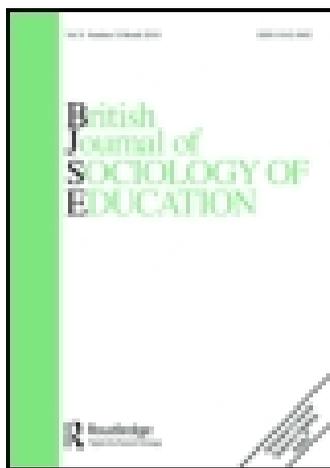


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Indicators of esteem: gender and prestige in academic work

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The continued gender imbalance in senior positions in higher education is a problem that persists despite decades of feminist research and publications in the area, as well as interventions in many countries to promote the advancement of women. In this article we view the issue of gender inequality through the lens of the prestige economy, which suggests that academics are motivated by prestige factors accrued through advancement in their careers. Prestige, authority and status, we suggest, may be more easily acquired by male academics. We draw on a case study of one institution in the Republic of Ireland, including data from a survey on academic careers ($n = 269$), to explore how the concept of prestige is gendered. We explore the cumulative effect of four themes: homosociability; non-transparency of criteria; academic workload balance; and self-promotion.

Keywords: higher education; prestige; academic careers; inequalities; gender

Introduction

In the autumn of 2008, eight academic women from a university in the Republic of Ireland presented themselves for an interview in front of a panel appointed to assess the applicants for promotion to Senior Lectureship. These eight women had been shortlisted during the biennial promotions round organised by the Registrar's Office. All academic staff at the top of the lecturer scale with at least four years' service in the university were eligible to apply, and 47 applicants put themselves forward. There were guidelines for eligibility that covered the usual expectations (e.g. numbers of PhD students supervised to completion, numbers of publications, etc.) but it was not clear whether these were used as (or perceived to be) strict criteria for eligibility or simply general guidelines. Either way, only 15 academic women put themselves forward for promotion. The eight women who were shortlisted out of this pool were invited to meet the panel.

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At this point it is not clear how the panels decided that, although on paper these eight women were worthy of promotion, after a round of interviews only one woman was promoted to Senior Lecturer level. What did become clear was that in a university promotions scheme held only every two years, through which a strict quota system limits the number of promotions made to about 15–18 each time,¹ promoting only one woman did not bode well for gender equity in this particular university. Given that at the time there were only 26 female Senior Lecturers in the university and only nine female Professors (against 77 male Senior Lecturers and 88 male Professors) it is perhaps not surprising that the decision to promote only one woman received much negative attention in the university.

Although on the face of it this appears to be rather an extreme case of gender discrimination, it unfortunately fits into a global pattern of inequality in higher education systems at the senior levels (for a recent overview of international statistics on the lack of women in leadership positions in higher education, see Morley 2014). The problem has been persistent for decades, as is evident from the familiarity of Adrienne Rich's description from 1980:

The university is above all a hierarchy. At the top is a small cluster of highly paid and prestigious persons, chiefly men, whose careers entail the services of a very large base of ill-paid or unpaid persons, chiefly women: wives, research assistants, secretaries, teaching assistants, cleaning women, waitresses in the faculty club, lower-echelon administrators, and women students who are used in various ways to gratify the ego. (Rich 1980, 136)

The case-study university to be presented in this paper had, in 2008, a gendered staff composition very much like the one described by Rich. There is now a substantial body of research and literature on the persistence of gender inequalities in universities, which mostly ignores the women who are lower down the hierarchies. Indeed, much of the more recent literature in Ireland, but also internationally, focuses on women's leadership roles in a time of increasing managerialism within a neo-liberal context (for example, Blackmore and Sachs 2000; O'Connor 2014). However, in this case we focus on academic women at a mid-career stage (where most of them are stuck) in a more traditional higher education system in which collegial forms of management are still evident and are possibly contributing to the continued persistence of gendered inequalities. Part of the persistence of continued inequalities is due to the vicious cycle in which stereotyped views of women result in fewer opportunities for advancement, and fewer women in senior roles helps perpetuate the stereotypes that exist. Perceptions are an important part of processes of discrimination.

