Gender, ethnicity and feminism: An intersectional analysis of the lived experiences feminist academic women in UK Higher Education

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Abstract

Studies have begun to explore how those women academics committed to social justice, namely feminist academics, are navigating the increasingly managerial Academy. To understand how these multiple social identities, including gender and ethnicity, interact and intersect, this paper adopts an intersectional approach to understanding the heterogeneity of women's experiences in academia. Five focus groups with feminist academics (n = 6 to 10 in each focus group) reveal concerns of hampered career progression as a consequence of being female and openly feminist. Some ethnic minority academics felt that they were forced to choose between a feminist identity or that of their ethnic background. For some women, their feminist identity provided opportunities for challenging dominant practices. The paper concludes that the heterogeneity of feminist academics' experiences within academia is under-researched and that the lens of intersectionality helps to illuminate this. This paper advances understanding of multiple identities at work, though demonstrating that intersectionality can lead to the accumulation of advantage as well as disadvantage in relation to social identities such as gender and ethnicity, and a political identity such as feminist.

Key words: academic women, ethnicity, feminism, gender, intersectionality

Introduction

Despite a wealth of literature identifying gender bias in academic careers (Benschop and Brouns, 2003; Dixon, 2013), women academics themselves remain under theorized (Ali et al., 2010; Fotaki, 2013) although some studies have begun to explore how gender may intersect with other social identities to inform lived experiences (Sang et al., 2013). Feminist academics may be particularly vulnerable to a 'Chilly Climate' (Chilly Collective, 1995), facing symbolic violence from both other faculty and students (Davidson and Langan, 2006). However, little is known about how being a feminist affects the heterogeneous experiences of women academics. Intersectionality, the interaction of social identities including gender, ethnicity, sexuality and class, can be used to understand how different social identities affect an individual's experiences (Warner, 2008). This paper develops the theory of intersectionality to understand how multiple identities (gender, ethnicity and feminist) can intersect and interact at work to inform the lived experiences of feminist academic women. The paper begins by outlining gender inequality in academia, leading to a discussion of the experience of feminist academics and the theoretical framework of the paper; intersectionality. The methods are then detailed, specifically, focus groups with feminist women academics in the UK. The discussion presented in this paper furthers understanding of intersectionality, specifically its scope to theorize multiple identities including how a political identity such as 'feminist' may intersect with other social identities offering both disadvantage and opportunities for advantage.

Women in academia

Higher education is gendered in its norms, values and working patterns, which have served to set limits on many women's careers, while simultaneously (re)producing a false gender binary (Fotaki, 2013; Morley, 2011; Knights and Richards, 2003). These limits are seen in the frequent concentration of women academics in junior faculty positions in universities (Acker,

2008), Despite evidence of opaque recruitment and promotion practices (Van den Brink et al., 2010) and the impact of societal effects such as the household division of labour (Deem, 2003), persistent gender inequality is often explained in relation to women's choices in terms disciplinary specialism in or career decisions (Benschop and Brouns, 2003). Overall, research on women in academia reveals familiar stories of discrimination, work life (im)balance and slower career progression can be seen including the persistent lack of women in senior positions within universities across national contexts (Morley, 2014; Marchant and Wallace, 2013; Sang et al., 2013; Seierstad and Healy, 2012, Wane, 2009; Webber, 2005). However, considering gender in isolation from other sources of disadvantage or privilege does not allow for sufficient depth of analysis when theorising women's workplace experiences (Syed and Murray, 2009). As Mirza (2006) has detailed, black academics in the UK report a range of discriminatory practices, including lack of recognition of scholarly expertise and seniority. Black women academics are less likely than white women academics to reach senior academic positions, and more likely to report sexual harassment. Further, black women academics are used by organisations to embody diversity (Ahmed, 2009; Mirza, 2006). The experiences of black women in the Academy are bound by cultural and temporal contexts. Within a postcolonial context, Wane (2009) has suggested that black women in Canadian academia may be motivated to retain contact with the cultural heritages of their migrant parents. The paper now moves to consider feminist academics, whose experiences suggest that such an identity may result in further marginalisation for women academics.

Feminist academics

Despite the contribution of feminist theory to understandings of the persistence of inequality, (Mirchandani, 2003), the experiences of the scholars engaged in such work remains under examined. As Skeggs (2008) and David (2014) highlight, feminist academics have broadened the scope of what constitutes valid knowledge and routes to understanding the world. Feminist academics are engaged in activism within the Academy, challenging the gendered working norms which marginalise women within universities (Parsons and Priola, 2013; Hart, 2005) and other workplaces (Barg, 2009). Marginalisation is taken to refer to women's involuntarily reduced opportunities to participate fully in academic life (Andersen and Jensen, 2002). Much of the extant research has taken place in the United States, the site of emergence of considerable black feminist theory.

