THE COVENANTS OF A 'SLOW' RESISTANCE THROUGH FEMINIST SCHOLARSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

In this paper a critical, syncretic discussion is offered of two connected, qualitative feminist studies focusing on the experiences of women academics in the UK Higher Education system. The studies were respectively entitled '"Loaded dice?" Barriers to women's progression' and 'Donning the "Slow Professor'" and consecutively explore women scholars perceptions of their academic careers in terms of levels of satisfaction and progress, but where findings point to a greater level of concern relating to perceived barriers, stressors and dissatisfaction. In both studies the context of the working environment and how this influences individual careers foregrounds the discussion and is critically discussed.

In terms of methodology Focus Group Discussions were employed for the completed first study with the subsequent use of a Participatory Action Research co-researcher methodology for the second completed study.

New insights are offered as findings in this paper regarding how women academics are situated and 'managed' in the gendered commodification of the academy, where careers are experienced as channelled; and this appears to be owing to social constructions governing gender. Such gendered normativity within the academy may be enacted within the institution at a variety of levels and can be unconsciously assumed by students in relation to expectations of enhanced levels of emotional labour from women academics that are directed towards student needs. Additionally, co-researchers considered how the corporatization of the modern global university, with its regimes of managerialism, reinvention of scholarly time and productivity, is a form of isomorphic convergence. In turn this has given rise to a localized feminist

resistance in the form of embracing the so-called 'slow' academy, which is the topic of the second paper.

Both studies were initiated under the auspices of the 'Women's Academic Network', a non-corporate support network and forum created by women scholars and dedicated to promoting academic women's careers and lobbying on a range of issues affecting the workplace.

Keywords

Women academics, Higher Education, gender, corporatization, 'slow professor'

INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the synthesized findings from two interdisciplinary, feminist studies conducted under the auspices of the non-corporate women scholars' nexus, the Women's Academic Network (WAN) at a contemporary, corporate university in England.

WAN was originally established based on an informal survey of women colleagues at the institution where both studies were conducted. This revealed that there was a wish to see an academic network that would support women academics and promote their careers. This starting point formed the primary aims of WAN in terms of supporting and promoting the academic profiles of women academic, as well as lobbying on a range of issues affecting their careers and the working environment. A further survey undertaken in 2017 indicated that the network was considered to be very important to

WAN members; although it was recognized that there needed to be more effective ways to tackle gender inequities for greater institutional and external impact.

In addition to its current remit, WAN supports research into gender equality issues as well as undertaking such research. Here two qualitative WAN studies are critically discussed, both focusing on academic women's experiences of managing careers in the corporate work culture of Institutions of Higher Education (HEI) in a modern UK university context.

The rationale of offering a synthesized, syncretic discussion of the studies relates to the development of emerging concepts arising as findings from the first study. This informed researchers' understanding of phenomena leading to the second study. Examined together they offer deeper insights into the issues permeating women's academic careers, through the synergies that elevate each study above the constraints of a discrete examination of either. It is these synergistic findings that are explored as themes here.

The background to the studies draws on a body of international research into the slower career progression rates of women academics in comparison to men, together with the gendered barriers that women academics encounter. Accordingly, it is argued that in the context of HEI these processes are also found shaping the scholar into a new type of academic - the corporate knowledge production worker.

The concept of 'isomorphic convergence' is utilized. This refers to the replication of perceived successful models arising from the organizational pursuit of efficiency, but

which leads to a constraining homogeneity under the rationale of standardization that mandates and fetishizes conformity and compliance irrespective of context (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983).

In terms of the context of the British Higher Education (HE) system there has been high levels of encouragement within HE bodies across the European Union (of which the UK is still a member) to balance out gendered inequities in the workplace, including that of academia (Pascall, 2012). Equally there are increasing expectations that HEI will engage in developing gender equitable policies and practices through the UK AdvanceHE Equality Charters (https://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters/). Of these the 'Athena SWAN' Awards provide evidence that HEI are working towards gender equality. These awards serve to provide a benchmark standard for institutions to demonstrate gendered equality. Failure to engage in these diversity agendas not only means the denial of the award for competing HEI, but may prevent successful competitions for UK research council funds (http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/funding/diversity/).

Despite this there is a serious disparity in terms of gendered representation of women at senior leadership levels, where the numbers of UK male professors stands at 12,185 in sharp comparison to figures of 3,690 female professors (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2015). Wage discrepancies are implicated, where the British University and College Union (UCU) report a national 12.3% gender wage gap for the year 2014-5, representing only a fractional increase on the year before (UCU, 2016).

