

Diversity in Modern Society
Making Inclusion a Central Strategy in Our Universities

Panel - The Three SMILE Pillars Singularity and Intersectionality Pillar 2 – Women in Leadership



ESTER COIS – UNIVERSITY OF CAGLIARI, ITALY



Dipartimento di Scienze politiche e sociali

UniCa - Università degli Studi di Cagliari

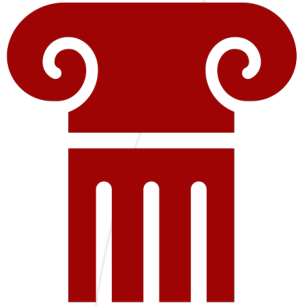


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The **Second Pillar**

as one of the main areas of inequality and disadvantage in higher education



Women leadership in HE
with a focus on
diversity management

- ✓ Addresses the need to foster **equal access to leadership positions.**
- ✓ It focusses on the need **to train university staff** (both academic and non-academic) but also on the need to address the topic with students and alumni.



Smile **The wider context of gender-based inequality in Higher Education**

Gender is situated as part of **enduring and deeply embedded inequalities in access and participation to leadership positions in higher education, intersecting** with other areas of inequalities including class, ethnicity, age and disability.

The **gendered experience** in higher education has been grounded in a **longstanding culture of carelessness in education**, emerging from Cartesian rationalism and Western scientific knowledge that has been exacerbated by the rise of neoliberalism in an increasingly volatile context of global capitalism.

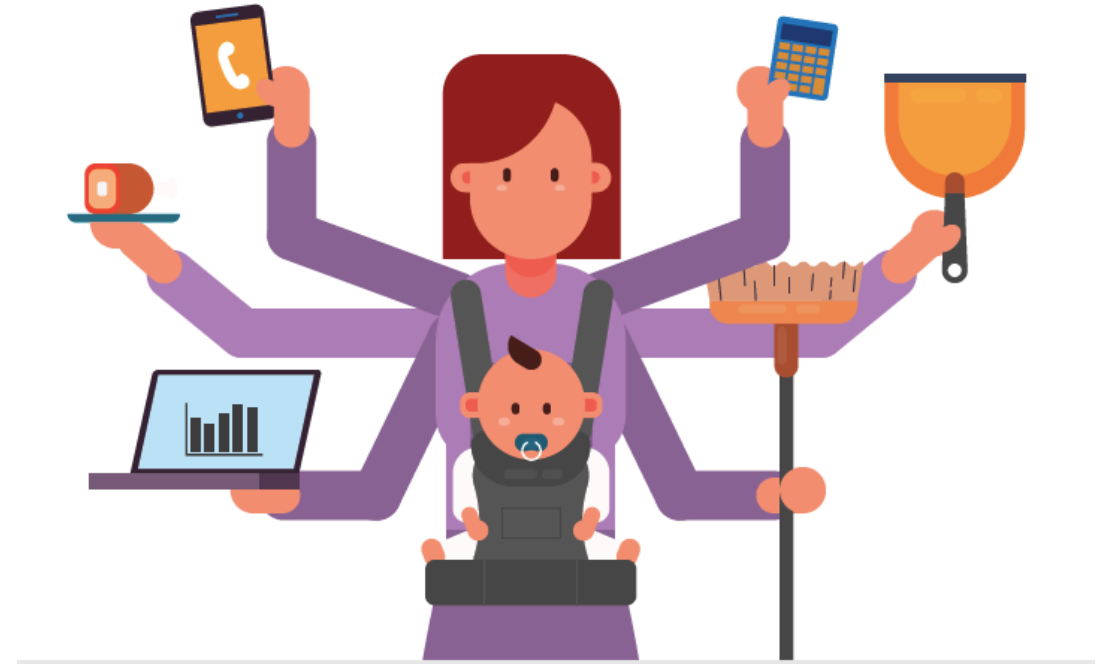
Patriarchy and capitalism are interdependent and the 'lean in' politics of liberal feminism can obscure the ongoing inequalities that many women experience.



