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"Dragged in the Opposite Direction": Identity Tensions Facing Women Academics in Management and Organisation

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Introduction

This chapter offers reflexive-reflective accounts of three women management and organisation (hereafter "management") academics on different career journeys within differing UK Business Schools. An inward-looking approach to our experiences allows us to "inquire from the inside" (Humphreys & Brown, 2002, p. 426), and listen to our hearts rather than our minds as we consider the assumptions about who we are; assumptions held by ourselves and those held by others. In "writing

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differently" (Gilmore et al., 2019) so we question the assumptions underpinning who we think we are, and should be, as management scholars, and to what extent we are who we want to be. Adopting a social-constructionist perspective on identity, we examine whether we have agency to construct our identities as "a" management academic, or whether our identity has been, or is at risk of being, regulated or corrupted by others holding greater power than ourselves; that we are willingly duped into taking on a particular self. We thus examine the tensions that exist between our assumptions about who we are, our idealised self-constructions, and the gendered bureaucratic societal norms and structures that we perceive to regulate and reinforce who we are and who we become. Through reflexively examining our stories we illustrate how the role of the management scholar—as with many social scientists—is based on the tensions between submission to pressures and trends in who we should be, and the power we hold to be who we want to be. We suggest that this tension is perhaps more prevalent within management and organisation studies than in business more generally, in other disciplines and workplaces, and is more urgent for female scholars, who might typically find themselves "dragged in the opposite direction" as they make efforts to live and work within a context that was traditionally the male preserve (Wittenberg-Cox, 2020).

Management and Organisation Academics' Careers Within UK Business and Management Schools

The nature of academic careers within UK Business and Management Schools has changed significantly over time. From their origins through to the 1980s these Schools were designed to provide postgraduate and executive education for practising managers which were achieved through relationships they developed with the corporate sector (Louw, 2019). Management was, within this context, understood as a practice-based craft. Thus, the large majority of Business-Management School academics were, or had been, managers, business owners or

entrepreneurs and the focus of their craft was in providing tools and techniques grounded *for* management, grounded in their experience (e.g. Schoemaker, 2008; Warhurst & Black, 2022).

Over the past three-to-four decades, the prestige of a Business-Management School has instead been derived from its research credentials. Academics are now doctorally qualified researchers rather than current, or ex-, practitioners and educators, and their career success is assumed sought through securing research funding and highly ranked research outputs (Alajoutsijarvi et al., 2015; Kitchener & Delbridge, 2020) rather than through practice experience and educational excellence. The focus has, thus, become *about* management.

Academic careers are though changing, and within UK universities especially. Data over the past decade from the Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA) illustrates the growing importance of alternative career pathways within the contemporary UK university. What in the past was an assumption of an academic-researcher now opens new pathways and opportunities. These changing career opportunities are seen more prevalently within the pre-92, traditionally research-focused,[1] Universities that have acknowledged the strategic significance of other key areas beyond traditional research, rather than the post-92s formerly teaching-focused polytechnics.

Informed by such work as Boyer's (1999/2016) "priorities of the professoriate", many of these institutions have appointed Professors of "Practice and Engagement" and of "Education", and such promotion paths are especially important in Business-Management Schools (Anderson & Mallanaphy, 2020) and other vocational disciplines. Some institutions have also awarded Chairs for excellence in institutional Leadership. This route is often though not a formal academic pathway (Grajfoner et al., 2022), but it is expected that individuals would concurrently excel in one of the three main pathways (research, education, or practice and engagement) alongside. As such, progression through

[1] The UK university sector constitute of two large groups of institutions. Traditional research institutions, often referred to as "red-brick" (or pre-92s) are those universities who were established as such and were always academic institutions. Post-92 Universities refer to the group of universities, formerly known as "Polytechnics", that started as vocational establishments and around 30 years ago were transitioned into a university structure.

Leadership necessitates significant juggling of different agendas and the meeting of implicit assumptions in how these are juggled—and, in consequence, few women secure such roles (Cotton et al., 2021). Our assumption that we should be able to create academic environment that is supportive, fair, and appreciative of differences, although core to academic ethos, is still an unsolved problem.

