Bringing positional processes back in: occupational gender segregation in 'non-academic' work

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This article highlights that organisations mask a 'gendered substructure' *and* a 'positional substructure', and reinforces the importance of (re)incorporating the effects of positional processes as an analytical concern in current analysis of occupational segregation. Drawing on the concept of 'inequality regimes', we use the case of 'non-academic' workers in Scottish higher education institutions as the context in which to explore how gendered and positional processes may be perpetuating occupational gender segregation ─ focusing on finance, registry, security and cleaning staff. Our findings show how embedded gendered and positional processes are reinforcing occupational gender segregation in many areas of non-academic work. We reveal that some gendered processes are position-sensitive and that stereotyped language use and related biases impact the progression and treatment of workers at the 'bottom' ─ and the compounding effects on women. We show that positions within organisational opportunity structures cannot merely be read off grading hierarchies and argue that any analysis of positional substructures necessitates uncovering the potential existence of multiple organisational hierarchies and other forms of positional advantage/disadvantage, whilst recognising that positional substructures are not static.

Keywords: gender; higher education; inequality regimes; occupational segregation; positional substructure

Introduction

The general shift away from economic explanations of occupational gender segregation to sociological explanations reflects a consensus that the latter are better able to deal with the disadvantages that organisational structural constraints confer on women (e.g., Anker, 1997; Crompton & Harris, 1998). Acker's (1990) proposition that organisations are not gender neutral has been especially influential here; organisations may well present a veneer of rational objectivity but essentially mask a 'gendered substructure'

(p. 154) ─ whereby often invisible, biased processes perpetuate occupational gender segregation. These processes do not operate in isolation but operate alongside other biased processes. Indeed, Acker (2006, 2012) suggests that any exploration of gender inequality that does not focus on at least one other category of inequality is necessarily incomplete. At the same time, she also acknowledges that biased processes linked to hierarchy tend to be neglected in analysis of occupational gender segregation because they are typically viewed as a 'legitimate' part of 'organizational life' (Acker, 2006, p. 211). We argue that it is time to redress this omission and incorporate potential inequality-producing processes linked to positions within organisational opportunity structures, 'particularly those stemming from the nature of hierarchy' (Kanter, 1976, p. 415), back into the analytical fold. Certainly the translation of HR policies into practices vary depending on position in the organisational pecking order (Hoque & Noon, 2004) ─ and women are disproportionately concentrated at lower levels in organisational grading structures.

There is also a lack of empirical evidence on how occupational gender segregation and efforts to address it are playing out in the context of neo-liberal reforms, especially in the public sector (e.g., Williams, 2013). Providing these missing empirics, our qualitative research examines occupational gender segregation within higher education institutions (HEIs). Our focus on the public sector is interesting because it sits at the intersection of competing pressures to: reduce costs (neo-liberal/austerity agenda); to support equality, accessibility and rights; and to act as a role model employer. HEIs are an interesting case because they are quasi-public sector organisations i.e., not formally public sector, but consuming significant public funds and increasingly infused with market ideologies (Acker, 2012; Olssen & Peters, 2005). HEIs also face mounting pressure to tackle occupational gender segregation (ECU,

2015). We focus on the often 'invisible' (Szekeres, 2004) and under-researched (Acker, 2012, p. 222) 'non-academic' workforce to provide a timely, and much needed, fine-grained analysis of occupational gender segregation. Drawing on the concept of 'inequality regimes' (Acker, 2006) we explore how gendered processes (e.g., Acker, 1990, 2006, 2012) *and* positional processes (e.g., Bhaskar, 1979, 1998; Martinez Dy, Lee, & Marlow, 2014) may be contributing to occupational gender segregation in non-academic work and consider institutional efforts and impediments to effect change. The questions our research set out to address are: in what ways are gendered and positional processes operating to perpetuate occupational gender segregation in non-academic work?; how does bringing positional processes back in enhance our understanding of occupational gender segregation?; what are HEIs doing to tackle gender segregation?; and, what are the lessons for HR policy and practice?

Our main theoretical contribution is to highlight the importance of (re)incorporating the effects of positional processes as an analytical concern in current analysis of occupational segregation. We show that positions within organisational opportunity structures cannot merely be read off grading hierarchies. Although closely aligned to hierarchical positions, the more nuanced concept of positions within organisational opportunity structures we propose is better able to focus analytical attention on and thus consider multiple organisational hierarchies (e.g., academic versus non-academic) and other forms of positional advantage/disadvantage (e.g., full-time versus part-time). Embedded positional substructures are not static (Martinez Dy et al., 2014, p. 460), and biased gendered and positional process can not only serve to reproduce patterns of occupational gender segregation but transform positional substructures in ways that further impact the position of women. We provide fresh empirical insight into the 'organizing processes' (Acker, 2012, p. 219) that perpetuate

enduring occupational gender segregation, and reveal that some gendered processes are position-sensitive. Whilst gendered and positional processes are indeed usefully conceptualised as 'simultaneous inequality-producing processes' (Acker, 2006, p. 442), our research shows they are not invariant in their effects, and the compounding effects on women.

After outlining the problem of enduring occupational gender segregation and approaches to tackling it in the next section, the second section makes the case for focusing on gendered *and* positional processes. The third section offers a rationale for researching non-academics and the fourth section describes and justifies the research design. The findings are presented in the fifth section. The concluding section offers an interpretation of the findings and considers their implications for future research and HR practice.

