



Citation for published version:

Chubb, J, Watermeyer, R & Wakeling, P 2017, 'Fear and loathing in the Academy? The role of emotion in response to an impact agenda in the UK and Australia', *Higher Education Research and Development*, vol. 36, no. 3, pp. 555-568. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2017.1288709>

DOI:

[10.1080/07294360.2017.1288709](https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2017.1288709)

Publication date:

2017

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication](#)

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Higher Education Research & Development on 08 Mar 2017, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/07294360.2017.1288709>

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Fear and loathing in the academy? The role of emotion in response to an impact agenda in the UK and Australia

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Abstract

The research impact agenda is frequently portrayed through 'crisis' accounts whereby academic identity is at risk of a kind of existential unravelling. Amid reports of academics under siege in an environment in which self-sovereignty is traditionally preferred and regulation is resisted, heightened emotionalism, namely fear and dread dominate the discourse. Such accounts belie the complexity of the varying moral dispositions, experiences and attitudes possessed by different individuals and groups in the academic research community. In this article we attempt to examine the role of the affective in response to a particular research policy directive - the impact agenda. In doing so, we reveal the contributing factors affecting the community's reaction to impact. In cases where personal, moral and disciplinary identities align with the impact agenda, the emotional response is positive and productive. For many academics however, misalignment gives rise to emotional dissonance. We argue that when harnessed, further acknowledgement of the role of emotion in the academy can produce a more socially and morally coherent response to an impact agenda. We review academic responses from the UK and Australia (n=51) and observe a community heavily emotionally invested in what they do, such that threats to academic identity and research are consequently threats to the self.

Keywords: Academic Identity, Emotions, Higher Education Policy, Impact, Knowledge.

Introduction

The emotional state of academic labour as it evolves in response to the challenges in higher education are frequently portrayed through 'crisis' accounts whereby academic identity is at risk of a kind of existential unravelling. Such diagnoses, however, belie the complexity of a rapidly changing organisational paradigm of higher education; the diversity of the academic research community; and the spectrum of cognate experiences, attitudes and moral dispositions. Amid such complexity and in the face of intensifying demands, the ability to distil a 'true' sense of academic identity is increasingly difficult – obscured by heightened emotionalism, particularly of fear and dread, which are yet to be fully explored.

Emotion, though prevalent in Western Philosophy through the discourse of Cartesian Dualism, remains 'rarely acknowledged and under or mis-theorised' in the context of higher education and research despite attempts to reconceptualise its relationship with rationality (Beard, Clegg & Smith, 2007, p.236). Nevertheless, we find emotion has a key influence in academic life. Much of the literature describes the tension between traditional notions of the academy as an 'emotion-free zone' to one where the role of the affective is acknowledged (Hey & Leathwood, 2009; Beard et al, 2007). Whilst much of the literature has focused on the effects of emotion on gender and teaching, (Boler, 1999; Light, 2001), the role of emotions in recent higher education policy directives such as the impact agenda, though emerging, appears relatively under researched (Evans, 2004).

Reminiscent of what Beard et al (2007, p.237) refer to as the 'rational–emotional dilemma', we find academics struggling to reconcile their sense of identity and practice with profound change. The process of coping with change is emotionally-laden and,

therefore, inclined to produce partisan, embellished behaviours and hyperbolic testimony. Academics' identity-politics are perhaps especially acute and exaggerated where in the academy, the status quo is traditionally preferred; where forms of regulation which might interfere with academics' right to self-sovereignty are fiercely resisted (Ahmed, 2003); and where organizational change of most kinds has until relatively recently been typified by a prevailing languor. Now however, academics working in public universities, increasingly find themselves subject to rapid rule-change through the reorganization of higher education including globalization, marketization; metricization; global recession (Palfreyman and Tapper 2014; Marginson and Considine, 2000); and in the UK especially a politics of austerity in the distribution of public funds.

A slide towards a doomsday scenario for higher education (Bhattacharya, 2014) appears further hastened, if not normalized, where the everyday working conditions and ideological tenets of the academic profession are said to be in a state of continuous decline and erosion (cf. Giroux 2014; Watermeyer and Olssen 2016). Many commentators point to the detrimental impacts on the academic profession caused by neoliberalism, citing the precarity of the academic career; the fetishization of competition (Naidoo, 2016); and the entrenchment of systems of control that are seen to erode academics' critical autonomy, freedom and agency.

