LEARNING TO BE A SOCIAL SCIENTIST: DISCIPLINE, DEPARTMENT AND UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC WORK PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

What are the everyday practices of academic work in social science? How do social scientists learn these everyday practices, particularly as they relate to the complex demands of the discipline, the department and the university? Whilst a number of studies have examined scientists and scientific work (including Latour and Woolgar, 1979), and ethnographers of higher education have focused on institutions (eg Tuchman 2009) and students (eg Nespor 1994, Mertz, 2007), rather less attention has been paid to social scientists. This is somewhat ironic in the context of a conference on work and learning, given that we are social scientists ourselves.

In order, therefore, to attend to this omission, a recent study of the 'black box' practices of academic work in the social sciences, from which this paper is drawn, was developed (Malcolm and Zukas, 2014). The study takes a sociomaterial approach, in keeping with a strand of studies on work and learning (eg Fenwick, Edwards and Sawchuk, 2011). It builds on previous work on the construction and development of disciplinary academic identity and practice (Malcolm and Zukas, 2009). The research was intended to trace how academic work in social science is learned, negotiated, experienced and enacted within universities and disciplinary communities. In particular, it examined the ways in which the competing 'workplaces' of institution, department and discipline interact, and how academics experience and negotiate the connections and conflicts of these academic workplaces.

The empirical work from which this paper is drawn was based on three case universities. We shadowed individual social scientists in their daily work to produce a detailed picture of everyday academic practice. Observations included meetings, teaching and research activities and social, collegial and technological interactions as well as the collection of images, artefacts and relevant textual material (such as emails, disciplinary texts, public documents).

In this paper, we will consider time, physical and virtual workplaces and [networks of] disciplinary, departmental and university relationships. By attending closely to the organisation of intellectual, technological, social and physical space and to the ways in which academics' time is negotiated, mapped and 'consumed', we explore how and why academics learn to adopt particular working practices. Further, by taking account of networks of relationships, we examine questions of power and influence in and through discipline, department and institution.

Although understood by social scientists as primary in their 'real' work, we show how disciplinary relationships are often enacted in the times and spaces between 'work about work' (eg recruitment and promotional activities, accountability demands, etc.). We identify overwork, self and institutional exploitation and gender inequalities as issues. We conclude that only a better understanding of social scientists' learning of work practices will enable us to support them in negotiating successfully and collegially the complex demands of discipline, department and university work practices.

INTRODUCTION

This conference considers the relationships between work and learning, and has helped to establish that learning and work are inextricable, so we will not justify here our premise that working practices entail ongoing learning. The conference is a community of those interested in learning in a wide variety of knowledge, service and pedagogic work settings: laboratories, factories, hairdressing salons, classrooms, hospital wards, simulation laboratories, and so on. But what do we know about our own work and learning as social scientists working in departments in universities?

For some long time, we have been preoccupied with these issues, not only as researchers but also in our 'day' jobs as managers and educators of academics and academic entities within universities in the British higher education system. We have presented papers at previous RWL conferences which have been concerned with the construction and development of academic identity and practice (Malcolm and Zukas, 2005, 2007) and developed an argument that the policy discourses about academic work (what we called the 'official' story) do not resemble the messy experience of academic work (Malcolm and Zukas, 2009). Instead, we have argued, work is done by the 'fabrications of managerialism' (such as workload allocation forms) to fragment academic experience and to reclassify the relationship between discipline and its various manifestations in academic practice such that the 'official' story comes into being. In that work, we paid careful attention to the sociomateriality of working practices, drawing attention to the conceptualisation of the academic workplace as widely distributed in time and space.

More recently, we have wanted to understand better the (sometimes) competing workplaces of discipline, department and institution, and the ways in which academic work is learned, negotiated, experienced and enacted in those workplaces. We have therefore sought to investigate the 'black box' practices of academic work in the social sciences (Malcolm and Zukas, 2014), drawing on a sociomaterial approach. The study from which this paper is taken, asks first what the everyday practices of academic work in social science are and second how the complex relationships between the discipline, department and the university are enacted in the everyday practices of social science academic work and 'learning in practice'. In this paper, we focus on 'learning in practice' in the discipline, department and university.

