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Gender Imbalance in Academic Careers

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Definition

Gender inequality is defined by the underrepresentation of women in sectors and professions in employment, a poorer record of advancement to higher levels of organizations than men and the historical relationship between the genders in society. Until the early twentieth century, the domination of men in governmental roles was mostly unchallenged. Gender inequality in the workplace can be defined as the lack of opportunity which females encounter in employment and includes “access to work”: advancement in careers and the women’s role in a male-dominated business world. This is further delineated by concepts of “horizontal” and “vertical” segregation. Horizontal segregation deals with the underrepresentation of women across roles, for example, the lack of females in science, technology, electronics and maths (STEM) areas of both study and work. Vertical segregation deals with the lack of female progression to the higher echelons of organizations, sometimes known as the “glass ceiling.”

Introduction

29

This article has two main foci: firstly the reasons for female underrepresentation across the full range of work areas and, secondly, the lack of female representation in more senior roles. Both are addressed from the perspective of academia, an important jumping-off point for a wider range of career opportunities.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) cover a wide range of global issues, and they include SDG 5: gender equality. As the UN has said, “while the world has achieved progress towards gender equality and women’s empowerment, women and girls continue to suffer discrimination and violence in every part of the world” (UN 2019).

SDG 5 has a number of targets including action on violence against women; action against forced marriage; a recognition of unpaid care and domestic work – including the promotion of shared responsibility within the family; a commitment to undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, property, and inheritance; and for society to adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

The overall goal is to “end all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.” This is an ambitious target, but it is not beyond the will of man to achieve it. “Will of man” is used deliberately because the historical

61 discrimination against – and even oppression of –
62 women is an issue primarily of male dominance
63 and power in a largely patriarchal world. One key
64 area from SDG 5 is to “ensure women’s full and
65 effective participation and equal opportunities for
66 leadership at all levels of decision-making in
67 political, economic and public life” (UN 2019).

68 Many business leaders and university col-
69 leagues believe that gender inequality is a thing
70 of the past. As the data in this paper show, things
71 have improved for female employees, but there is
72 not a situation of equity. In 18 countries, husbands
73 can legally prevent their wives from working; in
74 39 countries, daughters and sons do not have
75 equal inheritance rights. One in five females has
76 experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an
77 intimate partner with the last 12 months. Yet,
78 49 countries have no laws that specifically protect
79 women from such violence. While women have
80 made important inroads into political office across
81 the world, their representation in national parli-
82 aments at 23.7% is still far from parity; however, in
83 46 countries, women now hold more than 30% of
84 seats in national parliament in at least 1 chamber
85 (UN 2019).

86 In the UK, successive legislation since 1970,
87 while enshrining equality in law, has resulted in
88 progress that is both too slow and too shallow. Pay
89 equality is a basic human right and one that, along
90 with sexual harassment, has received much pub-
91 licity over the last 2 years. However, this media
92 attention masks the real issue of the systemic
93 barriers women face in reaching the top positions
94 in organizational life. Despite the increase in
95 legislation, commentators and researchers have
96 suggested that women in employment do not
97 receive fair treatment. In the higher education
98 (HE) sector, Docherty and Manfredi (2006)
99 reported that women on university career paths
100 were progressing well to promoted grades, usually
101 senior lecturer, but there careers stalled when
102 seeking advancement to more senior posts, partic-
103 ularly professorships. Since then, further impor-
104 tant steps have been taken, and there is evidence
105 of more female academics gaining promotion to
106 Dean, Pro-Vice Chancellor. However, the percep-
107 tion persists that all is not equal; that old-
108 fashioned attitudes persist; and, crucially, that a

new interconnectedness has emerged that shows
“accrued disadvantage,” when gender is com-
bined with race, sexual orientation, or disability
(Kirton and Greene 2016).

This article examines the reasons behind a lack
of advancement for female academics, evaluates
their perceptions regarding the causes of this lack
of progression, and examines what measures can
be taken to improve matters.

The Importance of Data

In order to show discrimination, legislation and
university sector reporting has traditionally relied
on data. Qualitative surveys which seek to explain
the reasons behind the data are arguably more
useful; however we start with the latest statistics
from the UK university body. The latest Advance
HE survey published in 2018 revealed continuing
underrepresentation of female academics:

Despite comprising the majority of staff working in
UK higher education, women remained under
represented among academic staff, staff in Science,
Engineering and Technology (SET) subject areas
and in senior management roles. A larger propor-
tion of women than men worked in professional and
support roles, worked part time, on fixed-term con-
tracts, and in lower salary bands. Gender pay gaps
remain highest among academic staff, though were
still evident among professional and support staff.
The proportion of female academic leavers was
higher than the proportion of male academic
leavers. (Advance HE 2018: 200)

The report highlights raw data and trends for
gender in UK universities. The key findings
include:

In 2016/2017, 54.2% of staff working in UK higher
education were women and 45.8% were men.
Trends between 2003/2004 and 2016/2017 (show)
the proportion of staff in UK higher education who
were women increased from 52.4% to 54.2%. The
proportion of academic staff who were women has
increased from 40.0% in 2003/2004 to 45.7% in
2016/2017. In contrast, the proportion of profes-
sional and support staff who were women has
remained relatively constant from 62.2% in 2003/
2004 to 62.6% in 2016/2017.

