Original Research

"Playing Mother": Channeled Careers and the Construction of Gender in Academia

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Abstract

Gender discrimination in the academy globally is widely recognized in terms of faculty ranking and career progression rates. U.K. national data notes the lower research recognition of women scholars as well as gendered pay gaps. This article reports on a qualitative study of women academics across discipline groups at a British post-1992 corporate university. Focus group discussion findings suggest that gendered career pathways are implicated in hindering the career progression of women academics. Participants perceive themselves to be regularly channeled into feminized teaching and administrative roles considered to be less advantageous routes to progression than elite and masculinized research routes. This together with the affective intensity of academic tasks that perform as emotional labour in relation to pastoral care are critically examined as examples of both essential and essentialized roles, where key "mothering" duties and "housekeeping" academic roles are allocated primarily to women academics. However, although regarded as vital, gendered roles and tasks are insufficiently recognized and rewarded by the bureaucratic processes that exploit them for institutional ends.

Keywords

women academics, emotional labour, careers, gender, pay gap

Introduction

This article discusses selected findings from a qualitative study of women academics based in a modern, post-1992 corporate Higher Education Institutional (HEI) context in England. The study sought to examine experiential participant perceptions of the pursuit of academic careers within a widely recognized higher education (HE) context of gendered discrepancies.

The expansion of HE over the last four decades has seen increasing numbers of female students entering tertiary education across the world (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2014). In the United Kingdom, for example, females now outnumber males at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels (Higher Education Statistics Agency [HESA], 2013a). Although such progress is welcome, evidence of equality in access to education and gender inequalities within society, and specifically within the workplace, are yet to be eradicated. For instance, female graduates can expect to be paid less than their male counterparts (Elias & Purcell, 2013), and there is slow growth in the number of women in senior roles within HE (Morley, 2013), where in general male faculty members experience faster career progression and females members are less likely to experience academic advancement than male colleagues (Dickey Zakaib, 2011; Grove, 2013; Shen, 2013). Arguably, as well, women are entering HE in greater

numbers precisely during a time when the structures and funding, values, processes, social utility of education, and expectations of HE have altered considerably over the past two decades (Collini, 2012; David, 2015; Fureidi, 2017).

The institutional context of this particular study is such that there are roughly equal numbers of female to male academics; women are seriously underrepresented at both professoriate level and senior academic leadership positions, which in turn leads to significant discrepancies between male and female academic wages. This reflects the situation reported by the U.K. University and College Union (UCU; 2016) regarding a national 12.3% gender wage gap for the year 2014-2015, which is fractionally higher than the previous year. There is a pressing need to address these discrepancies with combined pressures from different directions, the most recent being government mandates for transparent reporting by all companies of gender pay gaps, including HEI. In addition, the pan-institutional Athena Swan agenda now demands renewed observation by HEI nationally. To

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clarify, the United Kingdom's Equality Charter Unit "Athena Swan" Awards previously focused on the advancement of women academics solely in the natural sciences, but the agenda now embraces other disciplines as well as wider equality issues. The crucial importance of Athena Swan for HEI, over and above the issues of equality and fair play, is that it is used as a benchmark standard, where failure to engage in diversity agendas can prevent institutions from successful competition for U.K. Research Council funds. Finally, there are the challenges of good performance in the U.K. Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise; this being a national 5-year, government-mandated assessment to sift research activity and quality among HEIs, with heavy financial implications for institutions. Follow-up analysis of the national 2014 REF selection raised serious questions concerning the low inclusion of women academics, as well as those from minority ethnic groups (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2015), which arose from the evidence that the publications of White, male colleagues were more likely to be selected for the REF across institutions, over other groups. Such decisions may carry weighty significance in terms of career advancement for individuals.

Introducing Women's Academic Network (WAN)

Participants for the study were drawn from the WAN, a women's academic support nexus at the study institution, and a key player in pushing forward an agenda of gendered diversity and equality. WAN was established in 2013 by female scholars at the institution, with a view to promoting scholarly women's professional profiles and to act as advocates for issues impacting upon women's career progression (Ashencaen Crabtree & Shiel, 2018). Although it has received support from the University Executive Team, WAN remains independent of the structures of the institutional body to carry out its identified remit. However, despite its somewhat precarious autonomy WAN's informal but widespread influence has been sought formally by the institution with a view toward improving its Athena Swan status, being the main academic body that speaks collectively for women academics and lobbies over their concerns.

A recent WAN survey of its circa 150 members established that the network is considered to be very important to women academics by helping to develop academic careers, together with advocacy and activism in the workplace. In 2014, an informal survey carried out by WAN noted that blocks to women's academic progression were a dominant area of staff discontent. This followed on from earlier institutional equality and diversity reports noting that a lack of role models was likely to be one of the many barriers hindering female academic progress (Ashencaen Crabtree & Shiel, 2018). The study discussed here was developed from WAN initiatives to examine how women academics experience their working lives and the issues that are viewed as both negatively and positively influencing their academic careers.

Literature Review

British women workers are gaining ground slowly but steadily in terms of waged work and career progression, owing largely to facilitative European Union (EU) and U.K. legislation (Pascall, 2012), although the EU Referendum in the United Kingdom has raised the specter of reduced workers' rights and other serious legislative disruption. However, in terms of the career trajectories of women in academia, international research reveals entrenched problems (North-Samardzic & Gregson, 2011).

Much of the research literature on the barriers women experience in academia generally has focused on traditionally masculine STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) subjects, where gender imbalances appear to be particularly acute in both the United States and the United Kingdom (Bhatia, Takayesu, Arbelaez, Peak, & Nadel, 2015; Carr, Gunn, Kapla, Raj, & Freund, 2015; Dickey Zakaib, 2011; Easterly & Ricard, 2011; Shen, 2013; Wright et al. 2003).

Yet, although in the United Kingdom there is a concentration of women academics in the disciplines of health, education, social sciences, and humanities, this does not suggest that gendered, career parity has been secured in these disciplines in terms of rank or pay (HESA, 2017). For instance, for the year 2014/2015, the U.K. HESA data report a total figure of 12,185 male (full) professors, compared with 3,690 female counterparts across all disciplines (Grove, 2015).