The need to recognise and reward other facets of a UK university's role and purpose beyond research follows increasing marketisation of the sector, with the introduction of fees and simultaneous reduction in government funding streams (Marginson, 2018). Concurrent performativity metrics in the UK, such as the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) which directly informs the levels of permitted tuition fees, and the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF), have aimed to "increase efficiency and effectiveness in the use of public funding" (UKRI, 2023). Universities in the UK now have the characteristics of both public sector organisations in, for example, costly staffing, and the characteristics of private sector organisations as they compete in a global marketplace for students. Engagement with this global marketplace has inherently brought with it changing student expectations as customers (Calma & Dickson-Deane, 2020; Guilbault, 2016, 2018), consumers or service-users (OfS, 2023; Tomlinson, 2017). Such marketisation and performativity have thus established new frameworks to govern academic work and academic lives (e.g. Rosewell & Ashwin, 2019), and these frameworks bring with them ever-rising levels of bureaucracy which is regulating and corrupting who we are as management academics. This context also poses a larger question of how much agency we have as academic in choosing a particular career pathway, how much we are dragged in different directions as dictated by organisational needs, and how this affects our assumed professional identity.

A socio-cultural approach to understanding identity can help explain the effect of these changes to academic careers (e.g. Anderson, 2011; Black & Warhurst, 2019). From such perspective, identity is not established and fixed (e.g. Hutchins & Rainbolt, 2017), but is understood as an ongoing re/crafting of the self, influenced by various factors. The self is thus "reflexively understood" (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 53) through dialogue within specific context/s (e.g. Brown, 2019, 2022;

Brown et al., 2021) and organised in efforts to produce a "degree of existential continuity and security" (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 622). Our assumed or preferred academic identities can though be regulated by others, by social structures (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002), threatening who we think we should be, and want to be as academics (Brown et al., 2021). As women academics do we face alternative assumptions about who we are that place us more at risk from this identity regulation? (e.g., Romero-Hall et al., 2018). Are we though also inadvertently condemning ourselves, allowing our academic identity to be regulated and controlled by others to a less valorised, feminised career path? That is, are we complicit in disadvantaging our own careers? In what follows, we present three individual reflexive-reflective vignettes examining our experiences and our identity-work within the field of management studies within both post-92 and pre-92 institutions. We acknowledge upfront that we did not each necessarily anticipate following the research-focus that is assumed of contemporary management academics. Have we though willingly found an alternative academic career, or were we dragged *in*, or *from*, another direction?

Vignette One: Kate's Account—Dragged into Education?

I am Professor of Management Learning and Education at a "post-92", previously teaching-focused but now research-focused, university. My Chair was secured through "excellence" in education and "good standing" in research and leadership-citizenship. I am not a career academic. I did not complete my Ph.D. until I was in my 40s, having had a somewhat varied career largely outside of the Business School context. My career has comprised, environmental education, secondary high-school teacher, learning and development manager within the retail sector, professional manager within a university School of Education, and an associate academic within a university geography department. Indeed, it was within this geography department that I was offered a fixed-term academic contract on the same day as I was offered a permanent

academic contract in the Business School. Fearing the risk of uncertainty on a fixed-term contract, I took the latter.

Despite this eclectic and sinuous route, a key theme through my career has been education and learning. That I have embraced such a career focus, assuming an "educator identity" is though interesting given that, aged 7, I announced to my family that "when I grew up, I wouldn't be a teacher!" At that time, several of my family members were then working, or had worked, in education. Later, aged 17, when perceived to be underperforming in my mock A-level exams, I was taken aside by my form teacher and advised "perhaps you forget about entering university? Go to teacher training college instead". My response, maybe their intention, was that "I'd show them" and I successfully progressed to my university and programme of choice, studying Physical Geography, then securing a scholarship for a Masters in Ecology and Countryside Management.

It is perhaps not unexpected that I have become an educator, despite my assertions to the contrary. I strongly believe in the transformational power of education for changing people's lives. However, that I am an educator within the field of management is perhaps more questionable. Did I sacrifice my "true" self as a geographer and ecologist through the lure of a permanent contract in a discipline within which I feel less comfortable?

After securing my academic post, I completed my Ph.D.—in Education and, upon its completion, I had every intention of following an expected research-focused career, changing universities to support this trajectory. It was not though, to be. While I do research, and I do publish, this assumption that I would craft such identity has not come to fruition.

I am though lucky that I've had the opportunity to progress at a time when alternatives to a research-focused pathway have gained prominence and credibility and thus the assumptions underpinning what it means to be a management scholar have "on paper", although perhaps not for all, evolved. Yet, that I hold the title "Professor" is still something that I find it hard to come to terms with, and this imposter feeling has been intensified by a male Professor who swiftly pointed out, that I am not "a proper Professor". I still usually use "Dr" instead.