77.1% of male staff worked full-time compared
with 59.8% of female staff. For both academic and
professional and support staff, the majority on part
time contracts were women (55.6% of academic

158 staff and 79.6% of professional and support staff).
 159 Among professional and support staff, roughly the
 160 same proportions of women and men were on open-
 161 ended contracts (85.2% and 86.3%, respectively).
 162 As the seniority of contract levels increased, the
 163 proportion of female staff decreased. For example,
 164 24.3% of heads of institutions were women
 165 compared with 69.0% of assistant professional or
 166 administrative staff. For both academic and profes-
 167 sional and support staff, women were underrepre-
 168 sented in senior positions and overrepresented in
 169 junior positions. For example, at the head of insti-
 170 tutions contract level, 75.4% of academic staff and
 171 76.7% of professional and support staff were men.

172 58.5% of academic managers, directors, and
 173 senior officials were men. In contrast, 54.1% of
 174 professional and support staff managers, directors,
 175 and senior officials were women. Among profes-
 176 sional and support staff, there was a clear gender
 177 divide in many occupational groups, such as skilled
 178 trades occupations (80.3% men) and administrative
 179 and secretarial occupations (80.5% women). Within
 180 each occupational group, the majority of profes-
 181 sional and support staff on part-time contracts
 182 were women.

183 In areas of research, a major contributory factor
 184 in academic promotions to the most senior level,
 185 the survey found that “while the majority of male
 186 and female academics held teaching and research
 187 contracts, more women had teaching only con-
 188 tracts (31.1%, compared with 23.8% of men)”
 189 (Advance HE 2018: 200).

190 Horizontal segregation exists in some subject
 191 areas:


192 Subject areas with notably high proportions
 193 included electrical, electronic and computer engi-
 194 neering (85.3% male staff) and mechanical, aero
 195 and production engineering (82.9% male staff).
 196 Subjects with notably high proportions of female
 197 academic staff were nursing and allied health pro-
 198 fessions (74.9% female staff) and psychology and
 199 behavioural sciences (60.8% female staff). Non-
 200 SET subject areas: Non-SET subjects had an equal
 201 distribution of male and female academic staff
 202 (49.8% and 50.2%, respectively). However, within
 203 some subject areas a gender divide was present,
 204 such as education (66.9% women) and philosophy
 205 (70.3% men). (Advance HE 2018: 200)

206 A 2006 Scottish Funding Council (SFC) report
 207 noted, “At some levels – such as the number of
 208 women professors – the lack of women is stark
 209 and progress slow or non-existent. Universities
 210 need to look at why this is: is there a glass ceiling;
 211 a lack of opportunities for career breaks; a

212 long-hours culture?” (SFC 2006). Referring to a
 213 Catalyst study in 1996, Stroh et al. (2004: 152)
 214 comment, “women in the study identified the fol-
 215 lowing three barriers as the most important; male
 216 stereotyping and perceptions of women; exclu-
 217 sion from informal networks and lack of sig-
 218 nificant general management/line experience.”

219 While progress can be demonstrated, there is
 220 not enough improvement to invalidate the need
 221 for future research or, more importantly, action.

222 Equality Legislation

223 Many nations have tried to level the gender
 224 playing field by enacting laws aimed at equal
 225 opportunity, fair treatment, and transparency, par-
 226 ticularly in areas dealing with recruitment, promo-
 227 tion, and pay. In the UK the first such move came
 228 with the passing of the Equal Pay Act in 1970
 229 prohibiting less favorable treatment between men
 230 and women in terms of pay and conditions of
 231 employment. It was based on the 1963 United
 232 States Equal Pay Act, signed into law by President
 233 Kennedy. The rationale for “abolishing wage dis-
 234 parity” included that unequal pay “depresses
 235 wages and living standards for employees neces-
 236 sary for their health and efficiency; prevents the
 237 maximum utilization of the available labor
 238 resources; and constitutes an unfair method of
 239 competition” (Federal Employment and Labor
 240 Laws 1963).  AU3

241 In the UK, the 1970 Act also brought the UK
 242 into line with the European Union’s declaration
 243 that “each Member State shall ensure that the
 244 principle of equal pay for male and female
 245 workers for equal work or work of equal value
 246 is applied” (Rubery 2005: 7). The term “pay” is
 247 interpreted in a broad sense to include, on top
 248 of wages, holidays, pension rights, company
 249 perks, and bonuses. The legislation has been
 250 amended on a number of occasions to incorporate
 251 a simplified approach under European Union law
 252 that is common to all member states. The 1970
 253 Act only dealt with equal pay for the same work
 254 but in 1975 a broader EU directive on Equal Pay
 255 was passed based.

