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Introduction

The underrepresentation of women academics in the most senior ranks and leadership positions in higher education is an enduring social justice issue. We would like to think that universities are at the forefront of demonstrating a commitment to social justice and inclusivity, but they remain 'bastions of male power and prestige' almost 30 years after the Hansard Society Commission (1990). Understanding and acknowledging the barriers women face in progressing within the profession continues to be important.

Why women remain globally underrepresented as academic leaders is highly complex and multifaceted. Family remains a dominant discourse in explaining why women fail to move through academic hierarchies (Baker, 2010; Raddon, 2002, Isgro and Castañeda, 2015). In the research prestige economy of higher education - that is, where research is valued or prized most highly - family is cited as an explanation for the perpetuation of the gendered research productivity gap (Beddoes and Pawley, 2014). The academy is positioned as a 'carefree workplace' that assumes academics have no other commitments than the devotion of their time to the profession (Morley, 2013). The concept of 'fairness' and a belief in the meritocratic academy fails to acknowledge the gendered nature of family life, thereby privileging male academics that may not be shouldering caring responsibilities (Nikunen, 2012). The loss of female talent – the leaky pipeline – is explained as a result of the incompatibility between the role of mother and academic (Crabb and Ekberg, 2014).

However, we might question the positioning of family as the most significant factor in explaining women's underrepresentation as academic leaders. A number of studies evidence a wider concatenation of gendered assumptions that combine to negatively impact academic women. For example, there is evidence to suggest that family is not, in all cases, operating as a form of negative equity in the research prestige economy of higher education and that workload allocation might well be a stronger explanatory factor (Barrett and Barrett, 2011; Aiston and Jung, 2015a; Leberman, Eames and Barnett, 2016). Workload allocations confine academic women to the 'ivory basement' where they are allocated enormous amounts of work with minimum recognition or rewards (Fitzgerald, 2012). Gender stereotypes influence the work that academic women are seen as being best placed to undertake (Hughes, et. al., 2007; Kjeldal, Rindfleish and Sheridan, 2006; Morley, 2007; Ropers-Huilman, 2000; Schein, 2007; Turner, 2002). Academic gate-keeping, selection processes and the allocation of resources are seen as disadvantaging women's career progression (Husu, 2004; Van den Brink, Benschop and Jansen, 2010). Moreover,

leadership is implicitly constructed as male and 'masculine' values privileged, making it difficult for women when they do enter leadership roles to negotiate their identities as female leaders (Acker, 2012; Biling, 2011). There is evidence to suggest that within highly masculine organizational cultures women are rejecting leadership roles (Chesterman, Ross-Smith and Peters, 2005, Morley and Crossouard, 2016). In addition, we must not neglect the voices of women casual academics, given the increasing casualisation of the academic profession in some parts of the world, such as the USA and Australia (Crimmins, 2016). Nor must we fail to recognize, and understand, the heterogeneity of women's experiences and how multiple identities, including gender, race and ethnicity interact and intersect (Ahmed, 2009; Sang, 2018).

The aim of this article is to present a new conceptual dimension to our understanding of the factors or forces that prevent women academics from leading in the academy. Based on interviews with women academics from three world-leading universities in Hong Kong, this article will present a two-part conceptual framework – the silence of, and the silen*cing* of academic women.

Women's Silence

Feminist scholars have emphasised the sociopolitical nature of voice and silence; social power structures privilege some voices, whilst excluding others. Adrienne Rich (1977, p. X) powerfully wrote 'Where language and naming are power, silence is oppression, is violence'. To speak and to be heard is to have power. To be silenced is to have that power denied (see Reinharz, 1994). There are myriad of ways of silencing women (Houston and Kramarae, 1991) and research suggests that even for those women who feel they had found their 'voice', problems 'with voice abound…they felt unheard or unheeded' (Belenky, et. al., 1996, p. 146).

As noted above, we now have extensive research into the position, status and experience of women academics and the literature does provide some insight into the issue of silence and gender in higher education. Luke explicitly refers to the 'politics of silence' whereby 'women's lack of voice is a social consequence of the absence of her reflection in the mirror of history' (Luke, 1994, p. 218). She comments that women academics have earned *de jure* rights to speak, but face challenges in doing so. These challenges include getting and maintaining 'the floor'; men do not hear or take up what women say, dominating the discursive space by speaking louder and monopolizing turn-taking. Similarly, Özkanlı's research found women were not equal partners at the 'table'; women articulated not being listened to or being told not to speak. The metaphors of holding the floor and being at the table stand in sharp contrast to women as 'observers' (Özkanlı, et. al., 2009). Morley's (2006) research provides evidence of this observational role, with Nigerian women academics remaining virtually silent in meetings. The 'didn't I just say that' syndrome was also observed, with women's ideas being taken up when recycled by their male colleagues.