Understanding enduring gender segregation and approaches to addressing it

Occupational gender segregation refers to the tendency for women and men to work in different occupations (horizontal segregation) and for women and men to be located at different hierarchical levels (vertical segregation) (e.g., Jarman, Blackburn, & Racko, 2012). Patterns of occupational gender segregation vary but there are recurring aggregate divisions, which include exceptionally high levels of gender segregation in some occupations and much higher concentrations of men in managerial, director & senior official occupations (e.g., Burchell, Hardy, Rubery, & Smith, 2014). There has been a general shift in the literature away from economic explanations of occupational gender segregation that privilege individual choice/preference, and typically rooted in the neoclassical tradition (e.g., Becker, 1985; Polachek, 1985), to sociological explanations (Anker, 1997) which are better able to deal with organisational structural constraints that lead to unequal access to resources, power and status (e.g., Crompton &

Harris, 1998). Acker's (1990) proposition that organisations are not gender neutral has been greatly influential in this area. Organisations, she suggests, may well present a veneer of rational objectivity but essentially mask a 'gendered substructure' (p. 154) — a structure deeply embedded within the gendered social structure of society. A 'gendered substructure', she elaborates (Acker, 2012), refers to the largely invisible processes within organisations where 'assumptions about women and men, femininity and masculinity, are embedded and reproduced, and gender inequalities perpetuated' (p. 215). It is these very processes, she argues, that lead to occupational gender segregation and resultant pay gaps.

Gendered processes play out in key areas of HR practice (Acker, 2006; Ashkraft, 2013; England, 1999; Williams, 1992), and in the working environment and organisational culture more generally (e.g., Acker, 2006; Kanter, 1976; Williams, 1992; Zanoni & Janssens, 2015). Embedded gendered processes can hinder vertical progression for women (the 'glass ceiling' effect, e.g., Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, & Vanneman, 2001) and ensure men working in female-dominated jobs are more likely to be promoted (the 'glass escalator' effect, e.g., Williams, 1992). Gendered processes support horizontal segregation by perpetuating stereotypes and images about 'women's work' versus 'men's work' (Bradley, 1989, p. 2). Ashkraft (2013) uses the 'glass slipper' metaphor to illustrate how some occupations become a seemingly natural fit for some (e.g., men) and not others (e.g., women). She argues that occupations themselves develop (synthetic) identities based on their typical incumbents i.e., 'we know the character of an occupation by the company it keeps' (p. 26). Training and promotion opportunities are often restricted in female-dominated occupations because 'society and employers appear to devalue women's work, at least in part because women do it' (Reskin, 1993, p. 242). Female-dominated occupations tend to be undervalued in

relation to occupations of 'comparable worth' (England, 1999, p. 752), and apparently objective processes such as pay evaluation systems can obscure embedded gendered biases (Acker, 2006, p. 450). Even after controlling for other potential contributory factors such as labour market conditions and skills, jobs undertaken primarily by women tend to pay less than those undertaken primarily by men (Baron & Newman, 1990, p. 155). Moreover, organisational policies aimed at tackling segregation can sometimes serve to generate the opposite effect. Part-time and other flexible working arrangements, for instance, are viewed as an important policy lever to help address the fact that women disproportionately bear the burden of balancing paid work and unpaid caring responsibilities (Ali, Metz, & Kulik, 2015). Yet flexible working policies are often associated with 'alternative' working patterns targeted at and largely taken up by women, thus operating to sustain gendered assumptions and biases that can adversely impact women's career progression, pay and status within organisations (Smithson, Lewis, Cooper, & Dyer, 2004).

The Chartered Institute for Personnel Development (CIPD, 2018) suggest a range of 'good' HR practice measures to counteract the effects of gendered processes, such as: ensure fairness and inclusion in hiring, performance appraisal, training/ development, promotion, pay; stipulate only absolutely essential qualifications; offer flexible working arrangements; avoid stereotyped and discriminatory language use; undertake gender equality analyses of HR policies and ensure effective implementation; increase line manager accountability for decisions; and promote organisational cultural change. Correll (2017) suggests that change efforts work better when targeted at processes rather than individuals, and highlights how 'small wins' can lead to big changes. Noon (2018) also questions change efforts focused on individuals, arguing that sociological perspectives can better explain and inform interventions that address the

disadvantages that structural constraints and biased processes confer on some groups of workers. Providing just such a perspective, Acker (2006) proposes that viewing organisations as 'inequality regimes' provides 'clues about why change projects designed to increase equality are so often less than successful' (p. 460).

Gendered processes *and* positional processes

Our analytical approach draws on Acker's (2006) concept of 'inequality regimes', or 'interlinked organizing processes that produce patterns of complex inequalities' (p. 459). Acker (2006, 2012) suggests that any exploration of gender inequality that does not focus on gender and at least one other category of inequality is necessarily incomplete. Gendered processes, she argues, do not operate in isolation but operate alongside other embedded, biased processes ─ linked to a range of potential categories of inequality and exclusion ─ which act in much the same way. As Gunnarsson (2011) elaborates, it is important to account for 'the complexities stemming from women's different positioning in power relations other than gender' (p. 25). Whilst the sheer number of category possibilities (e.g., race, sexuality, age, geographical location etc.) has led to what Cho, Crenshaw and McCall (2013) refer to as 'the eponymous "et cetera" problem' (p. 787), a recurring theme in the literature is the impact of processes linked to positions within organisational opportunity structures (e.g., Cassirer & Reskin, 2000; Kanter, 1976). Not all women or men in organisations have the same access to resources, power and status. Neither are they necessarily subject to the same level of stereotyping and biases. Stereotyping and related biases are, in fact, most typically targeted at groups with less status (i.e., 'esteem and respect') in hierarchies (Ridgeway, 2014, p. 1), and the translation of HR policies into practices vary depending on position within the organisational pecking order (Hoque & Noon, 2004, p. 496). As women are

disproportionately concentrated at lower levels in organisational hierarchies, it is important to examine potential inequality-producing positional processes, in addition to gendered processes. Positional processes have been neglected in analysis of occupational gender segregation because, as Acker (2006) suggests, they are typically viewed as a 'legitimate' part of 'organizational life' (p. 211). Nevertheless, just as Kanter (1976) argued over 40 years ago, we propose that it is time to bring positional processes back in, 'particularly those stemming from the nature of hierarchy' (p. 415).