For British female academics, irrespective of academic discipline, it is argued that given the evidence of low inclusion of women academics in the REF, the balance of academic tasks is weighted toward teaching roles as the "new housework" (Grove, 2013), rather than more prestigious research roles. A corollary is that the gendered balance in academia means it is more likely that routine academic management and pastoral "mom's roles" may be primarily assigned to women (Eddy & Ward, 2015, p. 4). Hochschild's (1979, 2003, p. ix) concept of "emotional labour" illuminates the demands created by the feminization of pastoral support roles (Mariskind, 2014). Emotional labour involves the inducing or suppressing of feeling as an essential part of the role that holds the corporate machinery together, while asserting the human aspect that makes it palatable to primarily the consumer. As noted by Darby (2017), there is little written about emotional labour in academic institutions, yet owing to more conspicuous levels of emotional need among the student body, there has been a focus on the quality of pastoral support offered to students, with clear expectations of what support should look like and how it should be delivered (Seldon, 2016). Demands made upon the provider toward the student consumer of pastoral support make it likely that inducing a due sense of emotional concern may

need to be generated at times, particularly in working contexts where emotional support may feel unidirectional.

The increasing global corporatization of HEI, as argued by Berg and Seeber (2016), has seen the increasing commodification of tertiary education together with the reframing of the student as customer (Collini, 2012; Fureidi, 2017). This trend has gained particular traction among the "new," post-1992 universities, which have specialized in embracing the vocational, industry focused, mass student market (Blass, 2005), adopting a quasi-business model premised upon high and escalating student tuition fees. Thus, keeping the "customer" happy has never before been so important or, arguably, so difficult to achieve (Fureidi, 2017), along with the perception that students now nurture unrealistic expectations from academia (Nixon, Scullion, & Hearn, 2018).

In terms of commodification in the academy, the huge importance given to student evaluations, such as through the U.K. National Survey of Students (NSS), dictate the position of universities in league tables. Teaching performance indicators carry an even greater significance owing to the controversial and newly implemented U.K. "Teaching Excellence Framework," a controversial teaching version of the REF.

Emotional labour not only stokes the engines of academia, leading to greater efficiency, but also lubricates the encounters between the internal workings of HEI and the human experience. A direct example of this relates to teaching and pastoral care of students. Bartlett (2005, p. 196) discusses her teaching experiences where students pass value judgments on the moral worth of the author through their teaching evaluations, where to be "nice" is the culminating verdict of her effectiveness as a pedagogue. Commensurately, Guy and Newman (2004) refer to a mothering role in reference to student expectations of and their punitive judgments toward women academics as suppliers of emotional supportiveness—or otherwise as "bad mothers" in failing to provide the expected levels of nurturing. Given the higher rates of women at the lower ends of the academic hierarchy in the United Kingdom, including insecure contract work (HESA, 2013b), the observation of Tunguz (2016), writing from the United States, noting enhanced level of emotional labour in academics who are low in power (i.e., in insecure academic employment) is suggestive of gendered, affective exploitation.

Resisting less valorized, feminized academic roles suggests that the mentoring of female academics may be a crucial support mechanism, where as far back as 1997, Schor claimed that female academics with mentors publish more articles, feel more confident in their capabilities, and are more satisfied overall with their careers than those without mentors (Schor, 1997).

The wider question of an assumed gendered lack of confidence among women in terms of competent ego, performance, and competition is one recognized by Gill and Orgad (2017, p. 19) as implicit to a "confidence culture" focusing on women in the workplace, as well as in the domains of motherhood and intimate relationships. The confidence culture embraces positions such as the "lean-in" rhetoric of Sheryl Sandberg (2013), and overall masquerades as positive, feminist empowerment of women who are assumedly plagued by self-doubt. It is this, so the argument goes, that in relation to waged work cripples women's ability to meet male competition on equal terms. As Gill and Orgad (2017) note, the confidence culture argument provides a compelling and reassuring narrative of a gendered pathology that avoids addressing structural inequalities and institutional sexism.

Given this critique, insensitive mentorship of women academics could be in danger of being used as another disempowering tool of the confidence culture rhetoric that lays the blame for the scarcity of women in the upper hierarchies firmly on the shoulders of the individual. Meschitti, Lawton, and Smith (2017) argue that mentoring is a gray area, poorly defined, and where the research evidence of what constitutes good mentorship is contradictory. Yet, mentorship is generally viewed as a guide for initiates into the complex and often unstated rules of academia (Ali & Coate, 2013). Tailoring to individual circumstances is endorsed (Blood, Ullrich, Hirshfeld-Becker, Warfield, & Jean Emans, 2012), although gender and ethnic nonmatching may prove fruitful where privilege can be virtuously harnessed (Meschitti & Lawton Smith, 2017). The concept of feminist "co-mentoring" is a useful one, as described by McGuire and Reger (2003), being a means of deconstructing unhelpful hierarchies of power that are apparent between ranking, gender, and indeed discipline areas.

This study argues that gendered constructions are pervasively experienced in academia. Commensurately the concept of gender is an analytic vehicle building on the established foundation of a social construction (Butler, 1999; Charlebois, 2011; Wharton, 2012), relating in turn to the constitution of gender in the academy (Morley, 2013). The issue of labor in terms of waged work is replete with gendered connotations and practices. Findings in this article illuminate how these govern levels of academic engagement and achievement among women academics.