What I do though notice is that there is an unspoken assumption that women will take on such education-focused roles. Yet, as educational innovation, pedagogy and a genuine focus upon students' experiences is replaced by increasing bureaucracy, as universities make belts-and-braces responses to regulatory body legislation, so this bureaucratic burden is thus falling disproportionately upon female academics. This burden is, in turn, potentially corroding who they are, blocking opportunities for them to become what is expected of them by the academy, and/or to craft an identity that fulfils their ambitions and identity as an educator. Indeed, I still find myself regularly expected to "make up the numbers" on recruitment and promotion panels. Being the "token" woman is an expectation of me even when I might have other priorities or deadlines.

I do though sometimes question myself, as Head of Education and in accepting an education-focused Professorship, am I complicit in upholding the administrative yoke? Do my actions in fact contradict my own principles and values of learning but do they also inherently present a barrier to others' learning?

Vignette Two: Dawn's Account—Dragged Along into Academia?

I never set out to be an academic, it was an unplanned career but something which appealed while undertaking an undergraduate degree. I joked to the lecturers that I was going to join them one day; it looked like a fun and flexible job. Ten years later after a successful career as a Chartered Surveyor, I was head-hunted to join my former tutors, at a post-92 university seeking practitioners from industry. My transition to an academic was unfolding as I became a Senior Lecturer. I was probably quite naïve at this point, or maybe avoiding what I unconsciously knew, but research never really featured on my agenda, it was briefly mentioned in my interview, but the focus was very much on teaching, and I wanted to teach, share my knowledge and experience as a surveyor. I did not really see myself as an academic, I was a Chartered Surveyor employed as a Senior Lecturer, and so I threw myself into teaching and a leadership role. The only qualifications I possessed were my undergraduate

degree and professional qualification, and it soon became evident from discussions with colleagues that I should start thinking about research and was encouraged to undertake a master's degree. To support my leadership role, I opted to study part-time for a MBA, and it was during this time that my interests started to shift, and this led to my next significant transition in my career, I moved to a different Faculty to focus on Business and Management programmes. During my first year in a Business School, I struggled to find my identity, I was no longer a surveyor or a specialist in a subject area and at first felt rather discombobulated. A prerequisite of this move was to undertake a Ph.D. or Professional Doctorate, I had already started to undertake a part-time DBA, the focus of which was on employability, and I therefore focussed much of my teaching around career development, employability, and academic skills with the Business School. Perhaps this focus resulted from the tension I was facing in wanting to prioritise my support of learners to "become", but having to take on a revised identity of what it meant to be an academic. But still I did not really relate to the term Academic; was I resisting this assigned identity? I still referred to myself as Senior Lecturer, with the emphasis being upon "lecturer", my interest lay still very much on teaching. Research was really just like a dull ache there in the background, but it wouldn't quite go away. I tried all I could to resist what others were trying to ascribe to me by just trying to ignore the dull ache, focusing on everything but research. This resistance was something which I soon began to regret. I was a reluctant researcher, possibly because I lacked confidence in undertaking it and found teaching and leadership more rewarding, and very much within my comfort zone. The dull ache, however, soon developed into a right pain, the lack of research was holding me back in terms of career development. I could not climb the academic ladder, and while I enjoyed teaching, I was driven to achieve more for both financial reward and a strong desire to undertake a leadership role as I wanted to contribute at a higher level. I was able to undertake interim and deputy leadership roles, but the lack of credible outputs and research income was limiting my progression. I had naively believed that in being loyal, hard-working, and good at my job as an educator and leader I would be successful and able to secure promotion to an Associate Professorship. This was not, however the case, the

university was focussed on a strategy where research took primacy and thus considered academics only for their contribution to research. Little consideration was made of the educators and leaders who had built the university to be what it was, nor did they acknowledge personal constraints that might face individuals in writing highly ranked journals. Concurrent with this, the University changed academic job titles. My title of "Senior Lecturer" became that of "Assistant Professor". After a number of unsuccessful attempts at promotion, both in terms of grade and responsibilities, and despite 17 years as an academic through which I had held a number of interim leadership roles, I was reminded that I was "just an early career researcher" and thus "I lacked necessary gravitas". Although working within a vocational discipline in which students were hungry for real-world insights and, despite applying for posts that necessitated managing the department team, my organisational practice and leadership experience apparently did not count. My academic self that I had built up was severely threatened. Arguably, "gravitas" is a gendered word, and interestingly it was a male colleague that secured this specific promotion.