A number of scholars of visual representations and imagery of women in academia have noted the persistent depiction of females as stereotypically sexualised or otherwise intellectually impoverished in relation to the positive

images of men (for example, Aiston 2006; Dyhouse 2006; Leathwood 2013). These scholars draw attention to the ‘othering’ of women through the ‘male gaze’: images in student newspapers, the *Times Higher Education* (a UK-based magazine for higher education professionals), university websites and other university-produced media continue to depict women as generally young, beautiful, quizzical, fearful or fairly placid. Images of authoritative men in higher education, on the other hand, abound: anyone who works in a university will be familiar with the boardroom containing the portraits of the great men who have in some way led the institution. The dominance of stereotypical masculinities in academia has led Leathwood and Read (2009) to suggest that the ‘intellectual woman’ is an ‘impossibility’. As the data from this case study explore, discrimination is partly based on perceptions of value and status, thereby increasing the significance of stereotypes.

In this article we use the lens of the prestige economy (Blackmore and Kandiko 2011b) to argue that the factors of prestige accrued over the course of an academic career are more easily acquired by men and are more likely to be associated with male academics. The ways in which notions of authority, status, expertise, scholarly standing and so on are perceived in academia are remarkably gendered, and yet these are all important factors within the prestige economy that are ‘traded’ in exchange for even greater status. Thus, these prestige factors are a highly motivating aspect of academic work, and if women find it more difficult to acquire them they are likely to be disadvantaged throughout much of their careers. We also argue that the ‘exchange rate’ of prestige factors, or the value of the prestige ‘currency’, differs for women and men.

Higher education in the Republic of Ireland

Ireland does not often feature within the international literature on women’s position in higher education (although notable exceptions include Grummell, Devine, and Lynch 2009a, 2009b; O’Connor 2010; Devine, Grummell, and Lynch 2011; O’Connor and White 2012), but the seven universities within the country have poor records in relation to the advancement of women. Despite the fact that the Universities Act of 1997 required universities to promote gender balance and equality of opportunities amongst employees, European figures suggest that Irish universities are nearly at the bottom of the ‘glass ceiling index’ (a measurement of the proportion of women at lower levels in relation to senior levels; see European Commission 2009).

At a national level, the statistics on gender and employment in Irish higher education are difficult to obtain. The Higher Education Authority in Ireland (HEA) published a review of equality policies in Irish universities in 2004 in which much concern was expressed over the lack of data on gender

and employment in Irish universities. Ironically, the HEA would itself be the only organisation able to publish national statistics, but it stopped doing so even though its own report states that ‘equality data is essential to the analysis and monitoring of progress towards greater equality in Irish society’ (HEA 2004, 20). In fact the HEA seemed to shelve the 2004 report, enabling universities to take no action on advancing their equality policies in the subsequent years. A request made in 2012 by one individual (a PhD student) to all Irish universities to provide basic data on gender and academic staff met with resistance from some universities and required Freedom of Information requests to obtain the data. Eventually, however, the HEA Facts and Figures Report for 2011/12 (HEA 2013) provided a gendered breakdown of academic staff, revealing that 18% of those at professorial level are female. There are no published data concerning the ethnic origins of Irish academic staff, but it is safe to say that the numbers of Black and minority ethnic background staff are very small indeed.

For several decades, there have been concerted efforts by women in Irish higher education for something to be done about representation at senior levels (O’Connor 2003). The HEA acknowledged that ‘A serious barrier to increased equality in the universities would appear to be institutional culture’ (2004, 22). The few studies that have been done on Irish higher education and gender come largely to the same conclusion for example, O’Connor 2010; Grummell, Devine, and Lynch 2009a, 2009b). Although studies on gender in higher education often focus on the individual level, these studies highlight the role of institutional culture and systemic challenges to gender equality.

A case-study institution

To gain a deeper insight into the institutional factors that impede women’s progress, we chose an Irish university with one of the poorest records of promotion of women as a case study, focusing on one promotions’ round and the subsequent institutional follow-up. Although this is a particular case within a national context perhaps best described as not quite up to speed in relation to gender advancements that have been made elsewhere, it does fit into a general pattern of gender disparities in higher education across a range of countries (see Morley 2005, 2013). However, following the 2008/09 promotions’ round in which only one of the 17 promotions to Senior Lectureship was granted to a woman, the issue of the gender imbalance in the university became highly politicised. It was agreed by the Governing Authority that a small working group should be established to investigate women’s academic careers with a view to making recommendations for action back to the Governing Authority. As part of these institutional efforts to explore the situation, an internal survey was conducted ($n = 269$) on academic careers and sent to all academic staff at the institution. Both the

quantitative and qualitative data from this survey were analysed in relation to gender and the concept of the prestige economy.

