



JPAAP, Editorial

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Welcome to the Special Issue of JPAAP on 'Breaking the Gender Bias in Academia and Academic Practice'. The inspiration for this Special Issue was International Women's Day 2022. For those unfamiliar with International Women's Day, this was started in 1911 and sees March 8th as the date that celebrates the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women, and which is marked by events and calls for action for accelerating women's equality (<https://www.internationalwomensday.com/about>).

Each year a new campaign theme is used as a lens to explore gender equality and to encourage people across the world to show their support and solidarity for International Women's Day (IWD). For International Women's Day 2022 the theme was 'Break the Bias' and this, and the associated #BreakTheBias social media hashtag and campaign, was used to encourage supporters, activists, and campaigners to consider how we can break the bias in communities, the workplace, in schools, colleges and universities.

At the University of the Highlands and Islands, a federated university in Scotland, the university's Learning and Teaching Academy (LTA) has coordinated an annual university-wide conference for IWD since 2018. Each year this event has explored the international theme for IWD in relation to gender equality and parity in education, and educational and academic practice, at UHI and beyond. Previous IWD events at UHI have welcomed guest speakers from the National Union of Students, Stonewall, from the #FemEdTech movement, and from colleagues leading gender equality and inclusion initiatives within their own universities.

From the outset, the IWD events and associated activities at UHI have placed an emphasis on producing tangible actions and outputs. For 2021 this included the publication of the open eBook 'Gender Equality and Representation within and beyond the University of the Highlands and Islands: A book in Celebration of International Women's Day 2021'. This book featured chapters on topics including women's networks in further and higher education, student activism in progressing gender and other equality agendas, women and female students in Science, Technology Engineering, feminist art practice in relation to learning and teaching, male allyship, and gender representation in library provision.

The focus of the IWD 2022 event at UHI was '#BreakTheBias...in education and research!'. Due to being held during the lockdown period of the COVID pandemic the event was the second to be held entirely online and, in keeping with an embracing of more open and inclusive approaches to engaging in professional development as explored further in this Special Issue, the invitation to participate in or contribute to the 2022 event was extended to the wider sector.

Presenters for the 2022 conference were invited to submit contributions to this Special Issue of JPAAP to expand on the topics of their presentation and offer further perspectives on 'Breaking the Gender Bias in Academia and Academic Practice' that could be shared through open publication in JPAAP. Contributions in the form of invited pieces were also sought.

Within this Special Issue, we are therefore pleased to feature original research papers, case studies and reviews, opinion pieces, and short articles that, between them, explore and address several important issues, dimensions and practical initiatives relating to breaking gender bias and ensuring greater gender parity and representation within academic institutions, academic and academic-related work, and academic and related professional practices including in the sphere of professional development and progression. The institutional contexts drawn upon are also varied, including Higher and Further Education establishments.

Chronologically the Special Issue begins with an original research paper by Melissa Highton from the University of Edinburgh. This presents and considers the implications of findings and themes arising from a qualitative investigation involving with digital leaders working in universities across Scotland, and which concerned their experiences and perceptions of workplace equality, diversity and inclusion with respect to gender and other EDI dimensions. Key amongst the findings of the research – which offers recommendations at the levels of senior management, academic staff and human resources – is that class and gender are significant factors in shaping digital leader's motivations to champion equality and diversity in the workplace, mediated by consideration of their personal and organisational values and the demographics of senior management colleagues.

The influence of the values held by the self and others, and the influence of the language of others in privileged positions, are also to the fore in the critically reflective, extended Opinion Piece by Kara Smith and titled 'Battles for Occupied Academic Space'. Opening with the observation that, for women, sharing space and being acknowledged in that space is a battle of trust and spirit, Kara then explores three common intersectional narratives of 'spirit murder', 'protectors and restorers' and of womyn's spaces in the academy. While recounting the challenges in academic space experienced by women, the rich narrative offered also underlines how the ownership of the language and spaces of an academic institution affects many marginalised groups, including women. The above point underlines a general observation that is threaded through many of the contributions to the Special Issue, which is that

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in exploring and considering how to challenge and address gender bias and representation we are also discussing many issues, approaches and interventions that support the broader equality and inclusion agenda to be progressed within 'The Academy'.

From Kara Smith's paper, we then move into two further Opinion Pieces. In the first, Heather Fotheringham continues exploring the theme of academic space with a focus on the importance of women-only spaces in the form of women's reading groups. Heather considers the origins of women's book groups and reading circles, including the 'consciousness raising' groups of the 1960s which provided a space for women to reflect on how sexism affected them personally. Attention then turns to the Women's Reading Group at UHI and how this bridges the historical functions of similar groups while also providing a women's space that has supported engagement in scholarship and the forging of relationships of trust which now extend outside of the group itself.

