

# *Mind the gap: gender disparities still to be addressed in UK Higher Education geography*

Article

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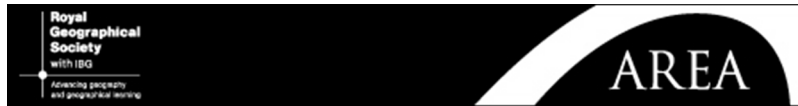
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## Mind the gap: gender disparities still to be addressed in UK Higher Education Geography

Journal:	Area
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Keywords:	gender, survey, United Kingdom, Higher Education, geography
Abstract:	<p>This paper evidences persistent gender inequalities in UK Higher Education Geography departments. The two key sources of data used are firstly, Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data for staff and students, which affords a longitudinal response to the McDowell (1979) and McDowell and Peake (1990) surveys of women in UK Geography higher educational departments; and secondly, a qualitative survey of the UK Higher Education Geography community undertaken in 2010, that sought more roundly to capture respondent reflections on their career, their choices, status and experiences. Findings show that although the gender gap is closing within HE geography in the UK there are significant ongoing gender disparities. . Therefore, the paper argues that the long and demanding process of reducing gender inequalities (alongside other, equally vital intersectional inequalities) requires continued commitment. Furthermore, respondents evidence the cost of these inequalities: enablers and barriers to job security and career progression can have long term impacts on the quality of life, financial security and affect personal life decisions. In recent years the UK based Athena Swan and Gender Equality Charter Mark agendas have prompted universities to address gendered disparities and the authors note a changing zeitgeist. However, the survey findings point to the need for sustained leadership within geography departments to address the day-to-day gender – and other - inequalities experienced in the workplace.</p>

**Abstract**

This paper evidences persistent gender inequalities in UK Higher Education Geography departments. The two key sources of data used are firstly, Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data for staff and students, which affords a longitudinal response to the McDowell (1979) and McDowell and Peake (1990) surveys of women in UK Geography higher educational departments; and secondly, a qualitative survey of the UK Higher Education Geography community undertaken in 2010, that sought more roundly to capture respondent reflections on their career, their choices, status and experiences. Findings show that although the gender gap is closing within HE geography in the UK there are significant ongoing gender disparities. . Therefore, the paper argues that the long and demanding process of reducing gender inequalities (alongside other, equally vital intersectional inequalities) requires continued commitment. Furthermore, respondents evidence the cost of these inequalities: enablers and barriers to job security and career progression can have long term impacts on the quality of life, financial security and affect personal life decisions. In recent years the UK based Athena Swan and Gender Equality Charter Mark agendas have prompted universities to address gendered disparities and the authors note a changing zeitgeist. However, the survey findings point to the need for sustained leadership within geography departments to address the day to day gender – and other - inequalities experienced in the workplace.

**Key words**

gender, United Kingdom, higher education, geography Athena Swan

## 1. Introduction

The Athena Swan agenda, established by Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in 1999 to combat underrepresentation and promote the career progression of women in science in UK universities, has changed the way gender equality is being addressed in some geography departments and units. The Athena Swan award, and the more recent (now merged) Gender Equality Charter Mark for non-science subjects, is awarded by HEFCE's Equality Challenge Unit to universities and departments demonstrating strategies to combat gender inequalities and create positive working environments (Equality Challenge Unit, 2014). This unprecedented interest in gender equality is to be welcomed given the need to address systemic inequalities evidenced since the first numerical survey of women in higher education geography undertaken by Linda McDowell (1979) and more recently by the International Benchmarking Review of Human Geography, which described UK geography's intellectual work as world-leading, but identified gender and minority underrepresentation as key shortcomings within the discipline (ESRC 2013, 24). Despite burgeoning growth in feminist scholarship within geography, sparse attention has been given directly to women's position in UK HE geography in the more than twenty years since McDowell and Peake's (1990) follow-up survey. McDowell brought feminist methodologies, gender-based power relations, and the "difference gender makes" in academic geography to the fore (see McDowell 1990, 400; McDowell, 1992). These were complemented by UK-focused studies on gendered degree results (Chapman 1995, with response by Bondi 1996), gendered postgraduate student participation (McKendrick 1996), gendered participation in fieldwork and physical geography (Maguire 1998; Dumayne-Peaty & Wallens 1998; Bee et al 1998; Madge &

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2  
3 Bee 1999; Bracken & Mawdsley 2004) and the gender gap in the British geographical  
4  
5 canon (Maddrell 2009; 2012). In recent years the contemporary gender (im-)balance in  
6  
7 UK HE geography has been most directly addressed by Crang's account of 'Malestream  
8  
9 Geography' (2003). Internationally, the issue has been addressed in the US  
10  
11 (*Professional Geographer* (2000) and Brinegar (2001)); Australia (Klocker and  
12  
13 Drozdowski (2012) and Johnson (2012)); Spain and Catalonia (Garcia-Ramon and  
14  
15 Pujol (2004) and Pujol et al (2012)); and in a comparison of Europe, the East and North  
16  
17 America (Monk et al 2004).