The research corpus highlights the so-called "male model of work" as conforming to a regime of total and uninterrupted commitment to employment (Pascall, 2012), which disadvantages women (Taşçı-Kaya, 2016). O'Connor (2015, p. 310) comments on the prevailing masculinized organizational culture that is "chilly" to academics on the margins. While Lindhardt and Bøttcher Berthelsen (2016) state how even in female-dominated disciplines, like nursing, a permanently employed, female professor with a full quiver of domestic commitments is a rarity owing to hierarchical, vertical gender segregation. In contrast, and writing from the Australian context, Probert (2005) does not take issue with the prevailing masculinized work ethos as such but argues that there is little evidence for gender discrimination in HEI policies; instead that career disadvantages relate to the individual choices of women scholars regarding domestic

commitments and the sharing of these in the home. Yet, boundaries between work/home spheres are often much more porous among professionals like academics, where computer technology aid institutional expectations for audited rapid responses to staff and student communiqués (Nippert-Eng, 1996). The home environment thereby becomes an extension of the working context regardless of personal commitments. Accordingly, Toffoletti and Starr (2016) explore the conundrum of a viable work–life balance in academia, commenting that their Australian participants believe that this is very unlikely to be achievable on the academic treadmill.

Regardless of Probert's point regarding the neutrality of HE policies, Heijstra, Thoroddur, and Gudbjörg (2015) consider the hard choices facing women in the Global North: between having an academic career or having children. Sallee (2013), in reference to the United States, notes the higher rates of male academics in cohabiting relationships with dependent children, compared with the numbers of single, childless women colleagues. Writing from Turkey, Taşçı-Kaya (2016) deplores the difficulties of managing the expectations of heavily bureaucratized academic roles and the demands of family life.

Thus, while there are improvements in terms of academic gender balance, inequities continue. Carr et al. (2015) note that subtle gender bias persists in handicapping women's opportunities for academic advancement. For instance, despite enlightened universal social benefits and "defamilization" (reducing the significance of the role of family to maintain a decent standing of living, through wage earning or welfare benefits), women academics in Iceland are still less likely to reach professorship at the same rate as male colleagues due to gender discrimination (Heijstra et al., 2015). Whereas Zhang (2010) reports higher stress levels among women academics in China compared with male counterparts, owing to perceived conflictual relationships, individual research productivity, and slow career progression.

Finally, across the picture, it would seem that women academics tempted to leave academia are those who enjoy significantly lower salaries and overall job satisfaction compared with others, and indicating that their original expectations of academia did not match their later experiences (Spivey et al., 2012).

Methodology

This qualitative study sought to explore the experiences of academic women drawn across the institution's faculties, via the WAN. The following three research questions were offered for investigation:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What barriers to progression do women academics within the institution experience during their careers?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How are the implications and impact of these perceived?
Research Question 3 (RQ3): How do participants identify positive solutions that might facilitate change based on these experiences?

The first two research questions were developed from a review of the research canon on gender inequities and women academics, in addition to intelligence derived from institutional and WAN staff surveys indicating gendered career dissatisfaction. The third research question was chosen to provide a counter-balance to a dominant rhetoric of gendered obstacles. All were designed to elicit a range of perceptions, opinions, and viewpoints from respondents (Krueger & Casey, 2009).

The scaffolding of these research question was underpinned by the following open-ended questions/topics for the interview protocol:

1. What kinds of career barriers have you experienced during your time at Bournemouth University as a woman academic?
2. What other gendered barriers have you become aware of in your academic career toward women academics?
3. What is the impact of these barriers in your opinion?
4. What kinds of ways forward would help to overcome or deal with gendered barriers at [study institution]?
5. What advice might you offer to other women facing gendered barriers in academia?

Focus group discussion (FGD) was chosen as the best approach to develop insights into participant experiences, opinions, and concerns (Kitzinger & Farquhar, 1999, p. 5). The FGD process is facilitative in allowing in-depth discussion of the topics to take place, where participant opinions are both formulated and refined by the group dialogue process (Seal, Bogart, & Ehrhardt, 1998), thus generating high quality data (Woodyatt, Finneran, & Stephenson, 2016).

FGD offers some particular advantages over individual interviews. This is described as the capacity to enable the co-construction of arguments and viewpoints within the group (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007) in which "meaning-generation" is the primary aim (Wilkinson, 1999, p. 67). This group co-construction exercise, albeit interpreted by the researcher, is a dynamic, interactive, and iterative process, in which much data are generated in a comparatively short time—an important consideration here in terms of academic pressures for both participants and researchers (Morgan, 1998). In addition, FGD methodology resonates particularly well with the aims of WAN as an activist collective of diverse members and accorded well with our feminist commitments to overturning hierarchies of power typified by the hierarchical researcher-subject polarity (Naples, 2003). Instead,

respondents were seen as operating within the ecology of a socio-political context, which we, as women researchers and moderators of the FGD, also inhabited and could relate to. Finally, and significantly, FGD has the power to raise consciousness within the group with transformatory and beneficial potential (Wilkinson, 1999).

The canvassing and facilitating of meaning needed to take place within a "safe" environment where people were likely to feel comfortable owing to shared commonalities with each other (Kitzinger, 1994). Membership of the WAN network for participants provided this level of security. Following Stewart et al. (2007), we took an interpretivist position, where meaning was viewed as a social construction (Butler, 1999; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002) but where data would include not only *what* was said but also *how* it was said (Bryman, 2016, p. 503). The latter was particularly noted in terms of "sensitive moments" (Kitzinger & Farquhar, 1999). These related to outbursts of emotion in the group, usually elicited by another participant's words; and where sudden self-awareness was expressed when another's story chimed with their own experiences or alternatively clanged discordantly. An example of a singular and discrepant view was an assertion made by one younger participant, working in a male-dominated science discipline, who stated that she had never experienced any institutional sexism during her career; this was greeted with much surprise by the other participants. Yet, while there were interesting variations of opinion offered and noted, it was also intriguing to see that there was an even greater degree of congruence among participants, where dialogue distilled around particular points and examples as raised by individuals, which were then discussed at length within the group moving the topic into rich areas of exploration. These significant areas would later be developed into analytical themes (Van Teijlingen & Pitchforth, 2006).

Method

Three FGDs involving 15 participants took place over a 4-month period in 2015. Invitations to participate were offered via WAN networks. To ensure all eligible female academics were reached, further invitations were issued via the institutional research community blog.

