

Becoming Academic in the Entrepreneurial University: Researcher Identities and Research Impact Development

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Abstract : The concept of the Entrepreneurial University and emphasis on higher education institutions as both hives of innovation and as producers of future innovators accord special significance to the role of academic researchers in future economic and social prosperity. Researcher development in the UK has embedded an emphasis or 'enterprise lens' on developing the capabilities of researchers to support a stable economy whilst providing solutions to societal challenges. However, the notion of the 'entrepreneurial university' and what that represents to many academics is met with tension and (dis)engagement in the premises of the 'knowledge economy' or 'academic capitalism.' Set in a landscape of UK higher education wherein the increasing emphasis on research impact, coupled with increasing competition for scarce funding, has created a 'climate of performativity'. This research seeks to better understand the ways in which academic identities are (re)constructed in the everyday experiences of doctoral (PGR) and early career researchers (ECRs) as they navigate what is referred to by some as the 'academic hunger games'. These daily pressures and high expectations of success are part of the identity work PGRs/ECRs undergo. This is often fraught with tension and struggles to adapt to the research environment suggesting a reason for imposter phenomenon to be rife in academia - particularly (but not exclusively) in the early stages of development. This pilot study involves qualitative semi-structured exploratory interviews with a mixed gendered sample of participants from a variety of subject disciplines who have taken part in an intensive 3-day innovation and enterprise program for PGR and ECRs premised on developing personal and research impact. The research seeks to better understand the processes of identity formation of becoming academic and offers a commentary on the notions of 'imposter phenomenon' and the exchange and development of resources or capital needed to 'play the game' in academia in the context of the 'entrepreneurial university'. It explores ongoing (re)constructions of what it means to be an academic and the different ways in which social identities may embody and challenge the development of entrepreneurial academic identities. As such, it aims to contribute to our understanding of the innovation ecosystem of academia and the prosperity of academic researchers.

Keywords : entrepreneurial development, higher education, identities, researcher development

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