Our concept of positions within organisational opportunity structures derives from Bhaskar's (1979) concept of 'positioned-practices' (p. 52) within the social structure of society more generally. Depending on which positions (e.g., job groups, occupations, roles) individuals fit into in organisational opportunity structures, their capacity to engage in particular practices depends on the differential resources, power and status available to them by virtue of the structural conditioning of these positions (e.g., Bhaskar, 1998, pp. 220-221). At the same time, organisational opportunity structures are not static, but liable to change through their reproduction and transformation by active human agents (Bhaskar, 1979, p. 51). Indeed, this conception of organisational opportunity structures allows us to better understand 'how individuals and groups can be constrained or enabled by [these] structures, and how agency can affect structures in turn' (Martinez Dy et al., 2014, p. 460).

We therefore propose, much in the way Acker (2012) conceives of a 'gendered substructure', that a 'positional substructure' exists and operates in much the same way. Our approach to understanding and explaining occupational gender segregation is thus guided by the underpinning assumption that embedded gendered processes *and* positional processes (i.e., processes linked to positions within organisational opportunity structures), whilst analytically distinct (Gunnarsson, 2011), operate as

'simultaneous inequality-producing processes' which are 'interlinked' (Acker, 2006, pp. 442&449). This approach directs us to uncover the existence of biased gendered and positional processes, and to consider how they intersect to perpetuate (and/or transform) patterns of occupational gender segregation.

Some organisational opportunity structures, nonetheless, are less transparent than others. Certainly, one of the main objectives of examining inequality-producing processes within organisations is to shine light on what are often invisible, embedded, biased processes ─ and less visible workers (e.g., Acker, 2006, 2012; Gunnarsson, 2011; Jonsen, Maznevski, & Schneider, 2011). It is for that reason our research focuses on what Szekeres (2004) describes as the 'invisible workers' in higher education i.e., non-academics.

Researching non-academics

The mass expansion of higher education and its institutions has been well-documented (Teichler, 1998). With this expansion, the non-academic workforce has steadily increased (ECU, 2015), and, with it, an 'administrative bloat' (e.g., Bergmann, 1991). Yet this so-called 'bloat' envelops a broad spectrum of job groups and significant number of incumbents. Notwithstanding some notable exceptions (e.g., Johnsrud & Heck, 1994; Szekeres, 2004), much of the extant literature on gender segregation in HEIs is limited to academic workers. These under-researched and invisible workers (e.g., Szekeres, 2004), however, account for just over half (51%) of the UK's HEI workforce, the majority of whom (63%) are women (ECU, 2015, pp. 27&217). What is more, gradual improvements in the gender imbalance in the academic workforce over the past decade stands in stark contrast to any discernible shift in the non-academic workforce in the same period (ECU, 2015, p. 220).

The gender pay gap favours men across almost all broad non-academic job groupings; and although there is a part-time pay penalty for women *and* men, most (80%) non-academics working part-time are women (ECU, 2015, pp. 252&46). It is worth noting here that the term 'non-academic' is frequently applied to HEI workers not classified as 'academics' but the use of this term is not uncontentious (e.g., MacFarlane, 2015).

Research design

All three authors are Scottish, female academics, and our motivation for undertaking this research stemmed from our frustration that Scottish HEIs do not seem to be taking positive steps to tackle occupational gender segregation, despite growing pressures to do so. Indeed, the UK's *Equality Act 2010* superseded the *Sex Discrimination Act 1975* and a number of other anti-discrimination acts. The Act places a positive duty on all public sector organisations to tackle gender inequality (Public Sector Equality Duty, PSED). Public sector organisations in Scotland, in addition to UK-wide legislation, must also comply with further equality specific duties outlined in *The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012*. In April 2013 all Scottish public sector organisations with 150 employees or more were required, for the first time, to publish statements on occupational gender segregation (both horizontal and vertical) and gender pay gaps. Our desk-based review of these statements revealed that patterns of occupational gender segregation and pay gaps across Scottish HEIs are broadly consistent with UK-wide patterns (ECU, 2015). However, it was important to dig beneath publicly available reports to examine what is happening given the increased scrutiny HEIs in Scotland now face.

Sample and Access

The project funder, the UK's Equality Challenge Unit (now AdvanceHE), selected six

HEIs to take part in the research and negotiated access via HEI Principals. Its rationale

for institutional selection was primarily to ensure adequate geographical spread given its

national focus. Institutional representatives (typically HR Managers/Directors) then

contacted all relevant internal senior/functional managers and helped organise the

interviews and focus groups. We purposively selected four job groups, or 'information-

rich cases' (Patton, 1990, p. 169), for special attention: finance, registry, security and

cleaning. Finance and registry were selected because many of these jobs are classified

as 'administrative and secretarial occupations' (Elias & Ellison, 2012, pp. 2&4);

administrative and secretarial occupations account for around one third all non-

academic jobs, and 82% of incumbents are women (ECU, 2015, p. 232). Security and

cleaning are located within a broader group of non-academic jobs typically termed

'campus services' (Elias & Ellison, 2012, pp. 2&5). Security and cleaning were selected

because these jobs are often stereotyped as 'male' and 'female' (e.g., Anker, 1997). The

plan was to gather data from human resource managers/directors and equality &

diversity representatives in each of the six HEIs, and gather data from staff and

managers working in each of the discrete job groups from two different HEIs per job

group.

As is the case with all Scottish HEIs, all participating institutions now map

every job role onto a UK-wide agreed single 51-point pay spine. Although grade

mapping differed slightly across institutions, grading ranged from grade one (the

lowest) to grade ten (the highest). In relation to the HEIs where the empirical data for

the discrete job groups was generated, it is worth outlining some important patterns. All

cleaners in both HEIs were grade one. In security there was a notable difference in

grading between the two HEIs. Whilst the nature of work was broadly similar, security staff were designated 'security officers' in one HEI and in the other 'janitors' (of 'comparable worth' e.g., England, 1999). In the first institution, following an internal review, some porters and car park attendants were relocated to security, and all security staff subsequently upgraded to grade five. In the second institution, janitors underwent a similar grading review but remained at grade one. In registry and finance, men were disproportionately concentrated in higher grades, at 'professional', head of function and director level and women were clustered in middle to lower grades. Horizontal segregation was marked. All cleaners were women and all security staff men, and the vast majority of registry and finance staff were women. Part-time working was far more prevalent at middle and lower grades. All cleaners were part-time in one HEI and in the other there was a mix of full-time (including split shift working arrangements) and part-time staff.

