Gender Equity in Higher Education: Celebrations and Challenges

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Momentum and Melancholia

- **Pessimistic repertoire of challenges for gender equity in the academy.**

- **Gender and melancholy are often deeply connected (Butler, 2002),**

- **Loss, hurt, anger and grief often underpin studies of gender and power in higher education.**

- **Writing/ discussing gender equality means referring to something that does not yet exist.**

- **Desire, as well as loss, needs to be considered.**

- **Tendency to critique, rather than to celebrate or engage in futurology.**

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Why Re-Imagine Higher Education?

Major site of:

- ✓ cultural practice

- ✓ identity formation

- ✓ knowledge formation and dissemination

- ✓ symbolic control.

Caught between:

- ✓ archaism

- ✓ hyper-modernisation

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Gender in Higher Education Policy Discourse

- **Gender = access, disadvantage and remediation.**

- **Women's increased access = feminisation (Leathwood and Read, 2008).**

- **HE products and processes = gender neutral.**

- **Power and privilege = under-theorisation.**

- **Redistributive measures = social engineering.**

- **Equity = threat to excellence.**

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Celebrations

- **Participation rates for women in higher education have increased between 1999 - 2005 in all regions of the world.**

- **Global Gender Parity Index of 1.05.**

- **There are now more undergraduate women than men in higher education** (UNESCO, 2007).

Participating Women

- **Women's participation rates are higher than those of men in North America and Europe.**

- **Participation rates for men are higher than women in East Asia and the Pacific, South and West Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.**

- **Women are globally under-represented in science and technology disciplines.**

Feminisation

- **When women access HE in significant numbers, moral panic over the feminisation.**

- **Women's newly-found professional and economic independence blamed for:**

- ✓ **societal destabilisation**
- ✓ **a crisis in masculinity**
- ✓ **devaluing of professions/ academic credentials**

(Evans, 2008; Leathwood and Read, 2008; Quinn, 2003).

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The Feminisation Debate as Partial and Exclusionary.

Excludes consideration of:

✓ **leadership in higher education**

✓ **whether quantitative change has allowed more discursive/less space for gender.**

✓ **intersecting gender with other structures of inequality including social class.**

Questions We Still Need to Ask?

- Is gender equality just about quantitative change?

- What are women accessing in higher education?

- How are gender differences relayed and constructed in higher education today?

- Is difference conceptualised as disparagement?

- Is transformation driven by neo-liberal policies rather than academic imaginary?

Gender as a Verb

- **Gender is not a given, but is in continual production.**

- **We 'do' gender in:**

  ✓ **processes of knowledge production and distribution;**

  ✓ **opportunity structures;**

  ✓ **social and pedagogical relations.**

Gender Challenges

- **Gender insensitive pedagogy** (Welch, 2006);

- **Sexual harassment** (Townsley and Geist, 2000);

- **Gendered micropolitics** (Morley, 1999);

- **Limited opportunities for promotion and professional development** (Knights and Richards, 2003);

- **Gendered curricula and subject choices** (Morley *et al*, 2006).

# Gender Characterised as Under-Representation of Women in...

- **Senior academic and administrative positions** (Blackmore and Sachs, 2001);

- **High-status disciplines** (Bebbington, 2002);

- **Prestigious institutions** (Dyhouse, 2003).

- **Need to remove gendered codes from disciplines, professions etc** (Morley and Lugg, 2009).

- **Need a sociology of absences** (Santos,1999).

Generative Potential of the Global?

- **Higher education is becoming a single, world-wide arrangement** (Marginson, 2006).

- **Some gender inequalities are also globalised** (Morley *et al.*, 2005).

- **Low representation of women in positions of seniority in a range of countries in divergent cultural and geopolitical contexts** (Brooks, 1997; Morley *et al.*, 2006; Singh, 2002, 2008).

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Proportion Of Female Academic Staff by Grade in The European Union, 2004 (EU, 2006).

