Uncertainty, Worth, Identity

How Early Career Academics Navigate Evaluative Landscapes

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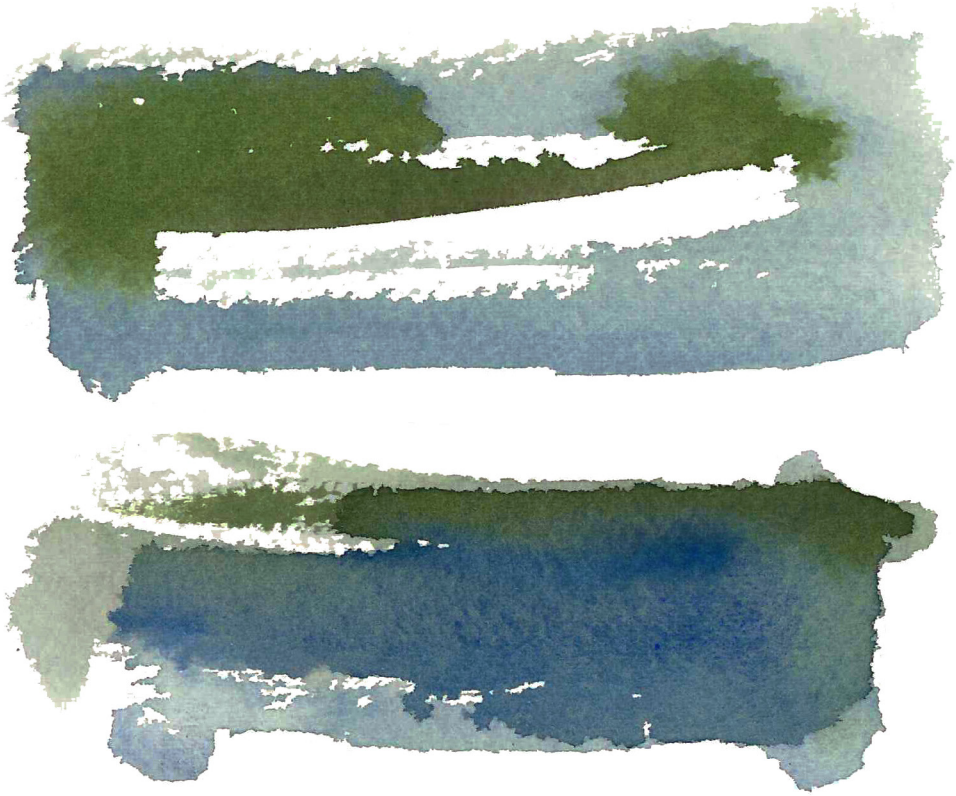

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Jonatan Nästesjö

Lund Studies in Educational Sciences 21

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MADE IN SWEDEN

Acknowledgements

This is a dissertation about scholars. Hence, it is also somewhat about me. Representing an individual aspiration to become a scholar, the writing of this thesis has involved learning how to read and write in new ways; how to conduct empirical research and how to theorize; how to enter a scientific dialogue and make a contribution. It has also involved learning about what counts, what is valuable, and by what measures. As will be evident for the reader of this thesis, the experience of being evaluated and the exercise of assigning value – to oneself and others – are both difficult. They are surrounded with uncertainties, contradictions, and struggles. During my years as a PhD student, I have tried my best to learn the craft of research and to navigate evaluative landscapes. In both cases, I owe a lot to my respondents whose lives are the material of this book. From you, I have learnt a lot. Thank you for taking the time to talk to me about the world of academia. I am grateful to every one of you for your sense of generosity and openness. I hope you find your trust in me deserved.

During the writing of this thesis, I have often been reminded of the collective character of knowledge production. I have been lucky to work at a place where people care about each other and many have helped me in times of need. A big and collective "thanks" to all my colleagues at the department of Educational Sciences, Lund University.

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students in Lund. Now, we enter the world of academia as PhD graduates. You are a truly terrific scholar and an even better friend. I am sincerely grateful to have someone like you in my life. Let us continue to carry each other, until the phenomenology of nothingness becomes all too real.

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Jonatan Nästesjö, Malmö January 2024

To Jonna

CONTENTS

List of Papers

This thesis is based on the following articles, which are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals.

I. Nästesjö, J (2021). Navigating Uncertainty: Early Career Academics and Practices of Appraisal Devices, *Minerva* 59(2), 237-259.

II. Nästesjö, J (2023). Managing the Rules of Recognition: How Early Career Academics Negotiate Career Scripts Through Identity Work. *Studies in Higher Education* 48(4), 657-669.

III. Nästesjö, J (2024). Between Delivery and Luck: How Early Career Academics Negotiate the Project Frame. *Submitted Manuscript*.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Sitting in his office at a prestigious university in Sweden, the postdoctoral researcher talks about himself and the world of academia with ease. Dressed in a formal yet casual garment, he offers a detailed description of his identity, his colleagues, and his work. With references to "excellence," "prestige," and "high-impact papers," he distinguishes between first-rate and second-rate scholars, emphasizing his willingness to live up to the standards of the former. His biographical reconstruction of entering the world of academia denotes the importance of hard work and talent; experiences of competition and judgment are entangled with his individual aspiration of success; issues of work-life balance are turned into a story of sacrifice and reward. "An academic career," Eric tells me, "is not for everybody."

Having just received a grant that will provide him funding for three more years, Eric is in many ways a successful scholar. Despite still being considered "junior," his publication list is impressive and contains some of the top-ranked journals in political science. Having spent time abroad as a visiting scholar, his networks are wide-ranging and he frequently collaborates with some of the best-known researchers in his field. This assures him a steady flow of publications and conference attendances as well as invitations to be part of funding applications and seminars. Eric explains that social relations are valuable resources in the pursuit of career advancement: "They provide you access and credibility, but also information […] I believe that if you want to be the best, you have to work and compare yourself with the best. I mean, they are the ones that knows how to make it, they know what counts." Accordingly, Eric is confident about what evaluative criteria he needs to meet:

> On the one hand, it is about keep pushing yourself to produce more research. It is quite simple, productivity matters. On the other hand, it is about aiming for the best, most prestigious journals in your field. That is academic currency with the big C. You can't publish low-quality, low-ranked shit.

Still, he is not entirely sure how to actually meet these two standards:

> The only problem is that it takes a very, very long time to produce such high-impact papers. And as a postdoc, working these short-term contracts, time is not what you have the most of. So yeah, it's a struggle to make it work. I mean, you must be prepared to work all the time.

David takes me to a coffeeshop near his workplace downtown. As he sits down in a brown, worn-out armchair, he groans: "Well, as for how to pursue an academic career, this was not what I had in mind." After finishing his first postdoc project, David found himself out of job. To pay rent, he started to work hours at a local library. He managed to keep his office at the university and spent as much time there as he could. In contrast to Eric, experiences of competition and long working hours are not told in a heroic manner. With a mixture of fretfulness and pride, David describes himself as a non-careerist; someone who loves research and teaching but lacks a competitive and strategic mindset. "That was part of the problem, I guess," he tells me, "I did not adapt to the rules of the postdoc period well enough. I was also quite naïve in the sense that I thought that someone else would sort of look after me and make things work out in the end."

After finishing his PhD, David combined substitute teaching and administrative duties before being included in a research project run by a professor at the department. His working tasks mainly revolved around gathering data and coding. The schedule for the project was delayed many times due to problems with collaborating partners. Ultimately, it did not result in any peer-reviewed publications with David's name on them:

> This project basically ended up in a CV gap. I had worked my ass of but ended up with nothing. At the same time, my colleagues really started to deliver. They published, collaborated with new people, they progressed. At least, that was my experience… In this rat race, I was simply falling behind.

While not drawing clear distinctions between first-rate and second-rate scholars, David nevertheless evaluates himself and his own performance in relation to a similar career script as that described by Eric. The standards of prestige and productivity are evoked unremittingly as David talks about what he ought to do in order to "make it" in the future. Rather ambivalent, he underscores the importance of being "realistic" and "adapt" as the competition characterizing postdoctoral life does not leave much room for acting differently. In contrast to Eric, David does not claim much agency over the career he is trying to pursue. Several times during our conversation he stops himself and says: "That's just how things are."

Afraid of being perceived as a "failure" or a "drop-out," David was reluctant to talk to his colleagues about getting a job outside of academia. He deemed it incompatible with "the story you have to tell about yourself."

~

Michèle is in the middle of her first postdoc project. She is the daughter of a professor and is familiar with the uncertainties inherent to academic life: "It really helps to have some insights about this world, I have always felt kind of prepared." Michèle gives a confident impression. She elaborates effortlessly on whatever topic comes up. Talking

about her research and career, the narratives revolve around notions of commitment and genuineness. She frequently distances herself from scholars whom she considers to be overly strategic or competitive:

> Sure, the competition is harsh and you have to deliver in order to be able to make it. But it's like… For me, it's important that academia does not just become a game to be played. I hate when everything we do is reduced to a question about maximizing outputs, citations, or whatever. I mean… I do not see academia as simply a competition. It is something more, something much more important.

Throughout our conversation, Michèle defines herself in opposition to scholars that she labels as "players." Her identity is embedded in images of authenticity and hard work. Often, research is highlighted as somewhat of a lifestyle to which one needs to be fully devoted in order to succeed. Accordingly, Michèle tells me that she "works more or less all the time." Similar to Eric, Michèle has an impressive CV and shows great awareness of the conditions under which academic careers are pursued. However, Michèle seldom mentions explicit career strategies or career standards. Instead, the description of her work and what is needed in order to succeed circulates around rather abstract values. Like David, she takes pride in describing herself as "not that interested in careering." Unlike David, she seems to have full control over how to deliver as expected.

~

I meet Paul at his house where he lives with his wife and two kids. He is the first in his family to obtain a university degree. Growing up, Paul used to dwell on facts about significant historical events as well as more ordinary stories from people in the past. "I fell in love with history quite early on," he recollects, "I like being a detective of past events, you know, try to find out what has happened. But I also like the stories. I think that was what got me going really, and it still does."

After finishing his PhD in history at a renowned university in Sweden, Paul has combined research grants of different sizes with teaching duties for roughly five years. He talks about his tiredness of working project to project, handling the constant uncertainty of not knowing whether or not he will have a job the following year. At the same time, he describes himself as "lucky": "I got funding right after finishing my PhD, so I could move on, do some new empirical work, and start publishing. In the eyes of others, that sort of made me a *real* researcher." In this regard, Paul contrasts himself with colleagues who ended up teaching or doing administrative tasks, which he considers risky:

> Sure, it will provide a salary in the short run, but if it keeps you from doing research for too long, you don't stand a chance when it's time to apply for external funding or a position; you're simply too far behind.

During our conversation, it becomes clear that Paul does not leave much to chance. While he considers himself lucky, his career choices are deeply embedded in calculative descriptions of what will pay off in the future. This is a balancing act. At the same time as social bonds and teaching are described as important, Paul talks about minimizing his involvement at the department since it "takes valuable time from writing and publishing." Whereas he distances himself from "shallow careerists," he nevertheless pictures academia as a "game that must be played." Conferring his CV, it gives an impression of a productive scholar who is confident and focused. Still, Paul is deeply concerned about how his work and he himself will be evaluated in the future:

> That is what makes it so strange. I really don't know what the rules are! In principle, I'm just guessing. Should I write an article or should I write a second book? How many peer-reviewed articles equal a second book? Is it better to write in English rather than Swedish? How will co-authored publications be evaluated? Do they count?

Throughout the interview, it is clear that the uncertainty Paul describes is partly due to the experience of change. Describing history as a discipline in which preferences for publishing and structures of academic careers are shifting, he often talks about his own position in contrast to the conditions under which an older generation of historians were socialized.

Unlike Michèle, Paul does not see academia as a lifestyle and he feels ambivalent about the level of uncertainty individual scholars need to deal with. Research is a job he is passionate about, but it is also a social game he tries to decipher.

~ ~ ~ ~

In many ways, the four scholars mentioned above contrast with each other. They come from different backgrounds and they pursue their careers in diverse contexts. Their access to valuable resources in terms of publications, citations, money, reputation, and networks is uneven. They also differ in how they draw boundaries in regard to others when defining themselves as academics. Nevertheless, they all belong to the same category of academic staff. As *early career academics*, they have finished their doctoral education but are yet to obtain a permanent position. Employed on temporary contracts, they continuously interact with the job and grant market, trying to secure a future in academia. Because permanent positions have been far less relative to the increasing number of PhDs and other temporary staff members in recent decades, this "early career" phase has extended in terms of time (Franssen and de Rijcke, 2019) and has become subject to hyper-competition (Fochler et al., 2016). Accordingly, members of this group are considered the most vulnerable in the research system (Laudel and Gläser, 2008).

But what do these narratives consist of? Talking about their past, present, and future lives in academia, the stories of Eric, David, Michèle, and Paul circulate around the complex network of uncertainties, tensions, and struggles that surrounds the question of *what counts as worth* in academic life. On one hand, this involves what counts by others who may evaluate their performance. In academia, notions such as "quality" and "worth" are intrinsically hard to define, so the judgment of gatekeepers plays a significant role in determining the future of individual careers (Musselin, 2010). Moreover, partly due to the reorganization of academia along the lines of new public management, the lives of scholars are increasingly ordered by audit exercises and new measurements of performance (Rijcke et al., 2016). In this context, what these individuals describe are different aspects of the multifaceted evaluative landscape in which every scholar must learn to navigate in order to earn recognition. On the other hand, the question of what counts also involves how early career academics themselves ascribe worth to people, practices, and objects (Fochler et al., 2016). What comes across in the above statements is that navigating the uncertainty about what counts is closely interlinked with how junior scholars make sense of themselves and their world. This process is both cognitive and tactical, as well as emotional and interactional. It is culturally embedded and influenced by the dynamics between the image junior scholars hold of themselves and what they wish to become and the experience of continuously being defined and evaluated by others. As such, we might think of the narratives of Eric, David, Michèle, and Paul as *narratives of worth*. When these narratives are shared intersubjectively, they set the terms for who belongs, who matters, and who is worthy. As one of the driving forces of action, narratives are not just individual choices nor are they captured from the air (Polletta, 2013). Instead, they dramatize the link between institutional reward structures and how early career academics come to understand themselves and their working lives.

The present study explores the interplay between valuation and academic socialization. To do this, I turn my gaze towards early career academics in two disciplinary cultures within the social sciences and humanities. Empirically, this entails 35 in-depth interviews with scholars working at three history departments and two political science departments located at four research-intensive universities in Sweden. Having completed their doctoral education within the previous eight years, all of the interviewees work on fixed-term contracts with varying lengths and conditions. Comparing how these individuals seek to demonstrate their worth in order to be recognized by others and advance in their careers, I try to make sense of their world. As argued by Fochler et al. (2016: 177), this task holds significance as "those being socialized today will shape the cultures and practices" of academia in the future. Moreover, the existing literature on academic socialization predominantly focuses on graduate studies, neglecting the early career phase and its function as a "status passage" in today's academia (Åkerlind, 2005; Laudel and Gläser, 2008). Indeed, the structural conditions for growing into academia have changed during the past few decades. Transformations of funding rationales, employment patterns, professional roles, and the level of competition involved

in staff selection have established the postdoc period as a bottleneck in many academic career systems around Europe, including Sweden (Frølich et al., 2018). These transformations have provoked diagnoses of an academy in crisis. Characterized by a shift towards an output-centered academic culture governed by quantitative measures (Burrows, 2012), acceleration (Vostal, 2016), precarious working conditions (Schwaller, 2019) and an entrepreneurial spirit (Elzinga, 2012), concerns have been raised about how such developments establish new normative expectations, and narrower career scripts, for junior scholars to follow (see e.g. Fochler et al., 2016; Müller, 2014; Roumbanis, 2019). At the same time, riddled with values, norms, myths, and traditions, parts of academia seem to be relatively static, offering highly institutionalized frames for how to act and think within it (Degn, 2018). This speaks for the multilayeredness of contemporary academic cultures (Ylijoki and Henriksson, 2017). If new categories and values do not easily replace "traditional" notions of what constitutes academic careers and identities, this means that scholars are increasingly accountable to multiple standards of evaluation and regimes of worth (Rushforth et al., 2019).

The present thesis explores how this ambiguity – these different orders of worth – is experienced and negotiated in the everyday lives of early career academics. As they are growing into academia, how do early career academics experience possibilities and limitations for recognition? What evaluative principles do they draw upon when making sense of themselves and their work? And how do they handle tensions stemming from the coexistence of multiple definitions of worth? A better understanding of such questions is crucial given that they are part of deciding *who* belongs in academia and *what* kind of knowledge is likely to be produced. Zooming out, the developments within the field of higher education are indictive of more general changes in society at large. Whether conceptualized in terms of evaluation society (Dahler-Larsen, 2012), risk society (Beck, 1992), social acceleration (Rosa, 2013), or identity projects (Giddens, 1991), many of the topics touched upon in this study are considered to characterize late modernity as such. This is to say that the thesis will shed light on social processes having important structuring effects on a range of institutions and domains of human activity beyond the world of academia. Not least, this includes questions about the dynamics that shape identities and shared definitions of worth – a particularly important endeavor in times of neoliberalism and market fundamentalism (Lamont, 2023).

What is primarily at issue here is how early career academics in history and political science navigate changing *evaluative landscapes*. Coined by Brandtner (2017: 206) in his work on plurality in organizational evaluation, the concept of evaluative landscapes is defined as "the collectivity of evaluative practices […] in an organizational field" and describes "the universe of relevant practices in the environments of a set of organizations that aim at evaluating and comparing these organizations' performance." This means that "many organizations face not a single social order but a diverse set of competing rationales" (Brandtner, 2017: 208). When I started interviewing early career academics in political science and history, it soon became clear that one of the main challenges

they face when growing into academia is how to orient themselves in situations characterized by multiple social orders and a diverse set of competing rationales. In their narratives, the question of what counts as worth seldom had an explicit, uniform, or fixed answer. Instead, the criteria for recognition and career success remained surrounded with ambiguities. Additionally, the process of learning how to deal with these uncertainties involved both strategic issues related to career choice and moral issues of how to become a "good" scholar, a "trusted" colleague, and be "true" to oneself.

For this reason, the present study focuses on the navigation of evaluative landscapes rather than the outcome of single evaluative practices. Whereas there is a growing literature on academic evaluation to which this thesis seeks to contribute, empirical studies have often zoomed in on specific evaluative practices or certain evaluative moments (Rijcke et al., 2016). This has provided important insights on the use and effects of performance indicators (Müller and de Rijcke, 2018; Rushforth and de Rijcke, 2015), how individuals and organizations react to the implementation of evaluation systems (Hammarfelt and de Rijcke, 2015; Hicks, 2012), how candidates are evaluated for employment positions (Hammarfelt, 2017; Hylmö, 2018) and research grants (Lamont, 2009; Langfeldt, 2001), and how the evaluative repertoires of academic CVs have evolved over time (Hamann and Kaltenbrunner, 2022; Macfarlane, 2020). Yet, academia is permeated with both formal and informal evaluations. Ranging from standardized assessments procedures related to policies and organizational goals to the many ways an individual's worth is judged based on peer assessments and local hierarchies, there is a "plurality of both evaluating bodies and evaluation practices" (Åström and Hammarfelt, 2019: 1285; see also Hamann and Beljean, 2017).

Studying the interplay between valuation and socialization, the task of the present study is to explore how early career academics experience this plurality and how they handle it in practice. As such, this thesis sets out to investigate the interplay between valuation and socialization from a pragmatic approach (for a similar approach, see Lamont, 2009). Influenced by symbolic interactionism (Fine and Tavory, 2019; Goffman, 1974) and pragmatism (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006; Dewey, 1922), I am concerned with how early career academics make sense of the context they are in and how they should relate to it, involving the many ways in which they learn how to navigate evaluative landscape and to perform worth. This is, I would say, a particularly productive approach when studying the heterogenic, and in the context of science studies, understudied epistemic cultures of the social sciences and humanities (Camic et al., 2011). In contrast to the natural sciences, disciplines in the social sciences and humanities are characterized by a rather loose set of defined criteria according to which individual scholars and their contribution to the field can be assessed (Cole, 1983; Whitley, 2000). Consequently, they often make use of very strong definitions of disciplinary boundaries to control assessment procedures; for example, by selecting applicants based on the field where they got their PhD degree or whether or not they have articles in journals that are regarded as belonging to the disciplinary core (Hammarfelt, 2017; Hylmö, 2018). At the same time, the lack of well-defined evaluative criteria makes these

disciplines more sensitive to the developments outside of their field (Åström and Hammarfelt, 2019). In the context of social sciences and humanities in Sweden, this is not least reflected in changes in publication patterns (Hammarfelt and de Rijcke, 2015) and new career investment strategies (Salö, 2017). More broadly, efforts to quantify the value of social science research has been shown to influence academic careers and homogenize knowledge production, shaping the borders of disciplines and their hierarchies of worth (Pardo-Guerra, 2022). Hence, while disciplinary boundaries are of particular importance for controlling assessment criteria within these fields, they are also challenged due to new evaluative dynamics stemming from outside pressure and changing framework conditions.

