

# The workplace: glassed and gendered?

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@drkcarrutherst #gendersatwork #gwordtour

# the g word tour



- [www.thegword2017.wordpress.com](http://www.thegword2017.wordpress.com)
  - #gwordtour
  - #gendersatwork
  - #gettinggraphic

# ceiling

It's a bit of a myth the glass ceiling,  
didn't we smash it some time ago?  
Aren't we prime ministers, bishops and CEOs?  
All the paperwork has to be equal  
and the pay – well, there's some way to go!

I can see where I want to get to  
not the top, just a place where I know  
my work matters and I've something to show  
for my labour. Not ticking boxes.  
But why is it all so damn slow?

And if I got there, would it be so rose-tinted?  
Perhaps it's better to stay here below  
and not try, just go with the flow.  
But one day I might blow a gasket,  
lose my cool, hit the roof, smash right through...

Kate Carruthers Thomas 2018



## the research:

### *Gender(s) At Work* (2016-2018)

- how does gender shape workplace experiences and career trajectories within a post-1992 UK university? (the HE sector?)
- what are the implications for the idea of 'career' as a linear, uninterrupted, gender-neutral trajectory?
- what is happening in the spaces between organisational rhetoric/lived experience?

*and*

- what are the implications for the Athena SWAN Charter and the university in addressing/redressing gender inequality?

## the research:

### *Gender(s) At Work* (2016-2018)

- 'institutional research (IR)' - research conducted within an educational organisation to inform decision-making, planning and effectiveness
- IR typically seeks a quick turnaround and clear simple answers, is not underpinned by theoretical perspectives
- *Gender(s) At Work* aimed to increase corporate intelligence about gender equality and contribute to the university's Athena SWAN gender equality agenda
- **but** also - 18 month duration, qualitative data (interviews and visual mapping); feminist geographic analytical framework, findings reported externally

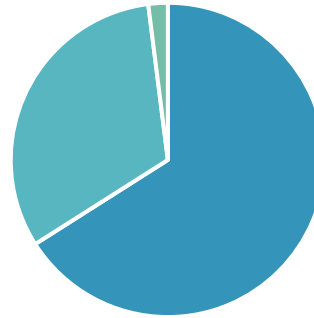
# sample

45 self-selecting participants

academic/professional roles

across organisational hierarchy

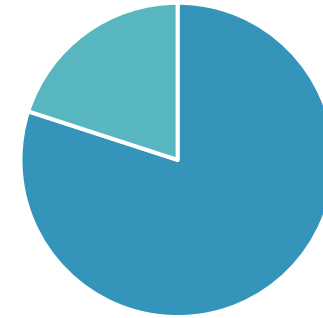
### gender



■ female ■ male ■ gender non-binary ■

- Female 28 (62%)
- Male 16 (35%)
- Gender non-binary 1 (3%)

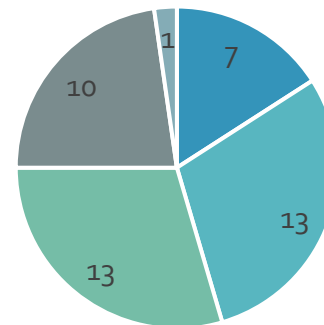
### ethnicity



■ White ■ BAME ■

- White 36 (80%)
- BAME 9 (20%)

### age



■ 18-29 yrs ■ 30-39 yrs ■ 40-49 yrs ■ 50-59 yrs ■ 60+ yrs

methods:

participant narratives

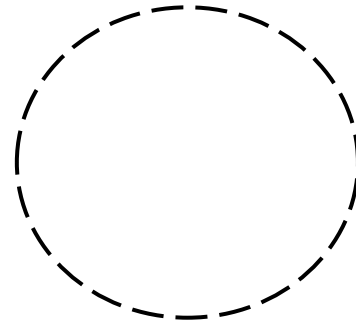
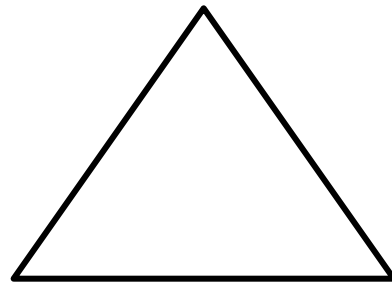
why narrative?