The working group conducted a survey of academic staff to gather basic demographic information, and data on career progression, career opportunities and perspectives on academic career advancement. The questionnaire was sent to 510 academic staff (all Established Professors, Personal Professors, Senior Lecturers, Lecturers and Junior Lecturers) in December 2010. Of the total population receiving the survey, 63% were male and 37% were female (see Table 1). We received 269 responses, although not all of them were complete (some respondents skipped sections of the questionnaire, but most respondents filled in the entire survey and provided qualitative comments).

The data were analysed by the working group and a report was submitted to the Governing Authority of the university with a number of recommendations for action. Some of these were acted upon, but given that the Irish government froze all public-sector posts in 2009 as a response to the financial crisis, there were no promotions between 2009 and 2013.

Much of the concern and discussion amongst academics in the university focused on the promotions system, particularly the competitive promotion system in place for advancement to Senior Lectureship. Prior to the embargo, a promotions round was held every two years but a cap on the number of senior positions available meant that many people have been denied promotion for years (and decades, in some cases). Approximately 25% of Senior Lecturers in the university are women (see Table 2 for the gender breakdown in 2012), which means either that women are being

Table 1. Survey responses by gender.

	Female	Male	Total
Total population	189 (37%)	321 (63%)	510
Surveys returned	139 (52%)	130 (48%)	269

Table 2. Gender breakdown by position at case study institution.

	Female	Male	Total
University teacher	25	6	31
Lecturer (fixed term)	35	30	65
Junior Lecturer	45	32	77
Lecturer	110	125	235
Senior Lecturer	26	77	103
Associate Professor	1	31	32
Professor	8	57	65

discriminated against through the process or that most women in the university simply have not met the standard required to compete with their male colleagues. Either way, women have been disadvantaged and although many questions have been raised as to why only one female applicant was successful in 2008/09, no clear answers emerged.

It is possible that the competitive nature of the process may disadvantage women, as research suggests women fare better when they are promoted in non-competitive, competence-based systems (for example, Olsen, Kyvik, and Hovdhaugen 2005). There is also a body of evidence that suggests ‘excellence’ is a gendered term, and academic selection and promotions processes tend to favour male candidates even when the criteria are fairly transparent (van den Brink and Benschop 2011). If it is the case, as van den Brink and Benschop found, that academics struggle to define ‘excellence’ beyond the common statement that ‘you recognize it when you see it’ (2011, 512), then there is reason to take seriously the evidence which suggests that men are more likely to be recognised as excellent even when the achievements between male and female academics are comparable (Mervis 2012).

The survey was intended to shed light on some of the perceived barriers to promotion and advancement in academic careers. For the case study, both the quantitative and the qualitative data that were gathered in the survey were analysed with a view to exploring whether and how the prestige economy might operate differently for women and men. The analysis revealed that there is a recognisable difference in the ways in which men and women experience academic work. We examine these themes after an explanation of the prestige economy framework.

Prestige and academic work

Work on the academic prestige economy developed in the context of motivation in academia, particularly in relation to understanding why some academics pursued certain types of activities, such as interdisciplinary work, and others did not. In investigating motivation, it was noted that many academic activities are not financially advantageous, such as reviewing journal articles and research grant applications (Lamont 2009). However, these activities are often recognised and rewarded in non-financial ways. To explore academic motivation and reward schemes, a model was developed considering different ‘overlapping’ and ‘associated’ economies. This included the term ‘prestige economy’, an anthropological term describing organised patterns of exchange that stand outside a conventional financial economy, but are related to it (Bascom 1948; English 2005; Grinev 2005; Herskovits 1948).

A model of the academic prestige economy has been used to investigate notions of motivation and reward with interdisciplinary academics in two national contexts (Kandiko and Blackmore 2008; Blackmore and Kandiko

2010, 2011a), to explore academic motivation across a range of disciplines and institutions in the United Kingdom (Blackmore and Kandiko 2009), and to examine the influence of national context on prestige across the United Kingdom, Ireland, Iceland and the United States (Kandiko 2013). A major finding in this research was how motivation was influenced by hiring and promotion policies, across disciplinary, institutional and national contexts. This highlighted the importance of perceived career pathways and reward schemes in academics' motivation.