The disciplines under study reflect the above-mentioned changes regarding work and career conditions as well as the tensions between outside factors, institutional evaluation practices, and the reputational systems of disciplines. Regarded as high-status fields within the social sciences and humanities, respectively, political science and history are characterized by a high level of competition, for funding as well as tenured positions. Consequently, early career academics in these disciplines work on temporary contracts for a long period of time and interact heavily with the job and grant market. Moreover, studies of how candidates are evaluated for academic positions indicate the importance of disciplinary boundaries to control assessment procedures (Hammarfelt, 2017; Nilsson, 2009). However, political science and history are also sites where negotiations of "ideal" career trajectories are currently ongoing. Indeed, one of the main reasons for choosing them as an object of study is that, as representatives for the social sciences and humanities in Sweden, they have often been portrayed as "the other" in research policy. Under the impact of internationalization, the strive towards "excellence," and an increasing usage of bibliometric measures in research assessment, their dissimilar publication patterns and high dependence on local contexts have been deemed problematic (Nelhans, 2013). In Swedish research policy, the ambition to "internationalize" and "speed up" these fields has been explicit (Swedish Government Official Reports Serie, 2007). For larger parts of the social sciences and humanities, shifts in how research is organized and evaluated have generated tensions between rivalling value systems, intensifying struggles over what counts as worth in academic careers (Haddow and Hammarfelt, 2019; Hicks, 2012).

Still, political science and history also differ in meaningful ways. Over the past two decades or so, Swedish political science has gradually adapted to what is framed as "international standards" regarding publishing practices and favored publication language (see e.g. Swedish Research Council, 2021). History, on the other hand, is a discipline that has only recently begun to adapt to this trend and issues such as publishing preferences, language use, and choice of dissertation form are heavily debated within the field (see e.g. Jezierski, 2016). Whereas the working culture of both disciplines has become increasingly project-based due to the impact of competitive funding allocation and the rise of temporary positions (Franssen and de Rijcke, 2019), political science and history differ in terms of the level of collaboration and mutual dependency between

scholars (Whitley, 2000). Together, these disciplines provide an analytical opportunity to explore how early career academics navigate changing evaluative landscapes and how the dynamics of the interplay between valuation and socialization are shaped by their different position in, and interpretation of, these landscapes.[1]

What follows from the above is that this thesis is guided by two assumptions that also signify its contribution. First, if we are to study the interplay between valuation and socialization, a fruitful approach is to focus on the plurality of evaluative landscapes and the many moments of valuation that shape the everyday lives of academics. This does not just include formal assessment procedures, but the interaction between a diverse set of evaluative practices and the more or less subtle norms, values, traditions, and myths framing academic life. Second, in order to get a more fine-grained understanding of the social processes of academic valuation, it is useful to focus on a specific group and context rather than the research system as a whole. As argued by Felt (2009), the living spaces of scholars and its multidimensional structures get most visibly assessed and reflected upon in moments where much is at stake. The early career phase is such a moment. In its function as a status passage, it entails movement into a different position in social structure as individuals attend to transition from the identities and practices of unestablished to established scholars. This process is shaped by the possibility of *becoming* and the risk of *unbecoming* (Archer, 2008b), dramatizing the link between opportunities for recognition, institutional reward structures, and how early career academics make sense of themselves and their work. While previous research has identified early career academics as especially perceptive to outside pressures when growing into academia (see e.g. Fochler et al., 2016; Hammarfelt and de Rijcke, 2015; Herschberg et al., 2018), one of the most important contributions of the present study is to enrich our grasp of the balancing act involved in this process. Comparing how early career academics in political science and history navigate evaluative landscapes, I will show that they relate to a more versatile evaluative repertoire than sometimes assumed. Although the level of uncertainty about what counts, as well as how judgment is reproduced, differ between the two disciplines, they jointly describe the need to learn how to legitimately claim, reject, perform, and balance between conflicting notions of worth. In this process, early career academics do not simply enact career scripts – they negotiate them. They frame their situation in certain ways and draw boundaries between what they desire and hold dear, and what they do not like. This is to say that early career academics are not only guided by the ambition of maximizing their own position. Instead, the empirical findings of this thesis indicate the importance of identity and morality as sites of, and motivations for, navigating evaluative landscapes.

[1] 'Position' might here be understood both in terms of disciplines and individuals.

Aim and Questions

The aim of this dissertation is to explore the interplay between valuation and academic socialization. To do this, I study the realities of early career academics in political science and history both from the perspective of *evaluation* and *valorization*. Each perspective entails a set of explorative questions. The first perspective relates to how early career academics experience possibilities for recognition and the meanings they ascribe to various practices of evaluation. For example, what evaluative criteria do they regard as dominant? How do such criteria become visible and reproduced? In what way are practices or devices of evaluation intertwined and to what extent do they support or contradict each other? The second perspective acknowledges that early career academics also engage in establishing definitions of worth in the course of action. How do they conform, add, or reject certain evaluative criteria? How do they seek to build and increase the worth of themselves and their working practices? What criteria do they use when drawing boundaries between worthy and less worthy scholars? And how do they make sense of notions such as success and failure?

Acknowledging these perspectives as two sides of the social process of valuation (Vatin, 2013), and how they are often intertwined in reality (Lamont, 2012), makes it possible to account for how early career academics play an active but constrained part in shaping the academic cultures in which they are situated. In the emerging literature on early career academics, junior scholars have often been reduced to rather passive agents, more or less determined by structural conditions and measurements privileged in policy. This thesis provides a change in perspective, studying the social life of early career academics as a collective, practical accomplishment (Fine, 2012). With its focus on opportunities for recognition and shared definitions of reality, I explore how the narratives of early career academics reflect certain structural conditions for doing and valuing academic work, but also how they shape these conditions by learning how to maneuver them. This involves the many ways in which early career academics negotiate and perform definitions of worth and what boundaries and identities that are thereby enacted.

The overarching question guiding this thesis is: *How do early career academics in political science and history navigate evaluative landscapes?* This question is explorative in nature and has served as a background for the three articles that makes up the empirical analysis. More detailed aims and questions are found in each of the three articles. While these will be presented briefly in the next section, the concluding discussion will reflect upon how they together answer the main research question by exploring different aspects of how early career academics navigate evaluative landscapes.

Structure of the Thesis

This dissertation is organized into eight chapters, three of which are journal articles that have been or are about to be published. As such, it follows the model of an article-based thesis, which has become increasingly popular, but also heavily debated, in the social sciences and humanities. The criticism of the move from the monograph-based to the article-based thesis is diverse, ranging from the legal uncertainty surrounding the thesis format and how it affects the assessment of the individual contribution of doctoral students (Brunsson and Wigren, 2020), to disciplinary tensions stemming from how publication formats are assumed to steer knowledge production (Jezierski, 2016), and in what ways the article-based thesis is symptomatic of a more general shift in academic evaluation characterized by accountability and audit (Park, 2005).

While such criticism has its merits, I would argue that the article-based thesis does not produce any less valuable knowledge than a monograph. Instead, it involves a different way of structuring doctoral work, both intellectually and practically. On one hand, an article-based thesis allows for the doctoral student to enter a scientific conversation in a different and much quicker way than the monograph. For me, this provided an opportunity to position my own research within particular fields of study at the same time as being able to feedback reactions from the academic community into my ongoing thesis work. Moreover, as this dissertation aims to contribute to discussions on the interaction between uncertainty, worth, and identity in academia – discussions that are taking place simultaneously in different fields and in different journals – the article-based thesis meant that I could participate in a way that aligned with the overarching goal of being able to draw some of these perspectives and discussions together. On the other hand, as argued by Kaltenbrunner (2015), the article-based thesis comes with specific epistemic constrains. First, the opportunity to engage in scientific conversations by publishing parts of your thesis work hinders the possibility to further develop and modify an argument into a unified narrative. Thus, an article-based thesis "trades off speed circulation for internal coherence of a monograph" (Kaltenbrunner 2015: 25). Second, it further consolidates the case study approach that is dominant in many social science fields, including higher education research and science and evaluation studies. While this is not a problem *per se*, as methods are not intrinsically good or bad (Lamont and Swidler, 2014), the case study approach risks over-emphasizing the uniqueness of the particular case and not paying sufficient attention to how each case study adds to what we already know (Hylmö, 2019). In other words, the case study method risk downplaying the importance of knowledge accumulation. This may hinder a more in-depth understanding of the processes we study, while also making it more difficult to assess contributions to the field by large since the field itself becomes increasingly fragmented and detached – a particularly harmful outcome for interdisciplinary fields. Finally, an uncritical use of the case study "threatens to reify the level of an individual case" as a natural and neutral unit of analysis, thus ignoring how methods are always "generative of reality" (Kaltenbrunner, 2015: 26).

Against this backdrop, the following chapters aim to demonstrate that the independent articles amount to a larger argument in their totality. Still, rather than a single unified narrative, the three articles adopt a different set of lenses and ask distinct questions, aiming to foreground a range of constitutive parts of the topic under study. In fact, I have deliberately cased my data in different ways, both empirically and conceptually, to avoid reifying and naturalizing the unit of analysis in an uncritical way.[2] While based on the same interview study, the articles make use of the empirical material in slightly different ways. In Article I, political science and history provide a comparative case study. In Article II, the disciplines make up a joint empirical case of early career academics in the social sciences and humanities. In Article III, comparative observations are made both between and within disciplines, highlighting contextual factors such as departments and research groups.

Extending the introductory discussion, *Chapter 2* sets the wider frame by focusing and contextualizing the research object. I discuss the concept of early career academics as well as a set of literatures within which this group can be pictured. The chapter ends with a discussion on disciplinary cultures and the empirical settings in which I have explored my research questions. *Chapter 3* elaborates on the theoretical approach of the thesis. Informed by symbolic interactionism and pragmatism, the role of experience, meaning-making, and agency are emphasized, as are the processual character of social orders. Valuation is theorized as social practice and issues stemming from the uncertainty of multiple orders of worth are discussed. *Chapter 4* presents the empirical material and methodological considerations. This includes a reflection on the possibilities and limitations of in-depth interviewing and a detailed description of the interview study.

This is followed by the three articles that make up the empirical chapters of the thesis. In general, these articles probe into the everyday practices of early career academics, focusing on how they make sense of themselves and their work with regard to three distinct features: uncertainty, worth, and identity. Rather than a short summary in the running text and the original articles attached as appendices, I have chosen to integrate them as empirical chapters. Hopefully, this will increase the readability of the thesis while also highlighting the interrelationship between the articles and the "kappa." *Chapter 5* (Article I) focuses on how early career academics in political science and history deal with the uncertainty regarding how they will be evaluated by future gatekeepers. Comparing how such anticipatory practices rely upon the interpretation and differentiation of the judgement of others, the study demonstrates how navigating uncertainty impact valuation practices and socialization structures differently within the two disciplines. Furthermore, findings suggest that the practices of dealing with uncertainty about future evaluative criteria are shaped by scholars' self-concept and desired

[2] In this regard, I have been influenced by Timmermans and Tavory's (2012) work on theory construction in qualitative research, especially their notion of "alternative casing."

identities as well as their disciplinary context. *Chapter 6* (Article II) extends this analysis by focusing more specifically on how early career academics negotiate definitions of worth through identity work. Discerning several contrasting understandings of what it means to act and to represent worth, the study shows that successful identity management requires a certain feel for the game of recognition. On one hand, the study points at the balancing act of conforming to multiple roles and diverse definitions of worth. On the other hand, it demonstrates how such identity performances are shaped by scholars' social identities in terms of gender and social class background. Articles I and II both highlight the importance of academic work and careers becoming increasingly project-based, setting the scene for how uncertainty, worth, and identity comes into play at the early career level. Therefore, *Chapter 7* (Article III) takes a broader perspective and explores how projectification frames the social world of early career academics. Comparing how scholars seek to align to a "project frame" when accumulating worth, findings indicate the importance of local variations – such as disciplinary cultures, departments, and group memberships – to understand the dynamics of projectification. Additionally, the study highlights different ways in which early career academics negotiate or alter the normative meanings of the project frame. This allows them to adapt to certain institutional demands of the early career while committing to wider definitions of worth.

The three articles cover different aspects of how early career academics navigate evaluative landscapes. Although utilizing different analytical concepts, the theoretical perspective provided in each article is sensitive to the realities unfolding in practice. In *Chapter 8,* the findings of the thesis and how they contribute to a better understanding of the interplay between valuation and socialization are discussed. This includes a summary of the key findings in each article and how they answer the research question. Moreover, I consider the dissertation's overall contribution to the study of academic careers as well as its wider implication for broadening narratives of worth in academia. The thesis concludes with a summary in Swedish.

CHAPTER TWO

BACKGROUND

In this chapter, I provide a contextual and analytical background for the thesis. The first section defines the concept of "early career academics" and discusses how the "early career" can be understood as a transitional phase. The subsequent section discusses a variety of literatures within which early career academics can be pictured. Focusing especially on research related to issues of projectification and precarity, inequality and careers, academic (e)valuation, and academic identities, this chapter provides a range of understandings of early career academics as well as the conditions for the interaction between uncertainty, worth, and identity. The third and final section consists of a discussion on disciplinary cultures and the empirical settings in which I have explored my research questions.

Defining Early Career Academics

While there is no agreed-upon definition of what constitutes an early career academic, the term generally refers to scholars in a phase of transition: from newly minted PhDs to senior positions (Haddow and Hammarfelt, 2019). As such, the early career is defined as occurring after the completion of doctoral education and is considered a status passage process (Glaser and Strauss, 1971) where the identity of scholars and the state of their careers are transformed, socialized, and ultimately recognized by a shared community of peers (Laudel and Gläser, 2008). However, defining this transition phase more specifically, and how to decide when individuals leave it, has proven difficult. Important factors such as career structures, possibilities of stable employment, and funding varies across disciplines and national contexts (Frølich et al., 2018; Whörer 2014). Consequently, the criteria for "early career status" differ between empirical studies (see e.g. Boeren et al., 2015; Hakala, 2009; Petersen 2011) as well between different actors, such as funding bodies and research institutions.

In the context of developing research funding schemes for younger scholars, Bazeley (2003: 274) defines early career status as applying to someone "who is currently within their first five years of academic or other research-related employment allowing uninterrupted, stable research development following completion of their postgraduate research training." Evidently, this definition is based on the assumption that academic careers are built upon the completion of postgraduate research training and that five years is sufficient time to start building a track record. Moreover, it assumes a particular stability regarding the employment situation, which enables the development of a personal research program. Although such definition allows for some variation in terms of

career tracks post-PhD, it does not sufficiently address how the current casualization of academic work shapes and extends the early career phase (Roumbanis, 2019). This opts for a more generous definition of early career status in terms of academic age while also emphasizing the importance of considering the relative insecurity characterizing different types of employment positions. Furthermore, the above definition does not fully recognize how the transition phase at the early career level differs in meaningful ways from the doctoral education and more senior career stages.

To capture this latter aspect, Laudel and Gläser (2008) have proposed a theoretical framework according to which the early career phase is defined as a double move from "apprentice" to "colleague" and from "dependent" to "independent" research. More specifically, they argue that this transition involves three different but interrelated careers: *cognitive career* (consisting of the research projects academics are involved in), *organizational career* (consisting of the positions academics attain in different research organizations), and *community career* (consisting of the different roles as knowledge producers academics might have in their scientific community). From this perspective, the early career phase is to be understood as a complex interplay between junior scholars' history of knowledge production and their movement through social and organizational positions. This is because cognitive, organizational, and community careers are interlinked in an intricate pattern of interactions. For example, the cognitive career depends on the community career in that it is the social position within the community that to a large extent determines how opportunities to engage in research are distributed. Moreover, the cognitive career depends on the organizational career since it is the latter that provides the material and intellectual resources needed for research work. Hence, "the community career must provide the reputation that is necessary to be hired by organizations, and the organizational career must provide the opportunities to pursue the community career" (Laudel and Gläser, 2008: 389).

In defining the early career as a transitional process, the conceptual framework developed by Laudel and Gläser points to how the early career phase contains a distinct status passage that, according to the authors, is about attaining "autonomy" and "independence in research" (Laudel and Gläser, 2008: 402). Since this transition may "occur in extended PhD phases, postdoctoral positions, other forms of employment, or in the first teaching and research position," it is a definition of early career status that puts less focus on academic age and more on the factors that influence the process of attaining autonomy and independence. Still, it remains difficult to pinpoint when this transition is completed. Furthermore, while the strength of this definition is that it acknowledges how the reputation of scholars is dependent on their recognition among a wider community of peers, the narrow focus on research independence as the criteria for becoming a full community member excludes significant aspects of how younger scholars are socialized into the current academic landscape. This is perhaps especially important when studying early career academics in social sciences and humanities disciplines, where the development of research practices is often intertwined with other engagements, such as teaching, public outreach, blogging, or writing criticism in daily press. This would

suggest that the composite academic identities they need to cultivate in order to be recognized as a full community member shape the status passage process quite differently than in other epistemic contexts.

Inspired by the accounts above, I define early career academics as a group of scholars who have completed their doctoral education within the previous eight years and who are yet to find stable employment. While they are all individuals with career aspirations in academia, they work on fixed-term contracts with varying lengths and conditions. This variety has several dimensions and points to the context specificity of the terminology being used. In the natural and medical sciences, the notion of early career usually refers to a formalized, clear-cut postdoc period with research-only positions (Åkerlind, 2005). This makes them different from many disciplines within the social sciences and humanities in which the postdoctoral phase is not a mandatory step in a research career. Nor does the early career phase within these fields exclusively involve research, but also teaching and administration work. Against this background, I follow Haddow and Hammarfelt (2019) who argues that early career *academics*, rather than early career *researchers,* might be a more accurate label when the concept is used in the social sciences and humanities. Nevertheless, it is important to note that postdoc positions are becoming more common within these fields as well. During the interviews, many respondents referred to themselves as "postdocs" or someone "at the postdoc level," regardless of their formal employment position. Therefore, I use notions like "early career level" and "postdoc level" interchangeably in the subsequent chapters. This also includes the usage of synonyms such as "early career," "postdoctoral," "younger," "junior," and "aspiring" scholars.

The dual criteria of academic age and type of employment position means that this dissertation focuses not only on a particular group within the research system, but also on a particular group of scholars at the early career level. While this limits the possible comparative dimensions that may be studied (for example, younger scholars working on temporary and full contracts), it is supported by recent studies on academic careers, pointing to an increasing divide between professoriate and junior academics: "the first enjoying permanent positions, autonomy of work organization, and professional status, the second depending for several years on fixed-term contracts and poor ability to plan their careers in the long term" (Fumasoli 2020: 3; see also Castellacci and Viñas-Bardolet, 2021). To enable a more fine-grained analysis of how fixed-term scholars navigate these uncertain conditions, and thus not assume their internal homogeneity, I have prioritized depth over breadth when defining and studying the group of early career academics. As I will elaborate upon in the method chapter, this prioritization still allows for a comparative analysis across and within disciplinary settings, as well as in regard to variations within the group of early career academics as a whole (for example, in terms of academic age, gender, social class, networks, epistemic practices, and working routines).

The dual criteria is also important given that temporary positions and insecure working conditions are becoming more common in general within academia (Waaijer et al.,

2017). This has led to criticism towards the concept of early career academics for not taking into account how the purpose of temporary academic work has shifted "from a development stage into an indefinite employment practice" (Burneva, 2022: 17). From this perspective, the notion of early career academics does not in itself imply temporariness or insecurity, but simply a "shorter time spent on the job." While this is true given the definitions provided by Bazeley (2003) and Laudel and Gläser (2008), such criticism fails to recognize that it is precisely the shifting purpose of temporary academic work that makes the concept of early career academics analytically powerful. As a manifestation of that very shift, the concept of early career academics captures how the social identities of academics in between PhD and tenured position are closely intertwined with the changing structures for recognition, reward, and career advancement. Today, this means a longer time spent at the early career level, where one must constantly interact with the job and grant market (Franssen and de Rijcke, 2019; Roumbanis, 2019). Hence, in accordance with the definition used in this dissertation, "early career" does not simply imply a shorter time spend on the job. Instead, it sheds light on how the character and length of this transitional phase are currently changing and expanding. It is a definition that seeks to explore the dynamics of growing into academia while enduring precarious work conditions, such as lack of job security, uncertain career prospects, and strong competition for a limited number of positions (Herschberg et al., 2018; Ylijoki, 2010). These conditions intensify the interplay between valuation and academic socialization.

Researching Early Career Academics

Early career academics form a group that has recently been of great interest in both policy and research. Changes in working and career conditions, along with the roles of younger scholars within these evolving conditions and the impacts these changes have on them, are among the more explored topics. This includes issues such as precarity (Herschberg et al. 2018), work-life balance (Bozzon et al. 2017), gender inequality (Murgia and Poggio 2018), uncertainty (Sigl 2016), valuation (Haddow and Hammarfelt 2019), and temporalization (Ylijoki 2010). To capture this breadth, while also providing necessary limitations, I will map out the fields of study in which this thesis is situated by focusing on four key areas: *projectification*, *inequality*, (e)*valuation*, and *identity*. On one hand, these key areas function as a contextual backdrop for the dissertation's empirical chapters in that they constitute particularly important framework conditions. On the other hand, they also provide four areas of research in which the realities of early career academics in different ways have been, and might further be, explored.

