In pursuit of career advancement in academia

Do gendered pathways exist?

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Introduction

Despite the worldwide increase in women's education and employment in third-level education and initiatives to decrease gender inequality, female academics remain under-represented at the senior levels of these institutions (Catalyst 2017). For example, in the US, while there is close to gender parity (52%) in low-ranking positions, female academics are still less likely to hold a tenured position (38%) and account for less than one-third (32%) of professorial posts (Catalyst 2017; National Centre for Education Statistics 2016). According to the European Commission's *SHE figures 2018*, while progress is slow throughout Europe, there is an overall improvement in women's representation among holders of PhDs and academic positions (European Commission 2019). However, female academics still remain under-represented at senior levels, with women representing 46 per cent of grade C, 40 per cent of grade B and only 24 per cent of grade A, the highest academic position (European Commission 2019). In disciplines that are considered masculine-typed or male dominated, such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), there is an even greater gender disparity in representation at all levels, with women accounting for only 15 per cent of grade A professorial posts (European Commission 2019) (see Chapter 1). Thus, the consistent pattern is, that while there is an increasing representation of women and gender parity in lower-level positions, this does not carry through to senior posts.

This continued under-representation of female academics in senior positions in higher education institutions, especially in STEM areas, led to the creation of the Athena SWAN Charter. The Charter's original aim was to promote and support gender equality for women at all levels within higher education institutions in the UK (Equality Challenge Unit 2019). In 2015, the Athena SWAN charter was launched in Ireland (Equality Challenge Unit 2019) as part of a major national initiative by the Irish Higher Education Authority requiring Irish HEIs to commit to the principles of gender equality, as outlined in the Charter. They must also apply for an Athena SWAN award: Bronze, Silver or Gold. Bronze applications require an assessment of gender equality that identifies challenges and opportunities in the institution. The findings analysed in this chapter are based on the empirical

data gathered in the Dublin Institute of Technology (now called the Technological University Dublin). Institution-wide data were collected through a staff attitudinal survey and three focus groups with senior-level academics. These results were subsequently used in the Dublin Institute of Technology's successful Bronze Athena SWAN application. Before presenting these findings, the chapter reviews the literature on career barriers faced by female academics.

Barriers to career advancement for female academics

Theories such as 'role congruity theory' of prejudice towards women leaders (Eagly and Karau 2002) and a 'lack of fit' model (Heilman 2001) emphasise that women and men are perceived differently in society and are typically associated with different characteristics and attributes. Women's perceived characteristics and attributes are stereotypically identified as warm and communal and therefore incongruent with the perceived requirements of senior positions in society. This leads to negative self-perceptions among women (Eagly and Karau 2002; Heilman 2001). The lack of fit or incongruence between the female stereotype and the perceived requirements of a senior position leads, in turn, to prejudice and discrimination (Rudman and Glick 2008).

Perceived ability and lack of mentorship and role model

The influence of this perceived lack of fit or incongruence can negatively impact women's self-perceptions, in particular, women's self-efficacy (Dickerson and Taylor 2000). Research on women's self-efficacy in academia is mixed, depending on their level and discipline, with some studies finding no gender differences in motivation and self-efficacy amongst staff (Bailey 1999). Other studies find that male academics report stronger self-efficacy, as well as more time spent on research activities and outputs (Vasil 1992). Regardless of the mixed nature of the literature, self-efficacy is considered a strong determinant of career choice and direction, with lower self-efficacy resulting in self-limiting behaviour deemed detrimental to career advancement (Dickerson and Taylor 2000). These self-limiting beliefs and behaviours may include women undervaluing their work contribution (Haynes and Heilman 2013), or lacking confidence in their ability to perform challenging roles. This, in turn, affects their beliefs about pursuing leadership or senior positions (Davis *et al* 2005; Dickerson and Taylor 2000; Simon and Hoyt 2012).

Lack of mentorship and positive role models are also barriers to women's advancement to senior academic positions. Typically, mentorship involves: 'a developmental relationship between two individuals, where usually the individual with more experience, provides guidance for a lesser experienced individual' (Johnson and Kaslow 2014, 273). A role model, on the other hand, is typically someone to imitate and admire. In recent years, the concept of mentorship has

changed, becoming broader and more diverse. It includes group mentoring, e-mentoring and intergenerational or reverse mentoring (Karcher *et al* 2006). There is a body of literature on the topic of mentorship and role models in education and academia that lies beyond the scope of discussion for this chapter. However, in Meschitti and Lawton-Smith's (2017) work, mentoring is found to be important in addressing gender imbalance and women's exclusion from important networks (Van den Brink and Benschop 2014). Furthermore, women's exclusion from social networks can impede their ability to develop social capital which is often seen as an essential resource for a successful academic career (Angervall *et al* 2018).