Methods and Data Collection

The data collection took place in the period December 2013 to January 2014, and was split between the three authors. Our case study of non-academics employed mixed methods. The methods of data collection were semi-structured interviews (interviewees n=25) and focus groups (participants n=55). Table 1 provides a more detailed breakdown of the 80 research participants. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with human resource managers/directors and equality & diversity representatives in each HEI, other than in one HEI where there was no dedicated equality & diversity representative. Focus groups were undertaken with staff working in the jobs groups and interviews were undertaken with their respective job group managers. One registry focus group became a one-to-one interview, and therefore another registry focus group

was arranged in a third HEI. Focus group size ranged from four to nine participants. A further interview was also undertaken with a 'campus services' manager with overall responsibility for security and cleaning.

Table 1. Details of Research Participants

	Interview participants	Focus group participants	Women	Men	Part-time
HR Managers/Directors	7		2	5	0
E&D Representatives	6		4	2	0
Finance Managers/Directors	2		1	1	0
Finance Employees		14	12	2	1
Registry Managers/Directors	5		4	1	0
Registry Employees		13*	10	3	2
Security Managers/Directors	3**		0	3	0
Security Employees		12	0	12	0
Cleaning Managers/Directors	2		1	1	0
Cleaning Employees		16	16	0	12
Total	25	55	50	30	15

* Figure includes focus group that became one-to-one interview
** Figure includes interview with senior manager overseeing cleaning and security
Note: All part-time workers were women

The interviews and focus groups lasted approximately 60 minutes, although some interviews were slightly longer. Interview guides and focus group topic guides were prepared for all stakeholder groups, and the interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and fully transcribed by a professional transcription company. Questions/topic areas varied by participant grouping but collectively covered the following areas: recruitment and selection; training/development; performance appraisal; promotion; pay and rewards; the management, supervision and organisation of work and working time; HR policies/trends; and data collection, analysis and action.

All participants were clearly keen to talk. The fact that the three authors are female academics did not appear to have any discernible impact on the process other than a general recognition that we understand what it is to work in an HEI. However, as

we are located within the 'other' half of the HEI workforce, we did not fully anticipate the less favourable positions of non-academics generally ─ or indeed the extent and impact of stereotyping and biases for some groups of workers within HEIs.

Data Analysis

A thematic analytical approach was adopted, which is aligned to our critical realist orientation, and was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) 'phases of thematic analysis' (p. 47). Our initial coding included deductive (*a priori*) codes and inductive (empirical) codes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 81). The deductive codes were derived from: themes, concepts, ideas from the literature; topic areas in the focus group and interview guides; and demographic information (e.g., stereotyping, vertical segregation, flexible working, promotion, finance staff, women). These codes included two 'master codes' directly linked to our conceptual framework and research proposition (e.g., Miles et al., 2014, p. 81) i.e., 'gendered processes' and 'positional processes'. The inductive codes started to surface during the research process, and were finalised after reviewing the final transcripts (e.g., qualification bars, language use, 'upstairs' versus 'downstairs', stigma, outdated ideologies, increasing precariousness, stuck on data analysis).

Resultant and higher-order themes

After all three authors reviewed the initial codes independently, we worked together and concluded that most could be subsumed under one of the two master codes (but more often than not, the two), to varying degrees. However, it became apparent that positions within HEI opportunity structures cannot be read off hierarchical positions and we thus adjusted what mapped to the master code 'positional processes' to accommodate the

less favourable positions of non-academics generally and part-time workers specifically. Our resultant themes included: preference for one gender, and related biases; women get 'stuck' 'downstairs'; structural constraints to upward progression for non-academics; biased status assumptions about some work and workers who do it; and, absolving responsibility (see also Tables 2-6). After reviewing and revising our resultant themes, we determined that these themes clustered around, and were essentially sub-themes of, five higher-order themes (see Tables 2-6). 1) *Biased processes in recruitment and selection*. This theme helps illustrate how ingrained horizontal gender segregation in some areas of work is perpetuated. 2) *'Upstairs' and 'downstairs'*. This theme shows how vertical and indeed horizontal segregation is sustained through biased gendered and positional processes. 3) *Why position in HEI opportunity structures matters*. This theme helps draw attention to the effects of biased positional processes. 4) *Language use, impact and stigma*. The sub-themes within this theme were initially included in some of the other themes, but the data suggested it warranted special attention. 5) *Institutional (in)action and related biases.* This theme highlights the lack of institutional 'buy-in', and how HEIs seem to have absolved themselves of responsibility. Although gendered and positional processes are embedded in and woven though each theme, these higher-order themes better tell the overall story of the data (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92).

Findings

Biases in Recruitment and Selection

Biased processes in recruitment and selection are clearly reinforcing horizontal occupational segregation, most notably in areas with highly gender-segregated groups of workers (see also Table 2). In security, one HEI paid for the existing (all male) staff

group to train for and obtain security licenses in CCTV and door supervision. All new

recruits must already have these licences:

> We put all the guys, we got somebody in to put us all through it … Anybody that
> came in after that had to have these badges. (Security Manager)

Table 2. Biased processes in recruitment and selection

Theme	Illustrative quotes from the data
Perceptions about work culture in all-woman teams	*The role or people's perception of what working in an office is, is kind of a wee bit skewed. I'm not saying wrong, but I think sometimes people would see it as, oh, it's just a bunch of women sitting about discussing what happened in East Enders [UK Soap Opera] last night and eating cakes. (Registry Employee).*
Preference for one gender, and related biases	*Inherent biases are there in the recruiting decisions and no matter what we do in terms of paperwork they want women to do the work out in the general office, because what are you going to do stick a man out there? (HR Representative)*
Gendered assumptions based on 'typical' job incumbent	*I remember a very senior person here apologising for his office being a mess because he hasn't got his PA in post yet and actually using the phrase, 'but when she starts, it'll be fine'. So he wasn't even considering the possibility that a man might apply, and be successful. (HR Representative)*
Some female-dominated jobs challenge 'real men'	*I call it the real men don't eat quiche syndrome. So, very few men will go into clerical work, which is where our biggest occupational segregation is in terms of horizontal segregation. (E&D Representative)*