18  
19  
20 Importantly, historic inequities have been set in the context of increasing  
21  
22 *neoliberalisation* of today's HE sector. Although small, compared to the broader  
23  
24 literature on work-life balance (WLB) in geography, a body of work is emerging which  
25  
26 addresses problems of intensification, the rise of 'audit' cultures, and corporatism  
27  
28 within HE, alongside analysis of variegated WLB issues affecting 'core' faculty versus  
29  
30 temporary, part-time and contract staff (Ni Laoire & Shelton 2003; Dowling 2008);  
31  
32 processes which are inflected by gender in complex ways. Feminist geographers have  
33  
34 documented how attempts to balance these demands are associated with 'fractional'  
35  
36 working among tenured and permanent faculty – mostly women. Birnie et al's (2005,  
37  
38 255) important discussion of fractional working, highlighted how such arrangements  
39  
40 can challenge "the traditional white masculinism of the discipline", but can also produce  
41  
42 an "altered balance of power" in which fractional faculty are both marginalised and  
43  
44 unduly obligated. Yet faculty with permanent fractional contracts are nonetheless  
45  
46 privileged when compared with many adjunct, sessional and contract workers. In the  
47  
48 face of a relative paucity of UK data with which to explore how gender, social location  
49  
50 and identity (Madge and Bee 1999) shape the subject positions of geographers across  
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3 these shifting landscapes of academia, this paper provides a statistical overview and  
4  
5 introduces key narratives from qualitative survey responses.  
6

7 For UK geographers, the McDowell (1979) and McDowell and Peake (1990) studies  
8  
9 provided a baseline against which to judge steps towards gender equality in geography.  
10

11 In 2010 this follow-up study was undertaken by the authors under the auspices of the  
12  
13 Women and Geography Study Group of the Royal Geographical Society (with the  
14  
15 Institute of British Geographers), renamed the Gender and Feminist Geographies  
16  
17 Research Group in 2013. It sought to update statistical data on gender representation  
18  
19 within geography by analysing Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data for  
20  
21 staff and students alongside responses collected in a 2010 qualitative survey of those  
22  
23 studying and working in UK HE geography.  
24  
25

26  
27 Survey respondents included women, men and transgender contributors. The decision to  
28  
29 widen the survey beyond women was in no way a marginalisation or depoliticisation of  
30  
31 their experiences of inequality in the workplace. Rather, it was hoped that by giving all  
32  
33 individuals the opportunity to reflect on the gendered politics of the workplace, the  
34  
35 survey would help produce contextualised and fine grained understandings of women's  
36  
37 position in HE geography departments, the relational nature of gender, and other  
38  
39 gendered experiences and positionalities that have not previously been identified in  
40  
41 subject-based commentaries. This survey presented an opportunity to open up a  
42  
43 productive space for the discussion of gendered identities and experience within the HE  
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45 workplace.  
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## 51 **2. The representation of women in geography: the same old story?**

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3 When McDowell (1979) and McDowell and Peake (1990) mapped the presence of  
4 women students and staff in geography departments across the UK, they expressed  
5 concern for the attrition of women over the career course from undergraduate to PhD  
6 study and in the transition from postgraduate study to academic employment. The data  
7 in Table 1 show that the gender balance has improved significantly over time for both  
8 undergraduate and postgraduate students, with female students now making up half or  
9 more of the HE geography population; a trend that should continue given geography's  
10 close to equal numbers of males and females studying geography at A-Level (Joint  
11 Council for Qualifications, 2014).  
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23 **[Note: Insert Table 1 here or nearby]**  
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26