Furthermore, although often located at different starting and end positions on the career track compared to men, women academics are enmeshed in global isomorphic trends whereby academia is becoming a quantifiably driven, quasi-business. Corporatization therefore focuses on the increased productivity of research 'output' in work environments of depleting resources, particularly that of time (O'Neill 2014), which Berg and Seeber (2016) explore in their 'manifesto', *The Slow Professor: Challenging the culture of speed in the academy*. Here the authors scrutinize the concept of the corporatization of the academy (which the reader infers is associated with masculinised and capitalist discourses) arguing this to be damaging to both academics and the academy (Ashencaen Crabtree et al., forthcoming).

> We believe that the problems of time stress will not be solved with better
> work habits.....The real time issues are the increasing workloads, the
> sped-up pace, and the instrumentalism that pervade the corporate university.
> (Berg and Seeber, 2016: 25).

The concept of time, explored by Berg and Seeber (2016: 26), are two-fold: one is 'timelessness' (Ylijoki and Mäntylä, 2003): the contented, uninterrupted and un-noted time of deep scholarly immersion. The other is 'corporate time', characterized as an exhausting and endless race composed of an unnaturally hurried and punctuated tempo. In regards to the latter the reader is reminded of the crazily accelerated world of the 'Red Queen' in Lewis Carroll's celebrated Victorian children's fantasy *Through the Looking Glass*, where an out-of-breath Alice is appalled to see that after a desperate dash with the Queen, the scenery remains just the same:

> A slow sort of country!' said the Queen. 'Now, *here*, you see, it takes all the running *you* can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!'
>
> (Carroll, 1871).

In keeping with feminist research methodologies, this paper explores how women academics are situated and 'managed' in the gendered commodification of British HE, with resonant applications to a wider international community of women scholars.

The concept of gender is used extensively here and rests on the notion of gender as a social construction that is created and enacted within specific social and cultural milieu as a normative process (Charlebois, 2011; Wharton, 2012). Gender comes to the fore in consideration of how it is constituted within academia (Morley, 2013) and how women academics thereby operate or negotiate, comply with or undermine these gender constructions. The ontological aspects of gender, such as biological differences and gender normativity (Butler, 1999), for instance in relation to the domestic roles of motherhood, are explored further.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The main body of international research literature focusing on gender inequities in academia refers to those working in the so-called STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) disciplines, where gender imbalances are particularly apparent. This has in turn prompted the inception of the UK Athena SWAN movement for women in the sciences.

Attrition rates of junior female staff through the 'leaking pipe' phenomenon are noted by a number of researchers, particularly in terms of medicine and other STEM subjects (Easterley and Ricard, 2011), with particular reference to the USA. Johnsrud and Wunsch (1991) comment on the need for women to better adapt to the expectations of the disciplines, rather than suggesting that institutional change needs to take place. Wright et al. (2003) review gender discrepancies in terms of salaries, ranks and resources in these disciplines. Furthermore, although women study medicine at the same rate as men, far fewer remain in academia following graduation (Bhatia et al., 2015). A longitudinal study by Carr et al. (2015) demonstrates a consistent lack of parity between male and female academics working in medicine over the course of four decades. While Dickey Zakaib (2011) and Shen (2013) note that these findings are also congruent with the UK context as well.

Academia has been typically portrayed as a male-dominated environment, by its nature inhospitable to women scholars and often remaining so, regardless of a shift from a traditional monastic-type context to today's corporate macho environment of competitive individualism. In the latter case this has fully embraced the notion of the 'male model of work' as conforming to a regime of total and uninterrupted commitment to employment (Pascall, 2012) where the 'clock-work' of academic careers are geared towards the masculine (Wolf-Wendel and Ward, 2006: 489). To survive in this austere, masculinised academic climate appears to demand that a woman learns to behave like a man, as this quote from Lindhardt and Bøttcher Berthelsen describes in reference to a successful woman professor of nursing.

> A professor was lecturing PhD students on career-planning using her own path as an example. The auditorium was struck with aw at the amazing and speedy

progress she had made. A female student asked how she had managed the
work-life balance. After a small pause, she explained that her whole life was
centred on work, she had no family of her own and few friends. It was
probably not the answer the student had hoped for, and clearly not one that
gave directions for the balancing of academic carer and family life with
children and spouse (2016: 1249).