CONTEXTUALISING THE STUDY

This is not the place to speculate as to why the study of higher education has, until recently, failed to any great extent to study social scientists, although it is an interesting question. Of course, excellent studies of higher education exist, but they tend to focus on universities as their primary level of analysis and concern (eg Tuchman, 2009), or students (eg Nespor 1994, Mertz, 2007) or early-career academics/doctoral students (eg McAlpine et al, 2012, 2014). Apart from pedagogic studies which are concerned with learning in specific disciplines and professions, there are few studies which consider disciplinary working practices; the exception is science and technology studies, which emerged from early studies of scientists and scientific work. Despite Wisniewski's (2000) acknowledgement of what he called the 'collective averted gaze' and his plea for ethnographic studies in higher education looking particularly at academic change, efforts to research our own academic working practices as social scientists have been sparse. We note that the picture is changing with recent studies on, for example, how academics spend their time (Decuypere and Simons, 2014, Ylijoki and Mäntylä, 2003, Ylijoki, 2013); this is explored in more detail below.

This study is built on previous work on the construction and development of disciplinary academic identity and practice (Malcolm and Zukas, 2009). It is grounded in an awareness that we should not presuppose that we know what academic practice is: instead, we work from a number of assumptions. First, we presume that academic practice is always in the making. As Decuypere and Simons (2014) put it, 'academic activities are enacted in practice rather than already predetermined beforehand' (p 102). Second, we assume that disciplinary practice is also always in the making and cannot be separated from academic practice. Third, in order to research academic work, we need much better understandings of the nature of the academic workplace – and that means the daily business as it operates at and between the discipline, the meso (departmental) level and the macro (university) level. We are seeking to understand how individual academics are effected – that is, how they (academics) are brought into being through academic practice.

The daily business is complex: how does one understand what it is that academics actually do with themselves? An emerging strand of research focuses on time and academic work, particularly what is perceived as the acceleration of academic work in the light of other changes in academic life such as universities' introduction of new public management practices. For example, Ylijoki and Mäntylä (2003) interviewed academics about their work, and analysed the time perspectives academics employed in their discourse. They identified four common ones: scheduled time, timeless time, personal time and contracted time. They defined scheduled time discourse as 'all expressions referring to working according to externally imposed and controlled timetables, such as project deadlines, lecturing hours and administrative meetings.' (p 60) This contrasts with 'timeless time' discourse which 'involves transcending time and one's self and becoming entirely immersed in the task at hand' (p 62). Within academics' discourse, long working hours in scheduled time arise because of external requirements; in timeless time, they are said to come about because of the individual academic's absorption with the work. Timeless time is associated with research. Personal time discourse is that which 'raises questions like how to use your lifetime,

how to combine work and other areas of life such as family, and ultimately, how to live a good life.' (p 67) Contracted time (which we will not discuss further in this paper) refers to a sense of the end of 'the present contract … and a worry about the future …' (p 65). But we shall return to these discourses in the analysis of our own study below.

Others have also developed the theme of time and academic work. The speeding up of time, in particular, has been the subject of much deliberation (for example, Gornall and Salisbury 2012, Smith, 2015, Vostal, 2015, Ylijoki, 2013). The growth in interest is demonstrated by the development of an international conference, 'Power, Acceleration and Metrics in Academic Life', due to take place in December 2015, which makes the link between audit cultures, quantification of scholarship, institutional change and this acceleration of academic life. Some suggest that academics are complicit in the reproduction of such practices, not only as managers and quantifiers, but also through their own work practices. Gornall and Salisbury (2012), for example, coin the term 'hyperprofessionality' to describe 'the alignment between the professional, the always connected modality of a continuous electronic environment and research with academics in their important but unseen work … The term is an attempt to capture elements of 'giving more', 'going beyond and above' in the professional context' (p150). Vostal (2015) also believes that there are 'positive attributes of enabling acceleration as integral components of academic lifeworld.' (p 71) But no-one underestimates the anxiety, guilt and overwork also associated with such acceleration.

The institutional context and what Ylijoki (2013) calls the 'internal functioning of HE' (p 243) are crucial in understanding these temporal changes. There is already a substantial body of research as cited above concerned with the individual agent; there is also some work which recognises the place of different knowledge regimes in relation to temporality. Smith (2015), for example, distinguishes between disciplinary, transitory and transversal knowledge regimes and suggests we need to think about each knowledge regime through a different structuring device and temporality: discipline ('community' over a long time), career (individual agent over medium time or working life) and project (project team over short-term).