27 The proportion of women PhD students in geography has grown from 31 per cent (full-  
28 time students) in 1978 to 50 per cent in 2012/13 (see Table 1). This trend appears to  
29 have contributed to more women making the transition from PhD to academic  
30 employment, although the gains have been modest in recent years. While women did  
31 not constitute half of researchers and lecturers in 2007/8 (44 per cent for the two  
32 categories combined), they are better represented among research and teaching  
33 assistants in 2012/13 (55 per cent).  
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43 The data for mid and late career grades (senior lecturers and researchers, readers,  
44 professors) shows that early-career imbalances in the 1970s and 1980s have carried  
45 through a legacy of ongoing underrepresentation of women in senior posts, which  
46 echoes the whole UK HE sector (see Universities UK 2013; Grove 2013a and 2013b).  
47  
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51 The most significant gain has been the proportion of women geography professors,  
52 rising from 4 per cent in 1978 to 21 per cent in 2012/13. While this shift is a testament  
53 to women's intellectual and managerial leadership contributions to geography, in many  
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3 cases in the face of gender and other equalities within departments or institutions, as  
4  
5 well as the growth of the UK professoriate in recent years, the fact remains that almost  
6  
7 four out of five geography professors are men.  
8

9  
10 A view of the gender disparity experienced by women pursuing a career in UK  
11  
12 geography between 1979 and 2012/13 is presented in Figure 1, which approximates two  
13  
14 possible career timelines from the longitudinal data of the various studies. Series 1  
15  
16 approximates people studying as undergraduates in 1978 progressing to professor in  
17  
18 2012/13, while Series 2 approximates people studying in 1988 progressing to senior  
19  
20 lecturer/researcher in 2012/13. For women advancing their careers on these timelines  
21  
22 the most visible change in geography departments appears to have been after 1988,  
23  
24 when the proportion of women professors was greater than the proportion of women  
25  
26 senior lecturers/researchers (i.e. those feeding into the professoriate) in 1988.  
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29  
30 **[Note: Insert Figure 1 here or nearby]**  
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34 The improving equality between men and women appointed in early-career and middle  
35  
36 career stages encourages the view that the gender gap is closing, but wider structural  
37  
38 changes in HE geography affect how this data is assembled longitudinally and our  
39  
40 confidence in how quickly this is happening.  
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44 When comparing the two previous studies and more recent HESA data in Table 1, the  
45  
46 number of reported geography departments doubled from 34 responding departments in  
47  
48 1978 (a response rate of 83 per cent; 41 departments in existence (McDowell 1979)) to  
49  
50 69 in 2008. The number of academic staff across all grades almost tripled. This  
51  
52 expansion contributed significantly to the changing face of HE geography in the UK, as  
53  
54 did the relative growth of the proportion of academics in senior grades, especially the  
55  
56 professoriate. Consequently, widespread changes in the academic grade structure and  
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3 the HESA staff reporting structures make it difficult to compare precisely over time,  
4  
5 e.g. not all institutions report staff within nationally recognised structures or with  
6  
7 adequate grade differentiation, so some senior grades may be under-reported, such as  
8  
9 the introduction of Associate Professors and relative decline of Readers.

10  
11 The definition of geography itself is changing too. Domosh (2014) highlights the many  
12  
13 nomenclatures and rationales in the rebranding and restructuring of geography  
14  
15 departments in the United States, and a similar pattern can be observed in the United  
16  
17 Kingdom. Geography departments variously find themselves in science, technology,  
18  
19 social science and arts faculties, colleges and schools as universities attempt to codify  
20  
21 their cross-disciplinary interests (Hall et al, 2015), and geographers themselves are  
22  
23 similarly 'out of place' (Wainwright et al, 2014). The HESA student subject codes and  
24  
25 staff cost centres data are transient too, with changes to staff cost centres between  
26  
27 2007/08 and 2012/13, no clear relationship between student subject codes and staff cost  
28  
29 centres, and the inclusion of staff and students outside geography departments in both  
30  
31 data.  
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36 Even allowing for these caveats, the trend towards greater gender equality in senior  
37  
38 grades since the 1990's is demonstrative of a step change in career progression  
39  
40 opportunities for women in geography. But whether these changes are due to the rapid  
41  
42 expansion and change of the higher education sector itself, or changes within individual  
43  
44 departments or institutions is an open question. A national view of the gendered balance  
45  
46 of staff in geography can mask the progress towards equality, or on-going inequalities  
47  
48 within individual departments. It also, necessarily, masks or elides more complex  
49  
50 histories and stories of institutional change and personal trajectories – as Domosh and  
51  
52 Bondi (2014) remind us, academic 'success' often hides contingent outcomes, and is  
53  
54 narrated in ways that are themselves gendered.  
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3 This paper now turns to the qualitative survey and its findings in more detail, in order to  
4  
5 shed light on these questions.  
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### 8 9 10 **3. Attending to the ‘gap’: binding cultures of equality into the ethos and ambience** 11 12 **of UK Geography** 13

