

## **Dream, Plan, Achieve: Researching to Make a Difference**

### **Extended Abstract Application (NARTI)**

**Wordcount: 995**

### **Broad Research Area: Option 1. HRM/Organisational Behaviours/Organisation Studies**

#### **Paper Title: Exploring Experiences of Women in Academia**

##### **Purpose**

Women's journey to equitable representation and remuneration in organisations has been widely problematised in the literature, and the gendered nature of Academia is no exception. The Academy plays a significant role in societal development in both how we construct and develop knowledge, yet progress to achieving equity is lagging. In the UK alone, Women in Academia are achieving representation statistically, with 47% of academic contracts held by women (HESA, 2021). Yet, hierarchically, only 29% of women hold the position of Professor (HESA, 2021). Beyond University boundaries gender inequity in Academia extends to research councils, editorial memberships, and funding bodies (Metz and Harding, 2012; European Commission, 2021). It is also important to consider that while numerical representation recounts one perspective, the qualitative experiences of those working in these environments may narrate a different truth. Whilst studies citing the under representation of women in academia emerge iteratively, there are growing calls for more qualitative insight into the complex role of individual academics with the aim of generating a new understanding of the potential factors hindering greater progress in closing representation and pay gaps (Mauthner and Edwards, 2010; Bevan and Gatrell, 2017). There are also calls to consider these issues drawing upon female perspectives (Knights and Richard, 2003; Fotaki, 2013; O'Keefe and Courtois, 2019). Considering the increasing demands on UK business schools shaped by the wave of New Managerialism and their growing importance and influence on organisations, this poses as an interesting case setting (Trkman, 2019). This paper is based on empirical research that explores the experiences of Women working in UK Business Schools, focusing on the discursive construction of their identity, career experiences and motivations to stay within the dominant masculine academic culture.

##### **Theoretical Background**

This research draws on several theoretical perspectives in order to build and contribute to knowledge. Critically, the paper evokes feminist ideas explored by Wolkowitz (2006) and Kristeva (1997), considering the potential of maternal bodies at work and how the capacity of the female body impacts career experience. Inspired by these foundations, the aim of this research is to ultimately provide a voice to ostracized subjects within a social context, whilst advancing concepts such as abjection, place, misrepresentation, and identity (Fotaki, 2013; Bevan and Gatrell, 2017; O'Keefe and Courtois, 2019). For instance, the study extends the interrelated concepts of 'space' and 'place', by drawing on rich empirical data to elucidate how the body creates space through identifying its place (Puwar, 2004; Massey, 2005). UK Academia offers a valuable context to advance knowledge of these convoluted dynamics due to significant change in the sector in recent years, shaped by a range of forces

including the fourth industrial revolution, a movement of new managerialism and the increasing diversification of societies (Thompson, 2017).

### **Research Question**

The research question that this paper aims to answer is *How do women working in UK Business Schools experience their organisational place and how does this impact their past, present, and future career decisions?* Thus, the aims of this research are to (a) investigate career experiences of women in UK Business Schools, considering multifaceted complexities of their role, (b) explore the career decisions and experiences that shape their organisational place today and (c) understand what motivates women to stay within Academia.

### **Methodology**

The methodology of this study extends beyond the extant demographic information, enacting a qualitative study constructed through narrative enquiry and thematic analysis (Leedy, Ormrod and Johnson, 2019). The participants all identified as women working in UK Business Schools, who had experience of working in roles that incorporated both teaching and research. The qualitative approach used semi structured interviews, conducted in the style of Cassell (2005), which explored participants identities, career, and motivations. Intersectional representation is axiologically important, therefore, a heterogenous sample with regards to geography, ethnicity, age, and parental circumstances was purposively sought where possible to gather a range of intersectional perspectives (Rodriguez, 2018). In addition to this, this research will use careful, purposive sampling retrieved through a snowball sampling approach, as a practical solution to allow women in Academia to come forward to talk about their experiences willingly (Given, 2016). The study is organised in 3 phases: a pilot study, main study and further study. A pilot study including 5 participants allowed the initial format of the interview to be critiqued and refined through a review process (DeMarrais, 2004). The main study aims to reach 30 participants. This was estimated based on mean recommended number for non-probability, purposive sample sizes in qualitative interview studies, and allows a degree of confidence to provide depth and breadth to answer the research question and resourcefully compare (DeMarrais, 2004). Depending on the results of the pilot study, a review which inductively assessed the number of participants to consider data saturation was completed, aimed at reaching a point that additional data does not present emerging themes that have not previously been identified (Given, 2016). Whilst some scholars suggest data saturation is achieved on 'instinct', an approach is adopted to consider data saturation achieved at the point to which narratives significantly overlap (Nelson, 2017). Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim to capture the entire conversation and ensure accuracy. To maintain anonymity, pseudonyms were employed. Thematic analysis was then employed to analyse the text, and coded both using the transcript and audio (Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori, 2018). The codes were reviewed through multiple rounds, and patterns were retrieved to identify developing themes.

### **Findings and Contributions**

The developing themes identified include 1) *the benchmarks of identity in a social context*; 2) *the creation of hidden 'safer spaces'*; and 3) *the strategic steps to navigating pestilential cultures*. By rendering rich qualitative insight into the experiences of women in UK business schools, the study aims to contribute to existing literature by providing a novel perspective on the career experiences

of female academics. The findings will generate important implications for managing and promoting Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion in UK Academia, which may be relevant more broadly for both policy and practice.

**Keywords:** Women, Academia, Bodies, Identity, Career

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