Discipline, career and project are critical when thinking about academic work practices. But so, too, are the department and institution. As we said, to date, we have yet to find many studies which have attempted to unpack the 'black box' of practices of academic work in the social sciences. And there are few which focus on academics' learning those practices. Thus we turn now to our empirical study to examine discipline, department and institution in academics' learning to be social scientists.

METHODOLOGY AND ANALYTICAL APPROACH

A detailed account of the methodology of the study is available (Malcolm and Zukas, 2014) but, in brief, the original design had to be adapted because we were not able to negotiate access to the proposed case study research sites from our original proposal. We had proposed focusing on four social science departments in two universities in

which we would undertake workplace observation (e.g. meetings; teaching and research activities; technological, collegial and social interaction; ethos, rituals, departmental 'stories'), plus recording and analysis of visual data (e.g. photographs, artefacts, site maps) and institutional documents/ textual objects in order to address our research questions. Our primary methodological orientation was that academic activities are enacted in practice, rather than predetermined, and so tracing practice was our focus. The revised design retained this orientation and the case-study framework at the institutional level, but replaced general observation of departmental workplaces with 'work shadowing' of individuals. In other respects the data-gathering strategies remained the same.

We ended up with data covering three universities (Northside, Southside and Cityside) and 14 social scientists from postdoctoral to professorial level. Data collection took the form of extensive field notes and photographs, institutional documentation gathered in digital or paper format, including workload allocation models, minutes, prospectuses, web pages, screenshots of email in-boxes, staff policies, etc.; and some participants have also provided photographs of their home workspaces. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. Some other interactions (such as meetings, informal discussions and supervisions) were also recorded electronically with the permission of the participants.

Throughout the project, we had been looking at these academic working practices from a sociomaterial perspective, so the categories of analysis emerged from what Latour calls 'following the actors', that is, observing what is present in a situation and what work it is doing. The process of analysis focused on identifying the actors and practices (social, material, technological, pedagogic, symbolic) observed in each setting, and tracing their connections and interactions – including those which extend beyond the institution with significant disciplinary networks, organisations and media. So tools and artefacts may be significant actors, and actors may be physical, human, textual, virtual, etc. As described below, we have tried to avoid becoming locked into an individualised account of a single person's working life, although clearly the individual 'case' has been the way in to the data on the nature of academic work. Observing and listening to individuals has been crucial in helping us to trace how academic work is enacted *in moments of practice* (rather than, as is more common in studies of academic work, recalled in moments of reflection such as interviews). The privileged role of the observer, though clearly not a neutral or invisible one, also helped us to identify multiple actors at work in a situation which might not be immediately apparent to the participants. We have attended in considerable detail to the enactment of academic practice, but we rely in the account below on extracts from our interviews for our 'evidence', not least because of the challenges of retaining institutional anonymity and individual confidentiality.

The first stage of analysis involved writing up an anonymised case narrative of the data generated around each person, utilising a form of emplotment which balanced the individual, the tools and technologies they use, the department, the discipline, the university, and other people as actors in a constructed story of the complex sociomaterial practice of academic work. The grouping of these case narratives by

institution and by discipline then produced a rich account of how the work of the university, the department and the discipline are carried out on a day-to-day level.

The analysis attended closely to the organisation of intellectual, technological, social and physical space (for individuals, work-groups and departments), and the negotiation, mapping and consumption of academics' time (and that of their colleagues, students, significant others), to explore how these enable or constrain particular forms and standards of professional practice. Having observed considerable divergences across gender, career stages, specialisms and subject combinations, and the scholarly status of the departments concerned, we decided for the purposes of this paper to focus on a small group in the same discipline who were in their first posts (see below).

FINDINGS

In this paper, we draw examples from the academic work practices of two social science departments from the same discipline, based in two universities. We utilise our work shadowing and observations of three academics in their first posts, albeit with differing lengths of experience. We make no claims to representativeness but we believe that, although the two institutions are rather different, the departmental work practices are unexceptional and at least some are to be found in many, if not most, social science departments in British universities. Indeed, we might all recognise them in our own working lives. By looking at these work practices in detail, we can examine how the 'workplaces' of discipline, department and institution interact and sometimes compete.