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15  
16 “at present there are no formal reports on issues such as women geographers’  
17  
18 experiences of discrimination, membership of professional organisations, role  
19  
20 models, career progression or salary levels .... It is difficult to be certain exactly  
21  
22 what does stop women geographers reading for postgraduate degrees as they  
23  
24 have never been asked...” (McDowell and Peake 1990, 20, 25).  
25  
26

27 The need for a qualitative approach to understanding the uneven representation of  
28  
29 women at different levels, in different sub-disciplines, and across pay grades within UK  
30  
31 geography was addressed by the 2010 survey, which asked a series of questions about  
32  
33 experience of career choice and progression. The survey was widely advertised on UK  
34  
35 HE geography mailing lists and networks and 360 respondents completed the survey.  
36  
37 Of those, 253 were working or studying at a UK HE institution at the time of the  
38  
39 survey, with others seeking work, working outside academia, taking a career break or  
40  
41 working outside the UK. Respondents were 65 per cent female, 33 per cent male and 1  
42  
43 per cent other gender; more than 70 per cent of respondents were post-PhD, with all  
44  
45 career stages represented, including 11 professors. The survey explicitly asked  
46  
47 respondents to explore the dynamics of gender in relation to their career progression;  
48  
49 responses also highlight other inequalities linked to social relations within the  
50  
51 workplace, offering insight into the ongoing dominance of white, heteronormative and  
52  
53 ableist cultures within UK HE geography (Horton and Tucker, 2014), and challenges  
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3 faced by working outside or on the fringes of the academy. These rich data will be  
4  
5 further discussed in a subsequent paper, but it is important to signal a number of key  
6  
7 issues as context to the statistical findings above and their interpretation, namely:  
8  
9 discrimination and bullying, marginalisation, employment precarity, caring  
10  
11 responsibilities and departmental cultures.  
12  
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15

16 The survey allowed people who had experienced significant discrimination and bullying  
17  
18 to highlight their troubling situations. Under the UK Equality Act 2010, it is unlawful to  
19  
20 discriminate against anyone because of his or her protected characteristics, for example  
21  
22 age, sexuality, religion or belief (Gov.uk, 2014a). This Act also identifies the forms in  
23  
24 which discrimination can come (indirect, direct, harassment and victimisation). The UK  
25  
26 Government recognise bullying and harassment as ‘behaviour that makes someone feel  
27  
28 intimidated or offended’, however bullying behaviours are not against the law, unless the  
29  
30 ‘unwanted behaviour’ is related to a protected characteristic (Gov.uk, 2014b). Bullying  
31  
32 can be construed as *practices* that may be related to discrimination, but may more  
33  
34 broadly reflect the default mode of an individual’s interaction with colleagues, or  
35  
36 ambient culture in certain workplaces, which is not directly targeted at people with  
37  
38 protected characteristics. Departments need to be aware of both dimensions of this  
39  
40 problem. Some of the respondents had experienced positive resolution of these issues  
41  
42 within the workplace; others were driven to breakdown or moved jobs to escape it, as  
43  
44 exemplified by the following quote:  
45  
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49 In my last job the default mode of management was bullying. The bullying made  
50  
51 me really miserable just ate away at me. I watched [multiple] colleagues have  
52  
53 breakdowns and just wondered when the same would happen to me. It made me  
54  
55 desperate to leave my job and I would have left academia to get away from it - if  
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3 that had happened it would have killed my career. At home it just meant I was  
4  
5 always miserable and hard to be around but my partner put up with it. (Female 5,  
6  
7 35-44 years)  
8

9  
10 Those living with situations identified as indirect bullying reflected on the use of daily  
11  
12 practices of avoidance as a coping strategy:

13  
14 [I experienced] bullying by an administrative person in the department who talks  
15  
16 negatively about me... It has affected the way I work. I have avoided to be in the  
17  
18 department in certain periods of time and have worked from home or the library.  
19  
20 (Female 351, 26-34 years)  
21  
22

23  
24 Owing to the relative flexibility of the academic workplace, such tactics of avoidance  
25  
26 were a common feature of the ways in which those living with bullying/discrimination  
27  
28 handled the situation.  
29