Smile The wider context of gender-based inequality in Higher Education

More women head up **homeless families** across Europe (Mayock & Bretherton, 2015), more women have become **unemployed because of Covid19** (Zarrilli & Luomaranta, 2021) and a shadow pandemic of **gender-based violence** is now well documented.

Since the onset of the Covid19 pandemic, many women in academia have been lumbered with **disproportionate levels of the 'housekeeping of the university'** (Fitzsimons and O'Neill, 2021).

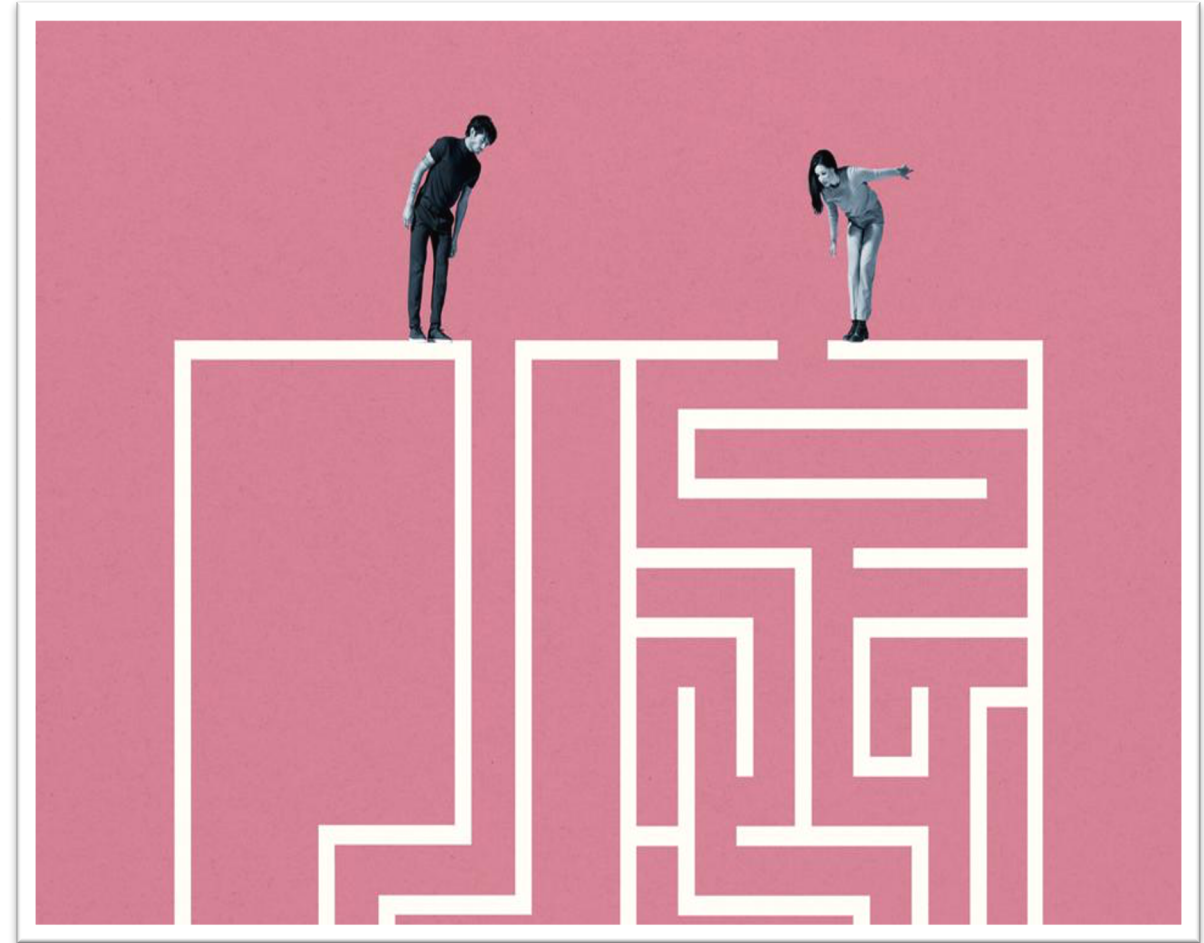


Smile A Systemic, Intersectional and Comparative Perspective

But beyond the contingent emergency, a **long-term analysis** can offer a deeply stable and **deep-rooted overview of gender inequalities in leadership in higher education.**

Three **intense years of dialogue, consultation, exchange and comparison** within the SMILE Consortium and in particular, as regards this pillar, among three partner institutions:

- **University of Cagliari (Italy)**
- **Applied Social Research Agency NOTUS (Spain)**
- **Maynooth University (Republic of Ireland)**



Smile A Systemic, Intersectional and Comparative Perspective

Some (not so surprising) findings

- The deep structural aspects of gendered experiences are deeply connected to **care issues**: those doing care work in our society are ascribed a **lower status, lower pay with more precarious working conditions**.
- This is increasingly evident in a **casualised labour market** where conditions of employment for educators and graduates are becoming **increasingly precarious**.