So what do our participants learn about work practices through their engagement in the department and the institution? In order to wrestle the unwieldy subject of work practices into shape for a brief conference paper, we narrow our focus to consider work practices in relation to time and space – both virtual and 'real': that is, how, when and where does academic work get done and how have academics learned to work in these ways? And why does it get done in these ways, rather than others? What networks of relationships contribute to developing, sustaining and changing these working practices? And how do academics learn to negotiate the connections and conflicts between the department, institution and discipline (shorthand for research and research networks)?

Although we are actively resisting the temptation to focus on individual case studies, nevertheless some brief background of the three participants who feature in this paper is essential in understanding what their workplace (department and institution) affords them for learning, as well as consideration of their different disciplinary networks and relationships. Two of our participants (Reuben and Cathy) were from the same department in Southside, whilst the third (Adam) worked in Cityside. Reuben had been in post for five years, having been appointed whilst he was completing his PhD. Cathy joined Southside ten years ago, following a period as a post-doc in another country. Adam had been working as a lecturer for two years, after an extended period as a post-doc and research worker in another university.

Reuben lived on his own although he had started a new relationship recently. Adam and Cathy had long-standing partners and Cathy had young children. Both Reuben and Cathy lived in the same city as they worked, whilst Adam had a considerable commute. All three worked at home as well as in the university, and all three spoke eloquently of the struggle to maintain (fluid) boundaries between home life, and work (the boundary between work and life, as Ylijoki (2013) puts it). Adam worked on trains on his commute; Cathy worked in the evenings after the children went to bed; Reuben divided his year into two – those months when he was able to fit his work into a working day, and those in which he was teaching and ended up working each evening:

> *"Starting from the night before, what I do generally between 8 or 9 o clock and midnight is just do all my emails, I catch up, I just do emails, like two or three hours before I go to bed, it's a bit of an OCD thing that I hate having emails in my in-box, so I'll sit there for two or three hours before I go to bed, so when I go to bed, I've got no emails in my inbox. Then I go to the gym from 6.30 till 8.30 [a.m.] and I get in between 8.30 and 9 and then I deal with all the emails that come in over the course of the night, from people who work in other countries or people that are early risers, I clear my inbox and that normally takes another hour. It's just insane. So that takes me up to 10 o clock."* (Reuben)

Clearly Reuben experiences this as a subjective problem, a need for him to manage his time efficiently and productively. But why does Reuben have enough email to occupy two or three hours of his time each night? And is it the case that clearing his inbox is an individualised problem for Reuben, or might we find that this expectation arises from elsewhere?

Email and Other Work Practices

Academic work practices are constituted every day in digital technologies. It is not, as Decuypere and Simons (2014) argue, that academic work is the result (output) derived from particular processes (input), but that "academic activity is being composed on a daily basis and …digital devices play a role in that composition" (p 89-90).

This is recognised by Reuben:

> *"I have very split feelings about this [email] because for a long time I really felt that I really wished email could be uninvented and I just hate it. But now I've come to the conclusion that it's just work; email is just work; it's where your work gets done, so before, you'd go and sit in a room and you'd talk about something or people would phone each other and they'd do stuff but really now, what takes time with email is not often writing the email, it's thinking. So if someone emails me about a research project, I've got a question about it, it's not writing the email that takes the time, it's thinking about the question they've asked. But that said, there's undoubtedly an element of the fact that just often something you can sort out in 15 seconds in a conversation, it takes 10 emails and lasts over an hour."* (Reuben)

From a sociomaterial perspective, the daily practice of reading, writing and answering emails is work in the making – work is not that which is achieved when an email is answered, but work is emergent in the practice of answering emails. Thus, when we observe academics spending many hours writing emails as we did when shadowing them, we are witnessing work – most frequently what we call 'work about the work' (such as 'keeping warm' admissions emails, emotional labour with colleagues and students, responding to queries about curriculum document formatting and so on). We are party to the web of relations – human and non-human – in which the academic is located; and we are able to understand better how, following Decuypere and Simons (2014), email is a boundary actor (Bowker and Star, 1999) at the border of multiple regions (preparing, student processing, communicating) with different operational effects (adding value to students, organising activities, creating authorship).

