	45,814	25,572	55.8
General Secondary	49,733	29,225	58.8
Technical-Vocational Secondary	19,069	8,083	42.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>123,401</b>	<b>71,484</b>	<b>57.9</b>

Source: Ministry of Education, Annual Statistics, 1998

Numerous research projects and authors have tried to explain the phenomenon of high representation of women in the teaching profession (both in primary and secondary education), not only in Greece but in Western societies in general (Vassilou – Papageorgiou, 1992, Bucher & Saran, 1995, Cowan & Koutouzis, 1997, Dimitropoulos, 1997, Neave, 1998). We shall not repeat the arguments here. Briefly however, teaching (especially in primary and lower secondary education) has been considered to be the continuation of childcare and child-rearing, which in turn has been associated with women in the above societies. Given these facts, however, one would expect a strong representation of women in managerial positions in the Greek educational system.

### **Women in Managerial Positions—The Case of Greece**

There are four kinds of managerial positions in the Greek educational system: **Heads of Schools, Heads of Regional Educational Office** (Local Educational Authorities), **School Advisors**, and finally **Heads of Greek Educational Offices Abroad**. What has to be noted however, is that the responsibilities of all the above are limited compared to related positions in other educational systems. The highly centralized nature of the system is mainly responsible for the limited authority of the above positions.

For all schools, the center has: defined the content of the national curriculum; recommended appropriate teaching methods; published textbooks; allocated funding; legislated for participation by various stakeholders in schooling; determined student examinations and has taken full responsibility for the organization of schools, including all aspects of staffing (OECD, 2001 p. 79).

Traditionally, within the highly centralized and bureaucratized Greek educational system, Heads of Schools have been administrators expected to follow and implement decisions made at the central level, i.e., the Ministry of Education. The same could be argued for the Heads of Regional Education Offices (HREOs). They are the "link" between central government and local schools, and they coordinate the schools in their area of responsibility. They are responsible for allocating staff to the schools of the region for which they are responsible. However, the Ministry of Education allocates the staff to the region. In essence they do not decide the number of teachers; they merely administer the decision made at the central level.

School Advisors (SA) have a slightly different role. They are experienced subject specialists, often holding post-graduate degrees, and they assist teachers by offering

advice and disseminating good practices. The area of responsibility of each School Advisor depends on the number of teachers teaching the specific subject in each region. For instance there is only one Advisor for Art Education for the whole of the country, but several for Mathematics (34) and Language & Literature (98). Their role is also centrally determined.

Despite the limitations posed by the educational system, all three positions enjoy a certain degree of prestige and status in Greek society, with the HREO and the SAs placed higher in the "ranking." This can be explained by the crucial role of the schools in the early stages of the formation of Greek society, and also by the participation of HREO and SA in various Assessment and Selection Committees. As discussed below, these positions, irrespective of their status in the society, are key to the successful operation of the system and thus, important for the Ministry (and the Minister) of Education.

Perhaps the most prestigious, but definitely the most attractive and well-paid positions, are the Heads of Greek Educational Offices Abroad (HGEOA). Their role is *advisory, managerial, andcontrolling*. In essence, they represent the Greek Ministry of Education in their area of responsibility. Occasionally, HGEOA have to negotiate with authorities of the host country on issues of organization and administration of the Greek schools, while they also play an important role in the social life of the Greek Diaspora. We could argue, therefore, that their role is also political. There are 26 such positions around the world: 13 in Western Europe and 13 in other continents (USA, Canada, Argentina, Egypt, South Africa, Ukraine, Turkey and 6 in Australia). HGEOA enjoy greater autonomy than their counterparts in Greece, as it is difficult for the Ministry to interfere in everyday aspects of Greek education in these areas. Their selection, however, is centrally administered by the Ministry of Education.

According to Table 2, 41% of Primary Heads are women, although almost 56% of primary teachers are women.

**Table 2**  
**Percentage of Women in School Management in European Countries**

Country	Primary Education		Secondary Education	
	Teachers (%)	Heads (%)	Teachers (%)	Heads (%)
England and Wales	81	49	49	26
France	79	64	56	30
Greece	56	41	59	36
Hungary	85	33	97	30
Ireland	78	46	54	29
Italy	93	46	63	30
Netherlands	76	13	33	7

Norway	74	40	39	22
Spain	74	47	50	20

(Source: Wilson, 1997)

What is interesting in the above table is that Greece stands among the countries with the highest representation of women in School Management positions, indicating that the reasons for the observed under-representation are not country-specific. Rather they come as a result of the reasons stated above by the Eurobarometer study.