The investigation of academic motivation and perceptions of the role of prestige factors – those that carry honour, respect and standing – explores if and how the prestige economy concept may factor in academics' conception of identity and role in their departmental, institutional and disciplinary context. This framework, and taking a social practice theory approach (Reckwitz 2002) to academic motivation, moves beyond conventional accounts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and looks to find ways of capturing the social aspects of motivation that are associated with the disciplinary and professional groups within which academics are located.

A key aspect of prestige is the accumulation and transaction of indicators of esteem. These can be official, such as title, academic rank and salary; honorary, for example fellowships and keynote speeches; and informal. The latter are often socially based, and often are 'traded' and 'exchanged' for more formalised rewards (and *vice versa*). There is inherent overlap in such indicators; for example, being appointed to chair a committee may be prestigious but also involves work, and supervising a barrage of doctoral students is time intensive but is also highly regarded.

Such indicators of esteem come to the fore in hiring and promotion decisions. Blackmore and Kandiko (2011a) found that interdisciplinary academics struggled to advance their careers because their academic prestige was shared across disciplines. This highlights the internal prestige networks within disciplines that function to isolate and elevate the field. Even when academic advancement moves away from disciplinary communities, as part of corporate managerial trends, accrued indicators of esteem are still in effect. These include job freedom and flexibility to pursue research funding and associated outputs, high-status publications and academic services, such as journal editing and conference chairing, many of which are based on personal networks and have gendered elements (Morley 2014).

The social nature of prestige – its tangibility only resides in a relationship – often lends it a negative connotation. This can be at odds with academic ideals of the search for knowledge for its own sake. Prestige can be acquired at the expense of others, such as when researchers' teaching loads are given to colleagues, or through the exploitation of PhD students. The social nature and informal transactions of prestige often manifest outside formal working arrangements – such as through drinks after work or sporting events at the weekend. The transactionary nature of prestige can place it

in a virtuous cycle, in that once acquired it can be ‘traded’ for more and greater prestige. Combined with its social nature, this can preserve and strengthen existing hierarchies. In academia, this can lead to a reinforcement of gender differences (Slaughter 1993; Metcalfe and Slaughter 2008).

A shrouded aspect of prestige is the exchange process and the ‘exchange rate’. While it is difficult to measure and impossible to assign causation, there is certainly an association between esteem indicators. The exchange rate functions in terms of what one can ‘trade for’ with the prestige they have, but also the value placed on different esteem factors. For example, activities such as chairing institutional committees or taking on departmental leadership positions may be valued within an institution but have less currency in a disciplinary context. Chairing and convening conferences and editing journals may lead to national and international prestige but carry less weight in an institution.

The haziness of prestige is further clouded through the lack of quality data, as discussed above, particularly in relation to gender issues in higher education. While the prestige economy can function as a virtuous cycle – rewarding those with prestige with more – it can also lead to cycles of cumulative disadvantage, where those, often women, with less prestige to begin with have less to trade and achieve less with what they have. A major factor in academic life is how much time academics can devote to prestige-seeking activities. These are more often associated with research and research outputs, particularly compared with teaching. The area of service work, or administration, lies somewhere in between, with some activities leading to prestige and others that fail to lead to productive indicators of esteem. There is often a ‘minimum to get by’ with teaching and service activities, whereas research is the academic activity capable of generating most rewards and prestige. As academic activities tend to be gendered, as we will discuss below, the ‘prestige returns’ for academic work are further segregated by gender.

The role of gender and prestige

Drawing on data from the case-study institution, we found four main areas where the prestige economy functioned differently for men and women. Interestingly, these areas – homosociability, non-transparency of promotion criteria, academic workload balance and self-promotion – were noted by both men and women in the study. We explore these themes below, and note how the cumulative effect of ‘exchange rates’ are exacerbated through institutional policies, including those designed to mitigate them.