It is widely recognised that online communication imposes informal obligations to be always available and ready to respond, but that is not to say that this has always to be the case. Institutions and departments may try to specify when and how emails are dealt with:

> *"… the university's senior management team has a rule that no emails are to be sent from close of business on Friday, till opening of business on Monday because it just can lead to people over the weekend having … these discussions and well, they just encroach constantly on your time, so SMT has said that but that hasn't trickled down to the rest of us." (Cathy)*

This suggests that, by agreeing not to send emails over the weekend, work is only enacted during the week. Of course, this is not the case. The institution's concerns about recruiting students and assumptions that quick responses influence applicants' decisions mean that admissions officers and their administrative teams learn quickly to undertake work unbounded by the opening and closing of business:

> *"When I used to do admissions work with administrative staff, they would want immediate replies … If an applicant emailed, the quicker you replied, the greater the impression. Southside as a university, we would have to work hard to get our students to come to us so you replied because it's a good impression and that kind of thing. Part of that … is it just my own personality being conscientious? But you feel that it's like a sales thing, if somebody emails asking a question about qualifications or something like that, will I need to reply because that will give a good impression and they'll think highly of the university and they'll put us as their No. 1?" (Cathy)*

Responding to email is seen as a means to an end which is managed by individuals in their own time, as it were, leaving many with an overwhelming sense of responsibility (and its concomitant, guilt – see Vostal, 2015) for the success or otherwise of the university. Further, the admissions role, which had conventionally entailed gatekeeping on behalf of the department, is transformed through email practices to an institutional recruitment role – that is, marketing and 'selling' on behalf of the institution.

Academics thus learn that institutional impression management is a crucial part of academic work:

> *"I also get things like, you know I have to check the admissions and then email them to tell them 'Welcome to Cityside, we've accepted you, you're now being processed'." (Adam)*

Swift emails to applicants enact 'warm' institutional relations with applicants, but email also enables students to enact particular (service) relations with academics, sometimes making work of unmanageable proportions:

> *"Previously when I was teaching two big courses, over 100 emails a day, about 150 emails a day, it was just insane, even now, I don't know … obviously, even now I think I probably get 40 emails a day, 50 emails a day." (Reuben)*

Institutions may try to intervene in minor ways to manage "student expectations" of academic staff, but nevertheless, individual academics are left to manage 'work about the work' for themselves:

> *"One thing I have found increasingly as an academic is the student will email you at the weekend and they expect an immediate answer. Now there are protocols within the university about how soon we are to reply to an email but you might come in on a Monday and the student says, 'You didn't reply to my email', 'Yes, because I'm not at work on a Saturday and Sunday', so the students, they'll email you late at night but I don't reply to those until [the next day]." (Cathy)*

Email is, of course, not the only way in which academics and students relate to each other. Moodle groups, Facebook, Twitter and other 'one-to-many' communication systems exist, but with multiple channels for doing work, many contradictions arise across technologies and between the institution and department. For example, as noted above, Cathy's institution has protocols about how soon students can expect replies to their emails. But her faculty learning technologist has told her that, if she wants to use the university's virtual learning environment (VLE) to respond to queries so that she does not have to answer the same question ten times, "…she said the only way it works is that you have to say 'I won't reply to emails, if you send me an email about content, related to the module, I will not reply to it, you have to put it on [VLE].'" Divergence between institutional protocols and departmental and/or individual practice has become a matter of enhanced institutional concern (in the UK at least) because of the treatment of students under consumer law (Competition & Markets Authority, 2015) and the right of students to take legal action against the institution and/or seek redress.

The obvious contradictions between, on the one hand, the apparent freedom to choose academic work practices and the explicit demands of the institution to work in particular ways do not go unnoticed by academics, although they tend to be difficult to resist:

> *"As academics, we're used to being semi-autonomous in a sense and having … you can have quite a degree of control over how you organise, although that is changing. In the 10 years I've been here, that is changing so much and it's so much more coming down, 'Do this, do that, do the other', so is it just that we've been very lucky? But then part of the nature of being an academic is being able to be an independent thinker and that kind of thing."* (Cathy)

The requirements to 'do this, do that, do the other' are not necessarily direct instructions so much as the work effected by forms, templates, performance measures (such as response time to enquiries) in the name of 'quality assurance' or 'standardisation' (and now, 'consumer law'). Cathy's classic tale of administrative instructions to complete a module outline in a particular way not only brings with it a groan of recognition from many (British) academics, but also highlights how learning 'work about the work' comes about:

> *"We have a (quality) review coming … so there's lots of 'we need to standardise, we need to get ourselves sorted for that'. There was a very prescriptive template [for module outlines] that we were asked to use because the students were complaining that there were discrepancies in the information that they were getting from colleagues. Our Director of Learning and Teaching and the head of department [said] 'We need to standardise this a bit more'. I never had any problems with my module outlines…. But you get an admin person coming back to you going, 'Cathy, you've done this wrong, you need to put your thing in a box so that all students know that they'll go to the assignments table and they'll find all the details.'"* (Cathy)

Emails constitute departmental as well as institutional and disciplinary work, of course. They also enact departmental culture and new colleagues quickly learn what it means to be an academic in a specific department through the torrent of requests, instructions, responses, information and other exchanges arriving on email. Email writing and (speed of) responding with respect to one administrative area or another *is* what it means to hold a departmental responsibility. But no matter how subjectively the pressure to respond is experienced, it is never extricable from the network of relations and expectations of the department; nor from the departmental labour and power relations associated with these responsibilities. For example, administrative responsibilities about something as seemingly 'technical' as admissions may entail considerable emotional labour and even abuse which flows through the evening and weekends and through personal spaces and relationships when email 'work about the work' is unregulated:

> *"…the workload was [such that] I'd still have to work in the evening. And so I was checking my email and he [a colleague] came in with a query with regards to admissions and because I used to have to instruct other staff to do things, he had gone off and done something without asking me whether it's okay and made arrangements. I essentially asked him 'In the future, if you do something like this, could*

you please tell me?' and he went off on one and this was all at night and our emails were crossing over. I was trying to calm him down but he was getting more and more [agitated] … My husband was screaming at me, 'What are you doing? Just leave it' and I was 'I just need to calm him down now' and he's like 'That's not your job', so he did calm down and completely it blew over for him but I was left feeling absolutely, I was in bits really." (Cathy)

Cathy's husband's view that calming an angry colleague down was not her job was inaccurate: within the departmental culture, academics understood that this was work that they were expected to undertake whenever necessary, even if this played out over the weekend. So putting students on hold, as it were, was not the same matter as staff, in this department.

This is not to say that academics do not try to change academic practices. Having had five years of trying to clear his inbox each day, Reuben finally tried to intervene in the 'always-on' culture of his department by proposing a change to practice because he felt that he needed to respond to every email or else he would be uncomfortable (Vostal, 2015):

"I've really tried hard at the school away day this year, to ban emails outside of office hours. I thought we should all stop emailing each other, colleagues, we should say 'We're not replying to emails, we don't send emails to each other outside office hours' because I think it puts pressure on. I can't help but check my email, it's my own fault but I can't help [it]. It's connected to my phone and everything else so I check it all the time … people email me and I feel an obligation to respond, even if it's at the weekend, even if there isn't an obligation there. It's in my own head most of the time but I just don't like to have backlog." (Reuben)

Mobile phones and other technologies afford so much, for example in sustaining and developing research relations. Decuypere and Simons (2014) suggest that we begin to speak of academic practice as *humandigital* because it makes little sense, they claim, to consider academic practice in terms of humans or non-humans, material or digital and so on. Indeed, academics may well equip themselves to be 'always on' for reasons other than teaching and administration. Research work, for example, may be conducted out of hours with others in other time zones:

"Got another colleague I'm writing an article with, the article is nearly, nearly finished … he keeps wanting to speak to me at weekends because he's in Rio de Janeiro and he's the only person I'll talk with at the weekend." (Adam)

But while the possibilities of working on what one wants and at one's own convenience are seductive, academics, especially those with administrative responsibilities (whether departmental or institutional), come to feel that, once they have the means to do so (and it is assumed they have the means), it is expected that they should be 'always on' (Gornall and Salisbury, 2012):

> *"When I was our school's admissions officer, I had resisted until then to get a smartphone. But I did because with kids and everything and because I worked part time, I thought it would help me keep on top of my email, so I'll check it at home and if there's anything urgent, I can reply straightaway. But the flipside of that is then you end up checking it at all hours of the evening and so I actually technically checked my email at 6.30 this morning and just looked." (Cathy)*

And, of course, whilst the boundaries between work and life might be fluid and ever-changing, when it comes to paying for that fluidity (mobile phones, broadband, and the rest of the paraphernalia needed to be 'always on'), there is no doubt about where the bill lands.