Projectification and Precarity

At the core of the growing interest in academic work and careers in general, and in relation to early career academics in particular, is the notion of changing framework conditions. Over the past few decades, the world of academia has undergone substantial transformations, which has deeply affected the production of research (Gibbons et al., 2010), the nature of academic work (Currie and Vidovich, 2009), and the academic on-the-job experience (Waaijer et al., 2017). Situated within the context of neoliberalization, these changes involve "strong shifts in both career structures and the discourses and practices aiming to define and assess" academics and their careers (Fochler et al., 2016: 177). At the same time, there has been a shift away from block funding of research towards competitive performance-based project funding (Franssen and de Rijcke, 2019), along with an increasing focus on performance measures and quantitative indicators in evaluative procedures (Rijcke et al., 2016). Stemming from governmental pressures for efficiency and transparency, the move towards a managerialist model of university management emphasizing accountability and marketisation constitutes the frameworks for what has come to be called "academic capitalism" (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997) and the "entrepreneurial university" (Elzinga, 2012). Such concepts suggest that the re-organization of academic institutions along the lines of new public management involves a fundamental shift in both ideologies and practices. On one hand, this shift has increased the competition between and within academic organizations (Musselin, 2018). On the other hand, "it constitutes the cause of growing instability in terms of working conditions and careers" (Murgia and Poggio, 2018: 15).

In line with this, Ylijoki (2016) argues that the rise of temporary positions in academia is both an organizational response to these new managerial demands *and* an outcome of academic work and careers becoming increasingly project-based. Referred to as *projectification*, it is a process in which research and careers are structured around a project format that goes hand in hand with the concept of both academic capitalism and entrepreneurial university by providing a particular market logic for organizing, conducting, and evaluating academic work. Centered on the delivery of results within limited time frames, it is "a perfect match with the need to conduct solution-focused, one-off research" based on competitive performance-based funding (Ylijoki, 2016: 11). Hence, the project format is not "a mere technical organizational tool" but "challenges and reshapes research practices and ideals" (Ylijoki, 2016: 13). Still, how and in what way is not self-evident. While the project format has been found to act as "straitjackets" or "iron cages," suggesting that scholars are being "trapped" by its temporal and instrumental logic (Felt, 2016; Müller, 2014; Ylijoki, 2015), empirical evidence also points to how scholars develop different modes of coping (Sigl, 2016). Under certain circumstances, projects might be used as highly versatile and loose temporal "instruments," creating new spaces for crafting agency and managing time (Virtová and Vostal, 2021). Furthermore, how disciplinary fields adjust to a project mode of research varies depending on socio-epistemic conditions (Torka, 2018).

From the perspective of early career academics, the projectification of academic work and careers shapes the conditions under which they are socialized. For example, comparing PhD candidates and postdocs in the life sciences, Fochler et al. (2016) found that the latter group report a narrowing of valuation regimes that, in part, are legitimized by the insecurity of fixed-term positions and the hyper-competition involved. Similarly, Roumbanis's (2019: 197) observational study on how Swedish universities respond to projectification by organizing open lectures by successful professors as guidance for junior scholars demonstrates how "a competitive academic work ethos and a form of pragmatic acceptance of the prevailing funding conditions" are justified. Although this kind of micro-politics is nothing new to the university field (Bourdieu, 1988), it does play an important part in the social reproduction of a much-changed entrepreneurial research culture. As such, it functions as a subtle form of power by which an instrumental rationality is legitimized: "If you want to be a member of the academy, you will have to accept the rules of the game" (Roumbanis, 2019: 214). In a similar vein, but on a more general level, Lorenz (2012) argues that whereas neoliberal policies in higher education are characterized by a combination of free market rhetoric and intensive managerial control practices, it is the way in which such policies employ a discourse that occupy and transform the everyday meanings of their concepts – efficiency, accountability, transparency and quality – that most substantially reshapes scholarship and academia.

Previous research on projectification and its related processes points to a range of different effects on the academic system as a whole, including a concentration of resources due to the Mathew effect (Merton, 1968), which are observed both on an organizational level (Bloch and Sørensen, 2015) and an individual level (Bloch et al., 2014). This way of organizing research activities has increased the relative share of fixed-term contracts as well as the amount of time individual researchers spend on applying for grant money (Roumbanis, 2019). Furthermore, it has had a differentiating effect on academic careers, further separating research and teaching practices while also introducing new professional roles for those engaging in project work (Ylijoki, 2016). This is to say that the process of projectification shapes the social structures of academia. But how is this process to be understood in more detail? Focusing on the mechanisms involved and the relationship between them, Franssen and de Rijcke (2019) developed a model of the effects of the rise of project funding on the social structures of research groups (see Figure 1).

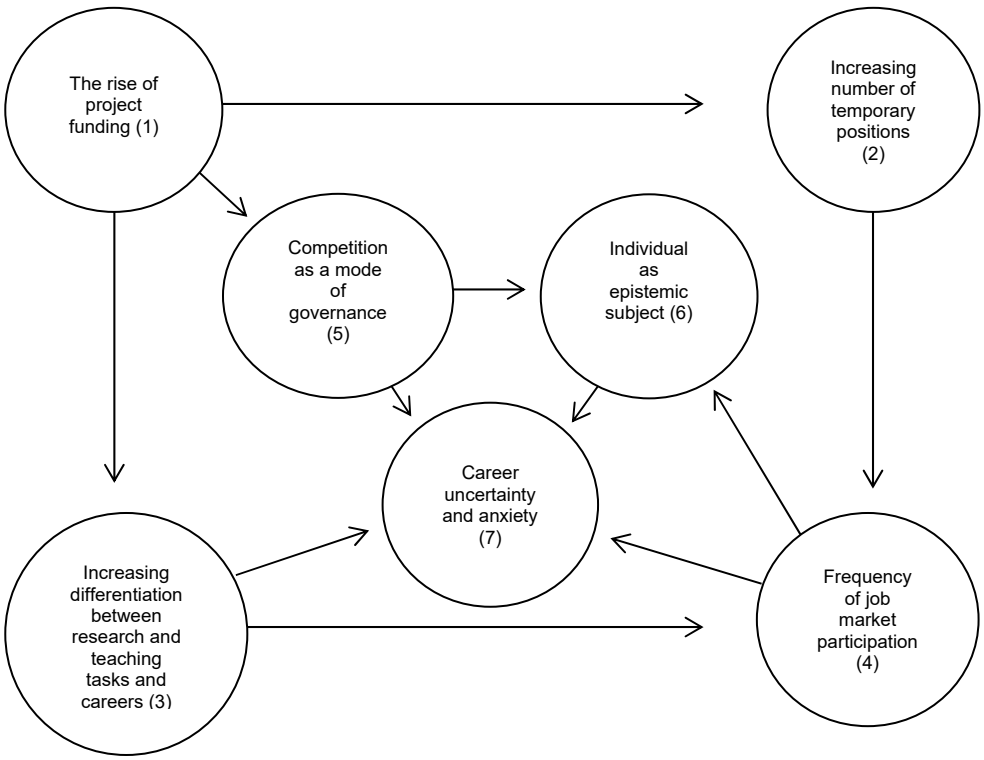

Figure 1. Model of the effects of the rise of project funding (Franssen and de Rijcke, 2019: 146).

According to this model, the rise of project funding has resulted in a substantial growth of temporary positions, which has increased the length of the temporary career phase. Establishing competition as a mode of governance, this has enforced competitive behavior among individual scholars while outsourcing epistemic authority to funding bodies and project leaders since. The extension of the temporary career phase means that juniors scholars are more frequently involved in job market participation. Together with the competition for project funding, the individual is established as "the primary epistemic subject in the science system" (Franssen and de Rijcke 2019: 147). On one hand, Franssen and de Rijcke (2019) argues that such institutional conditions push early career academics towards entrepreneurial behavior according to which the science system is understood in individualized terms relating to one's ability to compete (see also Müller, 2014). On the other hand, they also conclude that it increases career

uncertainty as early career academics do not know what is enough to secure permanent academic positions (see also Fochler and Sigl, 2018). This is a particularly harmful outcome since it constrains the possible ways in which the individuating force of projectification might be countered. In their empirical analysis of how senior members in project-based research groups aimed to promote "communitarian ideals and merit-based (rather than publication count-based) hiring procedures," Franssen and de Rijcke (2019: 155) found that this, rather than shifting focus in evaluations, mainly added to "the already lengthy list of what makes a good scholar."

This point resonates in several ways with recent studies that have investigated the role played by social uncertainty and precarity in academic life. Studying the recruitment and selection of postdocs in social and natural science departments in the Netherlands, Herschberg et al. (2018) demonstrate that a commonly shared ideal type of a postdoc is created and reproduced. This "ideal postdoc" reflects norms of a flexible but narrowly oriented project worker who is primarily characterized by the ability to successfully complete the short-term contract. Hence, there is a lack of continuity between the evaluative criteria and its intended objectives for short-term and full positions, which turns the postdoc into a job rather than a career step (Collinson, 2003). Furthermore, precarity manifests itself not only with regard to social and job insecurity (Ylijoki, 2010), or the marginal positions early career academics inhabit within academic work organizations (Harney et al., 2014; Waaijer et al., 2017), but also in the shifted responsibility for dealing with uncertainty of funding and careers – from the organizational level to the level of the individual (Cannizzo, 2018a; Herschberg et al., 2018). Given the lack of support and opportunities for development and progression, this becomes an increasingly difficult task for early career academics to manage (Åkerlind, 2005).

What follows from the above is that the individuating force of projectification is to be understood on at least two different levels. First, it relates to precarious work as a condition that is characterized by uncertainty, insecurity, and vulnerability (Crompton et al., 2002). Second, it relates to precarization as a major trend of the entire body of social relationships, marked by the dispersion of individual risks and opportunities (Beck, 1992). Several studies have pointed to the individualization of precarity as characterizing the social world of early career academics. For example, exploring the narrativization of success and failure among fixed-term academics in the UK, Loveday (2018) shows that precarious employment conditions and unclear career structures precipitate a feeling of being "out of control." This resulted in a contradictive sense of agency among the interviewed academics. While success was pictured as "being lucky," indicating a lack of agency, failure was considered one's own responsibility, thus conforming to the notion of individualized "enterprising subjects." Similarly, Gill (2014, 2016) argues that the feeling of being "out of control" consolidates with the experience of academic work as "boundaryless." This enforces a culture of overwork in which one can always produce more and more quickly.

The last decade or so has seen the emergence of a literature on "accelerated academia," underlining how the process of projectification not only impact the social structures,

but also the temporal structures, of academia (Vostal, 2016). Given the prevalence of projects, audits, marketization, and competitions, studies in this area demonstrate an accelerated pace of academic life. This involves socio-cultural temporal patterns requiring "short-termism" and "immediate impact" (Moriarty, 2011) as well as a more general form of "anticipatory acceleration," which Müller (2014: 16) describes as a situation in which individual scholars aim at "increasing units of output per units of time." What characterizes this later type of acceleration is that it "is not developed in response to a certain event or specific time horizon, but rather constitutes a generalized response to a state of pervasive competition." As such, it relies upon a specific relationship between temporality and valuation.

Whereas these studies capture the oppressive side of acceleration, others have observed that the energetic characteristics of a faster pace are not inherently foreign to academic life. Examining the phenomenology of research conduct, Vostal (2015: 88) argues that "accelerative moments comprise significant motivational and energizing aspects in the lives of academics." Such nuances are important in that they underline that the level of oppressive acceleration gains under certain circumstances and connects to the (lack of) recourses individual scholars possess. Additionally, empirical studies have focused more specifically on how fixed-term employment subjugates academics to conflicting forms of temporalities. Examining the experiential structures of academic time as it relates to broader shifts in organizational patterns and management of Finnish universities, Ylijoki and Mäntylä (2003) distinguish among four time perspectives: scheduled time, timeless time, contracted time, and personal time. They show how the experience of time is closely related to academic's social position and their type of employment. In a subsequent study, Ylijoki (2016) argues that the project format is embedded in a specific temporality, which she calls "project time;" this contrasts with "process time." While the latter refers to the internal organizational logic of research, project time is commodified and controlled, speeding up the pace of individual work as well as subordinate other temporal frames.

However, the dominance of project time is not absolute and all-encompassing. Rather, projectification enforces a certain temporality that creates temporal conflicts. Importantly, this means that "academics are not mere objects or victims of projectification, but active agents who appropriate, adapt, negotiate and shape the ways in which they navigate project time" (Ylijoki, 2016: 26). This idea is supported to some extent by Sigl (2016) who, in studying life science postdocs, claims that the project format creates a structural link between social and epistemic uncertainties. As a response, postdocs develop different modes of coping, often centered on the reduction of risk and the securing of individual merits. According to Sigl, these coping strategies become part of the tacit governance of project-based research cultures, affecting both the social fabric of research groups and the epistemic decisions of postdocs and what knowledge is thereby produced.

Still, with regard to how early career academics appropriate, adapt, and shape the ways in which they navigate a projectified academic landscape, the picture is

incomplete. While much research has commented on the pressures and conflicts inherent to projectification, little is known about how scholars actually make sense of, and deal with, such tensions as they are growing into academia. Moreover, because empirical studies are heavily biased towards the life sciences, there is a need to open up for how the meanings and dynamics of projectification are shaped in contexts that are shaped quite differently. In this regard, the present study adds new layers of understanding.

Inequality and Careers

The previous section describes how the process of projectification is closely intertwined with the process of precarization. Yet, the conditions are not the same for everyone. Rather, precarious working conditions and a high level of insecurity intensify existing social inequalities present in academic contexts (Crew, 2020; Warnock, 2016). For example, the shifted responsibility for dealing with uncertainty of funding and careers – from the organizational level to the level of the individual – privilege those who can afford unstable income conditions and penalize those who cannot (Sigl, 2016). This is particularly evident given the current extension of time between PhD completion and finding stable employment (Franssen and de Rijcke, 2019). Thus, the experience of feeling precarious from having to work short-term contracts intersects with other forms of precariousness connected to social origin (Burton and Bowman, 2022). Additionally, precarious working conditions feed back into disadvantages structured by gender (Bozzon et al., 2018) as well as migrant background (Behtoui and Leivestad, 2019).

Academia has always been shaped by larger structures of discrimination and inequality. Not least, this involves classed judgments and the struggle for working-class academics to fit in and pass as "insiders." In *Homo Academicus*, Bourdieu (1988) shows how signs of value in academic settings – such as elegance, style, and ease – are conflated with elite or upper middle-class membership, underlining that valuation and selection processes privilege those who have academic culture as their native culture. Certainly, research on higher education demonstrates that those from more privileged class backgrounds disproportionately enter top universities (Waller et al., 2017). Students from lower social class backgrounds entering these institutions often feel stigmatized (Billings, 2021), grapple with mixed feelings about their past (Warnock, 2016), and develop skills to conceal their backgrounds (Chin and Thompson, 2023). As such, social class shapes the transition into higher education as well as the experience within these institutions (Reay, 2018). It also matters for the transition from universities (Waller et al., 2017), as the economic, cultural, and social resources (not) available to graduates are significant to labor market outcomes (Friedman and Laurison, 2019).

In other words, working-class students routinely suffer from the more or less subtle ways in which class-based discrimination manifests itself. The same is also true for those continuing with an academic career. Statistically, the composition of PhD programs

follows class-based patterns, visible in generally low socioeconomic diversity in "pure" disciplines, such as economics, in contrast to "applied" fields, such as education (see e.g., Schultz and Stansbury, 2022). Studying working-class academics in the UK, Crew (2020) explored symbolic markers of a classed identity among academic staff. Her interview study shows that the lack of an economic safety net to manage precarity constrained the level of participation among working-class academics, especially with regard to social events such as conferences, research travels, and dinners (see also Crew, 2022). A combination of financial limitations and uneven access to cultural capital also mean that they are more inclined to stay at less prestigious institutions or to apply for teaching jobs rather than continuing a career in research, which was perceived as riskier. Without explicitly discussing the role of class background in academic socialization, Crew's (2020: 32-38) study demonstrates the potential "cost" of rapid social change and mobility. Among working-class academics, this involves feelings of not belonging to the dominant culture of academia, the experience of losing touch with one's social origin, and the difficulty of balancing between identity positions characterized by adaptation (to academia) and consistency (to one's background). In this regard, growing into academia as a working-class academic is characterized by what Bourdieu and others call a *habitus clivé*; that is, a sense of self torn by dislocation and internal division (Friedman, 2016).

Autobiographical essays by academics coming from working-class backgrounds testify to the difficulties and experiences of alienation involved in the process of growing into academia (see e.g., Dews and Law, 1995; Reay, 2013). This process is often highly affective. Exploring the subjective experience of class among staff and students from working-class backgrounds in English higher education, Loveday (2016) argues that the struggle of value and classed judgements generates emotional imprints such as shame. Both the experience of shame, and the potentially of it, shape how working-class students and staff make sense of their role within academia and how they learn to navigate it. In this regard, shame is not "merely a residual effect of classed relationships; shame is part of the *practice* that feeds back into unequal relations*, shaping* perceptions and action, and, ultimately, helping to reinforce such inequality" (Loveday, 2016: 1145). Importantly, by examining the "affective practice" of judgement, Loveday not only underlines the relational nature of social class, but how it intersects with other forms of social division, such as gender. For example, describing how they managed the judgment of others when becoming pregnant during their PhD education, female scholars' experience of shame was read through both classed and gendered identities.

If the role played by social class in academic careers remains rather understudied, there is a vast literature on how higher education institutions are shaped by structural inequalities associated with gender. Summarizing data from the UK and USA, Becher and Trowler (2001: 150-151) reveal that the marginalization of women in academia follow some similar cross-national patterns: women are more often employed in institutions with lower status, they experience slower promotion rates, achieve tenure at a

later stage, and their salaries are lower compared to men of equivalent academic rank.[3] [4] In comparison to their male counterparts, female academics devote more time to teaching and less to research (Misra et al., 2012) and generally demonstrate lower levels of productivity throughout their career (Toutkoushian and Bellas, 1999). Since both the prestige of departmental location and individual productivity as measured in publication and citations are associated with career success (Long, 1978) and rank advancement (Long et al., 1993), gender differences seem to be a consequence of "accumulative disadvantages" within the science field (Cole, 1979), as well as a reflection of larger social differentiation (Ridgeway, 1997).

Focusing on how gender inequality unfolds throughout the academic career life course, Winslow and Davis (2016) highlight two main ways in which the dynamics of peer-interactions and institutionalized norms and policies combine to disadvantage women. On one hand, gendered stereotypes (such as "the caring mother") and gendered schemas for judging competence (such as "men are good leaders") shape the distribution of low- and high-status working tasks on the shopfloor level. During the early career phase, this contributes to a division of labor in terms of teaching and service work (women) and research (men), shaping the trajectories and pace of academic careers (Bozzon et al., 2018). When reaching stable employment, the very same dynamics provide the conditions for women generally being expected to carry out more service work than men while also being less encouraged to apply for promotion (Misra et al., 2011). Investigating faculty socialization at American colleges and universities, Tierney and Bensimon (1996) show that "sex-role spill over" – that is, the linkage between domestic responsibilities and professional roles – means that women are expected to do more "smile work" and "mom work" in order to adjust and gain recognition in male-dominated departments. In this regard, gendered division of academic labor strongly connects to the notion of *academic housework*; that is, how undervalued tasks and responsibilities follow gendered scripts which, in turn, structure academic roles and careers (Heijstra et al., 2017). Scholars have argued that these gendered lines of divisions, especially between teaching and research, are accentuated when academic careers are reorganized along the lines of new public management and neoliberalization (Angervall and Beach, 2020).

On the other hand, across all career stages, women are disproportionately impacted by family obligations (Winslow and Davis, 2016). Mason and Goulden (2002) describe

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[3] For the relationship between gender and career patterns in Swedish academia, see the section "Career Structures and Temporariness in Swedish Academia."

[4] Although I have limited the discussion in this section to class and gender, similar patterns have been identified among individuals with immigrant background in Swedish higher education. Given the same work experience and compared to a reference group (born in Sweden with at least one Swedish-born parent), Behtoui and Leivestad (2018:213) demonstrated that "individuals born in Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America are, firstly, more likely to be unemployed and, secondly, *if* they are employed, to have a lower income (lower position)."

the impact of motherhood as a "maternal wall" in the US, underscoring the significant influence of having children resulting in women being less likely to achieve tenure. Similar patterns have been found in other national contexts, which is evident in a disproportionate representation of women when comparing PhD completion rates and senior positions (see e.g., Heinrichs and Sonnabend, 2023; Morley, 1994). However, the numbers are not conclusive and differences exist between geographical and disciplinary contexts (Winslow and Davis, 2016).

Investigating how academics make sense of parenthood more broadly, Harris et al. (2019) found that both parents and non-parents generally perceived it as detrimental to a "successful" academic career. When such narratives become widely shared, they tend to feed back into already poor institutional support structures, while also legitimizing a narrow conception of what an "ideal" academic is or should be. Not surprisingly, parent academics – and especially mothers – devoted considerable energy to comply to the role of a "good" academic: someone who is highly productive and highly devoted to their work. Indeed, "the linear, lockstep nature of career progression presumes an ideal worker unencumbered by family responsibilities, a model that is more attainable for men than women academics" (Winslow and Davis, 2016: 405). This is especially the case at the early career level, where the "up or out" nature of research careers and family formation generally intersect (Jacobs and Winslow, 2004). Empirical evidence points to female careers, especially at their beginning, being more fragmented due to dynamics of biographical trajectories and cultural expectations. Generally, this shapes their mobility (Ackers, 2008), access to powerful networks (Bagilhole and Goode, 2001), collaborations (Kyvik and Teigen, 1996), and mentors (Hilmer and Hilmer, 2007). Similarly, studies have pointed to value-laden notions such as "excellence" (van den Brink and Benschop, 2012), "ideal career trajectory" (Hammarfelt et al., 2020), and "devotion" (Bozzon et al., 2018) being strongly gendered, potentially influencing recruitment and other evaluation processes (Nielsen, 2016).