30  
31 Respondents also recorded 'everyday' discrimination: the small, normalised acts of  
32  
33 exclusion that are often absorbed by those who experience them as a part of the  
34  
35 everyday ethos and ambiance of a workplace. Respondents were often ambivalent about  
36  
37 labelling these everyday acts as 'discrimination' per se, but felt strongly that it  
38  
39 marginalised or excluded them from equality in the workplace. A common example of  
40  
41 an everyday act of exclusion as a consequence of departmental ethos was identified as a  
42  
43 result of assumptions that women should assume more pastoral roles, or would be more  
44  
45 likely to receive teaching related administration, rather than research management or  
46  
47 leadership (see Maddrell 2009 for longstanding evidence of this gendered practice and  
48  
49 McDowell 1990 on how department culture can influence forms of stereotyping or  
50  
51 harassment). The following quote exemplifies the process, assumptions and cumulative  
52  
53 negative impact of such everyday sexism:  
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3 Just the subtle comments or tongue-in-cheek jokes of less enlightened  
4  
5 colleagues... jokes about their discomfort being around 'so many women', or  
6  
7 jokes about how useless they are at doing things women might be better at doing  
8  
9 (like counselling students, etc.). It's the kind of silly stuff that just shouldn't be  
10  
11 said but is anyway. It's just frustrating! Some of it can get shrugged off, some of  
12  
13 it less so. (Female 48, 35-44 years)  
14  
15

16 Other examples of quotidian exclusion linked to the ambience of a department included  
17  
18 male respondents reflecting on the long-term advantages of sharing the same social  
19  
20 lexicon or interests, for example sporting or other (normalised male orientated)  
21  
22 activities that resulted in enhanced social capital within the profession:  
23  
24

25 Yes, I think I had an advantage during undergrad & grad studies. We (other  
26  
27 male students) would play [sport] & go for drinks with our male profs which  
28  
29 helped us establish informal and cordial relations with the male faculty. This  
30  
31 came in handy for marking & research jobs as well as references for grants. I  
32  
33 still consult with a number of my profs from undergrad, one or two I still  
34  
35 consider mentors. I think my gender helped me to establish this social capital.  
36  
37 To this day I tend to get along better with male colleagues, supervisors and  
38  
39 professors. (Male 278, 26 to 34 years old)  
40  
41  
42

43 Thus, social activities can be simultaneously inclusive and exclusive. Shared cultures of  
44  
45 drinking (during fieldwork or in the pub) were likewise identified as an exclusionary  
46  
47 practice for those who were not included, were made to feel they didn't 'fit', or were  
48  
49 barred from participation by other commitments. The observations of respondents  
50  
51 resonated with debates in geography about, for example, masculinist cultures of  
52  
53 fieldwork (Rose 1993; Sundberg, 2003; Mawdsley and Bracken, 2004); and ways of  
54  
55 thinking (Longhurst and Johnston, 2014; Mott and Roberts, 2014). There are also  
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3 obvious implications for those whose religious observance bars them from social spaces  
4  
5 and practices of alcohol consumption, as well as those who may have alcohol-related  
6  
7 problems. The implications of informal processes of exclusion relate to multiple sites  
8  
9 and practices of academic subject formation, and are of particular relevance in an era of  
10  
11 increased international mobility of faculty and students in which significant barriers still  
12  
13 exist to the full participation of women of colour (Mahtani 2004).  
14  
15  
16

17  
18 The twin issues of workload intensification, and feelings of insecurity and precarity of  
19  
20 employment, were recurrent themes within the responses (see Strauss et al 2013).  
21  
22

23 Permanent staff highlighted stress as a result of increasing teaching, administration and  
24  
25 research workloads (especially grant applications and publishing, key performance  
26  
27 indicators in the government's Research Excellence Framework evaluations):  
28

29  
30 Some senior staff fail to realise or comprehend how difficult it is to work as a  
31  
32 junior member of staff at this university and they dump work on us at will. As  
33  
34 such this is the first time I have worked somewhere where with more seniority  
35  
36 comes less responsibility. This sort of bullying is insidious in universities. (Male  
37  
38 133, 35-44 years)  
39

40 On the other hand, echoing Birnie et al (2005), researchers on temporary and fixed term  
41  
42 contracts expressed feelings of precariousness and insecurity – some of whom felt they  
43  
44 had no chance of ever securing a full-time permanent academic role with possibilities  
45  
46 for progression:  
47  
48