Learning Academic Work Practices - Disciplinary Networks and Relationships

Our participants were much more likely to cite their external disciplinary networks – PhD supervisors, fellow students from their doctoral studies, as well as collaborators - as sources for learning research work practices than they were to cite their own departmental colleagues, even where formal mentoring relationships had been established. Learning was effected through shared work (joint research and writing projects), advice, conference participation, emulation of more senior others and a wide range of networked activities.

Conferences have a special place in our consideration of the learning of disciplinary work practices, well beyond their disciplinary content. They provide a face-to-face space in which to talk about work practices other than those found within one's own department, to observe and to participate in disciplinary work practices (and to learn them by proxy) and to form an understanding of what being a member of the disciplinary community entails:

> *"It's just a game, it's all just a game and you just … you just learn by doing, you know? It's crazy. I think it's weird, in some respects, no-one really told me a lot of this stuff when I was first doing my PhD, which means you're kind of ignorant to so much stuff and it's only that you pick it up just from being involved, normally at conferences actually." (Reuben)*

But conference participation – and the essential disciplinary practice learning and networking entailed - relies on academics being able to leave home and visit far-flung places for sustained periods. We see, therefore, how the constitution of such disciplinary networks are inherently gendered: in the case of women with children, like Cathy, maternity leave and motherhood disrupt an individual's ability not only to participate in those events but to learn the 'stuff', as Reuben calls it, of disciplinary academic practice.

Already, therefore, at a disadvantage in not knowing the 'stuff', women may be allocated gendered, burdensome and labour-intensive roles involving for example pastoral care as their contribution to the department. Not only was Cathy unable to learn the 'stuff', but she was also given the role of admissions officer from which she

was not relieved for many years. Such roles – 'work about the work' - are all-consuming and, while essential, do not usually help to advance academic careers.

So when finally Cathy extricated herself from being the admissions officer, she decided to pay for herself to attend a conference in her specialism, where she reconnected with her doctoral supervisor:

> *"I thought this one, I will go. It's a big conference. I'll fund myself. I'll just get back into networks again. I will see what's been done... My old supervisor was at it and she was getting a lifetime achievement award but she's really been a mentor to me and she's so good, … [she said] 'We're going to go and do lunch' and in that hour, she basically [said] 'Right, this is what you need to do' and just discussed with me and give me lots of advice about how I should go about getting back into it and managing my expectations, which was really, really helpful." (Cathy)*

In other words, despite Cathy's years of labour for the department and institution, they offered no help (financial or otherwise) in developing Cathy's disciplinary academic practice. It was only through reconnecting with the discipline and those she had worked with in the past that she was encouraged to do what many of our male participants had learnt so well:

> *She [Cathy's ex-supervisor] said 'You'll need to give yourself head space, scoping what other people are doing, just get yourself back into reading, get yourself back into …' and removing all of the stuff that now isn't relevant in terms of administrative things because that's just taking up your head space and she said 'You'll have to get rid of that and then just completely zone in'." (Cathy)*

This is good advice but it is not surprising that Cathy's supervisor, a woman, should have to spell out for Cathy the need to discard the 'work about the work' to enable 'timeless time', as it were: after all, without wishing to suggest a deliberate conspiracy, it was probably very much in the department's interest for Cathy to undertake a departmental role that kept her close to home and that others would have rejected unless it were seen as a stepping stone to a promotion.

A further point to note about learning disciplinary academic practices: the PhDs which Reuben, Cathy and Adam had undertaken had not prepared them adequately for academic work. Although more recently attempts have been made to reorient the PhD towards the development of 'employability' and transferable skills, these are often based on an idealisation of the academic workplace as a knowledge-building disciplinary community, with little or no attention paid to academic work practice in the round (Zukas and Malcolm, 2015). Aside from generic 'employability' and transferable skills, doctoral preparation in the social sciences is mostly about 'the work', with the work understood to be primarily dedicated research time and effort ('timeless time'). As we have shown, lived academic work practice is different in that so much of working time is not taken up by 'the work' itself (even if that is understood to include teaching and activities such as course leadership): it is constituted by the 'work about the work',

be this answering emails, filling in module forms, recruiting students and so on. In fact, conventional PhD training in the social sciences could be regarded as unfit for purpose, setting up unrealistic expectations of what it means to do academic work (that is, academic work constituted as 'timeless time' rather than as 'structured time').