The all-female FGD groups were heterogeneous in terms of time of employment service and rank, where participants ranged from full professors to demonstrators (although the majority of participants occupied the lecturer/assistant professor career points commensurate with the organization's gendered hierarchy; Morley, 2013). Ethnicity and nationality equally varied, where White British participants formed only a small majority, as well as representation from other European backgrounds, Asia, the greater American continent, and the Australasia/Asia-Pacific rim. Unfortunately, no African Caribbean participants volunteered to be included in this particular study for reasons unknown, although their very low numbers institutionally were undoubtedly a factor in terms of selection.

There was further diversity in terms of mixed age groups: from young academics in their 30s to those approaching retirement, as well as in terms of personal care-giving status and sexual orientation, although this latter point was not one discussed in any depth. Participants were also drawn from a wide range of discipline areas, including the pure and interdisciplinary areas of the social sciences, media, humanities, public health, nursing, natural and conservation sciences, technology, sports sciences, business, and tourism.

Data Gathering and Analysis

Analysis was carried out using rigorous and established qualitative methods, where anonymized interviews were transcribed and the raw data then subjected to thematic coding in accordance with ethnographic methodology, where FGD forms part of the ethnographic toolkit of methods (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2010; Stewart et al., 2007). Themes were subject to both vertical and horizontal analysis, where approximately three layers of coding (from initial crude, working codes to the refined) created a vertical framework leading to thematic development. Finally, a horizontal analysis was used to compare the findings across the three FGD, leading to a meta-analysis of the "constructed career channels" and "constitution of gender." For the purposes of this article, the first meta-theme, the "constructed career channels," incorporates subthemes of "gendered careers" and "emotional labour," while the second meta-theme, the "constitution of gender, incorporates "masculinized work models," "initiation," and "playing the (male) game."

Ethical Considerations

Participation for the study was entirely voluntary and anonymous. Although the two researchers are active members within the WAN network, there was no attempt to coerce members to volunteer and where the recruitment of participants, organization of the groups, along with transcription was undertaken by a non-WAN research assistant. All normal university ethical safeguards were followed relating to confidentiality, right to withdrawal, data protection, and other such ethical stipulations as mandated by the university research ethics protocols, which were required for ethical approval.

It was anticipated that some participants could have found the FGD upsetting in terms of relating distressing personal experiences; however, appropriate emotional support had been set up prior to the discussions and was made available to any participant requiring such. Most participants expressed relief at being given the opportunity to discuss work stressors in a safe and confiding environment, among known WAN members.

This limited study and the self-selection of participants could be viewed as skewing findings in a group dynamic feedback loop of confirmation of negative experiences, which did not necessarily reflect the individual's views at the time or the general experience of women scholars at the institution. However, we would argue that the depth of feeling emanating from participants in the FGD were all the more palpable because concerns expressed were felt to be viewed as illegitimate within the institutional context and where corporate staff surveys did not adequately uncover or explore female staff concerns.

Furthermore, we contend that the predominant ethical issue related to not conducting such research, which we argued moved beyond the principle of doing "no harm" to actively promoting gender equality, and a fair and just academic environment that would benefit not only current academic staff but future staff and their students.

Finally, instead of anonymous signifiers attached to the narratives of participants, we have chosen to use fictional names in keeping with our feminist commitment to avoid the objectification of participants.

Findings

The FGD produced results rich in detail and where particular themes could be clearly identified. That said, Kitzinger (1994) notes, the power to prioritize, develop, and reframe topics are relinquished to the respondents in the FGD process. Commensurately, we noted that those interview topics (Topics 4-5) designed to address RQ3 were dismissed or generated weak responses across the three groups in favor of a strong focus on experiences and perceptions of a range of barriers and disadvantages that were construed as fundamentally gendered.

In this article, therefore, we examine the dominant interrelated themes, linked primarily to Topics 1 to 3, of the academic female scholar as occupying or being expected to occupy roles that conform to an essentialized feminized stereotype but which are simultaneously those that are operationally essential to the smooth running to a university embedded in a work culture often experienced as antithetical and inhospitable.

Gendered Career Journeys Through Academia

The career trajectories of the greatest majority of participants were felt to be integrally gendered from the outset, where novice academics, regardless of former careers, were propelled into certain channels of work, typically routine teaching and program administration. At the time, these were seen as potentially beneficial to establishing precarious careers in a competitive environment, but over time, they were viewed in a somewhat different light:

> I wish somebody had told me when I first started you've got to make the most of the early career researcher years, because that's the time it makes a real difference whether you are going to pursue a research career or be stuck in teaching and admin for the rest of your professional life. There's a certain slack that's cut when you are an early career researcher—and if that isn't respected—and it [comes] at a time of great uncertainty when you've just started out: "Oh my God, I've finally got there!" [Now] I look at others who were of my kind of era, in terms of PhD, and they are streets ahead and I've left it too late . . . I haven't the profile to be considered alongside anyone else who finished their PhD ten years ago, which was when I finished mine. [Despondent voice and slumped posture] So I'm just stuck treading water. (Cathy)

The female academic novice, striving for a permanent place in HE, by taking on routine "housekeeping" tasks, such as teaching (Grove, 2013), may, over time, find herself established on a less valorized career track that becomes increasingly hard to escape from. One such role is that of academic program administration, which is viewed as a vital and demanding role for the smooth running of teaching programs and where the incumbent is normally expected to carry out all the normal duties of academia (teaching and research), as well as to act as the first port of call for students, managers, administrators, other faculty colleagues, and, finally, their own teammates. Their duties institutionally are to interpret mandates from above (normally of a highly bureaucratic nature) and to attempt to ensure collegial compliance to these in their teams. Accordingly, assuming program administration role can be a heavy undertaking requiring careful negotiation and deep emotional reserves in treading a narrow path between interest groups of differing perspectives, duties, and agendas.