49  
50 It is not my gender, but rather the gendered nature of temporary contract  
51  
52 research status which I feel is holding me back in career opportunities and  
53  
54 responsibilities. Contract research staff are not always treated as full members of  
55  
56 staff in some universities - I do not have access to institutional research funds or  
57  
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3 mentoring schemes, no opportunity to take on departmental responsibilities  
4  
5 which may help me to get involved in the core activities of my department. ... I  
6  
7 work on a research team as the junior member and find myself having to do  
8  
9 menial tasks, and feel that my work is not given sufficient credit in attributing  
10  
11 authorship in joint publications. (Female 262, 26-34 years)  
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16 Not only are women over-represented in junior posts, these jobs have undergone a  
17  
18 process of feminization, most notably in their short-term nature. The responses indicate  
19  
20 that negative experiences of intensification and workload were commonly experienced  
21  
22 and that particular stages in the career course (transition from temporary or fixed-term  
23  
24 to permanent roles, and mid-career progression in particular) and personal  
25  
26 circumstances (caring responsibilities, home situations and work/life balance choices)  
27  
28 intensified the day to day stress and (in)ability to respond to the pressures of the  
29  
30 neoliberal(ising) university. In some cases supportive managers facilitated satisfactory  
31  
32 part time contracts for those with caring responsibilities, but others echoed Birnie et al's  
33  
34 (2005) description of being made to feel both invisible and a particular sense of  
35  
36 obligation for the 'dispensations' afforded to them, and/or pressure to overwork.  
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43 The survey also shows that respondents were taking on a variety of personal caring  
44  
45 roles, of particular significance due to pressure on academics to work beyond contracted  
46  
47 hours. While parenting responsibilities for pre-school children were highlighted, other  
48  
49 caring responsibilities identified were: children of all ages, partners; elderly and/or  
50  
51 infirm parents and neighbours; friends experiencing challenges or long-term illness.  
52  
53 Respondents indicated that their caring roles required different intensities of care at  
54  
55 different times, with wide-ranging impacts on work/life balance, regardless of seniority:  
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3 Very exhausting responsibilities for elderly members of the family (now  
4 mercifully over, through death and residential home). This almost brought me to  
5 a complete nervous breakdown. I still take the medication, for fear of not  
6 knowing what might happen if I stopped. I really do not want to go back there.  
7  
8 How I got through teaching, admin, [working in senior management]... all of  
9 that in the worst months is beyond my comprehension. I never took a day off  
10  
11 sick in my whole career (contrary to the advice of my GP). (Male 116, 65+  
12  
13 years)

14  
15 Although UK Universities are bound by the 2014 UK Flexible working law (Gov.uk,  
16  
17 2014c), the ability and inclination of an employee to navigate these with confidence will  
18  
19 depend on the institutional policies and the leadership of their department.  
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22  
23 While the survey reported women and men undertaking caring responsibilities, many  
24  
25 women in particular feel the need to downplay these responsibilities for fear of being  
26  
27 seen as less committed to their work, whereas men appear to seek (and receive)  
28  
29 recognition for caring roles. The fact that a number of women respondents referred to  
30  
31 the impossibility of combining academic work and a family life, while this issue was  
32  
33 not raised by men, suggests that women still anticipate having to sacrifice career for  
34  
35 childrearing, or vice versa, in a way that men do not. These women reported the implicit  
36  
37 and explicit message that children and academic progression did not mix.  
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41 On several occasions I have been told by senior female academics that if a  
42  
43 woman has children she is signalling that she is not serious about an academic  
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45 career! There are a lot of things that are said 'under the radar' that affect the  
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47 chances of an academic career. (Female 157, 26-34 years)  
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3 Despite advances in work practices around maternity leave and a smaller gender gap in  
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5 earlier career stages, comments such as this indicate a sense of conflict in younger  
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7 female academics, who perceive an academic career as incompatible with starting a  
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9 family. As Crang (2007, 511) noted: “Balancing demands to be a carer and have an  
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11 academic career raises an unequally gendered set of issues”.

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14 For scholars familiar with the politics of intersectional identities and practices of  
15  
16 exclusion/inclusion, the findings of the survey may not be surprising. Indeed, in some  
17  
18 ways the results echo the title of the McDowell and Peake (1990) paper ‘same old  
19  
20 story?’. Crucially, responses made visible the overt inequalities in the workplace that  
21  
22 still endure, for example, the difference between legal entitlement to maternity leave or  
23  
24 flexible working arrangements and departmental attitudes to such entitlements in  
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26 practice, and, reiterating McDowell’s (1990) findings, the significance of less tangible  
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28 factors such as departmental culture serving to privilege some and marginalise others.  
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30 Furthermore, testimonies indicate a systemic issue around the way in which  
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32 departmental ethos can enable and/or perpetuate a culture that undermines equality, at  
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34 the loss of physical and mental wellbeing and the intellectual, social and emotional  
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36 capital of those who are excluded.  
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#### 43 **4. Conclusion**

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47 Regardless of some structural differences in the longitudinal statistical data, the survey  
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49 and study show four clear findings.