Further studies refer to silencing in and exclusion from social and professional networks; for example, academic conferences, which might be conceived as 'arenas for displaying hegemonic masculinities' and constructed as

male-only social spaces. As a result 'speaking in academic settings might be associated with a danger of a verbal assault and/or intimidation' (Fotaki, 2013, p. 1262). Heijstra et. al's, (2016) study of 'academic housework' in Iceland also shows how marginalized groups – particularly women and newcomers – with heavier academic housework loads are in a difficult position in terms of challenging their workload allocation and therefore their voices remain *unheard*. Similarly, Crimmins research on women casual academics found that they perceived themselves to face the dilemma of staying silent or risk losing their jobs (Crimmins, 2016).

Female academic leaders in predominantly male executive teams in Australia described open hostility when seeking to be heard; 'they have a vision of a female senior manager as someone who does not speak' (Özkanlı, et. al., 2009, p. 250). Women academics who fight to gain 'the floor' conform to male-authored stereotypes. Verbally assertive women are labeled as 'bitchy', quarrelsome', 'ambitious', and 'aggressive' – the last two qualities may be valued in men, but are considered 'unseemly' in women (Luke, 1994). 'Culture tells her that men abandon women who speak too loudly, or who are too present' (Griffin, quoted in Luke, 1994, p. 218). We might also argue that increasingly women are silencing other women. Ahmed's work on Black feminists speaking up about racism in the academy highlights that 'to speak out of anger as Black woman is then to confirm your position as the cause of tension' (Ahmed, 2009, p. 49).

The conceptual framework of the silence/ing of academic women takes forward this evidence base, drawing on the study described in the following section.

Research Approach

Funded by the Research Grants Council, Hong Kong, the focus of this project was to understand the enablers and barriers to career progression and entry to senior leadership roles within the Hong Kong context. A semi-structured interview approach was taken to understand the experience of women academics (Aiston, 2015b). Previous studies suggest that a qualitative approach, as opposed to a quantitative approach, is advantageous in the study of engendered organisational and management practices and culture. Interviews provide the opportunity to pay close attention to meaning, process, and context, explore in depth issues not anticipated by the researchers, and support theory development and strategic initatives (Deem, 2002).

Interviewees were selected from 3 out of the 8 University Grants Committee (UGC) funded universities in Hong Kong, namely University of Hong Kong (HKU), Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) and Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK). The three selected universities have been traditionally regarded as Hong Kong's 'research intensive' institutions and are currently ranked in the top 60 universities worldwide (see QS World University Ranking 2018 and Times Higher Education University World Rankings 2018). The rationale for choosing these institutions was a working assumption that in these highly competetive, research intensive environments, academic women might face even greater barriers in terms of their career progression. In the global research prestige economy of higher education, where research performance is the pathway to promotion and academic seniority, we

have extensive evidence indicating a gendered research productivity gap (Aiston and Jung, 2015a).

A stratified sampling approach was employed to select the interviewees. The sample was stratified by two key variables: academic rank and discipline. In total 35 interviews were conducted, involving 13 academic women employed in science and engineering and 22 women in social sciences and humanities. Interviewees were asked to reflect on what they saw as the enablers and barriers to career progression, and entry to senior leadership roles, in relation to their own career and for women academics more generally. Interviewees were also asked to consider to what extent Chinese cultural context, norms and values had affected, or had the potential to affect, their career progression. Finally, interviewees were asked to what extent they felt that the higher education sector in Hong Kong was committed to, and proactively supporting women in attaining senior academic roles.

Academic Discipline

Science and Engineering	13
Social Sciences and Humanities	22
Total	35

Rank

Assistant Professor	17
Associate Professor	8
Professor	10
Total	35

Origin of PhD

Hong Kong	5
United States	21
UK	4
Canada	4
France	1
Total	35

Work Experiences Abroad (either as tenure-track staff or non-tenure-track staff)

Yes	26
No	9
Total	35

Ethnicity

Asian – Chinese	20
Asian – non-Chinese	8
Non-Asian	7
Total	35

Insitutions

University A	17
University B	9

University C	9
Total	35

Two of the interviewees were in 1st-tier leadership positions, defined as leadership at the level of Dean and above. At the time of the interviews there were only 8 women across the 8 University Grants Committee funded universities who held 1st-tier leadership positions (Aiston and Yang, 2017). Voluntary consent was sought and a consent form was signed by each interviewee. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim into a word file. The data collected was then anonymised and individuals and institutions have not been identified. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Hong Kong.

