Equality, Diversity and Inclusion conference, Nicosia, Cyprus, July 2016

Title: *‘Playing it right? Greek women’s embodied performances of gender, respectability and legitimacy in higher education’*

**Background:** Feminist scholarship has exposed how men use respectability to ‘other’ women and exclude them from the public realm (Skeggs, 1997; Haram, 2004). Research on gender and professions has demonstrated context specific elements of female respectability and workplace acceptability (Fischer, 2013). There is however, limited literature on the respectability projects of academic women, particularly in non-British contexts. In thispaper I examine the discourses and embodied practices associated with gendered respectability in Greek medical schools and I argue that Greek academic women’s efforts to generate respectable professional femininities is a strategy to assert their legitimate belonging in a high masculinised profession-academic medicine (Tsouroufli, 2012; Tsouroufli at al. 2011).

**Methodology:** This paper draws on semi-structured interviews about the career narratives of 15 women in Greek Medical Schools. The study employed a narrative approach with a diverse sample of academic women to explore how professional identity and academic professionalism are negotiated in academic medicine. In this paperI use discourse and content analysis to explore the gendered positioning of Greek academic women that relate to the contingencies of participation and recognition in specific domains and settings (Noble, 2009).

**Findings:** Greek women’s accounts oscillated from constructions of academic medicine as a de-gendered profession to compelling notions of lack of entitlement of their participation and advancement in it. To resist exclusion in academic medicine women employed a number of embodied strategies, such as managing the aesthetics of dress in line with the gendered culture of different clinical specialities; desexualised demeanour; ‘acceptable’ ways of speaking in meetings; avoiding conflict particularly with male colleagues; working harder than men; and performing emotional work with medical students. Although these highly gendered performative acts were scripted along the lines of heteronormative and patriarchal (Bulter, 1990; Guano, 2007) norms, and the class capital of academic women, they did after all enable them to resist their marginalised position. I argue that *‘playing it right’* in gendered academic contexts is a complex and sophisticated process for Greek women that requires both resistance and consent.

**Theoretical/Practical Implications:** This paper contributes to knowledge about the performative politics of gender, competency, and legitimacy in academic spaces and raises awareness about the agency of women in patriarchal work contexts.

**Originality/Value:** Attention to the respectability and legitimacy projects of professional women can raise awareness about gendered inclusion in organisations.