- ❑ *experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals and relates to the singular and particular within a social context* (Creswell 2007)
- ❑ *accommodating complexity...revealing ambiguity* (Bathmaker 2010, p2)
- ❑ *space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far ... place is a collection of those stories* (Massey, 2005, p9)

- 'potted' career histories
- common question schedule
- experiences of working at the university and sector more widely
- participants' perceptions of the influence of gender on those experiences/trajectories
- participant verification

methods:

## organisational maps



why maps?

- ❑ *Participant-generated visual materials are particularly helpful in exploring the taken-for-granted things in their research participants' lives* (Rose 2014, p. 27)
- ❑ *space as social relations shaped by power* (Massey 2005, p9)

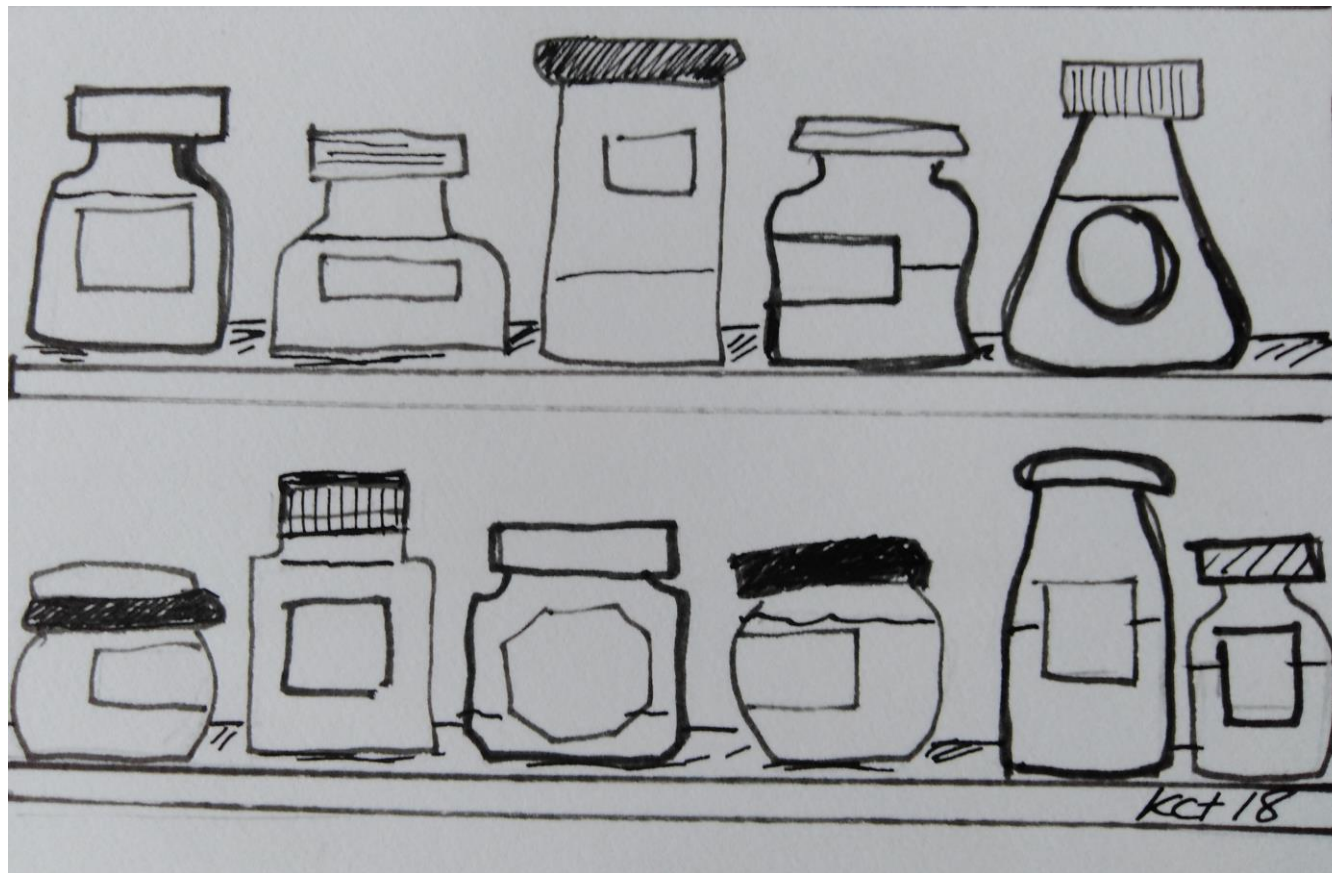
- mapping sheet
- common shapes – or freedom to create own
- *'select the shape which best matches your perception of the university'*
- *'place yourself in relation to the shape'*
- changes/annotation allowed.