Gender discrimination, promotion and pay equity

Eagly's social role theory (Wood and Eagly 2010) posits that gender stereotypes or beliefs can influence women's and men's behaviour through a combination of gender identity or self-concept and stereotypical expectations (Deaux and LaFrance 1998; Wood *et al* 1997; Wood and Eagly 2010). Stereotypes or beliefs about men's and women's attributes are located in two dimensions: agency (agentic) and communion (communal) (Bakan 1966). Characteristics more stereotypically associated with women include concern for others, affection, kindness and interpersonal sensitivity (Fiske *et al* 2002; Diekmann and Eagly 2000). Agentic characteristics, more stereotypically associated with men, relate to social status and power (Conway *et al* 1996). These entail confidence, control and assertiveness (Diekmann and Eagly 2000).

Eagly and Karau's (2002) work on role congruity identified two types of prejudice that correspond with women's challenge to the descriptive and prescriptive aspects of their gender stereotype. Descriptive expectations characterise the qualities that differentiate men from women (Cialdini and Trost 1998). Descriptive prejudice results from the presumed incongruence between female gender stereotype and masculine leadership role or senior position: women in communal and senior positions typically require agentic qualities (Heilman and Eagly 2008). Hence, female applicants for senior positions like professorships are more at risk of being evaluated less favourably than their male colleagues, due to the perception that they lack the required characteristics to do the job successfully (Eagly and Karau 2002; Heilman 1983; Heilman and Eagly 2008). Studies on employee selection and promotion have consistently demonstrated that in masculine-typed domains, male applicants are more likely to be hired and are perceived to succeed at specific tasks than equally qualified female applicants (Alimo-Metcalfe 1994; Davison and Burke 2000; Heilman and Haynes 2005). The suggestion is that different standards are set for men and for women, with women being set a lower minimum competency standard but a higher ability standard (Biernat and Fuegen 2001; Biernat and Kobrynowicz 1997). In a series of hiring simulations, Biernat and Fuegen (2001) found that although women were more likely than men to make the shortlist (set a lower competence standard), they were less likely to

be hired for the job (set a higher ability standard). The shifting standard model argues that, due to the male stereotype and gender bias, women are evaluated to a lower standard than their male colleagues when it comes to meeting a minimum standard. However, women are evaluated to a higher standard than their male colleagues when it comes to ability to perform the job (Biernat and Fuegen 2001). These findings suggest that prejudice and the resulting negative selection and promotion expectations may contribute further to women's under-representation in senior academic positions.

In contrast, prescriptive or injunctive expectations specify the ideal behaviours for each gender, what each gender 'ought' to be like (Cialdini and Trost 1998). Perceived incongruence or lack of fit are not stable concepts, rather they are malleable, depending on the context, occupational role and candidate. So it would seem reasonable that women who seek to advance to senior positions could narrow the lack of fit between their perceived characteristics and the requirements of a senior position by adopting more agentic characteristics and behaviour. Female academics could thus avoid their perceived lack of fit for a senior academic position (Eagly and Karau 2002; Heilman 2001; Heilman and Eagly 2008). Heilman *et al* (1995) found that when women managers were depicted as successful, they were perceived to be as agentic as their male counterparts. However, despite being ascribed the same level of agency, the same women were also regarded as more hostile and less rational than their male counterparts. This demonstrates the second type of prejudice, that results from women's violation of the prescriptive aspect of their female gender stereotype. Such violations result in negative consequences such as being less liked and less influential (Butler and Geis 1990) and being perceived as less qualified than equivalent job applicants (Davison and Burke 2000). Agentic women may experience social and economic penalties for self-promotion (Rudman 1998) and for being successful in traditional male domains (Heilman *et al* 2004). Women face a double bind or lose-lose situation in that, if they fulfil the requirements of their senior position, they may violate their female gender stereotype, resulting in being perceived as competent but unlikeable. If women comply with their female gender stereotype, they could fail to fulfil the requirements of their senior position, resulting in being perceived as incompetent but likeable. Violation in either case results in negative evaluations that can negatively impact women's career progress (Eagly and Karau 2002; Heilman and Parks-Stamm 2007; Heilman *et al* 2004; Rudman and Glick 2001).