256 The 2006 Equality Act introduced the require- 301
 257 ment for public authorities, to produce gender 302
 258 equality schemes, which included gender equality 303
 259 objectives, an action plan, and an equal pay state- 304
 260 ment. This duty came into force on April 6, 2007, 305
 261 and required institutions to have due regard to the 306
 262 need to “eliminate unlawful discrimination and 307
 263 harassment” and to “promote equality of opportu- 308
 264 nity between men and women.” 309

265 Public authorities were also given specific 310
 266 duties to gather and publish data, consult 311
 267 employees, assess policy impact, and develop 312
 268 and implement actions to address gender inequal- 313
 269 ity. The style and content of the 2006 Act was 314
 270 the forerunner for the 2010 Equality Act, which 315
 271 adopted similar duties. Often referred to as the 316
 272 general equality duty, this legislation required 317
 273 public bodies to: 318

- 274 • Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harass- 319
 275 ment, and victimization and other conduct pro- 320
 276 hibited by the Act. 321
- 277 • Advance equality of opportunity between peo- 322
 278 ple who share a protected characteristic and 323
 279 those who do not. 324
- 280 • Foster good relations between people who 325
 281 share a protected characteristic and those who 326
 282 do not (EHRC 2019). 327

283 Subsequent initiatives have dealt with gender 328
 284 pay gap reporting (2017) and more recently, 329
 285 following public outcry primarily related to 330
 286 Hollywood and Westminster, guidance on 331
 287 avoiding and dealing with sexual harassment in 332
 288 the workplace. 333

289 While these governmental initiatives were 334
 290 welcomed and in many ways groundbreaking, 335
 291 the data presented above calls into question their 336
 292 efficacy in addressing the detriment suffered by 337
 293 women when seeking promotion in university 338
 294 teaching roles. 339

295 In the UK following legislative changes in the 340
 296 early 2000s, public bodies appointed many more 341
 297 equality and diversity specialists to help address 342
 298 issues and react to the requires of the various 343
 299 duties. While such posts had existed previously, 344
 300 the growth of positions in this period reignited the 345

301 debate as to whether these change agents should 302
 303 or could work as advocates for the disadvantaged 304
 305 or simply as organizational policy makers. Their 306
 307 role is also one of persuasion and influence, but 308
 309 given the nature of the work, the positions attract 309
 310 those who are committed to change and social 310
 311 justice. This is often in conflict with business 311
 312 profit motives. As researchers noted, “diversity 312
 313 professionals might be characterized as tempered 313
 314 radicals because they challenge by their actions 314
 315 and their very existence, the *status quo* – they are 315
 316 inevitably involved in contentious issues and 316
 317 unpopular policy-making areas” (Kirton et al. 317
 2007: 1982). 318

Bradshaw (2018) conducted interviews with a 319
 selection of these specialist equality officers 320
 working in universities, and other researchers 321
 have questioned the usefulness of legislation: 322

the law is not proactive: it only comes into play 319
 in an adversarial context. There is a huge range of 320
 issues that cannot be addressed through legislation 321
 and require other tools of social engineering. One 322
 example is the ‘freezing out’ process which can 323
 eliminate people from sex-atypical occupations. 324
 (Hakim 1996: 201) 325

Mallier and Rosser (1987: 132) comment on 326
 the limitation of legislation in provoking proac- 327
 tive action, “It must be remembered that no single 328
 policy instrument can lead to the achievement of 329
 equal opportunities; it can only seek to prohibit 330
 sex discrimination.” Larwood and Wood (1977: 331
 69) agree, “laws concerning discrimination are an 332
 important weapon....however women who use the 333
 laws to obtain their rights risk their careers in the 334
 process.” Dickens (1994) goes further and 335
 suggests that existing legislation has had little 336
 effect: 337

The relative stability of the picture of disadvantage, 338
 despite more than two decades of sex discrimina- 339
 tion and equal pay legislation, testifies to the limits 340
 of a ‘stick’ approach to EO based on urging compli- 341
 ance with UK legislation... ..even if action is 342
 taken by employers to get into compliance with 343
 the UK legislation, very little is actually required 344
 of them. 345

Another long-standing debate surrounds the 346
 use of positive action, which encourages less dis- 347
 crimination as opposed to affirmative action 348
 (in the US context) or positive discrimination 349
 (e.g., in the context of balancing public board 350

gender in Scandinavian countries). In the UK positive discrimination is illegal; however there is an argument that a time limited use of it would more quickly redress the imbalances in senior roles. Many women are opposed to positive discrimination, rather wishing to be appointed or their merit. In interviews with the author, female academics were not unanimous on this point but noted:

I'm against positive discrimination but positive action I'd be more in favour of but it's hard to think of what you can do that is going to make a difference for women; and

I think the prohibition of positive discrimination was actually a good part of our equality legislation. Positive action, no matter how well meaning the government are, is discrimination and what we should be aiming for is equal opportunities (Bradshaw 2018).

