

PUBLIC CONSULTATION - CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON GENDER EQUALITY 2020

QUESTIONNAIRE

CA30239

Name: Geraldine Halpin

Theme 1: Gender norms and stereotypes

Gender norms and stereotypes as barriers to gender equality

Fixed ideas about what women and men should do in the home or at work are learned by girls and boys in early childhood and throughout their lives. These ideas or gender stereotypes affect their choices in school and as they enter careers and contribute to a lack of progress toward equality between women and men. This limits not only the jobs that women and men consider or are available to them, but also can exclude women and men from social roles and tasks.

- Please outline what you see as the key barriers/ obstacles and challenges to gender equality under this theme in law, policy and practice.

For the purposes of this submission I would like to interrogate some of the words being used. While the term "gender" sounds like a scholarly and academic synonym for "sex" it is not and this is clear from its use in phrases like "gender identity". The term "sex identity" is never used, presumably because it sounds silly. Sex means being male or female. Gender assumes a consensus on what men and women are and should be which comes down to stereotyping. Any person interested in analysing why women are oppressed in society understands that suggesting three and a half billion women have the same "sex identity" is basic sexism. Women share female biology but are all individual human beings. Saying biology is the only thing we share is not the same as saying biology is the only thing we are. Gender can be more accurately understood as the cultural notions that accrue around sex; the prescriptions and proscriptions imposed on men and women, boys and girls. Unlike sex, gender is not stable and can vary over time and between cultures – Ireland in 2020 has different social mores than were prevalent in Ireland in 1950 and what is acceptable "feminine" behaviour in Ireland would draw censure and punishment in, for example, Iran where there are very rigid expectations of women and girls. On the internet, gender identities proliferate. Facebook has more than 50 options, other sites list 200 genders and more. An analysis of inequality between amorphous, ever-changing genders would be fruitless. I don't think it is reasonable to believe that genders most people have never heard of (and which may not exist tomorrow) are being systemically discriminated against. For this reason I believe the rider in the preface to the Oireachtas Resolution on the Citizen's Assembly website ("It should be noted that the Oireachtas resolution...") is not useful to analysing inequality and making change in society. In Ireland, people can change gender by declaration. Gender cannot be synonymous with sex in this instance as it is impossible to change sex by any means. Yet self ID permits a person to change the sex marker on their birth certificate and obtain a new passport. Further, even if a person obtains new documents, the extent to which they can "change" gender in every day life is affected

by a wide range of factors. Gender is culturally constructed; it is virtually impossible to control how one is perceived by others, to affect other people's cognizance or prior knowledge of one's birth sex and stereotyped role in society or to erase what one has been taught to believe about gender. Beneath the clouds of gender smoke the reality is that people in Ireland know that there are two sexes. We know which sex gets pregnant and which sex never will. We know which sex is expected to care for the young and the elderly and which sex will prioritise themselves, which sex can be coerced with threats or money and which sex uses coercion to get what they want. We know which sex perpetrates over 95% of violence, sexual assault and crime and which sex requires protection. Women are oppressed on the basis on their sex; gender, as a faulty synonym, muddies the waters. A discussion of "gender inequality" will suffer from this lack of clarity. With this in mind I will use the word sex throughout this submission to refer to sex and gender to refer to cultural beliefs about the sexes.

- Please identify the steps to be taken to address the issues raised and who should address them (e.g. the state, private sector, education system etc.)

The first step to addressing these issues would be to define the goal. Greater clarity is needed about what sex equality would look like. There would have to be sex parity everywhere. The myriad stumbling blocks to women's participation in the professions, fields and pursuits in which men dominate would need to be identified and overcome individually. There is no blanket remedy. Women's sex-based rights would have to be clearly drawn up in law separate from any legislation that cites men and their needs and achievements as the standard. Social problems like pornography, prostitution and rape culture, which depend on objectification of and violence towards women, would have to be tackled head on by the state and in education. If men and boys viewed women and girls as being as fully human there would be no issue with men engaging in "women's work". Such a distinction would cease to exist.

Theme 2: Work: Occupational segregation by gender, gender discrimination and the gender pay gap

Women and men are often concentrated into different kinds of jobs and within the same occupations, women are often in work that is less well paid and has less opportunities for career advancement. Women often work in areas where they can work part-time so as to fit in with their caring responsibilities. While many men work in low paid jobs, many professions dominated by women are also low paid, and professions that have become female-dominated have become lower paid. This worsens the gender pay gap (the average difference between the wages of women and men who are working).