Despite this, many academics persist, remaining dedicated to a role and field of inquiry they have heavily emotionally invested in. For every articulation of despair or despondency, a balance (of sorts) is recovered where a sense of commitment and/or love of what they do is asserted, despite the multiple, incongruous and seemingly grievous challenges they face. The emotional ties to academic labour, are binding. They are exhibited in the kinds of vocationalism and hyper-professionality studied by Gornall et al. (2013) and the 'passionate attachments' explored by Hey & Leathwood (2009), marking academic life as all-encompassing and indivisible from other aspects of personhood. In some cases, the link between an academics' life and research is inextricable, as seen through the supposed phenomenon of 'mesearch' (Nguyen, 2015). Knowledge is, for personal and philosophical reasons, fiercely protected by its custodians: within this discourse, to be an academic is to *live* academia.

Of course, not all will be in a state of ideological conflict nor will they be necessarily ideologically bound. For some, existence in the neoliberal academy is less problematic and more easily negotiated. Smith (2012) for instance refers to some academics exhibiting either conformist or flexible behaviours in response to the intensification of new managerialism in higher education. 'Flexians' are those perhaps most pragmatic and able to moderate their emotional investment in being an academic. Others might construe this as inauthenticity and a preference for playing the game; it might equally be a form of covert transgression. Either way, ideas of what it is to be an academic and how the academic role is configured and (self) presented is far more composite when understood in reference to underlying emotional frameworks.

Impact agendas in Australia and the UK

Both Australia and the UK have sought to introduce research policy which achieves economic and/or social impact. These policies envisage a potentially transformative

role for knowledge produced through university research and are part of a broader trend to see universities as central to a knowledge economy (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000; Gibbons et al., 1994). Such policies tend to eschew ideas of 'knowledge for its own sake', which might be conceived positively as an exhortation to avoid academic insularity; or alternatively more negatively as another instance of neoliberal performativity and a reduction of research to an investment intended to produce a (financial) return. Discussions of impact appeared first in Australia, before being taken up more forcefully in the UK, and finally returning to Australia. While similar ideas have been raised in other countries such as Canada through knowledge mobilisation policies, Australia and the UK have been at the forefront of policies on research impact.

The focus of the accounts explored herein reflects the testimonies of academics responding primarily to an impact agenda in the context of research funding. The formal inclusion of 'pathways to impact' in grant applications for Research Council UK (RCUK) funding in the UK seek to address how potential research will lead to economic and social impact. RCUK broadly defines impact as 'the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy' (RCUK, 2011, p.2). In the UK, assessment of impact accounts for a 20% measure of research quality in the 'Research Excellence Framework' (REF) - an exercise undertaken by funding agencies approximately every five years to determine the volume and quality of research undertaken in UK higher education institutions for the purpose of allocating mainstream quality-related research funding (HEFCE, 2016). Inevitably, the testimonies of UK academics provided herein may also reflect these changes. Here, REF impact is defined as 'an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia' (REF, 2012). Within the context of the UK REF, impact was assessed through structured narrative case studies, where evidence was provided about how the underpinning research had caused change outside the academy. Impact case studies were assessed by expert panels who formed an overall view as to the reach and significance of the impact. Following a variety of concerns about impact as a component of the REF process and the value judgements made thereof, (Martin, 2011; Samuel & Derrick, 2015), the recent Governmental Stern Review consultation in the UK (July 2016) announced a continued focus on impact in forthcoming assessments.ⁱ

Proposals to the Australian Research Council (ARC) similarly require a statement on impact. In 2016, the Australian Research Council (ARC) consulted the sector with the Australian Academy of Technology and Engineering (ATSE) 'Research and Engagement'ⁱⁱ consultation, in which views were sought on how to best implement a research impact agenda. This follows the ARC's shift towards an impact requirement in grant applications, the Excellence Innovation Australiaⁱⁱⁱ (EIA) trial in 2012 and plans for impact to form part of Excellence in Research Australia 2017 (ERA).