Such examples offer a sharp contrast to the situation of women academics attempting
to lead balanced work/home lives. Toffoletti and Starr (2016) comment that
Australian women participants believe that such a balance is barely attainable in
academia. While acknowledging the challenges, Wolf-Wendel and Ward (2006) offer
a positive view of combining academic careers with motherhood. Nonetheless Taşçı-
Kaya (2016) writing from Turkey refers to the difficulties of managing family life in
conjunction with the burdens of bureaucratized academic roles. Increased levels of
stress among women academics in China are attributed to high expectations of
productivity combined with slower career progress and conflictual personal
relationships (Zhang 2010). In turn Heijstra et al. (2015) question the hard choices
facing women in the Global North between having children or an academic career.

A sobering gendered context is provided by Sallee (2016) noting the much higher
rates of married US male academics with dependent children in comparison with the
higher numbers of single, childless women colleagues. Finally, Probert (2005)
writing from the Australian context argues that barriers to women's academics careers
do not stem from institutional policies, but arise from the choices women make in
relation to their domestic commitments and the unequal sharing of these.

The 'virtual', online world of work provides new terrains to negotiate as academics. Porous boundaries between work and home created by omnipresence computer technology, may either serve to increase academic engagement in the domestic sphere or may exacerbate the encroachment of the corporate world into the private domain (Nippert-Eng, 1995). Yet, despite expected long working hours, it would seem that this is not sufficient to balance gendered disparities in the academy, where, for women, the balance of academic tasks is weighted against research and towards teaching roles, described as the 'new housework' (Grove, 2013). This observation is supported by evidence relating to the UK's idiosyncratic, hugely expensive, national 5-year Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise designed to discriminate between HEI based on research performance in order to meet government funding agendas. REF2014 showed a low inclusion of women academics as well as academics from minority ethnic groups (HEFCE, 2015). Additionally, national surveys point to extremely high levels of stress among UK academics (Kinman and Wray, 2013); and where corporatization is regarded as more deeply entrenched among UK HEI than in the US (Holmwood, 2016).

The consequences of all these factors can be profound for women's career progression, as Grove (2013) suggests. Routine academic tasks and bureaucratic management, teaching and pastoral roles are more likely to be assigned to women as 'mom's roles' (Eddy and Ward, 2015: 4). This in turn resonates with the concept of 'emotional labor' as formulated by Hochschild (2003, 1997), which involves keeping the machinery of operations running smoothly through the inducing or suppressing of emotional feelings, which form a part of the task (here one may think of the false smiles of flight staff and shop assistants (Ashencaen Crabtree and Shiel, forthcoming

b). Although there is little written about emotional labour in academia (Darby, 2017), Goffman's (1959) early work into dramaturgy resonates with these ideas in terms of how individuals present themselves in the public arena. Academics spend a great deal of time in the public eye where they stand under the critical gaze of colleagues, both within the institution and via the global domain of academia, facilitated by Internet presences, citation indices, Google and H-indices, as well as publicly accessible curriculum vitae. Students too must be appeased, where great importance is given to content and teaching evaluations (Bartlett, 2005).

Tertiary level teaching forms a plank in the global corporatisation of HEI as quasi-businesses. Education as profiteering has seen the commodification of tertiary education in a marketized, neo-liberal context (O'Neill, 2014), with its preoccupation with standardization and bureaucratization (Wallace and Marchant, 2012), along with the reframing of the student as a 'customer' (Collini, 2012; Furedi, 2017). The issue of student tuition fees, a matter that has bedevilled UK tertiary education for example, is an important equation for the quasi-business academic model. Thus keeping the customer happy has never before been so important or, arguably, so difficult to achieve (Furedi, 2017).

Effectively emotional labour in academia plays an essential role in consequence, where managerialism has come to the fore as part of the corporate agenda (Berg and Seeber, 2016). This increasingly requires the 'human touch' allowing corporate machine to operate efficiency, while ensuring that the experiential encounters of students and staff are not too bruised in the process. It is perhaps not surprising

therefore that women, rather than men, are channelled into these emotional labour roles (Ashencaen Crabtree and Shiel, forthcoming).

In reference to the essentialized mothering role, Guy and Newman (2004) note student expectations of women academics as suppliers of emotional supportiveness, where failure to provide the expected levels of nurturance may result in punishment through poor teaching evaluations. Thus Tunguz (2016) comments on how US women academics who are low in power (e.g. untenured positions) are obliged to display high levels of emotional labour to compensate for job insecurities.

The question of how women academics can best be supported in academia provides some interesting insights. Women academics have greater confidence, feel more satisfied with their careers and publish more with mentorship support, a point noted by Schor back in 1997. Mentorship can provide much needed insight for novitiates into the rules of the academic game (Ali and Coate, 2013). Equally mentorship needs to be a subtle tool, as inappropriate mentoring may be harmful and where individual circumstances need to be carefully matched (Blood et al., 2012). Accordingly, McGuire and Reger (2003) consider the issue of power that come to the fore in unhelpful dyads and propose feminist co-mentoring, as a means of deconstructing power relations.