Like virtually all careers, academic careers are shaped by factors beyond the control of the individual. In academia, these biases and inequalities follow larger economy-wide patterns while also being bound to "the noncontractual expectations that shapes our sense of commitment – to scholarship as well as to disciplines" (Pardo-Guerra, 2022: 15). While informed by the body of research pointing to how social division shapes dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, it is important to note that this thesis is not primarily concerned with the role played by social class and gender in academic careers. Systematically investigating those issues would have meant a very different study. Rather, social class and gender have been two analytical categories among many and the empirical articles pay attention to them to varying degrees. The connection to the above literatures is most explicit in Article II, whose analysis focuses on the kind of identity work needed of working-class and female academics in order to fit in and be recognized as worthy. Moreover, the role played by class and gender in academic life provides a backdrop to read more general implications of my empirical findings; I will return to this in Chapter 8.

Valuation and Evaluation

The two previous sections have illustrated early career academics in chunks of literatures all engaging with the institutional structures of academic careers. In providing information about the conditions under which junior scholars are trying to establish themselves as part of the scientific vocation, those sections set the scene for evaluation processes shaping the very "production and reception of scholarly work as well as for the status of academic entities like scholars, departments, or universities" (Hamann and Beljean, 2017: 1). Because research fields are reputational economies (Whitley, 2000), evaluation play a central role in academia. This implicates a wide template of practices and arenas, ranging from informal peer-interactions to formalized assessment systems. As previously mentioned, it is important to consider this variety, since it points to the multiplicity shaping the evaluative landscapes in which junior scholars are set to navigate.

In academia, processes of recognition and valorization largely operates through peer review. Described as "the foundation of quality assurance in scholarly research" (Langfeldt, 2001: 820), peer review sets the standards for what is considered *good research* as well as who is considered a *good researcher* – within and across disciplines (Hamann and Beljean, 2017). This is to say that decision-making by peer review – decisions regarding who gets a position, a grant, or the opportunity to publish – shapes not only the content of research (Gläser and Laudel, 2016) or the boundaries of disciplines (Hylmö, 2018), but also how academic roles and careers are constructed and perceived. For example, investigating the social process of recognition through appointment procedures for professorship, Hamann (2019) argues that we should conceive of "professor" as both an organizational status position and a subject position. In appointment procedures, academics are acknowledged by their peers as *a particular someone* who is professorial in hiring decision – embodying a set of relevant qualities and accountabilities. This is a complex interplay between different forms of judgment and legitimation, collectively contributing to the making of professors. Similarly, studies on academic CVs in peer review point to the interpretative character of peer recognition. In addition to comparing applicants among each other or to imagined ideal career trajectories (Hammarfelt et al., 2020), applicants are also compared to the referee's own experience-based understanding of academic practice and biographical categories (Kaltenbrunner and de Rijcke, 2019). Hence, peer review provides a site in which worth and qualities are constructed and attributed to academic entities. Moreover, it is a site of negotiation, as academic judgment needs legitimation in order to stabilize and be made acceptable – both to others as well as to the referees themselves.

In this regard, studies of funding panels and editorial boards are particularly interesting, since they provide empirical settings in which the interpretive nature of academic judgment may be studied as a collective accomplishment. Involving the operationalization of evaluative criteria in recognizing and rewarding good research(ers), the reliability of, and the possible biases in, peer review have been heavily debated. Studies of

disagreements between reviewers have pointed to "cognitive particularism" (Travis and Collins, 1991) or "confirmatory bias" (Mahoney, 1977) as explanatory factors for the inconsistent outcomes of review processes. From this perspective, the subjectivity of referees is primarily understood as obstructing the operationalization of fair, non-biased judgment. However, disagreements have also been interpreted as "real and legitimate differences of opinion among experts about what good science is and should be" (Cole et al., 1981: 885). Rather than concluding whether peer review is reliable or biased, this body of research has focused more generally on how the review *process* affects the review *outcome*. Investigating the decision-making process in grant review, Langfeldt (2001) demonstrates that organizational constrains in the form of decision-tools – such as review guidelines, rating scales, and rankings methods – heavily influence the outcome of evaluative processes. In a similar fashion, Roumbanis (2017: 95) argues that what may be seen as flaws in human judgement could be understood partly as a result of the "dynamic aspect of collective anchoring effects," emerging from a combination of evaluation techniques and the efforts to find an agreement. This is to say that academic evaluation is a situated practice, accomplished in concrete situations and interactions using particular devices (Hamann et al., 2022). In her seminal study on multidisciplinary funding panels in the United States, Lamont (2009) studied the practices reviewers perform in order to reach consensus on what "excellence" means and what criteria to be used when recognizing it. Her findings suggest that through interactions and discussions, evaluators develop a set of hybrid standards. Rather than obstructing the operationalization of fair judgement, she demonstrates how the subjectivity of reviewers – such as their self-concept and emotion-work – is a vital part of the process of evaluation. This is not to downplay biases or discrimination in peer review – which are well documented in empirical research (see e.g., Lee et al., 2013; Wennerås and Wold, 1997). Instead, it is to provide a very social understanding of peer review as practice and commitment.

The work needed by reviewers in multidisciplinary panels to overcome pluralism of evaluative criteria underlines the importance of disciplines and communities in shaping evaluation practices. Together with postgraduate education, peer review is perhaps the most important institution in terms of reproducing disciplinary boundaries (Hylmö, 2018), "signaling which scholars and ideas are integrated into or excluded from a field" (Hamann and Beljean, 2017: 1). Still, the internal diversity of evaluative criteria varies greatly, ranging from the homogenous natural sciences, over the less paradigmatic social sciences, to the humanities, where consensus is even more elusive (Cole, 1983). Thus, what is defined as quality or value, and how to recognize it in practice, is closely connected to the epistemic practices and normative systems of disciplines. This is true for reviewers acknowledging what "good" research is (Hylmö, 2018) as well as for scholars chasing recognition and reward. For example, Hessels et al. (2019) investigated variations in valuation practices by comparing the way research groups accumulate credibility across four epistemic cultures – humanities, social sciences, mathematics, and geosciences – and demonstrated significant differences in terms of what resources are

identified as valuable and how they might be converted into academic capital. Drawing upon the concept of "credibility cycle" (Latour and Woolgar, 1986), according to which the interplay between knowledge production and symbolic rewards are described as a "repetitive cycle in which conversions take place between money, staff, data, arguments, publications, and recognition," the authors conclude that it can only "be used as an analytical tool to explain the behavior of researchers or research groups when taking differences across cultures into account" (Hessels et al., 2019: 127). In a similar vein, comparative approaches to researchers' valuation practices point to the diversity of intradisciplinary evaluation criteria, or the lack thereof, as shaping the condition for the reproduction and potential contestation of what counts as worth within disciplines (Salö, 2017). Importantly, fields characterized by a lack of well-defined internal set of assessment criteria – for example many fields within the social sciences and humanities – rely heavily on a robust definition of disciplinary boundaries in order to judge value and maintain reputational autonomy (Hammarfelt, 2017). At the same time, this very characteristic makes them more exposed to external evaluative pressure (Åström and Hammarfelt, 2019).

Whether in the distribution of grants, the appointment of employment positions, or the allocation of journal spaces, the central role held by peer review underlines peer recognition as the primary form of recognition in academia. Nevertheless, the rise of new public management and its impact on university governance have altered the landscape of recognition. In contrast to the *internal* standards offered by peer review, this development implicates a much stronger emphasis on *external standards* of evaluation – such as performance assessment systems (Hicks, 2012), rankings (Brankovic et al., 2023), and the usage of new evaluative devices, such as quantitative indicators (Rijcke et al., 2016) and social networking sites (Francke and Hammarfelt, 2022). According to Hamann and Beljean (2017), this development goes hand in hand with the marketization of higher education – as described in previous chapters – where competition and performance-based funding are key. It also represents a shift in governance that heavily increases the accountability of universities and scholars (Strathern, 2000), making them subject to the pervasive logic of living in an "audit" (Power, 1997) or "evaluation society" (Dahler-Larsen, 2012).

Although counting publications and citations is a long-established practice for judging merit and value within academia (Clark, 2006; Josephson, 2014), the intensity and availability of quantitative performance measures have grown considerably over the past three decades (Rushforth and de Rijcke, 2023). Importantly, such measures have become an integral part in governments attempt of steering higher education institutions towards certain definitions of quality and performance (Hamann, 2016b). In Sweden, for example, resource allocation systems based on performance indicators are now the norm rather than the exception (Hammarfelt et al., 2016), and although casual links are difficult to establish, the growing reliance on indicators appear to have a host of feedback effects on the practices and organization of scholarship – both in Sweden (Hammarfelt and de Rijcke, 2015) and elsewhere (Rijcke et al., 2016). Crucially,

empirical evidence suggests that the measuring of value and quality in research fosters a specific form of "reactivity" (Espeland and Sauder, 2007), which, among other things, leads to strategic behavior and goal displacement (Colwell et al. 2012), task reduction (Laudel and Gläser 2006), and institutional isomorphism (Hammarfelt et al., 2016). In an ambitious study combining both quantitative and qualitative evidence to understand how research evaluations shape the careers and knowledge production of British social scientists, Pardo-Guerra (2022) demonstrates the homogenizing effects of research evaluations over time. In perturbating labor markets for academics, research evaluations change the structure of careers in a way that produces more similar and standardized institutions. These evaluations also change the way academics make sense of their own worth, "echoing in their everyday practices of these formal assessments of research excellence" (Pardo-Guerra, 2022: 5). An important aspect of reactivity is that performance indicators embedded in formal assessment procedures not only tend to trickle down (Aagaard, 2015), but also tend to function autonomously as premier tokens of value (Burrows, 2012). As such, they come to shape the very notion of who and what is valuable (Hamann, 2016b; Pardo-Guerra, 2022).

As argued by Fochler et al. (2016: 177), early career academics working on temporary contracts are "particularly strongly affected by both hyper-competition and shifts in the ways in which scientific work is evaluated, as both dynamics are intrinsically linked to career structures and the processes of institutional staff selection." In their comparative study of doctoral and postdoctoral life scientists, they found that the latter group, in contrast to the former, base their decisions on one dominant form of worth centered on high-impact publications. Under the influence of increasing measures of performance and the temporalization of research work, young life scientists are thus socialized into "an ever narrower regime of valuing their work and that of others" (Fochler et al., 2016: 197). Such observations are in line with the suggestion that, in order to survive today's competitive academic audit cultures, researchers increasingly learn to act like entrepreneurs (Fochler, 2016). Seeking to acquire and exchange reputational capital as effectively as possible, quantifiable performance indicators make up a powerful infrastructure for making definitions of worth durable (Rushforth et al., 2019). Similarly, several studies – primarily of postdocs or more senior researchers in parts of the natural sciences – have pointed to how indicators promote certain hierarchies of worth according to which scholars adjust their epistemic behavior. This involves how indicators penetrate every stage of the research cycle (Müller and de Rijcke, 2018), including how scholars decide on the endpoints of research processes (Rushforth and de Rijcke, 2015).

Still, as argued by Rushforth and Rijcke (2023: 9), it is important to emphasize that "performance indicators *do not* completely dominate researchers' thinking and practices in a totalizing sense", and their impact is far from uniform across nations and disciplines (Whitley and Gläser, 2007). For example, studies of social sciences and humanities underline that the use of metrics often creates conflicts between intradisciplinary and extra-disciplinary notions of worth (Haddow and Hammarfelt, 2019; Hammarfelt and Haddow, 2018). Whereas responses from early career academics within these

disciplines have rarely been studied in a systematic fashion, it has been suggested that their social position makes them especially vulnerable to outside pressure (Hammarfelt and de Rijcke, 2015). Hence, it is not surprising that criticism of performance indicators is mixed up with different forms of strategic use (Haddow and Hammarfelt, 2019). Under certain circumstances, early career academics in social sciences and humanities might actually take advantage of the evaluative dynamics supported by "the metric tide" (Wilsdon, 2015) as they provide them with new forms of currency to be used for career advancement (Salö, 2017). Despite repeated criticism among scholars, these new evaluative procedures and institutions nevertheless seem to have become an established part of the wider evaluative landscape in which they navigate. Yet, how scholars navigate these evaluative landscapes and with what consequences remains largely understudied.

As mentioned above, the literature on academic (e)valuation has often focused on specific evaluative practices or certain evaluative moments. In contrast, the present thesis investigates how junior scholars experience and deal with a plurality of practices, moments, and devices of (e)valuation as they are growing into academia. In this regard, the study aligns with recent suggestions to pay attention to how "contemporary research practices [are] being configured around multiple, hierarchically ordered regimes of worth" (Rushforth et al., 2019: 229). Such a perspective recognizes scholars as an obligatory passage point of policy and opens up a more inductive approach to the study of how they assign worth to themselves and others and the resources they draw upon when doing so. As I will demonstrate in the empirical chapters, negotiating worth is a balancing act in which not only disciplinary borders and dominant discourses of success are key, but also scholars' self-concept and desired futures. Indeed, one of the dissertation's main contributions to the study of academic careers is tied to its emphasis on the interactions between valuation and identity. Having discussed the former concept in this section, it is time to move on to the literature engaging with the latter.

Identity and Roles

In his book on social identity, Jenkins (2014: 6) provides a definition of identity as a "multi-dimensional classification or mapping of the human world and our place within it." Thus, at the most basic level, identity may be regarded as the human capacity to know "who's who" and "what's what," involving ourselves as individuals and as members of collectives. From this perspective, identity is not a thing that one possesses; instead, it is something that one *does* through ongoing processes of *identification*. Accordingly, the notions of change and uncertainty are significant because they dramatize the process of identification, provoking questions such as "what is happening here?", "who are we?", "how do we do things?" and "where do I belong?". The way individuals make sense of these questions impacts their understanding of their own identities and that of others. This may include both personal and collective identities relating to institutions, organizations, and group memberships (Lamont, 2001; Mills et al., 2010).

In general, this way of conceptualizing identity has been particularly salient within the study of academic identities. The experience of changing framework conditions has spurred a growing literature investigating how scholars make sense of the current transformations of higher education and what kinds of academic identities are thereby constructed. This includes tensions between academic values and policy (Henkel, 2005), as well as a fragmentation and polarization between academic identity positions (Ylijoki and Ursin, 2013). Under pressure to adapt to a managerialist model emphasizing accountability and entrepreneurship, academic identities have been described as being under threat (Clegg 2008), becoming increasingly fragile (Knights and Clarke, 2014), and contested (Archer 2008). In one way or another, these accounts relate to the notion of changing nature of academic work and careers, or indeed, the changing nature of the academic profession itself: its content, status, and boundaries as well as the valorization of knowledge and education more broadly (Barnett, 1997; Rhoades and Slaughter, 1997). While often pointing to the general character of such transformations, studies of academic identities have also argued for the role that context plays in shaping its dynamics – for example in terms of disciplinary cultures (Musselin and Becquet, 2008), gender (Bozzon et al., 2018), and social class (Archer, 2008b).

To map out the main contours of the body of research studying academic identities, I suggest that we might analytically differentiate between three perspectives: *traditionalism*, *fragmentation*, and *subjectivation*. Although not mutually exclusive, they represent three approaches to the study of academic identities that have been particularly dominant. By elaborating upon what characterizes these three perspectives and providing empirical examples, I will end with a brief discussion on how I seek to extend the theoretical and empirical scope of academic identity research.

Traditionalism

The first perspective is centered on a "traditional" notion of academic identities as being attached to longstanding institutions such as the academic profession or disciplinary cultures, investigating what happens to such identities in the face of change and structural reform. Relying upon the idea of academics as tribe members, socialized into the values, norms, practices, and belief systems of their specific community (Becher and Trowler, 2001), it is a perspective that focuses particularly on how such internal regulations of identity values are challenged by external forces. For example, studying policy change in the British context, Henkel (2005) argues that individual and collective values central to academic identities are challenged. More specifically, she points to how changes in policy, such as the development of strategic, solution-based research and the emphasis on research-industry relations, contest the dominance of the discipline, both as an organizing structure for knowledge production and as a guardian of academic culture. Such policy initiatives interfere with traditional notions of academic autonomy. These observations are in line with studies pointing to academics becoming "managed

professionals" (Rhoades 1998) whose work is no longer characterized by academic freedom and self-regulation, but by the steering and monitoring of institutional management (see e.g. Gordon and Whitchurch 2008; Musselin, 2005).

Yet, rather than being replaced, Henkel (2005) demonstrates that the normative power of disciplines and academic autonomy remains strong. Still, new patterns of interactions between scholars, disciplines, and institutional management mean that the position of disciplines and the meanings of academic autonomy are modified. This seems to apply for early career academics as well. Studying the relationship between the entrepreneurial orientation of contemporary universities and what motivates junior scholars to engage in academic work, Hakala (2009) argues that some elements of traditional academic identities and the moral framework in which academic calling is embedded continue to resonate strongly among junior researchers. This includes elements such as academic freedom, passion, persistence, and disciplinary belonging. However, in the face of changing career structures and insecure working conditions, Hakala shows that junior scholars also search for new interpretations and sources of meaning in order to make sense of their academic selves. Thus, what characterizes the traditionalism perspective is not a collapse of "traditional" academic identities. Instead, it is a perspective that focuses on "the breakdown of longstanding conditions for strong, stable academic identities, sustained internally by the structures and cultures of academic systems" (Henkel, 2009: 7).

Fragmentation

The second perspective on academic identities is based upon a similar dichotomy between past academia as stable and present-day academia as unstable. But in contrast to the traditionalism perspective, the second perspective concentrates more on how external pressure leads to a *fragmentation* of academic identities. Consequently, it does not primarily focus on the tensions between internal and external values, but rather the tensions *within* the profession itself. For instance, drawing upon interviews with Finnish academics, Ylijoki and Ursin (2013) discerned nine narratives, each of which provided a different answer about what it means to be an academic in the present-day university. While narratives such as "resistance" and "loss" were embedded in a regressive storyline characterized by a sense of deterioration and lack of recognition, narratives of "success" and "mobility" relied on a progressive storyline characterized by a sense of development and status. In positioning themselves differently in relation to the notion of changing academia, these narratives imply a variety of academic roles and commitments that make up increasingly fragmented and diverse academic identities (see also Barry et al., 2006; Smith, 2012). Similar findings have been reported in studies of early career academics, for whom the fragmentation of academic identities is particularly significant because it produces very different understandings of what it means to engage in academic work and pursue academic careers. For example, Ylijoki and Henriksson

(2017) point to the shifting cultural resources junior scholars rely on while making sense of their careers. In their study of scholars working on short-term contracts, they identified multiple "career stories," each containing a distinct set of values and moral justifications according to which academic careers are conceptualized and understood. These stories – labelled "tribal," "proletarian," and "entrepreneurial" – show that there are radically different ways to make sense of academic careers and the identity positions involved (see also Duberley et al., 2006). Moreover, as these stories conflict, Ylijoki and Henriksson (2017) conclude that academic careers and identities are not only becoming more diverse, but also more polarized. Such polarization may contribute to the stratification of academic careers by further emphasizing the role of unequal starting points and the identities (not) available to junior scholars.

Another level of analysis is the relationship between academic identities and the identity of working organizations, such as a university, a faculty, or a department. Billot (2010) argues that when higher education institutions transform in response to new forms of governance, so do the roles, responsibilities, and practices of individual academics. In particular, the reshaping of academic work and the multiple roles that are created lead to tensions between a sense of professional self and the diverse professional identities prescribed by their employing organization. Such tensions are especially evident in situations characterized by insecure professional selves shaped by the proliferation of managerialist control (Knights and Clarke, 2014). Nevertheless, in studying how academics respond to identity threats stemming from organizational change, Degn (2018) claims that scholars may not seek to reduce the degree of dissonance felt between their own perception of desired identity and the perception of the working organization. Instead, "they actively try to make sense of this dissonance by categorizing the disturbing elements as irrelevant" (Degn, 2018: 317). In justifying certain types of responses, such as ignorance or decoupling, these sensemaking practices use tensions between identity positions to construct categories for identification that scholars find legitimate. Others have noted how the reality of academic roles and responsibilities have always been more complex than outlined in, for example, employment documentation or privileged by formal organizations (Whitchurch 2008). Hence, it is important to emphasize that academic identities have never been a uniform and monolithic entity. Instead, what the fragmentation perspective demonstrates is that the factors differentiating academic identities have changed. This has multiplied academic roles and identities, making them more diverse, fragmented, and polarized (Ylijoki and Ursin, 2013).