Feminist academics in the US face what has been called a 'Chilly Climate' (Chilly Collective, 1995; Dixon, 2013), perhaps struggling to find research and pedagogical space within the academy (Wright, 2014). The UK context provides particular concerns for academics, including the move towards managerialism. Davidson and Langan (2006) take this concept further, arguing that feminist academics in the UK experience violence, rather than the politer, but no less damaging, Bourdieusian concept of Symbolic Violence. Indeed, there does appear to be resistance to feminism and gender equality amongst the student body in universities both in the UK (e.g. Morrison et al., 2005) and internationally (Webber, 2005). This resistance exists within a higher education system which is moving towards satisfying the demands of market forces and managerialism (Knights and Clarke, 2013). Feminist academics may be particularly vulnerable due to shifts in the relationships between staff and students (Lee, 2005) and desires to maintain high levels of student support despite increasing target driven

managerialism (Moss and Pryke, 2007). Within this changing context existing gendered working practices and relations continue to be reproduced with pressures to recruit more students to courses reducing time for all academics, including feminist academics, to work with students to challenge these gendered norms (Moss and Richter, 2011).

While feminist academics may face difficulties with students, concern has been expressed that feminist ideals are in opposition to the requirements of an academic careers (Deem, 2002). UK academics Mauthner and Edwards (2010) argue that conflicts exist between the identities of feminist, scholar and manager. Edward's (2000) review revealed that feminist academics in leadership positions found it difficult to pursue feminist ideals, often preferring to leave their 'radical' feminist identities at home. In contrast, Deem (2003) has suggested that the increased emphasis on managerialism may have enabled some women to reach more senior positions. Mauthner and Edwards (2010) reflect on their own experiences of being feminist research managers within the UK higher education sector noting that despite their intentions to treat all members of the research team, this may not be possible. They argue that certain research tasks are more valued than others. In particular the detailed research work undertaken by contract research staff is devalued, while the more strategic, managerial aspects of research management is valued while conferring status and prestige. There is a risk that a feminist managerial approach may be seen by colleagues and team members as 'soft' and therefore exploited (Mauthner and Edwards, 2010). Further, Reay (2000) has reflected on the fundamental individualistic characteristics of working life and an academic and its compatibility with a collectivist feminist ethos.

The conflict between being an academic and being a feminist predates the above changes in higher education. Specifically, academia traditionally values so called objective, knowledge

whereby the researcher adopts a neutral, value free position to her research. In contrast, feminist research often produces work which values subjective, personalised knowledge (Jenkins, 2014; Coates et al., 1998). If marginalised academics undertake applied research within their marginalised communities, this work may be hard to publish in leading journals, resulting in a professional cost (Edwards, 2000). A similar situation has been reported in Canada where feminist academics felt undertaking feminist action research was impossible, because such work is not valued by funders or universities and that gaining ethical approval is too onerous (Coates et al., 1998). Ketcham Weber et al (2008) argues the de-valuing of practice has resulted in a focus on feminist theory rather than feminist practice within the Academy. As a result there is comparatively poor understanding of what feminists do within the Academy. Further, feminists may face a double bind while they attempt to simultaneously retain a feminist political stance and build a career within mainstream academia (Jenkins, 2014).

Much of the literature to date assumes homogeneity of feminist thinking within the Academy despite the recognition of multiple feminisms (Brewis, 1998). Scholars engaged with, or identifying with, Black feminisms may be particularly vulnerable, with continued resistance within the Academy to recognise 'race' and racism (Henry, 2015). Within the UK, the experiences of Black and ethnic minority academics is gaining attention. Black and ethnic minority, within the UK, refers to those whose cultural heritage differs from that of the dominant group and may include first and second generation migrants, refugees and asylum seekers (Sepulveda et al., 2013), Ahmed (2009) has identified that black feminist academic women, by their very presence, disturb the Academy. This disturbance extends to white feminism in the Academy by revealing its racism and colonialism. The marketisation of higher education has been identified as one of the '*forms of regulation of Black feminism*' within the Academy,

whereby Black feminism is forced to operate within a market driven system which defines 'value' (Ali et al., 2010: 648). Specifically, Ali argues that a move towards intersectional understandings may help to reveal the formation and maintenance of various forms of inequalities within the Academy and the role of structural factors. Further, given the increased emphasis on managerialism outlined above, and student satisfaction surveys, it remains to be seen how space will remain for the work of Black and post-colonial feminists. Lee (2005) calls for feminist academics to resist these moves towards marketization of the Academy and to campaign against the poor treatment of feminist academics.

While the above sections detail the difficulties faced by women, ethnic minority, feminist academics, efforts are being made to improve the situation. Hart (2005) argued that feminist activist women faculty operate within existing academic structures to 'create a delicate balance between the influences of feminism, activism and professionalism' (e-journal – no page number). In addition, Ali (2009: 84) argues that given the increased diversity of the student population in the UK there is hope for a new generation of black feminists entering the Academy. However, she adds the caveat that '*as black feminists, we might be paradoxically be 'hidden' within curricula, but hyper-visible within institutions*'. This increased visibility can result in Black women academics being seen, while remaining invisible as part of the Academy (Maylor, 2009). This point can be further understood in the context of public sociology in the USA, where minority academics, e.g. women of colour, maybe recruited in order to diversify the faculty (Sprague and Laube, 2009). More recently, Macoun and Miller (2014) have drawn attention to the potential for feminism to act as a collective source of support for early career academics to allow thriving within the academy.

