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0075

Women Academics: An International Comparison

Status: Accepted Presentation type: Oral

Category: Academic Practice, Work and Cultures

Author's preference: Individual paper

Sarah Jane Aiston, Jisun Jung

University of Hong Kong, SAR, Hong Kong

This paper provides a new gender-based analysis of international survey data collected on academics in 2008. First, the extent to which women experience and view the academy differently, not only in contrast to their male colleagues, but also female colleagues working in different international contexts will be explored. Particular attention will be paid to those factors that prevent women reaching senior, leadership positions. Second, the importance of addressing the under-representation of women in academic leadership will be discussed.

Over the last two decades, there has been a growing body of research that has considered the position of women as academics. Studies have been undertaken in Western and first-world contexts, and increasingly this scholarship has been extended to developing countries (Morley, 2013). The research has documented both the ways in which women experience working in higher education differently to their male academic colleagues and why (Aiston, 2011). Despite the advancement women have made in terms of their participation rate as undergraduate students worldwide, research indicates that women as academics are underrepresented in senior and leadership roles globally. A range of theories and metaphors are put forward to both describe and explain this 'absence': the pipeline; the glass ceiling; negotiating the stone floor; inhabiting the trenches and being stuck in a swamp.

This paper will make an important contribution to the field by undertaking an analysis of *The Changing Academic Profession* (CAP) survey. This survey is an international comparative survey which was carried out in 1992 and 2008. The most recent survey, upon which this paper is based, includes 19 countries and contains questions on career and professional context, general work situation and activities, teaching, research, management and personal background. To date, there has been little published research which provides a gendered analysis of the data.¹ The survey provides a fascinating, and importantly, large-scale comparative insight into the working environment and attitudes of academics internationally.

By contrasting the experiences of both male and female academics across a range of international contexts, we can further explore the extent to which women experience and view the academy differently to their male colleagues. Particular attention will be paid to those factors that mitigate against women academics leading, rather than being led, within the academy. This analysis will be

¹ Bain and Cummings' (2000) draw on the 1992 survey data to explore the academy's glass ceiling.

framed within the context of the 'prestige economy', namely what do academics prize highly (Blackmore, 2012). Or alternatively how is the notion of 'prestige' demonstrated within a university career in the 21st century. What counts for and what will gain academic promotion?

In addition, the paper will consider the extent to which differences occur *between* academic women, for example, do those women working in countries with a high proportion of women in the academy (e.g. Australia) have a different experience and/or views to those women working in contexts within which the number of female academics is low (e.g. Japan)? In this respect, the paper provides a comparative insight into both the shared and divergent lives and opinions of academic women internationally.

Finally, consideration will be given to the importance of addressing the inequity between male and female academics, particularly with respect to the issue of women and academic leadership. A case-study of the Hong Kong CAP survey (Aiston, article currently under review) suggests that women academics hold different values to their male colleagues; values we might consider important and significant for the leadership of higher education in the 21st century.

References:

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