

Higher Education, Leadership and Women Vice Chancellors

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Palgrave Studies in Gender and Education

Series Standing Order ISBN 978-1-137-45634-2 Hardback

978-1-137-45635-9 Paperback

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Higher Education, Leadership and Women Vice Chancellors

Fitting into Communities of Practice of
Masculinities

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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2015 978-1-137-44403-5

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First published 2015 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Palgrave Macmillan in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

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ISBN 978-1-349-49548-1 ISBN 978-1-137-44404-2 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9781137444042

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Burkinshaw, Paula.

Higher education, leadership and women vice chancellors : fitting in to communities of practice of masculinities / Paula Burkinshaw.
pages cm

Summary: "Why are there so few women vice chancellors in UK higher education? In this book, Paula Burkinshaw explores the contemporary conversation around the 'missing women at the top' across UK society through in-depth interviews with the (hitherto) silent voices of women vice chancellors. These women have successfully negotiated with and navigated the gendered leadership cultures of higher education throughout their careers and speak of the masculine communities of their workplaces. Advocating the need to achieve a critical mass of women at the top, this book suggests there is still much to be done in the higher education sphere" — Provided by publisher.

1. Education, Higher—Administration. 2. Educational leadership.
3. Women college administrators. 4. Women in higher education.
5. Sex discrimination in higher education. 6. Masculinity—
Social aspects. 7. Organizational change. I. Title.

LB2341.B748 2015

378.0082—dc23

2015002336

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Preface

It's still seen as odd. Bit like that dancing cats. It's not how they do it; it's that they do it at all. (16)¹

This book represents a milestone along the way of a research journey during which I have been exploring the underrepresentation of women at vice chancellor level in UK higher education through the lens of gendered leadership cultures. Whilst I was working as a leadership development professional in universities, for ten years prior to embarking upon my PhD, I became passionate about the underrepresentation of women in leadership generally, and began asking myself 'where are the women?' and 'why are there so few women vice chancellors?'

As higher education is not alone in suffering from a lack of diversity in leadership, I have set the context of my research within the growing conversation about 'the missing women at the top' across all sectors, within and beyond education.

My study has been underpinned by a theoretical framework around 'leadership communities of practice of masculinities', by my epistemological feminism and by my agenda for change. Consequently, my review of the literature has searched for previous published work around gendered leadership cultures, feminist methodology and the critical mass conversation, and critical reflexivity around this literature has fundamentally informed my work.

As a result of their underrepresentation at the top of higher education, the voices of women vice chancellors have invariably been silent and strange (unusual), so my study seeks *their* views about the 'missing women' in higher education leadership. This book provides an insight into my interviews with 18 women who lead higher education institutions and discusses this data in relation to the literature and theoretical framework.

Three common themes emerged during my research study, namely: the negotiation and navigation of gendered leadership cultures; higher

¹ Whenever I use a quotation from my interview data, I identify that interview by a number from 1 to 18 and I explain more about my decision to do this in Chapter 3.

education leadership communities of practice of masculinities; and achieving a critical mass of women at the top. Throughout the book, these themes provide cohesion, make sense of what I have been learning and clarify my contribution to knowledge about this important issue.

Acknowledgements

It has been a great privilege for me that my research exploring the missing women in higher education leadership has brought me into close contact with so many wonderful women, as both a researcher and a practitioner. The richness of this study is without doubt due to the generosity of these women, particularly the 18 women research participants who freely gave me their time and trusted me with their experiences. I am especially grateful to all the women involved in this study and really hope that I have done justice to their contributions.

I cannot thank my family enough for their overwhelming support and encouragement throughout the years that I was studying for my PhD. Tackling such a major research project at my time of life was particularly challenging and I would not have succeeded without the care and consideration of my very special family.

This book is dedicated to my parents who both died prematurely so they missed out not only on many years of pleasure from grandchildren they hardly knew but also on my emerging career. They would have been immensely proud of my achievements and it is with great sorrow that I now thank them both for their unconditional love and lifelong inspiration.

Abbreviations

BERA	British Educational Research Association
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CIM	Chartered Institute of Management
CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
CUC	Committee of University Chairs
ECU	Equality Challenge Unit
EU	European Union
EHRC	Equality and Human Rights Commission
FTSE	Financial Times Stock Exchange
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HE	Higher Education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HR	Human Resources
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LFHE	Leadership Foundation for Higher Education
MP	Member of Parliament
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PA	Professional Assistant
SRHE	Society for Research in Higher Education
STEMM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine
THE	Times Higher Education
TUC	Trades Union Council
UCEA	University and College Employers Association
UCU	University and College Union
UK	United Kingdom
UUK	Universities UK