While Equal Opportunity legislation has been around for over 50 years, the 2006 Equality Act was the first to require universities to make specific plans for gender equality. The reaction of many universities seems to be a compliance one. That is to say rather than asking, "What can we do to make genders more equal?", the more common question was, "What do we need to do to meet the letter of the legislation?" This has led to a set of policies and procedures that are reactive in the main, fail to win hearts and minds to the cause of gender equality, and are short on radical ideas or novel initiatives. In recent years university marketing and PR has sought to promote a positive diversity and inclusion message, while the privileged position of male academics has gone largely un-touched. The attitude of senior leaders in HEIs is summed up by two quotations from equality and diversity specialists, "I was asked, 'What is the minimum that the legislation requires us to do?'" and, "It's difficult to get senior management to take gender equality seriously; they think it's my job" (Bradshaw 2018).

The lack of a robust enforcement framework results in the requirement for individuals to take legal action against their employer, and this is often cited as a barrier to progress. While the introduction of legislation has forced universities to develop equality schemes and action plans, many have not yet developed an equal

opportunity culture or mainstreamed issues of diversity, particularly in recruitment and curricula design. The legislation does not compel sufficient responses, and it is time for governments to grant wider enforcement powers to watchdog bodies such as the UK Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHCR).

Legislation can set out broad parameters and define that which is illegal, but it does not provide a deep understanding of or remedy to the causes of gender bias, which we turn to now.

Causes of Gender Bias

Data from the university sector show a pattern that is common in business and public life in general where gender discrimination is reported on a regular basis. Torrington and Hall (1998: 365) commented, "there remains a high degree of subtle (access to training and support for development and promotion) and not so subtle (gender segregation) discrimination." De Anca and Vazquez (2007: 68) note, "we cannot point to a single cause, or say that there has been a conspiracy by men or society to impede the full professional development of women." Rather there seems to be a multitude of causes, some of which are interconnected, societal and deeply embedded in the culture of UK education and society.

Hakim (1996: 212) speaks of the heterogeneity of women and contends that men are a homogeneous group in the workplace:

the key reason why male solidarity and male organisations are so effective is that women are diverse and divided. Men gain a huge tactical advantage from women's diversity. The heterogeneity of female preferences opens up a fatal weakness in women's representations of their interests.

In other words the perception that some women choose careers and others choose family, while yet more try to balance the two gives men, who, generally speaking, concentrate on only career concerns, an advantage. Where prejudice is acknowledged to exist, unsurprisingly women suffer most. Alban-Metcalf and West (1991: 161) discovered that, "a third of women managers

444 said that prejudice had a moderate or greater influ-
 445 ence on their careers whereas only 8% of men
 446 gave similar responses.”

447 Bradshaw (2018) asked female academics
 448 about their experiences of promotion processes,
 449 the support given, and the effect of culture on their
 450 progress; responses included:

451 The criteria are very clear and there’s a faculty
 452 committee that looks at it and the committee is
 453 gender balanced and it is composed of Heads of
 454 Department and external people and an application
 455 goes now from an external referee.

456 I think there is an old boys network and I know
 457 sometimes the discussions that take place before
 458 someone is appointed, they know who’s applied
 459 and they have an idea who they want. That sounds
 460 terrible, but I do know of a post that came up and a
 461 man was encouraged to apply specifically

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462 What emerges is an element of perceived
 463 inbuilt

463 discrimination in appointments. However, women
 464 in senior positions are also clear about their
 465 responsibility for ensuring equality in recruitment
 466 processes and for fairness in implementation.
 467 Perceptions regarding recruitment are affected
 468 by traditional approaches that characterize leaders
 469 are primarily male.

470 Male Characteristics in Managers

471 Powell et al. (2002) argue that male domination in
 472 management is due to the general acceptance of
 473 managers’ characteristics as masculine ones:

474 When decision makers believe that masculine char-
 475 acteristics are best suited for managerial roles and
 476 that men possess these characteristics in greater
 477 abundance than women, they are more likely to
 478 select men for open management positions than
 479 equally-qualified women.

