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## **STRUCTURE**

- Outline of PhD project
- Hegemonies and normativity ideals of masculinity and academia
- The 'Trump Academic'
- Subjective vs. institutional definitions and measures of success
- Performing success self-promotion and image
- Sustaining success economics, resilience, and identity
- Metrics, value, and (unequal) labour
- Consequences and conclusions

## FROM THE IVORY TOWER TO THE NEOLIBERAL MARKETPLACE

PhD project investigating competition culture and gendered ideals in early 21st-Century English higher education.

#### Particular attention to:

- Dominant/hegemonic archetypes of masculinity with relation to competitiveness;
- Academic culture, practice, and discourse as structured by masculine ideals from 'golden age' elitist principles through to the language and competitive audit processes of neoliberal policy;
- The resulting inscription of hierarchical (gendered?) binaries into academia as an institution: success/failure, winning/losing, excellence/absence;
- Consequences and contradictions individual, intellectual, institutional, societal.

## FROM THE GOLDEN AGE TO THE HUNGER GAMES

'sometimes you can look back at an **imagined kind of golden age** when everyone had a nice big office and lots of time and you know a permanent position and all this sort of thing. But when I imagine, I'm not in there, you know. I wouldn't have been-, I wouldn't have access to that. I'm sure it wasn't really, there's no such thing as a golden age'

(Female, Arts)

'the kind of ivory tower thing which is wealthy white men in elite universities competing sort of for honour duh duh, you know that kind of quite unrelenting narrative about competing ideas. And now it feels more like the Hunger Games, right. It's very brutal in some respects. But it's still competition, still very male, just differently so'

# PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT, SAMPLE SELECTION, AND DATA GENERATION

- Participants were recruited in two main waves through a combination of calls for participants on Twitter and Facebook, direct approaches, referral from existing networks, and snowballing
- Semi-structured interviews undertaken with 29 academic staff, lasting between 1h and 2h45m
- 15 men and 14 women selected from 105 potential interviewees
- Broad spectrum of disciplines, socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnicities, sexual orientations, and ages
- Career stages from fixed-term postdocs to senior staff with management responsibilities, including four recently ex-academics
- Different university types, rankings, disciplinary foci, geographical locations, and age (all public)
- Where possible, interviews conducted in staff offices or other campus rooms; some conducted at King's College London or in participants' homes
- Data generated 28/11/17 9/10/18 in three waves: pilot interviews 28/11/17 4/12/17; substantive interviews in two bouts, 9/2/18 24/5/18 and 4/7/18 9/10/18

## HEGEMONIES AND NORMATIVITY: MASCULINITY AND ACADEMIA

'Hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly **normative**. It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to **position themselves in relation** to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men.'

(Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832)

'it is interesting that it [academia] is all **built so much around** competition, and I don't see the point. I don't, I don't, you know it's interesting isn't it? Because it's so much **taken for granted** and yet, why? Why is that? Why those ground rules? There could be completely different ground rules, couldn't there?'

## THE RISE OF THE 'TRUMP ACADEMIC'

'Academia, often portrayed as the home of eccentric loners, has always had its share of self-important grandstanders. But current inducements are giving rise to a new phenomenon of the Trump Academic [...] [whose] boastful certainties, unanchored in the truth, might allow the suppression of a negative result, or the inflation of some calculations to reach a threshold of significance. They may switch paradigms entirely in order to run with the popular crowd.

If you haven't yet met the Trump Academic, you should probably get out more. Increasingly they will be hard to miss as the **motivations coalesce around work which pleases governments, university managers and students**. Now, even a permanent contract cannot guarantee the indulgence of ethical behaviour and academic freedom.'

(Morrish, 2016, https://www.thesociologicalreview.com/blog/the-rise-of-the-trump-academic.html)

## **WHAT IS SUCCESS?**

'I guess that means whether you feel you've been successful in achieving what you want to achieve, or whether you think the outside world sees you as successful, which are two different things' (Male, Social Sciences)

'I think my plans are really plans that kind of are in a way buying into that kind of marketised, metricised, paranoid, panicked culture that exists, you know. Because I think that's how you get rewarded and that's how success is seen. So when I thought, "what shall I say to that", my first sort of thought was, "I want to get some big funding to do some research and then I want to publish and I want to be in the REF". And my second thought was, "oh but that's like, that's one way of looking at it isn't it and the other way of looking at it which I probably should have thought first, not second, is wanting to do things for their own sake and then the other stuff would just be how I would get there". But unfortunately that isn't how I've been taught to think now'

(Female, Arts)