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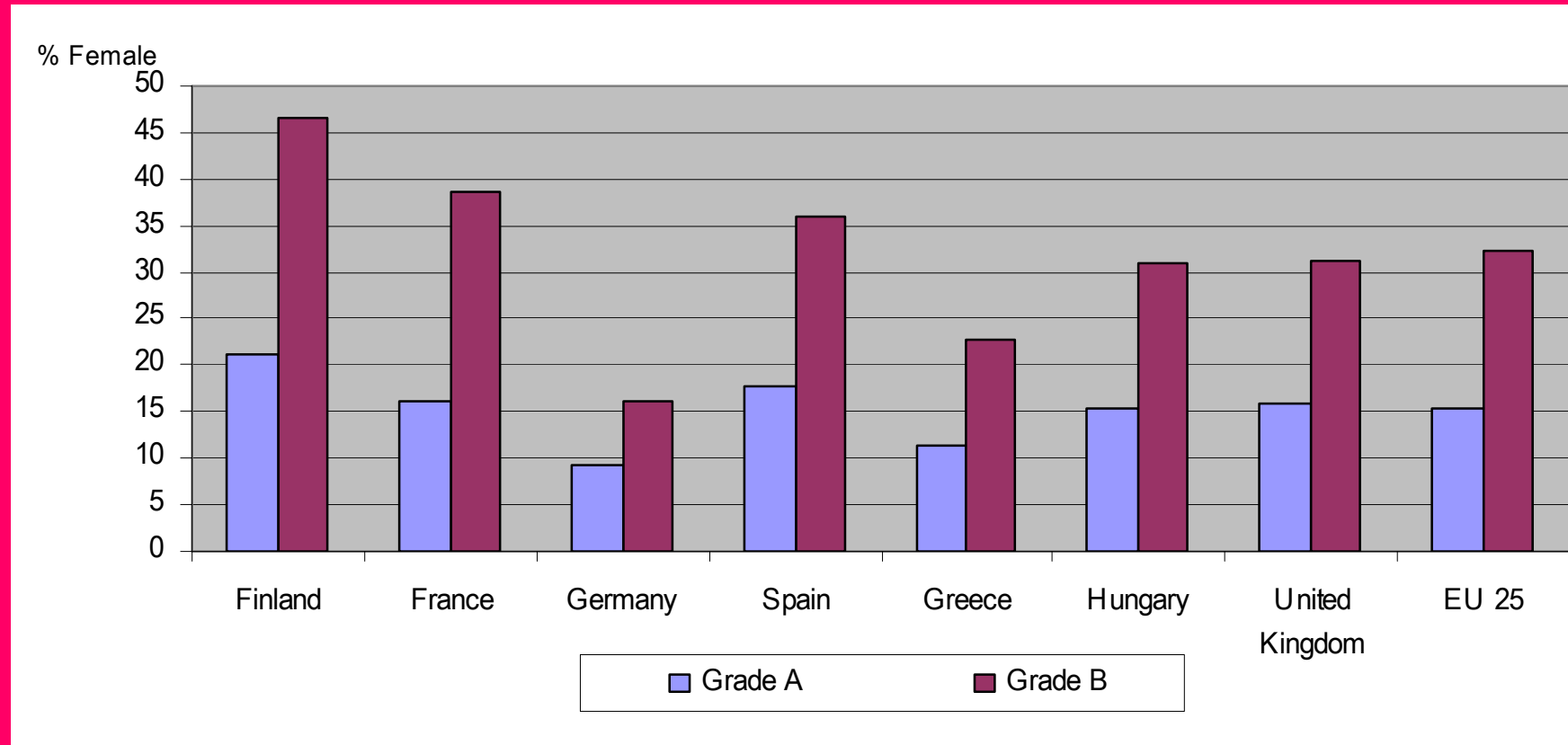
Women's Participation In Management and