Additionally, and resonant with the studies here, an intriguing phenomenon is noted relating to women's support networks. Wilson et al. (2005) refer to the founding of a group called the 'Critical Pedagogy group' that provides Australian women academics with a safe outlet to discuss their successes and failures, exploring women-

centric ways of working and surviving in the academy. Interestingly only two members were tenured with the rest on insecure contract work in keeping with Tunguz's (2016) point. In another paper Selepè et al. (2012) writing from South Africa refer to the jocularly named 'W(h)ine Club' established as a multidisciplinary research team but with the further vital remit as a social (wine) and supportive (whine) community of women academics. These examples are reminiscent of the author's academic group, WAN, serving as a nexus of female collegiality that acknowledges its responsibilities to promote academic careers, but within a woman-centric forum where feminist discourses and connections are encouraged. In some ways therefore, such groups offer the next step up from one-to-one mentoring, to a wider domain of being able to collectively articulate issues of concern, as well as shaping institutional responses to them.

THE WAN STUDIES: METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

As mentioned, this paper discusses two small-scale qualitative studies focusing on women academics and carried out successively within the same institution. Participants were recruited from across the WAN network by an emailed invitation.

Entitled respectively, '"Loaded dice?" Barriers to women's progression' and 'Donning the 'Slow Professor': a feminist action research pilot project', both studies were based on recognized elements of feminist epistemologies. Accordingly it was important that the subjective perceptions of oppressive practices by participants were linked to wider structural constraints, in this case national and globalised HE as increasingly corporatized entities (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002).

The subversion of the objectivising hierarchies of 'researcher' and 'subject' was implicit to the research where the researchers sought to explore our own conditions, as women academics, through processes of reflection and self-reflexivity (Stanley and Wise, 1993; Ashencaen Crabtree and Shiel, forthcoming; Ashencaen Crabtree *et al*., forthcoming). Accordingly Stacey's (1991: 21) claim that in exploring women's everyday experiences, feminist research embraces authenticity, reciprocity and intersubjectivity, were principles that lay at the heart of the work. Finally, both studies to an extent, but particularly the second (Donning the 'Slow Professor') attempted to create new levels of consciousness through the co-construction of knowledge by participants and researchers.

In the first study, '"Loaded dice?" Barriers to women's progression', the data-gathering period covered four months where three focus group discussions were held with between five and eight participants all drawn from the WAN network. Three research questions were offered for exploration:

1. What barriers to progression do women academics within the institution experience during their careers?
2. How are the implications and impact of these perceived?
3. How do participants identify positive solutions that might facilitate change based on these experiences?

The fundamental group discussion element of FGD methods enabled participants to develop responses as part of an exploratory dialogue with others who share certain identified commonalities - in this case they were all women academics at the same

institution. Facilitation by researchers encourages the process of dialogue to unfold, incorporating all views for consideration, and gathering the raw data for subsequent thematic analysis. Topics can be explored in greater depth, where shared views create and generate deeper insights (Seal et al., 1998). An example of this revolved around a discussion of the perceived authority given to male voices in academia over that of women's, highlighting a collective experience of gendered disadvantage within the group. Achieving a consensus is not the aim of FGD, for divergent views may also be used as data, but instead it is the context together with the content that is important to the process (Bryman, 2016; Woodyatt et al., 2016).

The second study, 'Donning the 'Slow Professor': a feminist action research pilot project', used a Participatory Action Learning (PAR) methodology and also recruited WAN members (Ashencaen Crabtree et al., 2017). PAR is particularly used for research work with marginalised groups and communities, enabling them to research their own particular circumstances and context with a view to identifying issues and solutions in an on-going cycle of exploration, problem identification and intervention, evaluation (Chesnay, 2016; Ashencaen Crabtree, 2001).

In terms of the PAR approach, it should be said that although women academics might be viewed as an elite group by many measures, here it is argued that they are nonetheless marginalised within the HE context in terms of career opportunities and wages. Feminist epistemologies used for studying HE environments are relatively rare and where, as Van Den Brink (2010) argues, there can be a defensive response to these by university leaders. In our study, a feminist mission was claimed in seeking an

emancipatory position for both female and male colleagues by challenging the

masculinization of the corporate university implicating all academics.

One research question only was posed in this second study:

'What are the perceived benefits and barriers towards the adoption of Slow Professor

principles for academic women in a modern corporate university following a period

of trial adoption?'

