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The Violence of Impact: unpacking relations between gender, media and politics

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Abstract

Engaging in public dialogue is a crucial part of the impact agenda, but what are the politics of this engagement? What happens when female academics engage with, or are reported by media, in disseminating their research? Does negative impact 'count' as impact? Adopting a poststructuralist intersectional feminist analysis, this article uses the REF policy agenda as a case study in order to explore these questions. Drawing on extensive qualitative interview data, I operationalise the concept 'cultural sexism' as a mechanism to connect micro and macro analysis; using cumulative individual experiences to render visible wider social and political power structures. This article argues that while women may seek to actively build impact and public engagement in to their research agendas, we need to be cognizant that the site of interaction between media and academia is gendered and raced. I argue that we therefore need to reflect upon the ethics of pursuing a policy which: 1) disproportionately exposes a diversity of women to structural and symbolic violence; 2) has the potential to silence women's contribution to knowledge and; 3) conversely may serve to simply privilege masculinised assumptions as to what does and does not count as knowledge.

Introduction

Impact now forms 25% of the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF) agenda. Its current definition has been broadly taken to mean a positive interpretation of the role of academia in public life. But is this engagement always positive? What happens when the responses to this engagement are negative? And what happens if the impact of this

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engagement on academics themselves is negative? The building of impact requires academics to engage in public dissemination activities, and media are often a key mechanism through which this is achieved. Media do not operate in a vacuum, nor does the academic construction and dissemination of knowledge. While we may think these spaces are gender neutral, they are far from gender blind (cf. Fraser, 1985). The argument here is that the current impact agenda fails to account for existing gendered divisions within the academy, which are reinforced and co-constituted by public engagement via a gendered media structure.

In this mediated public sphere, women are more likely to have negative experiences. Women are more likely to be trolled and subject to gender specific forms of abuse (such as rape and threats of other forms of sexual violence [Mantilla, 2015]). Mary Beard is perhaps the most high-profile female academic to have been subjected to this type of online abuse. Following her appearance on *Question Time* she describes how on social media 'They discussed whether I needed rogering, and how I was an "ignorant ****" and a disgrace to Cambridge University and woman-kind' (in Fyrer, 2013). Beard's response was to take on the trolls and to 'fight back'. While the agency she displayed is powerful, underlying this experience, however, are questions about the wider cultural political context through which sexism is culturally legitimated and normalized (AUTHOR OWN, 2017). The active role media play in this process is crucial to our understanding of politics: the ways in which media frame discourses can shape public understanding and influence public policy (Entman, 1993; Barnett, 2016). Impact, that we are encouraged to pursue through public engagement, is lived out and experienced, in part, through media platforms of dissemination. In this sense, media and academia co-exist as iterative and co-constitutive sites of interaction. These two contexts are neither race nor gender neutral. The consequences of this public engagement can be negative and I argue, this interactive space can therefore serve to inflict 'symbolic violence' upon a diversity of women, by reinforcing their silencing and marginalization.

As academics in UK Universities are aware, the Impact agenda plays an increasingly important role in the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and by extension in their daily working lives. Following widespread criticism of REF 2014, an independent consultative process headed by Lord Stern, led a review of REF policy. While a series of recommendations were made in respect of the broader conduct of the REF, the particular focus of this paper is the Impact component of the REF agenda. Introduced in 2014, the impact agenda was weighted as 20% of all submissions, which has increased to 25% for REF2021. The Stern report produced as a result of this review, informed the development of current guidelines (REF 2021; 2017) and recommended a broadening of understandings of impact to include public engagement and cultural life. Impact was defined as ‘an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia’ (REF, 2015; HEFCE, 2018). This definition suggests, and has been widely interpreted to mean, that cultural impact and public engagement requires measurement. This contains positivistic assumptions that impact is only that which can be quantifiably measured. But as Collini [2017] observes, this tells us nothing about the actual quality of research.

Inconsistently, despite the recognition of the importance of culture (which by definition is fluid [cf. Williams, 1983]), the Impact agenda in REF policy is underpinned by the positivistic assumption that the value of, and to, culture can still only be established through its measurement. These assumptions are reinforced where we are encouraged by our institutions to engage in imaginative attempts to generate impact. Indeed, we have seen a proliferation of blogs (such as the well-informed LSE blog; and the Conversation) which seek to make academic work available and accessible to a wider public audience. Excellent detailed analysis has been undertaken on the ways in which the impact agenda has shaped the discipline of political science (Dunlop, 2018). We are encouraged to ensure our work has relevance (see for example Flinders, 2013; John, 2013). Although these accounts have failed to take gender in to account. As Campbell and Childs (2013) point out women have a history of actively engaging in public policy debate: Feminist scholars provide long standing examples of best practice (Campbell &

Childs, 2013: 185). Concurrently, there is a developing literature which encourages academics to promote their research impact through the use of social media (e.g. Mollett et al 2017). This is reinforced for example, through journal and University practices which urge academics to pursue active media and social media strategies in their dissemination activities (cf. Duffy & Pooley, 2017). In what follows, I would like to add a critical layer of reflection to these technological and operational policy developments.

