

'An unequal opportunity? Female academics' experiences of research evaluation in the UK'

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Outline

- Introduction
- Rationale and Research outline
- Sample & analytical framework
- Published theoretical model
- Key Findings-informality as the key catalyst for inequality?
- Upcoming research- Inc. 'women and impact case studies'

Introduction

- Progressive study that, in part, turned existing notions upside down, and explored how research evaluation affects female academic careers
- Investigated female academics' perceptions of research evaluation and its career effects, whether this is gendered and how this plays out in female academic career trajectories
- Qualitative study built around 1 anonymous case*
- Moving on from REF2014; different game, inequalities remain/worsened?

Time frame & game change?

- REF2020-
- 'The minimum and maximum limits on the number of outputs will apply to the person, not their FTE' (REF, 2020). But, In 2016/17, '48% of full-time staff and 68% of part-time staff were female' (HESA (2018) & disproportionately employed on teaching only contracts. Pattern remains static in 2021
- Stern review (2016) only mentioned gender 3x
- EDAP & REF not really interested



Research Rationale

- Lack of women in the upper echelons of the academy-26% of Professors are female (HESA, 2018) of which 0.7% are black women.
- Women are still less likely to be submitted for research evaluation exercises than their male counterparts (data from HR department of the case university) and nationally - '67% per cent of men selected vs. 51% of women. However, the proportion of women submitted has increased (from 48 per cent in RAE 2008)' (HEFCE, 2015)*
- Need for further research on gendered academic career construction in the context of increased evaluation and measurement and the broader volatile, uncertain, complex & ambiguous (VUCA) context
- Prevalence of theoretical papers-more UK empirical research needed that builds on ECU, UCU data, drilling down through in-depth qualitative approach.
- Women, both in the case study and nationally, are disproportionately represented in teaching roles, in precarious research positions such as contract researcher positions, and in part-time roles
- At 154 HEIs women are paid less than men, on average, and at only eight HEIs are women paid equal to or more than men (UCU, 2016). Gender pay gap remains static, and worse at Russell Group Institutions (16.3% median, ibid.) UoP 23.2%

Sample Outline

- 1 Anonymous case study of a UK Russell Group University*
- N80 Interviews across Humanities and Social Sciences including key respondents
- Participants included a range of academics spanning early, mid and late career stages in order to glean how research evaluation affects women at different stages of their careers. (Grade, not solely age dependant; 27 and 67 years of age, across all academic grades)
- ‘Key respondents’-Heads of School, Research Directors and REF strategy managers-Provides management insight how strategy is both implemented and experienced which aids exploration of disparity between the two.
- Case study approach allowed for a lot of detail to be collected to further contextualise interviews-policy documentation, REF dry run data and disciplinary differences to be explored, compared and contrasted.

Analytical Framework

- Developed Acker' (2006) Inequality regimes -analytic approach to understanding the creation and maintenance of inequalities in organisations
- *'Inequality regimes are the interlocked practices and processes that result in continuing inequalities in all work organizations' (2006:441)*
- Identification of where the 'academic inequality regimes' may be produced and further entrenched
- Nvivo was used to analyse the interview data in order to further implement a systematic and organised approach, and to allow for elements of grouping to the above points and aid thematic analysis.