Lee (2005) is not the only author to issue a 'call to arms' for feminist academics. Ali (2009) explores 'black feminism' calling for readers to remember the gains achieved by black feminists using coalition politics adopted during the 1960s and 1970s. Asher (2010) has issued a similar call (within a US context) suggesting that those engaged in social transformation (in this case, Asian American Academics) should join with other marginalised groups. Kethcam Weber et al (2008:7) argue '*despite popular assertions that we don't 'need' feminism anymore, we still live in a society that supports oppression in its many forms, and to overcome oppression we must face it together*'. In other words we must move beyond saying we are feminist, we must do feminism, considering how we can change the patriarchal and misogynist rules of the game of academia (Morley, 2014).

Intersectionality

Although women academics may share some common experiences, it is important to note that group unity does not automatically mean group uniformity (Hancock, 2007). Feminist scholars are turning to theories which can explain the experiences of those who stand at the cross roads of multiple sources of disadvantage and privilege within education (Unterhalter, 2012). The theory of intersectionality has been used to explain how individuals may face multiple sources of discrimination and oppression. More broadly, intersectionality can be a theoretical and empirical approach to highlight the interaction of different categories of difference (Davis, 2008; Warner, 2008; Hancock, 2007). An important element of intersectionality is that an individual is not the sum of the social groups they belong to. Rather each group interacts with each other to form experiences and manifestations, which cannot be explained by membership to one group (Warner, 2008).

Intersectionality can help to understand the '*tensions between assertions of multiple identity and the ongoing necessity of group politics*' (Crenshaw, 1991: 1296). A feminist identity may be different from those identities which have their root in naturalisation, for example race and gender (Yuval-Davis, 2006). However, as Crenshaw (1991) has argued, these categories of race and gender are socially constructed, but still have significance. 'Some researchers have taken intersectionality beyond analyses of multiple disadvantage as experienced by women of colour (for example) to apply to any group of people, both advantaged and disadvantaged (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 201). While feminism can be conceptualised as a theoretical or political position, it has also been argued to be an identity. Cichocka et al (2013) have suggested that feminism can be seen as an identity, specifically a collective political identity. However, there remains little understanding of how a political identity such as feminist, may intersect with other forms of identity such as gender, which are more traditionally researched within intersectionality work.

For the purposes of this paper intersectionality is taken to mean: "*the way in which any particular individual stands at the crossroads of multiple groups*" (Minow, 1997; p.38). Therefore the aim of this paper is to explore how an identity such as feminism may intersect with other identities, such as professional identity, ethnic identity, parental status. Different social divisions, such as race, gender and age are often 'naturalised', i.e. resulting from biological destiny, whereas in reality there can be cultural variations (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Importantly, such naturalisation implies homogeneity within divisions, i.e. that all women share the same 'natural attributes' (ibid, p.199). Minow (1997) argues that political affiliation and other 'commitments' may further 'bisect and realign' groups. Such group identity may help to make visible taken for granted intersections, such as white male. Given the roots of intersectionality in feminist theory, it is perhaps surprising that there appears to be a paucity

of research which uses intersectionality to understand the experiences of feminists / and how feminist identity may intersect with other identities. This paper builds on extant work which argues that while women are marginalised within the Academy, women's experiences may qualitatively differ.

Methods

This papers aims to further understand academic labour, but in particular the heterogeneous lived experiences of feminist academics within the UK. As with other similar research, this paper does not attempt to quantify oppression or make generalisations to larger populations, rather it aims to understand processes (Weight et al., 2008). This paper recognises that social identities are social constructed with their meaning situational and temporal (Gottfried, 2008), having temporary stability at the point of analysis (Walby et al 2012). Focus groups are a useful tool for feminist research since they allow for power to rest with the participants, rather than the researchers (Jowett and O'Toole, 2006; Wilkinson, 1999). This paper uses data from focus groups undertaken at a one-day networking event for feminist academics from any discipline based in the UK. As such the participants represent an opportunistic sample of those who attended the networking event, identified as feminist and provided consent to participate. Similar sampling approaches have been successfully used to understand the lived experiences of feminist academics (see for example, Skelton, 2005). The networking event (name removed for anonymity purposes), brought together academic and academic related staff who self-identified as feminist to discuss a range of issues relating to feminism in the Academy.

The focus groups were the core component of the day, designed to provide a forum for academics to freely discuss their lived experiences within the Academy. The organisers of the

event provided no definition of feminism so as not to exclude any potential participants who self-identify as feminist. The participants were a combination of those who were engaged in feminist scholarship (academic feminists) and those whose political values were geared towards gender equality, but were not undertaking feminist scholarship (feminist academics). A participatory approach was adopted for the study, whereby research participants decide on the appropriate topic for study and inform its design (Gyi et al., 2013). All those registering for the networking event were asked to suggest topics for the focus groups, in this sense the determination of the topics for the study was a participatory approach. These suggestions were then grouped into themes which formed the broad focus for discussions. Five focus group facilitators were equipped with a list of questions for their focus group, although these were not prescriptive. These questions were developed from the list of suggested topics provided by the event participants. Participants selected which focus group they would attend. As such the topics discussed, and who attended each group was at the discretion of the research participants. In addition, each focus group leader was provided with a guidance sheet on how to effectively lead a focus group and all were chosen based on their expertise.

