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Women, academia and identity : constructions of equal opportunities in the "New Managerialism" ; a case of lipstick on the gorilla?

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Abstract

This paper has two distinct foci. The first is an introductory focus on the current position and problems of academic women working in UK universities (despite the valorization of Equal Opportunities (EO), and within the context and constraints of the "New Managerialism"). The second and main focus is on the personal impact of university work on the lives of academic women, towards exploring and uncovering how higher education's institutional structures and processes impact upon academic women's identity structures and processes. Idiographic analyses of a small number of case studies suggest that despite considerable recent gains, some academic women's identities are compromised, challenged and made "vulnerable" through feelings of being undervalued, overburdened and often the subjects of unequal treatment ? more than 30 years after the Equal Pay Act and almost 30 years after the Sex

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Discrimination Act. The paper's conclusions therefore warn that continued valorization of EO policy without its assimilation into the underlying core institutional culture will sanction the valediction of any tangible or effective progress in HE's ability to produce more robust academic identities and more satisfying daily working lives for academic women. Insofar as such assimilation is not achieved, the policy, practice and rhetoric of equal opportunities and equal treatment in UK higher education will remain little more than "lipstick on the gorilla". (HRK / Abstract übernommen)