- Given the predominance of women in caring professions including education and the **moral imperative on women to do care work**, women face unique challenges combining their professional role and personal lives.



Smile A Systemic, Intersectional and Comparative Perspective

Some (not so surprising) findings

- For women in higher education especially at **senior levels**, “the **ideal worker** continues to be seen as one with no interests or responsibilities outside of work” which profoundly disadvantages women.
- Moreover, **academic institutions** have been found to be **‘greedy’** in terms of the level of commitment, work productivity and emotional engagement that they expect of employees.
- This is often placed in a ‘care-less’ frame, driven by **individualism and 24-7 availability for work.**



Smile A Systemic, Intersectional and Comparative Perspective

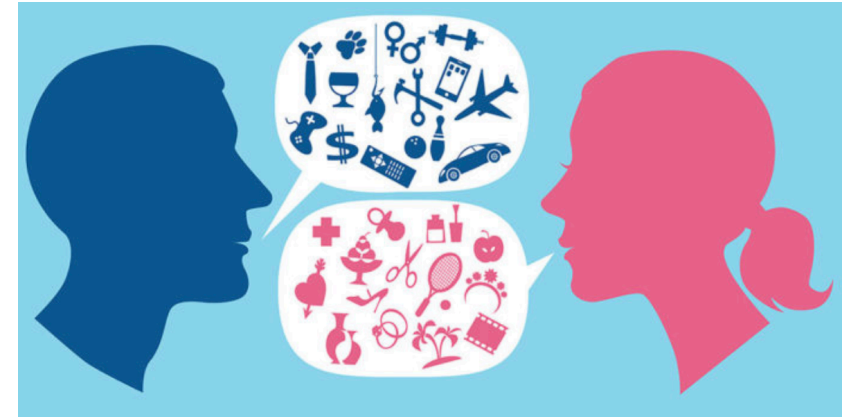
Some (not so surprising) findings

- More women tend to undertake both paid work and unpaid caring “acting as care’s foot soldiers while men are care commanders” and many women take temporary posts to accommodate their caring roles, which means they do the lower status day-to-day work of departments; **work that is often not visible and receives little career recognition.**
- Female education leaders described how they felt that their childcare responsibilities had to **remain invisible in their career**; leading them to try to compete equally with those who had no caring responsibilities.
- These expectations surrounding career paths and the denigration of care and gender also intersect with a complex range of **other cultural and structural factors**, including **self-confidence** creating powerful disincentives for females.