A critical feminist approach was used to analyse the data. Such an approach positions the social construction of gender at the centre of one's inquiry with:

> gender as a basic organizing principle that profoundly shapes/mediates the concrete conditions of our lives…our consciousness, skills, and institutions, as well as in the distribution of power and knowledge (Lather, 1992, p. 91)

The initial analysis adopted a three-stage coding approach (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). First, basic coding was carried out, for example, to identify the 'enablers' to career progression. Second, attention was given to the content of what was said, to generate themes to reflect the language the interviewees used. Third, abstraction from what the interviewees had said was used to inform the creation of broad analytic themes. The data were analysed with the aid of NVivo. Having 'carved up' the data in numerous ways and on re-reading codes and themes, what emerged, and what was striking, was the way in which academic women were silent and silenced. We then returned to the full length transcripts to be immersed in each individual narrative to see to what extent the data set was suggestive of a new conceptual framework to understand the experience of women academics: the silence and silenc*ing* of academic women.

Silence/ing: cultural context

Research suggests that traditional Asian culture places a premium on women as dutiful wives, mothers and homemakers and influences the actions of most female academics. Women's public conduct is expected to be 'subdued', 'quiet' and 'withdrawn' (Luke 1998, 2000; Chen 2008). Before presenting the theoretical framing for this research, and the conceptual framework of the silence/ing of academic women, it is important to consider the cultural context of the interviewees.

Interviewees were asked the following question: 'To what extent, if at all, do you feel Chinese cultural context, values and norms have impacted on, or have the potential to, affect your career progression?' As noted earlier, 28 of the interviewees were ethnically Asian (20 Chinese and 8 non-Chinese) and 8 were not originally from Asia. Thirty of the interviewees had studied for their PhDs

outside of Hong Kong and 25 of them had worked as academics overseas, thereby providing interviewees with comparative experiences.

Chinese culture was discussed generally as a hierarchical, top-down culture. Nora, originally from Japan but with a PhD from the US, in reflecting on the lack of negotiation with respect to workload commented, 'maybe this is Chinese culture, everything is top down…which is very, to me, authoritarian and hegemonic' (Nora, Assistant Professor, Social Sciences and Humanities, Asian – non-Chinese). Similarly, Ada, originally from the US, noted: 'So in Chinese culture, they respect the authority, the line of hierarchy…we feel we are never listened to':

> I find a lot of our Chinese colleagues would not volunteer information, they wait to be asked, and even then have a very delicate light touch in the way they convey what they feel about things, and I think the non-Chinese are much more to the point about they want and how they feel.
> (Ada, Associate Professor, Social Sciences and Humanities, non-Asian)

The recognition that both Chinese men and women were less likely 'to want to attract attention', to 'stand out' was seen, however, as more detrimental to women. Women needed to be more pro-active, to speak up and as a result of not doing so were perceived as suffering (Vanessa, Assistant Professor, Social Sciences and Humanities, Asian – non-Chinese). Chinese values for one interviewee were associated with women not speaking up, being quiet and troublesome if making a 'noise'. Being non-Chinese and being vocal meant being positioned as a 'crazy foreigner', thereby allowing the discursive space to speak more freely (Rosie, Professor, Social Sciences and Humanities, Asian – non-Chinese). However, as will be argued subsequently speaking more freely is not without consequences regardless of cultural context.

Chinese culture was also described in terms of normative values in relation to how women should behave. Alicia describes how her Chinese father, also an academic, reflected on how to become a successful female academic. This was described as showing one's weakness or inferiority and asking for help from male colleagues in recognition of their expert positioning:

> …he says everybody feels very comfortable and very nice around her…when she needs help people will help her and when she asks for promotion they will be very happy to promote her.
> (Alicia, Assistant Professor, Sciences, Asian – Chinese)

These comments by her father made the interviewee reflect on her own personality and to what extent this would be a disadvantage in a Chinese cultural context:

> …my personality is the opposite, I've been in the US for a long time and there if you really want to get ahead you need to promote yourself right?
> (Alicia, Assistant Professor, Sciences, Asian – Chinese)

In the above examples, we see the interviewees making comparative remarks concerning Chinese culture and other Asian contexts and the West.

There was also the recognition of distinctions within Chinese culture, for example in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan (Alicia, Assistant Professor, Social Sciences and Humanities, Asian – non-Chinese).

The lead author's research, including a survey of women academics across the 8 UGC-funded universities and interviews with the most senior male and female academic leaders in the Hong Kong sector, found that there were strikingly mixed views as to whether culture served as a barrier to women's progression. For example, the notion of Asian femininity as discussed in Luke's work in the late 1990s, was seen as outdated, stereotypical and not relevant to Hong Kong. The idea that Asian culture places a premium on women as dutiful wives, mothers and homemakers was also not seen as a uniquely Asian cultural phenomenon, but equally applicable to Western women; 'culture can overstate the problem – isn't the issue patriarchy more broadly' (Aiston, 2017). What was clear was that culture is only *one* aspect of a complex problem. The most influential factors identified as limiting women's potential were *power* and *patriarchy*. It is the culture of **gender** which is most significant.