Depending on academic departments, the role can be viewed as either a burdensome duty that the incoming tyro may cut her teeth on or as one suitable only for more experienced academics. Often, it is framed as a good route to promotion, as Anna learned:

> Well, I'm a "Programme Leader"—I wanted to be a senior lecturer pretty quickly because I'd been teaching for a few years. I was trying to move to a better job really. I was told that it was only possible that I could become a Senior Lecturer in my department if I took on programme leadership. And you know, it's a leadership role and I can develop that side of my career and that's brilliant. But in the process what I have found is that it's now the biggest barrier to progression. (Anna)

However, once an academic starts down this administrative route, then it is all too easy to continue to be burdened with a continuation of similar roles that eclipse the scholarly profile with that of a bureaucrat. Cathy followed Anna's interjection to add,

> I've had similar experience. I've been here 8 years and I've had some administrative role in some capacity or other ever since I started here. Started out as a Programme Leader, then (Year)

Level Tutor, then Postgraduate Framework Leader. I would say exactly the same as "Anna," it's been the worst thing for my career development, ever! [Respondent looks very tense and then grins and shrugs angrily]. (Cathy)

The perceived gendering of academic tasks dictates the status attached to these roles, as well as to their incumbents, with due implications for career progression. Those tasks deemed feminized relate to matters directly affecting students such as teaching, program administration, and pastoral care. Emotional labour is a key attribute in the successful undertaking of these roles, as will be discussed further. In the channeling process, so-called "leadership" roles may seem to offer a promising step-up the career ladder but participants soon discovered that they were likely to constitute a cul-de-sąc from which one may notice with regret former peers now speeding onward and upward:

So literally, I am pigeon holed, my male colleagues were hired on the exact same day as me [and] are now further along in their research careers. They are now making more money than me, they, you know, are climbing that ladder and I'm now considered to be the "mother" of my degree, "why would we *ever* want to let you go?" Because I'm so good at it. And it is actually now an absolute nightmare. (Jenna)

HE is dependent upon the assumption of routine tasks, such as teaching and administration, where the notion of mothering-by-proxy, as suggested in "Jenna's" narrative, lies in relation to management of student needs demanding the feminized, so-called "soft" qualities of dutiful, self-sacrificing nurturance (Eddy & Ward, 2015; Tunguz, 2016). Women academics are likely to experience such assumptions, although they may also be applied to men displaying certain traits where, in keeping with Connell's (1995) theorization of masculine hegemony, such men occupy a subordinated status in the masculinized hierarchy:

We have a male colleague on a Senior Lecturer grade . . . he hasn't had the time to do any research because he's literally teaching 5 units (courses) or so . . . but I have to say he's not a typical male character. He's a very gentle character, says yes to everything. Nobody does him any favours, his own line manager doesn't. (Antonia)

If teaching is regarded as lowly, feminized work compared with masculinized and validated research roles, this does not imply that women academics feel compensated by a greater expertise in the classroom setting, but rather this can reinforce gendered stereotypes and academic hierarchies (Bartlett, 2005; Guy & Newman, 2004):

I find in the classroom actually, I think men have an easier time in establishing authority when you're teaching, in certain classes, than women do. We really need to, like, set our foot down there. (Helen)

In vocational and purely academic disciplines, the teaching work of the good "housewife" (Grove, 2013) was thought to be regularly shunned by highly ambitious academics (of both sexes) attempting to distance themselves as far as possible from the stigma of teaching:

And the guys don't do them (teaching administration). There are a lot of senior guys who've never developed a curriculum in their lives. (Roz)

Moreover, there was also a general suspicion among some participants that while good teaching is rewarded by yet more teaching, bad teaching is alternatively rewarded by a more rewarding sidestep:

What, I've noticed . . . is that all the women do the programme administration—and it's, you know, they're programme leaders, they're programme administrators . . . they've got all that kind of responsibility. Whereas the men, who are all on grade X (equivalent to the UK Principal Lecturer/US Associate Professor) make a "cock-up" of teaching and then basically they get to do research, so they get taken off. (Lucy)

The annual U.K. NSS can also feed into this damaging dynamic where it is likely that many reliable but lowly academics are simply too valuable placed where they are in the hierarchy to permit them to easily move onto career-enhancing pathways that will reduce their teaching load.

It could be argued that the teaching excellence framework (TEF) may serve to alter attitudes toward teaching as a Cinderella duty within a shifting HE landscape. However, given that this involves excavating and overturning a heavily entrenched *status quo*, an equally likely scenario is that this may deepen cleavages between research and teaching across HEI, leading to even greater gaps between those perceived as "teachers/educators" and "researchers."

Emotional Labour

The burdens of academic careers in addition to the quasi-mothering academic role connects with Hochschild's (1979, 2003) concept of emotional labour, along with the more recognizably common morbidities of parenthood in the form of anxiety and guilt. In this study, participants described the pressures of trying to rise to the heavy demands and expectations of women academics as being very arduous and demoralizing. The pastoral side of program administration as a continual frontline service for student issues and problems was regarded as particularly difficult to sustain:

It's strenuous when all the students come to me with their problems. So even when I do get space in my week to even contemplate doing research or working on the projects, I am so exhausted and drained, I just don't even have the head-space. So, yeah, that's me. (Trish)

Moreover, irrespective of role, an easy, automatic assumption was often made that a woman's input is of necessity more appropriate and more skilled than that of a male colleague:

> So there's an assumption that because we're women, well then by God, we can solve every problem and deal with every emotional outburst. I mean I actually have had a colleague, who's a Level Tutor and male—he has children, and came to me and said a female student had come to him to tell him that she was pregnant and was trying to weigh up her options and whether or not she should have an abortion or something like that. And he came to my office to let me know that he took her out of his office and sent her to me, because he just figured that I would be more . . . Because I'm a woman, because it would be easier for me to talk to her. And I was like, "I've never been pregnant! I don't have any kids. You have two. You know more than I do." But because I'm a woman, you know, it was an assumption. (Alex)

Apart from the obvious unfairness of such gendered assumptions, these generally serve to strengthen the belief that academic time, a precious commodity in itself, is of lesser value in relation to female colleagues than for men, and can therefore more easily be encroached upon While patriarchal calls to female colleagues to assume motherly duties in providing care for student "children" are regarded as no imposition but instead are assumed to be correctly attributed to women (Eddy & Ward, 2015; Hochschild, 2003).