Scholarly reactions to impact

Much has been written on the schism in HE in which the traditional norms and ideals of sovereignty and a bounded territory of academe (Henkel, 2007) are seen to be threatened by 'new managerialism' arising from a neoliberal mandate (Deem, Hillyard & Reed 2007). The university, reported to be 'in crisis,' (O'Shea, 2014) is seen to impair and inhibit the possibility of freedom and autonomy (Marginson and Considine, 2000; Chubb & Watermeyer, 2016). The inclusion of impact statements in both RCUK and ARC grant applications has prompted an emotional reaction from the scholarly

community. Impact as a 'measure' of research quality has been deeply contested, seen as part of a growing 'audit-culture' (Lucas, 2006; Sparkes, 2007; Cupples & Pawson, 2012).

Characterised as a "creeping assault" on freedom and agency (Holmwood, 2011; Hammersley, 2016), the impact agenda initially received a hostile reception by some members of the UK academic community (Braben et al, 2009; Collini, 2011; Watermeyer, 2012), and a similar "chorus of dissatisfaction" was reported in Australia (Cuthill et al., 2014, p.42; Donovan, 2008). Scholars describe how this has affected 'academic identities' (Delanty, 2008; Whitchurch, 2012, Winter, 2009;) and, how this may have contributed to the erosion of academic virtues (Chubb & Watermeyer, 2016;). By its critics, impact is deemed incongruent with traditional academic ideals (Smith, 2012; Winter, 2009; Harris, 2005; Lucas, 2006).

Much of the public debate concerning the reception of the impact agenda is characterised by academic *resistance*. In particular, voices which dominate the discourse are those whose research is less predisposed to impact Gibbons et al., 1994; Braben et al., 2009). Here, such individuals and their 'tribes' (Becher 1989; Biglan 1973) have depicted a 'culture of fear' (Bhattacharya, 2012) and resistance in the academy. The result of which appears at first negative for the academy.

Notwithstanding disciplinary preferences and predispositions towards impact, support for the agenda (Becher, 1994; Leathwood & Read, 2012) comes from those who embrace and celebrate the non- academic influence of their work; those who pragmatically choose to adapt towards it (Smith, 2012;), and those who recognise the opportunity and reward that may accompany it (Harris, 2005).

In this article we explore the varying emotional responses of academics from the UK and Australia towards the research impact. Through the metaphor of a 'belt of resistance' which can be tightened or slackened, we attempt to elucidate the contributing factors to academics' reaction to an impact agenda. In so doing we aim to use an emotional register as a way of further differentiating notions of academic personhood and the way with which it is conceived and exhibited in the milieu of the university's alleged existential crisis. In cases where personal, moral and disciplinary identities align with the impact agenda, the emotional response is positive and productive. For many, misalignment gives rise to emotional dissonance. Policy which pays no heed to the emotional register faces limited success. However, the difficulties arising from the impact agenda are not entirely externally imposed. The discourse which places academic identity at the centre of personhood – and whereby threats to academic identity are consequentially threats to the self - appears to be endogenous to academia.

Methods

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 51 mid- senior career academics between 2011- 2013 in the UK (30) and Australia (21) at two research-intensive universities. Interviewees were asked how they felt about the introduction of an impact agenda in terms of both funding and assessment in higher education research policy. Interviews were typically between 40 and 60 minutes in duration.

Interviewees represented a range of disciplines covering the arts and humanities (13), social sciences (12), engineering and the physical sciences (15), and life and natural sciences (11). Participants were selected based upon their grant-writing experience, specifically as principal or co-investigators on grant applications. Many also had experience as reviewers of applications and several had authored impact case studies for assessment purposes in their national context. Participants were recruited via research offices at both institutions. While the aspiration was to achieve equal representation of men and women, this was not realised, principally due to an overrepresentation of men among grant award holders. There were 20 women and 31 men in the achieved sample.

The risk of harm to the participants was reduced by ensuring they were making a voluntary informed decision to participate and anonymity was assured. Interviews were thematically analysed using qualitative analysis software NVivo 10 and a grounded theory approach was applied. Transcripts were coded according to the subjective, personal and emotional responses provided. Use of descriptive language - suggestive of positive, negative or neutral feelings towards the impact agenda was also analysed. Themes were drawn inductively from the data. Informed consent to use the comments and testimonies of all participants was provided and where they are cited their discipline and country is stated.