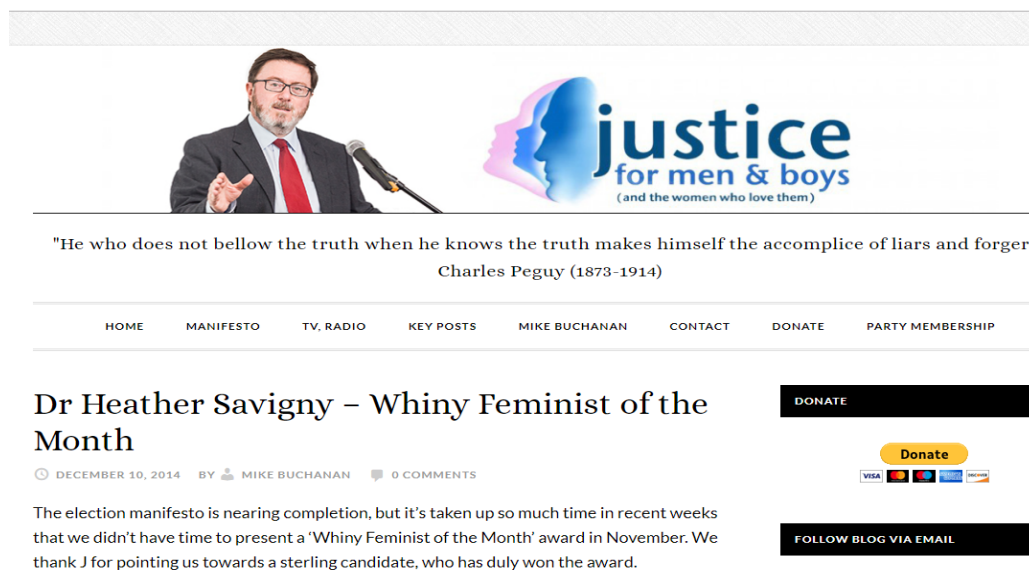
The aim of this article is to offer a critical reflection on: 1) the impact agenda of the REF, by exploring the ways in which a diversity of female academics are impacted through the activity of building REF impact in and through the public dissemination of their research; and 2) the politics of two interactive contexts context (media and academia) in which the construction and dissemination of knowledge is gendered and racialized. Offering a poststructural feminist and intersectional (Crenshaw, 1991) analysis using surveys as a means to gather interview data, this article also explores 3) the impact of mediated public engagement on female academics themselves. This I argue enables us to make visible the ways in which academic women experience 'cultural sexism' alongside 'symbolic violence' in the mediated public sphere which has deleterious consequences for a diversity of women in academia seeking to engage in public dissemination and the building of impact. Fundamentally, this also asks political questions about the nature of power in a policy agenda situated in a mediated context. This, I contend, fails to acknowledge the embedding of masculinized knowledge and cultural sexism, as features which can serve to silence (Beard, 2017), 'discipline and punish' a diversity of academic women.

Impact in the Higher Education context

In 2014, I was interviewed for the *Independent on Sunday* about a paper I'd had published about women's experiences of sexism in academia. The interview, I was advised, would be another excellent dimension to my 'impact case study'. Here was an

example of ‘public engagement’ and my research being disseminated beyond the confines of the narrow ‘ivory tower’ of academe. Indeed, I was advised that this exactly the kind of thing that the REF impact agenda was seeking to foster and I was strongly encouraged to take part.

Following my interview and the publication of the story about my research in the Sunday press, I received an email (which I later discovered had been blind copied to a large number of male colleagues, including some particularly senior ones) telling me that I had been awarded ‘Whiny Feminist of the Month’. The email contained abusive language. It seemed designed primarily to humiliate me in my workplace, given the people who had been blind copied in, and in the public sphere. Upon Googling, I discovered that my “award” was given by Mike Buchanan, leader of Justice for Men and Boys political party (who had stood in the 2015 election).