Participants

All participants self-identified as feminists and the majority were either academics or worked closely with academics, for example, a University Equality and Diversity Manager, a professional development advisor for academics. Participants were from a range of ages (early 20s through to mid 60s) and occupied the full range of academic roles (PhD students, one undergraduate student, post-doctoral researchers, lecturers, senior lecturers and professors). Although those on traditional 'academic' contracts formed the bulk of the sample, the research aimed to include all those who identify as feminist academics, with PhD students, contract researchers and allied professions included within the sample. The majority of

participants were white British, although all those who attended the focus group on 'race and ethnicity' identified as members of ethnic minority groups. As the focus groups were led by the participants themselves, the data on the demographics on who participated in each focus group is not complete. There was some concern amongst respondents of being identifiable from transcripts. All but two participants in the focus groups identified as women. The focus groups lasted 45 minutes with one group choosing to break for lunch and return for a further 45 minutes.

Research ethics

The British Sociological Association's (2002) guide for ethical practice informed the research ethics of the study. Informed consent was secured prior to the networking event, and reiterated at the start of each focus group. When registering for the event, all participants were informed that the focus groups would be recorded and the resulting transcripts would be analysed and used for research publications. Participants were asked to return, via email, a consent form. At the start of each focus group all participants were informed of the purpose of the sessions, and reminded of their right to anonymity and to withdraw from the research without providing an explanation. Further, all participants were made aware that transcripts would be used in publications. The research ethics were covered again at the start of the day, and at the start of each focus group. This resulted in useable data from five focus groups, each with a focus group leader and approximately 6 to 10 participants. Anonymity was a significant concern for participants. All transcripts were anonymised and returned to participants who had requested to see them. Following this, further anonymisation took place. In addition to the focus groups below, a further focus group discussed lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues in academia. However, the LGBT group did not wish for their data to be used within the study, accordingly, no digital recording was taken and any notes were destroyed.

Data Analysis

The recorded and transcribed focus group topics were; career progression, ethnicity, engaging with the media, feminism and the recession and feminism and the trade unions. All recordings were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service. The transcripts were analysed using Template Analysis (King, 2004) frequently used in qualitative organisational research, including to reveal the lived experiences of academics (Knights and Clarke, 2014), The topics listed above were used a broad template for the apriori codes with additional themes incorporated as they emerged from the data. The intersectional analysis was inspired by the work of Bowleg (2009), who provides the following guidance for intersectional data analysis. To avoid the additive approach which is implicit in much intersection work, the current study remained sensitive to the stories of individuals which emerge through the data. Further, the analysis was sensitive to the tensions and agreements within the respondents' discussions. Doing so moves analysis towards an intersectional approach which does not add race, gender and feminism, but understands how these identities qualitatively interact. It is important to note some self-reflection at this point. The author is a white, middle class, British, cis gender, heterosexual, disabled feminist woman, currently on an open-ended contract in a UK university, although at the time of the study, I was on a precarious contract. As such I am both an insider to the subject under study, but also an outsider as I am not a member of an ethnic minority group. I occupy a position of relative privilege in the academy, which may have affected my analysis of the data. I have attempted to address this through retaining a self-reflexive approach as is required by template analysis (King, 2004) and following Bowleg's (2009) advice to focus on the narratives of the individual study participants.

Findings

The key themes emerging from the focus groups are discussed, along with the author's observations from the day. The following section is structured according to the key themes emerging from the data, namely, the changing context of higher education UK, gender, ethnicity and 'being other'. First names of respondents, where provided, are used to protect anonymity. This section begins by briefly describing the broader political context which framed the discussions.

Changing context of higher education in the UK.

Real term cuts to research funding have resulted in significant alterations to the UK Research Council's priorities with the reduction or abolition of post-doctoral grants, smaller grants and PhD scholarships within Social Science disciplines. Respondents felt that these changes may alter the nature of research being under-taken, particularly critical feminist research. One participant expressed concern that feminist research agendas may conflict with current research priorities: '*everyone's tripping over themselves to build up certain research agendas that speak to government priorities*'. One participant also reflected that, despite PhD students expressing desires to study gender issues, their subsequent work may be focussed on topics which do not critique UK Government policies:

'*PhD students are going to want to go off and do the sort of official sanctioned subjects that the government wants to fund*'.

These concerns are not new. Previous researchers have highlighted that the introduction of tuition fees changed the relationships within universities with students viewed as consumers and customers, rather than active agents in their own education (Lambert and Parker, 2006).