## spatial storytelling

- *'In Gender(s) at Work I use spatial storytelling to map and report stories beyond dominant and exclusionary narratives, to uncover spaces between ... to foreground relationships between spaces and power'* (Carruthers Thomas, 2019)

# findings

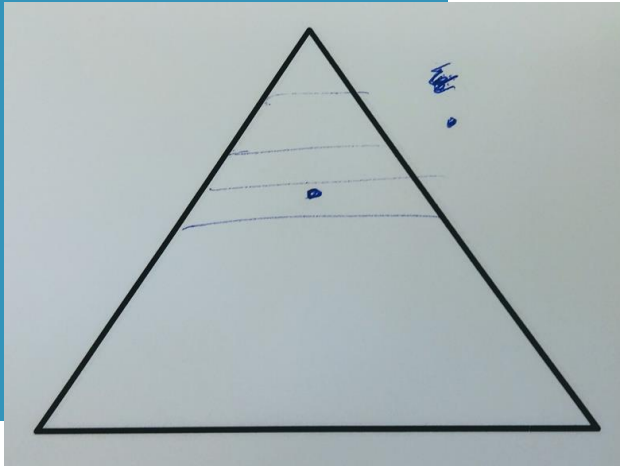




## Story A

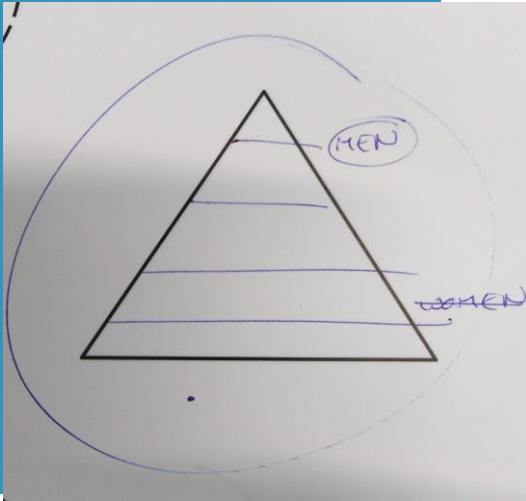
- flexible working – something women ask for
- maternity leave – basically irritating to an organisation
- always running to catch up

*I'm instantly drawn to a hierarchical structure because I'm a central service and I report up to the top floor, it's literally like that in this building. And I would say that I'm probably here in terms of structure. I'm probably here in terms of what I'm being asked to do. When I am representing the University outside of the building, people interact with me kind of up here. Internally, I don't even get to go to management forum, so I'm down here'*





## Story B



- further ahead than I should be at this point in my career
- facing a career crossroads
- expectation that male academics will engage in particular conversational style

*It is very hierarchically organised. In an ideal university the students would be at the top. My role is somewhere in the middle. But me, who I am, what I do, my hopes, my dreams, my aspirations, that is not interesting or important to anybody. I feel relatively powerless to affect change in any meaningful way in my institution.*