Subjectivation

The third and final perspective centers specifically on how the intensification of government and the reorganization of academia along the lines of new public management produce subjectivity. Focusing on how academic identities are constructed in the process of *subjectivation*, this perspective investigates how individuals are made accountable

to dominant discourses and technologies of government. This includes a range of studies on how specific subject positions and its corresponding values are internalized, becoming part of scholars' sense of self (Acker and Webber, 2017; Davies, 2005; Mula et al., 2022). This is not to say that new forms of governance act deterministically upon individual scholars (Sigl, 2019). Exploring the extent to which new public management initiatives influence female academic's experience of their professional identities, Thomas and Davies (2002) show how such arrangements offer gendered subject positions centered on competitiveness, individualism, and instrumentality which effectively positions women as the marginalized "other." At the same, there is a plurality of responses among the studied group of scholars, ranging from a competitive compliance to critical resistance. As reported in other studies, such ambivalence creates an increasingly fragile sense of self (Knights and Clarke, 2014) and is part of the dynamics in which academic subjectivities are shaped (Gill, 2014).

These observations strongly relate to the casualization of academic work and its impact on the construction of academic identities (Horak, 2004; Leišytė, 2016). While temporalization and uncertainty shapes academic subjectivities across academia (Burneva, 2022; Gill, 2016), this is particularly the case for early career academics working on temporary contracts. In two interrelated studies of younger academics in the United Kingdom, Archer (2008a, 2008b) argues that their construction of professional identities are deeply shaped by the opportunity of "becoming" and the threat of "unbecoming." Because of this particular form of vulnerability, junior academics are pushed to an understanding of themselves in neoliberal terms, generating tensions between personal commitments and dominant constructions of what makes a "good" academic. Finding "themselves unwittingly implicated within some of the [neoliberal] practices that they sought to resist" (Archer, 2008a: 282), junior scholars construct increasingly conflicting identities (Bristow et al., 2017), which are amplified through matrices of ethnicity, social class, gender, and age (Bozzon et al., 2018). Focusing on how the experiences of younger scholars relate to the notion of "success" and "authenticity," Archer (2008b: 401) shows how aspects of social division shape the extent to which scholars might "inhabit identities of success/authenticity with any sense of performance or legitimacy." Hence, what the subjectivation perspective emphasizes is both the production of subject positions in accordance with dominant discourses and how such positions might increase already existing patterns of inequalities within academia.

Identity as a Symbolic Resource in Career-Making

The three perspectives above capture different aspects of why academic identities have become an important site to study. Under the impact of a much changed academic landscape, they highlight conflicts between internal and external values (traditionalism), the polarization of identity positions within the academic profession (fragmentation), and the constrained relationship between professional and personal identities as

shaped by the power of discourse (subjectivation). However, these three perspectives say little about how identity matters in academic career-making. This is partly because of their emphasis on identity construction as an outcome of change. While being informed by these understandings, this thesis extends the literature on academic identities by investigating identity as a symbolic resource that is performed. Rather than an outcome of change, this is to accentuate identity as a kind of career capital. Studies of other "status markets" – such as art, film, music, and writing – have drawn attention to how identities constitute important resources in the pursuit of recognition and reward (see e.g. Mao and Shen, 2020). I argue that this holds true for academics as well. Hence, I explore identity as a symbolic resource that is performed: as something scholars do and work upon when trying to advance in their careers. Shaped through the awarding status of those who perform well, this involves different ways in which early career academics manage their identities according to the perceived rules of recognition. By empirically investigating how this is accomplished through different patterns of identity talk, the aim is to enhance our understanding of the interplay between valuation and identity formation in academic life.

Setting the Scene

In different ways, the previous chapters have denoted the importance of context. Academic work and careers take place within certain institutional and organizational settings, which are shaped by disciplinary boundaries and vocational principles as well as national career systems and labor markets. The following describes and situates the empirical settings in which I have explored my research questions. First, I provide an overview of the Swedish system of higher education, with a particular focus on career structures and opportunities for young faculty. Second, based upon a brief reflection of the concept of "disciplines," I present the disciplines under study – political science and history – and discuss their position in Swedish academia. In the last section, I consider what distinguishes the respondents and their social settings, and how casing allows for different levels of analysis. The discussion in this chapter relies on several sources, including official documents, evaluation reports, bibliometric analyses, and interviews. To maintain anonymity, I do not cite these sources directly when concerning the specific departments that are part of the study.

Career Structures and Temporariness in Swedish Academia

The core of the Swedish higher education system is made up of sixteen public and two private universities, as well as fifteen public and two private university colleges.[5] While many of these institutions have the right to award doctoral degrees, the traditional universities are more research-oriented and may award doctoral degrees in many academic fields. The younger institutions are usually smaller and more education-oriented, with limited rights granting doctoral degrees. Accordingly, the Swedish system is described as "binary rather than a unified system" (Frølich et al., 2018: 34). Furthermore, Swedish academia is characterized by a rather ambiguous national career system. What initially looks like a straight-forward career path – starting with a PhD position to a merit position, then to a permanent position as associate professor, which in the end would qualify one for a position as professor – is less clear-cut in reality. Due to several reforms opting for a deregulation of higher education institutions, there is no central career system for faculty and institutions are provided with considerable freedom regarding employment structures and positions (Pinheiro et al., 2019). This means that there is considerable "variation in career systems and the use, content, and existence of different positions and titles" – both between and within institutions (Frølich et al., 2018: 34). Which obligations and working tasks one has does not depend on the name of their position but how their position is funded. At the same department, we find lecturers with nearly no time for research and lectures with barely no teaching duties (Benner, 2016). In this regard, the move from block funding to competitive third-party funding has deeply influenced the conditions for academic careers and the relationship between professional roles and working tasks.

Like many European countries during the last three decades, Swedish universities have "experienced continuous reduction in block grant allocations from the state in favor of larger shares of competitive project-based funding" (Roumbanis, 2019: 200). Today, approximately 55 percent of the government's investments in research are delivered through external funding agencies. In Norway, the corresponding figure is around 30 percent (Frølich et al., 2018). Additionally, Swedish scholars are encouraged to compete for funding from the private non-profit sector – accounting for 10 percent of research and development expenditure in Swedish higher education in 2015 – as well as from more prestigious international funders such as the European Research Council. A significant consequence of organizing research in this way is that external funding has shifted from being an additional funding source to being the main source. By affecting who has the right to research time, project-based funding shapes authority relations in research (Krog Lind et al., 2016) and the division of labor within departments (Benner, 2016). Crucially, it structures academic careers and how prestige and worth

[5] Five of these are university colleges of art (four public and one private).

are attributed to people, practices, and institutions (Bloch et al., 2014; Edlund and Lammi, 2022).

While this development places new demands on all scholars, early career academics are among those most heavily affected. Not least, this is because of increasing competition for funding and permanent positions as well as the extension of time junior scholars need to work on temporary contracts. As mentioned above, the rise of project funding has resulted in a substantial growth of temporary positions, increasing the length of the temporary career phase as well as the frequency of job market participation among early career academics (Franssen and de Rijcke, 2019). In 2020, the share of higher education staff on temporary contracts was close to 30 percent, which is significantly higher than in the overall Swedish labor market where the equivalent share is 14.7 percent (Fagerlind Ståhl, 2021: 6). In reality, the numbers for temporary positions in academia are likely to be even higher as the statistics do not include postdocs financed through a stipend, which is estimated to be around 20 percent of all postdocs in Sweden (Skarsgård, 2022). Furthermore, individuals who are employed as "researchers" (see Figure 2) are often someone who have either obtained external funding or are employed in someone else's externally funded project. As soon as the funding comes to an end, they are dismissed with reference to labor shortage (Fagerlind Ståhl, 2021).

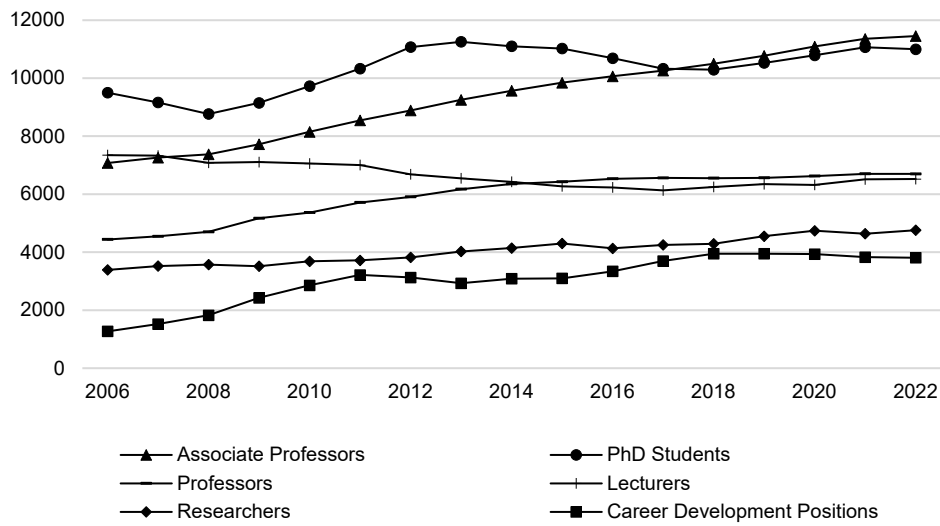

Figure 2. Development of researching and teaching staff as well as doctoral students (individuals) between 2006 and 2022. Source: Swedish Higher Education Authority, Open Data.

Currently, there are three different career development positions in Swedish academia, all of which are based on temporary contracts. Figure 3 shows that *postdoc* is by far the most common position, followed by *assistant professor*. The third position, *postdoctoral research fellowship,* which is a four-year position as research assistant, is currently being

phased out and replaced. While postdocs are financed through an employment contract that is usually limited to two years of full-time research, the assistant professorship is the Swedish equivalent of the US tenure track system.[6] The position must be applied for within five years of obtaining a PhD and comes with institution-specific percentages of research and teaching. The contract is limited to four years and when it expires, the assistant professor has the right to apply for promotion to associate professor; this option is not given to postdocs.

Since 2006, the category of career development positions has seen the steepest increase of all categories of academic staff, growing by over 300 percent. Again, this does not include postdocs on stipends nor individuals in the category of "researchers" who work on temporary contracts. Since there are restrictions on when PhD graduates are allowed to apply for postdocs and assistant professorships, at the same time as the transition phase between PhD completion and finding stable employment are extended (Swedish Research Council, 2015), this category is likely to hold a great number of early career academics. Bearing evidence of the current precarization of Swedish academia, this is a category that includes two contrasting groups of scholars: those who have obtained external funding for full-time research and those who work as "temporary lecturers" and have little or no time for research.

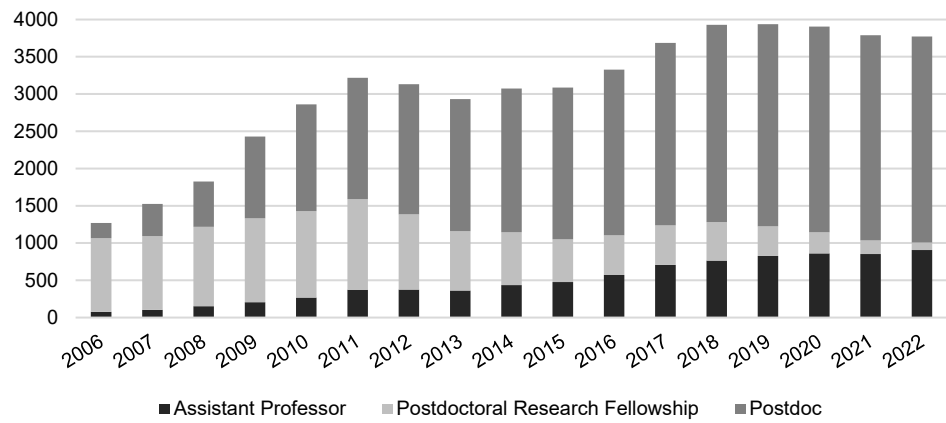

Figure 3. Amount of career development positions (individuals), sorted by type of position, between 2006 and 2022. Source: Swedish Higher Education Authority, Open Data.

Considering that a high dependance on project-based funding increases the differentiation between research and teaching tasks, and research intensive and teaching intensive career scripts (Franssen and de Rijcke, 2019), there are important gender differences

[6] This position, which in Swedish is called "biträdande lektor," can be translated to *assistant professor* as well as *associate senior lecturer*.

that shape an academic's early career. Comparing the pace and patterns of career development between three groups of PhD holders (from 1995/96, 2002/03, and 2008/09), a report from the Swedish Research Council (2015) found that the early cohort were characterized by a significantly slower career pace for women. This was evident for the employment of lectureships as well as obtaining professorship. Yet, career development has generally progressed more slowly in the latter cohorts. This is because the pace among men has slowed down, becoming more similar to that of women. At the same time, partly new gendered patterns are observed. Whereas the number of men and women obtaining a PhD degree has started to converge in recent years, the opposite is true for the appointment of postdocs (see Figure 4). Meanwhile, an increasing percentage of women hold lectureships. This is "partly due to the fact that research domains with a high proportion of lectureships, such as the social sciences, employ the highest percentage of women, but is also due to differences within research domains, such as the humanities and medicine" (Swedish Research Council, 2015: 5). In terms of gendered division of academic labor, the report suggests "that women tend to teach, while men tend to do research."

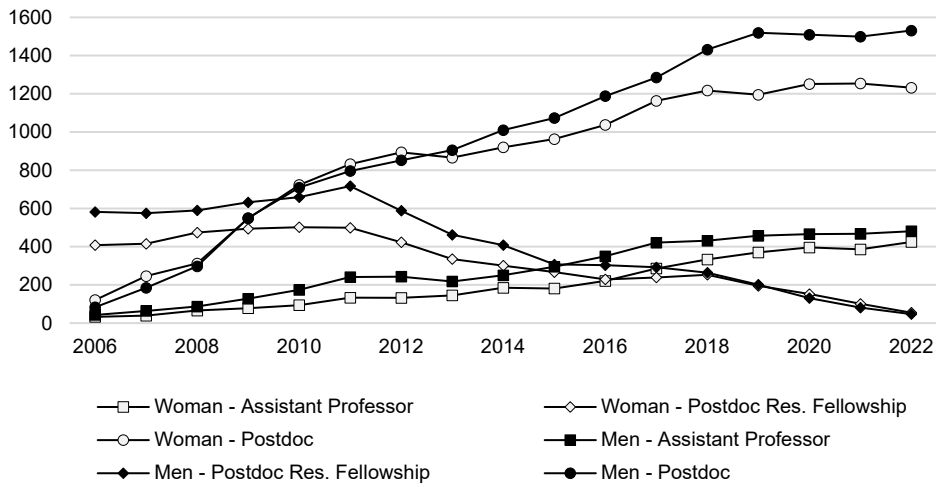

Figure 4. Development of assistant professors, postdoctoral research fellowships, and postdocs (individuals), sorted by gender, between 2006 and 2022. Source: Swedish Higher Education Authority, Open Data.

This was confirmed in a latter report by the Swedish Higher Education Authority (Dryler et al., 2022) demonstrating that, within ten years of obtaining a PhD degree, women were more often than men permanently employed as lecturers. This was particularly evident in the social sciences and humanities. However, the opposite pattern was observed for the appointment of professorship. Moreover, the greatest gender difference was observed among those who had obtained their PhD before the age of 30. Within

this group, the share of men being employed as assistant professors, and later on as professors, was considerably higher, underlining how academic careers are shaped by gender and family formation (Bozzon et al. 2018).

In combination with the lack of a common national career system, the growing dependence on competitive project-based funding means that career paths for Swedish scholars "have become both narrower and less clear" (Roumbanis, 2019: 199). Whereas the postdoc phase is viewed as a bottleneck in the system (Frølich et al., 2018), what working tasks this phase actually contains and how it is funded varies greatly. As it generally takes seven to twelve years for junior scholars in Sweden to reach a tenured position (Swedish Research Council, 2015), the early career is often a pie-like arrangement with multiple funding sources. In the social sciences and humanities, these long series of fixed-term contracts tend to involve both research and teaching. Still, because the competition is fierce and the number of career-development positions are few,[7] career advancement is highly dependent on individuals' success in the funding market (Öquist and Benner, 2012). This is particularly true for early career academics at more prestigious research-intensive universities, such as the respondents in this study, where the competitive dynamics are intensified by actors on international academic labor markets.

Disciplinary Cultures and the Case of Political Science and History

Some general contours of the Swedish academic career landscape have been sketched out above. Due to the function of research fields as reputational economies and the strong departmental structure of academia, academic careers also take place within more specific institutional settings and disciplinary cultures that see great variation. For example, in the previous section, we learned that disciplines within the social sciences and humanities are generally more teaching intensive than their counterparts in the medical and natural sciences. This shapes career opportunities and gendered trajectories. We also see variation between and within the social sciences and humanities. Comparing the number of career-development positions since 2001, the increase in the social sciences (450 percent) is more than double that in the humanities (190 percent).[8] Still, the growth is unevenly distributed between disciplines, reflecting how career conditions differ across the Swedish university field.

The concept of *disciplines* is commonly used to denote particular areas of knowledge, research, and education. Etymologically, the concept entails a tension between the

[7] For example, among those who obtained a PhD between 2013 and 2015, only 7.45 percent in the social sciences and 2.02 percent in the humanities had been employed as an assistant professor within six years after PhD completion (Dryler et al., 2022).

[8] However, stipends – not visible in the statistics – are more common in the humanities than the social sciences.

social aspect of discipline (as followers) and the content of knowledge (doctrines), pointing to the many ways the concept might be interpreted and applied. In the context of studying academic careers, my understanding of the concept is close to that of Hammarfelt (2020) who argues that disciplines are primarily to be understood in relation to the institutional and organizational features they refer to. This is to emphasize the role played by departments, graduate training, conferences, journals, and labor markets in defining disciplines. Involving historical narratives and traditions (Sugimoto and Weingart 2015), as well as conventions for how status and rewards are distributed (Lenoir 1997), disciplines are closely related to the concept of "professions" (Abbott 1988). Like professions, disciplines are social systems that rely upon demarcation and control (Gyeryn 1999). By drawing boundaries towards others, disciplinary identities and ideals are enacted, shaping the socialization of PhD students (Hylmö, 2018), the inclusion or exclusion of scholars in hiring decisions (Hammarfelt, 2017), as well as the interpretation and mobilization of evaluative criteria more broadly (Guetzkow et al., 2004).

There is variation in what characterizes academic disciplines and the borders surrounding them. Seeking to examine the significance of disciplines within the realms of research and higher education, Becher and Trowler (2001: 35-39) distinguish between *soft/hard* and *pure/applied* research. Whereas pure science (including soft disciplines such as history and political science, and hard disciplines such as physics) is generally self-regulating regarding the use of results, applied science (such as engineering or medicine) is open to influence from other arenas and actors. In addition, Becher and Trowler (2001: 184-185) use the conceptual pairs of *urban/rural* and *convergent/divergent* to reflect upon how densely inhabited a discipline or a research field is and to what degree standards and procedures are agreed upon. Enforced by the importance of scientific elites as guiding examples, convergent fields are characterized by a high level of agreement. In contrast, divergent fields depend less upon the praxis of scientific elites and the degree to which standards and procedures are agreed upon is generally low. Consequently, individual scholars within this latter category – such as many social science and humanities disciplines – have more freedom, and uncertainty, in choosing problems and methods. Yet, the lack of internal agreement also means that the set of criteria for assessing scholars and their contribution is rather loose, at least in comparison to the natural sciences (Whitley, 2000). This increases the importance of disciplinary boundaries to control assessment procedures, while at the same time making them more sensitive to developments outside of their discipline (Åström and Hammarfelt, 2019).

Although presented as means of making distinctions, Becher and Trowler underline that variations within disciplines can be as large as the differences between them. Thus, the variables – soft/hard, pure/applied, urban/rural, and convergent/divergent – are to be understood as scales rather than fixed categories. This is evident when taking communication practices into account. Shaped by its overall organization, the style, language, routines, and formats generally differ between disciplines that are urban and hard (such as physics) and those that are rural and soft (such as history). While

researchers in the former category tend to use highly specialized language and almost exclusively publish together with colleagues in scientific journals, those in the latter category more often write alone, emphasizing literary qualities connected to publishing monographs in local languages. Nevertheless, variation is to be found within single disciplines as well. For example, whereas political science in Sweden may be characterized as pure, rural, and soft, parts of the discipline are more applied, urban, and hard than others. The writing and publishing practices, as well as the epistemological homogeneity, amongst quantitively oriented political scientists differ from their qualitatively oriented peers. In terms of language use, the same applies for political scientists working in the field of domestic public policy and those who work in the field of international relations. In history, the scales are not as wide-ranging – partly because of the division between "history" and "economic history" in Swedish academia – but variety exists. For example, scholars focusing on the modern history of Sweden write in Swedish more often than those working in the field of global history who more often communicate their results in English.