However, HEIs are not making links between their actions that contribute to indirect

discrimination. Very few women hold these licences and therefore do not make it to the

interview stage of the selection process:

> There was female applicants for the three security officers posts that just went
> through but there wasn't one of them held a current licence … The first thing
> they're looking at when they're running through their list of applicants is, 'have
> they got the two badges?' (Security Employee)

This irony was lost on the security manager, who stated, 'we're actually screaming out for female security'. Biased selection processes extended to proactively hiring women into female-dominated teams. Some teams in registry and finance reportedly foster environments where there is 'a lot of female banter and female talk', leaving men feeling 'slightly isolated' (Registry Employee); rather than address this type of gendered culture, managers reportedly often follow the path of least resistance by hiring more women. An HR manager explained that the line of thinking adopted by some managers when selecting new staff into an all-woman team is, 'it's a hen coop, just put another woman in there. Don't rock the boat'. Similarly, several cleaners suggested that cleaning managers specifically select female cleaners because, as one cleaner speculated, 'I don't think they think men are as good cleaners'.

Biased assumptions based on the gender of 'typical' job incumbents (e.g., Ashkraft, 2013, p. 26) was widespread and frequently evident in explanations of the dearth of male applicants for female-dominated, lower-graded jobs. Not only was the lack of male applicants viewed as something outwith the control of HEIs, one registry manager judged that the quality of men's applications acts as a barrier to efforts to address it:

> I think still [the] perception very much in society is that admin is a female task …
> and I have to say the males that do apply, usually their applications are abysmal.
> So, even if you wanted to try and do a positive male selection onto it, it's difficult
> because it doesn't stack up.

The lack of male applicants for 'clerical' and cleaning jobs was additionally attributed to the perception that these jobs can undermine what it is to be a 'real man'. One of the cleaning managers, for example, stated:

Men will not apply for jobs that traditionally, and I'm going to be a bit sexist, traditionally are seen as women's jobs … Is it that you go home at night and the man's a cleaner and he goes home to his wife and he's maybe not as much of a man?

Upstairs and Downstairs

Divisions between qualified and non-qualified staff was a recurring theme in finance (see also Table 3). The majority of women do not hold professional accountancy qualifications, which are required for higher grade positions, and tend to work in lower paid operational rather than higher paid management accounting roles. The term 'upstairs and downstairs' was frequently used to distinguish between these functions. This term not only referenced the actual physical layout of the building in which the function was housed but provided a fitting metaphor for job grading divisions:

> Downstairs is more sort of operational, they do all the like daily transactions of everything … Upstairs we're just mainly with management reporting, the budgeting, compiling all the statutory stuff that's required for various bodies out there. (Finance Employee)

Whilst the gender imbalance in management accounting ('professional') roles has increased, lower-level finance roles remain female-dominated:

> At the qualified level there is a good split … it's much more even balanced men and women going into the profession. (Finance Employee)

> It's still the case that most of the clerical jobs are done by women. (Finance Employee)

Nevertheless, the more even gender balance 'upstairs' has generally been the product of recruiting graduates from the external labour market rather than upward progression of existing staff. Finance managers reported they encourage 'downstairs' staff to undertake professional accountancy qualifications but tended to hold generalised assumptions that women are reluctant to undertake these qualifications 'when they've got young children to bring up' (Finance Manager), and institutional structural constraints were often ignored (e.g., Crompton & Harris, 1998). For instance, staff are typically expected to undertake professional qualifications in their own time without regard for the barriers this can present.

Upstairs versus downstairs divisions in finance mirror related issues in registry. Women are mainly located in lower-graded job roles and subject to similar 'glass ceiling' effects (e.g., Cotter et al., 2001) such as the absence of and barriers to professional qualifications. Restricted promotion opportunities into 'downstairs' supervisory or team leader roles exacerbates these effects and led to a sense of being 'stuck' (Finance Manager) and of feeling 'frustrated' (Registry Employee), which results from the compounding effects of it being 'a bit of dead man's shoes business' (Registry Manager):

> Once you reached the top point of the salary scale in your grade, that's it, you're stuck, you're stuck there … because there is no development where you are. (Finance Employee)

> You would be dependent on somebody either moving on or retiring. (Registry Manager)

At the same time, men seem to benefit from 'glass escalator' effects (e.g., Williams, 1992): 'what you find is when they [men] do come in they move up quite quickly as well, very often' (Registry Employee). That men are more likely to progress quicker was attributed to the fact that 'they stand out more' (Registry Employee). However, a persistent theme in the data generally, and woven into one finance employee's explanation, was an assumption that women in lower-graded jobs are not interested in upward progression:

> I think there's definitely more women who are quite happy to be a Grade 2, or whatever … they don't want to progress any more. So, if you're a guy coming in … and they are maybe taking a slightly more passive sort of role, then the person who does want to progress takes a more progressive role. (Finance Employee)

This perception was strongly contested by some finance and registry women in these very positions:

> People do get the perception [we're] just sitting there until retirement kind of thing, and that's not the case (Registry Employee)

Promotion opportunities are further restricted by the fact that HEIs are increasingly demanding degree-level qualifications, and some longer-serving staff reported that they are now 'underqualified' for their own job.