Some of the respondents in the current study saw a potential opportunity in this changing relationship, which involves a perceived increase in the importance of teaching. It was argued that since women staff devote more of their time (than male colleagues) to teaching and pastoral care of students, this change in priorities may result in these student centred activities increasing in value. However, the likelihood of increased value placed on teaching seems unlikely given international evidence that research productivity is the key predictor of promotion (Vardi and Quin, 2011; Lissoni et al., 2011)

An alternative view expressed was that the perceived need for more teaching could provide opportunities for academics to '*break down that false dichotomy between research and teaching*'. Further there was some suggestion that the austerity measures from the UK Government might heighten political awareness amongst feminist academics:

'*… I keep thinking that maybe this is an opportunity but, again I may be naïve, I might be thinking you know, oh, there'll be much more political awareness, maybe there's going to be a sort of uprising ... you know, especially with all the dialogue around the election and ministers' wives and no female ministers, even in the media there was a load of* [attention].

Gender

A number of respondents also felt that a feminist identity may intersect with gender in terms of career progression, either by conferring multiple sources of disadvantage, or offering a source of privilege Specifically, some respondents felt that women are disadvantaged within academic careers and identifying as feminist may exacerbate that disadvantage;

'If you say 'I'm a feminist' does that mean you don't get promoted? It goes with a lot of other things. I don't think it's only that, but it doesn't on the whole do you any favours'

Echoing the work of David (2014), there was a sense amongst some respondents that a feminist identity was, in part, related to relationships with their mother. Specifically, one respondent noted how learning of her mother's feminism and how she used it to critique working practices within her institution. Specifically this respondent felt being a feminist could help to overcome some of the disadvantages experienced by female academics. She cited the example of her mother (occupation not stated):

She was like, look, he's working the same job as me, he's got the same amount of experience, why am I being … and she was confident enough to go and ask for it which, if she wasn't fine about being a feminist then she might not have got quite as … I know it could have had a complete backlash but I think in certain situations it can be an advantage.

However, identifying as feminist was seen as linked to questioning of identity, for example, whether this identity is legitimate. The following quote from the ethnicity focus group suggests that for feminist academic women the identity of feminist can be contentious:

'*But I think a lot of women in terms of what they try to do or in terms of their life experience that they're battling these resistances but there's also a kind of thing in terms of how authentic a feminist are you. Are you engaging in feminist activism? Are you sure you're qualified to call yourself a feminist.*'

This debate within academic as to who can identify as feminist was complicated by what some respondents referred to as the 'shame' of identifying as feminist which '*is going to hinder your career progression*'.

Ethnicity

Previous literature has highlighted the marginalisation of Black women academics within the Academy (David, 2014). Rather than discussing experiencing racism or marginalisation from the Academy more broadly, the women here focussed on the dynamics of ethnicity and claiming a feminist identity. The data presented here suggests that ethnic minority women academics feel marginalised as women in the Academy, and further marginalised as black academics within academic feminism. One respondent argued that identifying as a 'woman' (as a salient marginalised identity) is easier for those women who are part of the dominant social group, in this case, white women:

'It's easier to identify as a woman because a lot of the women look very similar to you and it's alright to say "yes" this is where I stand in this society'

Within academic feminism ethnic minority women spoke of feeling '*tagged on'* to feminist scholarship. In particular, it was felt that there were incompatibilities between feminism and certain ethnic (non-white) identities, with the experiences and scholarship of ethnic minority feminist women remaining on the margins of wider feminist discourse. For the respondent below, this was associated with a distancing from the identity of feminist:

'I don't feel like a feminist because, yes, one – I'm constantly tagged on or looked at as a specific kind of little special case where I have very similar experiences to other women –

also have very different experiences to other women and I think the voices should be equal. I would not say I am a feminist, I'd say I'm more – I know this sounds very dramatic – I'm more a humanist. I believe in equal rights for everyone because there is as many black men who are disadvantaged as there are black females.'

Another respondent argued that being a feminist in work-related settings might result in further isolation from her ethnic group outside of work, illustrating the complex relationship between identities at 'work' and their social identities outside of work. One respondent reported pressure to chose which identity was most important, their ethnicity or their feminist identity from the different communities they were members of: *'It's almost like Multiple identities where you have to choose from but by choosing one you have to desert the first ...'.* This was further illustrated by a participant who reflected that to identify as feminist, was to identify as white and also middle class.

The experiences of ethnic minority women were also related to the research they were engaged in. Specifically for these feminist academics, their feminist identity was closely related to their research in national contexts outside of the UK. The quote below illustrates how women academics, undertaking feminist research with women outside of west contexts, may find it easier to adopt the identity of feminist, in part because of the stark gender differences they were working with. The quote also illustrates how women doing such work may be positioned as feminist by others.

'I am somebody who works in the area of women's development and always has and I think in some cultures where the roles of men and women are so divided, and so defined, it's probably easier to identify yourself with that feminist label if you are trying to bridge those

divisions and those gaps. So, for example, in Middle East cultures you've got a certain group of women who are very devoted to this agenda and work hard at it and whether they label themselves as feminists or not everybody else considers them as feminists so it's not an issue that is this going to be good for me it's not bad for me. It's how can I use it to get the job done.'