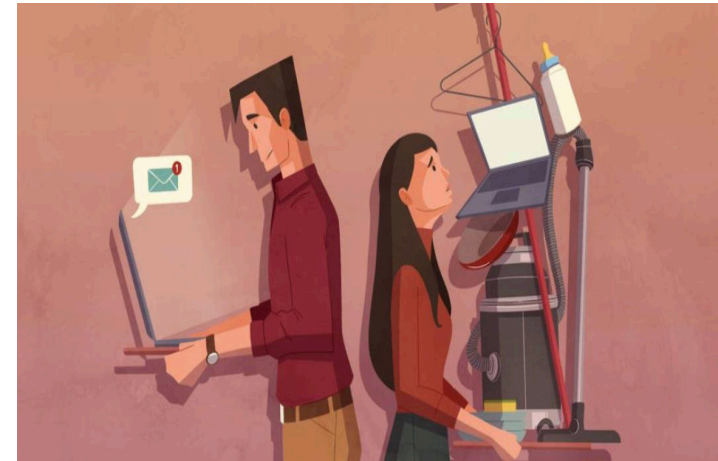
Smile So, What happens inside and outside HE Environments?

- Persistent **Gender Biases and Stereotypes** linked to moral careers
- Tendency to confirm **horizontal and vertical gender segregation**
- The need for women to **constantly demonstrate** that they are "**the best**" in order to even be able to compete for a promotion



Smile So, What happens inside and outside HE Environments?

- The measures to support the **balance between private care responsibilities and professional tasks** are too limited, or targeted only at women
- Women are more often forced into **dilemmas of choice**, which involve even long breaks, and continuous stop and go or stop and that's it (e.g. renounce investing in fellowship abroad to improve their professional profile)



A Biographical and Embedded Perspective: from structures to actors and viceversa

- Very **complicated stories**, full of sacrifices, difficult choices, moments of discouragement, but also of **key figures** who played as role models, e.g. a particularly far-sighted and supportive teacher
- Huge investment in **self-esteem**, despite the frequent sense of isolation



A Biographical and Embedded Perspective: from structures to actors and viceversa

- Strategic ability to **manage the resistances** perceived by both men and women when the top position has been reached by a woman, especially in case of a young woman.
- Investment in **personal reputation rather than authority**, based on merit and an assertive but empathetic, non-aggressive management style



A Biographical and Embedded Perspective: from structures to actors and viceversa

- Frequently women who reach a top position in HE should feel a sort of **«moral constraint»**, that is a sense of responsibility towards all women still weaker than men in their career paths, using their decision-making power to **undermine the system from within**
- Initial rejection of the idea of **pink quotas as a ghetto and a shameful privilege**, then replaced by the understanding of the need for these **positive actions** at least for the mechanisms of access and evaluation in the academy



Smile **Macro-Challenges & Micro-Strategies: Some Proposals**

Urgent Need for **effective and evidence-based strategies** to give greater visibility and positive examples to women in HE, such as:

- Specific **leadership training programs** starting from the first year of university, during the PhD courses and in the early stages of their academic careers
- **Peer-to-peer coaching-and mentoring sessions** with women already in top positions
- National and international **networking/alliances**