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51 **First**, it evidences growth of the number of women appointed as professors and  
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53 growing gender equality within some departments, but persistent gender disparities in  
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55 UK geography as a whole.  
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3 **Second**, the changes required to reduce gender inequalities within UK universities  
4 represent a long and demanding process. Discipline-wide and departmental ‘ethos’ and  
5 ‘ambiance’ can supports or undermine efforts to secure equality. *Good practice*  
6 highlighted by respondents included attentiveness to social relations and a wider ethos  
7 of equality within departments, and the use of varied and sustained strategies to address  
8 inequalities.

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16 **Third**, respondents were acutely aware of key career transition points, and both  
17 enablers and barriers to their progression. Much has been written on the *glass ceiling* –  
18 preventing mid-career moves to senior roles, but the *stone floor* keeps people, notably  
19 women, stuck in the lower echelons of academia (Heward and Sinclair Taylor, 1995).  
20 This can have long-term impacts on quality of life and personal life decisions such as  
21 parenthood, as well as penalising individuals financially with lower salaries now, which  
22 map on to lower pensions in retirement, resulting in significant gender disparities in  
23 lifetime income.

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34 **Fourth**, the advent of HEFCE’s Athena Swan and Gender Equality Charter Mark  
35 initiatives suggest a changing zeitgeist. However, evidence of early-career precarity,  
36 workload pressures, stress-related illness, discrimination, harassment and bullying in  
37 this survey highlight grave concerns about institutional cultures and the wellbeing of  
38 academics in geography, which can be linked to broader narratives of job insecurity,  
39 stress and (lack of) well-being in the wider university sector, as evidenced by *The*  
40 *Guardian*’s article on ‘Dark Thoughts, mental illness on the rise in academia’ (2014).  
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52 This paper has made visible ongoing gender inequality in the geography workplace and  
53 challenges assumptions that geography has successfully tackled the ‘gender problem’.

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55 The collective personal testimony of respondents evidence and illuminate the day-to-  
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3 day experiences of inequality in departments, which statistical data analysis alone  
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5 cannot speak to. Together this data should inform our collective understanding of  
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7 inequality and exclusion, and our mutual responsibility to work towards equality in the  
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9 workplace. Heads of Departments and their supporting senior colleagues have a  
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11 particular responsibility in leading change to address gender inequalities and the direct  
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13 and indirect discrimination that is frequently associated with such inequalities.

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16 To conclude, we call for the discipline of geography as a whole to ‘mind the gap’ and  
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18 call on all departments to work towards meeting the gender equality requirements  
19  
20 through Athena Swan and Gender Equality Charter Mark accreditations. We see this as  
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22 integral to, rather than separate from, a broader agenda that addresses other significant  
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24 areas of inequality, e.g. sexuality, race and dis/ability, through the UK Race Equality  
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26 Charter Mark now being trialled and the Stonewall (2013) Top 100 Employers list.

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28 However, policy alone is rarely sufficient, and indirect factors such as departmental  
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30 ethos and ambiance play a significant role in fostering and maintaining cultures of  
31  
32 equality. There still needs to be a greater and more systemic integration of ‘formal’ and  
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34 ‘academic/theoretical’ approaches; that is, of structured programmes for addressing  
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36 inequality, and more difficult, contentious and reflexive debates about how geography  
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38 operates as a discipline and how academic subjects are shaped under particular  
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40 conditions. The latter includes confronting, as Valentine et al (2014) remind us, the  
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42 ‘ordinary sexism’ that patriarchy and the gendered division of space – as well as the  
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44 gender division of labour – produce and reproduce. There are structural and  
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46 interpersonal issues that demand both policy and praxis of equality. Ultimately,  
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48 departments working towards an inclusive ethos and ambiance will constitute healthy  
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50 working environments, which are simultaneously an investment in the long term  
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52 wellbeing of staff, and therefore the quality of student experience.  
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**Table I: Number and percentage UK higher education participants who are female; staff by academic grade and students by level of study**