The quote here suggests that for this ethnic minority academic feminist, a feminist identity can be a useful tool for her social justice research. This was echoed by another ethnic minority participant who felt it was easier to identify as feminist in India than in the UK. Another respondent in the ethnicity focus reflected on this statement, arguing against the use of feminism as a tool, rather than a social identity:

'Whatever, your neighbourhood group and that I think is ... then it's a tool, rather than an identity. But I always thought of feminism as an identity rather than as a means to gain or lose something and maybe that's why looking at feminism and ethnicity is an interesting topic because maybe it does, maybe it is a tool for the groups to alienate the women who join the feminists who are seen as white rather than within their own groups as well.'

The ethnicity focus group made reference to class as important to the experiences of women they undertook research with, but not in terms of their own positionality in the Academy.

Being 'Other'
The previous sub-sections have considered gender and ethnicity separately. However, the data suggests that gender, ethnicity and feminism intersect with each other in complex ways to confer privilege and disadvantage. There was a feeling amongst some respondents that

the intersection of a feminist identity with another characteristic (such as ethnicity) could be an advantage. More specifically, some respondents appeared to identify with one or two particular group identities, which they felt offered a benefit. Minow (1997) suggested that individuals who stood at the crossroads of several identity groups may select one or two for strategic approaches. Respondents used variations of the term 'other', providing examples of where they felt their intersecting identities which differentiate between 'us and them' (Ibarra-Colada, 2006). One respondent felt that being othered in two areas (feminist identity and ethnicity) enabled her to take and voice a position which was different:*' I feel quite liberated. I'm always "other", I'm "othered" by black people and I'm "othered" by white people so … so it's quite easy to take a* [different] *position.'* As described in the previous section, participants recalled using this position of 'other' to challenge working practices. In the passage below, one participant recalls how she was able to use her position as 'other' along multiple axes to introduce challenging teaching material. Otherness is used strategically.

The liberating effects of being othered along multiple axes can be complex, for example, one respondent recounted her experiences in the United States where she was an ethnic minority academic (not Christian) in a Catholic institution:

'*I was there for a year and my job was to introduce a women's studies minor so this was ninety six, nineteen ninety six… the Dean of my school was saying I'm not sure how the students are going to take this, they may not like it but you're only here for the year ... don't worry. But the funny thing was that I didn't have a problem with the students at all, the problem came from the Establishment and I realised just towards the end of my year why it made sense for me to do it because I wasn't Catholic, I wasn't American, I was every other that the institution could have so if I was this mad woman'*

This respondent went on to explain that after she had left the institution, women's studies were introduced as a main degree programme. She felt that her temporary status, in addition to her other sources of 'other' enabled her to be 'brave' in introducing feminist courses. Here Otherness may be strategically adopted to challenge existing disciplinary norms.

Not all respondents felt that being other in this way was beneficial to them. While it may help to make a voice heard, there was concern that may not result in change due to lacking sufficient influence within organisations due to their marginalised status:

'Yeah, and I think it's useful to get your opinion across. The problem after is can you make really a change by influencing the power structures, by being the "other". You can probably can get the voice out but can ... can that really make the change?'

Activism

Respondents also considered how they could engage in feminist activism, rather than feminist scholarship. One route to this was engagement with trade unions, with which feminist academics reported a complex relationship, in part because of a perceived decline in trade union influence. However, one respondent felt that working with trade unions offered an opportunity to reflect on the nature of feminism within the Academy and its engagement with socialism:

'I think there is also the issue about the kind of feminism or feminisms we're talking about because it seems to me that as soon as you engage with the issue trade unions are taking on capitalism'

In contrast, another respondent felt that there were tensions in identifying as a woman and a trade union member or activist, given was she felt was a history of protection of male members:

'But you also need to look at the other side of that which is getting unions interested in women when you look at the way that some unions have treated women, particularly in failing to represent them because it threatens their male members'.

The same respondent later reflected that her identity as a woman and a feminist were of greater importance to her than trade union membership or activity:

'You've got to pitch your fight, that's the point, you've got to pitch your fight and, for me, I think that feminism … I can do feminism far more actively and immediately, right here where I am, rather than paying money to a union and then having to go to conferences and having to shout … I think it should be fundamental for unions'.

This final quote reveals an interesting feature of a feminist identity, namely, choosing which battles to fight. While there may be scope for trade union membership to offer potential for engaging with organisational and societal structures, for some feminists a desire to engage in feminist activism is at odds with trade union activity.