In the second of our two Opinion Pieces, Keith Smyth explores 'male homophily' and associated forms of bias in academic research, publishing and practice. After first acknowledging historical points to which the privileging of the male voice in thought, scholarship and print can be traced, attention then turns to the male homophilic practices that prevail today in forms including male dominated editorial boards and citation bias. Recommendations are then offered to counter gender bias in academia and academic practice, including for editorial boards, research leaders, academic leaders, and in relation to learning and teaching.

Published bodies of academic scholarship and literature remain in scope within the case study paper by Karen McAulay. Karen explores how we might seek to break gender bias in a very specific and critical area of work within our educational institutions, which is in the collections and curatorship of academic libraries. Set within the context of the Whittaker Library at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, which is a specialist performing arts higher education institution, Karen observes how conservatoire libraries support undergraduate and postgraduate students in their specific areas of study, but due to their scale have a narrower coverage of subjects than typical university libraries. From here, Karen outlines her work to increase the Whittaker Library's stock of music by women composers, and scholarly literature about and also by women composers. The measures taken to achieve this, including cataloguing and social media interventions, are outlined. Recommendations are then offered pertaining to how similar approaches can ensure library collections are more representative in other dimensions of equality and representation, including in the parallel stream of work ongoing at the Whittaker Library with respect to curating the work of composers of colour.

From here, two 'On the Horizon' papers explore 'in development' or 'emergent' areas of practice and research. In the first of these, Patricia Perlman-Dee provides insights relating to establishing a Corporate Mentor Partner Program focusing on corporate social responsibility at the Alliance Manchester Business School at the University of Manchester. While the mentoring programme was devised mainly to provide support for Asian females studying on specific MSc programs, wider engagement and benefits were experienced, as well as pragmatic lessons learned which are offered at the conclusion of Patricia's paper. In the second of our 'On the Horizon' pieces, Susannah Wilson from UHI Argyll articulates how we may seek to support greater gender equality in learning through applying a 'sociomaterial' lens to view the learning process. Susannah's paper explores the changing norms and expectations relating to technology-enhanced learning in the context of the COVID pandemic was a catalyst, and considers the impact of these on gender equality within education and the need for future avenues if research on gender equality in education.

Mentoring comes back into scope within our following two contributions, which are in the form of Reflective Analysis papers. In the first, Fiona Kolontari, Megan Lawton and Sarah Rhodes from the University of Wolverhampton explore their use of developmental mentoring and coaching approaches in academic and professional development to address feelings of 'imposter syndrome'. Fiona, Megan and Sarah question the notion of 'imposter syndrome', asking why this might be disproportionately applied to women. Drawing on theoretical, personal, and professional contexts they appraise two different mentoring models, and reflect on how developmental mentoring and coaching can be used in relation to inclusive learning and teaching.

In our second Reflective Analysis, and our penultimate paper, Alexandra Walker offers a critical exploration of approaches to professional and leadership development that can be harnessed to break the gender bias in academic practice and progression. Alexandra considers the extent to which professional development and mentoring schemes can challenge the gender bias in academic practice for women in FE and HE, beginning by outlining the barriers and challenges to career progression for women academics. Alexandra questions how fully the aforementioned kinds of interventions can be perceived to positively influence career progression and/or professional practice. From here, the benefits and limitations of moving to a more digital approach to mentoring and professional development are explored, drawing on examples of with initiatives from UHI.

The focus on digital approaches introduced above segues into our final contribution to the Special Issue, within which Louise Drumm, a past keynote for the Women's Network at UHI, provides a review of 'Feminist Critical Digital Pedagogy: An Open Book' edited by Susan Koseoglu and George Veletsianos. Louise observes how the book, which is an ongoing and evolving open online volume, is an accessible book that would appeal to readers whether new to feminist pedagogy or not, and offers a variety of windows into what feminist critical digital pedagogy can look like in practice. This was certainly the impression given when Susan Koseoglu, one of the co-editors of the book, delivered a keynote titled 'Feminist critical digital pedagogy: Why our personal stories matter' for UHI's IWD event in 2022 from which this Special Issue has resulted.

We hope you will agree that the research, practice, perspectives and personal stories presented within this Special Issue matter, and that what they represent with respect to breaking the bias in academic and academic practice is both critical and essential.

With warm thanks and appreciation to all of those who have contributed.

Alexandra Walker and Keith Smyth

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