The concepts provided by Becher and Trowler describe differences between the sciences fairly well, but more fine-grained variances between and within disciplinary sites are not as easily captured. In particular, the conceptual pairs say little about the position of disciplines within wider evaluative landscapes – an important condition for both knowledge production and career-making. Indeed, one of the main reasons for choosing to study early career academics in political science and history is that, as representatives for the social sciences and humanities in Sweden, they have often been pictured as "the other" in research policy. Under the impact of internationalization, the strive for "excellence," and an increasing usage of bibliometric measurements in research evaluation, the dissimilar publication patterns and high dependence on local contexts characterizing these disciplines have been deemed problematic (see e.g. Hicks, 2004, 2012). In Swedish research policy, the ambition to "internationalize" and "speed up" the social sciences and humanities by providing incentives for increased output and publishing peer-review international publications has been explicit (see e.g., Swedish Government Official Reports Serie, 2007). As the natural sciences have tended to serve as a role model for how to conduct and evaluate research, social scientists and humanists have been left frustrated, causing debates about how to properly define value and merit as well as how to measure it (Nelhans, 2013). In particular, this has involved discussions on the value of non-English publications (Björkman, 2015) and the role and impact of the humanities and social sciences in terms of societal and political influence (Östling et al., 2016; Salö, 2021). Notwithstanding, changes in publication patterns (Hammarfelt and de Rijcke, 2015) and the emergence of new career investment strategies (Salö, 2017) suggest that the social sciences and humanities have not been unaffected. Rather, shifts in the ways in which academic careers are structured and evaluated have generated tensions between rivalling value systems and junior scholars are continuously

mentioned as those most strongly affected by these dynamics (Haddow and Hammarfelt, 2019).[9]

With this in mind, political science and history were deliberately chosen because of how they converge and diverge in meaningful ways. In fact, having their roots in classic humanistic-historical traditions, the two disciplines emerged as a joint field of study in Sweden, focusing primarily on the political history of the state (Odén, 1991; Ruin, 2003). Gradually separated in the 1950s and 1960s, both disciplines developed perspectives, work models, and empirical strategies considered specific for the social sciences and the humanities, respectively. For political science, this meant a growing dependence on quantitative methods and an overall change in temporal perspective, from the past to the present (Nilsson, 2009: 110-113). For history, this involved negotiations of the role of "evidence" and "validity" in scholarly enquiry (Torstendahl, 2017). Although the discipline of history is sometimes described as straddling the border between the social sciences and humanities (see e.g., Lamont, 2009: 79-86), the division between history and economic history in Sweden, as well as the tradition of being located at the faculty of humanities, have generally fostered a distinctive humanistic identity among Swedish historians.

Due to the expansion of higher education in Sweden during the second half of the twentieth century, both history and political science were the object of specialization and differentiation. The establishment of new fields such as global history, microhistory, and women's history (Torstendahl, 2017) as well as comparative politics, international relations, and political communication (Ruin, 2003), led to a heterogenization of the disciplines. Still, the dependence on local language, contexts, and audiences largely remained. This is not only because the Swedish context often served – and still does – as a central empirical site to study, but also because the disciplinary identity of political scientists and historians have been, and still are, shaped by their close connection to the surrounding society. In terms of newspaper articles, interviews, or public talks, the visibility of political scientists and historians is generally high. For political science, political representatives and citizens serve as natural audiences and government agencies, the Swedish Parliament, and municipalities are part of a non-academic labor market. For history, the lines between academic and non-academic publishing are somewhat unclear as an interested public constitutes a significant audience that brings legitimation to the field. To some extent, this has retained the importance of Swedish in communication practices.

The domestic perspective is still a central part of both disciplines. However, the internalization of political science over the past two or three decades has meant that research on various aspects and regions beyond Sweden has grown considerably. Crucially, this development has given rise to a gradual shift in publication practices: from

[9] Again, it is important not to downplay the internal differences between social science and humanities disciplines (Verleysen and Weeren, 2017). While often pulled together in research policy, there is great variation in terms of traditions, methods, boundaries, and practices.

Swedish to English, from monographs to journal articles, and from single- to co-authored publications. When comparing two international reviews of Swedish political science, it is striking that whereas political scientists in 2002 were urged to publish more in other tongues than their own (Swedish Research Council, 2002) the discipline is considered internationally prominent with regard to quality standards and publication practices in 2021(Swedish Research Council, 2021). Overall, the discipline is described as heterogenous, well established at Swedish higher education institutions, and in good health. This is reflected in a steady number of awarded PhDs between 2000 and 2022 (see Figure 5). In particular, the larger and more well-established departments at Swedish universities have been singled out as "excellent" in terms of the quality of research, their societal engagement, and their ability to obtain external funding (Swedish Research Council, 2021). Still, the internal variety should not be underestimated. In Sweden, as elsewhere (Shapiro, 2002), the discipline is characterized by a qualitative-quantitative divide. This divide relates to variations in working routines and publishing practices, but also the question of whether or not political science should strive for the level of epistemic consensus found in fields such as economics (Lamont, 2009: 96). Consequently, how to interpret disciplinary standards and evaluative criteria is not self-evident.

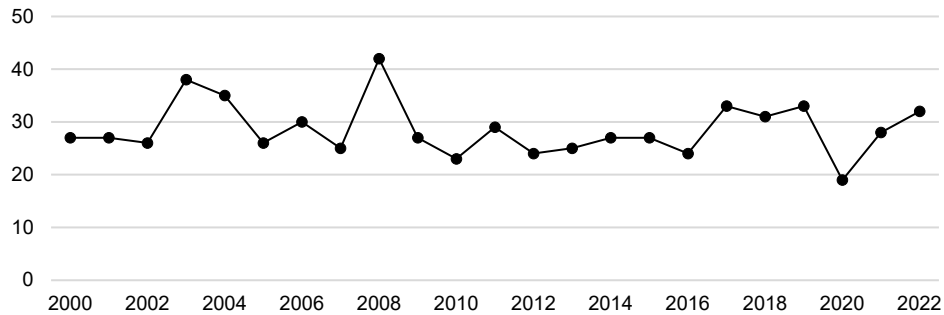

Figure 5. Yearly completion rates of PhDs in political science between 2000 and 2022. Source: Swedish Higher Education Authority, Open Data.

The two political science departments (hereafter PS1 and PS2) included in this study capture the breadth of the discipline and include both qualitatively and quantitatively oriented scholars. At both departments, early career academics were generally employed as postdocs or researchers, with some teaching responsibility. Assistant professors were rare, but existed. Whereas collaborative research groups working in joint projects were considered a standard, the size of research groups and the extent to which they influenced the organizational structure of the departments differed. At PS1, junior scholars tended to work both individually and collaboratively. The research groups were usually rather small and dependent on short-term projects connected to specific grants. At PS2,

junior scholars more often worked in larger and formalized research groups or centers. Because these were not only linked to a specific grant, but a shared epistemic focus and developed infrastructures for research work – such as joint datasets, budgets, practices for co-authoring, seminars, events, and informal gatherings – these groups or centers shaped the organizational structures and working routines at the department to a greater extent.

Like political science, the discipline of history is well established at Swedish higher education institutions and generally described as being in good health. The discipline has experienced significant expansion in its scope over the last thirty to forty years, driven by the emergence of new subfields (Torstendahl, 2017). Interestingly, this thematic broadening has been combined with a growing dominance of a cultural historical perspective (Ågren, 2014). Because of the division between history and economic history, the discipline relies heavily on qualitative methods. Since working routines and publishing practices are very much oriented towards the individual, larger collaborative projects are rare. Overall, it is telling that no striking differences between the three history departments (hereafter H1, H2, and H3) were identified. If any, H1 were slightly more successful at attracting external funding, meaning that they had a particularly strong position in terms of research intensity and career-development positions. Nevertheless, all three departments were characterized by a large variety in terms of how early career academics were funded, ranging from a few but growing numbers of postdoc positions to researchers having obtained grants, to a mixture of teaching vacancies and stipends of various sizes. None of the respondents held a position as an assistant professor.

If the praxes for doing and valuing research in political science have adapted to what is regarded as "international standards," the discipline of history has only recently started to adapt to this trend (Salö, 2017). Whereas the internationalization of the discipline has spurred new perspectives and established new networks of scholars (Larsson Heidenblad, 2021), it has also provoked a current debate within the field where issues such as publishing preferences (Hammarfelt and de Rijcke, 2015), publication language (Salö, 2017), and choice of dissertation form are discussed (Jezierski, 2016). In particular, some perceive that disciplinary standards associated with doing careful archival work and the central position of the Swedish monograph are threatened. It is interesting to relate these current debates in the Swedish history field to the discipline having been described internationally as "consensual" about what constitutes quality and how to recognize it (Lamont, 2009: 79-86). Moreover, the field shows a decline in PhDs granted between 2000 and 2022 (see Figure 5). Of course, figures on completion rates of PhDs "are not a conclusive indicator of the vitality or status of fields." Yet, by highlighting "a constellation of conditions that [potentially] sustain – or fragment – disciplinary consensus," PhD rates are likely to influence the reproduction of disciplines (Lamont, 2009: 59).

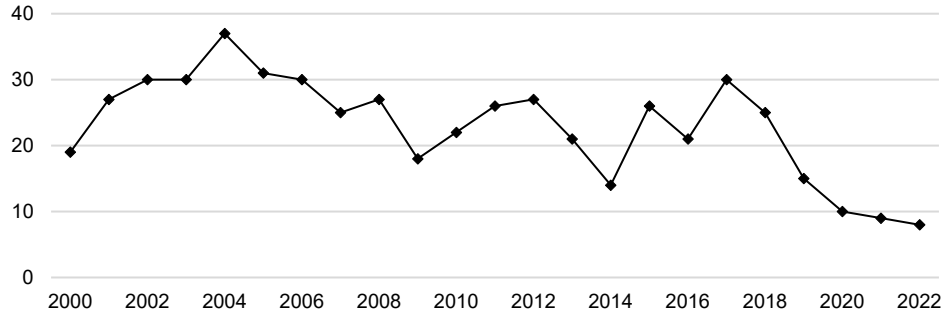

Figure 6. Yearly completion rates of PhDs in history between 2000 and 2022. Source: Swedish Higher Education Authority, Open Data.

Empirical Settings: What are they a Case of?

To summarize, political science and history in Sweden are two broad and heterogenous disciplines, which rely on a variety of disparate research tools, methodologies, and approaches. To some extent, they both depend on local contexts and non-academic audiences. As high-status disciplines within the social sciences and humanities, the competition for funding and positions is fierce. Consequently, early career academics in these disciplines tend to work on temporary contracts for a relatively long period of time, relying heavily on external funding. Due to outside pressure and changing framework conditions, both disciplines are characterized by ongoing negotiations about what makes up ideal career trajectories and hierarchies of worth. Still, their praxes for doing and valuing research also diverge in meaningful ways, positioning them differently in the current evaluative landscapes.

More specifically, what are these empirical settings a case of? Because the case study method always risks reifying or naturalizing the unit of analysis, this question is important. It pushes the researcher to reflect upon the specificities of the group(s) under study and what possibilities and limitations these features bring to the research process.

One way of casing the empirical settings is to compare the two disciplinary cultures under study (as done in Article I). This involves focusing on the conventions, values, and boundaries that make up the organizational and interactional settings of political science and history. Such a perspective involves how the respondents make sense of their discipline and how they enact or dispute disciplinary standards. Because of the high level of heterogeneity characterizing political science and history, comparative observation may also be made between and within disciplinary sites (as done in Article III). By highlighting contextual factors such as departments and research groups, this form of casing is more sensitive to local variations.

Whereas I have explored my research questions in two disciplines and five departments, the empirical settings share some important characteristics. All of the studied

departments are located at research-intensive universities. These universities and departments are among the top-ranked higher education institution in Sweden. As demonstrated previously in this chapter, such characteristics shape the competitive dynamics and structures of academic careers in certain ways. Additionally, all of the scholars I interviewed aspired to continue with an academic career. For many of them, this not only meant that "dropping out" was considered a failure and that alternative careers outside of academia were seldom considered, but also that many of them had the ambition of continuing to work at highly ranked, research-intensive universities. Some perceived moving to a university college a disappointment or a dead-end. Thus, in addition to disciplines and departments, it is possible to case the study as an investigation of how early career academics at research-intensive universities navigate evaluative landscapes (as done in Article II). Including junior scholars at university colleges would undeniably have broadened the study of academic career-making. However, top-ranked higher education institutions tend be highly normative for the rest of the field, which makes them important sites to study. Furthermore, these universities and departments are peculiar social settings. On one hand, they obtain a high degree of autonomy given their social status in the Swedish higher education system. On the other hand, because they are devoted to keeping their top position within international university hierarchies, they are also receptive to what is happening around them. These contrasting features – autonomy and dependency – shape the dynamics of (e)valuation in interesting ways.

In accordance with this contextualizing chapter, it is possible to case the empirical settings and the respondents in at least three different ways, based on disciplinary cultures, the local orders of departments and groups, and their position as aspiring scholars at top-ranked higher education settings. Yet, the answer to the question "what is this a case of?" does not only concern empirical casing possibilities. The question is more abstract in the sense that a case study, regardless of its internal divisions, is always a case of a broader social phenomena and/or social process. To figure that puzzle out, we need to turn to theory.

Chapter Three

Theory

The aim of this chapter is to elaborate a theoretical approach according to which the process of navigating evaluative landscapes can be explored and understood. By and large, I draw upon two paradigms from sociology – pragmatism and symbolic interactionism – that are concerned with social life and social order as a collective, practical accomplishment. This means focusing attention on the relational character of being in a meaningful world (Schütz, 1967) and how situations and their social actors create structures of interpretation, coordination, and performance (Goffman, 1974). This approach takes individuals and groups seriously in that it rejects any form of systematic reductionism in which the "representation of the social world" cannot "account for the experience of social actors themselves" (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999: 364). Concerned with the realities of early career academics as they unfold in practice, the thesis focuses attention to "the competing webs of meaning" they "spin to make sense of their everyday activities" and how they relate to, and negotiate, frameworks that extends their personal epistemic schemas into shared understandings (Lamont, 2009: 17). This is not to downplay the importance of structures or power. Rather, it is a perspective that acknowledges that while such instances do shape actions and identities, "that shaping operates through the understandings and preferences of social actors" (Fine, 2012: 2. See also: Martin, 2011).

This chapter discusses the theoretical underpinnings of the dissertation in a way that is not possible in the individual articles. The primary focus is not on the specific concepts developed in each article, but on the theoretical issues they jointly engage with. Such a discussion will effectively outline the sociological perspective that has functioned as the foundation of the research process. The first section discusses valuation and evaluation as general social processes. Informed by pragmatism, (e)valuation is understood as social practice embedded in culture and with ordering effects. The second section develops this perspective further by drawing upon the concepts of uncertainty and worth, engaging with issues stemming from the coexistence of different orders of worth and multiple evaluative principles. The third and final section draws together the discussion on valuation as social practice with the concept of evaluative landscapes. By connecting negotiations of worth to the relational processes in which people experience and make sense of each other and the world they share, a more explicit pragmatist-phenomenological perspective is elaborated.

Valuation and Evaluation as Social Practice

Thus far, the concepts of valuation (giving worth or value) and evaluation (assessing how an entity attains a certain type of worth or value) have been discussed exclusively in relation to the empirical settings of the thesis; that is, the world of academia. However, to consider them as social practice – or indeed, basic social processes (Lamont, 2012) – implies that their relevance succeeds this domain and requires us to take a step back, engaging with theories of (e)valuation from a more general standpoint.

Throughout the course of our everyday lives, we are constantly confronted with the issue of what counts. In the face of having to decide between "incommensurable frameworks" – which book to buy, what wine to drink, how to prioritize between work, career, family, and friends – "we ask ourselves what counts, what is valuable, and by what measures" (Stark 2011: 6). Moreover, valuations appear to be performed almost everywhere. From hotels, schoolchildren, and music to universities, industries, and countries, there are few instances in our social world that are not subject to a wide variety of valuations according to which notions as disparate as performance, aesthetics, and wealth are defined and assessed. Valuation is undeniably an engaging social practice and its outcomes regularly come to matter. Ratings and rankings inform film viewer decisions (Bialecki et al., 2017) and how quality is estimated and acted upon in school choice (Zanten, 2013). Valuations through economic forecasts continuously generate activity among investors and consumers in the present (Beckert, 2016) and the valuation and ranking of academics ultimately decide who gets a research grant (Langfeldt, 2001) or a position (Hammarfelt, 2017). Thus, valuations are part of defining and ordering the social world, shaping how actors experience and participate within it (Helgesson and Muniesa, 2013).

In the sociology of valuation and evaluation, many perspectives are used to explore "how value is produced, diffused, assessed, and institutionalized across a range of settings" (Lamont, 2012: 213). Still, a common denominator is to theorize valuation as social practice; that is, to consider it an outcome of more or less organized social work which includes a wide range of actors, activities, and arrangements that contributes to "making things valuable" (Kornberger et al., 2015). But what does *making* things valuable really mean? On the most basic level, it means acknowledging that neither the value of something nor the values of someone are an intrinsic property or some kind of natural state. Instead, value is a quality that must be performed. In his seminal works on valuation, Dewey (1939) was one of the first to consider *value* as a verb – "to value." On one hand, he pointed to how common speech exhibits a double usage of "valuing" and "valuation" as they are employed "to designate both *prizing*, in the sense of holding precious, dear" and "*appraising* in the sense of putting a value upon, assigning value to" (Dewey, 1939: 5, italics added). On the other hand, he also underlined that valuations are bound by context; they take place in situations which are felt by the participants and must be recognizable to others in order to have effect (Dewey, 1915). This is to say that for valuation, "not only do people's view matter; who these people are matters,

too." Conceptualized in terms of identity, "each has more or less status" (Aspers, 2018: 141). Hence, what we learn from Dewey is that valuation is an embedded activity that is temporally and spatially located (Hutter and Stark, 2015). It involves the interplay between personal preferences and emotional states (how people personally like something and hold it dear) and the conditions of the valued object itself and its relation to other things (for example, money or a standard). In this pragmatist sense, valuation is tackled "as an action" (Muniesa, 2011: 26).

From this perspective, valuing is a process in which practices of valuation operate, *making* things valuable (Helgesson and Muniesa, 2013). If value is not naturally given, but the outcome of collective processes in which entities "become seen as possessing certain traits and occupying a specific position in relation to other" entities, valuation shapes social reality in different ways (Musselin and Beckert, 2013: 1). In an attempt to elaborate this insight into a comparative sociological perspective, Lamont (2012) extends the work of Dewey by analyzing valuation and evaluation as basic social processes. In accordance with the pragmatist perspective, she focuses on (e)valuation as it "happens not inside the mind of an individual" but "in practices and experiences, in what people spend their time doing, through latent or explicit dialogues with specific generalized others" (Lamont, 2012: 215). She also clarifies on the grounds upon which (e)valuation may be regarded as a social and cultural process. First, practices of establishing value require *intersubjective agreement/disagreement* on a set of evaluative criteria or referents against which an entity is compared. In academia, this may consist of disciplinary conceptions of good and bad science or notions of ideal career trajectories. Second, (e)valuation requires *negotiations* about what criteria to use, how to interpret these criteria, and who can legitimately do so. Third, establishing value entails a *relational* process in which entities are distinguished and compared. Across all these levels, power struggles, boundary work, and identity potentially play important roles (see e.g., Hamann, 2016; Lamont, 2009).

More specifically, Lamont (2012: 216) considers two subprocesses of (e)valuation that contributes to the ordering of social life. At a minimum, (e)valuation requires *categorization*;[10] that is, determining in which group an object, a person, or a certain practice under consideration belongs. To some extent, this is a phenomenological insight: valuation contains the process of how entities enter the social world of meaning as they must be recognized as *something* (Hutter and Stark, 2015). For example, research has shown that evaluations often function as a form of assisted sense making in organizations. To identify an entity in order to evaluate, it must be interpreted and represented (Dahler-Larsen, 2012: 13). The criteria used in evaluations helps to define both the entity under consideration as well as the concept it claims to measure, including the hierarchical relationship to other entities, concepts, and occurrences within the same

[10] Categorization dynamics include "classification, commensuration, equivalence, signaling, and standardization" (Lamont, 2012: 214-215).

social space (Dahler-Larsen, 2014). In this regard, processes of categorization are part of ordering reality, rendering experience meaningful (Zerubavel, 1996). Furthermore, if categories are part of establishing perceptions of value, they require *legitimation*[11] in order to be socially effective (Lamont, 2012). That is, both the category and value of an entity needs to be justified in order for it to be recognized by others. This points to the contested nature of both categories and value. When institutionalized, they exist as devices that create order and normative reference points, allowing for the routinization and coordination of (inter)actions (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1983). At the same time, relying on intersubjective agreements that are more or less fragile, categories and value definitions must be continuously interpreted and performed by social actors. Like all institutions, categories and values "are not in themselves strong and efficient, but gain in strength and efficiency as actors conform to them" (Musselin and Beckert, 2013: 13; see also Fine, 2012). In many situations, this provides a challenge since multiple categories and definitions of value operates simultaneously (Stark, 2009). As such, (e)valuations are sites of tensions, risk, and uncertainty; that is, sites in need of ongoing negotiations.

From Orders of Worth to Multiple Evaluative Principles

In this thesis, the primary focus is not the institutions in which academic evaluations are embedded. Rather, I am concerned with experiences and practices of valuation and how these connects to how early career academics make sense of themselves and their world. Here, I draw on insights from pragmatist perspectives in economic sociology and their focus on the coordination of actions in situations of evaluation (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006; Stark, 2009. See also Karpik, 2010). This perspective is characterized by a rejection of the dichotomy between value (economy) and values (social relations in which economies are embedded), as made famous in Parson's Pact between economists and sociologists.[12] Instead, value and values are combined in the concept of *worth*. With its double connotation to economic good and moral good, the notion of worth "signals concern with fundamental problems of value while recognizing that all economies have a moral component" (Stark, 2009: 7). Under the influence of Dewey's perception of valuation as situated action, we embark here on an analysis of worth that focuses on ongoing *processes of valuation*. This is an approach in which "value and

[11] Legitimation dynamics include "the contestation and negotiation of value as well as its diffusion, stabilization, ritualization, consecration, and institutionalization" (Lamont, 2012: 215).