Theoretical Model

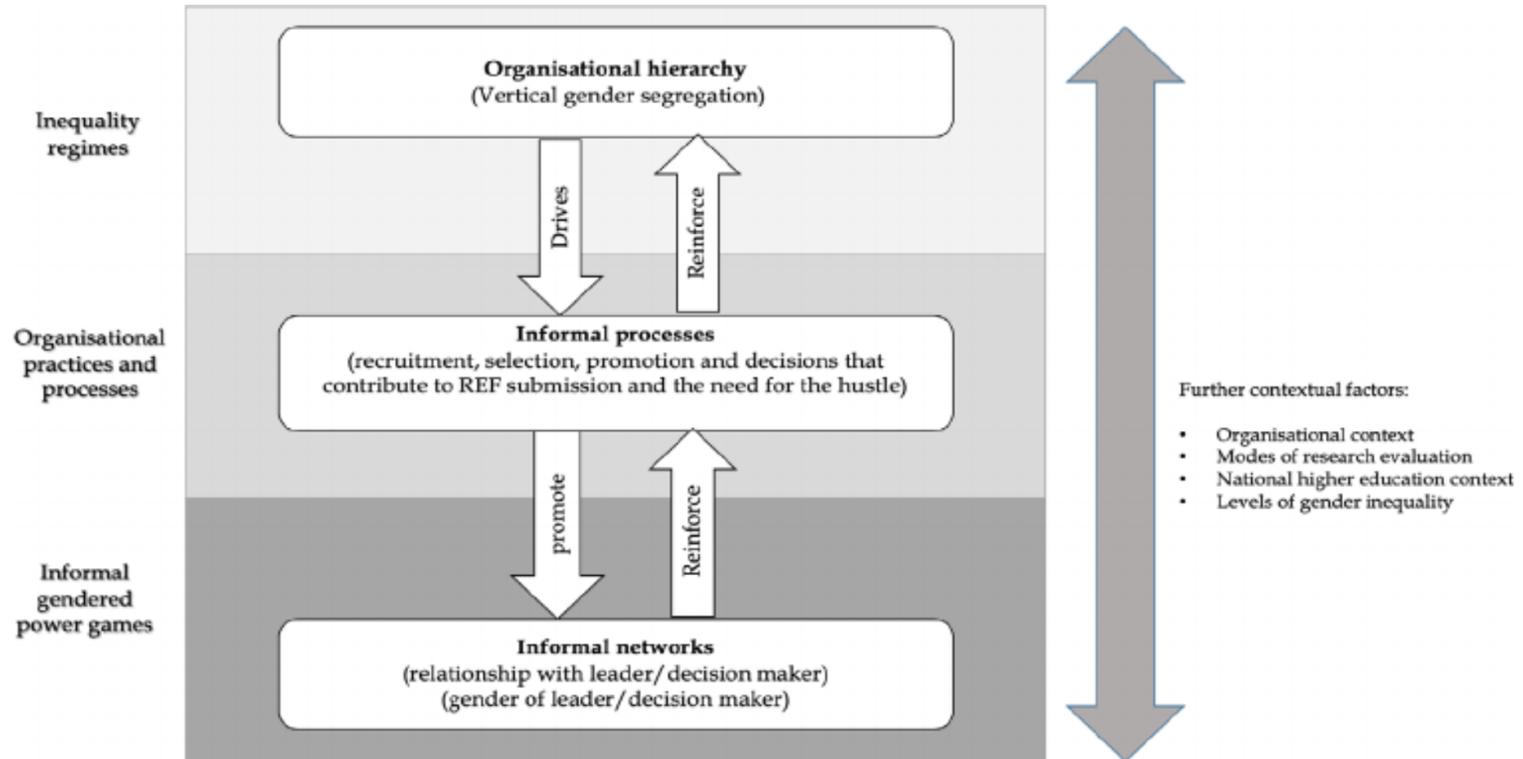


Figure 1. Framework of inequality and gendered power interactions [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Control and Compliance

- Precarity of work and performance anxiety surrounding REF submissions contributes to the maintenance of managerial power and is argued to be a form of indirect control, management disproportionately male
- REF serves as an effective mechanism for exerting control over individual academics-micro, macro and meso levels
- Potential rewards associated with REF inclusion serve as a direct form of control - manifestation of new managerialism in the academy more widely.
- Although REF allowances are made for time taken out of an academic career for maternity leave or caring responsibilities, the expectations surrounding performance and outputs serve as a form of control.

Key Findings

- REF contributes to the maintenance of gendered inequality regimes, primarily because of the ways it is implemented and implicit reliance on informal networks (recruiting panel members and within the university, REF submission readers)
- Importance of networks is argued to be further increased for recruitment and selection, if an individual was *not* included* however, overall 'the hustle' (Yarrow, 2020) still matters immensely
- Research evaluation contributes to the increasingly individualised ways of working, and is modelled on idealised notions of the unencumbered worker because of the insufficient account taken of time taken out of a REF cycle, which disproportionately affects women.

Key Findings

- The REF functions as a control mechanism over the work that is *produced**
- In some disciplines, such as Law and Business, certain types of [increasingly conservative] research are becoming more valued due to the level of risk associated with submissions
- ABS Guide e.g. –

“I no longer aim for lower ranked journals; I just can’t afford to do that! So I no longer consider certain journals that otherwise I would love to publish in” (Lecturer, participant 35)

Key Findings

- The underrepresentation of both women and BAME academics on REF panels may lead to gendered and racialised perceptions of merit and preferences for certain types of outputs.
- Above finding reflected in ABS rankings (e.g. GWO 3*)
- Performance anxiety is driven by outcomes of research evaluation becoming deeply personalised, and the perceived effect that inclusion appears to have on the leverage for career advancement.
- Exacerbated when the increasing individualisation of work is considered alongside the caring responsibilities of some women, as well as when the importance and role of participating in informal networks is considered

Key Findings

- Informal practices, rather than explicit discrimination, legitimise and further entrench existing inequalities through the undermining of formal policies and practices-gendered micropolitics and 'the hustle'
- Whilst the policies and stages of recruitment are transparent, the final decisions that are made and how these are arrived at are not.
- Some women who may not be as well networked or have as good relationship with the Head of School/Group appear to be at a disadvantage.

