

GLOBAL: Women's progress: More action needed

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After her presidential campaign, Hillary Clinton (pictured) commented that 18 million votes in the primaries equated to 18 million cracks in the glass ceiling. Maybe, but at the same time that the cracks are being made, there are still people seeking to patch them up.

Recently there have been a number of articles in the British and US media about the increase of "female power" in the workplace. The discussion tends to centre around, on the one hand, the need for educated women in the workplace, and, on the other, the consequences of such developments for society and individuals.

The articles tend to give a very rosy view of the current position of educated women in richer western countries and also avoid discussing the global situation of women, particularly women suffering under oppressive governments.

What is surprising is that the burden of change is placed solely on women. Men and male roles are treated as a constant. It is women who have changed so it is their job to solve the problems, it appears. But why should women have to shoulder all this guilt about social change?

Where do female academics fit into this discussion? Let's look at the situation in Finland. According to European statistics, Finland is in top place in the table on "Women and men in senior university posts" with over 35% of women in senior university posts, followed by Sweden and Spain. The EU average is around 26%.

The **table** suggests everything is looking good and we can sit back and wait for equality to come. However, if you look at a different graph, at the proportion of women among new university students, of holders of higher university degrees and of university teaching staff in Finland in 1997 and 2007, the picture changes.

There are more female students in HE to begin with, but a clear male dominance in the senior academic posts over time. What has changed over the last ten years is the point where the female and male graphs cross. Women now obtain about half of all doctoral degrees in Finland.

In terms of salary levels, a woman's euro is, on average, worth 81 cents in Finland (according to 2007 statistics). By 2015, the aim is to reduce that difference by 15% and increase the worth of a woman's euro to 85 cents, but most people believe this target will not be reached.

It is therefore even more important to reveal the bluff that lies behind statements such as "poor men, they have no say any more", "women have already taken over", "we no longer need to invest in equality" and "now the focus should shift to the marginalisation of men".

The external glass ceiling still exists, but there is also an internal glass ceiling, a ceiling that women construct through absorbing the values surrounding them at home, school and work.

We should ask ourselves why we train girls to feel insecure and boys to feel secure. Why do we tell girls what they are not supposed to do and boys that they are supposed to push their limits? Why do we condition girls to be conformist and obedient if later on this is a drawback for their careers? Why do we think that networking on moose hunts is so much more important than doing it through making fruit preserves together? Why do we admire a work culture that promotes working overtime? Could globalisation mean joint responsibility instead of fierce competition?

Marginalisation starts early and we are not necessarily conscious of the internal glass ceilings that we are allowing to build in our minds. We should therefore empower girls from the beginning to grow into self-confident adults. And we should not stop doing this when girls have entered university and embarked on their studies. Biology starts playing its role and priorities change at that stage.

Young mothers should be told that that they can both be parents and pursue their studies and ambitions. It is the senior academics' (both female and male) duty to prevent young female academics from constructing their internal glass ceilings which prevent them from feeling equal in the academic world.

We need both genders to work towards equality, but, nevertheless, I think that senior female academics have a greater responsibility than their male counterparts. Men rarely notice that there is anything wrong in the group pictures of world leaders, award winners or leading academics that consist predominantly of males. Can we blame them? I don't think so. Instead, we can make them aware of the situation.

It is very important that we make a thorough analysis of the stereotypes and default attitudes with

which we burden the younger generation of academics, both female and male. We need to know which attitudes to unload from the new generations and start at the preschool stage.

Universities are workplaces that few people want to lead and where even fewer want to be led. Women university rectors or presidents do not have wives to support them, but they can do a good job nevertheless. It takes both genders to promote equality in academia and positive action is needed.

Good practice that has worked in different contexts includes diagnosing the obstacles that impede women rising to top positions in universities, collecting reliable data, developing female networks and support structures for potential leaders, developing legislation and implementing it and including men in discussions about the reasons for inequality in the workplace. Men need to realise that they are an equal part of the problem and an equal part of its solution. Single gender leadership does not lead to sustainable development.

So let's stop patching up the cracks in the glass ceiling. We can break through the glass ceiling by encouraging girls and women to accept responsibility for their lives, by challenging stereotypical attitudes, by mentoring younger colleagues and creating supportive networks at an early stage and by being alert when new leadership structures are being introduced.

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