Findings

Academic testimonies were rarely dispassionate when responding to the emergence of an impact agenda. Instead, the majority of interviewees expressed an emotional attachment to their work and as a consequence the impact thereof.

Notwithstanding the potential for hyperbole or rhetoric, when asked to discuss impact academics expressed emotions ranging from ambivalence and apathy - nervousness and vulnerability – to excitement, love, hate and distrust. For many of our interviewees impact was seen as critical to their agency and identity; for others it had the potential to threaten the very nature of what they do. Concurrent with an emotional commitment to or disassociation from impact, interviewees were nevertheless united in articulating the tensions related to having to account for the use of public funding and a sense of public responsibility.

Responsibility is not felt without complication and anxiety. For some it carried a deep burden, tightening the belt of resistance towards an impact agenda, where self-justification was resisted and internalised. For others it was an opportunity and resource, where emotion was harnessed in a positive and productive way. Impact is therefore either critical to academic agency - inherently related to motivation and responsibility; or is instead feared, where control and identity is lost through the experience of impact agenda.

Impact as critical to academic agency and personhood

Contrary to the 'siege-mentality' depicted by those critical of an impact agenda, several interviewees expressed a range of positive and affirming emotions when describing their feelings towards impact and in particular the *mechanisms* by which it can be

achieved. Emotions such as passion, happiness, enjoyment, excitement and even love were expressed by academics whose agency and personhood appeared co-dependent upon 'making an impact'.

Importantly, those who expressed positive emotion did so with an accompanied sense of responsibility inherent to their perception of the academic role:

It's sort of where my heart lies – quite deliberately and specifically working to apply the research that you are doing to real world political and social challenges across domains of theory and practice.

Politics, UK, Lecturer

Here, impact was considered as inextricably linked, inseparable from the research itself: 'there's no point doing science unless you tell people' (Environment, UK, Professor). Understood as a core component of academic labour at least in certain disciplines, impact was therefore 'part and parcel' of the academic role. Notably, the most positive reactions towards impact came from those whose work was naturally predisposed to it and those who felt morally compelled to give back to society:

Someone I know who got one of the largest grants ever said, "I don't care if my research has impact — I'm doing this because I'm curious about this" and I just thought that was an appalling waste of tax payer's money to be able to get a lot of money to research something just because you're curious about it and not even see that down the road it might have impact.

Education, UK, Professor

Often, moral compulsion was accompanied by a perceived sense of privilege. In this context the existential purpose of academics was to contribute to society:

We are paid from the public purse and we should be doing research—we are ridiculously privileged to work on whatever we like and it's wonderful, and to bend your mind a little bit to the fact that some of the stuff you do does have benefits outside the academy, and to put measures in place to make that happen, it's a minor tax.

Archaeology, UK, Professor

Well, what else are we here for?

Linguistics, Australia, Professor

The tenor of interviewees' reactions often hinged principally upon the *type of research* they were conducting. Where research had obvious connections to real-world application, such as in the natural or social sciences, respondents were typically positively disposed to the impact agenda and did not exhibit great fear or anxiety.

Here, impact was ‘pretty much bread and butter stuff’ and therefore ‘not worth losing any sleep over’: ‘I don’t think people should feel unduly stressed by it’ (Physics, UK, Professor).

In addition, academics commonly expressed positive emotions for the mechanisms leading to impact. Depicted in several instances as fun, exciting, fulfilling, inspiring and engaging, several interviewees expressed their enjoyment and happiness at conducting public engagement and knowledge exchange activities. Many were enthusiastic and positive, indicating that to communicate research – and enjoying it - is not essentially at odds with academic personhood.

It’s an agenda I quite enjoy engaging with and I must say that going into the more practical, doing stuff that might actually change the way people manage things is probably much closer to what I set out to do as a scientist in the first place actually.

Biology, UK, Lecturer

Rather, it was the bureaucratic burden seen to accompany impact which incited emotional distress and frustration, as well as a putative on-going divorce of research and impact as distinct activities:

Yeah I enjoy it, but I don’t see that as being part of my research I see that as part of an education thing, as providing a service to the community - I see it as a service thing.

Finance, Australia, Professor

Despite these accounts, impact is nevertheless predominantly seen to destabilize the traditional perception of academics whose role it is to purely teach and do research. It is here that control is lost and identity is seen to be at risk.