## **FEELING SUCCESSFUL**

'I'd feel successful if I've solved a tricky problem [...]. That would be a brilliant day. I would really like that. If on the other hand you're talking about success in the eyes of my institution, then that would be a day when I brought in a grant. But you know for me personally, the only thing I'd really feel is relief at not having to worry so much about meeting that metric. So I wouldn't necessarily feel that I was successful for having done that, I'd just feel, "oh thank God I don't have to worry about being sacked"

(Female, Sciences)

'I don't know what that means, "successful" right. I mean on paper sure, I mean if I show somebody, like I don't know, I have a permanent job, I earn-, I mean from the outside point of view yeah I mean I realise that I'm probably seen as successful. I don't feel that way at all'

(Male, Sciences)

'I can say "yeah I'm successful. I've got this really good CV and my career's going well". Also "I don't deserve to be here and I'm an impostor and I shouldn't be here and eventually they're going to find me out". And I think that's probably quite common. I think we all kind of feel that'

(Female, Humanities)

#### **PERFORMING SUCCESS**

'I think an awful lot of academics who do succeed really get there because **they have the right profile**. I do mean white and male and they're good at doing one tiny little thing and they've written more and more papers about this tiny little thing and **told everyone how brilliant they are** at this tiny little thing'

(Female, Arts)

I:What do you think it takes to succeed in academia, or what kind of person would you draw as your-?

A: If you mean 'succeed' from an external perspective of succeeding and becoming a professor at Cambridge then you need to be [counts on fingers] male, white, sure of yourself. Sorry I'm being facetious now.

(Female, Sciences)

'I've been practising for this interview and the thing that comes across in my mock interviews, that I've had six of, they've all said that I'm too modest and too sincere in my responses and the way that I carry myself. [...] my brother is very different. So my brother is very bolshie, he's very confident, he kind of goes into a room and people, you know he gets jobs that he's hugely under-qualified for, but he can talk, you know he talks the talk.'

## WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE SUCCESSFUL?

Subjective success: 'to what do you attribute your success?'

- Luck (sometimes recognised as privilege)
- Support/personal relationships
- Hard work
- Perseverance

Ideal success: 'what does it take to be a "successful academic"?'

- Ruthlessness
- Privilege/'looking right'
- Networking/knowing the right people
- Confidence
- Financial stability
- Resilience

## I AM SUCCESSFUL BECAUSE...

'When I've succeeded in things, probably less that I'm really good and more my ability to be quite persistent and not give up on things'

(Female, Sciences)

'having people around me has been really helpful. And kind of knowing that you know there are people you can talk to and like who can give you advice, you know and even go in to bat for you if you need to. And even if that's just something as simple as you know someone who know will write you a good reference. So just so you know you can rely on them to do kind of stuff like that. But yeah then **luck** again'

(Male, Social Sciences)

'No matter how much the shit hits the fan, I might panic in my office or I might go home to my wife and say, "fuck I don't know how I'm going to do any of this". But I never do it in the institution. So I always look completely calmly controlled and it's really weird how far that goes'

(Male, Social Sciences)

#### OTHER PEOPLE ARE SUCCESSFUL BECAUSE....

'A certain **ruthlessness**. You really do have to look out for number one. And you can see within departments, you'll have a backbone of people who are, who keep things running and then you'll see people who are **dodging anything that doesn't advance them personally**. And the level you're at where you start doing that dodging anything that doesn't benefit you personally, is getting earlier and earlier in people's career. And I think there is, there's a certain cultural element to it. Because people are trying to survive to start with and **you survive by hitting a certain set of numbers**. And those numbers are not picking up the bit of teaching that needs to be done, because otherwise the students go into the next year completely unprepared. Or you know, doing the certain kinds of administrative work that has to be done and should properly be done by academics. You just keep firing out grant applications and when it comes in you just keep firing out papers and you inch your way up'

(Male, Sciences)

'the people who seem to be surviving best in this institution are **white, male, and middle-class**' (Female, Sciences)

#### OTHER PEOPLE ARE SUCCESSFUL BECAUSE....

'There's a sort of a **scrappiness** and a kind of **an entrepreneurial thing** that needs to be going on as well. But there's such inequity at the moment. There's such a determination not to listen except to the favoured few. I don't know, you could be incredibly entrepreneurial and brilliant and you know **if you're in with the in-crowd, you're in with the in-crowd and if you're not, you're not** and I think there's nothing you can do about it really'

(Female, Humanities)

'I think there's a lot of selling of yourself that you're supposed to do and a lot of kind of bigging up of your research and you know, telling people how wonderful it is' (Female, Arts)

'I've been to conferences and you see the people that are really successful and I think a lot of it's down to networking and I think particularly how you're able to use Twitter'