Thus the methodological approach used was chosen as the best approach to examine

the research question and to attempt to embed selected 'Slow Professorship' strategies

in the working lives of co-researchers, as documented through a PAR methodology.

ANALYSIS

Analysis of the first study was carried out using thematic coding techniques of

transcribed interviews in accordance with ethnographic methodology, where FGD

forms part of the ethnographic toolkit of methods (Ashencaen Crabtree, 2011). Six

themes were developed from the raw data using both a vertical and horizontal analysis

to form the basis of the findings following a process of developing three layers of

coding (Ashencaen Crabtree and Shiel, 2018).

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Both studies were subject to University Research Ethics Committee approval

mandating conventional ethics protocols, including confidentiality, the right to

withdraw from participation and data protection management. Given that all

participants were WAN members, and in respect of the author's role within the

network, this may raise additional ethical considerations. However, no attempt was made to target or coerce volunteers in any way and where declining to participate, or withdrawing from participation was guaranteed not to compromise normal working relationships.

Research ethics may be considered from a negative rights standpoint of freedom from interference (Berlin, 1969). Yet ethical concerns can also be framed positively, in terms of increasing self-actualization and self-expression (Ashencaen Crabtree, 2013; Horne, 1999). Accordingly it was noteworthy that the opportunity to participate in both studies was taken up with alacrity by volunteers. It also appeared to be experienced as a very welcome chance to air issues of concern to individuals within a known confiding and safe environment.

FINDINGS

From the first study, focusing on barriers to women's academic careers, six connected themes were developed through a thematic analysis. For the purposes of this paper however, two of the themes are explored: 'toxic environments' and 'helping hands'. These are discussed in an analytic synthesis with emergent findings from the subsequent study 'Donning the Slow Professor'.

The concept of slowness used here has been developed and inspired by the rise of other 'slow' movements (Berg and Seeber, 2016), such as, for example, 'slow food' (involving the idea of nutritious food, ethically produced, cooked and served with care and respect) as opposed to 'fast food' and the 'McDonaldisation' of globalized

food industries.

The notion of 'slow' semantically conforms to ideas of 'deliberate', 'thoughtful', 'in-depth' and 'conscious', which are deliberately encompassed within the term 'slow professor' (Seeber and Berg, 2013). The WAN study sought to explore these ideas within the co-research group, attempting to find or (re)ignite these within ourselves (Ashencaen Crabtree et al., forthcoming), instituting them as embedded working practices, and finally, sharing the fruit of our collaborative enterprise with other faculty colleagues as part of the PAR approach. The shared, emancipatory goal of the work formed the aims of the study.

Here the research process involved a repeated PAR cycle of problem identification, intervention and evaluation, where 'slow' strategies were identified by each researcher to be individually adopted and evaluated personally and then within the group over the duration of the study. The effectiveness of the ideas would be tested against the standards of deliberate scholarship, rather than in terms of corporate efficiency. The list produced included the following items (with explanations), inspired by Berg and Seeber (2016).

- 'Timelessness' strategies (*the difference between artificial 'corporate time' and genuine 'academic time'*)

- Restricting the inner bully

- Risking candor (*being honest about what I am finding hard to accomplish*)

- Scheduling in 'thinking' time (*I don't have to 'do' all the time to be of value*!)

- Making sure I always prioritize supporting colleagues above the demands and often artificial deadlines of the organisation (*people first!)*

- Planning to look at work emails only twice a day. Closing Microsoft

Outlook at all other times (*the multitasking/continuous online presence is really affecting my ability to concentrate*).

- Stop feeling guilty *(I would love to learn how to do it. I recognise this as a big issue for me)*

- Learning to say 'no' a bit more often and assertively (*saying 'yes' to other demands often means saying 'no' to what I want to do*)

- Permitting 'fallow' times (*time to rest my mind between bigger projects/tasks instead of trying to rush into the next big job immediately*)

- Instituting rest times within the working day

- Sharing these ideas with other people, including students

- Working towards the goals of this project by sharing with other colleagues

- Listen more to myself and other people

- Stop charging through day ticking off tasks on a list that never disappears because I keep adding new things at the bottom (*have list-free days!*)

- Address my addiction to emails/the online world.

- Accept and embrace my imperfections

- Time to care (*specifically I plan to: A. Plan break times in my day – to go for a walk, to reflect and clear my head. B. Be more critically discerning about the emails I send. Do I need to send them or can I phone instead? C. Don't be critical of myself for wanting to protect home time. Stop myself from feeling I have to work at the weekends to keep afloat*).