Masculinized Work Cultures

The work context was generally regarded by participants as not overtly hostile to women, although some offered experiences that certainly could support such a view. As the following accounts demonstrate, it was regarded as basically incongruent to personal and professional values that may hold, such as the need for a balanced life, well-being toward all, including self, moderate tempos, and reasonable workloads. In general, participants believe these concerns were typical for the majority of female colleagues they knew but were views institutionally ignored or invalidated.

Initiation

The automatic provision of good mentoring as an effective form of initiation at an early stage of career development would suggest that such problems can be avoided in showing "new hands" how to work the ropes (Ali & Coate, 2013), which presumes an informed choice about career pathways made at the outset. However, mentoring of junior staff is by no means automatic or always helpful but where the significance of what good mentoring could have offered may only become apparent in retrospect:

> What I recognised is that when I joined the institution, there wasn't any mentoring or guidance, you were just left up to, you know, to work it out for yourselves. Which does seem to be changing a lot now, and I wish if somebody had told me when I first started, you've got to make the most of those early career researcher years, because that's time when it's kind of, make the real difference if you're going to pursue a research career, or be stuck in teaching and admin for the rest of your professional life. (Carole)

Commensurate with Blood et al.'s (2012) observation regarding mentoring, this needs to appropriate to the circumstances and position of the mentee. The importance of a complementary mentoring dyad is essential for support that goes beyond lip service. Clumsy pairing may result in an unhelpful advice that maintains the status quo in inculcating tyros into the established masculinized work culture regardless of their personal circumstances:

> I was mentored by a male in my faculty. I said it was really hard to find time to write and he said "well, I do my writing on Tuesday and Friday evenings." This was a few years ago and my kids were still both at home. We're expected to . . . you have to make choices as a woman, which I don't think men have to make. It's more of a cultural than institutional thing. But I've heard from so many male academics "I'll write at the weekend" and "I write in the evenings." And I think "oh great! That's not how people should be mentored and it's not a proper work-life balance either." (Rea)

The difficulties of being able to achieve an holistic life balance in HEI is recognized (Toffoletti & Starr, 2016), but the problems are compounded by the insidious belief that it is not reasonable to expect it at all, and therefore there is little encouragement given to develop accommodating work cultures. Such challenges to the accepted notion of total commitment to working lives (Pascall, 2012), in addition to inappropriate mentorship pairings, may be better addressed in feminist co-mentoring dyads (McGuire & Reger, 2003). On the contrary, a woman mentor is no guarantee that good career development is easily mastered:

> I have a colleague in another faculty who has taken me under her wing for the last couple of years. . . . She gives me advice and then sends me things "go apply for this. Do that" . . . And I never have time to do it and I feel I am letting her down in some way because she is putting this time and energy into me. (Abigail)

This quote rehearses a critique of the "confidence culture" as defined by Gill and Orgad (2017), where it is not a lack of confidence that holds Abigail back but literally the lack of time and space within the working context to pursue opportunities.

In addition, the differences in position between women in the institution can be as wide as their personal circumstances

dictate, and thus all mentorship needs to be viewed as contingent upon how far this satisfies both parties. This is to assume, however, that the institutional expectations of mentorship accept that rewarding and supportive collegial exchanges are relevant, facilitative, exploratory, and developmental to both parties, rather than authoritarian, unidirectional, and directive (McGuire & Reger, 2003).

Masculinized Work Models

Just as feminized, "soft" traits may be found among some men in HE as well as assumed of most women, some female academics will negotiate masculinized work models successfully; although the comparative rarity of women in the upper academic hierarchy suggests this is uncommon (Morley, 2013). Instead, career barriers occur commonly for academics with personal commitments (Lindhardt & Bøttcher Berthelsen, 2016), and this is an aspect that is most likely to affect women, owing to entrenched gender constructions in society. Yet, while flexible working in the academy may be accessed by all staff, this is offered under the prevailing culture of high pressure and productivity achievable only through long hours of highly concentrated work. That women's careers will consequently suffer under such working regimes is regarded as an obvious corollary:

> I think the reality is that women do carry the greater caring burdens in society. That is reality. And, so if the work life balance is not being addressed, then it's having a greater impact on women. And that is probably reflected in the number of women who are getting to the top, because our work life balance in the University is *toxic*, because we're all seen to be working all the time. And so, if you're not able to work all the time, you can't progress, can you? It makes sense. (Fran)

That such institutional expectations are not just as immensely difficult to meet and sustain over time but were also experienced as damaging and unreasonable is made apparent in both Fran's use of the word "toxic" and in Anna's following measured critique that follows on from Fran's comments:

> Yeah—but it's like, you know, people should be able to grow their own role and their own work, life balance, which works for them, and we shouldn't be saying that they should be working all the time in order to achieve that, when, you know, we need to recognise that people have other responsibilities. (Anna)

It could be argued, as Probert (2005) does, that it is the personal choices of women academics in the domestic sphere that carry an impact on their progress within the workplace. This, however, is to assume that such choices are largely neutral decisions and not influenced by gender normativity, practicalities, and the politics of gender in wider society and within families (Wharton, 2012).

Productivity is institutionally audited but the work culture may irrespectively force some individuals to ensure that they are seen as continually working without reprieve:

> It does turn into a pissing competition. And, in a way, I think it's showing that you don't want anyone to think that you're sitting at home in your pyjamas watching reruns of "Friends" all day. (Annette)

This account suggests a pervasive and oppressive hegemonic discourse regarding what constitutes an academic life, which appears to be a total embracing of a role that goes far beyond that of the normal expectations of waged work. An academic may well be expected to entirely internalize the role and its associated demands so completely that the individual is continually disciplining the self toward servicing it (reminiscent of emotional labour). This is less easy to resist given the porous work boundaries and technological intrusions that inexorably colonize personal time and home environments (Berg & Seeber, 2016; Nippert-Eng, 1996).