(Female, Social Sciences)

## THE AESTHETIC OF SUCCESS

'The academy is set round people like me so in our institution I've always had access to the most senior management, because I look like them [...] I've leant in to my white maleness, deliberately'

(Male, Social Sciences)

'I wouldn't say that I fit into the trope of a successful academic'

(Female, Social Sciences)

'saying things like, you know "oh I haven't had a haircut in five years. I actually haven't had time for that". [...] Or "oh I just threw this on", when they're wearing T-shirt and jeans, because you're not allowed to care about such frivolities as looking a certain way or wearing makeup or having your hair done, or that sense that, "well I'm a proper academic because I put the learning before, you know washing my hair in the morning". I get the sense of that quite a bit. Because I always wear dresses, I don't wear anything else, there have been comments sort of like, "oh another new dress, another dress. Where's the party?" [...] We were talking about feminism and someone had said, "why is it that if you're a woman you're a female academic but if you're a man you're an academic? And the same with scientists, like a female scientist. Why do we not have male scientists, we just have scientists?" And I think that sense of "a female academic might wear lipstick and a dress, and an academic won't." So there's that sort of odd distinction between, "oh I'm an academic. She's a female academic"

(Female, Humanities)

## **SUSTAINING SUCCESS**

'when you're in, it's about, and I hate this word but this is a word that everybody uses. I hate it for political reasons, this idea of resilience. So don't get sick. Don't have any mental health issues. Don't have any caring issues. In that early phase of your career you need to be that stand alone, "I can devote all of my time to it". This to me is if you want to be an academic who ends up in one of these top institutions, because if you're not willing to do that then there are 50 people behind you who are. These are the kind of things you need to be successful in the short term.

If you're going to be successful in the long term, unless you want major health issues, you're going to have to work out how to trade off and decide what is really important, what people are actually telling you is important. Because you'll just burn out. I mean my supervisor who's a great guy, who I really like and has been very supportive, even he who has been a highly successful academic is bluntly, and he's told me this, it's no great secret, he's zonked to the eyeballs on anti-depressants. And I always remember the last time I was at [Russell Group institution] and I was thinking about the people I talked to have either got mental health problems or are zonked to the eyeballs on anti-depressants'

(Male, Social Sciences)

'A few years ago I got really really sick, really ill, really really ill. I think I was kind of suicidal and I had to stop and I had to take a couple of months off and it was terrible. It was just absolutely gutting and I remember I said to my husband at the time that I didn't feel like a human being. I didn't feel like a person any more, I felt like a task list.[...] suddenly I had these three enormous grants. I was working part time. I had two tiny children. I mean this is why I ended up really really ill. But ultimate-, well but I don't know. They promoted me for that. I feel ambivalent about that, right, because they promoted me for the thing that made me so ill I nearly died'

## **IDENTITY/IDENTITIES**

'when that all gets on top of me I think, "well I'm pretty happy in my personal life". You know I've got a wife with a child and all that, and they're lovely and it gives me something to look forward to. Like if I've had a crap day at work or something I can go home and play with my daughter and chat with my wife and stuff and tell her I've had a crap day, and that's really nice. And I've got friends and I've got family and all that, so I try and hold onto those bits as well. And I think it's again down to why maybe I think of it as having two identities rather than having one whole one, is it lets me step away from, you know "am I good enough at what I do?"

(Male, Social Sciences)

I: It's almost like you're saying there was a time maybe when your values and the values of the environment were more in line with each other, so there was not that sense of conflict-

A:Yes.

I: -and now it's not but now you have to consciously divorce yourself from that lest they eat you.

A: Yeah absolutely. And I think it does eat people and yeah. I don't know, there seem to be still quite a number of blokes who manage to float around kind of slightly oblivious. I don't know how they manage to do this but I think it must be something to do with being privileged in that environment. I mean not necessarily privileged in terms of holding power particularly but in the sense that somehow that environment belongs to them in a way that I don't feel it belongs to me.