Why position in HEI opportunity structures matters

Merely by virtue of being located in the 'non-academic' staff category results in more restrictive progression opportunities (see also Table 4). For non-academic staff promotion is largely reliant on existing posts becoming vacant, whereas for academic

staff promotion is largely based on the performance of the incumbent. The majority of non-academic staff are women and therefore this constraint disproportionately affects women. Part-time workers are generally positioned less favourably within HEI opportunity structures. Most part-time workers are women, and this leads to a range of biased gendered and positional assumptions ─ not least perceived gender differences in non-work responsibilities and assumed related choices: 'I tend to see it as reflecting how men and women set up their lives, set up their home life', one finance manager stated. Cleaning managers also claimed that part-time work suits women because it enables them to manage childcare responsibilities. Yet this justification is at odds with the evidence that many cleaners had no such responsibilities and 'some of them have actually got three jobs' (Cleaning Manager). Such assumptions, nonetheless, were used justify a shift to part-time or fragmented hours in cleaning ─ linked to efficiency-saving. All cleaners in one HEI worked part-time but there was a discernible push towards part-time work in the other when appointing new staff:

> I mean us now, X [manager] wouldn't start a full-timer. It's all part-time. I mean the folk that's got full-time just now have got full-time, but there won't be any more. (Cleaning Employee)

Part-time workers in some HEIs receive less favourable overtime terms than their full-time counterparts. As one registry employee explained, her part-time colleague was not happy with this inequity:

> Sometimes we're asked to come in on a Sunday and we get double time for it but she would still only get normal time back, so she's not always happy with that.

Similarly, cleaners on split shifts, unlike security staff in the same HEI, do not receive a

shift allowance, which 'bugs the life out of the girls' recounted a cleaning manager.

Table 4. Why position in HEI opportunity structures matters

Theme	Illustrative quotes from the data
Structural constraints to upward progression for non-academics	*There are very few opportunities for advancement in the university generally for AT&S [non-academic] staff, which is anybody who is not academic. (HR Representative)*
Upward progression constraints on part-time workers	*What I've heard back from the part-time staff when I've discussed the AAT [professional accountancy] programme with them is that they might do it later once their kids have got a bit older and they've got more time. We've not had take-up from the part-time staff for the AAT qualification. (Finance Manager)*
Variation in line manager support for development	*I think it depends on your line manager again. When I was in my previous post I asked to go on training courses to let me progress, but I was told no, you can only go on training courses that are for your grade. (Registry Employee)*
Perceived operational constraints and attitudes to flexible working	*I've got a couple of girls that work for me, that sounds really bad actually, colleagues, and mums drop kids off at school, et cetera, and they have flexible working hours, move their hours, which I support, I'm a mum myself. But … some of the roles are part-time and the business need is really for a full-time person. (Registry Employee)*
Inflexible organisation of work makes flexible working 'difficult' downstairs	*If you've got to provide a desk service to customers between nine and five, then it's a bit more difficult to actually have flexible working. (Finance Employee).*
Shift to part-time/fragmented hours in cleaning	*I don't run the cleaning on people, I run it on hours. So if someone leaves and they've worked 36 hours, I don't have to replace that with one person, I can replace it maybe with three or two or whatever. (Cleaning Manager)*
	They'd rather have more cleaners than just one cleaner [for] 36 hours. (Cleaning Employee)
	They'd rather have maybe three cleaners at 12 [hours]. (Cleaning Employee)
	But they didn't do that, they cut the hours. (Cleaning Employee)
	Aye but they'll be lucky if there's two. (Cleaning Employee)

Variation, linked to grading within institutional hierarchies, existed in the implementation of a range of institution-wide HR policies. Annual development reviews were inconsistently applied, not used to best effect ─ being used instead as proxies for routine duty of care for line management communications ─ or, often, not taken seriously:

> A group of staff like that … I could do with a better hoover, I've put on a bit of weight, my tunic's too tight. You know, it's basic. (Cleaning Manager)

> I've done one since I started and I've never done another one after that. It depends on who your manager is. It is supposed to be a requirement. (Finance Employee)

Variation in line manager support for personal development was also evident, and although flexible working arrangements were widespread 'downstairs' in registry and finance, 'whether or not the requests are agreed comes down to individual line managers' (E&D representative). Inflexibility in the organisation of work 'downstairs', moreover, led to perceived operational constraints that impact attitudes to flexible working.

Language use, its impact and status biases

Stereotyped gendered labels were consistently applied to groups/units with high concentrations of women/men (see also Table 5). 'Downstairs' finance and registry staff were regularly referred to as 'girls' and cleaning staff as either 'girls', 'ladies' or 'lassies'. Janitors were often referred to as 'boys' or 'men' but security officers always 'men'. The use of such language, including by some institutional representatives charged with effecting change, was reserved for staff groups/units in less favourable positions within HEI opportunity structures. These gendered processes are therefore

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position-sensitive. In this case, these processes play out in use of gendered language which serves to strengthen the association between one gender and specific groups/units of workers and work (e.g., Ashkraft, 2013) and imply subordination (e.g., Zanoni & Janssens, 2015, p. 1464). Gendered labels were often combined with biased inferences that are likely to have an impact on the progression and treatment of these groups/units:

> There's none of the girls really interested in taking their job any further in here. They're quite happy doing what they're doing … I think quite a lot of them have got other obligations, maybe other commitments when they leave here. (Cleaning Manager)

The title 'janitor' for security employees in one HEI, moreover, generated negative connotations. The word 'stigma' was used by several janitors. 'There is a stigma attached to it … he's only a janitor' (Security Employee). Indeed, in sharp contrast to the upgrading of security staff in the other HEI, janitors underwent a similar review but were not upgraded. The title 'cleaner' also has 'a stigma attached' (Cleaning Employee), and related status beliefs seem to have been internalised: 'I'm only a cleaner' (Cleaning Employee). Jobs titles, gendered language use and status biases may explain why, unlike every other staff group included in our research, janitors and cleaners did not have email accounts or access to IT facilities. A cleaning manager stated that this situation will soon change but anticipated problems with complaints from other staff:

> I know from past experience that if … they decided to go in and do perfectly legitimate university stuff on that computer I would have phone-calls saying, 'do you know your cleaner's in the library using the computer?'.