Emotional Repercussions

Insecurity was regarded by some participants as at the root of women's beginning and on-going compliance to the perceived masculinized, cultural norms of the academy. This process was thought to begin in their early inculcation as junior members of staff and also because insecurity was regarded by some participants as an inherent emotional characteristic of women compared with men, particularly for those working in perceived male spaces such as HE, as emerged in this group dialogue:

> Kate: I also find that in that sense my male colleagues are much better than my female colleagues and myself, in saying no to things, or in just saying, "right, this is it for the day." I feel they are much quicker in saying "this is what I've done" and "I've done well today."
>
> Ooi: You know it's maybe a little bit our fault because we are insecure, generally speaking of course. (Men) are confident enough to, forgive the language, bullshit. Because they, they, well, it doesn't mean that what they do, or what they say is actually so big and so important. And I think we [women] tend to be perhaps more . . . Sorry . . . we tend to be more insecure and we think, "oh I don't want to brag about that because is that really important?" Or, "I don't want to say about that because it looks like I'm showing off or something like that." So it's, it's . . .
>
> Kate: You know, it's maybe a little bit our fault because we are insecure, generally speaking. But, I think, I always defined some colleagues "prima donna," [still referring to male colleagues] because whatever they do seems like they discovered, I don't know—you

know—the secret of life, or you know.Abigail: That happens with women too I think.

Ooi: I think there are a few women definitely. I think it is a, more of a male trait.

Fran: But isn't the problem that those women who are like that get slashed down much more than men would.

Kate's use of a term connoting the demanding feminine diva in an association with academic male ego is unintentionally ironic given the context, yet such views notionally provide support for the propaganda of the "confidence culture" (Gill & Orgad, 2017). However, insecurity may be understandably high for women working in an environment traditionally viewed as a predominantly male and/or macho or monastic career, where many may aspire but few succeed to reach the upper echelons of success, whether in terms of full professor status (usually via alpha scholarship) or university executive level (alpha administration). Proving oneself worthy to succeed by adopting the male working model is one good example of a "lean-in" (Sandberg, 2013) strategy, but this too creates its own destructive dynamics:

> I live in guilt. I wake up in the morning and I feel guilty. I get here at 8 am and I feel guilty I wasn't here at half seven. Or, you know, I feel guilty when I take 30 minutes to take a lunch break. I never have a lunch break, ever, ever! And if I do take a lunch break it tends to be with a colleague. It's the only time I'll allow myself to have lunch, is with someone, or at a meeting at my desk . . . Yeah, there's guilt everywhere. It's got the point where I actively try not to socialise with colleagues at the university because then that just adds to the guilt or stress, because I am in a situation where people are trying to outdo each other, with how many hours they've worked or papers they've published. (Claudia)

The stress of attempting to compete by assuming the public mantle of a highly productive and competitive academic is normally regarded as crucial ingredients for career progression (Spivey et al., 2012). Yet, incessant work and goal setting may ultimately prove too difficult to maintain over time. In this study, one participant was seriously considering opting for demotion on the academic ladder to reduce her work and stress levels. Another individual had sidestepped out of an academic scholarship track into academic services, which was viewed as more hospitable to women professionals.

While emotional labour is exacted from academics in the care of students, participants felt few institutional outlets provided to experience such care themselves without exploiting others:

> You know, I ended up finding another programme leader that I could talk to, but then I was taking away from her, being, you know—she's as busy as I am, but now I'm, you know, now I'm taking 20, 30 minutes of her time just going, "blah, blah, blah, and then I did this, and then I did that, do you think I should've done this? I don't know." And you're really just kind of—you're

verbally vomiting really, what's just happened, and you need some . . . I don't know what it is, you just, it's almost like you need to go, "yeah you know what, you did that fine," you know, or, "yeah I got, yeah that was great, yeah I think you're right." There's no congratulatory thing there. [Short wry laugh] I'm just rambling now.

Yet, resisting the stereotype of the ever-giving, self-sacrificing maternal role where the female self is subsumed by caring duties creates dilemmas in contexts of corporatized mass education, where greater numbers of students are entering university from diverse backgrounds, meaning that the need for pastoral support is equally in much greater demand. However, at the same time, performance measurements focus on research "output" and teaching evaluations, rather than extra-curricular pastoral care, and it is by these standards that most academics are measured. The fulfillment of one expectation involves sacrifice of the other, presenting a clear dilemma to individuals:

> I've literally been told, and I've been told by a man *and* a woman, that I just have to be selfish. And I've actually started to do that. I just flat out say no to a lot of things, whereas before, and even to students, which is terrible, because . . . I love teaching [but] my research's got into the point in which I'll just keep getting emails from students and I feel really sorry for them, but I'll just say no, because I know other people out there, mostly men actually, more than the women, are also saying no. And it was made very, *very* clear to me. (Jo)

The division and quality of pastoral care among staff is often connected to work roles but where those in program administration, predominantly teaching positions and middle to low-ranking positions in the hierarchy are more likely to take up the slack, these being areas where women academics congregate. Refusing appeals to apply pastoral care is described as a "selfish" action in benefiting the ambitious individual that openly flies in the face of expected feminized duties.

"Playing the (Male) Game"

The donning of a (masculinized) camouflage for success was viewed as a good strategy given experiences that the playing field was loaded with obstacles against women participants. Nonetheless, even adopting macho posturing was apparently thought not enough in the perceived monastic culture of female exclusion:

> Val: You know I worked in all male newsrooms for my entire career and I thought "oh yeah, I'm going into academia, it will be completely different." [Pulls a disgusted face] I'd go back to an all male newsroom any day! You know I had better progression rates, I mean I had to act like a man, but you know, here, even acting like a man doesn't get me anywhere!

Fleur: I've only been in academia for a year and its been a horrible shock for me . . . the institutional sexism really. Well, I do some work for (X International) Bank and you think well, "they're a bank" but they have the "He for She" programme. So they've recognised that men have a responsibility to sponsor and promote women. And you don't see that here.