Theoretical Framing

On exploring the concept of silence/ing, 'micro-inequities' became relevant as a theoretical framework. Micro-inequities are defined as small, unjust inequalities that play an important role as part of the larger story of inequality in the workplace. Such inequalities might include small events, which are hard-to-prove, covert and often unintentional. Extensive research indicates that much of the discrimination women experience in the academy is subtle and almost intangible (Aiston, 2011). It is 'hidden', thereby making the case for the study of micro-inequities as a mechanism to uncover that which is hidden.

The cumulative effect of micro-inequities at the level of the individual can damage self-esteem and lead to withdrawal (Brennan, 2013). As Rowe points out micro-inequities exert influence both by walling out the 'different' person, and by making the person of difference less effective (Rowe quoted in Brennan, 2013, p. 188). A common response to micro-inequities is to give alternative interpretations or explanations and wonder why the individual is so sensitive. Individual instances of micro-inequities may seem 'trivial', but their cumulative effects can account for large-scale differences in outcome (Wylie et al. 2007, quoted in Brennan, 2013). And herein lies the case for not viewing each act individually, but studying the aggregate effects and patterns that are relevant to understanding bias and discrimination. Micro-inequities do not tell us the whole story, but do play a significant compounding causal role. Rectifying them could go some way toward redressing the imbalance, being aware of them and acting to minimise effects (Brennan, 2013).

In addition to micro-inequities, the study of 'micropolitics' is relatedly important in analysing the silence and silencing of academic women. Power is a key aspect of professional relationships, which can be overt – for example, in decision-making – but also present in everyday communication that can 'confound and confuse and leave actors unsure of their readings' (Morley, 2016, p. 1). The study of micropolitics enables us to consider how power is relayed through 'seemingly trivial incidents and transactions' revealing the subtle and sophisticated manner in which dominance is achieved in organisations. The study of micropolitics also provides an explanation as to why legislation and

policies to eradicate discrimination are not wholly successful and achieve minimal impact (Morley, 2006).

Whilst the central theoretical standpoint of this article relates to micro-inequities and micro-politics, it is important to acknowledge the conceptual framework of 'micro-aggressions', a term first used by Pierce, et al. (1978) to describe racial discrimination. Scholars have extended the work on micro-aggressions beyond race, to gender, to capture the *range* of discriminatory behaviour, from the subtle to the overt, or explicit (Basford et. al., 2014). They emphasise the subtleties of sexism, rather than explicit acts of discrimination, sometimes referred to as 'microassaults' – deliberate acts with the intent of hurting or oppressing (Sue et. al., 2007 quoted in Basford et. al., 2014). As Basford comments 'many scholars fear that discrimination is not disappearing but rather has become more subtle in nature' (Basford, et. al., 2014, p. 340).

The presentation of this conceptual framework will be structured as follows. The following section, entitled 'The Silence of Socialisation: Constructing the Feminine', will present the concept of *internal* silencing in two parts. The next section entitled 'The Silencing of Academic Women' will present the concept of *external* silencing, again in two parts. The distinction made within the conceptual framework between 'internal' and 'external' silence/ing has been made to tease out the multifaceted ways in which academic women are both silent and silenced in the academy and why. Butler's theory of gender as performative has something to offer us in relation to this 'inner'/'outer' distinction (Butler, 1990). If gender is constituted through discourse that exceeds the individual, then in effect the 'outer' becomes the 'inner'. A series of illustrative quotations will guide the narrative and presentation of the overall conceptual framework.

The Silence of Socialisation: Constructing the Feminine

Part I: Internal silencing – the inner voice

In identifying barriers to women's careers in educational leadership a number of theories are posited, including what are conceptualised as 'internal barriers' (Cubillo and Brown, 2003) or 'missing agency' (Manfredi, et. al., 2014; Shepherd, 2017). These internal barriers or 'missing agency' manifest themselves in women in a variety of ways, such as a lack of confidence or a fear of failure. The recognition that women face 'internal' barriers does not imply a deficit discourse of women but rather acknowledges that such barriers arise as a consequence of socialisation and gender stereotyping (Cubillo and Brown, 2003). Academic women are certainly not immune to such stereotyping, as the following examples demonstrate. Our argument is as follows; this socialization (the 'outer'), this constraint on how women *should* behave, partly explains their silence in the academy, or indeed in any leadership role, because of 'masculine' traits/norms which are privileged. 'Missing agency' is not in itself a sufficient explanation for women's continued underrepresentation at the top of higher education. Shephard's (2017) study of the aspirations of women *already* in management positions indicates that women are no less ambitious in applying for senior leadership roles. However, our research shows that internal barriers can play a

significant role in women's sense of themselves as academics and as academic leaders.

