

Editorial

# Women and Leadership in Higher Education: Special Issue Editorial

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This Special Issue focuses on women and leadership in higher education (HE). The editorial briefly reviews the journey of women aspiring to and succeeding in leadership roles and explores what progress has been made since the new millennium; continuing barriers for women; how leaders are developed; and ongoing challenges, including the masculinist organisational culture and discourses around excellence. It then introduces the eight articles in this Issue.

Much has been written about women and leadership in higher education in the last two decades, including the micro-politics of the academy (Morley 1999); the impact of managerialism on women's leadership ambitions (Deem 1998; Currie et al. 2002; O'Connor and White 2011); and gender inequalities and the limits of change (O'Connor 2014; Burkinshaw 2015; Burkinshaw and White 2017). Despite robust national anti-discrimination and affirmative action frameworks (White 2011) and organisational and institutional gender equality frameworks, women are still under-represented in higher education leadership. As O'Connor (2018, p. 1) observes "formal positions of academic leadership in higher education remain concentrated in male hands".

Barriers that impede women moving into leadership in HE are well known. One is the underrepresentation of women as full professors. As Jarboe (2018, p. 27) notes, being a professor with a distinguished research background "is almost always a prerequisite" for being a Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Pro Vice-Chancellor or Dean (see also Bagilhole and White 2011; Burkinshaw 2015). However, once women become full professors, they are more likely to experience discrimination at work and in scientific organisations (Popp et al. 2019), although Santos and Stéphanie (2019) dispute this view. O'Connor (2017, p. 274) questions if increasing the representation of women as full professors is sufficient to change the culture of HE: "Such developments can meet the need for institutional legitimacy but may not challenge the dominant paradigm", because what matters is not the number of women professors (and hence potentially senior leaders driving cultural change) but the number of feminist women (and men) in leadership (Burkinshaw 2015). While more women in the professoriate can be symbolically important, it "is not enough" (O'Connor 2018, p. 5). Rather, organisations need to embed gender into their nature and purpose, as discussed in Angela Wroblewski's article in this issue.

Another barrier is lack of transparency in recruitment, promotion and retention (Van den Brink 2009; Morley 2014; Acker 2014), despite universities having equality and diversity policies (Fitzgerald and Wilkinson 2010). For instance, Picardi's article in this issue demonstrates how initiatives specifically designed to measure the gendering processes in recruitment in Italian academia disclosed new forms of gender segregation. Interventions such as the UK's Athena SWAN (Scientific Women's Academic Network) place equality and diversity policies under the microscope. While Barnard's (2017) analysis of those university departments in the UK that received Athena SWAN Gold Department Awards concluded that they promoted a commitment to gender equality, the impact of this commitment was more difficult to identify. An important factor in this lack of transparency in appointing leaders in higher education is the role of executive selection firms (ESFs) used widely by universities in the UK, Austria and Australia. This is the focus of Manfredi et al.'s article in this issue.

Disciplinary differences in women accessing leadership are a further barrier. Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths STEM academics are more likely to be appointed to leadership positions in HE (Bagilhole and White 2008; Jarboe 2018).

Mobility and location can also act as barriers for women. Limited geographic mobility (González Ramos and Bosch 2012; White 2015) can adversely impact on their careers. However, those who are mobile can reap the benefits. Zippel (2017) argues that being a woman and a foreigner in another country can be an advantage for one's career. The impact of mobility on academic women's leadership in African countries is explored in Prozesky and Beaudy's article in this Special Issue. Women working in regional universities can face particular barriers due to location, as Thomas et al.'s article in this Special Issue emphasises, and the technology linking women at distributed campuses with the central campus can often isolate them (Herman and Hilliam 2018).

The continuing gender pay gap remains a barrier to women's career advancement. Inequality in employment has resulted in a significant gender pay gap in the HE sector. In Australia, for example, the full-time average total remuneration gender pay gap for higher education in 2018 was 14.8% compared to the national average gender pay gap of 14.1% (WGEA 2018). In the UK (2018), the HE median gender pay gap was 13.7%, which was significantly higher than the national average of 9.1%. Worryingly, in some UK institutions the gap was twice this average. The gender pay gap is inextricably linked to the themes of this Special Issue.

Finally, the issue of choice continues to be a barrier. Early qualitative research suggested that flexible working was key. However, many women are forfeiting their careers and remaining in lower paid work where flexible working is acceptable, sadly trading their ambition for this flexibility. Most are keen to progress if only flexible working at senior levels was an option (see White 2017; Mathews 2019). Yet Padavic et al. (2019) found that flexible work options alone would "not dismantle the culture of overwork, nor will they dislodge the deep-rooted . . . association of women with family and men with work" (p. 43). The decision to work flexibly produced unequal outcomes, changed career trajectories and pushed women into career cul-de-sacs (see also Barrett and Barrett 2011). Watton et al.'s article in this Special Issue argues that job sharing can keep more women in leadership. Unfortunately, as the authors have experienced, it is very unusual to find models of working flexibly at senior levels and this is not encouraged when recruiting for these posts. Therefore, choosing flexible work options can in fact often embed gender inequality. More research is needed to further explore this structural problem.

