Rationale

The literature of academic identity is well represented in the sociology of Higher Education. However, accounts of women's journeys through the process of 'being' and 'becoming' an academic are less present. This paper focuses presents case stories of women pursuing academic careers in the 'liquid modernity' of a globalised academy (Bauman, 2000). My interest focuses on the female journey in order to foreground the ways in which women negotiate their identities and careers in a male hegemony.

Morley (2012) reports that in spite of the increases in female student and graduate populations, the She Figures (2009) demonstrate that women's careers remain characterised by strong vertical segregation, and that "high rates of women's participation in higher education have yet to translate into proportional representation in the labour market or access to leadership and decision-making positions" (OECD, 2010).

(Morley, 2012:3)

My research seeks to produce insights into the factors which appear to block women's perceived 'progress'. The findings foreground the effects and affects of academic career-making and illustrates how a) women's academic identities are deeply and often painfully rooted in gendered structures of society; b) these are continually being socially reproduced within the academy, partly through a culture of virile performance indicators and partly within what has been characterized as a 'vernacular positivism' in executive policy making.

> what we have is an academy that is grappling with the complexity of late modern life and an executive that prefers the simplicities of objectivism, naturalism and neutral true description

(Dunne, Pryor and Yates, 2005:16)

Whilst there is nothing absolute to be reached in terms of the formulation of new theory from just five case stories, the power of the narratives serve to highlight important dimensions of structural relationships in the academy which may contribute new understandings and action towards a paradigm shift in equalities policy-making.

Methodology and theoretical frameworks

Narrative inquiry is used to explore personal accounts of what it means to have an academic career in Higher Education at a time of significant educational change. The potential of narrative methodology to produce different knowledge by producing knowledge differently (St. Pierre, E.A., 1997) is explored through the construction of 'case stories' of the career journeys made by five mid career women academics. It espouses the notion that it is through 'stories' at the micro level where complex relationships of structure and agency might best be seen and understood. The aim was to use a methodological framework which both troubles common sense understanding (Clough, 2002) in order to challenge paradigms of institutional policy-making and development practices.

In any study of culture it can be seen that 'story telling' is a powerful tradition. The stories that are told, and that we tell ourselves in our professional lives, the stories indeed that institutions tell themselves, are a relatively little heard aspect of research into the sociology of H.E. and in particular investigations into notions of professional identity.

the philosophic concern with life as narrative involves an emphasis on dialogue, conversation, story and the processes of inquiry and reflection on experience that allow the individual to identify what has personal significance and meaning for him or her personally.

(Taylor, 1999:52)

Dominances and absences in the policy discourses in Higher Education are theorized in terms of power relations produced by institutional responses to neo-liberal reform agendas. Carey and Biesta (1994, 1995, 2004c) and others have effectively shown that cultures are both structured and structuring. The stories in this research speak of grand narratives; structure v agency; class and gender oppression finding expression in organisational structures and the no less powerful if more fluid contexts of 'tribal' academic territories. There is no lack of agency in the voices of these women, however, emerging from the narratives are identities formed by individual struggles within macro and micro sociological forces.

Findings

Morley and others have problematized theories which seem to accept gender equalities as largely accomplished, or simply attribute the lack of women in leadership and management roles to:

- The gendered division of labour

- Gender bias and misrecognition

- Management and masculinity

- Greedy organizations

Whilst all these aspects are resonant in my findings, the meanings emerging from the case stories presented in this paper support the increasing recognition that the problem is not simply the exclusion of women or the existence of the male norm (Morley,2012, Butler, 2004; Verloo and Lombardo, 2007). In an age when HE is redefining itself, continuing adherence to gendered perspectives of the wider social world implicates the very nature of knowledge production itself (Calás and Smircich, 2009; EC, 2011; Wickramasinghe, 2009).

A striking finding is the extent to which the women in these stories locate the origins of their career trajectories in early childhood experiences, both educational and social, and the effect and affect of this as they encounter the academy. The paper draws on the notion of performativity developed by Butler (1990, 1993, 2004) to analyse this.

Butler's work on gender identity introduces the inter-related concepts of 'performativity' and 'citationality', whereby the incessant replication/repetition (citation) of norms (e.g. how girls ought to walk, talk, look)" operate ideologically to structure the fictive solidity of gender". (Hey, 2006).

"performativity is the discursive mode by which ontological effects are installed" (Butler, http:www.egs.edu/faculty/butler-resources.html

Conclusions

What can be seen from the case stories in this paper are the visible and less visible ways in which dominant social structures are embedded in individual ontologies and interact with positivist cultures in the Academy to reproduce gendered worlds in Higher Education. This paper suggests that the awareness and understanding of these effects should concern policy makers more.

The author concludes that equalities policies based on polarised understandings, where the problem is simply seen as the exclusion of women will not redress wider nor internal social equalities which women face (Morley, 2012). Holistic approaches to gender equalities are required. It is not just that women require support, it is the organisational cultures that require transformational change (Cockburn, 1991; Ely and Meyerson, 2000; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). Cockburn (1991:12)

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