

# Foreword

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It is always a privilege to be invited to join a project but so much more so when you feel a strong connection to the area of work and the ethos of others. I feel this strongly in relation to this book coming from the European Union TRIGGER project on gender inequality in academia.

The results from this important project are brought together here as a body of work. There is no doubt that it will provide a valuable source of both reference and inspiration for readers interested in or exercised by, the issues surrounding gender in higher education.

My direct involvement with the project is peripheral. I was invited to participate in a TRIGGER panel examining the role of learned and professional bodies in relation to gender. Initially I was challenged as to what my contribution could be. The Regional Studies Association has an international and multidisciplinary membership of academics, policy makers and practitioners interested in regional issues. To inform my presentation, my colleagues and I began collecting data on gender from within the Association, and the results were intriguing.

In the course of our data examination we learnt that gender-based research is tricky. Even seemingly simple things such as setting benchmarks are fraught with complex decisions. Views on gender and gender balance vary around the world, as they do on the appropriate methodologies to use for its analysis. For our international organisation, this meant some explaining to our constituencies. We quickly understood that snapshots in time can be unhelpful and misleading, and that long-term data are necessary to gain real understanding of trends. Most importantly, we came to see that it is dangerous to react to headline figures. Detailed understanding of how those data come to be is necessary in order to form well-grounded conclusions. A good example of this is where one committee of a society might be under-represented by one gender and another may be over-represented. Surely beating the benchmark for women on a committee is a good thing? But in fact, not necessarily so, because committees vary in status and if the one in question has low status because it works virtually with few networking opportunities, or it uses only skills that members already have such as for grading applications and does not

offer new learning opportunities, then having a high female membership would not necessarily be celebratory.

With colleagues on the board and the committees of the Association, we began a series of discussions about diversity and inclusion. The Association has had a diversity policy for many years and this was updated. We renewed a benchmarking exercise seeking to understand the gender balance in our global academic community. We did this by sampling academic departments in relevant disciplines in many parts of the world. We excluded non-faculty members and took an average, which interestingly we can see took a turn to the masculine following the 2008 financial crisis but has now reversed and sits at 32 per cent female. At the time of writing in summer 2019, female membership is 35 per cent.

A vexing question that arose was whether or not the journal publishing process on which science and social science careers in academia depends, was gender biased. The Association, with the full and curious support of its editors, undertook a piece of research that was funded and executed by its publishers, Taylor & Francis (Routledge). In the context of a worrying literature, the findings were reassuring. Evidence was collected for a six-year sample using submission and publication records for the Association's monthly and blue-chip journal, *Regional Studies*.

We considered gender balance across submissions and published articles. Broadly we found that 33 per cent of articles were submitted by females as opposed to 67 per cent by males, and that the ratio remained the same both for all authors and for corresponding authors. Corresponding authors were slightly more likely to be male than female, and out of the totality of articles submitted, 16 per cent were all female, 46 per cent all male, and 38 per cent had both male and female authors.

We found that for accepted articles there was a slightly higher proportion of males compared to the ratio for all submitted articles (67 per cent of all articles were submitted by male corresponding authors, with 30 per cent of these published). Of the articles submitted by female corresponding authors (33 per cent of the total) 23 per cent were published. We can only surmise at the explanation for this. A possible reason, given the unbalanced gender membership by career stage with far more female members in the student and early career categories than more senior membership classes, is that female corresponding authors submitting papers are more likely to be more junior. The geographical spread of membership also suggests that many in this cohort might not have English as their first language.

As a proxy for hidden bias on the part of the editorial team we tested for the position of female authored articles both within each issue of the journal and across the annual volume. The most advantageous position

for an article is article 1, issue 1 so that it has two full calendar years to gather downloads and citations. We found that there is no evidence of unconscious bias in the positioning of female authored articles. If anything, they tend to run towards the front of both articles and the volume. This finding was pleasing. Further investigation revealed that usually, in the journal in question, the ordering was set by the Editorial Manager, who worked only from the article title and surname and who usually had no idea of the gender of the author. This finding confounds other results in the literature which have suggested that the way women title their work can affect its treatment by editorial teams.

Research on gender and the Regional Studies Association journals is ongoing but it has already become clear that in order to offer evidence-based explanations for the patterns being revealed, we will need to collect more data about our authors, and that will require community consent. It seems that, from reactions to presentations of our work, both males and females are willing to spend a few extra minutes when submitting their articles to share critical data with us. Examples are where they received higher education, what their first language is and what their age is.

It is noteworthy that in my study of a recent collection of learned society strategic and development plans across many disciplines, the majority have chosen to explicitly address diversity and equality, with most at least seeking to appoint a board member with this responsibility.

The Regional Studies Association has appointed a champion for equality and diversity to help us to benchmark, to set up evaluation and monitoring protocols, and to raise awareness in our daily work. She will be supported by a committee with a budget to meet in person and with the Chief Executive as the Committee Secretary. We have learned from the many studies in this area that in order to make change lasting there needs to be leadership from the top, continual monitoring and evaluation, and support from the administration.

It is in this context that the kind of work undertaken by the TRIGGER team is so important. This book addresses, in a no-nonsense, no-hyperbole way, key themes for higher education today.

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