480 Heilman (2001) defines these characteristics in
 481 terms of “aggressive, forceful, independent and
 482 decisive, whereas women are characterised as
 483 kind, helpful, sympathetic and concerned about
 484 others.” Schein et al. (1996) support this view:

485 Despite changes in women’s progress in the work-
 486 force, males, unlike their female counterparts, con-
 487 tinue to perceive the managerial position as
 488 requiring masculine characteristics. To the extent
 489 this attitude is unchecked by structural limitations;
 490 the male decision-maker may still favour the male
 491 candidate. As a psychological barrier to the
 492 advancement of women in management, the ‘think

manager-think male’ phenomenon can foster bias 493
 against women in managerial selection, placement, 494
 promotion and training decisions. 495

This is illustrated by the way that job descrip- 496
 tions and roles profiles are written, “with few 497
 exceptions, upper level managerial positions 498
 appear to be characterized in masculine terms” 499
 (Heilman 2001). This underlines the effect of 500
 the perceived need for masculine characteristics 501
 in managers and points to a potential for default 502
 recruitment of men for managerial roles. Many 503
 female academics interviewed were reluctant to 504
 adopt a more aggressive or masculine stance in 505
 managerial relationships (Bradshaw 2018). 506

507 Women as Carers

Another cause of discrimination is the idea of 508
 “women as carers.” Greenhaus and Beutell 509
 describe this as, “a form of inter-role conflict in 510
 which the role pressures from the work and family 511
 domains are mutually incompatible in some 512
 respect” (1985: 77). Jacobs focuses on childcare 513
 as a barrier to women’s careers, citing both a lack 514
 of childcare provision and the role of part-time 515
 work as a lever to entry into predominately female 516
 careers. She links this to how professional women 517
 are perceived by their peers and notes a difference 518
 in attitude toward childless women who work full 519
 time. In other words, she asserts that women with 520
 children or other caring responsibilities are not 521
 taken as seriously or accorded equivalent status 522
 (Jacobs 1999). 523

This raises the question of whether the societal 524
 expectation of women as homemakers and carers 525
 is still a factor in work discrimination. Fine (1992: 526
 158) links the caring role to reduced work choice 527
 and lack of mobility, “The significance of the 528
 constraints imposed by childcare is demonstrated 529
 by women working at short journeys from home 530
 and taking regular employment on a five-day 531
 week, with reduced hours to fit in with the hours 532
 of children’s attendance at school.” 533

The suggestion is that women do not apply 534
 for senior positions because they believe their 535
 work-life balance will suffer. Timing of career 536
 decisions is also important. Yanez and Moreno 537
 (2008) note, “women in general have entered 538

539 university teaching later than men, and such a
540 kind of isolation in a world of men could have
541 led to them to encounter some difficulties in get-
542 ting on in their academic careers.”

543 There is a clear link between women’s role
544 as carers and a lack of career progress. Most
545 of the academics interviewed in Bradshaw
546 (2018) have children commented on the difficult
547 balance women in work face:

548 This is not necessarily a 9 to 5 job and you can find
549 your classes going on into the evening..... It’s
550 probably more difficult for my colleague simply
551 on the pure logistics of arranging childcare, ensur-
552 ing that her husband is there if she’s not, and I think
553 that has had more of an effect.

554 I certainly couldn’t do the hours that I work in
555 here if I had young children; it would be totally
556 impossible and the job is not possible in 9 to
557 5 hours. I don’t know how women manage if
558 they’ve got to go home and start looking after
559 a baby.

560 One male manager here actually said he
561 wouldn’t promote me because I have family; that
562 was some years ago. I wonder if that is representa-
563 tive of how people think.

564 Once again, it is noted that positive changes to
565 legislation, in this case on maternity rights, have
566 done little to alter the culture in many universities.

567 The male domination and devaluing of the home
568 caring role seems to be worse in older universities,
569 where there is a greater leaning toward research.
570 Paradoxically, although the home caring role is
571 undervalued, many women academics are given
572 the caring, personal tutor-type roles in academia.

573 The devaluing of the caring role may also
574 affect women’s confidence and self-perception.
575 Female academics suggested that their jobs
576 could not be done in a standard 35-h week and
577 that longer hours were required, particularly to
578 keep up a research profile. Career breaks have
579 a detrimental effect on research activity and
580 currency, and some females have made definite
581 choices about when to have a family. Successful
582 females, and not just in academia, have
583 either no children or have a grown family
584 (Bradshaw 2018).

585 With the exception of policies on flexible
586 working, universities appear to have done little
587 to address the needs of professional women with
588 caring responsibilities. One reason may be a lack

589 of understanding among male managers of the
590 work-life balance issues faced by female col-
591 leagues. Any adjustments made in universities
592 seem to be around timetabling or work allocation,
593 in relation to fulfilling the existing role and not
594 helping women to adjust to more senior roles and
595 responsibilities. The issue of career breaks, for
596 maternity in particular, has a negative effect on
597 career aspirations, particularly when linked to
598 the academic being research active. Female aca-
599 demics speak about disguising family needs to
600 avoid discrimination in a culture of long hours.
601 Where women had made a deliberate decision not
602 to seek promotion for family reasons, or to take a
603 break from work to have a family, there seemed
604 to be an acceptance that this would be detrimental
605 in their future career. There are now more funda-
606 mental discussions around the perceived role of
607 women as carers. The societal norm of female care
608 for children and elderly relatives has been chal-
609 lenged, although the effect of “family-friendly”
610 legislation in the UK in the early 2000s was to
611 underline the role of females as carers, rather than
612 to address the root cause of discrimination which
613 is the perceived supremacy of the “male bread-
614 winner.” However, this questioning of female
615 roles has had little impact on university cultures
616 to date.