In this first quotation, Rosie is reflecting on how women are not particularly good at saying no when asked to do something. The interviewee, originally from Asia (non-Chinese) had studied for her PhD and worked in the US in a post-doctoral position. She was the most senior woman in her department at the point she gained tenure:

> …But now that's a female personality thing right? I mean we could say no, we're not going to do it, but we don't, and I think that's partly, probably our fault…we're not assertive enough in saying 'I'm busy', right? So I don't think we protect our time very well…heads probably realise that…
> (Rosie, Professor, Social Sciences and Humanities)

Rosie makes reference to the 'female personality', women not being assertive enough and goes on to comment that women feel obliged to give explanations when they cannot do something which in turn sends out a 'sign', a signifier of 'difference'. She concludes 'We are almost conditioned into behaving in a particular way…' But a reluctance to speak up, to say no, has significant consequences as this interviewee went on to explain. For her personally, this resulted in service responsibilities, which she observed her male colleagues had not had to do, which in turn impacted on the allocation of time given to other aspects of her life, particularly her research and her family. The comment 'So I don't think we protect our time very well…heads probably realise that…' is an indication of how micro-inequities, in relation to workload, can occur.

Interviewees spoke of a number of ways in which social constructions of femininity led to internal silencing, which then in turn acted as a barrier to women considering themselves as academic leaders. Reflecting on the qualities required to be a leader, for example, risk-taking, Tiffany commented: 'So I think women are just more risk-aversive, again it goes back to socialization, girls are taught to be careful' (Tiffany, Professor, Social Sciences and Humanities). Lack of confidence was also evident from the following interviewee, originally from Hong Kong (Chinese) who had studied and worked in the same institution throughout her career. Pearl discussed at length her struggle in gaining promotion to full Professor:

> …but many women always feel, myself included and I've struggled a lot to, to overcome this… I'm not…good enough to be where I want to be, or to be in certain positions.
> (Pearl, Associate Professor, Social Sciences and Humanities)

This next quotation directly references the concept of women being silenced in discussing the underrepresentation of women as academic leaders. Joy (White, British) had studied in the UK and at the time of interviewee was in an Associate Dean position:

> I do wonder whether…there are personality issues involved, there are gender issues involved, *women are still taught to be quiet*, not to be aggressive.

(Joy, Associate Professor, Social Sciences and Humanities)

The effects of differential expectations – that is who will be a leader (= male) and who will not (= female) are also cumulative, and over time the differences become real (Brennan, 2013). Relatedly, Fotaki (2013) discusses how women's perception of themselves as inadequate frames the ways they speak and experience themselves as academics. It is also worth noting the invocation of 'personality' issues, which in itself individualizes the issue, rather than pointing to wider cultural gendered norms. Here Beck's theory of individualism is relevant. For Beck, individuals in post-industrial societies will be free from the constraining and social ordering of individual society and see themselves as the centre of their own biographies. Greater individualism, however, means greater individual risk, with inequalities remaining, but now the individual has to produce personal solutions to systemic contradictions. Taking on board Beck's thesis, we can see how academic women might well take responsibility for their positioning in the academy, and that the 'willingness' to do so brings another aspect to the constraints facing them (Aiston, 2011).

Part II: Internal silencing – Silence and Conformity as a Strategy

In Part I the internal silencing related to what could be considered as responding to an inner voice. In Part II the internal silencing relates to silence and conformity as an 'inner' strategy. Gendered societal cues guide our behavior and decisions on how to negotiate, in this instance, academic 'space'. Let us look at an example of what this silence looks like in the context of meetings:

> …and there's a lot of issues in our university with female faculty for whatever reasons *not opening their mouths and making their voices heard*, and I don't know if it's because they lack seniority, I don't know if it's because culturally they are women and they are supposed to be polite… is it a lack of confidence, is it, you know, these social norms? I don't know what it is but I think it's something that needs to be worked on.
> (Ada, Associate Professor, Social Sciences and Humanities)

Aside from providing a good example of what internal silencing looks like, this quotation also touches on another significant issue. Ada, originally from North America, places the onus of responsibility upon women speaking out. In the literature this is referred to as 'fixing' the women (Schiebinger, 1999); training for women should focus on building women's confidence and self-esteem and developing their assertiveness, competiveness and aversion to risk. A 'deficit' model of women is put forward, whereby women are positioned as being in need of development to gain the same (*prized*) attributes as men (Cubillo and Brown, 2003).