The screenshot shows a website header with a photo of Mike Buchanan speaking at a microphone. To his right is the logo for 'justice for men & boys (and the women who love them)'. Below the photo is a quote: "He who does not bellow the truth when he knows the truth makes himself the accomplice of liars and forgers. Charles Peguy (1873-1914)". A navigation menu includes links for HOME, MANIFESTO, TV, RADIO, KEY POSTS, MIKE BUCHANAN, CONTACT, DONATE, and PARTY MEMBERSHIP. The main content area features the article title 'Dr Heather Savigny – Whiny Feminist of the Month' with a 'DONATE' button and a 'FOLLOW BLOG VIA EMAIL' button.

While it seemed I was in good company, Harriet Harman, Laura Bates, Jo Swinson and Caroline Criado Perez had also been ‘recipients,’ this kind of abuse and harassment nonetheless seemed to be predominantly reserved for women. I decided to turn this experience around and use the ‘award’ as evidence of impact. In response, I was advised that this kind of negative response did not count as ‘impact’. Interesting. So a negative response to research does not count as impact? Not only was I shaken by this

experience but it also served to further knock my confidence in my research. This question and experience, in line with feminist methodological approaches (e.g. Crenshaw, 1991; Ahmed, 2007), led me to ask questions about other academic women's lived experiences. Not only about the reactions that women were receiving in relation to their disseminated research, but the impact that this was having on them as academics. These micro level experiences generate cumulative insights. This cumulative effect is the basis from which we can ask political questions about the wider structures of power within society. In the case of this article, asking more specifically about the politics of the academic and media context which form the basis of a diversity of women's public engagement in the impact agenda.

Gender and the Higher Education Context

In UK academia, women are under represented both descriptively and substantively (cf. Childs, 2008). Descriptively, we see that women are 35% more likely to undertake an undergraduate degree than men (Weale, 2016). And yet, only 36 of the world's top 200 Universities have female leaders (Bothwell, 2017) and in the UK, only 2 female VCs are BAME (Khan, 2017). Men are over represented elsewhere at senior level, constituting 76% of the professoriate despite being 55% of the academic staff (HESA 2017). And out of nearly 20 thousand professors, only 30 of those are BAME women (Solanke, 2017). UK Higher Education also has a gendered pay gap; UK female academics earn on average 11.3% less than men, and in some institutions these figures widen to 27% (Grove, 2015).

Substantively, women are less likely to be cited (Ferber, 1988; Maliniak et al, 2013) or invited to speak at conferences or be on panels (Yong, 2017); more likely to have their work devalued (Jenkins, 2014; Wright, 2014) or ranked lower than their male counterparts in peer review processes when author identities are known (Le Goues et al, 2018). Women are more likely to be viewed as "teachers" rather than "researchers,"

and undertake far more of the administrative obligations than their male counterparts (Misra et al. 2011). Women are also more likely to be evaluated negatively by their students (Mitchell & Martin, 2018) and experience micro sexism and racism as part of daily life within academia (Gabriel & Tate, 2017; AUTHOR OWN, 2017). Within the academy, scholars have argued that entrenched gender biases have resulted in an 'inhospitable institutional climate' for women (Shames & Wise, 2017). These experiences and structures provide the context within which academic scholarship is both done and engaged with. In short, structural inequalities around gender and race are entrenched within university cultures, practices and modes of evaluation. Higher Education does not exist in a vacuum, and indeed the impact agenda serves to very much reinforce this point. The impact agenda, however, is also situated within a structural context, and the media play a key role in providing the platform through which knowledge is disseminated and communicated. And so making sense of the ways in which a diversity of female academics take part in public engagement and 'impact building' requires understanding of the interactive lived and mediated contexts which structures this engagement.

The mediated context: The politics of communication

Media play a necessary role in the framing, communication and dissemination of ideas. Media are a site where ideas can be expressed, debated, contested and legitimated. But media are not neutral, and as a wealth of literature has observed, play an active role in contemporary political processes (e.g. Street, 2001; Savigny, 2016). That media are considered as significant political actors, is evidenced for example, by the extent of resources which are devoted to attempts by politicians to generate favourable media coverage. The site where discussion about what takes place in public life, in our politics, and in our society, and informs policy decisions is often assumed to be gender blind. As Nancy Fraser (1985) observes however, gender blindness does not equate to gender neutrality. The ways in which media represent women has long been recognized as

profoundly problematic (e.g. Van Zoonen, 1994) in its perpetuation of a masculinised view of what the world looks like and the role that women should perform within this. To understand the politics of media, is to understand not only the role that media play in political (elite) life, but to understand the political role media play in reinforcing gendered power structures at the micro level. Media do provide a site where ideas are contested, debated and legitimated, but, they are also providing the place where the 'limits of our imagination' (Lewis, 2013) are articulated.