[12] In the gloss of Stark (2007: 2), this pact involved a division between the study of value (economists) and values (sociologists), between making claims on the economy (economists) and on the social relations in which economies are embedded (sociologists).

values, the intellectual and emotive, valuation and the evaluative" are integrated in an understanding of worth that emphasizes the experience of social actors and their capacity for interpretation and practical engagements (Stark, 2009: 9).

If there is no single way of categorizing entities and demonstrating their worth, but multiple principles of categorization and valuation, we are confronted with the problem of uncertainty and how to justify our actions in relation to others. In short, this is the starting point of Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) sociological theory of value in which they argue that a modern economy is not a single social order but contains multiple *orders of worth*. They use this concept to point to the different principles that people appeal to, knowingly or unknowingly, when making sense of a situation and justifying their actions. Orders of worth cuts across both categorization and legitimation as they refer to "the systems of equivalences that allow actors engaged in interactions to interpret and qualify the situation they are in and to coordinate their activities based on a common appraisal" (Musselin and Beckert, 2013: 12). More specifically, Boltanski and Thévenot (2006: 153-158) argue that justification falls into six logics, all of which comprise a distinctive order of worth: *market*, *industrial*, *civic*, *domestic*, *inspiration*, and *fame*. Each order is a convention that provides a collective grammar according to which people, objects, and practices can be qualified. As such, orders of worth anchor experiences and expectations in shared knowledge, facilitating the justification and coordination of action.

However, because each order construct different criteria of judgment, they offer conflicting principles of evaluation. For example, while the logic of *industry* favors notions of worth based on "efficiency" and "performance," promoting the productive "man of action" who is directed toward the future (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006: 204-205), the *domestic* logic reflects the importance of "traditions," "loyalty," and "locality," promoting hierarchical relationships in which assigning worth is based on authority and seniority (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006: 165-171). Furthermore, in sustaining the operation of qualification, these orders are symbolic systems and ways of ordering reality, rendering situations, identities, and practices meaningful. How are we to understand this plurality and the conflicts produced? Throughout their work, Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) stress that each order does not translate into a separate domain. Rather, they point to the coexistence of different orders of worth within a single field and how justifications may clash as people compete to legitimate their view. This is to emphasize agency and the processual character of social orders. Faced with the uncertainty of multiple social worlds, people continuously interpret and negotiate which conventions are appropriate, while also shaping them in the process (Schütz, 1967). In this context, conflicts and power struggles play important roles with regard to establishing which principle(s) of justification are perceived as dominant. This also entails how people create compromises between orders of worth in the unfolding of their everyday lives (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006: 277-284; but see especially Boltanski and Thévenot 1986).

Within this theory of value, rational calculation is not opposed to moral judgment. Instead, rationality works within orders of worth that reduce uncertainty about what counts, making action and coordination possible. Karpik (2010: 41) offers a similar view, arguing that in situations where the quality of an object or a service is uncertain, judgment is needed in order to ground "the comparison of incomensurabilities". This is perhaps most evident in the world of art and literature, but also in fashion and restaurants industries, where quality is multidimensional, uncertain, and incommensurable; these are all what Karpik call *singularities*. To reduce uncertainty and to guide action, consumers who are about to assess the quality of, for example, a novel are in need of *judgement devices*, such as rankings or critics. As demonstrated by Fürst (2018), this is true for those who produce and represent singularities as well, such as artists. In order to reduce uncertainty about the quality of their work and to guide future action, artists continuously rely on *appraisal devices*, such as mentors or competitions. As will be evident in Article I, the use of appraisal devices is key for how early career academics in political science and history learn to handle uncertainty and anticipate future value. I also extend the perspectives of Karpik and Fürst by showing how the use of devices is an interpretive and existential process by which scholars come to make sense of their world and their own place within it.

In this regard, it is important to expand the notion of uncertainty and the role it might play in social life. While providing an understanding of the multidimensionality of social hierarchies and evaluative criteria, the accounts above have been criticized for idealizing the role of harmony and agreement. In his work on organizations and innovation, Stark (2009) consider how orders of worth influence grammars of value and bounded rationalities, and how they transform uncertainty into risk. He also draws attention to the productive tensions of uncertainty which Boltanski and Thévenot ignore. Whereas they see uncertainty as a problem that must be resolved, Stark (2009: 15) argues that orders of worth can neither eliminate uncertainty nor "eliminate the possibility of uncertainty about which order or conventions is operative in a given situation" (Stark, 2009: 15). More specifically, Stark claims that innovative action is not primarily facilitated through an agreement on a principle of justification, but by the divergence of multiple *evaluative principles*. This conceptual shift – from *orders of worth* to the multiple *evaluative principles* actors refer to in the course of (inter)actions – provides a complementary perspective to the negotiation of predefined logics of justification; a complement that is able to account for the dissonance of a given situation in which "there is more than one framework for assessing it, more than one value system for measuring worth" (Hutter and Stark, 2015: 6). Consequently, attention is given to the ability of actors and organizations to keep different evaluative schemas in play while benefitting from the friction of their interplay. This does not just happen by chance. Instead, dissonance must be organized as to create opportunities for action. Stark (2009: 19) refers to this as *heterarchy,* representing a form of governance that organizes diverse evaluative principles in a non-hierarchical mode of operation. In other words, heterarchies combine horizontal accountability and organizational heterogeneity to

make use of the dissonance between different evaluative principles, generating new combinations of resources and patterns of actions.

Evaluative Landscapes and Negotiating Worth: A Pragmatist-Phenomenological Perspective

The theoretical discussion above, including the notions of "orders of worth," "evaluative principles," and "heterarchies," feeds back into my understanding of *evaluative landscapes* (Brandtner, 2017). Used primarily as a sensitizing concept that calls for empirical investigation, 'evaluative landscapes' draws attention to how multiple social orders and conventions operate simultaneously within academic settings. While this may create tensions or conflicts that scholars are confronted with, it can also open spaces for creative action in which both individuals and groups might benefit from the friction. Still, the possibility to prolifically make use of conflicting forms of worth are "primarily constituted through organizational routines and practices, which may be more available to some than others" (Rushforth et al., 2019: 212). Moreover, as emphasized by the pragmatist perspective (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1983), valuations are sites of ongoing deliberations and compromises, and as such, the relationship between different notions of worth may be redefined by the practical engagements in which they are actualized.

In accordance with this perspective, negotiating worth is a relational activity that is bound by context. It involves (e)valuation as it happens in experiences and practices, "through latent or explicit dialogues with specific or generalized others" (Lamont, 2012: 215). In academia, negotiating worth is shaped by normative systems of disciplines as well as various rules, norms, and values that surround the locality of academic life, ranging from national labor markets, career systems, and research policies, to organizational routines, status hierarchies, group cultures, and peer interactions. By providing a relational view, one of the strengths of the landscape metaphor is the ability to emphasize the importance of situated practice while acknowledging that moments, practices, and devices of (e)valuation are more or less interrelated. As scholars are growing into academia, these instances of (e)valuation often come to build and depend upon each other and increase in power through these repetitive "chains of interactions" (Collins, 2005). In this regard, I am inspired by recent attempts within the field of valuation studies to move beyond a radical situationalism by focusing on the configurations of (e)valuations. Whereas these attempts have been characterized by a rather structural approach (see e.g. Désirée Waibel et al., 2021; Hylmö et al., 2023), my perspective is primarily phenomenological, exploring how individuals and groups experience and make sense of patterns of (e)valuation which they encounter over the course of their career.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, such a perspective is based on a wide interpretive and phenomenological ambition to understand the meanings that individual and collective actors give to their actions, surroundings, and identities, including

how they relate to frameworks that extend their personal epistemic schemas into shared understandings. These shared understandings are part of and constitute a meaningful social world that people both *inhabit* and are *inhabited by* (Schütz, 1967). This is to say that although meanings depend upon shared understandings and continuous self-reflexive interaction that refracts actors' past, present, and anticipated futures, it is also "a world of stability, of possibilities, and of conflict, where action is always tethered to relations" (Fine and Tavory, 2019: 458). Certainly, just as situations increase in power because they build and depend on other situations, so does the meanings people act upon. These are patterned through actors' participation in distinctive communities and supported by structures. Although the theoretical perspective guiding this thesis emphasizes the ability of actors to navigate situations in light of their pragmatic interest, it does not neglect the embeddedness of this pragmatic interest: meanings, actions, and anticipations always take place within institutional frameworks that structure opportunities and limitations.

To further understand the interplay between inhabiting a meaningful world and being inhabited by it, we might consider the concept of *frames*. According to Goffman (1974), frames are interpretative schemes that structure actors' subjective involvement in a given aspect of social life. By rendering events and practices meaningful, frames function to organize experience and guide action. This is because, at the same time as framing involves the interpretation and application of frames (what is going on here?) actors are also constrained by frames (what is applied here?). In the words of Scott (2015: 76), "frames act as blueprints for social conduct by providing a set of shared meanings" and "understandings of the rules, roles, and rituals to be followed." As I will show in Article III, early career academics are *framed* by certain institutional arrangements structuring academic careers. Yet, these frames do not act deterministically upon them; rather, they set the scene for both alignment and misalignment: a process in which the normative meanings of frames might be confirmed and stabilized as well as altered and destabilized. By paying attention to the dynamics between "individual's experience, other people's expectations, and the patterning of norms and values across situations that govern orderly conduct" (Persson, 2018: 128), a pragmatist-phenomenological perspective sensitizes us to first-hand experience while still asking sociological questions concerning how such experiences and meanings are socially organized. Hence, the challenge is not to "look beyond" social actors, but to take them seriously without simply accepting their experiences and meanings at face value (Martin, 2011). These are empirical evidence, not "sociological understandings in and of themselves" (Persson 2023: 51).

Adopting a pragmatist-phenomenological perspective on evaluative landscapes means exploring it as part of a meaningful social world of early career academics. This is to draw attention to how scholars make sense of this world and the people who are part of it, to try to figure out what is important and unimportant to people in this world, and how they see it ordered by institutional frameworks and social structures. Furthermore, it is a perspective that aims to understand how the world of early career academics

meaningfully holds together and the inconsistencies, contradictions, and tensions that pertain to it. In this regard, evaluative landscapes become sites in which valuation and identity continuously interact as early career academics navigate these landscapes when seeking recognition and reward. This process is both cognitive and tactical as well as emotional and interactional. It is culturally embedded and tied to how early career academics create structures for interpretation and coordination. This approach to valuation certainly owes much to Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) in the sense that it recognizes how practices of valuation relates to symbolic systems of meaning and acts of interpretation. However, rather than concerning itself with predefined logics of justifications, it is more inductive, seeking to reveal what criteria of worth scholars draw upon when making sense of the world of academia and what narratives, devices, institutions, and structures support or enable them. Crucially, this involves how they make sense of their social identity as early career academics – that is, their self-concept and how others define them.

To account for the identity of early career academics and how their self-understandings shape their experiences and practices of (e)valuations, I draw upon the works of Lamont (1992, 2009), who approached valuation through the device of *boundary work* (see also Lamont and Molnár, 2002). Differentiating between *social boundaries* and *symbolic boundaries*, the latter are defined as "conceptual distinctions that we make to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space" (Lamont, 1992: 9). This involves separating insiders from outsiders, moral from immoral, worthy from unworthy, and pure from impure. Similar to frames, boundaries are not created from scratch, but exist prior to interactions. Shaped by available cultural resources and structural constraints, boundaries help us to separate one entity from another and to define the world we encounter (Zerubavel, 1991). Furthermore, "boundary work is an intrinsic part of the process of constitution the self; they emerge when we try to define who we are" in relation to others (Lamont, 1992; see also Snow and Anderson, 1987). As such, drawing boundaries is important in order to develop a sense of self and to signal group membership. When repeatedly enacted, these boundaries come to shape more general structures of inclusion and exclusion.

Here, it is important to note that I make use of an identity concept that is rather loose and open. This is intentional. Much of the writing on identity in academia makes use of the notion of "professional identity." This concept is based on a clear distinction between what the identity literature labels "personal identity" – which refers to people's unique experience of their own character and sense of being in the world – and "collective identity" – which refers to group memberships, shared norms, and external categories (Lawler, 2014). While these notions have their merits, they tend to turn something that is "rather intangible, situationally contingent, hard to grasp, and multi-layered into something fixed and rigid" (Persson, 2023: 53). Indeed, early career academics' sense of identity was seldom fixed or rigid. Instead, it involved a set of identity claims and dilemmas concerning who they were according to themselves and others as well as who they desired to become. Moreover, in their narratives, the distinction

between the private and the professional, the individual and the collective were rarely meaningful or clear. This implies that if we want to account for the messy realities of human group life, while also adopting a more inductive approach to the study of when and how identity actually come to matter, an open concept of identity is more suitable than the closed concepts of professional, personal, and collective identity. Referring both to a sense of self and a symbolic resource that is performed, an open concept of identity allows for an analysis of how maintaining self-worth might influence career-making (Article III) as well as how scholars enact career scripts through specific patterns of identity talk (Article II). Importantly, it provides the possibility to pay attention to the interplay between these different aspects of identity.

Together with the overarching theoretical perspective that guides this thesis, the concepts of boundaries and identity sensitize us to how early career academics experience, make sense, perform, and negotiate worth as they navigate evaluative landscapes. These concepts also draw attention to how navigating evaluative landscapes is closely intertwined with the process of developing a sense of self and group membership. Hence, by emphasizing how a meaningful social world of early career academics is a collective and practical achievement, the thesis provides a pragmatist-phenomenological perspective on academic socialization that avoids the passivity of functionalism (Guhin et al., 2021). If valuations are manifested in interactions and practices, and become real when people and groups react to them in a systematic manner, norms and values are not just given. Instead, they are "locally situated rules of order that can be negotiated or even serve as conflict" (Fine, 2012: 69). Accordingly, early career academics do not simply obey norms and values; they perform them. While enacted, they are capable of being reported, justified, and recognized as well as contested and disputed (Scott, 2015). How these social processes are manifested in the experiences and practices of early career academics is what this thesis wishes to explore.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHOD

The empirical settings in which I have explored my research questions were discussed at the end of the second chapter. This discussion involved a description of the Swedish career system, the disciplines of political science and history, as well as local variations at the level of departments. Moreover, I reflected upon how to characterize the respondents as a group. Building upon these descriptions, this chapter will provide a more detailed presentation of the empirical material and methodological considerations of the thesis. First, some general methodological issues relating to in-depth interviewing are discussed. Thereafter, the interview study is presented. This contains a detailed description of the sampling procedure, the interview experience, analytical strategies, and ethical considerations.

Limits and Strengths of In-Depth Interviewing

Since the micro/macro, qualitative/quantitative divide in the 1970s, to more recent methodological debates pitting interviewing against ethnography and surveys, the nature and meaning of information collected using in-depth interviews have been heavily debated within the social sciences. Criticism has pointed to the discrepancy between what individuals say they do and what they actually do (Jerolmack and Khan, 2014), as well as the inability of interviews to account for non-discursive cognitive processes (Vaisey, 2009). Furthermore, it has been argued that interviews primarily capture the relative adaptation of respondents as their answers are directly affected by what they presume to be the interviewer's own definition of the "right answer" (Hammersley, 2003). From this perspective, "interviews would produce nothing more than a template of the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee's identity, or an original 'text' to which no additional meaning should be attributed" (Lamont, 1992: 19).

Certainly, interviewing has limitations and researchers must carefully reflect upon what kind of information they obtain when using this method. Not least, this involves reflecting on the different tasks that are set up for the respondent to perform during the interview. Are these tasks possible to perform? How do they relate to the phenomena under study? And what kind of data can be gathered during the performance of these tasks? As argued by Martin (2017), because it is the very constructional nature of interviews that make them powerful research tools, the interviewer must take these constructions seriously. Otherwise, there is no way to "theorize the process whereby [the] data are being jointly produced" (Martin, 2017: 75). This is not to say that interviews

are an active construction that has no meaning beyond the interview situation. Nor is it to assume that there is only one "true" way that people talk (and act) – and this is what the researcher must somehow discover. Instead, it is to acknowledge the peculiar situation every interview represents. On one hand, the interview is a set-up. It is carefully arranged and is therefore distinctive from other situations in which we talk. To tackle this complexity, this set-up needs to be theorized. Moreover, there are practical guidelines to consider: be specific, ask only one question at a time, variate your questions, do not force choice, listen, follow up on the respondents answers, and triangulate (see e.g. Lareau, 2021; Martin, 2017; Weiss, 1994). On the other hand, precisely because they elicit talk, "interviews allow us to glimpse what is perhaps the most human characteristics: our ability to tell narratives about who we are and what we do" (Tavory, 2020: 457). From this perspective, "representations, fantasies, metaphors, and narratives are not 'noise' [but] a crucial part of the social world that people co-construct." While these narratives and symbolic representations cannot be referred to as simply "how people think," they still matter "as a way for human to construct their world together." Hence, when conducted properly, in-depth interviews "tell us something about how people make sense of their world well beyond the interview situation" (Tavory, 2020: 458).

Criticism that relies upon an antagonistic divide between different techniques of data collection often fails to recognize their shared practices (for example, most interviews entail observation and ethnography usually entails interviewing). Such criticism also tends to focus on a rather traditional and fixed understanding of interviewing. In contrast, I agree with Lamont and Swidler (2014: 157), who argue for an interview approach that is more open-ended and pragmatic: "one where we aim to collect data not only, or primarily, about behavior, but also about representations, classification systems, boundary work, identity, imagined realities and cultural ideals." According to such an approach, talk is important in itself since it "is a kind of action, and narratives are crucial for any understanding of the self and social world" (Tavory, 2020: 450). Although it is a kind of talk that is refracted, in the sense that the relationship between the interview and other situations is patterned but not direct, it still provides "some sort of window into cultural sense-making," showing "the general contours of the landscape upon which action takes place" (Tavory, 2020: 457). In addition to understanding action, this approach acknowledges that one of the strengths of interviewing is that it can reveal dimensions of social experience that are not often evident in visible behavior (Gerson and Damaske, 2020). This involves all the (no)things that could have been – the jobs we did not get or partners we almost married. While these things did not happen, they often shape our understanding of ourselves and the world we live in (Scott, 2019). Finally, for many people "the *imagined* meanings of their activities, their self-concepts, their fantasies about themselves (and about others) are significant, and we generally cannot get to those without asking" (Lamont and Swidler, 2014: 159).

Rather than the immediate interactional situation, in-depth interviewing seeks to access the "larger situation" of social actors. To some extent, this means that interviews

privilege breadth over depth: interviews make it possible to gather data about numerous aspects of a given situation and from a large number of individuals (Weiss, 1994). Improving possibilities of comparisons, the behavioral information that this technique obtains is not as detailed as that acquired from ethnographic observations. Nor does it let us investigate the dynamics of situations as they unfold in face-to-face interactions (Persson, 2021). Still, exploring actors' larger situation might facilitate a nuanced understanding of the respondents worldview, and provide information about elements that help us explain variations between individuals and groups, such as background factors, individual trajectories, and desired selves (Lamont and Swidler, 2014). In addition, one fruitful way of expanding the kinds of data gathered by in-depth interviewing is to pay attention to its ethnographic dimensions. Interviewing contexts are more ethnographic than usually assumed and may in themselves be analyzed as a specific type of interaction (Gerson and Damaske, 2020). For example, this may include what signals the respondent tries to mobilize in order to make a good impression (Lamont, 1992) or the emotional dynamic of the interview situation (Pugh, 2013). Interviews can also be more or less systemically "ethnographized" (see e.g., Ortner, 2003), eliciting talk about specific situations and examples rather than generalized statements. Such examples serve as "self-constructed windows into ethnographic details" and are "interesting as much for what they show us about the windows – the particular frames through which respondents view the world – as about the 'facts' of the case" (Pugh, 2013: 50).

By probing into different situations, in-depth interviews can evoke a variety of settings which allows insights to how people inhabit different social places and frame the relationship between them. Subjugated to interpretative analysis, these kinds of information bring a broader, social dimension to individual talk (Pugh, 2013). Hence, interviews might yield valuable and textually rich data. While not explaining action as a strict relation between verbal expressions and actions (Dean and Whyte, 1958) or as non-discursive cognitive processes (Vaisey, 2009), there is still a relatively high correlation between what interviewees and survey respondents say and their subsequent actions (Vaisey, 2014). Although imperfect, interviews can thereby provide access to information about what people have done in the past (Martin, 2017: 68) and to discursive knowledge from which it is possible to outline schemas that can guide action (Lamont and Swidler, 2014). Crucially, interviews can show us the contours of the cultural landscapes of meaning in which action take place, constraining "what elements we put in our landscape but also how we go about constructing it" (Tavory, 2020: 457).