- Be more realistic of myself (*stop expecting the impossible*)

- Start putting in 'keep clear days' to remind myself not to book in meetings when I plan to work from home and when I have to be in the office (*Skype instead so I have 'time'*)

- Be more realistic in the targets I set myself – plan how long tasks may take and then double it.

A CRITICAL SYNTHESIS OF STUDY FINDINGS

The 'No pain, no gain' work culture

The academy, as representing an unhealthy and even a dangerous environment for academics in terms of their mental and physical wellbeing (Kinman and Wray, 2013), was identified as a particularly challenging issue arising from both studies. The demands of the total masculinized work culture were viewed as creating precarity for staff, in requiring an equally total work commitment that was incompatible with personal lives and a reasonable work-life balance (Pascall, 2012; Toffoletti and Starr, 2016). The repercussions were viewed as falling most heavily upon women owing to their normative gender and biological roles in society, as one participant from the first study explains:

'Mala': I think the reality is, that, that women do carry the greater burden, caring burdens, in society... And so if the work life balance is not being addressed, then it's having a greater impact on women. And that is probably reflected in the [low] number of women who are getting in to the top, because our work life balance in the University is toxic, because we're all seen to be working all the time. And so, if you're not able to work all the time, you can't progress, can you? It makes sense.

Another participant argued in turn that in her view male colleagues appeared to feel

more able to draw the line in terms of work demands in a way that women found difficult:

Miriam: I also find that my male colleagues are much better than my

female colleagues and myself, in saying 'no' to things, or in just

saying, 'right, this is it for the day'. Yeah, in all these things where we are

hesitant to display what we might be done...I feel that they [men] are much

quicker in saying, 'this is what I've done,' and 'I've done well today,' or 'I've

done well in this project,' and, 'this was my doing,' etc. And also they don't

hesitate so much to say 'no'.

Attempting to manage heavy workloads, described as overwhelming at times, was viewed as very stressful, exacerbated by the inability to be able to confess to such experiences owing to the fear of being seen to be failing as an academic. The highly competitive nature of academia: firstly, to secure a permanent post in the UK context (or tenure in other HE systems) is followed by the subsequent attempt to prove oneself worthy of the post. Such individual exertions take place in a work environment where, based on these studies, most colleagues seemed equally burdened. The resultant tensions were experienced as generally punitive, as this participant account from the first study indicates:

'Pam': I have to say that, there are days when I just want to burst into tears in my

office because things have got too much. And I'd have to say that in the

four years I've been here, that has only happened once. And the shame I felt,

because it happened in front of a male colleague, who shared my office, and I

was just mortified, well I just couldn't handle it anymore. But I think, for me, I do try to definitely put on this front that, you know, that 'yep, no, everything's ok, I can handle everything, no problem'. But, the number of times I actually go home at the end of the day and just cry, you know, just because I can't handle the stress of it...'

Tears then can only be safely shed at home. The manipulation of emotion, expressed, contrived or suppressed, is here portrayed as a form of emotional censorship. As such it conforms to Hochschild's notion of emotional labour, where personal feelings are subject to self-governance to ensure a level of congruence with context and expectation (Hochschild, 2003, 1997).

Claire: But I've also watched other women having worse experiences, just, you know, where you go to meetings and somebody's obviously really distressed and no one takes any notice of it, you know. And even the other women around the table, you know that everyone's conscious that this person is really distressed, but they won't acknowledge it, no one does *anything*. That really shocked me, but I think that is also a cultural thing.

The witnessing of distress and collegial callousness appears to create levels of secondary trauma according to this account. The context of the encounter is also very important where the 'cultural' issue referred to relates to those working within an academic health discipline. Irrespective of whether it is in fact a male-dominated environment, a masculinized ethos of cold aloofness towards displayed emotion implicates and dehumanizes academics of both sexes.

Returning to the second study, a 'Slow Professor' strategy offered by one participant raised the tactic of 'risking candour', which was felt to represent a serious risk for individuals. If one has to the courage to adopt honesty, for instance, this could then perhaps lead to adopting two other brave new positions on the list: 'Be more realistic of myself (*stop expecting the impossible*)' and 'stop charging through day ticking off tasks on a list that never disappears because I keep adding new things at the bottom (*have list-free days!)'*

The dilemmas raised by these brave, new strategies were significant. Upon reaching this crossroad individual academics risked revealing themselves as incompetent in failing to achieve the endless demands of the increasingly greedy corporate entity. Indeed one member of the co-research group was actually warned off participating in the second project by a senior member of staff in case it prejudiced their chances of promotion, so draconian is the expectation of compliance and conformity. Yet the rewards of pursuing slowness in the academy were also seen as potentially high, where the co-researchers could possibly achieve a genuine liberation from the internalized myth that machine-like labour and productivity (for both sexes) are sustainable and necessary. Thus a big gamble was posed for individuals both ideologically as well as practically, with consequences that could seriously affect their careers.