Organizational Culture 617

618 The culture of universities is believed to contrib-
619 ute to the failure of some women to progress.
620 Thomas and Davies’ (2002) qualitative study of
621 53 women academics in 3 universities reinforced
622 the view that the traditional culture is deeply mas-
623 culine and that it often resembled an exclusive
624 men’s club. By comparison, the newer university
625 included in their study employed a larger propor-
626 tion of female academics, and they did not feel
627 marginalized in their daily work (cited in
628 Docherty and Manfredi 2006). Bradshaw (2018)
629 explored this area with female academics whose
630 responses included:

631 I think the culture of management is predominately
632 male and white and heterosexual, so anybody who
633 is not in that group is going to feel out a bit.

634 One previous institution had a bar environment
635 where men congregated and actively undermined
636 any women so that they never lasted.

637 There was no quarter given, and I was very careful
638 never to mention the family or family commit-
639 ments; in fact in the culture at the time, it would
640 have been a great detriment to my career to have
641 done so. I was very, very careful never to take time
642 off, unless it was a dire emergency and never to ask
643 for flexible arrangements or anything. I just worked
644 round it.

645 Women don't have the same networking, things like
646 the pub and golf. There's an old boy's network but
647 not an old girl's network.

648 The predominately male culture has a detri-
649 mental effect in excluding women from network-
650 ing and other career development opportunities.
651 This dominant culture leads to a lack of interest in
652 equality, and university culture also has a role
653 to play in access to research.

654 The Importance of Research

655 The importance of research activity in academic
656 life and in promotion to senior positions can give
657 women an inbuilt disadvantage, partly because
658 females are viewed to be better at maintenance
659 roles and personal student support, whereas "hard
660 research" more often comes to male colleagues.
661 Docherty and Manfredi (2006) note, "women are
662 taking on more of the maintenance activities and
663 the invisible emotional labour of universities."
664 There are two dangers associated with this: firstly,
665 as more women progress to middle management
666 and course leadership, this work may become
667 devalued. Secondly, these tasks are taken on at
668 the cost of women's research. For example, the
669 women in Thomas and Davies' (2002) study
670 felt under considerable pressure to publish and
671 generate research income, yet found that their
672 ability to do so was hampered by the expectation
673 that they would pick up more of the administrative
674 workload than their male colleagues.

675 Rees (2005) argues that research is deeply gen-
676 dered. She has drawn attention to the way men
677 dominate decision-making about research in sci-
678 entific committees, editorial boards of journals
679 and informal academic networks. Fenton (2003)
680 points to two key problems. Firstly, academic

environments promote homosociability, 681
binding men into a hierarchical fraternity that 682
marginalizes women. Secondly, competitive 683
values are reinforced by changes in higher educa- 684
tion that tie the production of academic work to 685
market forces and ensure a more overt split 686
between research and teaching than ever before. 687
Developments in student fees and increased mar- 688
ketization of H.E. since 2011, leading to greater 689
focus on pastoral care and "the student experi- 690
ence," may lead to a further barrier for female 691
researchers. 692

Bradshaw (2018) asked specific questions 693
regarding the importance of research to female's 694
careers: 695

As far as research was concerned, I felt very much 696
held back until the children were relatively inde- 697
pendent. I felt guilty if I did, so the family came 698
first. 699

Academia is not a career choice, it's a lifestyle 700
choice, and it's not enhanced by the fact that many 701
researchers at the bottom of their career work 702
60 plus hours a week, and that becomes the 703
expected norm. Therefore when you have family 704
and such pressures, you can't put these hours in and 705
your career doesn't progress as fast. 706

Family commitments are a barrier to research 707
although direct discrimination was not cited as a 708
reason for limited access to research; more often it 709
was felt to be a consequence of having other 710
commitments outside work. The cultural aspects 711
of decision-making in relation to research and 712
the awarding of research grants should not be 713
underestimated. The response among female aca- 714
demics has been to seek support and role models 715
to bolster their career self-confidence. 716

Self-Confidence, Support, and Role Models 717

Where legislation may have failed, women's sup- 718
port networks increasingly look to improve career 719
prospects in universities. One criticism of the rise 720
of female networks is that this phenomenon does 721
not address the exclusion of women from male- 722
dominated networks; it merely implements a par- 723
allel and less significant structure. Neither does it 724
address the perceptions that men are excluding 725
women from important networks for example in 726
research. 727

728 However, there is evidence that positive
729 aspects exist in female academic career as inter-
730 viewees in Bradshaw (2018) noted:

731 I think having a role model, somebody who has
732 done it, shows it can be done, and I'm not some-
733 body who thinks, "well I've made it and everybody
734 else can struggle up." I think my job is to give
735 women as much help as I can, encourage them to
736 go forward for promotion, and talk to them about it.