Loss of control and identity

Despite the presence of positive and enabling responses towards impact, the majority of interviewees described how the academic community was emotionally and morally conflicted through the experience of an impact agenda.

Accounting for much of the resistance was the perceived risk to freedom and autonomy, cited by a large proportion of participants. Over two thirds repeatedly used words such as ‘constrict’, ‘prescribe’, ‘limit’, ‘impair’ and even ‘stifle’ or ‘constrain’ when describing how impact and other pressures arising from the managerialism in research affected their freedom and ‘their ability to do things.’ One interviewee optimistically exclaimed however: ‘you cannot stop me thinking about Keats in the morning!’ (Literature, Australia, Professor). Notwithstanding the potential for emotional embellishment and sarcasm here such comparisons imply that freedom is nevertheless potentially impaired.

Words such as; ‘scary’, ‘threat’, ‘nervousness’ and ‘worry’ littered the transcripts as many spoke of their ‘frustrations’, ‘suspiciousness’ and even ‘resentment’ of the impact

agenda. Participants reported feeling 'sad', 'unhappy', 'jealous', 'anxious', 'demoralized', disilluminated 'confused', 'hopeless', 'paranoid', 'vulnerable', 'scared', 'nervous' and 'depressed' about the impact agenda.

Despite an almost unanimous consensus that research paid for through public funds ought to be justified, for many interviewees this was personally internalised, as though they themselves were being scrutinised and (de)valued. Here, we see responses in which the impact component is seen to 'threaten', 'destabilize' and 'demoralize' whole disciplines. This resulted in the expression of existential crises from individuals who felt they had to 'justify their existence':

I don't feel happy with it, and do I need to justify my job? How many levels do I have to justify it?

Music, Australia, Professor

The effects of having to demonstrate research impact to the public received a hostile reception from some academics who felt personally attacked by the insinuation that academia was in some sense a discrete population of society, de-humanised in their ivory tower (Bok, 2003):

Don't start me on the Ivory tower theory! No do start me! Yes, that is a word often used. The strange thing is that it's often used in a kind of out of context that implies that academics are not human. They're disembodied robots. Just because they work at a university they don't have lives, they don't have families, and they don't have to earn a living or pay their mortgages. Often it comes out as, 'oh what would you know about this, you're an academic'. It'll be about something like paying your mortgage, what do you think I know? I'm paying off my own, just like you.

History, Australia, Professor

Academics expressed concerns not only for themselves but for the on-going stability of their discipline. Most notably, though not exclusively, participants who expressed fears relating to their discipline conducted less 'applied' types of research, such as those found in the theoretical humanities and physical sciences. Here, participants reported 'deep seated worry', 'frustration', 'struggle', 'fear', 'shock' 'hopelessness' and a range of other emotions: 'I sort of struggle' (Maths, Australia, Professor); 'I don't feel happy' (Music, Australia, Professor).

Feelings of dissatisfaction were accompanied in many cases with hopelessness and surrender:

What we have now is a demoralizing, denigration of disciplines.

Philosophy, Australia, Professor

I get really sick because of the kind of research I do - I get pissed off at the idea that where you should put your funding is cancer research – that's the generic answer isn't it?

Music, Australia, Professor

Humanities researchers in particular feared having to justify the *value* of their work and reconciling the work they do with the ability to prove or show (particularly) economic impact - they described their work as 'precious' and would happily 'scream and shout' about it (Music, Australia, Professor), in order to defend it:

The agenda reinforces that the only valuable thing in life is money and that is deeply worrying.

Performance, UK, Professor

In other theoretical disciplines this position was mirrored. Academics predominantly from the physical sciences commented that impact was 'scary and really hard' because of the theoretical nature of the work they do (Maths, Australia, Professor); 'everyone is enormously worried' (Computer Science, UK, Professor). Many theoretically-focussed Australian academics also explained that an impact agenda would make many of them feel 'hopeless'. Here, worries related to a fear about government interference and instrumentalism in science:

I tell you - it's serious, the scientific community is in shock ... It's a shattering blow to science – just this shaping of something, which is so precious, leave it damn well alone!

Chemistry, UK, Professor

In addition, interviewees also described how some of these emotional reactions, related to academic labour and job security. The pressures of new managerialism were reflected in many (perhaps hyperbolic) emotional responses from participants:

You can easily lose your job, a previous dean was kicked out, you can lose your job if you question practices of a higher level, so everyone is vulnerable, and everybody is paranoid about losing their jobs.