Homosociability and leadership of the university

Since Kanter’s (1977) seminal work on the nature of homosociability in organisations, women scholars have been identifying the ways in which male

networks disadvantage women in the academy. Feminist researchers have argued that networking, male bonding and homosociability help men advance in their careers and are processes that work to exclude women from access to powerful positions in the university (for example, Leonard 2001). The masculinist organisational culture of Irish universities has been a feature of the literature on gender and higher education in Ireland, with homosociability seen as a particular factor in the exclusion of women from senior levels (Devine, Grummell, and Lynch 2011; O'Connor 2010; Grummell, Devine, and Lynch 2009a, 2009b). The predominance of men at the upper levels of university hierarchies in Ireland is a persistent problem, and the fact that no university in Ireland has ever appointed a female President is indicative of the scale of the problem.

The taken-for-granted nature of a masculinist culture in higher education makes its inner workings difficult to expose. The rituals of homosociability – sponsorship, patronage, favours – are often hidden from view. In Ireland there are a large number of cultural factors that exacerbate the importance of the ‘old boys’ network’. The senior managers of Irish universities are not a diverse group: many will have been educated in Catholic (and single-sex) schools and will have been born locally. Irish culture is still fairly homogeneous, and religion and sports (in particular hurling, football and rugby, which are all male sports) strongly shape social bonds. The institutions of the Catholic Church and the Gaelic Athletics Association are both male dominated and confer much local prestige on those in the upper ranks of the organisations, and they quite significantly shape the culture and attitudes within the local environment.

Two additional factors are worthy of note in relation to the higher education culture in Ireland. First, the universities play a key role in the promotion of the Irish language, and anyone aspiring to a senior role will need to speak the language to some extent, even if just to contribute to graduation ceremonies and to similar events at which Irish would typically be spoken. Secondly, there is little academic mobility between Irish universities. In this particular case, most of the senior management team had been in the university for 20 years or more. These two factors make it difficult for outsiders to obtain senior positions in the university, as a tendency to favour and promote ‘those like us’ is strongly rooted.

The importance of homosocial networks was observed within the survey responses. Interestingly, even those men who benefited from this culture were willing to speak out about the unfairness of it:

I must go on the record and state explicitly that as a man I have benefited enormously from being included in informal networks which are dominated by other men [...] too much happens in this university based on the 11 o'clock coffee break, the gathering of senior male colleagues who use bad

language, gossip, engage in character assassination – homosocial bonding, in other words. (Male survey respondent)

Many important decisions regarding the allocation of resources etc. are made in an adhoc manner based on conversations over coffee/golf/etc. Again, this leads to unfair bias against certain members of staff (often age and gender based). (Male survey respondent)

The informal networking is crucial. (Male survey respondent)

When asked what factors hindered career progression, several respondents similarly drew attention to the importance of informal networks:

I don't want to be seen as part of [the university] crony elitism networks that exist. (Male survey respondent)

Being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Not having access to the informal networks. (Male survey respondent)

Not having an association with a person in a leadership role who will take a particular interest in promoting my case to university management. (Female survey respondent)

The relationship between the prestige economy and the effects of an institutional homosocial culture is important to understand. Although many prestige factors are gained through external recognition rather than institutional recognition, homosocial networks create almost a separate economy that operates internally. Informal networks generate a culture whereby those who are on the inside are more likely to be granted prestigious internal roles or favours (for example, the directors of the major research institutes in the university were all men, and the process of their appointment was not always transparent). Such internal positions also afford the opportunity for external reward and recognition.

Non-transparency of promotion criteria

Appointments to many senior management posts are gradually becoming more transparent as Irish higher education slowly shifts from a collegial culture of decision-making to a more managerial culture (see Grummell, Devine, and Lynch 2009a, 2009b), although there is still a way to go before there is a general confidence amongst staff that appointments are merit-based. However, the competitive nature of the promotions process to Senior Lectureship is still widely seen to be non-transparent. If panels are inclined, as much research suggests (Mervis 2012; European Commission 2004; Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004), to assess male candidates more favourably than women, even when their achievements are identical, this would help explain the lack of promotion of women within the competition.