Improving higher education leadership capacity is one response to overcoming these barriers to women moving into leadership roles. Mostly, universities use some mix of competency frameworks to develop people for leadership. These models are inevitably based on masculine leadership practice and gendered excellence in the field of leadership (Morley 2013). Leadership development programmes are generally delivered piecemeal with emerging leaders coming together sporadically to 'study' modules designed around competences, returning to their day job unsupervised until the next module. More recently, leadership development has been delivered through coaching and action learning, although invariably facilitators are also practicing masculine models (Burkinshaw et al. 2018). The discourse of diversity has shifted gender equity programs to have a greater focus on individualised approaches, recognising intersectionality. Now that diversity is on the agenda, those who do not traditionally succeed through these development models are offered tailored programmes like the women professor's programme in Germany and the women's only leadership programme in Sweden discussed in this Special Issue. Such interventions can be perceived as remedial, as though it is the women who need fixing rather than the higher education leadership culture (Burkinshaw and White 2017).

The themes described above suggest that unless institutions address the organisational culture that positions women aspiring to leadership as "other", little will change (Burkinshaw and White 2017; Tessiens 2007; Fitzgerald 2018; Ely and Meyerson 2000). Research indicates that the intransigent masculinist organisational culture (O'Connor 2014), direct discrimination against academic women (Santos and Stéphanie 2019), the straightjacket that managerialism imposes on leadership styles (Morley 2014; Blackmore 2014) and the symbolic violence on talented women produced by the practices of new

managerialism (Wilkinson 2008) are leading young, ambitious women to look elsewhere to build their careers (Burkinshaw and White 2017; Morley 2014). Those women already in HE middle management are often dispirited and exhausted (Acker 2014; Blackmore and Sachs 2007; Pyke 2011) or have made a strategic choice not to engage in senior management (Harford 2018). Other women leaders have persisted with the intransigent managerialist culture often by playing the game (Burkinshaw 2015) or trying to forge a different leadership style that is a bottom-up approach that listens to staff (Wilkinson 2008). However, such soft management skills continue to be devalued (White et al. 2011), which is likely due to the low levels of gender awareness of senior leaders, as O'Connor (2018) observes.

Discourses around excellence can also have an impact on HE leadership, as they judge academic women as not measuring up for promotion and, at a national level, not measuring up for competitive funding. However, gender biases exist in the production of knowledge (Rees 2011) which can "limit scientific creativity, excellence, and benefit to society" (Caprile 2012, p. 19). The liberal myth that merit is stable, objective and calculable has been questioned by Thornton (2013), who argues that the new knowledge economy has reinforced gender bias, transformed HE and led to a re-masculinisation of the academy. Not surprisingly, men and women in science often continue to be committed to a traditional model of scientific practice, where passion, working around the clock, commitment to scientific values, building up the knowledge base, and fostering a new generation of researchers are typical characteristics (Salminen-Karlsson et al. 2018). They also perceive equity measures in appointment procedures as undermining the meritocratic principle, and explain women's underrepresentation in professorships and top academic appointments as societal conditions outside science (Wolffram 2018). Consequently, both men and women in science frequently reject quotas in academia to increase the representation of women in leadership positions (Popp et al. 2019). Hence the masculine model of excellence perpetuates inequality and needs to be challenged (Caprile 2012), as it maintains the under-representation of women in leadership and "has implications for the normalisation of gendered constructions of valued knowledge" (O'Connor 2018, p. 1).

Nevertheless, research indicates that legislative frameworks and feminism can have an impact on HE leadership. Some universities require gender competent leadership; that is, a high level of gender awareness that can transform the organisational culture (Wroblewski 2017). Peterson and Jordansson (2017) examined the undoing of gender on a structural level by Swedish feminist HE leaders and its limitations, while Wroblewski (2017) linked feminist leadership in an Austrian institution to a high level of gender awareness and gender experts in its administration and management. She asserted (2017, p. 67) that feminist leadership presupposes a reflexive university culture "which is a precondition for sustainable change of gendered practices" and further pursues this theme in her article in this Special Issue.

The contributions to this Special Issue provide a rich and diverse exploration of women and leadership in higher education across Austria, Australia, Germany, Italy, Sweden, South Africa and the UK. The methodologies used range from quantitative studies (Lothar; Picardi; Prozesky and Beaudy) to both quantitative and qualitative studies (Wroblewski), qualitative studies (Peterson; Manfredi et al.); self-reflective case studies (Thomas et al.); and co-constructed ethnographic letters (Watton et al.)