Gender disparity in service and student support responsibilities

According to Misra *et al* (2011), female academics devote more time than their male counterparts to service duties such as pastoral care, with consequently less time for research. Furthermore, many service and care duties are not considered valuable for promotion (Guarino and Borden 2017). Guarino and Borden (2017) found that female academic staff performed more service than their male

colleagues and were mainly driven by internal (for example service to the university or the student body) than external service (for example service to national communities). They posit a number of explanations for the gender disparity in the allocation of these duties, including gender inequality structures that foster gender bias and discrimination, as well as promoting gender typical behaviour. This is consistent with the literature (O'Meara *et al* 2017; Pyke 2015) showing that disparities in the allocation of academic duties result from systematic gender bias, whereby women are simply asked to do more administrative, caring or 'house-keeping' work than their male colleagues and they comply with these requests (O'Meara *et al* 2017).

Another explanation for this gender disparity may be due to the consequences of lack of fit and incongruence between gender stereotype and occupational role. According to the stereotype content model (Fiske *et al* 2002), stereotypes can be rated by the level of perceived warmth and competence. As already noted, gender stereotypes can prove problematic for female academics since there is a perceived incongruence or lack of fit between the warmth or communality of female gender stereotype and the agentic or competent requirements of a senior academic position (Eagly and Karau 2002; Heilman 2001; Heilman and Eagly 2008). However women face negative consequences for not just acting in a gender atypical way, but for not acting sufficiently in a gender typical manner to counter the implied communality deficit of being a woman in a traditional male domain (Heilman and Okimoto 2007). Some studies have demonstrated that women who do not behave in a sufficiently communal way can be evaluated more negatively than their male counterparts who behave in the same way (Heilman and Chen 2005; Heilman and Eagly 2008; Heilman and Okimoto 2007; Vinkenbergh *et al* 2011). Therefore women must negotiate this double bind by acting as both competent and warm in order to avoid negative consequences, such as volunteering or agreeing to more gender-typical responsibilities and service. Pyke (2015) argues that female academic staff are asked to do more service than male colleagues because they are less likely to 'say no' due to the gendered norms and expectations within academia. According to Pyke (2015) and O'Meara *et al* (2017), advising women to just 'say no' is not helpful and can actually be damaging. This is consistent with negotiating the double bind of being both competent and warm, where women can experience backlash if they violate their gender role by not acting sufficiently communal in a typical masculine role or field (Rudman and Glick 2001).

Empirical findings

In the remainder of this chapter, it is argued that women and men in academia face different career barriers and responsibilities in the workplace. Empirical findings are provided to support this. As part of the Athena SWAN project in the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), all members of current academic and research staff, of all genders and in all areas of the Institute, were invited to participate in a survey that was designed to explore equality of experience and of opportunity, to

highlight positive actions and to raise issues that need to be tackled in the future. Survey participants comprised 385 academic and research staff (166 male, 219 female), ranging from assistant lecturer (equivalent to Grade C) to senior lecturer grade II and above (equivalent to Grade A). Due to the low number of participants not indicating their gender or identifying as nonbinary, participant confidentiality and anonymity was a concern, hence their responses were excluded from the dataset.

Data collection took place online using SurveyGizmo and branching methods based on questions such as job role in order to limit question fatigue. Participants were presented with a consent letter which included information about the survey which took approximately 15–20 minutes to complete. Focus group participants consisted of 22 academics - two groups of female senior academics and one group of male senior academics. Focus group participants were presented with a consent letter with information about the project and seeking their consent to record and transcribe the group discussion. The findings of the survey and focus groups identified a number of barriers and responsibilities that female academics face in their pursuit of career advancement

A number of career barriers were identified that were rated more highly by female, than male academics namely: lower belief in their abilities; lack of mentorship; work-life balance and greater care responsibilities; and gender discrimination, in terms of promotion and pay. More female academics (34%) than their male counterparts (16%) agreed that their gender impacted on the duties they were expected to perform with participants commenting:

'I think more so [gender] impacts on my female colleagues more. I think males are listened to more'.

'In general, females are asked to do more. Men say no quicker'.

'I take on more pastoral care roles than my male colleagues, I take on more admin roles too'.

Regarding mentorship, female academic and research staff agreed that lack of mentorship was a hindrance to their careers, rating having role models and mentors more highly than their male colleagues:

'Not having a role model or mentor at work'.