The rise of social media has provided a 'quick and easy' shortcut for academics to communicate and share their work. For some, new social media and digital technologies hold the capacity to provide an alternate ontology which requires a more complex understanding of the role that media play in shaping society. Arvidsson & Foka (2015) argue 'Internet research must let go of notions as lived within or without online spaces and instead re-imagine life as lived through digital technologies'. That is, while analytically it may be possible to separate social media from supposedly offline lived experiences, what these new technologies mean is that ontological boundaries between media and social lives are so blurred as to be inseparable. Life *is* what happens on social media.

At this same time, gendered online hostility is increasing (Jane, 2015), and is becoming increasingly common in academia (Kamenetz, 2018). Social media is a site where women may be subject to a whole host of death and rape threats (Citron, 2009) 'fraping' (Lumsden & Morgan, 2012). (For discussion of the term trolling see Mantilla, 2015; Lumsden & Morgan, 2012, 2017; Vera-Gray, 2017). Research in psychology points to particular kinds of individual behavioural/personality traits (such as narcissism, sadomasochism) which might account for a greater propensity to engage in trolling (Craker & March, 2016). These types of trolls are more likely to be male (Sest & March, 2017) and more likely to be influenced by the community they find themselves engaging in (Cheng et al, 2017). Where the literature focus moves away from the individual perpetrators of trolling, attention has been drawn to the ways in which the media

landscape more widely provides a structural response in the framing of trolling. Media reinforce a gendered narrative of trolling by focusing attention on women as victims, rather than men as perpetrators (Lumsden and Morgan, 2017). In these media discourses, invisibilising the agency that male trolls enact, ensures the narrative is structured around women. This framing by extension, serves to implicate the responsibility that women have to protect themselves, rather than the responsibility that men have not to adopt this behaviour in the first place. Consistent with feminist theorizing (cf. Crenshaw, 1991; Ahmed 2007) the argument here is that we need to hear the experiences of individual women in order to understand wider political power relations. Much like the most recent #MeToo movement, the voices of a diversity of women's experiences enables us to render visible the politics and consequences of a raced and gendered structural context.

Operationalising political analysis through lived experience: cultural sexism

In order to explore the ways in which women experience the impact of the impact agenda through the dissemination of their research, I undertook a preliminary survey, in order to gain access to interviewees. Respondents were situated across disciplines and a range of research topics from science, social science and arts and humanities. The initial survey was sent to a variety of women's networks and mailing lists in political science, feminist studies, the Black British Academics Network and University women's networks across the country. This survey attracted 76 respondents. The primary objective was to gain an understanding and insight in to women's experiences and as the nature of this research project is qualitative, I followed up with survey responses inviting interview volunteers and undertook 18 follow up in depth interviews.

This project received institutional ethical approval. Clearly, some of the data that was revealed was extremely distressing for the respondents. While the interviews were about soliciting data, there was also a necessary component of 'care' that was needed.

Each interview was not restricted by a time limit, allowing respondents to talk through not just what they had experienced, but how this had made them feel and their reflections on this. Respondents noted how they found giving voice to their experience was cathartic (and again, these interviews were conducted by self-selection of the respondents). Respondents were also sent the draft of the paper prior to submission in order to ensure that they were comfortable within what was being presented and that their anonymity was assured. In the quotes that I use from interviewees I am cognizant of the debate as to the extent to which reproducing the words of online trolls continues their circulation, potentially normalizing their position (Phillips, 2015: 3) and so have edited some of the more vicious comments.

Presented below are the key themes and issues which emerged from the data. Adopting a feminist methodology enabled me to map in which cultural norms become embedded (Reinharz, 1992: 19). Code (2000) reminds us that the ways in which we construct knowledge plays a crucial role in enabling us to make visible and challenge existing power relationships. Thematically, the data is structured around issues of violence (real, symbolic and epistemic), gendered norms and stereotypes and the cumulative effect of silencing. This terrain I argue, constitutes a 'cultural sexism' whereby a diversity of women experience sexism as an everyday, ordinary, occurrence, combined with the cultural context which gives rise to it. The cumulative 'drip drip' effects of this have (im)material impacts and outcomes for diverse groups of women, which in turn may disempower them or marginalize their experiences and contributions, ultimately giving rise to a structural silencing (AUTHOR OWN, 2017:648).

Violence

According to UN report, 73% of women have experienced violence online (Rodríguez-Darias & Aguilera-Ávila: 2018). Technological utopians have noted the opportunities afforded by online spaces where people may be freed from physical bodily stereotyped

constraints (e.g. Haraway, 2013). More critical accounts have argued that online spaces represent 'white male playgrounds' (Green and Adam, 2001) which can fuel sexualized violence (Harcourt, 1999) where 'deviant' women and men can be harassed (Sutton, 1996). Mantilla describes how women have been subject to death threats upon speaking at University events. These death threats were combined with the threat of "massacres" if the talks went ahead (Mantilla, 2015:73-4). This is clearly echoing the 1989 Montreal massacre, where 14 women students were killed by a gunman who upon opening fire shouted 'You're all a bunch of feminists, and I hate feminists' (cited in Bindel, 2012).