The non-transparency of the criteria was mentioned by a number of female respondents in relation to promotion to Senior Lecturer:

In recent years there have been no 'criteria' for promotion to Senior Lecturer. There are criteria for eligibility to apply; but amongst candidates who meet those the process is competitive. If someone is not shortlisted or is shortlisted but unsuccessful, it may not be because of a 'criterion' they didn't meet, but just because the board considered that other candidates were better than them. (Female survey respondent)

I have not yet applied but as there are no criteria it is unclear how to apply. There is no clear and accessible system to highlight what is necessary to progress as happens in other institutions. Which of course means that the system is open to allegations of bias. (Female survey respondent)

The competitive nature of a promotions process that operates under strict quotas has encouraged a lack of transparency. Given that only 15–17 academics were promoted to Senior Lecturer every few years, the panels had to ensure that those promoted were evenly distributed across the different departments in order to avoid certain schools being seen as favoured. Roughly one-half of those promoted would be in the science fields, while the other half were roughly in the social science and humanities, but even then there never would be two promotions within one department. In practice, then, the promotions process is more of a lottery than a competition, as much depends on how difficult it is for the panel to distribute promotions given the pool of applicants.

Also worth highlighting is the reluctance of some women to apply given the lack of explicit criteria. Data gathered about the three promotions rounds prior to the problematic 2008 round reveal that three to four times more applicants were men than women. Interestingly, in the 2008 round, when only one woman was promoted, the number of women submitting an application had increased to its highest level (15 women). Yet even then, twice as many men had applied (32 men), which does raise serious questions as to why so many women over the years have not felt able to submit applications for promotion. It may be that a lack of transparency puts them off; a feeling of insecurity as to whether they will meet the criteria may cause reluctance to even try.

Applying for promotion to a senior level is a marker of prestige: it sends out a signal that the applicant believes a certain status has been reached. The lower levels of women applying is therefore problematic, as women become more easily perceived as not having achieved that level of status even before they are assessed. The prevailing belief that women are not reaching the same level as men was clearly evident in 2012 when, in anticipation of initiating the next promotions round, the senior management sought legal advice on whether they could ensure that five of the 15

promotions to Senior Lectureship went to women (apparently this was considered by senior management to be ‘affirmative action’). Even at the point when there were over 100 women at the level required to make an application for promotion to Senior Lectureship (including the seven women who had been shortlisted but unsuccessful in the 2008 round), the senior management team seemed to believe that it would be a struggle to find five women worthy of promotion. The low value placed on women’s contribution to the university helps illustrate just how difficult women find it to acquire the internal prestige necessary for promotion.

Although the vagaries of the promotions process in this particular university will not be the same as elsewhere, many of the challenges resonate. The cycle of cumulative disadvantage for academic women working in a homosocial institution was clear: the lack of transparency of the promotions process, the perceived need for inclusion in informal networks to get ahead, the perception of women as less ready to apply for promotion than men, and so on, were building ever greater barriers to career success. The very competitive nature of the promotions rounds meant that the prestige economy was a significant part of the process, and in the next section we explore how access to the types of indicators of esteem that can lead to promotion was more difficult for women.

Academic workload balance

Another important aspect of the prestige economy is workload, particularly amongst institutionally prestigious work, disciplinary prestigious work and non-prestigious work. International research suggests that women academics teach more hours than their male counterparts, whereas men spend more hours per week on research (see Misra et al. 2011). Our survey also suggested that men and women prioritise their time differently. On average, male respondents self-reported that they spend ‘four hours less per week on teaching than the women and three hours more per week on research’ (Doherty and Cook 2011, 9–10). Given that these data were self-reported, we cannot verify whether these time differences are accurate, but it is likely that even a few more hours spent on research per week would have the potential to make a difference to academic career progression.

The survey included questions intended to reveal whether there were differences between women and men as they took on roles associated with varying levels of prestige (see Table 3). For instance, being an editor of an academic journal is usually considered to be an indicator of esteem, and we found that about twice as many men had taken on this role than women. Across all indicators that we surveyed, men were more likely to have taken on these roles than women (see Table 3).

The probable effect of men’s greater involvement in prestigious roles is that they are then more likely to be perceived to naturally inhabit these

Table 3. Survey data on external roles by gender.

Which of the following external roles have you held in the last five years?	Male (%, <i>n</i> = 92)	Female (%, <i>n</i> = 98)
External examiner	75	69
Editor of an academic journal	40	19
Leading role in a professional body	36	23
Leading role on a national-level committee	3	36
Convenor of a national/international conference	57	54

roles. In academia across the globe this is a recognised problem, as women seem to work much harder for the recognition necessary to be invited to be in prestigious positions. For instance, one investigation of journals in philosophy revealed that editorial boards were heavily populated by male academics (Haslanger 2008), and a recent campaign by feminist philosophers has called on conference organisers to invite female keynote speakers in recognition of the problem of under-representation of women on high-profile platforms.