This rejection enabled me to recognise that I would never be valued within that university unless I became a research-focused academic. However, this was not how I saw myself as a management academic. Research was not the basis of who I am, of my personality and my being. It was not why I left industry and took an academic role. While I recognise change within organisations, I know my strengths, and that my true self lay in an education-focussed role. While I could see value in pedagogic research this would not, in itself, enable me to meet the exacting identity of researcher that was being prescribed.

To be true to myself, it was time to move on and I was offered that aspired-for promoted post at a "pre-92" (Russell Group) university on an education-focussed career track. Yet in applying for the role, I was nervous. My confidence was shattered by the previous comments that I "lacked gravitas" and that I was "just an early career researcher". Would another university really value the knowledge, skills and experience I could bring in terms of my education and leadership capabilities? During my time at the pre-92 university, I considered myself as a Chartered Surveyor and Senior Lecturer and managed the tensions

that emerged between these two identities, especially the ever-present "imposter syndrome". Since becoming an Associate Professor at the pre-92 and holding an identity that is valued by the institution, this imposter syndrome is starting to diminish and, for the first time in my academic career, I would perhaps now refer to myself as "an academic".

Vignette Three: Gosia's Account—Dragged from Leadership?

I grew up within the harsh Polish education system and so I learned early on how to work hard. After a 5-year consolidated degree in Management and Marketing, which I selected as I was interested in the significant political and economic transformation that my country was going through, I started working with a government agency. At the time, I was one of few people with good English language skills and so I was sent to participate in multiple different European Union meetings. What this job taught me was not only what working life looks like, but specifically, how *not* to manage people and how *not* to push top-down onto your teams. I promised myself that if I ever moved into a managerial position, I would find a better way of translating strategy to operation and vice versa. Ultimately, I gave up this public sector job to start a small business while simultaneously enrolling on a Ph.D. in Management. I thought I could manage both at the same time; little did I know how hard that would be!

Through running my own company, I discovered that I work effectively with people and I used this opportunity to develop my own distinctive leadership style. I felt the need to demonstrate that I could run a successful business, acting as a role model for new staff, and so I ensured that I was able to step into any role within the business as needed. However, unconsciously that led me to delegate less and place a closer grip on staff. A typical entrepreneurial dilemma you could say.

In part because of my business endeavours, and in part due to other external factors, it took me 7 years to complete my doctorate and I changed my institution twice before I defended my thesis. At this time,

I decided to close the business and move to the UK where I took a fixed-term research associate contract before securing employment as Senior Lecturer elsewhere. I held a full-time academic position for 4 years before I considered taking a leadership role—as postgraduate research director. Arising from my doctoral supervision activity, this was perhaps one of the most enjoyable roles I've held. This enjoyment was perhaps because there were many problems to fix so I could see my work was making a difference. Yet, while enjoyable, I felt that this role equated to only a small part of our operations and I wanted more of a challenge; I wanted a role to which I could bring value but also learn from. The Business School then needed a Research Excellence Framework (REF) coordinator and so I took on that role. It was in this role though that I encountered difficulties through the exposure to university politics. To be frank, the role really scared me initially as I lacked the network at that level and had no history of working with these people. I felt out of my depth. I remember clearly shortly after taking on the role, I was to present the mock REF exercise outcomes. The results were poor, and I reported them accordingly. One of the Deputy Vice-Chancellors then came to me, patted me on the back, and said that "I shouldn't worry about my presentation; that it wasn't my fault". This really shocked me. How could anyone think this could have been my fault in the first place? I then realised that the expectation of delivering quality outcomes was high and that I was being scrutinised quicker than I thought!

I changed jobs at this point as despite my leadership contribution, and despite a good publication record, I had been unable to secure promotion to Associate Professor. I was apparently "only 98% there"! By moving institutions, I was able to secure this level of role with an associated leadership position as Director of Learning and Teaching (Quality Assurance) focused upon accreditations. At this point, I discovered that some UK Universities have a leadership-based promotion pathway. Such a pathway necessitates a credible research or education contribution alongside the leadership skills and knowledge of the business activities of the university. Some academics are of course able to "play" such a promotion pathway very effectively, negotiating their responsibilities effectively to secure a sought-after knowledge-base, for example relating to national excellence frameworks or business school accreditations.