Vera-Gray's (2017) work details the ways in which she was subject to voluminous abuse after posting details of her research project online. Vera-Gray's work was concerned with violence against women and located in a feminist framework. Although she made a conscious choice not to foreground this approach and she received comments such as: '... Bitch, please find the tallest skyscraper near you, and jump off of it. You would be doing a great service to society. (Comment on research site, 10 June 2012)' (Vera-Gray, 2017: 71). Vera-Gray makes the point that her research was not explicitly feminist but concerned with the ways in which women experienced violence and intrusion from men in online spaces. What is interesting and notable perhaps is that we might be encouraged to think that somehow doing a feminist project would perhaps 'invite' abuse? Somehow it seems being openly feminist in a public space appears to mean fair game for trolls to proffer abuse (Cole, 2015). And yet, this does this problematic implication also serve to reinforce the notion that somehow feminist research is less valuable as knowledge, than perhaps other kinds of research? Those I interviewed for this project were engaged in a wide range of research projects, many of which were not explicitly feminist (not that this legitimates this kind of abuse) and conscious of not making claims as to which kind of research might openly 'invite' comments. It is notable that while some comments were directed at research topics per se (for example around Brexit), what all of these experiences share is the trolling and abuse that was directed at

their gender. Where women were identifiably of colour, race also intersected with this gendered abuse.

It has been well documented that male violence towards women and threats of male violence are often normalised and legitimated in the broader mediated landscape (Boyle, 2005; 2018). Popular culture reinforces this normalisation of violence in music (cf. Hill & Savigny, forthcoming) and we see men rape women to drive plotlines in TV and films (Projansky, 2001). Not only is this masculine violence, and its threat normalised in our mediated cultural context, but it has real world material effects for this who experience it (e.g. Mendes et al, forthcoming). This fear of physical violence was a key concern for those female academics engaging in public dissemination. As one interviewee noted: *I consider [my] online activity to be a potential for real-life personal safety concerns*. This gendered threat of violence was also racialized towards a female academic of colour: *...In discussing [my research on] abortion I have frequently received abuse telling me 'your mother should've aborted you, there's too many brown people anyway' (or variations), 'maybe you should keep your legs closed, you sl*t' (or variations)*.

While my study participants included research and teaching staff, we know that students also become targets of this kind of abuse. Lola Olufemi was a Cambridge student who became subject to vile trolling when she campaigned for more people of colour to be included on her reading list in an attempt to “decolonize” the curriculum (Mosanya, 2017). It is not without irony to note that this abuse increased following the way in which *The Telegraph* framed her². The Pew Research Centre (2017) reports that in the US women are twice as likely to be trolled because of their gender, and 1 in 4 Black women say they have been trolled because of their race (in contrast to only 3% of white people). A recent report by Amnesty International (2018) has shown that MP Diane Abbot was subject to 45% of all online abuse targeted at women MPs in the last

² The Telegraph subsequently printed a correction for their inaccurate but abuse generating original headline ‘Student forces Cambridge to drop white authors’

election, and Black and Asian female MPs received 35% more abusive tweets than their white colleagues. This experience is reinforced in academic public engagement where a respondent highlighted the intersectional nature of this violence. She told me she was a regular recipient of: *Islamophobic tweets. People mocking Islam and the fact that I am a Muslim (or rather: a Muslim woman)*. Another interviewee told how: *When discussing colonisation, I would often be told to 'go back to where you come from', or 'be grateful for the civilising effects, you'd be burning on a pyre if it wasn't for us saving brown women' [and repeat]*. Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) has pointed to the ways in which multiple power structures intersect to form complex sites of oppression, and that women of colour subsequently experience gendered hostility in ways that are different to white women. And the argument here is that it is crucial not simply to accept a 'one size fits all' of being 'a woman' but that actually race and gender intersect as multiple sites of oppression and these need to be taken in to account.