Andrea Lothar's quantitative study entitled "Is It Working? An Impact Evaluation of the German 'Women Professors Program'" evaluated the huge national investment in increasing women professors and explores the value of a national initiative rather than focusing on the women themselves. In the ten years of the programme, the number of women professors in German higher education almost doubled and, Lothar asserts, about a third of this increase was due to the programme, although other gender equality initiatives also contributed.

Angela Wroblewski's study "Women in Higher Education Management—Agents for structural change?" examines whether and under which conditions rising participation of women in higher education management contributes to cultural and structural change in science and research. The analysis began in 2004 and is a conflation of three datasets, two quantitative and one qualitative. This contribution explores whether women wanted to change and shape things and whether feminists had

the goal of making women visible and serving as role models. It argues that by default senior women are overloaded with responsibility for gender equality and that nothing will change structurally unless this responsibility is owned and shared by the whole rectorate.

Janelle Thomas, Cate Thomas and Kirsty Smith's article "The challenges for gender equity and women in leadership in a distributed university in regional Australia" is a self-reflective case study of four women who worked across campuses of a regional university, exploring the intersection of gender and location. Despite abundant gender equality policies and practices, the institution had overlooked location as a barrier to women's leadership development. The article reminds us of the myriad of challenges women in HE face, some universal and others contextual, and argues that systemic processes need to be explored and identified early and enacted to strengthen equality of opportunity.

"How job sharing can lead to more women achieving senior leadership roles in higher education", Emma Watton, Sarah Stables and Steve Kempster's article, explores how leadership job sharing can significantly increase the representation of women in senior roles and help to retain, grow and develop leadership capability within organisations. Co-constructed ethnographic letters between the two job sharers generated valuable data which identifies several benefits of job sharing: promoting gender diversity in leadership, creating more appropriate organisational structures and job design for modern complex roles, and challenging leadership stereotypes and homosociability in the sector.

Helen Peterson's article "Women's only leadership program: Facilitating access to authority for women in Swedish higher education" focusses on the IDAS (identify, develop, advance, support) national women-only leadership programme and evaluates its relationship to the increase in women in HE management in Sweden. Fifteen women who participated in the programme and subsequently became vice-chancellors were interviewed. The research asserts that women can be supported to become senior leaders and consequently be considered as competent leaders, thereby challenging the masculinity leadership ideal. It also explores the 'support paradox' regarding why some women dissociate themselves from such interventions.

Ilenia Picardi's article "The Glass Door of Academia: Unveiling New Gendered Bias in Academic Recruitment" analyses quantitative data on the composition of Italian academia by the Italian Ministry of Education, Universities and Research from a gender perspective. The introduction of the glass door index, specifically designed to measure the gendering processes in recruitment in Italian academia, disclosed new forms of gender segregation in an Italian university despite the emphasis placed on the neutral and meritocratic criteria of the new recruitment and career progression rules. The article scrutinizes both the glass ceiling index and the glass door index and concludes that even in progressive institutions discrimination between men and women remains, a consistent theme of most contributions to this Special Issue.

"Mobility, gender and career development in higher education: results of a multi-country survey of 3000 African academic scientists", Heidi Prozesky and Catherine Beaudy's article, argues that mobility is vitally important to academic careers and that mobile researchers have better careers, publish more and are cited more, especially in Africa with its legacy of weak institutions. Results from a quantitative survey of more than 3000 academics across 41 African countries explored how limited geographical mobility creates barriers for academic women's leadership careers. From the perspective of our Special Issue, this article promotes the hidden voices of invisible women who exist on the margins of globalised academia.

Simonetta Manfredi, Kate Clayton-Hathway and Emily Cousens' article "Increasing gender diversity in higher education leadership: the role of executive search firms (ESFs)" explores an under-researched topic. ESFs have emerged as a product of the knowledge economy and the deregulation of the labour market, which is core to the contemporary neo-liberal paradigm. At least 12 ESRs now work regularly with UK HEIs when they are recruiting for senior leadership roles. The researchers interviewed 29 stakeholders across the recruitment process. The article highlights potential discriminatory practices associated with the commissioning of ESFs, such as reinforcing 'new boys' networks; gendered shaping of the labour market and the ideal candidate; selecting potential

candidates through ‘social matching’; and acting as gate keepers. The authors conclude that ESFs are here to stay, so assuring good practice is vital.

Our ambition in the Special Issue was to stimulate further research in this field, particularly in under-researched areas. The rich and diverse contributions have hopefully achieved that goal and will encourage even more research on women and leadership in higher education.

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