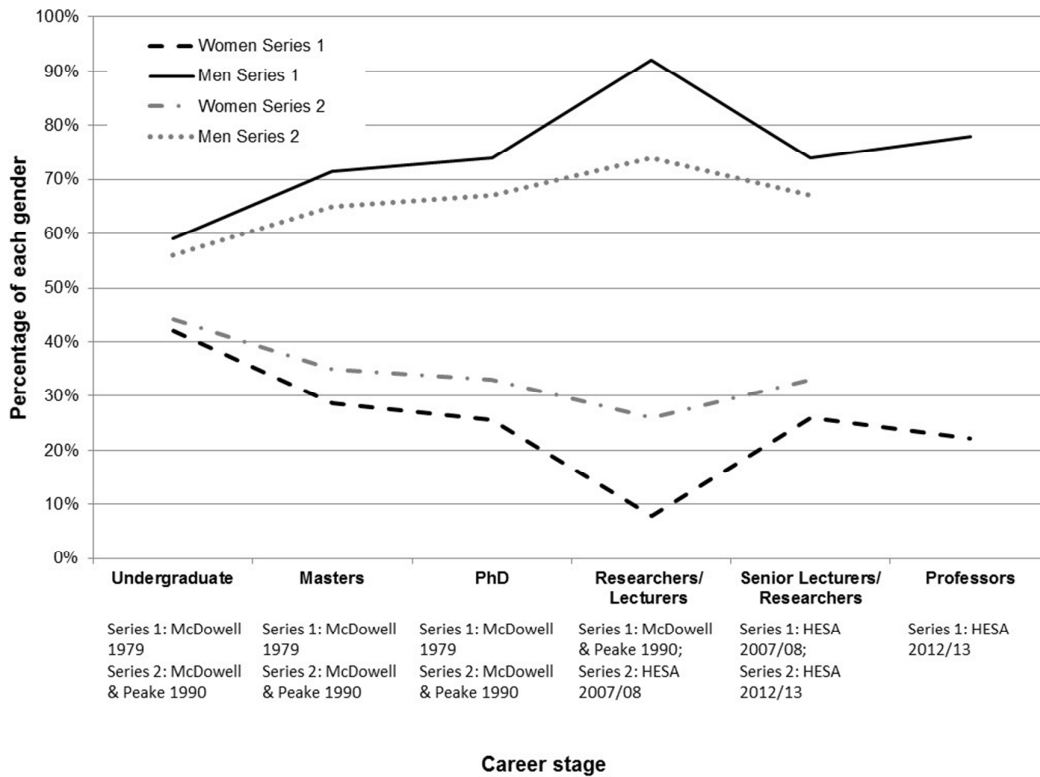
**Sources:** 1978: McDowell 1979 (0.5 values to reflect FTE status); 1988: McDowell & Peake 1990; 2007/08 HESA Student record (F8: Physical Geographical Sciences and L7: Human and Social Geography); 2007/08: HESA Staff Record (28: Geography); 2012/13 HESA Student record (F8 and L7); 2012/13: HESA Staff Record (124: Geography and Environmental Studies)<sup>1</sup>. HESA Standard Rounding Methodology was applied to the Staff Record data (shown as Full Person Equivalent, FPE) to prevent the disclosure of confidential or personal information, which may mean that some FPE counts do not sum to the rounded total and percentages calculated on a population of 0 to 52 persons are suppressed, indicated by [..]. Student record subject codes are not precise categories and include students studying related subjects outside geography departments.

Academic grade	1978	1988	2007/08	2012/13
<b>Students</b>				
Undergraduate	42% (3194)	44% (2872)	49% (11311)	50% (11925)
Masters	29% (79)	35% (97)	47% (1174)	52% (1332)
PhD – full-time	31% (155)	32% (135)		
PhD – part-time	20% (63)	34% (59)		
PhD – all			49% (629)	50% (670)
<b>Staff</b>				
Research and Teaching Assistants				55% (235)
Lecturers			38% (175)	
Researchers			49% (210)	
Lecturers and Researchers				48% (315)
Lecturers and Senior Lecturers	8% (38)	11% (58)		
Senior Lecturers and Researchers			26% (120)	33% (305)
Readers	6% (4)	7% (4)		
Professors	4% (3.5)	4% (5)	.. (50)	21% (65)
Other grades			37% (90)	
Other junior grades/administrative				71% (265)
Other senior grades/managerial				.. (20)
<i>Total staff (male and female)</i>	<i>620</i>	<i>686</i>	<i>1910</i>	<i>2745</i>

<sup>1</sup> HESA's standard rounding methodologies have been applied. HESA cannot accept responsibility for any inferences or conclusions derived from the data by third parties. GFGRG is grateful to the RGS-IBG for assistance in obtaining HESA data.

**Figure 1: Gender ratios of university geography students and teachers, 1978 to 2013**

Sources as labelled, see Table 1 for notes; see text for explanation of Series 1 and 2



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