737 We have a policy of academic staff being
738 entitled to one day a week to work at home whether
739 that's on research or on preparation, marking or
740 whatever... It's certainly not university policy,
741 and it may operate in different ways in different
742 schools.

743 However, this was balanced by some
744 negativity:

745 My first line manager was a woman and she was
746 single and not a great respecter of family, and
747 I found myself not disclosing that my second child
748 was due. I was working in the house on academic
749 stuff until he was born. Two days after I was back at
750 work and at least had some profile.

751 Given we have a female Principal, I ask myself,
752 'Does a gender bias work the opposite way, is she
753 trying to recruit females?'... We have no female
754 Deans, for example, but if a women gets that,
755 I wonder how many people will say that's because
756 the Principal wants to populate the executive with
757 women.

758 I've got to the stage now where, after encourag-
759 ing two women in this department to apply for
760 chairs and neither of them got them, I felt as
761 though I lost so much face I wouldn't want to do it a
762 third time. It's embarrassing when you know people who
763 are turned down and think the process is unfair and
764 in some way you're a part of it, so it potentially
765 damages friendships and relationships.

766 One equality specialist commented, "promo-
767 tion to professor comes up, women see it as a
768 glass ceiling, they see it as an old boy's network.
769 One example given was the need for approval
770 from your head of department followed by an
771 all-male selection panel, none of whom had exp-
772 ertise in the candidate's subject area." Women in
773 academic roles are reluctant to put themselves
774 forward for promotion; by comparison men are
775 more confident about their abilities and more
776 likely to sell themselves confidently. This situa-
777 tion is exacerbated by inconsistent advice and
778 support or even by outright discouragement
779 (Docherty and Manfredi 2006).

780 Female academics show both very rapid
781 advancement and more measured career progress
782 but, without exception, where women have had
783 children while working in universities, they
784 had not taken a long maternity break. This is
785 explained mainly by a fear of becoming out of
786 touch and working in a culture that doesn't toler-
787 ate absence. (Bradshaw 2018). Furthermore, some
788 women don't apply for senior positions because
789 they feel unready or unsupported in their
790 career ambitions. There is also an aversion to
791 self-promotion and a lack of institutional support
792 (Docherty and Manfredi 2006). The extent to
793 which they do not acknowledge their achieve-
794 ments and abilities, together with their desire for
795 work-life balance, explains in part why relatively
796 few women apply for senior roles.

797 There is a general female trait toward a com-
798 parative disinclination for self-promotion. While
799 men are effective in putting themselves forward,
800 in playing the political game, and in networking,
801 women are less so, partly because they lack access
802 to the same networks. Women are also less likely
803 to apply for jobs when they don't meet all the
804 selection criteria, whereas men will "have a go"
805 even if there are gaps in their experience or know-
806 ledge. One female academic placed the blame
807 squarely at the door of line management who
808 ought to do more to encourage applications from
809 women and discourage men who are not fully
810 qualified from applying (Bradshaw 2018).

811 This issue is closely linked to the male charac-
812 teristics in management' discussion above and
813 also a timing issue. As Yanez and Moreno
814 (2008) note, "women in general have entered uni-
815 versity teaching later than men, and such a kind of
816 isolation in a world of men could have led to
817 them to encounter some difficulties in getting on
818 in their academic careers."

819 While the article has concentrated on issues
820 that cause gender discrimination in academic
821 careers, there are also areas where support,
822 mentoring, and staff development have allowed
823 successful female academics to help other female
824 colleagues in their career. This leads us to other
825 areas where action to improve the situation can
826 be implemented.

827 Conclusions, Future Direction, and 828 Actions for Improvement

829 The United Nations SDG on gender equality pre-
830 sents an opportunity to learn from previous prac-
831 tice and to move the agenda forward. The reasons
832 for gender imbalance in academic posts revolve
833 around the perceived need for “masculine” char-
834 acteristics in managers; the effect of women’s role
835 in caring; the desire or need for a work/life bal-
836 ance; a lack of self-promotion on the part of some
837 female academics; and universities’ traditional
838 masculine culture and access to research.
839 However, the perceptions and choices of female
840 academics are vital in understanding the phenom-
841 enon and in suggesting remedial action.

842 The effectiveness and the implementation
843 of equal and diversity legislation are questionable,
844 and the EHRC has limited powers in taking
845 action against public bodies who fail their female
846 employees. However, there is no legal require-
847 ment for statistical equality in promoted positions,
848 just a moral obligation. The use of legislation, as
849 Hakim and others point out, led, prior to the 2010
850 Act, to a situation where redress against discrim-
851 ination was possible. The inclusion of a general
852 duty to “advance equality of opportunity” and
853 “foster good relations” gave rise to hopes that
854 more proactive policy and procedures would be
855 implemented. This has happened in more enlight-
856 ened and progressive organizations, but too often
857 the response has been minimalist and lacking
858 either depth or follow-through. Many organiza-
859 tions, while developing sound equality policy,
860 glossy brochures, and web pages have not done
861 enough to tackle the systemic issues that lead to
862 female disadvantage. This is particularly true in
863 areas of equal pay, in access to certain job roles in
864 STEM areas, and in the inequality of promotion to
865 senior academic roles including vice chancellor,
866 professor, and deans of school.

