

My topic is 'Whose job is it anyway?'

I am asking "Whose job is it to 'fix' the gender 'problem'?"

I present this through my own personal lens of a woman working in a male-dominated field (Physics). And for reference, about ~13% of the academics on continuing positions here at ANU are women.

But before I get into the tougher bits of this talk I really want to emphasise that I really feel that positive change is in the air, that change is happening and that change is possible.

This year has seen the #MeToo and #timesup movement and the release of the 'Change The Course' report on sexual assault and sexual harassment at Australian universities. At ANU and at universities all over Australia the [SAGE](#) process is well and truly up running and data in this area is being collected. ([Science in Australia Gender Equity](#))

And indeed we have also heard some positive changes announced in this space this morning by our VC.

So I feel generally positive – change can happen and is happening. We can make our spaces and fields safe, welcoming and supportive for women.

But who is coaxing the conversations, driving the change, making the recommendations, enforcing the guidelines, condemning the problems, and collecting the data?

Whose job is that anyway?

So I want to share briefly how I *feel* working in the area of gender equity and provide a quick insight into especially the emotional labor, associated with this.

When I ask "whose job is it?" this is a very real question regarding the obvious labor and time required to organize networking lunches, chairing and attending meetings. Collecting and presenting data. Taking notes,

preparing recommendations, writing guidelines and participating in mentoring programs. This is all time-consuming work and frankly it's not clear who should be doing this. We are most definitely under-resourced in this area but at least these jobs can be seen, appreciated and valued.

What I want to also highlight is the largely unseen emotional labor which is often carried out by women working in this area.

This is the sense that because you are a women in say, engineering, you are somehow responsibly for the gender problem. The logic goes something like this.

We have a problem with women in engineering. You are a woman in engineering. Therefore this has something to do with you. And perhaps you should work to fix this problem.

Of course that's mad when you put it like that but that is essentially how it is.

And as someone who has a known 'out-there' passion for equity issues I often wonder if there is any escape from this for me now. I imagine what it would be like if I could stop thinking about this and only think about the science, how much more productive I could be. But now I'm so sensitized to seeing inequities I see them without wanting to. When I glance at a list of speakers I calculate the gender balance almost without thinking. Ditto at a meeting. And if it turns out I am the only women in the room or if the workshop has only 15% women speakers, my heart starts to pound and I feel angry and stressed – what do I do?

Do I call it out? Can I go through making another fuss? How many emails will it add to my inbox this time? Can I be 'that person' again? Causing work for everyone? Burning my personal relationships at work both with the professional and academic staff. How much capacity do I have to cope with the enviable barrage of emails explaining they asked a few women but they were busy and it's very hard? Can I cope today with having the issues explained to me yet again afterward in the tea-room by some man who has decided to think about the issue for the last few mins 'using a

logical non-emotive thought process'. Explain how they read a paper on it. Explain that they have a wife so they know. Have a daughter so they get it. Have a someone explain to me that it's just not fair to ask the women as they are so busy. (How about we let them decide?!) Try not to swear. Bite my lip. Take a breath. Write but not send the email. Turn off the emails – go for a walk and drink more coffee. Neglect my students. Ignore the review that is due. Feel bad about it but not be able to concentrate because I am stressed wondering that will happen next.

I am not alone in this. I have dear friends and colleagues, wonderful women and some wonderful men, who get it too and together we share the load. We share angry swear-y conversations on the footpath. Occasionally cry the angry tears of frustration when we feel let down. Share the fact that we look at the job websites and wonder if this is sustainable. Buy each other yet more coffee and chocolate and listen to the latest story. Worry we aren't doing enough. Feeling bad and somehow responsible that progress is so slow. Confess we said yes to another 'thing'. Worry that we didn't do last year's thing well.

Worry and think about it all a lot.

So you can ask whose job it is to do the work, but think about who is carrying the emotional labor associated with these changes as well. Who is calling out the problems? Whose job is that?

When asked about my job I generally say I am a physicist who studies stuff under pressure using diamonds. I don't say I work to drive cultural change around women working in the STEM fields. That's because that's not really my job. Don't get me wrong. I am super keen and excited to do my bit to drive change in this area. I do feel truly honored to hold the position I do here at ANU and I love it most of the time. And I recognize that coming from middle-class anglo upbringing and being an able-bodied, cis-gendered white women, I am way more privileged and empowered than many. And I know that with that privilege comes responsibility to make the world a better place for everyone.

So whose job is it? Well the obvious answer is that it is everyone's job. And yes this is not ideal as if its everyone's job, so the saying goes, then it is no-one's job. But that is what we have and we need to all do our bit.

Everyone can ask questions about what the gender balance of an event before accepting a speaking invitation or push back when it's not ok. Every one of us can do just one thing per year to #PressForProgress. In fact I take this opportunity to challenge everyone here to do just one in this space this coming year. What to do? Google it! There are lists! And if you are a manager, a leader, a Dean, a Director, a DVC or even a VC, then as you already know you have an added obligation in this space too.

We all need to #PressforProgress through the resistance towards real change in this area.

Baby-step by baby-step.

Thank-you.