Table 5. Language use, impact and stigma

Theme	Illustrative quotes from the data
Gendered language use	*I think the two girls such as the two [cleaning] supervisors ... I thought, well, it might be good to have one of them in there anyway to show up some of the janitors and keep the boys on their feet if no other reason. (Security Manager)*
Gendered language use by institutional representatives	*We have nine girls that I work beside in the office. (E&D Representative)*
Stigma and job title linked to re-grading outcome	*We were told when we had a pay review, see the janitors will never go any further, we won't get promotion or anything, we couldn't get promotion, because this is, that was our grading, we were graded grade one janitor ... It doesn't matter what you do, you stay at the bottom, that was her answer. (Security Employee)*
Biased status assumptions about some work and workers who do it	*It would be them that would get, not victimised, it's too strong a word, but just tarred with a brush of 'you're supposed to be cleaning and you're on that computer'. And nobody would ever think they're on the computer doing online training, or they're on reading the bulletins, or they're doing that. What the people would think is, oh they're on Facebook, or they're doing their online shopping. Whereas people like me or academics, we would never do that. Anytime we access a computer we are working for the university. (Cleaning Manager)*
Cleaning cupboards	*As long as you've got a chair in your cupboard you're fine ... I just sit in my cupboard having my tea. (Cleaning Employee)*

Female-dominated, low status jobs are especially susceptible to dignity erosion (e.g., Crowley, 2013). Evidence of this erosion, and the 'invisibility' of cleaners, emerged in one cleaning focus group discussion where it was revealed that male staff and students often used the urinals whilst they are working in toilets. This invisibility extended to cleaners having to use cleaning cupboards located across campuses for break times: 'people just sit in their cupboards' (Cleaning Employee).

Institutional (in)action and the impact of embedded biases

Institutional representatives were well aware of patterns of horizontal and vertical occupational gender segregation, yet there was little evidence of a shift from data analysis to action ─ despite acknowledgement that HEIs should be doing more, such as holding line managers accountable for hiring decisions (see also Table 6):

> Why are we not going back and saying, 'What happened with those applications?' 'What was actually wrong?' 'What could we do about that the next time?'. We're not goading them. We're not making them think. We're not pricking their consciences. (HR representative).

Where measures to address gender segregation had been introduced they tend to focus on generic equality training, typically unconscious bias training. Unconscious bias training uptake had reportedly increased because of funding requirements and sector equality initiatives rather than to effect more deep-rooted transformation: 'it's not actually because they want gender equality [it is] because they don't want to lose research funds' (E&D Representative).

The absence of 'buy-in' from very senior management was a source of frustration for some: 'there's this feeling of why are we bothering … It won't make any difference. So a real profound lack of enthusiasm' (HR Representative). There was also a widely held view that enduring gender segregation in many areas of non-academic work merely reflects society, and is thus outwith the control of HEIs:

> There are key individuals who take this view that isn't helpful ... they basically say the university's only mirroring society. So, it's not our fault. (HR Representative)

Table 6. Institutional (in)action and related biases

Theme	Illustrative quotes from the data
Stuck at data analysis	*We did some additional reporting on horizontal and vertical segregation, knowing that the female staff is predominantly in the middle and lower ranges of professional support grades. We know where the high proportion of women are in secretarial posts, that sort of thing, cleaning posts ... And at the higher grades, there are obviously fewer women than men ... But we haven't got to the stage where we know exactly what we're going to do about these groups. (E&D Representative)*
Equality training not effective	*I've been on the course, and yes you come out of it just as chauvinist, racist and homophobic because you've ticked the box ... and as long as you don't mention it to anyone you can hide any decision that you make. (HR Representative)*
Lack of 'buy-in'	*Very few people will stand up in public and say women shouldn't be equal, but when you ask them to do something about it they either search for guidance or they delay or they think it's not their job. (E&D Representative)*
Absolving responsibility	*This rather bizarre excuse that, well, it's just society, isn't it, and if they don't apply we can't appoint them, which is a kind of laissez-faire type approach. (E&D Representative)*
Not all HEIs reporting from a level playing field	*They [other universities] outsource some of these jobs and so on. They may appear to have a different distribution of staffing than us because they don't directly employ the number of the people that we do. (HR Representative)*

Biased positional processes have diverted attention away from the non-academic workforce, and, with it, a preoccupation in benchmarking progress towards closing the professorial gender gap in academic work:

> We measure ourselves on whether we've got a better or a worse proportion of female professors than universities nearby. (E&D Representative)

Furthermore, the requirement for public reporting of 'headline' data in the context of ongoing neo-liberal reforms may tempt some institutions to remove highly gender-segregated areas of non-academic work out of the organisational (in)equality picture

altogether. One E&D representative suggested that their institutional pay gap could be airbrushed out of data if cleaners were removed from the analysis:

> We've got a high concentration of low paid staff and those are typically in cleaning roles. If we remove them from the sample, the pay gap collapses – almost totally disappears.

Some HEIs had already airbrushed cleaners and other groups of typically lower-graded, highly gender-segregated workers out of the equation:

> Cleaning is outsourced, so we won't talk about that. (HR Representative)

> The catering outlets are outsourced … I'm aware our car parking has recently been outsourced. (E&D Representative)

Indeed, not all institutions are reporting from a level playing field. There is therefore the very real potential that some HEIs will seek to redress this imbalance.

Discussion and Implications

Our research shows that organisations mask a positional substructure and underlines the importance of (re)incorporating the effects of positional processes as an analytical concern in current analysis of occupational gender segregation. In contrast to Acker (2006), we show that positions within organisational opportunity structures cannot merely be read off grading hierarchies. The more nuanced concept of positions within organisational opportunity structures we propose is better able to focus analytical attention on and thus consider multiple organisational hierarchies (e.g., academic versus non-academic) and other forms of positional advantage/disadvantage (e.g., full-time versus part-time). Our analytical lens has helped