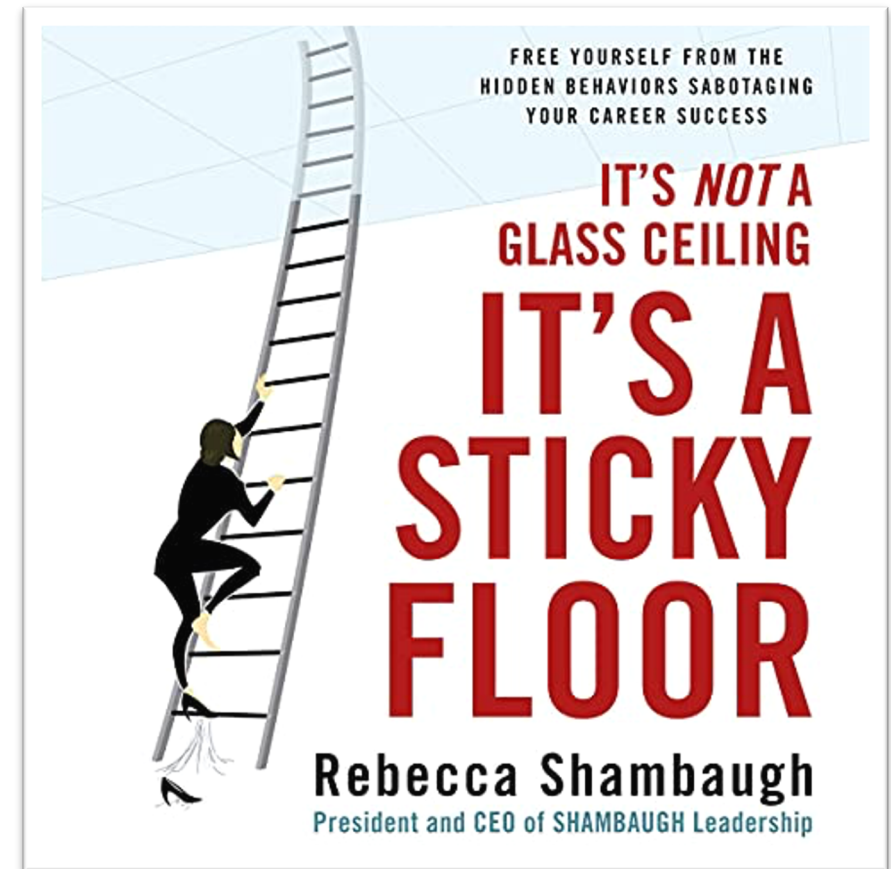
Smile **Macro-Challenges & Micro-Strategies: Some Proposals**

- To understand gender inequality in academia and design efficient gender equality plans, it is important to **collect the proper data**, constantly **re-examining** it together with the newest qualitative scientific knowledge.
- **Mere statistics without this reflective approach** do not allow for a real understanding of the state of play in institutional power relations.
- Nor do they inform us about **the sustainability of the measures** taken for concrete women in power positions.



Smile Macro-Challenges & Micro-Strategies: Some Proposals

- Furthermore, quotas implemented without any other measures and in a context with a low ratio of women in the institution, can often lead to the **so-called double burden of women** because of the failure to implement the necessary additional support.
- Moreover, if women remain in the minority at senior level, their workload can be increased as the same women must sit on different governance structures therefore **overburdening** them.



Smile **Macro-Challenges & Micro-Strategies: Some Proposals**

- **Care responsibilities** are a core factor at every level: entry and especially re-entry to the workforce, the challenges of day-to-day work, and the interruption to a smooth career trajectory.
- There is also a sense, particularly from those already in leadership roles, that there is work to be done in terms of **how women in the workforce are perceived** on a day-to-day basis with many gendered characteristics prevalent and embodied through their treatment by others.



Smile Macro-Challenges & Micro-Strategies: Some Proposals

So, who needs training?

- Maybe women holding post-graduate qualifications are not the ones who need training, which should rather be directed to **HR** in the first instance but also to **male colleagues** who might be encouraged to contemplate how they embody male privilege in particular.
- These are the factors that must be addressed in a **continuous professional development process** that helps build the capacity of women but that appreciates the wider contextual features at play.



Smile **Macro-Challenges & Micro-Strategies: Some Proposals**

It must also be informed by a **pedagogic philosophy** that draws from the following principles:

- A rootedness in **equality, justice and empowerment**
- A **needs-based approach** that is driven by the lived experience of women at the centre of the phenomena
- A **facilitative, participatory** process.
 - That promotes **critical thinking**.
 - That offers a social analysis of the **socially constructed nature of gender** and other intersectional features.
 - That focuses on **relationships building**.