Exploring the risks further, the punitive nature of the 'toxic environment' relates to a culture of blame. If the normative tempo of work is relentless then the demands from the institution via senior colleagues can also legitimately be. Perceptions of

institutionalized bullying, in the form of prevalence and the condoning of this in workplace were raised by participants in both studies. Another more invidious aspect of cultures of blame, lay in the internalizing of these cultures as normalized, where the individual academic became punitively self-policing owing to strict self-regulation without need for further reinforcement from others, as this narrative from the first study reveals:

'Diane': I live in guilt. I wake up in the morning and I feel guilty. I get here at 8am, I
   feel guilty I wasn't here at half seven, you know. Or, you know, I feel guilty
   when I take 30 minutes to have a lunch break. I never have a lunch break,
   ever, ever! Well, exactly like that, you know. It's exactly like that, but
   yeah, there's guilt.

The self-punishing elements describing this kind of self-denial and self-flagellation was aided by the pervasive sense of a conspiratorial collegial silence regarding what could constitute reasonable and unreasonable levels of work. A sense of isolation was one that co-researchers in the second study sought to break as creating damaging personal habits abetted by harmful institutional cultures. Accordingly the 24/7 work pace, facilitated by the Internet, where even the privacy of home and family life is infiltrated was viewed as insidious (Nippert-Eng, 1995). Connected to this problem was the identified engrained habit of constantly checking for work emails as described in these articulated strategies from the 'Slow Professor' study: 'Address my addiction to emails/the online world' and 'Planning to look at work emails only twice a day. Closing Microsoft Outlook at all other times (*the multitasking/continuous online presence is really affecting my ability to concentrate*)'.

Probert (2005) argues that gender inequalities have yet to be established in terms of the university polices she studied, and that therefore there must be other factors leading to low up-take of women academics in leadership positions. I argue elsewhere that findings from the first WAN study reveal that participants do feel that gendered inequities are apparent in HEI practice, if not in actual black-and-white policies (Ashencaen Crabtree, 2018; Ashencaen Crabtree and Shiel forthcoming, Ashencaen Crabtree et al., 2017). However, in respect of the syncretic theme of toxicity discussed here, there was a recognition of the ideal academic as one conforming to the obsessive and isolated figure, described by Lindhardt and Bøttcher Berthelsen (2016). Participant accounts in both studies strongly conveyed that in reality this is a dysfunctional role model created from an abnormal work context, which needed to be exposed and rejected as a hazard, rather than embraced and emulated.

The immovable object meets the irresistible force

In the face of relentless work tempos, inhospitable working environments and inhumane encounters and work ethos, the question of how women academics sustain themselves was an interesting one emerging from both studies. This is not to suggest that identifying individual coping strategies did not come at a cost, for one participant had moved sideways out of academic life and into university administration, viewed as providing a more equal gendered playing field. Another believed the only option was to work fewer ideas with demotion.

The total work context (not dissimilar to Goffman's 1961) concept of the 'total institution', where all functions of life are carried out within the confines of the

material and metaphorical structure) seems to be premised on the idea that any personal relationships are either subordinated to or subsumed within it. Making career sacrifices for the benefit of adult relationships is perhaps less expected for professional women than those made for their children. Women academics, whom out of choice or necessity, managed to maintain both their careers and parental responsibilities were often viewed as anomalous:

Claire: When I was at University of X one of the female administrators said to me, 'oh, you've got children,' and my children were both quite small then, I said, 'yes'. She said, 'oh, I didn't think people like you had children.' She said, 'well, you know, you have a career, and everything, you know you don't look like you've got children.' So you get these really odd comments from women as well.

Such assumptions that a successful female academic is unlikely to be a parent feeds into the asymmetrical gendered situation commented on by Sallee (2016) and Heijstra et al. (2015) of academics being composed of 'family men' and single or childless women who require no childcare. With such assumptions intact there would appear to be little incentive for HEI to soften hard edges, corporatized or otherwise, with overtly family-friendly policies.

Consequently, while women academics with family commitments may be reliant on the good will of female colleagues, refusing demands was viewed in the second WAN study as an unnaturally hard skill for women to acquire, seen in the tactic: 'Learning to say "no" a bit more often and assertively (*saying "yes" to other demands often*

means saying "no" to what I want to do)'.