Informality-the key catalyst

- Consistent finding that informal practices undermine and subvert formal practices
- It is the informal practices that arise alongside formal practices and processes, which appear most deleterious in particular to gender equality
- Strong elements of informal decision making surrounding the allocation of work-informal negotiations around work load models, informality in recruitment and selection
- Recruitment and selection of REF Panel members

Informality-the the key catalyst

'You look at the panel; I mean one thing, concerning the panel, there's no, there are no people from BME groups on the panel, and I think there are only three women, I think there are only three, is that all, so it's very male dominated. That probably reflects, that reflects probably two things: Historical thing about trying to have as many people overlap between the panels, so once you've started with a strong male panel, that's what you tend to replicate, and also the nomination process, so if the Professional Associations nominate men, then you end up with lots of men, so the fact is that most main professional associations within our area are dominated by men, and so you get male nominees coming forward, and there wasn't really, I don't think, I don't know, but I don't think there was an attempt to mediate that'

Head of School (school removed to protect participant)

Dining with informality

- Example of the subtle ways in which inequalities may be perpetuated by informal practices outside of formal recruitment and selection policies:

'I think that type of stuff has the potential of, well if there's someone with a louder voice that can dominate the conversation during dinner time. I remember this, I went for another, I was one year in and they were recruiting someone else for another centre, and I went for the dinner, as part of the faculty now, you know, and I mean what struck me is, one of the candidates was from Italy and there were two from the UK, and I don't know, I think there were just three of them, yeah, and you know how dinner conversation is where it's about work, it's not only about work and academia, and you have to have the social skills and the conversational flow and that's actually quite culturally conditioned. Now, I've been in the UK for a fair few years now and I feel fairly... I don't feel disadvantaged at that level more than anyone else, but that person, I mean she spoke English well enough, but she obviously, she was missing out in the conversation quite a lot just because, either colloquial expressions or reference to the UK academic system that would have been hard for her to know fully and so on, so I think sometimes she came across as being a bit clueless, when she wasn't at all a bad academic, but just you know'.

Informality-the key catalyst

- Gendered micro politics and informal negotiations playing an important role in recruitment and selection:

'Internally, what we do is we sit on the panel and there'll be the school and then the college representatives right, and the faculty representatives and normally what happens is that the men go to, the school reps go to the loo to try and work out who they want, before they go into the wider discussion in the panel to negotiate it, and of course when I was on the panel, they were like well, we don't know what to do, because we can't go to the loo, because you're a female. And I was like, and stuff like that happens all the time, but it's so normalized you know, it's not an intentional, but it's structural kind of stuff and there was just like, the men are like, this is who we want, and they tend to be more senior, so you just go fine. I mean normally it's fine, I mean if there was a real issue, I would be like, NO, you absolutely cannot appoint that person, but yeah.'

Reader, (School removed to protect participant)

Wrap-up

- Lack of transparency in the processes surrounding REF processes, with particular emphasis on the recruitment and selection of material evaluators and final submissions appear to militate against gender equality in the experience of the process at the individual level.
- Impact of time taken out argued to be further exacerbated by time-oriented REF mechanism, significant gender impact
- Research evaluation has the potential to be used as a career-path clarification tool, though imports new, gendered, WLB issues and contributes to precarity
- Creation of a quasi-marketplace further drives the need for the 'right type of publications' and, in turn, precarious working
- Further strengthens notions of the unencumbered (disproportionately male) scholar with REF contributing to precarious working

Taster: Women and impact case studies

Davies, J., Yarrow, E., & Syed, J. (2020). The curious under-representation of women impact case leaders: Can we disgender inequality regimes?. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 27(2), 129-148.

KEY FINDINGS

- Of 395 REF impact cases for business and management studies with an identifiable lead author revealed that only 25 per cent were led by women, of which 54 per cent were sole authored
- In a knowledge-intensive workplace dominated by men, the shape and degree of gendered bases of inequality, systemic practices, processes and controls result in sub-optimal talent management and gendered knowledge
- *Findings based on an analysis of 395/410 impact cases in Business & Management UoA 17 and 12 in-depth interviews*
- Our findings support Savigny's (2019, p. 14) view that 'wider social and political power structures may be reinforced, rather than challenged ... in the Impact agenda [through] ... the silencing of a diversity of women's knowledge'. We argue that inequality regimes are gendering the impact of business schools as the majority of leaders of REF 2014 impact case studies were men and many cases written by women were sole authored or, at worst, credited to men instead.

Upcoming Research

- Athena SWAN project-lived experiences of AS champions and bureaucracy
- Women impact leaders follow on study (current)
- Academics' perceptions of factors that can facilitate or hinder their academic promotion in the UK & Australia
- Global study of women's experiences of research evaluation-looking for collaborators & a PhD student

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Thank you for your time
& Invitation to questions

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