Corporatization is seemingly premised on innovative business acuity in HE, but in emulating corporate business enterprises there is the moot question of corporate responsibility to all employees. This could be exemplified by how privileged men can use their gendered prerogatives and career advantages to actively support women colleagues down the ranks, a responsibility that is thought to be conspicuously lacking in the quasi-business of HEI.

Academia has always been a competitive environment, particularly in STEM disciplines where certain research breakthroughs may lead to a host of coveted international rewards. In British HEI, today further competition is generated between institutions as a whole, rather than just research teams, through the REF and now the TEF national exercises. However, within HE, career advancement protocols ensure that there is often no evident individual benefit, apart from altruism or personal/political commitments, to be gained in assisting colleagues to develop their careers, and thus usually little motivation to support others. Instead, the ruthless shedding of unwanted tasks onto others down the hierarchy is a rational choice to be made, and under such circumstances, women academics, concentrated as they are in the junior ranks, are likely to be vulnerable to open exploitation, a process that the institution tends to gain from considerably in the short term:

An additional concern lies in the collusion of damaging gender norms that serve to disadvantage some colleagues and infantilize privileged others:

And I did actually hear a female Dean, talking about the boys upstairs. And I actually did challenge, and say, "you shouldn't really use that kind of language," because if we're trying for equality, talking them, as if they're "the lads," "the boys upstairs," is not good, because that's like being a mother with naughty children, and just laughing off bad behaviour. (Julia)

Symbolically, motherhood in the West is cast as fundamentally a joyful combination of self-fulfillment and self-sacrifice, as exemplified in the two images of the Madonna, blissful mother and child, or the agony of the Pietà. It carries characteristics of not only heavy responsibilities but also authority and maturity, for which notional "children" must be identified. A dangerous territory for women academics may be extending an attitude (and practice) of indulgent reprieve and therefore exoneration of male colleagues that permit gendered double standards to continue as offered in these accounts.

Concluding Discussion

The gender equality gap in academia is broadly recognized in being supported by statistical data in terms of rank and payroll, in addition to indicators of research recognition (HESA 2013b; Morley, 2013). These statistics, illustrating gendered inequities at many levels, could be framed as standing against the credibility of women academics as lacking sufficient confidence and motivation to adequately compete in the HE market place, and thereby justifying the rise of the "confidence culture" zeitgeist (Gill & Orgad, 2017), while leaving the HE status quo safely intact. Yet, a more convincing analysis, supported by the findings of this study, suggests that the path of academic women is strewn with obstacles to progression. What is insufficiently heard, nor is well understood, are the levels and structures of discrimination women academics contend with, in terms, for example, the cul-de-sacs that many are channeled into from the outset, arising from an entrenched culture of privileging masculinized-type career routes, which are, unsurprisingly, in turn dominated by male academics in the academy. This study offers a novel and graphic illustration of the impact of institutionalized sexism, as experienced by women academics, and contributes by supporting and extending our theorized understandings of gender inequalities in the academy.

Participant accounts clearly demonstrate a steep hierarchy of status in terms of academic tasks, along with imposition of gender essentialization in undertaking academic domestic drudgery (Ashencaen Crabtree & Shiel, 2018; Grove, 2013). Gender constructions in academia ensure that emotional labour is undertaken by those considered most suited to the role (Hochschild, 1979, 2003). The commodification of academia, along with the rise of mass education (Berg & Seeber, 2016; Blass, 2005), reinforces the organizational value of emotional labour (Darby, 2017), but just as in the case of the service industries, this becomes a feminized, frontline, public role relating to student service provision of various forms. Although it is institutionally important, it is correspondingly low in status, not unlike motherhood in the West (Eddy & Ward, 2015). Women's curtailed progression in academia is partially attributed by the participants to a gendered lack of confidence (Gill & Orgad, 2017), which stands in contrast to the part envied, part resented, assumptions of male egoism, presumption, and opportunism, as it is perceived.

Accordingly, the narratives from women participants, as they are explored here, enable us to view the terrain of academic careers from a very different vantage point to that of the normative and lauded models of what the academy *is* and what the expectations *are*, if one is to aspire to recognized success. Of these participants, theirs are tales that emerge from the margins; their experiences speak of a different reality of academic life and by so doing, deconstruct a masculinist, hegemonic normativity assuming the right to define academic life, and the ideal academic. Narratives as portrayed

in this study are vital to hear, where unwitting academics are likely to find themselves maneuvered down pathways that will have a significant influence over their future careers, as these narratives illuminate.

Moreover, there is a welcome if slow, international groundswell of activism and advocacy for a more equal academic playing field, of which WAN, and other such supportive networks are a phenomenon. This is linked, more organically rather than by strategy, to a growing resistance against the corporatization of modern universities, which in conjunction with the former monastic environment of traditional academia combines to inculcate unsustainable and brutalizing work cultures (Berg & Seeber, 2016). Women, like their male counterparts, are expected to conform to such cultures as a normative standard, which are little questioned within institutional hierarchies. In the meantime, contradictions are maintained through the fiction of, for example, contractual working hours that wages are tied to, but with the unsaid expectation that this bears little relation to expected working hours to produce the prodigious output that academics will be judged on.

Further contradictions entangle HEIs in their transitional institutional morphologies: whether to retain a typical monastic, masculine culture, or whether they fully embrace a macho, male-dominated 24/7 business model, but where each serves to exclude the majority of women academics, except in the menial housekeeping roles that are in fact essential to continued operations. Although some women will be able to negotiate and thrive in masculinized work cultures and some men will find themselves relegated to feminized, undervalued chores in HE, this does not overturn the central argument that the constitution of gender can be understood as a channeling of pathways within academic careers, carrying greater or lesser kudos, greater or fewer opportunities. Engrained masculinist work cultures embody an integral contradiction in the wider academy, one that apparently seeks to attract female students and to welcome women scholars but then undermines the latter's full entry into the greener pastures of academia where institutional rewards actually lie.

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