Academic Leadership in Selected Commonwealth Countries, 2006 (Singh, 2008)
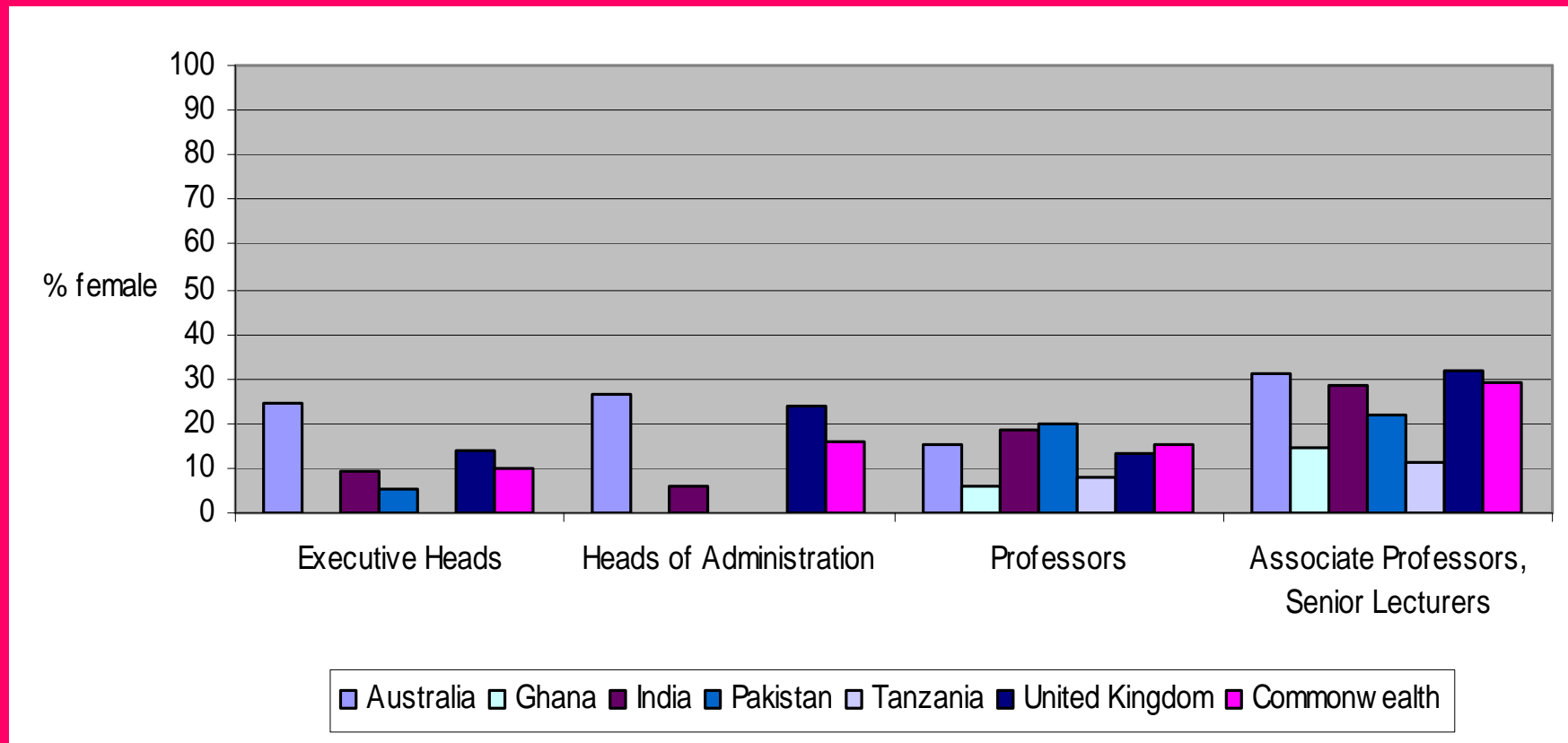
Disappearing Women

