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BECOMING UNSTUCK: SYSTEMATIC ANALYSIS OF MID-CAREER FEMALES AND THE PHENOMENON OF BEING 'STUCK IN THE MIDDLE'.

Abstract:

This paper will draw on research that investigated the working environment and practices of mid-career female academics in order to critically explore the challenges and obstacles that may keep mid-career women 'stuck'. The paper focuses on mid-level female academics as this career space is where most female academics will reach the limits of their academic careers? But is this a chosen career delimiter or can it be explained further in the way that women engage with their working environment and enact their working practices? The paper seeks to critically explore these two questions by discussing how gendered organisations are structured and enacted from the perspective of mid-career female academics. Seventy four mid-career academics across three Australian universities participated in a study of their workplace. The women responded to an extensive survey which asked questions about their leadership ambitions, networking, working environments and workplace practices. The paper will report on a section of the survey in which they were asked to identify obstacles to their career progress. The analysis of their answers is framed on a structure and agency analysis (Archer, 2000, Vongalis-Macrow, 2007) because this well rounded organisational theorizing allows for a understanding of both structural constraints and how actions interact with structures to reproduce constraints or create challenges when new actions are required. The prevalence of both structural constraints and actor obstacles suggests that in order to create change in gendered organisation, actions need to address both 'people and parts' of any organisation.

Keywords:

women, leadership, organisational change