A lack of indicators of esteem, coupled with a tendency to spend more time on teaching, contributes again to a cumulative cycle of disadvantage. Being effectively marginalised from the prestige economy makes it even harder to break into it. Some of the survey respondents pointed out the gendered patterns of prestige accumulation and exchange:

There is a prevailing attitude (although I accept not a deliberate one) that women are the worker bees and men the shining academic stars. The work that women do in this university needs to be recognised. (Female survey respondent)

I became very disillusioned with the attitude to women in the workplace. Lots of undeclared deals done which favour male staff in relation to salary levels, sabbatical leave and promotion. Little or no appreciation of the spade work done, mainly by women ... male staff generally escape lots of what is regarded by them as drudge work. (Female survey respondent)

Perceptions are a significant factor in relation to who is able to gain prestige. It is very difficult to imagine how an academic can be both relegated to the role of doing the 'drudge work' and gain any sort of (internal) prestige. The 'worker bees' of the organisation are fairly exploitable: they have little of value to exchange. However, it is important to recognise that this is not an insurmountable problem. Recognising the significance of the prestige economy should help university managers find ways of enabling women to break into it. In the next section, we look at how male academics may be more confident than women in terms of breaking into the prestige economy on their own.

Self-promotion: the alpha male

A recent investigation into journal articles published in the field of political sciences between 1980 and 2007 (Maliniak, Powers, and Walter 2013) found that female-authored papers received fewer citations than male-authored papers, and that women cited themselves less than male authors. The authors suggest that female authors may be less willing to engage in acts of self-promotion, such as self-citation, than male authors. However (and perhaps more importantly), the researchers also suggest that male authors are less likely to cite female-authored papers, given that female-authored papers were not as centrally located within citation networks as the male-authored papers.

The seeming reluctance of women academics to put themselves forward or engage in self-promotion activities is often discussed in the literature about women in higher education. Diana Leonard, for instance, pointed to the reluctance of female academics to become ‘involved in the competitive, self-promotional behaviour traditionally associated with dominant masculinities’ (2001, 4). Whilst this stereotype does appear to be supported by evidence, it can lead to the type of ‘fix the women’ approaches common in universities whereby special training (e.g. assertiveness training) is provided to ‘help’ women academics overcome their inhibitions in this regard. What is harder to tackle is the structural disadvantage women face if men do not see women academics as having the same status as them, or as able to assume the leadership roles that they do, or as producing scholarly output that is worthy of citation at the same rate as men.

The data from this project indicated that some women and men did perceive male academics as more able to engage in self-promotion activities, and felt that men were greatly advantaged by this:

I find the attitude of women and men to academic life quite different. Men tend to be quite ostentatious if not aggressive in their pursuit of their goals and the institution tends to take notice of them. Guys also tend to network behind the scenes to promote themselves. A woman can work very hard ... but still not get any encouraging response or acknowledgement from male colleagues ... the work culture ... is highly orientated towards male success. (Female survey respondent)

A male respondent made a similar comment:

When I look at the most ‘successful’ academics that I know here, I realise that one thing they all have in common is an ability to ‘talk the talk’ and carry themselves with a certain knowing self-assuredness in their own greatness. This aura, and this patter, impresses others, and it really doesn’t matter to what extent they can ‘walk the walk’. (Male survey respondent)

Another male respondent (perhaps inadvertently) conformed to this stereotype in one of his comments, in which he decided to shout at us while picturing himself winning a prestigious international award:

In [the university] the ridiculous eligibility criteria mean that one has to wait a defined period prior to being eligible to apply. THIS MEANS THAT EVEN IF ONE WINS A NOBEL PRIZE, but is not at the top of the lecturer above the bar scale you CANNOT APPLY. [...] In any other institution I would already hold full professorship status. (Male survey respondent)

The quantitative data also revealed a greater tendency for the male respondents to rate their work highly. We asked the respondents to self-report how frequently they published, how they would rate the quality of their published output, and how much success they have had in writing grants.