Shortly after, I secured a Departmental Deputy Head role. This was the most substantial operational role that I'd held, managing 80+ academics—and a role that on paper equates to 50% workload, but in reality, could be 150% some weeks. I knew though that I was good at organising and that the department needed a rethink regarding many of its processes and practices. I wasn't aware, though, that it would be so demanding of my time and that it would take a good 12 months before I felt confident in what I was doing.

A Deputy Head role is a strange role as it is expected that you fulfil everything that the Head does—except that you aren't invited to the meetings where the decisions are being made and so you are not able to influence but also don't always know the context of instructions sent down. This caused me significant frustrations! Perhaps not surprisingly, I felt relieved and really encouraged to subsequently step in as interim Head. This role gave me an opportunity to finally have a "seat at the meetings table", to be able to contribute to the ways things were done, and to advocate for the department. The role also revealed the full spectrum of departmental, faculty and university politics, and I had to learn, fast, how to navigate them. For much of the time in this role, I was the only woman in the room and on reflection, I think it created, albeit maybe unintentionally, an environment where I felt I had to fit into the setting rather than be myself. I felt that I had to conform to the expectations that have emerged from there being a persistent gender imbalance at the higher level of academic management. I remember one meeting with a new university director who looked at me with surprise on his face and commented, "I thought you were a man!" My name is foreign and so my gender may not be obvious, but needless-to-say that episode said a lot about "model academic leaders!"

Nevertheless, being Interim Department Head was the most rewarding and satisfying role I have performed so far. Quickly I learned that the role wasn't about efficiency and skills, but about building teams, selecting the right person for the right job and supporting everyone to achieve their potential. I developed a really good working relationship with colleagues, and I learned how to rely on them in order to make progress as a department. Unfortunately, though, my focus upon leadership had been at the cost of my research and when the permanent Head

role was advertised, with an accompanying Chair, I was not appointed. I was advised that my outputs were not commensurate with being a "Professor". This really highlighted the struggle that I, and indeed many leaders, face in navigating the requirements and expectations of differing academic workstreams, while, in my case and similarly for many other female leaders, also supporting a young family.

I therefore sought promotion elsewhere to achieve my Professorship, moving institutions (again!). I now lead a research team, while focusing on developing my publication and funding portfolio, in efforts to build a case for my next career step. Unsurprisingly this too requires a lot of investment and enthusiasm but also allows me to make progress on collaborative projects. For sure it is much easier than managing a whole department! I hope to go back to substantive academic leadership at some point in the future as this gave me the most professional fulfilment. I am good at doing research, I am a decent academic teacher, but my best skills are in people management and development.

Understanding Academic Identities Through an Identity Lens

How then can we make sense of these experiences? Taking a sociocultural approach to understanding our "selves" as academics, we acknowledge that we are constantly working on, crafting, our identity/ies. That is, we are constantly reasserting our "subjective claims" of "who I am" (Caza et al., 2017, p. 5) as we seek a "degree of existential continuity and security" (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 622) within the academy. Yet we do not craft our identities in isolation but rather, intersubjectively in interaction and dialogue (Watson, 2008) with others in specific social contexts at specific times (Alvesson et al., 2008). This might necessitate us invoking certain positioning tactics in relation to others (McInnes & Corlett, 2012), for example, to manage the assumptions of who we are to others we might choose to disassociate our self from others or, conversely, to emphasise our similarity with them (e.g. Tajfel & Turner, 2004; Turner & Reynolds, 2012).

While we might like to think that we have full agency in positioning our selves, in "becoming" and "being" who we are, we must necessarily recognise that our identity is also positioned, often regulated and controlled, by others (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). That is, differing meanings may be ascribed to us by others. Consequently, our assumed, or asserted, identity might be contested, suppressed or rejected (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) and/or an alternative identity might be imposed upon us (Winkler, 2013) by, for example, by our university, department or discipline and/or by political structures externally. Moreover, since who we "become" is constructed dialogically, crafting a new identity involves us drawing upon the available social and cultural resources of language and discourse, weaving these into our identity narratives. Our identity can thus be unconsciously "colonized" (Brown, 2017, p. 299), positioned and distorted by the dominant discourses available (Thornborrow & Brown, 2009) which may then discipline who we become (McInnes & Corlett, 2012) both in our eyes and in the eyes of others.

