Academic Identities Conference 2012

Professor Emerita Sandra Acker: Keynote address

Academic passion: Thoughts on careers, cultures, contrasts and change

This conference gives me the opportunity to look back on my forty-year career as an academic. While I use autobiography to frame my talk, the main focus is on four themes, signalled in my title, that typically emerge in the research I have done on academic identity, much of which also has a gender focus. My earliest preoccupation was 'career' and I wrote about careers of (women) postgraduates, teachers and academics in higher education, aiming for a conceptualization that was less of a ladder, more of an experience and sometimes an accident. My work on 'cultures' was typically on 'workplace cultures', the surroundings that influence our understandings of what is thinkable and possible in our work lives. In looking at 'contrasts', I am thinking of my own experiences developing an academic identity working in the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada, as well as the recurrent polarities in my research between those who succeed and those who struggle in the game of academe. 'Change' is a current preoccupation of writers on higher education who ask whether cutbacks and corporatization have drained the academic life of pleasure and autonomy. How can we retain our passion as academics? What research directions will add to what we know and where we might want to go in the future?