Mediated gendered norms and stereotypes

Western media structures, we know are predominantly populated by white men (Global Media Monitoring Project, 2015). Successive sources point to the ways in which a diversity of women and women's interests are silenced and marginalized in news and current affairs. For example, women comprise only 24% of people heard, read about or seen in newspaper, TV and radio news; where women do appear they are more likely to be presented in terms of their family status, and men are significantly over represented when it comes to news about, or speaking about, politics, government and economics (Global Media Monitoring Project, 2015). There is a wealth of literature which explores the problematic construction of gendered media content (for key examples see Van Zoonen, 1994; Ross, 2013). It has been argued that technology itself is a site where gender is constituted (Wacjman, 2000) where women may have equal access but unequal levels of participation (Royal, 2005). In this sense, misogyny itself is networked

(Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016). The argument is that media have gender built in to their structures, both in terms of the descriptive under representation of women as journalists, owners, editors, and the substantive under representation of women's interests which is technologically structurally embedded. Gendered norms and behaviours are reinforced rather than challenged (Reagle, 2012) and media become a site where women's bodies are regulated. These norms are reinforced in mediated public engagement, for example one respondent noted: *During my two pregnancies I did not refer to them and we filmed [for the YouTube channel that the respondent runs] so as to not make it obvious.* Telling us that even where a woman actively seeks to increase her visibility and voice in the mediated public sphere, internalised concerns with possibilities of violence and threats to personal safety, still result in the regulation of her body.

When female academics are invited to speak in media for a in a professional capacity, they are still subject to 'the male gaze' (cf. Mulvey, 1975). Despite appearing in media as a professional scientist who has a co-owned YouTube channel to disseminate her work told me how: *I regularly receive gendered comments on my YouTube videos: comments on my marital status, physical attractiveness... The overall effect is cumulative, to make me extremely aware of what I post online and how I present myself. I think carefully about what I wear for videos and what language I use online (even my jewellery will be commented on).* It is not the nature of the research per se which attracts comments, but the gender and race of the person doing the research which apparently generates the vitriol.

A scientist described how she had received: *direct email messages to my university address [which is not published on the media site] as a result of my social media work....while many have been supportive some have been sexually explicit and distressing.* Women's bodies are a site where a range of disciplining and attempts to silence take place. Interviewees noted how comments left on sites focused on their perceived failure to conform to media representations and normalization of what a

woman should 'be'. The 'hate mail' abuse written to a female academic following a public engagement event said: *See if I was a Modern Feminist, I'd be fat and wear shapeless bags in place of clothes too, and I'd like, marry a foreign man, because that's like so progressive, then quit my job and have him earn all the money. Get back to whingeing about the Non Existent Gender Pay Gap, fatty.* Mediated constructions of femininity and the focus on women's bodies and appearance as a means to regulate women, constitutes a site where 'femininity, is a discipline that produces bodies and identities and operates as an effective form of social control' (King, 2004:29). This is something that is not confined simply to mainstream media, but a key feature on social media and online activity as well.

Silencing

Gayatri Spivak (1998) uses the term epistemic violence to explore a type of violence inflicted upon marginalised groups which attempts to eliminate their knowledge. One of the ways in which this epistemic violence is enacted is through the silencing of voice. Mary Beard (2017) has demonstrated how women have been historically discursively silenced, and these attempts (and successes) at silencing was prominent in exploring women's experiences within the academy. Women in my study spoke of the microaggressions and silencing they have experienced by engaging in media debates: *I have been spoken over, spoken to rudely, mansplained to, interrupted, silenced* and these kinds of experiences were almost routine behavior that women were on the receiving end of. One female academic who had posted about her research online and had written for mainstream media noted that: *I received over 500 below the line hostile and misogynistic comments to a piece that I wrote. I no longer post [in that newspaper] I hardly ever post on Facebook, and I am not on Twitter. Partly it is fear of hostility, partly it is stressful, and I have enough stress in my job already.*

Another respondent described the consequences of this kind of 'hostile environment' wherein she had observed such abuse to female colleagues that: *The fear of harassment weighs much more heavily on me than actual harassment I have received. I have altered*

my research trajectory since my PhD to avoid the topics where I fear I am most likely to incur targeted harassment. Not only was this silencing having consequences in terms of changing research trajectories and projects, but this silencing has recognized as having the potential to impact career progression where 'impact', 'h' indexes, and raising public profiles are all aspects that regulate academic careers. And there was a clear awareness that this type of engagement was a demand of the job and could affect employment opportunities: I am on a fixed term contract. I avoid tweeting too much because I do not want to get the backlash from the nasty men's rights [groups] and the alt right... I do wonder though if this relatively low social media presence impacts on my job prospects

While this kind of overt silencing of women academics is concerning, just as pernicious have been the effects of women who had witnessed the treatment of other women online. And so a form of covert silencing is also taking place; where women do not post because of the concerns they have about what will happen to them if they do. An interviewee told me: *I've heard so many horror stories about abuse and trolling that I'm very wary of what I say on social media and, as such, rarely say anything. I do feel that this has curtailed my participation in public discussion on these platforms.* Notable in my study were the women who contacted me in response to the survey who said that they didn't engage in social media activity specifically and were hesitant to engage in media activity more generally, as they had seen what happened to women who did, as one respondent commented: *I don't engage on Facebook or Twitter, I have seen what happens to women who do, and I just don't think it is worth those extra levels of stress.* These women were silenced before they had even spoken.