uncover the existence of biased gendered and positional processes, and understand how they intersect to perpetuate and transform patterns of occupational gender segregation. Our analysis of gendered and positional processes provides fresh empirical insight into the 'organizing processes' (Acker, 2012, p. 219) that perpetuate enduring occupational gender segregation. We show that HEIs are neither gender nor position neutral, but mask a 'gendered substructure' (Acker, 1990, p. 154) *and* a 'positional substructure' whereby related biased processes are contributing to the reproduction of occupational gender segregation in non-academic work. Bringing positional processes back in, we are able to reveal that some gendered processes are position-sensitive. Therefore, whilst gendered and positional processes are indeed usefully conceptualised as 'simultaneous inequality-producing processes' (Acker, 2006, p. 442), our research shows that they are not invariant in their effects ─ and the compounding effects of this invariance on women located in less favourable positions within organisation opportunity structures. Embedded positional substructures are not static (Martinez Dy et al., 2014, p. 460), and biased gendered and positional process can not only serve to reproduce patterns of occupational gender segregation but intersect with each other to transform positional substructures in ways that further impact the position of women. The tendency for part-time working to increase as an occupation becomes more female-dominated (Burchell et al., 2014, p. 9), for example, suggests that the more female-dominated an occupation becomes the more likely it is to result in further positional disadvantage.

Enduring attitudes about women and men, and women and men at work, prevail. Human capital explanations of occupational gender segregation may well have decreasing explanatory power (e.g., Anker, 1997; Blau & Khan, 2017) but related ideological assumptions are entrenched and privilege individual choice/preference (e.g., Becker, 1985; Polachek, 1985) over organisational structural constraints (e.g., Crompton & Harris, 1998). Ideological assumptions extend to dismissing areas of ingrained gender segregation as merely

reflecting society, perpetuated often at very senior institutional levels, and used to absolve

HEIs of culpability. This line of logic not only acts as a serious barrier to institutional action

but also fails to recognise that organisations do not stand apart from society, and that broader

social and economic inequalities are often 'created in organizations' (e.g., Acker, 2006, p.

441). Nevertheless, this line of logic helps explain why efforts to tackle occupational gender

segregation in the non-academic workforce are largely absent, despite increased legislative

and funding pressures. What is more, embedded organisational processes and practices

continue to perpetuate horizontal and vertical gender segregation, and there is no indication

that the sound of breaking glass will be heard any time soon (e.g., Ashkraft, 2013; Ashkraft &

Ashkraft, 2015).

Stereotyped language use, related assumptions and status biases clearly impact the

progression and treatment of some groups of workers, and not others, and are most manifest

for women at the 'bottom'. Relatedly, the findings reinforce Ridgeway's (2014) argument that

the effects of status are often neglected, and status beliefs themselves can serve to justify the

unequal allocation of resources and power. Positional processes lead to structural constraints

that restrict upward progression opportunities for all non-academic staff. Structural restraints

are intensified because the translation of HR policies does indeed seem to depend on position

within organisational opportunity structures (e.g., Hoque & Noon, 2004), and, relatedly, line

manager discretion (e.g., Cohen, 2013). 'Downstairs' workers face a number of barriers to

moving upstairs. Qualification bars, qualification inflation, gendered and positional

assumptions result in 'glass ceiling' effects (e.g., Cotter et al., 2001). Men, on the other hand,

seem to be able to ride up on the 'glass escalator' (e.g., Williams, 1992). Gender segregation

extends to divisions by working time (e.g., Sparreboom, 2014).The overwhelming majority of

part-time workers are women and this renders them especially susceptible to a range of biased

gendered and positional processes.

The proposal non-academics are the invisible workers in higher education (Szekeres, 2004) requires refinement. Of all the oversimplified dualisms in higher education, MacFarlane (2015, p. 107) is right to suggest that the academic/non-academic binary is the most 'disrespectful'. Just as importantly, though, the term homogenizes a disparate group of workers that serves only to camouflage rather than shed light on stark gender divisions *within* the non-academic workforce. We show that some workers are more visible than others, and reiterate the importance of attending to women at the 'bottom', where career ladders are often non-existent and work increasingly precarious (Williams, 2013, p. 624). It is at the 'bottom' that efficiency-drives, fuelled by legislative reporting requirements, may well have unintended consequences by acting as a catalyst for outsourcing.

Future research examining inequality-producing processes within organisations should endeavour to bring positional processes back in to the analytical fold. The positional substructure we propose and the related new analytical lens we suggest for exploring positional substructures extends beyond simple hierarchical positions. Positional substructures cannot merely be read off organisational grading structures. Analysis of positional substructures necessitates working to explore organisational opportunities structures and uncover the potential existence of multiple organisational hierarchies and other forms of positional advantage/disadvantage, which cannot always be known *a priori*.

Implications for HR practice

Organisations, particularly in the public sector, are under increasing pressure to address occupational gender segregation and close gender pay gaps ─ and, with some Procrustean innovation, may well present a veneer of progress. However, as our study of Scottish HEIs helps illustrate, the existence and effects of embedded gendered *and* positional processes requires more substantive organisational change efforts. Implementing a range of 'good' HR

practice measures aimed at counteracting the impact of gendered processes, such as those suggested by CIPD (2018), might also serve to help counteract the negative impact of some positional process ─ for example, addressing stereotyped/discriminatory language use and monitoring the effective implementation of HR policies. Nevertheless, positions within organisational opportunity structures warrant specific attention in equality monitoring and analysis, extending to the compounding effects of other potential categories of inequality, including but not restricted to gender. The 'stigma' attached to some jobs also challenges HR professionals to think about how organisations value work and workers, and the repercussions for workers themselves.

Uncritical acceptance of change interventions is at odds with evidence-based HR practice. Yet our findings call into question the efficacy of unconscious bias training given widespread gendered language use, stereotyping and related biases. Noon (2018) is right to highlight the folly of unconscious bias training and other change efforts directed at the level of the individual, instead proposing that efforts should be directed at addressing structural constraints and related biased processes. Moving from presenting a veneer of progress to substantive attempts to tackle occupational gender segregation requires acknowledgement of the existence of and mechanisms to counteract biased processes linked to gendered *and* positional substructures. Change efforts should be targeted at biased processes rather than individuals, and 'small wins' can make big differences (Correll, 2017). One immediate small 'win' would be to remove unnecessary qualification bars.

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