Grace, orginially from the US, provided a potential explanation as to *why* women remain silent in the context of meetings, and how internal silencing is adopted as a strategic approach. At the time of interview she reflected upon her own personal frustration in gaining promotion to full Professor. In the following quotation she recounts observing her newly-appointed junior female collegaue moderating her behaviour in meetings to gain favour with her male colleagues:

> she's not a mousy person, but *she is mousy with them because she wants their favour*, you know, and that I understand.
> (Grace, Associate Professor, Social Sciences and Humanities)

Here we might consider that 'women's silences should not be unproblematically read as indexical of passivity and powerlessness in social, linguistic encounters' (Luke, 1994, p.214). However, silence as strategic decision not to perform raises issues of democratization and inclusion. Women are being silenced by a belief in male intellectual and managerial superiority (Morley, 2006). And whilst we might acknowledge agency in this 'silence', it still leaves women conforming to masculine norms and power relations.

Our next two illustrative quotes demonstrate that even when faced with derogatory, sexist remarks, women's internal analysis still leads to silence as a strategy. To return to our theoretical framing and the subtleties of sexism we might observe in these instances more overt forms of micro-inequities in which women are positioned as 'different' (e.g. good at housekeeping or 'girly') (Rowe, 1990):

> …and then one of the professors I share lab with comes and says, "oh, clearly you see that it's a woman who organizes a lab, you are really better than us to do the organization and cleaning." *I did not say anything* because *I don't want to fight for that*, because I think this person … *I will never win*… I think I just said, no, it's not because I'm a woman…I like to clean the lab…
> (Claire, Assistant Professor, Sciences)

Claire, originally from Europe, had experience of working as an academic in North America, Japan and Europe. Here the metaphor of academic women being positioned as 'academic housekeepers' (Guarino and Borden, 2017) is literally applied in the comments made by this interviewee's senior male colleague. Claire did comment – informing her colleague that it was not because she's a woman that the lab is in good order – but the statements 'I did not say anything' and 'I don't want to fight for that' indicate that she did not challenge her colleague's gender stereotyping head on – she did not 'call out' this comment as sexist. There is the strategic recognition that there would have been little point illustrated by the comment 'I will never win'.

This next quotation again is an example of silence being a considered as a strategic approach:

> …my other colleague, she's applying for tenure…she gets a very very gender derogatory remark…she was commented on as too girly…if we're brave enough we really should organize a press conference and expose these things…but for younger colleagues, right, if you present your image as a troublemaker, who would want you?
> (Pearl, Associate Professor, Social Sciences and Humanities)

Speaking out, being 'brave', is articulated as a significant risk, particularly for younger/junior colleagues. To speak out, to challenge, in this instance

inappropriate comments in relation to tenure progression, is to expose oneself as a 'troublemaker'. Here we see an acute awareness of the potential dangers of being vocal:

> …too many vocal contestations by women can result in senior males shutting them out altogether. Since women's work largely remains under the control of men, women cannot afford to alienate those senior men (Luke, 1994, p.219)

Whilst Luke refers to senior men, it is important to acknowledge that senior women can also 'shut out' other women. Bagihole's discussion of the 'Queen Bee' Syndrome – involving women who avoid being identified with the minority and whom exhibit a strong commitment to a male model of the profession (Bagihole, 1994) – is particularly relevant. This tenure candidate was described as 'too girly', but women who attempt to make themselves more visible, compete on equal terms, who are self-confident and promote themselves, are then criticised as unfeminine. Women are caught in a double bind (Heward 1996). Women are damned if they do, damned if they do not.

The Silencing of Academic Women

Having considered the ways in which we might conceptualise the 'internal' silencing of academic women both as a result of socialization and the inner realization that silence might serve as strategic approach to career progression, this next section discusses the 'external' silencing of academic women.

Part I: External silencing – the consequences of speaking out

In Part I we will look at examples of the consequences for academic women when they do not remain silent. The first example illustrates how women who try to be heard are in turn silenced:

> ..as I said this promotion committee there are three women, four men, every time a woman tries to speak up, the men start jumping in and attacking, this is the type of atmosphere we have and unless something is done about it…
> (Rosie, Professor, Social Sciences and Humanities)

Implied in this observation is that women academics are neither able to fully express their view – 'the men start jumping in' - nor able to have their views fairly considered, let alone accepted. The atmosphere depicted is one of aggression, in a context – a promotions committee – where the stakes are high. This example also indicates that simply improving the ratio of men to women on committees does not necessarily bring about change. Here we might observe how unconscious bias leads to micro-inequities; subtle behaviours that signal someone is less important than others, affecting who we attend to and who we are happy to speak over (Athena Swan, Panelist Training). Rosie goes on to comment that a strong Chair is necessary to make sure that women are allowed to speak and not be silenced by their male colleagues.

> …unless you have a very strong head of committee who says 'No, it's not your turn, quiet, be quiet, let this person…', you know, you literally, it's like policing children, you have four boys who are very loud and naughty and you have three *quiet girls*…

And in this next quotation from Rosie, we see the cumulative effect of micro-inequities – 'very small things'. Here the effect is described as academic women 'checking out'.