- Please outline what you see as the key barriers/ obstacles and challenges to gender equality under this theme in law, policy and practice.

Our culture has an underlying poor opinion of women. Because women are expected to do certain work for free that work has little value therefore any work that women do must also have little value. Following this logic, work that is considered of little value falls to women to perform and they are consequently underpaid. The more any type of employment is considered women's work, the more women are steered towards that work and the less likely it is that men will consider it. It has also been shown in studies that steps in career progression like further education and promotion are hampered by bias. Doctoral theses and CVs receive higher ratings when anonymised than when it is known they are from women. I would like to reiterate that this is because of sex, not gender. Women do not take on caring work because they are "naturally" more caring than men. The theses and CVs obviously have no perceptible trace of gender, it is express knowledge of the sex of the candidate that affects their grading. At the same time a realistic understanding of the physical investment by women in pregnancy, childbirth and long term childcare must be normalised. Currently the patterns of men's lives shape ideas around employment, career progression, etc. with 6 month's maternity leave tacked on for women and often a tacit assumption that a mother's mind won't really be on her job anymore and that a woman of a certain age will be deserting her work soon enough. This also creates a bind for men who would prefer to share caring responsibilities, whether for children or elders, because this is not typical for men and there is little leeway.

- Please identify the steps to be taken to address the issues raised and who should address them (e.g. the state, private sector, education system etc.)

as Theme 1 - Question 2 above In a culture which takes the full humanity of women for granted there would be no difference in the value placed on work done by a woman, there would be no woman's work and unpaid caring responsibilities would be distributed according to different criteria than sex. This requires radical changes in all areas of society.

Theme 3. Care, paid and unpaid, as a social and family responsibility

Care -- the social responsibility of care and women and men's co responsibility for care, especially within the family

Women remain disproportionately responsible for unpaid care and often work in poorly paid care work. For working parents or lone parents, balancing paid work with parenting and or caring for older and dependent adults presents significant challenges. Women are most disadvantaged by these challenges, yet men also suffer from lack of opportunities to share parenting and caring roles. Despite recent legislation and policy initiatives to support early years parental care, inequalities in the distribution of unpaid care continue between women and men. The cost of childcare has been identified as a particular barrier to work for women alongside responsibilities of caring for older relatives and dependent adults.

- Please outline what you see as the key barriers/ obstacles and challenges to gender equality under this theme in law, policy and practice.

please see the second half of Theme 2 - Question 1 above

- Please identify the steps to be taken to address the issues raised and who should address them (e.g. the state, private sector, education system etc.)

as Theme 2 - Question 2 above

Theme 4: Women's access to, and representation in, public life and decision making

Ensure women's participation and representation in decision-making and leadership in the workplace, political and public life

Women are systematically underrepresented in leadership in economic and political decision-making. Despite the introduction of a candidate gender quota (through the system of party funding) for national political office, and initiatives to support women's access to corporate decision-making roles, men continue to dominate leadership positions. There are also issues to be considered around how media represents women and men.

- Please outline what you see as the key barriers/ obstacles and challenges to gender equality under this theme in law, policy and practice.

The barriers to women in leadership and political decision-making occur in the earliest days of young girls' lives, quotas are an ineffective solution as they come much too late in the process of exclusion.

- Please identify the steps to be taken to address the issues raised and who should address them (e.g. the state, private sector, education system etc.)

Again a clear definition of sex parity and what that would look like in government is needed. There is a marked tendency among men and boys to think that there are "too many" women and girls long before they reach 50% representation. Men and boys react strongly against this. This must be foreseen and cut short.

5. Where does gender inequality impact most?

To conclude we would be interested in your response to the following question: In which area do you think gender inequality matters most?

Please rank the following in order of importance, 1 being the most important:

- Paid work 4
- Home & family life 1
- Education 3
- Politics and public life 5
- Media 6
- Caring for others 2

- Other – please elaborate

➤ Please outline the reasons for your answer below:

Inequality in the home is the first lesson for children in who has power over whom. The personal is political. Therefore this area is of most importance and precedes change in other spheres.

➤ Please include any further comments or observations you may have here.

It is important to clarify the difference between oppression and discrimination. Oppression is the use of power and institutions in the possession of one class of people to extract resources from another class of people. The class of men extracts sexual, reproductive, domestic and emotional labour from the class of women. Oppression works in only one direction. Discrimination is unjust treatment on the basis of a specific characteristic. A gay man who is sacked for being gay is being discriminated against for being gay but not for being a man. He is also not oppressed as resources are not being extracted.