In order to achieve a sense of meaning and coherence for our selves, and thus a personal security through aligning with our assumptions of who we should be, we need to continuously work on our identities (Bardon et al., 2017; Knights & Clarke, 2014). This identity-work, the process of "forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising" desired identity constructions (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165) is especially pertinent during periods of change or threat. In such periods, identity crises can be provoked as our established self-understandings are challenged, and a sense of self-doubt, insecurity, and anxiety is brought to the fore (Nicholson & Carroll, 2013; Winkler, 2013). Through identity-work we then strive to re-craft and re-build or reinvent a coherent sense-of-self (Ibarra, 1999; Learmonth & Humphreys, 2012).

Yet significantly, identity-work is not only necessary for establishing "who I am", but also "who one is not" (Watson, 2008, p. 134) and this latter state may involve us "undo[ing]" (Nicholson & Carroll, 2013), and "disidentifying" (Elsbach, 1999) with an established identity, such as that associated with a previous career position, to then engage in aspirational identity-work (Thornborrow & Brown, 2009) to become a different type of person. This identity-work typically involves conscious crafting to align our self with a desired, perhaps distinctive, or prestigious, identity

(Learmonth & Humphreys, 2012). Yet if such identity-work is rejected or regulated by others (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) an aspirational identity might not be achieved or indeed, be achievable. This rejection or regulation of our identity may result in a tension between who we are able to be/become and the assumptions we hold of our identity and resolving this tension might necessitate significant remedial or restorative identity-work (Knights & Clarke, 2014) often drawing upon resources from outside of the immediate context.

Understanding Our Management Academic Identities

Our vignettes that articulate our reflexive-reflective accounts of our experiences as academics illustrate the identity tensions we have faced through our academic careers. They also raised questions as to the extent we have had agency over our careers, crafting a true[2] self that is, we are who we think we should be as academics, and the extent to which our identity has been structurally and socially crafted for us whether consciously or unconsciously by the sector, our own institutions, our managers, and our peers.

The Agentic Academic Self

Perhaps most significantly, we all made a conscious decision to pursue a different form of academic career, to position ourselves (McInnes & Corlett, 2012) as educators and leaders foremost which is different to the contemporary "norm" of "research above all else".

In Dawn's account (Vignette 2), a significant professional career before joining academia gave her the strength of professional identity as a Chartered Surveyor. Although having aspired to be an academic when completing her original degree, this academic identity remained that of

[2] We have, throughout, referred to our "true" self rather than our "authentic" self, due to the proclivity of the latter term to assert a gendered form of control, contributing to the reproduction of gendered work and organising (Zaeemdar, 2024).

primarily educating the next generation of professionals, at least until the jaws of managerialism, notably those of the Research Excellence Framework [REF], started to bite. The changing nature of the academy that she experienced, and that coincided with her transition into the Business School, placed a threat upon this secure sense-of-self. We see evidence of her ensuing identity crisis as she tried to secure promotion and administrative leadership-management roles, to be told that she lacked the necessary "gravitas" to take on such roles. The identity she assumed as an academic remained misaligned with that expected of her. The rejection of her identity by others, combined with the change of role title from "Senior" to "Assistant", created a threat to her extant, and previously secure, identity as educator and resulted, whether consciously or unconsciously, in a process of identity-work as she sought resources from outside of that institution to engage in the necessary remedial and restorative identity-work (Knights & Clarke, 2014) in the form of a promoted post elsewhere where her experience and expertise held value and thus her chosen identity, how she saw herself as an academic, could be reasserted.

Similarly, in Kate's account (Vignette One), her education-focused identity was deeply ingrained; this was how she saw her academic self. She asserts this to be a career choice, albeit perhaps unconscious, due to her strong belief "in the transformational power of education" (e.g. O'Sullivan, 2023). This choice was despite her aspirations at an earlier stage of her university academic career to "be" a different kind of academic—a researcher—and of her moving institutions in pursuit of that dream. Then, rather than adopting the assumptions of the self that are embedded within the discourse of "research-above-all-else" she instead employed positioning tactics (McInnes & Corlett, 2012), working on and asserting her identity as an educator. This intention was achieved through her securing promotion on the grounds of educational "excellence" (albeit with the necessary "good standing" in research). Interestingly, and by contrast to Dawn, this identity claim as an education-focused Professor was not challenged by others and she would seem therefore to have been successful in agentically identity-re/crafting, despite the male colleague who questioned her over being a "proper

Professor". Concurrently though she finds it hard to accept her promotion, tending to disassociate from the title due to the assumptions that she un/consciously knows underpin it. She primarily uses "Dr" instead. Such disassociation is perhaps down to her recognition that education is still seen as second-class within the academy (Denny, 2023).