Although not mentioned by many respondents, there was a sense that a feminist identity may provide opportunities for women academics outside of academia. Specifically, one respondent reflected on her work with the media. Sharon (pseudonym) shared her

experiences of being invited to engage with popular media, such as women's magazines and newspapers where she felt that feminism was prevalent:

'The women who edit women's magazines were an interesting group of journalists, so I would be interested and thinking about it in terms of women engaging with the media. They're much more feminist than you might think – much more overtly … identifying as feminists'

Later in the focus group Sharon related examples of harassment she had experienced as a result of media misrepresentation of her work, as she had not been given approval of copy prior to publication: *'But my piece is feminist and you've attached the sexist headline to it'.* In contrast, another academic shared her experiences in Australia where she felt able to complain to publications if they had misrepresented her arguments:

'I've mostly had fairly positive experiences and I'm Australian and I've only lived in this country for two months, and I've mostly written for Australian publications…I don't generally get to check copying before it goes into the magazine….[but] *I'll call them up and complain about it'*

These experiences suggest that a feminist identity and identifying as a woman can intersect in complex ways when engaging in activities outside the Academy. In particular it may result in misrepresentation of feminist arguments to support sexist ideologies. This is of particular importance given increasing emphasis on the 'impact' of research.

Discussion

Despite making positive contributions to the Academy, feminist academics have reported difficulties maintaining feminist ideals while managing research projects (Mauthner and Edwards, 2010), difficult relationships with students (Hanrahan and Antony, 2005) and symbolic violence while research contributions remain undervalued (Jenkins, 2014; Davidson and Langan 2006). The experiences of black feminist women academics have been portrayed as particularly bleak, with increased vulnerability to sexual harassment, hampered careers, marginalisation and discrimination (Ahmed 2009; Mirza, 2006). Through focus groups, this paper has examined the experiences and perspectives of with feminist academics in UK higher education. Using a lens of intersectionality the paper has demonstrated that for female academics a feminist identity, intersecting with other social identities, can result in both perceived advantage and disadvantage. Accordingly this paper presents mixed patterns of experiences for feminist academics within the UK. For a number of women, being a feminist intersected with gender and 'race' creating space for critiquing the status quo within their institutions. In addition, women reflected on the opportunities to create critical curricula and undertake research in a range of contexts. However, for other women, the intersection of these identities restricted ability to identify with a particular ethnic group and may result in marginalisation.

Previous research has highlighted the impact of changes to the funding of higher education in the UK, and shifts towards manageralism and audit based cultures, on academics' working conditions (Knights and Clarke, 2014). Women in the current study felt some concern over changes to higher education funding which a number felt may be beneficial as the increased emphasis on teaching may benefit women. Of course this assumes that women academics are content to be teaching focussed, and masks the variety of perspectives amongst women

academics. This was emphasised by respondents who were concerned that the marketization of academia may lead to research being directed away from approaches which critique political discourse. Such redirection of research priorities may exacerbate the need for women academics to foster 'masculine' objective modes of knowledge production, in order to gain and retain positions of legitimacy in the Academy (Fotaki, 2013). Doing so has implications not only for women's careers, but the nature of scholarship being produced.

The current study revealed that being a feminist intersected with other social identities in ways which conferred both advantage and disadvantage for women academics. Minow (1997) has argued that when a group identity has resulted in oppression and marginalisation, identification with that identity can become as source of pride and provide an opportunity to develop solidarity with other members of that group*:* 'Asserting an identity group can give people a sense of place and connection that otherwise feel absent or beyond their control' (Minow, 1997: 21). For some women there were concerns over career progression, while others felt that being a feminist equipped them with the confidence to speak up when they saw injustice. The examples cited here suggests that when standing at the intersection of gender and being an academic, a further identity of 'feminist' can result in advantage for some. The data suggest that women may use their Otherness to strategically challenge and work around existing power relations (Shah, 2012), including the disciplinary and social norms in academia. However, the extent to which this strategic Otherness can be mobilised for sustainable personal or collective change remains unknown.

Gender and ethnicity intersect for ethnic minority women feminist academics with previous research suggesting particular vulnerability to marginalisation within the Academy. The focus groups suggest that for ethnic minority feminist academic women, marginalisation from white

feminist discourse is still evident (David, 2014; Ali, 2009, Ahmed, 2009). This suggests that more work is required within feminist organisations and networks to prevent the reproduction of practices which perpetuate the domination of white feminists and white feminism. In contrast women in the current study did not report invisibility within the curriculum (Ali, 2009). However, for a number of participants identifying as feminist is incompatible with membership of particular ethnic or religious groups. This echoes the argument of Crenshaw (1991) that political intersectionality is important. Specifically, ethnic minority women are 'situated within at least two subordinated groups that frequently pursue 'conflicting political agendas.' (p. 1252). For example, to be a feminist was seen to be 'white' and could therefore result in isolation from an ethnic group (which may itself have offered some support). Standing at the intersection of multiple groups does not simply result in the addition or accumulation of disadvantage. Rather these identities can interact, resulting in qualitatively different experiences for that individual (Ozbilgin et al., 2011), particularly within the context of the increased marketisation and managerialism within higher education, which serves to regulate Black feminism (Ali et al., 2010). As one participant suggesting being an ethnic minority, woman and a feminist provided an opportunity to introduce new teaching materials, which challenged the norms of the organisation. However, as this did not result in permanent or more secure employment, the benefits of being multiple other are fragile. Further, intersectional analyses have proved useful for understanding the relationship between the academic labour market and the teaching of critical studies, such as feminist and diversity studies (Moore et al., 2010).