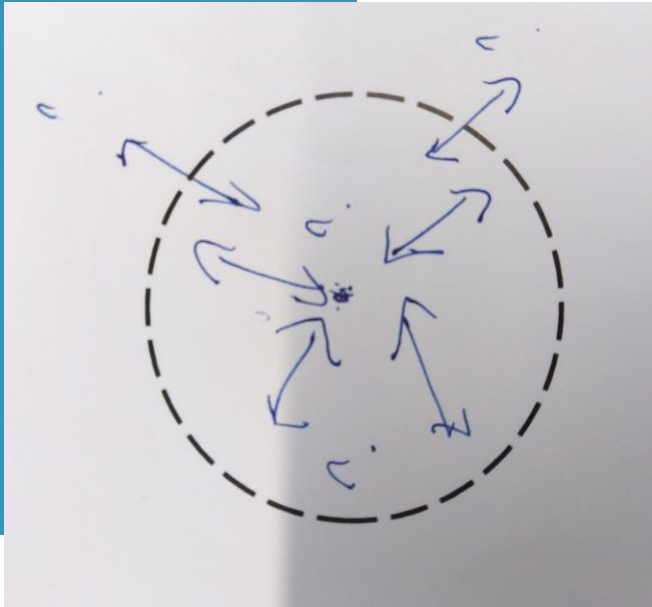




## Story C

- a zig-zag route to this point
- being the “feminist police” – a bit wearing
- am I willing to compromise who I am in order to get the jobs?

*I'm going to go for the circle, because the way I see academia is as a conglomerate: as a collegiate activity. I would place myself, I think, at the centre of that - not because I think I'm the centre of everything - but the way I interact with people is obviously from me outwards, whether that's students, or colleagues, or line managers, or people I line-manage.*



## career metaphors

glass ceiling  
glass escalator  
glass cliff



(Bruckmüller *et al* 2014; Williams 2013; Ryan and Haslam 2005; Budig 2002 *inter alia*).  
Illustrations Kate Carruthers Thomas 2017

## gender, work and career in HE?

- lived experiences of the higher education workplace are complex and gendered
- staff continue to negotiate paid workload and career within the continuing constraints of social roles constructed 'masculine' and 'feminine'

*but*

- career pipeline/trajectory/ladder ... ***aligned to male-defined constructions of work and career success ... continue to dominate organisational research and practice*** (Bilimoria et al. 2008, p.727)

*and*

- silent on structural factors and their positive/negative effects

*supporting*

- ***the idealized worker is one that is available 24/7 without ties or responsibilities that will hinder her or his productive capacities. She or he is unencumbered and on-call, even if not 'at work'*** (Lynch, 2010, p.57)

## implications for Athena SWAN?

- AS focus on 'leaky pipeline', enabling measures to advance gender equality/career progression eg:: maternity and flexible working, career development, organisational culture, attention to intersectionality
- AS works *within* 'career' norms – including metrics-driven (REF/TEF), valuing particular types of academic productivity, early-mid- late career ...
- *Gender(s) At Work* - what is happening in the spaces between organisational rhetoric/lived experience?
- if rhetoric not translating into lived experience, how effective is the Athena SWAN Charter. Does it risk being 'an institutional speech act' ie:
  - ***'institutional speech acts ... do not go beyond pluralist understandings of diversity and are non-performative in the sense that they fail to deliver what they have promised'*** (Ahmed 2006, p.764)



# what next?

## Status Quo

- AS Charter is a mechanism operating within a large, diverse and complex sector
- provides a valuable driver for change - within limited parameters
- offers a positive/practical framework to ameliorate/mitigate negative impacts
- informs sector intelligence/practice
- compulsory monitoring, revalidation processes
- subject to reviews/updates

## Athena SWAN +

- compulsory gender balance on Athena SWAN SATs/award panels?
- articulate/promote a more flexible 'career' model?
- increase senior accountability and actions ?
- include questions on
  - sexual harassment – data/procedures/ actions taken?
  - gender/ethnicity data in relation to academic precarity?
- embed intersectionality into all award questions?

cliff

Even now, even now in my meetings  
I'm still faced with wall to wall suits  
and I still hear my colleagues repeating  
the proposals I tried to get through  
weeks ago. *Great idea!* If I'm Chair  
their language is muted,  
I know they just wouldn't dare  
talk the way they do to each other  
when the 'feminist police' are not there.  
I wanted this job. I'm ambitious.  
I've waited a very long time.  
Opportunities like this are quite precious,  
but up here I can see there are lines  
to be crossed. If I cross them  
will my foothold crumble  
or will I achieve greater height,  
but as someone I don't want to become?  
And if so, was the climb worth the fight?

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thank you

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