And this is the contribution of SMILE Project on Pillar 2



Diversity Audit Tool

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To support universities in self-reflecting and assessing their commitment to diversity and social inclusion. The tool has been tested and continuously improved through a peer audit process that involved a total of 20 universities

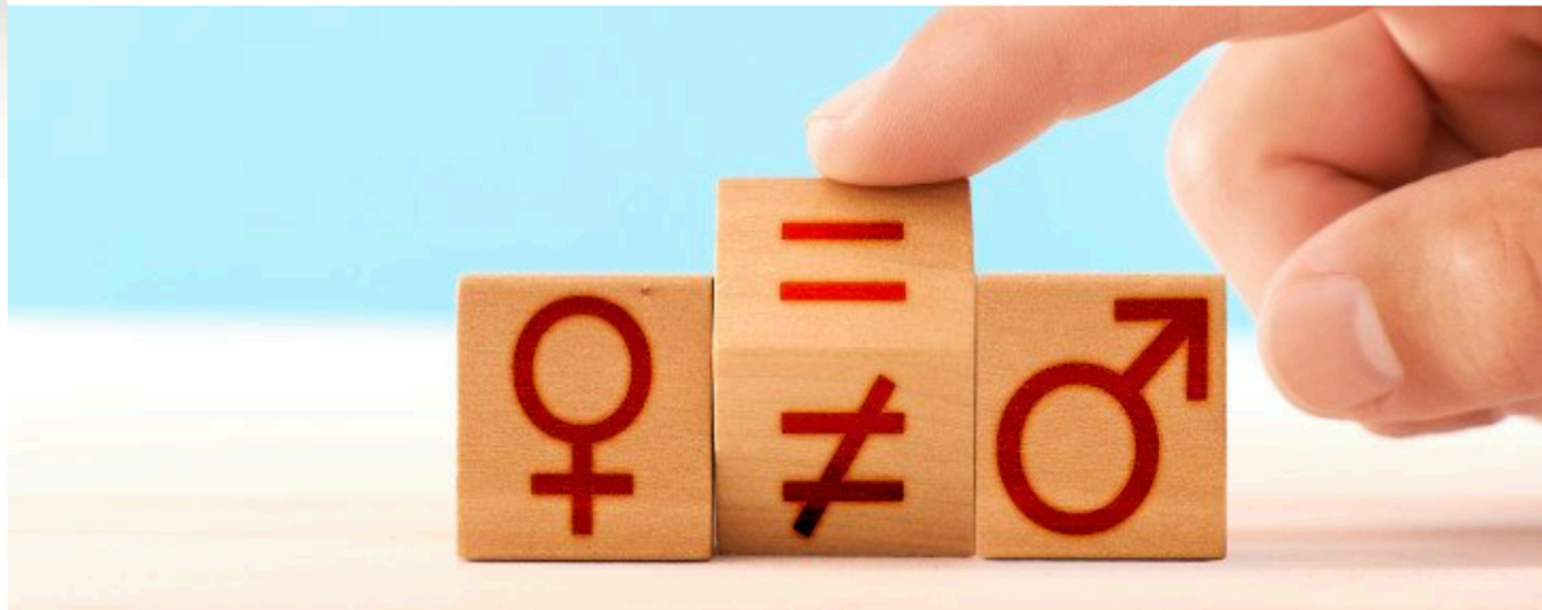
A CPD Course

Titled «The Glass Ceiling ain't broken», is addressed to university staff, developed and tested via a bottom-up approach (involving role models, representatives of indirect beneficiaries, NGOs and community groups) with the aim to give voice to the extensive experience of professionals, volunteers, parents, in addition to current and potential learners.

Policy operational action plan

Based on the perspectives and experiences collected during the project, to serve as a guide to support universities fulfilling their commitment to diversity and social inclusion and targeted to three different types of stakeholders: HEI top management, Policy Makers and Civil Society

Ester Cois ester.cois@unica.it



THANKS A LOT FOR YOUR ATTENTION!