Intersectionality has proved useful for identifying how being an academic and a feminist can intersect with other social identities, such as gender and ethnicity, to influence feminist women academics' experiences in the UK Academy. In particular, the data presented here has moved

discussions of intersectionality beyond considerations of multiple sources of disadvantage, to consider how a political identity such as 'feminist' can be drawn upon by marginalised academics as a source of confidence to critique the status quo. However, by examining gender, ethnicity and feminist identity, the data suggests that for ethnic minority academic women, a feminist identity may result in isolation from both the academic community and their ethnic group. Further the data suggest that feminist women academics have to carefully consider routes and opportunities for activism within their institutions. The historically tense relationship between feminism and trade union movement, complicates this traditional route for improving working conditions.

The study opens a number of avenues for future research, in particular how other social identities may intersect. That the LGBT group withdrew their data was disappointing and does not allow for analysis of issues relating to sexuality and gender identity. It suggests concern amongst the respondents that they would be easily identified through the dissemination of the research and that the loss of anonymity would result in negative consequences for them as individuals. Research from other sectors suggests that LGB employees face difficulties in integrating within dominant (heterosexual) cultures (Rumens and Broomfield, 2014). Further work is needed to understand how LGBT academics experience the workplace and how this shapes their professional identity and decisions to 'come out'. Further, future researchers must consider how the anonymity of LGBT participants can be preserved, particularly given the apparent concerns of negative consequences of the revealing of their experiences. In addition the experiences of ethnic minority women academics are not uniform and future studies should be sensitive to heterogeneity of experiences across forms of otherness associated with ethnicity (Mayuzumi, 2014). Valentine (2007) highlighted a common concern in intersectionality research, namely that the focus of such work is often the other or the

marginalised, rather than analysing privileged identities. Just as this paper has highlighted the complexities of women's experiences in the Academy, men's experiences are likely just as complex and warrant further exploration. Doing so can help to render visible the practices and processes which (re)produce the dominance of certain masculinities within organisations, particularly in relation to black men's feminism (Adu-Poku, 2001).

It is important to note that no definition of feminism was provided. This was a deliberate strategy to avoid the exclusion of any individual who might identify as feminist, however, it does limit the extent which the identity of feminist can be unpacked. It is possible that participants may have held very different definitions of 'feminism'. It is possible that how a feminist understand feminism may affect how they experience academia, particularly in relation ethnic minority women who reported most difficulty with combing a feminist identity with their ethnicity. Further, it is important to note that race and ethnicity are not static concepts, but are social constructs which shift according to time and place. As such, similar research conducted in contexts with differing racial politics may find a variety of patterns of experience of ethnic minority feminist women within the academy.

Participants did not discuss how whiteness may intersect with their gender to affect their experiences, despite some acknowledgement that feminism is often associated with being white. Although the intersection with a white ethnicity is implied in these discussions, it was never explicitly explored. While there is evidence that women feminist academics may experience difficulties in their careers and relationships with students, white women may be relatively privileged in comparison to non-white women. Further work is needed to problematise whiteness which is the implicit 'norm' which 'othered' non-white female academics are compared to. This can add to understanding of the ethnicity in the professions

more broadly where whiteness can facilitate access (Walker, 2005) and aspects of work are racialised (Mirchandani, 2003). It is essential that future research adopts a critical perspective to understand how women's experiences of the cross boundaries of ethnicity (Murray and Syed, 2010). Further, future work should consider the particular socio-political contexts of feminism, for example the complexities of 'race' within the UK with its colonial past and present.

The participatory approach in this study provides both advantages and limitations. Firstly for a number of participants it was evident that the focus groups were an opportunity for considerable personal and emotional experiences to be shared. This led to rich data and an opportunity to gain access to a diversity of experiences. However, LGBT participants felt concern that they would be identified and as such, withdrew consent for their data to be used in resulting publications. The participants took control over the study, determining the focus and data which was collected which illustrates a successful participatory project (Gyi et al., 2013). However, this also means the researcher lost some control and data which may have yielded a richer analysis was lost, for example, the ethnicity of each participant.fs

Conclusions

This paper has contributed to debates on the lived experiences of women in the workplace, specifically women academics, and how these can be explained using intersectionality. A feminist identity may result in an individual having a heightened awareness of how their gender affects their experience of life and work. As such, it qualitatively affects that experience. Studies of intersectionality must consider not only cumulative disadvantage, but also cumulative advantage. In contrast to recent research which has highlighted the difficulties experienced by feminist academics (Jenkins, 2014), the research here has suggested the

picture is more heterogeneous. As Macoun and Miller (2014) suggest, a feminist identity can be associated with opportunities to thrive within academia for early career researcher. The current study lends some support to this, with feminism being drawn upon as a source of strategic otherness for some women. However, experiences are diverse and affected by complex intersections of gender and ethnicity. There are considerable challenges to maintaining social justice agendas within an increasingly neoliberal university, especially those agenda which are sensitive to intersectionality (Moscowitz et al., 2014). As such, it is increasingly important that an intersectional lens is to be maintained if the challenges and opportunities for feminist academics are to be properly understood.

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