Individual and collective effects

As with much research around media technologies and media effects, the impact of such abuse on individuals may be temporary or ephemeral and as a result, difficult to establish (Mendes et al, forthcoming). The aim here is not to quantify the effect of the

abuse, but to articulate its existence and the ways in which this serves to reinforce the blurring of boundaries between public and private lives. These incidents had physical effects for the recipients as one respondent told me: *...I was shaking when I came across these tweets for the first time.* The reaction of this interviewee was to feel that she should not speak, or engage, for fear of further abuse or threats of violence. Other respondents noted repeatedly how they found: *These encounters ... violating. Really unpleasant. Put me off Twitter in particular where encounters can be really very nasty and upsetting.* In other cases, these experiences made women feel: *Angry. Distraught. Tired. It meant I stayed offline and didn't post. It meant I didn't engage with people. It made me think about my research differently and whether it was valid. It made me worry that my academic colleagues agreed with this- especially as there was deafening silence on most days.* The concerns about what was happening in the media world were internalised. Women respondents felt the interaction of media with academia more widely in their workspace. More widely this also contributed to the problematic reinforcement of 'imposter syndrome' (Parkman, 2016), which in turn has cumulative effects. Women are discouraged from speaking about their research, with both personal and career consequences.

Another interviewee described her experiences following appearing in a public debate. This had been filmed by her institution and picked up by the national media. The ways in which the media had positioned the article, calling her a 'deluded Professor' for discussing her research on international politics, led to an outpouring of online hostility. While she notes how she was supported by her department after the aftermath, it nonetheless affected her: *I am ...conflicted about taking part in public events. On the one hand I think it is really important that I have a voice in the debate [around Brexit] and I don't want to be silenced. But on the other it's really scary, as I don't know who these people are.* We have seen that in political debate women and minority groups have been digitally trolled into to a spiral of silence (cf. Noelle-Neuman, 1974; Olson & LePoe, 2017).

There was also a concern for how this kind of behavior might shape women's academic identities. One respondent commented that the experience she had resulted in some extremely conflicted feelings. On the one hand she said, she did not know what this would mean for her future as she reflected: *my entire academic identity is bound up with impact, so if I don't engage in impact does this mean that I am no longer an academic?* This kind of experience can further contribute to the feeling of being an 'imposter' in a masculinised space, which in turn undermines self worth and a sense of credibility (cf. Murabit, 2018).

Beyond the personal experiences and traumatic effects, collectively we see questions being raised as to the credibility and legitimacy of women as producers of knowledge. Historically women's value to the acquisition of knowledge has been negated (cf. Beard, 2017). The assumption of what academia is 'for' and who gets to speak, who has 'value' in the contemporary construction of academic knowledge is reinforced by the comment left for Vera-Gray which reads: 'Male scientists don't get involved in these kinds of thing because they are busy researching real things that may have an impact on the world. (Comment on YouTube video, 2012) (2017: 73). This notion that women do not have a right to be contributing to knowledge was noted by an interviewee who told how: *Posts are often questioning why a woman is doing science. As another respondent told me: I have been trolled under the line in various newspapers when I've been interviewed or contributed an article - often a dismissal or discrediting of my professional standing. I also received anonymous 'hate mail' after a recent exhibition (during which I appeared on television, radio and in the newspapers).*

These effects in themselves constitute a form of symbolic violence. Symbolic violence reflects the ways in which domination and subordination, systems of unequal power relations and exploitation are reproduced through daily practice, and through cultural

actions and experiences these relations of power are normalised (cf. Bourdieu, 2001) Women are publicly denigrated for their contributions to knowledge and so an 'everyday violence' is enacted (Scheper-Hughes, 1996). This takes place through the discursive institutionalisation of processes which reinforce gendered divisions and enable a range of forms of violence towards women to become accepted, normalised and reproduced.