> And so unless these types of *very small things*, that they are taken into account, women check out after a while because…
> (Rosie, Professor, Social Sciences and Humanities)

Rosie goes on to compare going into a meeting where women are not allowed to speak to going into a bar full of racists; 'would you go into a bar with a load of racists?'

Our next example describes the consequences of a female scientist speaking out. Alicia, orginally from China, had studied for her PhD in the US and also held a post-doctoral position there, before taking up her post in Hong Kong. Alicia had been given the responsibility of managing the lab. A disagreement arose between herself and a male colleague, who she describes as a white older man, in age but not seniority. The disagreement related to the correct use of a machine. Alicia had asked her colleague not to use the machine in the way he was, as it then made it difficult for others to use. He refused and Alicia asked her line manager to deal with the issue. She reports that the next day her colleague refused to help in the lab, and that the day after she arrived to a message on her desk:

> He wrote "You told on me, that's why I'm not going to help you"…I just thought it is very immature. And to me, it seemed like he probably would not do this if I was…a white male right? and I mean this is also based on other remarks "Oh, you're just the puppet", like "You don't have any power", it's almost because I'm a woman and I have more responsibility in the lab, he didn't feel happy about it and so he just would say or do certain things trying to put me down.
> (Alicia, Assistant Professor, Sciences**)**

This example moves along the continuum from a micro-inequity to an example of a micro-assault. The quotation also illustrates the 'credibility problem' women face when in positions of authority or leadership (Morley and Crossouard, 2016). Alicia further reflects on the consequences of not conforming to gender stereotypes and of not being silent. She recounts being closed down conversationally when she tries to speak and also reflects upon the positioning of confident academic woman as aggressive or 'bitches'. This further indicates why 'fixing' the women, as mentioned earlier in the article, is far from straight forward; when women exhibit 'masculine' characteristics they are demonised. As Luke notes:

> Feminine 'silence' and lack of voice have become the conceptual springboard on which 'empowerment' strategies for gaining a voice are scaffolded. However, the politics of 'granting' voice – that is, of clearing a discursive space so that women can speak in relative safety - are fraught with a number of potentially disabling political consequences (Luke, 1994, p. 218).

Further examples of women being silenced include Pearl, who spoke out critically in a public context and then received a telephone call telling her to '封口 ['seal your mouth' in Cantonese] (Pearl, Associate Professor, Social Sciences and Humanities). On speaking to her line manager about contract extension, Pearl was also informed it was unlikely she would be granted it, the reason given being '講得唔好聽 你就係篤眼篤鼻 ['Frankly speaking, you are such an eyesore' in Cantonese]. Here we can see examples of how micro-inequities exert their influence by 'walling out the "different" person' (Rowe, 1990, p. 156).

Silencing academic women can also be achieved by simply ignoring them and then attributing their ideas to male colleagues: 'Some other male colleague would say exactly the same thing and whole group will go 'Oh yeah, that's really good point' blah blah blah blah blah, and this happens to all of us, it's just ridiculous.' (Ella, Professor, Social Sciences and Humanities). Ella, originally from Asia (non-Chinese) with experience of working as an academic in the US and Australia, goes on to comment that she did not see the actions of her male colleagues as intentional, but raises an important point in relation to articulating micro-inequities:

> I think if you brought it up, it is very awkward because when you bring it up, you just seem petulant like you're saying 'I said that point before, why didn't everyone listen to me?'

In articulating micro-inequities, the recipient can be positioned as 'over sensitive', or alternative interpretations and explanations of the event can be given (Brennan, 2013).

Part II: External silencing – silence by exclusion

In Part II, we consider how academic women are externally silenced simply by exclusion. Micro-inequities are used to describe the pattern of being overlooked, underrepresented and devalued because of one's gender (Sue, et. al., 2007). This exclusion manifests itself in numerous ways and in being excluded, women almost become invisible. Claire, whose experiences we discussed earlier, refers to being in a minority and it is the absence of larger numbers of women that leads to this excluded status.

> …It becomes very difficult to really give examples of this, but it's more like a feeling. First, the numbers, because we are always in minority. And sometimes we are not included in the discussion, but is it because we are the junior one? Is it because we are women?

(Claire, Assistant Professor, Sciences)

In Uganda, the low representation of women – i.e., a lack of critical mass – was seen as a cause of women's silence (Morley, 2006). The beginning of this quotation hints at the illusive nature of micro-inequities in the comment 'difficult to really give examples…', 'it's more like a feeling'. In asking the question, is it because we are junior? Is it because we are women?, Claire goes on to answer her own question. She reflects on how her male colleagues go in and out of each other's offices and doors are closed and conversations had which she is excluded from. However, her husband, also a junior academic in the same department, is included.