Gosia (Vignette Three) has also seemingly had significant agency to become who she wanted to become as a management scholar—an academic leader-manager—but also the agency to be the type of academic leader-manager that she wanted to be, as learned from her first working experiences of how *not* to lead! However, more recently, as her vignette suggests, this agency has been to some extent regulated and controlled by others, by the assumed norms of what it is to be a Professor as held by the predominantly male incumbents of such titles, and the perceived credibility that is now required to be allowed to perform an academic leadership position.

Our Ascribed and Regulated Identities as Management Academics

Did, and do we, therefore really have agency in crafting our academic selves or are the identities we have crafted for ourselves really the result of regulation by others, and rejection of alternative identities by others with greater power (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002)? That is, have our assumptions of who we are as academics been brought into question by the assumptions held by others causing us to feel, albeit unconsciously, a sense of imposter syndrome (Addison et al., 2022)? Perhaps unconsciously we have understood that our assumptions of who we should be are misaligned with those sought and valued by a contemporary academy where research has primacy. Have we crafted an identity with which we had confidence and/or capability thus seeking recognition from elsewhere through being "different"?

We have shown how Dawn's transition to an academic role within the Business School met with a resistance to adopt the academic identity that was being ascribed to her (Humphreys & Brown, 2002). Yet the tensions she faced through the more recent threat to her identity,

that of being considered an early career academic without the "gravitas" to be promoted to a leadership role, was, consciously or unconsciously, the trigger for further identity-work, as she repositioned herself, crafting an alternative and aspired identity that was valued elsewhere. Dawn now suggests that she has re-secured her sense-of-self, holding tight to her true self of supporting nascent professionals rather than capitulating to the imposed identity of academic-as-researcher. That is, there is alignment between who she assumes she should be, and what others are assuming of her. Yet inherently, in transitioning to a new identity as an Associate Professor, "for the first time in my academic career, … [identifying] as an academic", has she succumbed herself to the managerial grasps of the new institution (e.g. Shams, 2019), her true identity lost and replaced by a regulated self? Moreover, in repositioning as an education-focused academic has she capitulated to assumptions held by others of who she should now be, accepting the gendered role of educator and administrator in lacking the supposed "gravitas" associated with research? (e.g. Cardel et al., 2020; Górska et al., 2021).

Similarly, in Vignette One, Kate's school experiences of "not being good enough for university" perhaps unconsciously pushed her to accept assumptions made about who she should be, crafting an identity that has supported her success—at least objectively. This success has been crafted, for example, through securing a permanent academic contract (even if that was not within her favoured area), in securing an education-focused Professorship, surrendering to the neoliberal discourse of striving to be "better". But in doing so, so she "sacrifice[d]" her more true identity within environmental and earth sciences, and of achieving the hard-to-craft identity of "researcher". Her identity has thus arguably been regulated by the powerful neoliberal discourses of "success above all else", and to achieve this success she has been pushed, perhaps dragged into crafting an alternative self as a management educator, inherently a more feminine role (Brommesson et al., 2022). Yet as she reflects, in achieving this success, is she complicit in the managerialism that corrodes our identities (Mansfield, 2023; OfS, 2022)? Moreover, is it really success to be ascribed an identity as "token woman" on panels, to take on the gendered role of nurturing "educator" (Cooper, 2019; Westoby et al., 2021)?