The relatively high percentage of women appointed as Heads of schools in Greece does not in any case mean that equality has been achieved, or that women have equal access to such positions. It just shows that the phenomenon of under-representation of women in managerial positions is not unique to Greece.

If we now turn to the more prestigious and, arguably, more influential positions of Heads of Regional Education Offices and School Counselors, the phenomenon of inequality and under-representation is clearly demonstrated. According to Tables 3 and 4, during the last selection process in 1998, only 11 women primary teachers out of 443 candidates expressed an interest in becoming Heads of Regional Office. In secondary education, the numbers were 13 out of 466.

**Table 3**  
**Heads of Regional Education Offices (Primary Education)**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>% of Women</b>
Candidates	433	11	2.48
Selected	199	6	3.01

Source: Ministry of Education, Annual Statistics, 1998

**Table 4**  
**Heads of Regional Education Offices (Secondary Education)**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>% of Women</b>
Candidates	466	13	2.78
Selected	191	13	6.81

Source: Ministry of Education, Annual Statistics, 1998

What is interesting to note is that all 13 women selected in secondary education were Greek language and literature teachers.

Moving to the School Advisors (Table 5), we notice that in Primary Education there were only 72 out of 512 women candidates, and in Secondary Education 148 out of 625.

**Table 5**  
**School advisors in Greece**

	Candidates			Selected		
	Total	Women	%	Total	Women	%
Pre-Primary Education	104	104	100	49	49	100
Primary Education	512	72	14.1	301	32	10.6
Special Education	57	8	14	16	0	0
Secondary Education	625	148	23.7	254	47	18.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,298</b>	<b>332</b>	<b>25.6</b>	<b>620</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>20.6</b>

Source: Ministry of Education, Annual Statistics, 1998

Finally, during the last selection process, for the position of Head of Greek Educational Offices Abroad, there were 199 candidates, 140 men and 59 women as we see in Table 6. Only 5 women were selected.

**Table 6**  
**Heads of Greek Educational Offices Abroad**

	Total	Women	% of Women
Candidates	199	59	29.6
Selected	26	5	19.2

If we now compare the above figures with the percentage of women teachers in Greece, we can easily reach the conclusion that female participation in managerial or other "crucial" positions in the Greek educational system is not as high as expected and does not reflect the composition of the teaching profession in the country. We see four interrelated reasons for this under-representation. There are three levels of overt or covert discrimination that result in the unequal representation of women in such high-status and highly responsible positions. Below we attempt to identify these levels of discrimination and the main reasons for them.

## **Reasons for the low participation of women in managerial positions**

### **Personal—psychological barriers**

Research has shown that lack of interest on behalf of women in managerial or other highly responsible positions can be explained by the stress caused by role-conflict (Al Khalifa, 1992, Thompson, 1992). A woman teacher does not separate her working life from her "personal" life in the same way a man does. Worrying that such a position and responsibility may absorb time dedicated to her family, she is reluctant to apply for it. It is felt that having "two jobs" places a significant burden on women's shoulders no



matter how helpful their partners are (Singleton, 1993).

In the Greek context, part of the responsibilities of some School Advisors is to travel and advise teachers from different areas, even prefectures. If a woman takes on such a responsibility, given the family structures in Greece, she is definitely aware that such a decision would probably cause "disorder" within her family. Thus, she is intrinsically demotivated, and prefers to continue her career as an ordinary teacher. Research has shown that women feel more satisfied in the teaching profession than men do, as they feel that there is no incompatibility between their personal and working life (Dimitropoulos, 1997).

Psychological barriers are not expressed only in a lack of interest for managerial positions. It has also been argued that women feel they should also adopt "male behavior" in order to become accepted and appreciated in such positions (Shakeshaft, 1987). Such an argument, however, is not valid, as it has been heavily disputed by research evidence. According to Shakeshaft, (1987) and Robetrson, (1996), in schools headed by women academic achievement and morale is higher, there is less violence, and generally fewer discipline problems. Also, De Lyon and Migniuolo (1989), confirming the above argument, suggest that it is women's rather different approach to educational management that succeeds. Moreover, current discussions about management and leadership in schools bring to the surface the effectiveness of more democratic, flexible and participatory models of leadership (Koutouzis, 1999). Such models do not require the dominance of a male Headmaster but rather the skill to bring together views and opinions. "The very nature of management, dealing as it does with areas of uncertainty, negotiation and policy making, draws on feminine qualities of intuition, aesthetic considerations, dependence on colleagues and so on" (Singleton, 1993, p.175). This is not to say that all women in relevant positions adopt such a leadership style. It indicates, however that the male stereotype is not the only way to efficiency and effectiveness.