As the above quotation illustrates, academic women are excluded from discussion and consultation. Similarly, Daisy, originally from the US who had studied for her PhD and worked as an academic in the US, observes how junior female staff were left out of conversations:

> …and of the senior faculty, one is female and two are male, the two senior male faculty run the department and they consult with the senior female and the junior male, they do not consult with the junior female…
> (Daisy, Professor, Social Sciences and Humanities)

And here we see an example of micro-politics and the subtle way power is relayed in the academy. This interviewee further commented on how she would have to leave her current university to pursue a leadership role elsewhere, describing her Head of School and Dean as 'sexist'.

Women not being represented on important decision-making committees and panels is a further of example of their silence by exclusion, as discussed by Wendy, orginally from Asia (Chinese), who had studied for her PhD and worked at the same university at the time of interview:

> …you know, most of these committees like whether it is research-related or it is about, well, distribution of money, I think most of them have male members, rather than have female members
> (Wendy, Assistant Professor, Social Sciences and Humanities)

> …if there is an international search the question, the key question to ask is 'How many people on the panel are women?', and that's an area where there needs to be some more work because there wasn't any.
> (Jennifer, Professor, Social Sciences and Humanities)

Linked to the above quotation, the absence of women on selection panels, brings us to another key point, namely the notion of selection panel (male) members appointing in their own image, or 'cloning', thereby excluding women from the game (Bagihole, 1993; Gronn and Lacey, 2006). Kate, with a PhD from the US and experience of working as an academic in the US, had held a number of leadership roles in the university, but commented that despite this she had had little involvement in policy decisions:

> ….the institution itself is highly patriarchal…you are going to…surround yourself with people who are like-mind, like-personality and have the same sort of agenda and so this just keeps perpetuating itself.
> (Kate, Professor, Social Sciences and Humanities)

As Rowe (1990) argues micro-inequities contribute much to the glass barriers:

> …it is the practical (not necessarily conscious) manifestation of the fact that senior managers want to choose people like themselves to succeed them, I believe that subtle discrimination is…the framework for discrimination against everyone who is obviously 'different' (Rowe, 1990, p. 154).

Concluding thoughts

This article advocates for a new conceptual dimension to our understanding of how and why women experience the academy differently. The notion of academic women being silent, and of being silenced, set within the theoretical framework of micro-inequities and micro-politics, suggests that the organisational culture of higher education continues to expect women to 'fit in'. Normative expectations of how women should act in turn opens up the 'space' for micro-inequities to be let in, with women struggling to negotiate how they *should* act. Paradoxically, women's silence is both an enabler and a barrier to their career progression.

But what to do? Encouraging women to speak up, to speak out, to be vocal is fraught with dangers, as this article has suggested, and arguably will not alter the culture of higher education. It is highly problematic to simply encourage women to 'lean in' as Jackson's (2017) work on the lean-in phenomenon and higher education also contends. There is a strong case to be made for taking micro-inequities far more seriously as advocates for greater equity in the academy. As noted earlier, despite legislation, policies and strategies – albeit not in all international contexts – there remain 'sticking points', whereby women are not reaching the most senior ranks, or leadership positions.

But how might we deal with tackling micro-inequities? Brennan (2013) has something to offer us. First, she cautions against taking steps to legislate, or even promote self-regulation, since micro-inequities can occur below the threshold of conscious decision-making. But it is appropriate within the workplace to raise awareness of the problem. She suggests the following ways forward: (1) changing some environmental factors that might be affecting our decision making; (2) mechanical solutions (for example, alternating genders on a speakers' list when chairing, rather than the chair having to examine their own motives and intentions about who they are calling on, or worrying about the effects of their actions); (3) Micro-affirmations, which are the opposite of micro-inequities, which include fair, specific, timely, consistent and clear feedback; (4) 'Bystanders' who can influence the workplace climate; 'bystanders can highlight positive acts that might otherwise be invisible or overlooked. They can redirect or de-escalate negative acts that might be problematic' (Brennan, 2013, p. 193). 'Active bystanders' can also challenge discriminatory behaviour.

We would also advocate that institutions provide an anonymous mechanism by which women academics can log micro-inequities. As has been discussed, recognising individual instances is very important, but equally reporting them as an individual is problematic. Mechanisms for women academics to anonymously report such incidents provide the opportunity for an institution to study the aggregate picture, and rather than singling out individual women, begin to look at how the academy silences academic women. 'Underpinning much of the understanding of micropolitics is the elusive sense that something is going on which cannot be satisfactorily named or described' (Morley 2016, p. 2). The conceptual framework of the silence/ing of academic women is a further move towards that which is difficult to name.

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