- **Women's participation as undergraduate students globally has increased rapidly.**

- **Women's participation in senior academic and executive positions globally is increasing very slowly.**

- **Sen's construct of 'missing women'** (2003).

- **Women disappear when power, resources and influence increase.**

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Chilly Climate

- **Sandler *et al's* study in the USA (1996:1) found:**

  'some thirty ways in which faculty members often treated women students differently in the classroom'.

- **This 'chilly climate' impeded women's full participation in the learning process.**

- **Is the temperature rising, with the ecology, culture and climate changing for women?**

International Empirical Findings

Gender Equity in Commonwealth Higher Education

- **The study explored gender equity in higher education in:**

  ✓ **Nigeria**
  ✓ **South Africa**
  ✓ **Sri Lanka**
  ✓ **Tanzania**
  ✓ **Uganda**

  An aim was to identify, via interviews with students and staff and observations, key sites of gender differentiated experiences of the academy (Morley *et al*, 2006).

Femaleness Irreconcilable with Intellectual Authority

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And I mean the guys… think we are absolutely useless. I mean we might score high marks you know in courses, but it is just the fact that they think we are stupid. And even our lecturers, I mean, I have a particular lecturer, who just thinks I am an idiot, and I have no reason, I have given him no reason to think that (South African student).

Not Taking Women Seriously

There are some who try to put the women down by asking a question and then laughing at us when we can't answer it, or ask something just to put us down (Sri Lankan student).

Horns and Halo Effect

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There was a situation when two students (a female and male) handed in the same piece of work, the lecturer awarded marks to the male student and cancelled the work of the female student on assumption that the female student had cheated. This in my view was not fair (Ugandan student).

Fears of Sexual Harassment

Basically, we don't really relate to our lecturers one-on-one. Me personally, because of stories which I have heard concerning lecturers trying to take advantage of female students and because of the fact that I am in a Faculty where there are few girls, it will be very easy for any lecturer who has it in mind to take advantage of female students. Because of that, most of the time, we try to keep our distance from lecturers (Nigerian student).

The Abstract Nature of Sexism

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…generally people believe that there is equity. But I don't think so. What now operates is done in a subtle way, so that if one complains, one looks stupid because it is so subtle. It is there, but you can't pin-point it (Nigerian Academic).

Micropolitics of Gender

- **Gendered power is relayed via everyday transactions that are difficult to capture and challenge (micropolitics / the hidden curriculum);**

- **Gender is reproduced in positionings, judgements and relations that occur on a daily and personal basis.**

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Widening Participation in Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania

- **Study focusing on how gender, socio-economic status and age intersect and constrain or facilitate participation in higher education, utilising:**

- ✓ **statistical data/ Equity Scorecards**
- ✓ **life history interviews with 200 students**
- ✓ **semi structured interviews with 200 staff**

in 2 public and 2 private universities.

www.sussex.ac.uk/education/wideningparticipation

Equity Scorecard 1: Participation on 4 Programmes at a Public University in Ghana by Gender, and SES (2006-7)

Programme	% female	% deprived school	% female who attended a deprived school
B Sc Physical Science	15.3	2.2	0.6
B Commerce	28.9	3.3	1.0
B Education (Primary)	41.4	4.6	1.2
B Management Studies	42.0	2.8	1.4
Data source: Project dataset: Enrolment on 4 programmes at Univ U, 2006-7 Date of Scorecard: January 2008			

Equity Scorecard 2: Overview of Access to 4 Programmes at a Private University in Tanzania by Gender, SES and Age (2007-8)

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Programme	% female	% deprived school	% 30+	% female & 30+	% female & deprived school	% female, deprived school, & 30+
B Ed Maths	13.02	12.56	68.84	4.65	2.4	0.0
Medicine	25.00	6.03	12.26	1.89	0.0	0.0
B Business Admin	42.06	10.28	18.87	7.48	3.74	0.0
Law	42.81	13.42	9.90	3.51	2.56	0.32

Data source: Project dataset: Enrolment on year 1, 2007-8, University T

Date of Scorecard: 14 May 2008

Intersectionality

- **Gender gains, in the form of affirmative action and access programmes, when scrutinised can often mask socio-economic privilege.**

- **When gender is intersected with socio-economic status, participation rates of poorer women are extremely low in both African countries in this study.**

Summing Up

- **Global policy discourses focus on quantitative change, wealth creation (rather than distribution), innovation, human capital.**

- **Feminist scholars critique, theorise and audit power and privilege in higher education.**

Imagining the University of the Future

I wish to invite an international feminist political imaginary to ask what would the gender equitable university of the future look and feel like?