Engineering Education, Australia, Professor

Interviewees claimed that impact reduced the attractiveness of academic life to the extent that it influenced job decisions. Here, one participant explained how impact had affected their decision on whether to go for a promotion:

Part of the reason I didn't put my hand up for [research leadership] role is, you know, this impact thing.

Literature, Australia, Professor

Indeed, these pressures were felt by many on a very personal level, some participants claimed to be 'depressed' or 'sad'. These concerns were more readily expressed by women, but with some exceptions; 'I feel like crying about it sometimes' (Chemistry, UK, Professor). Australian participants were especially open about their emotions when describing the divergent pressures they faced:

I got extremely depressed last year for the first time in my career and thought I can't do this anymore.

Education Engineering, Australia, Professor

Another participant talked about how her life was a 'bloody nervous wreck' and that she didn't feel happy because of the amount of stress she experienced in her career:

You know, somebody would look at me from the outside and think ok, she's got over 100 publications, whatever – so she's got all these publications and she's had grants – she's doing this and she's going here, actually my life is a bloody nervous wreck.

Music, Australia, Professor

The effects therefore are deep-seated and perhaps enduring, indicative of a broader set of concerns for academic labour.

A final justification for the tightening of a belt of resistance to an impact agenda is that many claimed they did not feel that they were skilled enough to deliver it, which resulted in emotional distress and concern.

Regularly described as a 'mind-set barrier', impact was viewed by many academics as something which strayed from the normal occupations and skills traditionally associated with the academic role. Several participants welcomed this and described how the impact agenda was a good thing as it challenged their abilities to 'think outside the box' but this was also seen as 'threatening' to academic identities many of whom confirmed they naturally preferred to be left alone:

I like what I do - but not on a stage.

Archaeology, UK, Professor

There were fears that the impact requirement would result in a need to re-define the academic role. This was met with concern from over half of the participants who felt this was at odds with their personalities: 'I think I'm one of those who aren't very out there and I'm actually fairly shy' (Health Sciences, Australia, Professor).

Personalities less inclined toward impact expressed how 'uncomfortable' or 'scary' it was to engage in knowledge exchange. A significant proportion of interviewees expressed a lack of confidence and fear when it came to their abilities to communicate their work to different audiences. Many put this down to a lack of training, their personality or their background, but for many it was also because they feared being the subject of mockery from their peers:

I think a lot of academics are quite egotistic and you have to have a good ego to perform well in a film or on TV so they can walk around with puffed up breasts quite legitimately when you're on film whereas when you're on campus people think you're a jerk.

Archaeology, Australia, Professor

One is considered research output and the other is laughed at. The one that is laughed at reaches more people!

Music, UK, Professor

Delivery of impact was regarded by many as a low status activity, several claimed it was not 'real research' and instead referred to it as 'pedestrian' or 'second-class', less 'high-brow' than pure research. Others claimed such attitudes were borne out of 'professional jealousy' and snobbery (Music, Australia, Professor):

Some of us might be perceived as unserious researchers if we engage with the public at a lower level where everyone can engage in debate. Frankly I think that type of academic snobbery is a bit archaic and outdated and I wouldn't want to bow to it.

Law, Australia, Professor

Finally, the 'flexians' amongst our interviewees gave pragmatic responses to impact and called for 'balance' and 'proportionality'. As opposed to 'groaning about new policy' (Biology, UK, Lecturer), some academics advocated the need to simply 'get on with it' and to take control of the agenda:

We can all sit back and whine about having to do it, but we could give our opinions and talk to people and have your input into what it looks like which might make it more helpful and more something that we can address – something we have all got a responsibility for.

Health Sciences, Australia, Professor

The flexians held a minority view and nevertheless, it is clear that academics are highly invested in what they do. In particular, Australian participants on the whole were largely more emotional in their responses towards impact than those in the UK. This is perhaps indicative of the fact that an impact agenda was developed and in force in UK universities whilst only in its fledgling stages in Australia:

The negative voices have fallen silent because they haven't got a choice.