### **Institutional barriers**

By the term "institutional barriers," we mean all barriers related to the educational system, its structure and the way it is organized and managed. As mentioned above, all three positions are considered crucial in terms of political operation of the Greek educational system, given its highly centralized and bureaucratized nature. We could argue, therefore, that authorities, irrespective of their political stand and ideology, seek to manipulate the crucial positions of the system by defining the selection criteria and controlling the internal structure of the system. The final aim is to be able to promote and realize educational policies determined at the center, i.e., the Ministry of Education. The fact that in every governmental change there is also an imposed change of persons in the above- mentioned positions can only confirm the argument of political manipulation of the system and its key posts.

Following the above argument it is safe to assert that such manipulation can be associated with gender issues. Let us be more specific. The selection criteria for all three key positions under discussion can be divided into two main categories: a) objective criteria, and b) subjective criteria.

In the first category, all academic or other qualifications, which can be proved by

relevant degrees, certificates and the like are included. Professional and other managerial experience is also included in it. In the second category, personal skills and qualities are included. Ability to lead and manage, general social activity, participation in local clubs... are among the expected qualities, assessed by the –centrally appointed – Selection Committee. The assessment of the Committee is of utmost importance in cases where the qualifications presented are about equal.

The composition of the Committee has always been male dominated. Given the persisting stereotypes in Greek society (see below), we would expect that in cases of equal qualifications, male candidates are preferred.

### **Social—cultural barriers**

It is very crucial for our argument to appreciate that in Greece gender equality has been introduced into legislation fairly recently. The Constitution of 1975 established legal equality between men and women. According to it, men and women in Greece enjoy the same rights and responsibilities in all aspects of social life (education, work, healthcare, etc.). However, it was only in 1983 that institutional and legal "barriers" were truly removed, establishing gender equality. For nearly a decade, these barriers, due to lack of subsequent relevant legislation, prohibited the realization of the constitutional right of equality (Kaltsoglia-Tournavitou, 1997). "Jobs whilst not legally labeled 'for men' or 'for women' are still viewed by many people as just that"(Singleton, 1993, p.165).

It would be safe to argue, therefore, that the process of reaching gender equality in Greece started less than twenty years ago. The results of the process and, more importantly, subsequent changes of attitudes and cultural norms, are not immediate; and evidence of inequality - hidden rather than overt – can be observed in many aspects of Greek social life even today. We observe in Greece, the phenomenon described elsewhere: substantial equality can not be achieved as long as "hidden" discrimination and preferences are reproduced. It is not enough to declared equality if you "do not feel very comfortable facing a woman in a authority position" (Al Khalifa, 1992).

In the area of educational management attitudes and perceptions, follow the patterns described above. "Somehow people assume that men possess the necessary qualities to do the job and this only changes when they demonstrate otherwise, but with women, we have to prove over and over again that we can do the job before our abilities are recognized" (Singleton, 1993, p.171) . Quite simply, educational management is considered a "male" job, not only by society in general but also by teachers and even pupils. Research evidence confirms that pupils hold a preconception that effectiveness of the school is increased by having a male as Headteacher, who tolerates less "mucking about" (Stanworth, 1984).

### **Conclusion and Implications**

Despite considerable progress made in various aspects of Greek political and social life in general, there is clear evidence of female under-representation in managerial positions of the Greek educational system. The reasons for this are traced not solely to the socio-cultural barriers that persist in Greek society. Personal as well as institutional barriers complete a picture of covert discrimination. The fact that the teaching profession is "dominated" by women has not resulted to equal representation in positions of

relatively higher status and responsibility. Such discrimination, as we stated in the beginning, is not just evidence of male-female inequality and unfair treatment. It goes far beyond that, and it is rather a clear sign of violation of democratic attitudes and practices in a democratic country. It demonstrates the exclusion (overt or covered), of a significant part of the society from certain positions and the weakening of the *social* dimension of citizenship. The fact that the same phenomena are observed elsewhere in the western world does not weaken our argument. On the contrary, it confirms the existence of a democratic deficit in the western world where large sectors of society are excluded from decision-making positions and mechanisms.

In an era that calls for greater participation of all parts of society in social and political developments, in an era that has demonstrated that observed democratic deficits create tensions, the covert exclusion of majorities from decision-making mechanisms and positions is clearly not acceptable. While other authors propose the use of quotas to improve the situation, we strongly advocate respect for fundamental democratic principles.

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