## **RESILIENCE**

'There's a sort of persistence, resilience, stamina in the face of rejection. You can't be too thin skinned I think. I remember the first time I had a paper rejected I was like mortified like for about a weekend. So sad. And now it's like, what I'm thinking about is how hard or easy it is to reformat the references, is my first thought. So I think you have to sort of really separate you from your work I think. And you have to have a life outside of academia. You have to think about what's important to you and not put all your self-value in this external thing you've got no control over. Don't make them, don't give people control over you I think is the secret. Because you can'

(Male, Sciences)

'if you'd asked me this question like half way through my PhD like when nothing was working, my boss was terrible, then it felt like a failure all the time. Now with a bit more experience and a bit more hindsight, like stuff feels horrible all the time but I've learnt to separate "this feels really really horrible today" from "I am actually a failure at life"

(Male, Sciences)

'you do get more robust as time goes on. But obviously these, you know the ability to feel like that is not really evenly distributed. So this is what's a bit disturbing about it isn't it, that there are some people who are brought up to feel like this I think and to think that these things are their entitlement. And I don't really want to say that they shouldn't, because actually I think everyone should instead. So I think that sense as you're growing up, "I could be anything I want, and I can try different things, and I'm entitled to fail and it's not a disaster and I'll probably be great anyway", is actually what we should be, have a society that we make sure that everyone feels like that when they're growing up. Not to be like pompous arses but just that sense, "well actually maybe I should have a go, I'll have a go at these things and it'll be all right." But it's obviously at the moment, it isn't where we are'

(Female, Arts)

## UNEQUAL LABOUR, UNEQUAL VALUE

'I was the only man in the room and what was really interesting was [...] they were talking about personal tutoring and that there's always someone in the department who ends up with all of the students going to them, and they were talking about this person being **the mother**. And I said, "well aren't you effectively acknowledging that all this **personal tutoring is gendered and it all gets pushed on to the women** in the department, and then that's great for the men in the department, because they can get on with the 'important' stuff?"

(Male, Social Sciences)

'I spent too much time doing admin stuff that needed to be done in the department and I didn't publish enough. To go from Senior Lecturer to Reader is really just predicated on research and I just hadn't done enough of it or kind of had enough outputs to demonstrate that I'd done enough of it at that time. So um instead I applied for an increment raise, which I did get, which was based on the kind of service that I did to the department instead, which I was really pleased about because you know it was annoying to me that I couldn't apply for promotion because I had spent the time doing other stuff'

(Female, Sciences)

'You need to protect your research time because that's what the system, performance management, tells you to do. So it trains staff to effectively learn to be helpless in other areas deliberately. [...] But I don't blame the individual staff because that's what the system teaches them to do'

(Male, Sciences)

## **METRICS: 'LITTLE COGS IN THE SAUSAGE MACHINE'**

'it changes the way in which people act and there's a kind of **self-reinforcing** thing and then it becomes so much more about **assessment and measuring and audit and compliance** and people fitting into the machine, that even if that's not how you think life should be, there's not a lot you can do about it, even as a manager within that structure. And I think that **that is true right the way up** actually'

(Female, Sciences)

'People respond to incentives. If your incentives are you know, there's very little money available. Basically there's scarcity. There's a scarcity of resources and we will apportion those resources by these metrics. **People then start to work according to those metrics in order to get the resources**. It's not great but **bad systems produce bad things**'

(Male, Sciences)

'there's a kind of success that seems completely detached from the values of higher education. I suppose what would put me off recommending to someone that they go into higher education is, this doesn't feel like higher education. This doesn't feel like what I wanted to go to university for, and success doesn't feel like success, doesn't look like success. And it's that, it's second rate corporatisation because it's-, the measures of success are numerical, financial, but they're crude measures which have been stretched way beyond anything reasonable'

(Male, Sciences)

'I think the Times Higher has a massive spreadsheet and just every week it decides what it's going to sort things by. So like, "we've got a new league table" and publish that'

(Male, Sciences)

#### **CONSEQUENCES**

'if you focus then you can achieve more but achieve more against which criteria. So perhaps the people who are very very narrow in what they do and they've done it for many years, they may achieve a great deal in terms of an academic career, so they may become a professor. They may have, you know within a very small field be a recognised name and maybe you could say within that field that scholarship would be outstanding but does it reach any further and does that matter? [...] every time you narrow, you make yourself less employable to people. So there's another pull in the other direction which is needing to stay broad because then you have more chance of getting a job relating to one of those things'

(Female, Arts)

'Trying to finish writing a book at the moment and all of the meetings in connection with the process that I'm currently going through, take up an enormous amount of time but they also just completely sap my ability to concentrate on writing and write interestingly'

(Female, Humanities)

'it is extremely competitive. And I think as well when I was younger that would have totally scared me off, because I was always scared of the fact that if you compete, you might lose. [...] I think when I was younger I would have thought, oh that must mean I'm not proper, right for this, you know, I'm not good enough or whatever. And even the idea, I couldn't even countenance that, I wouldn't go near the competition because I didn't even want to open up the question of whether I should be there doing it'

(Female, Arts)

'when I was a PhD student I didn't give a single presentation because I would rather have thrown myself into a vat of boiling oil'

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