As Table 4 shows, nearly one-half of the male respondents (44%) to the survey rated the quality of their publications in the categories of 'internationally excellent' and 'world leading'. That would mean the university had at least 50 male academics who are global leaders in their fields, a number that would presumably propel the university further up the league tables than it currently sits.

Table 4. Self-reported research and publication data from the survey by gender.

	Male (% , <i>n</i> = 105)	Female (% , <i>n</i> = 113)
Prolific and sustained	20	10
Regular and sustained	53	47
Erratic	20	25
Infrequent	6	16
N/A	1	2
Self-assessment of quality of publications	Male (% , <i>n</i> = 106)	Female (% , <i>n</i> = 113)
World leading	10	2
Internationally excellent	34	26
Internationally recognised	45	51
Recognised in Ireland	9	16
N/A	2	5
Self-assessment of success in winning research grants	Male (% , <i>n</i> = 105)	Female (% , <i>n</i> = 113)
Excellent	22	11
Good	31	28
Reasonable	28	25
Poor	14	21
N/A	5	15

When we asked respondents to identify factors they felt had hindered their career progression, one woman simply noted:

Reluctance of putting oneself forward in an aggressive manner that matches certain common Alpha-male practices. It doesn't mean lack of confidence, but it probably does effectively lead to comparatively a less proactive approach than some of my male colleagues who are not entertaining doubts about themselves. (Female survey respondent)

Again, we would argue that the response to these types of perceptions should not rest on attempts to encourage women to become more like the men. It is not in the best interests of the organisation, presumably, to only reward those who posture in a particular way, but rather to recognise value across a range of diverse activities and styles.

Conclusion

While the case of this particular university and the data from the research may present a seemingly intractable problem, some of the members of the working group were keen that the survey and subsequent recommendations led to positive outcomes. It was particularly important that the recommendations did not focus on 'fixing' the women but tried to tackle the problems of the culture of the organisation. However, it is difficult to initiate discussions about cultures of organisations without degenerating into gendered stereotyping. These discussions tend to focus on how women are less confident and unlikely to put themselves forward, which usually results in some form of assertiveness or leadership training for women being offered. Psychological research suggests that the awareness of gender stereotypes has a negative impact on performance (Haslanger 2008). It is therefore counter-productive to focus solely on 'helping' women overcome perceived weakness in performance at the expense of working to actively change the organisational culture. Indeed, if the focus and resources are channelled into 'fixing' the women, all that is being done is persuading women not to believe the stereotypes that continue to exist around them.

The other important stereotype concerns the perception that women's long periods of maternity leave inevitably results in delayed or non-existent career progression. In fact, most of the female respondents to this survey did not have children while most of the male respondents did, which suggests that remaining child-free did not help advance the careers of academic women in this university. Clearly the organisational culture and societal expectations are mainly to blame here, and endless discussions about the maternity leave issue were largely misplaced. However, the idea that women's childcare responsibilities hold them back is a convenient way for the institution to avoid doing much about gender inequality.

Several positive outcomes did emerge in this case, although there was an initial, predictable barrage of various training programmes laid on for women. The promotions criteria and process for Senior Lectureships came under intense scrutiny and did lead to some changes. A University Women's Network was established that enabled women from across the university to network and discuss relevant issues, and its steering committee began making further recommendations to senior management about how to improve prospects for all women in the university. One of the first suggestions was to remove the pictures of the 'great men' of the university from the boardroom, taking inspiration from an initiative by the Queen's Gender Initiative at Queen's University Belfast to change the visual culture of the university.

The prestige economy is so well entrenched in academic life that it is difficult to make meaningful changes as to how it operates. Sheila Slaughter (1993) argues that in effect it exists to perpetuate itself: the accrual of greater prestige justifies higher salaries, and the higher salaries lend greater prestige. Breaking into this cycle requires systematic effort at a number of levels, but the first step is to recognise how the virtuous cycle of the attainment of prestige factors can work to the advantage of men's careers, while the cumulative cycle of disadvantage can hinder women's careers. At the very least, the exchange rates within the prestige economy need to be transparent and equal for men and women.

Note

1. Promotion from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer in this university is usually made on a biennial basis through a competitive process for a limited number of promotions. There are eligibility criteria and applicants must demonstrate how they meet or exceed the criteria through submission of a range of documents. Short-listed candidates are invited to an interview with a panel of senior academics, and the panel makes the decision about who will gain promotion.

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