'Not knowing the right people to get ahead in my career'.

Moreover, in the focus groups, female senior academics outlined the importance of local political connections for career development. This included developing allies with power to support and provide access to and influence opportunities within academia (O'Hagan *et al* 2016). In particular, senior female academics stressed that in their experience, younger female staff (assistant lecturers) often had weaker network links than their male colleagues and this hindered turning their talent into tangible rewards.

These survey findings show that female academic and research staff rated their experience of gender discrimination (having a boss or supervisor who is biased against people of their gender); gender disparity in pay (not being paid as much as co-workers of the opposite gender) and in promotion (people of the opposite gender receive promotions more often than people of their gender) as hindering their careers, to a greater extent than their male colleagues. More female staff disagreed that: they understood the process and criteria for promotion; the promotion process was transparent and fair; and feedback was appropriate and useful. Respondents were asked to rate the culture of their organisation in terms of gender equality in a number of key areas, on a scale of 1 = women are significantly disadvantaged to 5 = men are significantly disadvantaged (0 = don't know). Topics included promotion, salary, access to career development opportunities, access to funding, access to lab and office space, and access to administrative support (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Gender differences in perceived beliefs about women's disadvantage

Key areas	Women (%)	Men (%)
Promotion	36	11
Salary	20	7
Career development resources	33	13
Access to funding	16	3
Lab access	11	3
Administrative support	14	2

One of the most surprising outcomes of the survey and focus groups was the perceived gender disparity in allocation of service duties and student care responsibilities. Consistent with existing literature, the study showed that the majority of staff rated research as the most important activity for an academic career (94%) and that it was most valued by their school/department (81%). In contrast, pastoral care (6%) and administrative duties (7%) were rated as much less important in contributing to careers and in their perceived value by schools/departments. In the study, female academic staff said:

'I appear to be given minding role more frequently than male colleagues'.

'I was recently asked by my manger to tidy up a lab. I am fairly certain that he would not have asked one of my male colleagues to do this'.

'I am expected to do a lot of the admin duties, organisational tasks and cleaning for the research group'.

'I tend to be allocated organisation, minute-taking administration tasks along with more pastoral care type roles'.

'Students in distress are passed on from male colleagues'.

'The view has been expressed by leadership that older, senior male academic staff cannot be expected to undertake administrative tasks to the same extent as other staff members'.

A way forward?

From the DIT research and an examination of the literature, three main issues are apparent: a lack of formal mentorship and leadership development programmes; gender bias via structural inequalities and culture, reflected in gender discrimination in selection, promotion and pay procedures; and the lack of a transparent and fair workload allocation that recognises and takes into account extra service or caring responsibilities, such as pastoral support for students. Additionally, there are a number of processes in relation to leadership that have relevance for women who seek these roles. Alongside any leadership development programme, universities and research institutions need to implement formalised mentorship programmes that would provide support for female academic staff (Ely *et al* 2011). Furthermore, academic institutions need to address the structural inequalities and culture within their organisations, review their selection, promotion and pay procedures for gender bias (see Chapters 3, 7 and 9) and engage with all staff to maintain positive momentum for gender equality. Addressing gender bias and structural inequalities in academia calls for a review of workload models that acknowledges activities, such as administration and service work, as much as research. This study shows that female staff often undertake additional roles and activities aligned with their female gender stereotype, which are neither valued nor beneficial for their promotion prospects. A transparent and fairer workload allocation model that clearly assigns activities equitably, regardless of gender, is essential.

Conclusions

This chapter analysed a number of barriers that female academics face in their pursuit of career advancement and promotion to senior positions. Drawing upon existing literature, it is argued that, due to a perceived lack of fit and/or incongruence between the female gender stereotypes and perceived requirements of senior academic positions, female academics who wish to pursue senior academic positions are often at a greater disadvantage, compared with their male colleagues. Moreover, given the gender bias and disparities that exist within academia, female academics frequently face additional barriers such as lack of mentorship, work-life balance issues and gender discrimination in terms of promotion and pay. The empirical findings in this chapter show that female academics consistently rated barriers to their career advancement higher than their male colleagues. Furthermore, female academics are also given, or volunteer for, a disproportionate amount of support or housekeeping work that is not accorded value for promotion. This confirms the need for formal mentorship and leadership development programmes, in addition to a more transparent and fairer workload allocation model.

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