867 The most important issue for female academics
868 interviewed in Brads [Law](#) (2018) was the disad-
869 vantage encountered by decisions made regarding
870 family and work/life balance and the detrimental
871 effect career breaks have on career prospects, and
872 there is evidence of women returning from mater-
873 nity leave very quickly to “keep their hand in.”

874 Generally, in some workplaces, women with fam-
875 ilies are not taken as seriously in their careers, and
876 this is supported by research in universities. The
877 importance of role models and, to a lesser extent,
878 staff development is growing, and most, but not
879 all of the role models, were female and in some
880 cases had been “trailblazers” in senior academic
881 positions.

882 A recurring pattern is that women see differ-
883 ences in their employers’ attitudes and policies.
884 Some comment favorably on flexible working,
885 promotion processes, and research policies,
886 while others have issues with these initiatives.
887 Some women see career breaks as the price you
888 pay for family and accept the related career hiatus,
889 while others feel this is discriminatory. Some
890 make deliberate lifestyle choices, especially
891 regarding working hours, while others complain
892 of unfair treatment. Few women openly complain
893 about discrimination, for example, on equal pay,
894 for fear of causing themselves trouble. This sup-
895 ports Hakim’s (1996) view that divisions among
896 women give men “a huge tactical advantage from
897 women’s diversity.”

898 A majority of women appear to be against
899 positive discrimination; however, many feel uni-
900 versities are in denial about discrimination,
901 because senior managers see equality in overall
902 staff numbers or in junior academic roles but
903 ignore the disparity at senior level and in pay
904 rates. A first step for senior managers would be
905 to acknowledge the problem exists and take real
906 steps to tackle it.

907 Gender bias is not necessarily deliberate. This
908 was noted by Torrington and Hall (1998) and
909 reflected by one academic, “I don’t think there
910 was necessarily gender bias, but what was abso-
911 lutely clear was some very important key
912 male figures in positions of power” (Bradshaw
913 2018). Dealing with unconscious and therefore
914 unacknowledged discrimination is extremely
915 difficult and a major areas of current debate.

916 Equalization of pension rights and equal pay is
917 also important, and other suggestions included tax
918 breaks for childcare, wider provision of on-site
919 childcare, and better performance management.

920 The range of initiatives aimed at improving the
921 situation have included the wider use of gender

922 balance on recruitment panels. This only works
 923 where the panel members have an equal say in the
 924 final appointment as opposed to a final decision
 925 taken by a male chair. Many UK public sector
 926 organizations have taken steps to anonymize
 927 shortlisting processes, removing gender, age, reli-
 928 gion, and disability so to prevent bias in the
 929 shortlisting process. This works well for the initial
 930 selection stage, but doesn't remove the chance of
 931 bias at final selection.

932 Unconscious bias training has become increas-
 933 ingly fashionable in recent years. However, it
 934 necessitates a "sheep dip" approach as few man-
 935 agers are likely to volunteer for this sort of train-
 936 ing. It also misses the crucial point that some
 937 bias in equality areas is in fact conscious.

938 This article has considered the reasons why
 939 women academics are not as successful in gaining
 940 promotion as their male counterparts. The
 941 answers are full of complexities, and, to an extent,
 942 differ between institutions. More traditional
 943 universities are likely to have a stronger "male
 944 culture" and promote more on research criteria
 945 and new and modern universities have more
 946 enlightened policies and are seen as more family
 947 friendly and inclusive places to work. Legislation
 948 has had little positive effect, beyond a "ticking the
 949 box" approach. The lack of oversight, audit, and
 950 penalty for non-compliance is a major factor here.
 951 Many female academics are skeptical about the
 952 use of legislation, including positive discrimina-
 953 tion, to provoke change. An approach based on
 954 staff development, mentoring, and positive role
 955 models aimed at progressive cultural change is
 956 more likely to produce results in the longer term.
 957 There is a need for universities to take gender
 958 equality more seriously while calling for more
 959 legislative action to support women in employ-
 960 ment. Other ideas have included a penalty on
 961 senior manager pay if they lead institutions
 962 where equality data shows a lack of parity (Khan
 963 2019) and stronger pressure from unions such as
 964 the UCU who have linked gender equality to pay
 965 negotiations.

Cross-References

966

- ▶ [Gender Discrimination in the Labour Market](#) 967
- ▶ [Gender Division of Labour](#) 968
- ▶ [Glass Ceiling](#) 969
- ▶ [Women's Participation in the Labour Market](#) 970

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