Languages, UK, Lecturer

A level of compassion towards those less able to conform to the requirement is perhaps therefore required from both the community that creates impact and that which requires it, in order to avoid a radical reconfiguration of the academic role altogether.

John Paul Satre never taught at a university – I think you're going to have more of an intellectual life outside of the university.

Philosophy, Australia, Professor

Discussion

Our initial intention to identify an emotional register that might show variance in the construction of academic personhood in the context of an impact agenda has, in these accounts been largely upended by the domination of a sentiment of hopelessness and tales of lost or ceded power. Furthermore, a belt of resistance to an impact agenda

has been shown to be ever tightening in parallel with the loosening of academics' sense of self-sovereignty.

Our interviews reveal a community with strong emotional reactions towards impact. For many of our interviewees, an impact agenda disrupted their sense of purpose as academic researchers - where panic was induced in terms of how they might maintain coherence with an adjusted version of their professional selves. However, this kind of panic appears at odds with another version of the implications of impact cited by a smaller subsection of our interview sample. This group perceived, within the impact agenda, a positive and logical drawing out or enhancing of the academic role through the figure of the public intellectual. For this cadre, impact provides an opportunity through which accountability and public disclosure confirms both their moral authority and the significance of their (public) role. An impact agenda was seen, therefore, to provide a platform from which academics can showcase not only to their public financiers but also to themselves (and each other) the efficacy of their research endeavours. For some, it appears to have provided a route to self-legitimization and an affirmation of academic personhood and agency. However, as has been discussed, the majority of those who perceived the benefits of impact as a method of critical reflexivity and, therefore, self-justification, were also those whose research was oriented towards direct application or had a more proximate user-interface and whom we might also infer might more easily demonstrate causality between research-outcome and user-impact.

What some interviewees reported as the benefit of an impact agenda in instilling greater self-confidence in the presentation of their public personas, others claimed as a sense of alienation and fear, principally a fear of being ill-equipped or unsuited to tackle the associated risks of operating in the agora. The latter cited a sense of lost control and vulnerability in terms of the choreography of their public face; the risk perhaps of being fixed with a professional portraiture they might not recognize, like or agree with. This sense of vulnerability was further exacerbated where the risk of 'going public' might culminate in forms of professional penalization such as lost esteem and status among academic peers.

A crucial aspect of interviewees' response is a concern with professional modesty and a perceived antagonism between their showing or 'selling' of their impact— in the pursuit of financial reward – and actually achieving scientific impact. For these academics, an impact agenda reinforces a market paradigm of research governance; the instrumentalization and individualism of research cultures; and ostensibly therefore, the predetermination and narrowing of their potential scientific, societal and economic contributions. In other words, these interviewees correlated an impact agenda with their professional enfeeblement, particularly in the terms of being self-directed and autonomous, and thereafter as detracting from the appeal of an academic career.

Ultimately, these accounts confirm an emotional register that is heavily weighted to a sense of fear and resistance to the perceived deleterious effects of an impact agenda on academic personhood or more precisely occupational welfare. We also identify an emotional split that separates from these a cohort for whom being impactful is less

extrinsically motivated. These accounts also reflect not only academics' struggles with what are frequently invasive and professionally debilitating approaches to performance management, but the muddling of the notion of the public intellectual and a confusing of public accountability with performance-related auditability. No wonder then perhaps the symptomization of professional distress takes centre stage in their reactions to an impact agenda.

And so to conclude, these accounts indicate more of the kinds of vitriol and emotional turmoil that is seen to inform an increasingly homogenous characterization of the university's existential crisis and unravelling of the academic profession. Yet we also have here an emotional register, the needle for which gravitates towards fear, despondency and desperation but with the potential to oscillate towards a different underpinning value framework. That framework would see academic work as transcending and ultimately trumping the habitually stunted evaluative criteria applied in measuring what counts in higher education and which influences the contours of academic personhood. The challenge then for academics is almost one of escaping a belt of resistance towards an impact agenda and invoking a more 'authentic' sense of what academia is so that policy does not define but exemplifies the achievements of science. The need for recognition rather than dismissal of the role of emotion and affect appears therefore increasingly significant for an emotionally coherent academic community (Hey & Leathwood, 2009). Indeed, if the impact agenda is an emotional challenge for academics to go beyond, it signifies an opportunity for academic personhood to exceed the parameters of policy expectations.

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