The social pressures to be compliant to demands, happily or otherwise, are also highlighted in the following narrative from the first study:

Holly: There's an assumption that if you're a single woman and you don't have a boyfriend or partner and you don't have any children, well then of course you're available... And of course you can stay late into the night, because you've got nothing else to do, because you're *just* a sad, single woman. So you end up getting 'guilted' into a lot of stuff as well, if you're a single female within the academy. So, it's interesting how it just hits you on both sides: you're screwed if you are and you're screwed if you're not.

Learning to protect one's time seemed a major task in both studies, but being able to do so without emotional repercussions was another big step forward, as conveyed in this individual's 'Slow Professor' list: 'Stop feeling guilty *(I would love to learn how to do it. I recognise this as a big issue for me)*'.

Guilt-ridden cooperation apart, Taşçı-Kaya (2016) reports women's difficulties in juggling academic careers with domestic life, and where Zhang (2010) also refers to resultant stress; and an aspect of both WAN studies noted how women colleagues are the primary and often sole supporter of other women. This is intriguing given an alternative assumption that parents, regardless of gender, are more likely to find mutually supportive common ground with parents than those who are not. Yet a perpetuation of anachronistic trading on the presumed availability of the traditional

'maiden aunt' continued in the contemporary form of the 'sad, single' female colleague taking on the role of unassuming woman on quiet standby in any domestic hiatus.

Collegial support can take other forms. Although the institution offers a good level of formal mentorship programmes through organizational development, informal mentoring, below the institutional radar, was appreciated. Informal mentoring often involved a veteran to novice dyad, as described by Ali and Coate (2013), or types of woman-centric sponsorship, such as advising mentees to take up available opportunities, as advocated by McGuire and Reger (2003). Yet because these were *ad hoc* or patronage relationship, usually between senior and junior women colleagues, (Blood et al. 2012), it left many others without help, but with an urgent emotional need to be heard as shown here:

'Ella': You know, I ended up finding another Programme Leader that I could talk to, but then I was taking away from her...taking 20, 30 minutes of her time just going, 'blah, blah, blah! And then I did this, and then I did that. Do you think I should've done this? I don't know!' And you're really just kind of... you're verbally vomiting really about what's just happened, and you need some... I don't know what it is, you just... it's almost like you need [someone] to go, 'yeah, you know what? You did that fine!' or 'yeah, that was great!' [But] there's no congratulatory thing there.

Thus choosing to embrace active listening as supportive of colleagues forms a challenge to the context of personal mortification in the corporate culture of

disregarding individuals. A point that can be discerned in this assertion from a 'Slow Professor' co-researcher: 'Making sure I always prioritize supporting colleagues above the demands and often artificial deadlines of the organisation (*people first!)*'

Due attention to hearing the needs of oneself and others, seemed nothing short of a feminist revolution in this 'slow professor' study, with these covenants added to the list: 'Listen more to myself and other people'; along with the evangelical mission of spreading the 'good news': 'Sharing these ideas with other people, including students'.

Co-researchers recognized that 'Red Queen' corporate time needed to be deconstructed into scholarly time: time to think, time to re-energize and re-group, time, simply, to be human, defined as: 'Permitting 'fallow' times (*time to rest my mind between bigger projects/tasks instead of trying to rush into the next big job immediately*)' and 'Instituting rest times within the working day'. A final gift was the quiet assertion of a new dignity of being: 'Accept and embrace my imperfections'.

CONCLUSION

Both WAN studies offer important insights into the perceptions by women academics of the pervasive culture and practices of the corporatized ethos of modern HEI. The studies contribute to a corpus of international research evidence emerging from a feminist scrutiny of women in masculinised working contexts, which despite the increasing numbers of women academics, reveals entrenched gendered inequities. The first study primarily illuminates how participants feel they are disadvantaged in the academy in terms of the working environment, its masculinized ethos and its

rewards. The complexities of the context implicate both sexes, but the disadvantages are unevenly weighted against women.

The second study, however, promises to move the issues onwards towards challenging the corporatized ethos and consequently shaping the everyday practice of academia starting at individual and group levels. This is clearly emancipatory in terms of the transitions and changes made by co-researchers. Yet the greater goal is a transformation of the academic environment that embraces both women and male colleagues along with students.

From identification of problem to action, both studies, taken together create a powerful vehicle from which to analyse, deconstruct, subvert but with the ultimate aim of reforming and liberating a community of scholars, entirely in keeping with feminist epistemologies.

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