Although on the face of it, Gosia (Vignette Three) has been able to craft an agentic self as an academic leader, at least until very recently, so, too, her assumptions of who she is have arguably been shaped and regulated, socially and structurally. She asserts at the outset that she is not afraid of hard work having been schooled within the harsh Polish education system, and as a result her assumptions of who she is, and should be, are underpinned by the need for hard graft, running a business while pursuing her doctorate, giving "150%" as Deputy Head, while also raising a child. This assumption of continuous grafting has arguably encouraged her to keep on pushing for a never-satiated success, even when enjoying the role that she held (Black & Warhurst, 2019). As Gosia secured more senior roles so she experienced a need to craft a "less true" self as a female leader adopting the assumptions that she held of who she should be. She notes how she felt the need to "fit into the setting rather than be myself" a sense of having "to conform to the expectations" and this was then further asserted by an explicit rejection of her identity by a senior manager who noted his surprise that she was female. This assumption made is perhaps though not entirely surprising given how few senior leaders within UK institutions, and Business Schools, are women (Cotton et al., 2021; UCU, 2022). Yet, that Gosia saw herself an academic leader, might be understood from a more critical perspective, not as a true desire but as an outcome of the neoliberal imperative to develop skills, notably leadership and communication, that have value as productive labour (e.g. Urciuoli, 2008)?

Conclusions and Implications

Who then are we as academics, as women scholars in the field of management and organisation? As we have seen, as management scholars we are faced with multiple identity pressures and expectations that emerge from within our institutions but also more widely, for example, from our discipline, neoliberalist politics and economics, student expectations and so on. Within this chapter, in drawing upon a socio-cultural identity lens, we have examined the tensions between these structural constraints and our own agency to craft who we think we should be. Have we been

dragged into becoming what/who others within our discipline assume we are? Has who we are been determined by the outcome of maximum utility as characterises *Homo oeconomicus*? Or have we been true to our hearts and become who *we* think we should be?

We also question whether we have felt these tensions more intensely as women academics, and women within management and organisation studies? Each of us has experienced our identity as we understand ourselves as management scholars being rejected, and having an alternative identity ascribed to us; an identity that we have accepted to varying degrees. Yet we have continued to craft, to re-craft, to use necessary positing tactics to make-the-most of who we can/have become, associating, and disassociating with others, as necessary, in efforts to craft some sense of security for ourselves; to be who we think we should. As we have navigated these tensions there is though evidence to suggest that we have simultaneously disciplined ourselves, being complicit in constraining who we can become as women academics. In taking on the more caring, education-focused, or leadership-focused, roles, supporting our learners and colleagues to achieve their aspirations, we have undoubtedly reinforced structural assumptions of who we should be, contributing significant invisible labour to this end, but we have also potentially curtailed how we are perceived by others within the academy while potentially corroding our own identities (Sennett, 1998).

Have we experienced these tensions, the rejections, and ascriptions, dragged *to* and *from* the opposite direction more strongly because we are women academics within a context that is conventionally masculine (Whittenberg-Cox, 2020)? The evidence we present, of a male colleague's surprise of being a woman (Gosia, Vignette Three), of lacking "gravitas" (Dawn, Vignettes Two) and of a questioned Professorship (Kate, Vignette One), would suggest this may well be the case. That management and organisation are, by contrast to more general business, dominated by conflict and power relations, positions that women tend to avoid (Mease & Neal, 2023; Schneider et al., 2016), further support our experiencing such tensions.

Such tensions in who we are, who we can be, and how others perceive us are though not only apparent within the academy. Issues of power and

conflict are evident across the very large majority of contemporary organisations and thus we are not in this way, distinct or "special". Indeed, such examples as these could undoubtedly be found in the life-worlds of many managers and employees. Yet, the level at which these tensions are experienced by women is, we suggest, far greater within the academy and thus the situation of women academics is perhaps more precarious than most.

What then are the implications of this situation for women academics within management and organisation? How then can such precarity be created through unresolved tensions between who we see ourselves to be and how we are assumed by others to be? Each of us must consciously take a stand on whether to assert greater agency to become the management academic we want to become or become the product of those with the power, forever assigned to those roles that are perceived to be more feminine such as those that underpin education-focused careers, and excluded from those perceived to be more masculine: the Leadership or research-focused careers. Standing against structural and cultural inequalities has never been an easy task and will certainly take a lot of effort but gives an opportunity to build solidarity among women academics. Asserting greater agency over our identity, ensuring greater inclusion and diversity within the academy will necessitate women academics making active efforts to resist the identities assigned to us, to collectively stand up for who we really want to be as management academics. At the same time, we must necessarily raise awareness across Management and Organization of the implications and shortcomings of assigning such identities upon their women academics. We also hope that our narratives and analysis will help senior academic leaders to understand the burden of identity tensions in today's academia and to support rebuilding the sense of solidarity and collegiality.

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