Learning Academic Work Practices - Online Identities

So far, we have been discussing how emails (receiving, deleting, reading and responding) effect academic work in relation to department and institution, in particular, and how conference networks particularly effect academic work practice in relation to discipline. There are other networks too which contribute to disciplinary academic practice. Take, for example, online research networks like ResearchGate and Academia.edu. Both are used by academics, as are blogs and other online interventions, to engage with other researchers, build identity and find relevant publications. ResearchGate, for example, claims to 'connect researchers and make it easy for them to share and access scientific output, knowledge, and expertise. On ResearchGate they find what they need to advance their research.' (https://www.researchgate.net/about). Perhaps less explicitly, they contribute to the metrification of academic success, employed for example as evidence in promotion applications. At any moment, academics are able to measure themselves in relation to their fellow academics ("Your RG Score is based on the publications in your profile and how other researchers interact with your content on ResearchGate"), as well as see how many people have not only cited them, but also downloaded and read their papers. The login page for Academia.edu (https://www.academia.edu) measures its own achievement in terms of citations as a proxy for academic success: it reads "Boost Your Citations By 73% - A recent study found that papers uploaded to Academia.edu receive a 73% boost in citations over 5 years."

Whilst these activities might be regarded by academics as voluntary, enabling them to escape the constraints of the institutional website structures and/or to ensure the portability of their academic identity, should they move institution, it would be remiss not to mention the ways in which institutions also expect academics to take up virtual identities, whether this be through the encouragement of blogging, tweeting and other new media activities or the requirement to join online registries (even more 'work about the work'). Cathy and Reuben's university, for example, insists that all academics join ORCID which, according to its website, is "an open, non-profit, community-driven effort to create and maintain a registry of unique researcher identifiers and a transparent method of linking research activities and outputs to these identifiers." (http://orcid.org/) Those developing ORCID are keen to see it as a "hub that connects researchers and research through the embedding of ORCID identifiers in key workflows, such as research profile maintenance, manuscript submissions, grant applications, and patent applications." Whilst ORCID maintains that it is not-for-profit, it begs the question as to whose interests are served by the linking of research activities and outputs to unique researcher identifiers when institutions insist on membership.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we have tried to open the lid of academic practice, not so much to reflect a complete picture, but to begin to understand how academics negotiate discipline, department and institution in their daily work, and how and where they learn how to be an academic. We focused on a single social science here, but we believe that the social science practices in this discipline are unremarkable and would be recognised in many others.

We have shown that much of the time, academics are undertaking 'work about the work' both at work and away from work, in working hours and outside them. Much of this 'work about the work', be it writing 'keep-warm' emails to applicants, managing colleagues on behalf of the department, or developing online identities so that the institution is able to claim credit for research done by its members, is concerned with sustaining the institution (and department), as opposed to disciplinary engagement. We showed how academics learn academic practices, not through their PhD training, but in the course of answering emails, filling in module forms and going to conferences, although we have also shown the dangers for academics of learning the institutional academic practices too well: the institution is, as frequently articulated, 'greedy' and the reality, for academics, is that lessons learned well result in institutional exploitation, gender (and other) inequalities, overwork and – ironically – the squeezing of discipline into whatever snatches of 'timeless time' can be created.

We have resisted the temptation to base our analysis on individual stories, having sought to sustain a sociomaterial 'sensibility' (Mol, 2010) throughout. However, in our focus on time and, to a lesser extent, space, we have noted, as have other researchers, the strategies and technologies academics have learned in order to snatch 'timeless time'. Reuben and Adam manage this through strict control of, for example, the weekends as 'their' time. This requires ruthless self-monitoring, as articulated so well by Reuben. But Cathy is triply disadvantaged: not only does she have childcare responsibilities which do not allow for much 'timeless time', even if snatched; and not only has she held for many years an administrative position in which she is 'always on'; but, because of her maternal responsibilities, she has not been able to join the disciplinary networks which would have enabled her to privilege research over her other responsibilities. This is, of course, a classically gendered story and indicates how critical academics' learning of work practices (as one contributory element in the persistence of unequal relations) as well as the work practices themselves can be.

A better understanding of social scientists' learning of work practices will enable us to support academics (and ourselves, for that matter) in negotiating successfully the complex demands of discipline, department and university work practice. It also helps to name overwork, institutional exploitation and power relations as systemic, rather than individual, issues and to resist the ever-growing trend for disciplinary work to be enacted in the times and spaces between the 'work about the work'.

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