Spaces of solidarity and support

On the one hand social media have provided a powerful space whereby women whose voices have been previously unheard or marginalized may be articulated. For example, Twitter has become a site where feminist activists have fought back against gendered and racialized abuse. It has been a particularly significant site for Black women, whose voices are often marginalized or silenced within mainstream media (Williams, 2015: 342). Twitter is a site where women have called out the tendency for mainstream media to 'victim blame' and have provided a mechanism whereby women can expose and discuss their experiences in spaces where these voices can be heard, as illustrated by the recent #MeToo campaign. A number of interviewees commented that the main source of support they had received had been from other members of the online community. One respondent commented that the online levels of support from senior people in her field had given her the strength to continue, indeed had shored up her determination not to be silenced. She said: *I felt really empowered as a result of the number and types of people who came in to speak up for me.* Another commented how the male regulator of the YouTube channel she used now regulated and moderated comments, so she was protected from the worst of the trolls and hostile comments. This building of a sense of community and solidarity is clearly a key feature of the ways in which women can be supported to engage in public facing dissemination of their research. And this sense of collectivity perhaps challenges, and renders visible, some of the problematic ways in which the individualised neoliberal agenda has become so

embedded in our institutions, that these levels of support are not necessarily available in the places that we work.

The argument advanced in this article is that we need to acknowledge the gendered space in which impact and public engagement takes place, and, allow for the ways in which engaging in impact is a site where women engage in extra emotional and affective labour. Universities would do well to support this agenda, not only in pushing colleagues to engage in impact but in providing training in engaging in impact; but demonstrating an awareness of the costs and benefits of this type of engagement particularly for a diversity of female academics; alongside recognizing the extra work that women burden in navigating the impact agenda. As one respondent commented: *I think impact is a crucial part of what it is we do as academics, and I don't want to change the academic that I am as a result of these experiences* and this quote perhaps illustrates the problematic nature of the issue.

When the impact agenda is experienced in a neoliberal individualised setting, we miss a fundamental question that needs asking: what is the cumulative cultural effect of women's knowledge being silenced? In the current climate, we would be required to measure this, but how, we might ask is it possible to measure the impact of absence and of silence. And if we can't measure it, in this epistemological positioning then we cannot make claims that it exists. And yet we do know this silencing of women's knowledge and contribution to public debate and public knowledge is a cultural impact of the technological demands of social media, demands which are reinforced by academic institutions and HE public policy in pursuit of an impact agenda. The focus on individuals as the authors of impact denies the collective and obscures the structural workings of power. The aim here has been: 1) to use the experiences of a diversity of academic women to expose the ways in which these cultural contexts impact on the ways in which women experience their professional practice as individuals; and 2) to demonstrate how these experiences collectively facilitate a wider understanding and exploration of the ways in which power relations operate.

Conclusion

In wider society the #MeToo campaign, emanating from the work of Tarana Burke, has brought women's experiences of sexual abuse, harassment and assault to media attention. Notably, speaking out about these experiences in and of themselves have led to further violent abuse on social media (Stewart & Elgot, 2017). The fundamental argument in this article is that we need to 'join the dots'. The ways in which media discursively construct women is political in the ways in which gendered norms are legitimated. This is intimately bound with an HE context. Media and academia interact and co-constitute raced and gendered norms and expectations. I am arguing that the impact agenda itself serves to embed the gendered and raced nature of HE though its interpretation and the denial of the negative impact that engaging in this agenda can have upon a diversity of women academics.

To have a politics of ethics around the impact agenda means that to understand the consequences of the impact agenda, we need to situate it in its structural context; one in which HE and media sites whereby research is disseminated are gendered terrains. In this sense, rendering visible individual experiences enables us to make sense of the ways in which structural contexts operate. A politics of ethics will therefore reflect on the structural interventions necessary to remedy the structural source of the problems that emerge for female academics engaging in the impact agenda. Some of the respondents noted how their Universities engaged in what they viewed as 'best practice' in providing media training sessions and having legal support available for staff. But this was patchy rather than uniform. As one of the interviewees said to me: *I do feel very angry that as academics we are expected to have this social media presence (it was an essential criterion for my job that I tweet), but then there is no support for us in doing it well or in dealing with the shit that comes with it. When I went on the radio I talked for a long time with our comms team about what to do if I got trolled. They were sympathetic, but the only advice they could offer was to go to the police.*

The aim of this article has also been to argue, when we are encouraging colleagues to

engage in the 'impact' agenda, we need a politics of ethics which acknowledges the intersectional nature of this engagement. We might require a more careful understanding of the nature of impact. The engagement with this policy agenda disproportionately impacts negatively on a diversity of women, not only in the extra work that is required by them as they navigate this terrain, but also in the types of responses and the effects on academics themselves. The fear of this type of negative engagement can have individual career and personal effects, alongside cumulatively marginalizing and silencing women's contribution to knowledge. A politics of the ethics of public engagement takes account of the ways in which gender precedes and structures the mediated context of higher education and the ways in which knowledge is both constructed and disseminated. This crucially invites us to reflect on what and how wider social and political power structures may be reinforced, rather than challenged by public engagement and in the impact agenda. In this interactive co-constitutive context there is the negative potential (and reality) of the silencing of a diversity of women's knowledge.

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