Drawing upon an open-ended and pragmatic approach to in-depth interviewing as outlined above, I have conducted interviews focusing on how early career academics make sense of themselves and their world. This includes detailed descriptions of what they spend their time doing and situations they have encountered, as well as the wider context of meaning, such as biography, expectations, memories, ideals, fantasies, and aspirations. Moreover, *what* scholars say involves *how* they say it (for example, humor, emotional tone, metaphors, turns of phrase, etc.), providing additional dimensions to

individual talk. These different types of data are key to scholars' experiences and meaning-making, as well as to their sense of identity and belonging.

Sampling Early Career Academics and Asking them Questions

On a general level, the empirical material consists of two disciplinary case studies. Providing information about specific social contexts, case studies seek to explore how actors think and act in relation to these contexts and what expectations, routines, norms, and value definitions dominate their situation (see e.g. Becker, 2014). Furthermore, cross-disciplinary comparisons might reveal otherwise invisible patterns, making disciplines useful analytical units. However, as previously mentioned, this is not the only way to case the study or the respondents. Ranging from newly minted PhDs to more experienced scholars who have spent up to eight years at the post-PhD level, early career academics in political science and history are a heterogenic category of academic staff. Therefore, the study was designed to explore differences and similarities between and across several groups and on various levels. This yielded information about general patterns (for early career academics in the social sciences and humanities at research-intensive universities), more specific patterns (for disciplines, but also departments and research groups), as well as variations within these empirical categories. On one hand, this approach provided an opportunity to transcend the traditional format of disciplinary case studies in the sense that I focused less on the historical aspects of political science and history, and more on the immediate surroundings, conditions, and self-concepts of early career academics (see Hasselberg, 2012). On the other hand, it allowed me to case my data in different ways, which meant that I did not have to reify and naturalize disciplines as the only unit of analysis (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012).

Sampling Procedures

Since the research design calls for a diversified group of respondents, the sampling strategy was designed to fulfil two purposes: to allow for a comparative analysis between political science and history and to bring as much variation as possible into the material. Sampling for range is a longstanding technique in qualitative research and is particularly suitable for empirical studies consisting of relatively small samples (Small, 2009). In contrast to random sampling or snowball sampling, sampling for range actively avoids the risk of unwanted duplication by ensuring significant variation through the construction of subcategories that are likely to contrast individuals of the group under study. While this technique is not able to say anything about the proportion of instances of differences in a larger population, it does make it possible to analyze what the various types are like. Furthermore, if the sub-categories are able to claim a variety

of instances that would appear anywhere, similarities or differences across the sample are likely to hold in a larger population (Weiss, 1994: 22-24).

To build a sampling frame, I selected three history departments and two political science departments located at four research-intensive universities in Sweden and constructed a list of scholars that had received their PhD between 2011 and 2019.[13] In consulting online profiles[14] and CVs, I gathered information about their academic age, employment history, track record for funding, list of publications, collaborations, mobility, as well as scholarly prize nominations and awards. Based on a descriptive analysis of the gathered information, I sampled early career academics who worked under fixed-term contracts with the aim of interviewing as wide a variety of scholars as possible.[15]

First, emails were sent out to potential respondents. These emails described the research project and invited them to participate in the interview study. I contacted all potential respondents twice. A majority responded positively on the initial contact. Second, after identifying a sizable number of people who were interested in the project, I selected for inclusion in the final sample a diverse group of respondents. This procedure resulted in 35 interviews, conducted between February and June of 2019. To ensure significant variation, the selection process was performed on the basis of four subcategories, which effectively functioned as selection criteria. During the interview study, I recurrently consulted these subcategories and made sure to fill in gaps in the sample. These subcategories are discussed in turn:

Gender and social origin

Gender is known to influence how academics experience and organize their careers (see Chapter 2). Therefore, I aimed to include as equal a number of male and female respondents as possible. The final sample contains twenty male scholars (eleven from political science and nine from history) and fifteen female scholars (seven from political science and eight from history). Based on the answers given when asked about their family background and social origin, roughly 80 percentage may be characterized as middle class or upper middle class and 20 percentage as working class. These numbers are telling for the high level of homogeneity characterizing the disciplines of political science and history in Sweden, especially at top-ranked universities. This is not only true in terms of socio-economic backgrounds, but also ethnic or migrant background.

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[13] The reason to include three history departments rather than two was because these were generally smaller than the political science departments. Hence, fewer scholars fit the definition of early career academics. Adding an extra department increased the anonymity of the respondents.

[14] For example, the department's website, personal websites, Google Scholar, and network platforms such as ResearchGate and LinkedIn.

[15] This criterion meant that I had to exclude two interviews from the final sample as it turned out that these interviewees had obtained stable employment. Therefore, the initial number of interviews was 37.

Academic Age

For reasons described in Chapter 2, the transition phase known as early career has extended during the past decades. Consequently, early career academics are an increasingly heterogenic group in terms of time spent at the early career level. Therefore, the final sample includes scholars whose academic age (that is, years post-PhD completion) range from half a year up to eight years, with a majority of the respondents having spent approximately two to five years at the early career level. This criterion of selection was introduced to maximize variation in terms of working practices and career experiences. Furthermore, it effectively resulted in variation with respect to the respondents' family situation, containing families of many children, single parents, couples, and single people.

Working profile

Unlike the natural and medical sciences, working and career practices are generally considered to be more diverse in the social sciences and humanities. Therefore, I sampled early career academics with various "working profiles." This criterion included experiences of research, teaching, and administrative duties but also experiences of mobility, public outreach, and whether or not they had been part of collaborative research projects. This ensured variation in terms of working activities and networks. A majority of the interviewed scholars worked in research positions, which meant that they had either received external funding or were employed in someone else's project. Still, the size of funding and the actual amount of research time differed.

Publication profile

For reasons described in the final sections of Chapter 2, publication practices in political science and history differ in meaningful ways. Moreover, both disciplines are characterized by internal variation. With this in mind, I sampled early career academics with diverse "publication profiles." This included preferable genres (such as books or articles), language usage (such as Swedish or English), specific outlets (for example, what type of journals), and authorship (single- or co-authoring, etc.). Variation in publication profiles resulted in a group of respondents who sometimes positioned themselves differently in relation to the identity of their discipline as well as to more general trends in scholarly communication and research evaluation.

Interviewing Procedures

Two pilot interviews were conducted in January and February of 2019. After the interview schedule had been revised, I conducted 37 interviews between February and June, 35 out of which are part of the final sample.

The in-depth interviews lasted between 90 and 140 minutes. Each interview was confidential, tape-recorded, and conducted at a place and site chosen by the respondents. Most often, this meant their office, but interviews were also conducted in public spaces, my office, and the respondent's home. Moreover, five interviews were conducted through video link. Before each interview, I prepared myself by reading the descriptive data I had gathered on each respondent. This was done in order to get a grasp on their individual profile and current position, as well as other types of information I could use to probe questions during the interviews.

The main point of entry into the world of early career academics was questions that identify the problems these individuals encounter in their daily lives; problems framing their particular situation as junior scholars working on temporary contracts aspiring to succeed with an academic career. Because of the tendency to "view our own actions as reasonable responses to problems," this effectively allowed me to "team up" with the interviewee and getting things from the "inside" (Martin, 2017: 84). Generally, I made a conscious effort to limit the use of direct interrogation, except for background information such as their family situation and parent's occupation. Furthermore, I tried to keep the tone as informal and intimate as possible. However, after having established a social bond and learned about the respondent's particular situation, I used my position as a doctoral student (that is, a position of inferior status relative to theirs) to ask questions that challenged what their answers seemingly took for granted. This created moments of disruptive reflection, resulting in respondents making an extra effort to further elaborate upon a particular issue or in more detail describe their point of view.

The data were collected using semi-structed interviews. The thematical categories containing predefined questions were broad, which allowed the interviews to be open-ended and inductive (Weiss, 1994) while still providing coherence across the sample (Martin, 2017). Additionally, the interviews had a reflexive-biographical character, which entailed a more specific focus on retrospective and prospective reflection about the respondents' experience of and position in academia. This does not mean that the objective was to reveal the "true" history of an individual nor the causality of careers (cf. Bourdieu 1998). Rather, the aim was to use temporal and situational perspectives as interview interventions for studying how early career academics make sense of academia and their own place within it. In other words, a reflexive and biographical approach to interviewing does not primarily aim to collect data about *biographical facts* but *biographical work*; that is, the ways in which respondents actively make sense of their context and how they should relate to it, including the resources and narratives utilized when doing so.

In the first part of the interview, I invited early career academics to give a biographical account of their individual trajectories. This included wide-ranging narratives, starting with their first fascination with research and the unfolding of their careers, inviting them to share personal reasons, doubts, and expectations. These biographical accounts comprised the institutional contexts they had been part of, how they saw their roles within these contexts, and what activities, relations, and other factors had been important for them progressing in their careers. Drawing upon these biographical accounts, the second part of the interview focused more specifically on their current situation. This included questions about their social world (for example, workplace, research groups, networks, and hierarchies), their disciplinary field (such as norms, traditions, and the importance of prestige), the planning and organization of their work (working routines, publication practices, epistemic and career decisions, etc.), as well as the conditions for their practical engagements (such as temporary contracts, uncertainty, and support). Moreover, it involved questions about the relationship between their professional and private lives. Finally, in the third part of the interview, I focused on the future. I asked the interviewees about their hopes and dreams, what they ought to do in order to succeed within their field, and what future images are communicated to them by others.

The questions divided into these three sections were generally open-ended, focusing on the respondent's own definition of themselves, others, and their situation. This allowed me to gather descriptively rich data. Furthermore, the temporal organization of the interview schedule made it possible to compare the construction of narrated career trajectories, both between and within disciplines.

To tap information about the interviewees' relationship to their field and what they regard as dominant evaluative criteria structuring this field (and the academic world at large), the interviews were constructed to explore how they acknowledged or claimed certain standards of evaluation while distancing themselves from or ignoring others. Inspired by Lamont's (1992, 2000) work on *symbolic boundaries* and Hasselberg's (2012) notion of *positioning*, I asked respondents to describe themselves and the standards of evaluation they use when organizing their work and making career decisions. I asked them to describe their perceptions of the status traits that are most and least valued by themselves and others. Moreover, I asked them to define academics who they (and others) regard as successful and unsuccessful. This included questions about notions of success and failure more generally as well as what a "typical" and desirable career should look like. In this process, I frequently asked the interviewees to relate their own trajectories to the broader frameworks of the academic career system they described. I also explored how they drew boundaries between themselves and others, asking them to describe scholars who they admire and trust, and scholars whom they disregarded or preferred not to be associated with.

Throughout the interview, I asked the interviewees to explain their standards and guide me to a greater understanding of the evaluative categories they used to make sense of the various demands structuring academic careers. I continuously tried to

ethnographize the interviews, asking the respondents to provide examples of specific events and situations in which evaluative standards come into play. I also made an effort to pay certain attention to conflicts, tensions and uncertainties in their narratives, asking follow-up questions that allowed me to explore how these were experienced, felt, and dealt with.

Data Analysis

To situate the interviews and to gather observational data, I devoted time after each interview to taking ethnographic notes. First, I wrote down my overall impression of the interview and the respondent. This generally included notes about how the respondent had presented him/herself as well as the atmosphere of, and the eventual changes of such during, the interview. For example, did the conversation end up in a therapeutic fashion? Did the respondents treat me like a student? Second, I reported on non-verbal cues such as manners, clothes, and explicit emotions. Finally, I took notes on the surroundings in which the interview had taken place. These ethnographic notes were incorporated into the interview transcripts alongside with the background information that I had gathered before and at the beginning of each interview.

The initial qualitative analysis of the transcripts followed an inductive approach which resulted in an empirical scheme consisting of themes and issues that stood out in the analysis of the respondents' narrative. To explore similarities and variation across the interview sample, I focused on the differences and commonalities between the disciplines under study as well as variations within these disciplines. I paid particular attention to how the emergence of analytical themes were dependent on factors such as academic age, gender, social class, working profiles, and group memberships. In the second round of coding, I used NVivo software to standardize the set of codes to be used. This allowed me to explore patterns between specific codes as well as patterns between codes and background factors. It also made it possible to quantitively check what themes and issues that were most salient in the interview transcripts. Some of the main themes to emerge from the first waves of coding were *worth*, *uncertainty*, *identity*, and *projectification*.

Based on this analysis, I outlined specific areas, problems, and questions for further investigation. Rather than having particular article ideas in mind when constructing the interview guide, the three papers that make up the empirical chapters are the outcome of this phase of the analysis. While this step was time-consuming, it also increased the possibilities for empirical surprises. For each paper, I have returned to the empirical material in its entirety.

In the first paper, I used the notions of "uncertainty," "appraisal devices," and "career aspiration" as sensitizing concepts to interpret the material. Based on the analysis, I subcoded sources of appraisal devices, paying particular attention to how the respondents drew boundaries when deciding whose judgement to trust. Finding great differences

between the two disciplines, the final phase of data analysis included a comparative analysis between political science and history.

In the second paper, I returned to the empirical material and identified situations in which identity and self matter. After identifying two broad and interrelated categories – identity as sense-making and identity as self-presentation – I moved on to discern four patterns of *identity talk* through which early career academics constructed identities in relation to experienced possibilities and limitations for recognition and reward. I paid particular attention to how these patterns of talk conformed to specific definitions of worth and career scripts, as well as which tensions and dilemmas they actualized for those performing these identities. The analysis did not convey any substantial differences between the two disciplines. Instead, I analyzed variations and commonalities across the interview sample as such, with a focus on gender and social class. Hence, in this article, political science and history make up a joint empirical case of early career academics in the social sciences and humanities.

In the third paper, I again returned to the empirical material in its entirety. The analysis of the interview data focused on the meanings and dynamics of projectification. The coding procedure began with a thematical analysis of the data that aimed to cover different aspects of how the respondents talked about projectification. This involved instances where respondents spoke about the significance of projects and project funding, ranging from specific practices and situations (such as writing applications or getting funding) as well as more general accounts of working as a fixed-term scholar and adjusting to the demands of project-based careers. I then considered which interpretive themes were most dominant and how variation depended on background factors, such as disciplinary background, departments, and memberships in research groups. The coding procedure allowed me to analyze how the meanings that respondents attributed to themselves and their practices were shaped by a *project frame* that was put around them. While the narratives entailed different attempts to align to such a frame, they also involved experiences of conflicts and contradictions, opening up possibilities for negotiating its normative meanings.

Ethics

In the initial interview request that was sent out by email, the prospective participants received detailed information about the study and what participating in it would entail. This included a description of the aim of the thesis and a brief thematization of what the interview would inquire about. The prospective participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, meaning that they would be able to withdraw their participation at any time before publication, as well as the assurance of anonymity. This information was repeated when meeting face-to-face and informed consent was obtained verbally before each interview.

The interview transcriptions were directly anonymized and provided with unique codes indicating disciplinary background, individual participant, gender, department, university, and pseudonym (for example, H10m_X,Y_Howard and PS10f_X,Y_Cathrine). To further ensure anonymity, details that might make a participant recognizable, such as specific area of research, name of university, or nationality, have been left out of the reporting of my findings.[16] Moreover, some details have been amended slightly. In interview research, upholding anonymity is a challenge, especially in studies that adopt a narrative or biographical approach (Allmark et al., 2009). Thus, without affecting their bearing as evidence, I have sometimes made minor changes to quotes or in the descriptions of individual participants. These amendments usually involved specific biographical elements and explicit statements about people and places. The interview transcripts have always been kept locked away and information regarding participants has not been shared with anyone.

Interviewing individuals who are colleagues means that care needs to be taken regarding what information that may travel from one interview to another. While sometimes relating a respondent's answer to fragments from other interviews, either to entice them to be more explicit or acknowledge their experience, I never mention whom or how many scholars I had interviewed. When making comparisons or confirmations, my statements were always general in nature (for example, about early career academics as a collective, about political science as a discipline, or about the department as a workplace) and not about particular individuals nor specific situations or events that could be traced back to certain individuals.

Finally, interviewing early career academics as a doctoral student puts one in a hierarchical context with diverse social roles that inevitably shape the interview process. The "doctoral student–early career academic" and "interviewer–interviewee" relationships contain power asymmetries. As mentioned, I used our similar experiences (of working in academia) and our different status positions (as doctoral student and someone at post-PhD level) to probe questions and to establish social bonds, while also challenging what their answers seemingly took for granted. A vast majority of the respondents expressed curiosity about the project and were eager to be part of it. This meant that it was easy to get access and to get the interviews going. Most often, the respondents seemed relaxed about talking about themselves and their work. However, their superior status position as more experienced scholars not only meant that they did not hold back in their answers, but also that they sometimes tried to "teach me" how academia works. Aiming at having their status position confirmed, they played a very active role in shaping the interviews. This provided a challenge, and an analytical opportunity, in so far as I had to relate these "general lessons" to their own description of

[16] As mentioned earlier, the disciplines of history and political science are highly homogenous in terms of ethnicity. Moreover, rather few international early career academics worked at the studied departments. To maintain anonymity, I have not described their particular experience as that of an *international* scholar, but as one of many early career academics.

themselves, their practices, and careers. It also meant that I had to be flexible with how to use my interview guide.

Given that the interview probed about aspects of being an academic that related to uncertainty, insecurity, competition, and career expectations – all of which may be hard to deal with – the interviews sometimes had a therapeutic function. In these situations, the task for me as an interviewer was to listen and show empathy. I made an effort to signal that the interview contained a peer-to-peer relationship, built upon shared experiences and notions of trust. On one hand, framing the interview as peer-to-peer allowed me to gather fine-grained data about the realities of early career academics. On the other hand, it shaped the ethics of interviewing in so far as it deliberately aimed to develop sensitive conversations with a vulnerable group of academic staff. In the words of Müller and Kenney (2014: 555), "research methods can help to address situated social problems," and as such, "practices of research can be practices of care, too."

CHAPTER FIVE

NAVIGATING UNCERTAINTY

Introduction[17]

Uncertainty is a main concern in academic life. Caused by a lack of knowledge about the outcome of actions, it is a problem that scholars must navigate when trying to reach ends. Previous research has acknowledged the significance in dealing with the inherent uncertainties to knowledge production (Knorr-Cetina, 1999) and how the degree of task uncertainty varies across fields (Whitley, 2000). Furthermore, there is a growing literature that, rather than focusing on the epistemic uncertainties in the research process, addresses how social uncertainties related to job security and careers are significant for the practices and identities of researchers (Gill, 2014; Knights and Clarke, 2014). Central to the latter perspective is to analyze how the conditions for doing and valuing research have changed under the impact of new public management. This includes new evaluative practices of research performance (Rijcke et al., 2016), an increasingly competitive allocation of recourses (Roumbanis, 2019), as well as changing temporalities inherent to the projectification of academic work and careers (Felt, 2017; Ylijoki, 2016).

Under these conditions, epistemic and social uncertainties become deeply intertwined and researchers are therefore compelled to address uncertainties related to the future in new ways (Fochler and Sigl, 2018). This is especially evident for junior scholars aspiring to make an academic career. Yet to obtain a position, they are required to anticipate how their work will develop within limited time frames and which accountable outputs it will deliver (Fochler et al., 2016; Müller, 2014; Sigl, 2016). However, early career academics must also try to anticipate what counts as accountable outputs and its *relative worth* in specific institutional contexts. Indeed, recent studies within the field of science and evaluation studies have emphasized the importance of "resisting singular notions of 'excellence'" and paying attention to how "academic research is becoming increasingly accountable to multiple – sometimes complementary, sometimes conflicting – evaluative infrastructures and regimes of worth" (Rushforth et al., 2019: 211). But how exactly does that work? Given that there is no singularity to (e)valuation in academia, how do junior scholars reduce uncertainty about what counts? And how do they use this kind of knowledge to evaluate their own performance and to guide their future work?

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This paper investigates how early career academics in two disciplinary cultures within the social sciences and humanities cope with uncertainties about how to demonstrate one's worth in accordance with what counts in future evaluations. Inspired by Fürst (2018), I conceptualize this as a tension between *career aspiration* and *market uncertainty*. Career aspiration is about people wanting to advance and to secure a position within a specific field. Market uncertainty occurs when these people are uncertain about how their abilities and work will be evaluated by gatekeepers within the field. This tension is important to study. Because scholars produce unique and incommensurable "goods," there is a general lack of objective evaluative standards. While this has been recognized in studies of how academic gatekeepers pass judgment on the works of others (Hammarfelt and Rushforth, 2017; Lamont, 2009; Musselin, 2010), little is known about how scholars deal with the uncertainty about how their work and they themselves will be evaluated by gatekeepers.

In the comparative case study presented below, I will demonstrate how early career academics in political science and history use different sources of information about quality, worth, and performance when dealing with the tension between career aspiration and market uncertainty. I propose to think about these sources of evaluative information as *appraisal devices* (Fürst, 2018). Appraisal devices come from knowledgeable and trusted sources, where early career academics are informed about whether their work and they themselves are good enough to succeed in academia. In contrast to any form of evaluation, appraisal devices are distinctive in that their usefulness depend on a *matching logic* between the evaluation that constitutes the appraisal and subsequent evaluations on the academic market.

Whereas there are several sources of appraisal devices available to junior scholars, I am zooming in on how they use evaluations produced by what Fürst (2018) calls *assessors*. Assessors are trusted individuals who are part of a junior scholar's network and who appraise his or her chances of success and failure. Because junior scholars trust the assessor's ability to produce evaluations that correspond to the judgment of gatekeepers, assessors are able to act as stand-ins, evaluating scholars *as if* they were being evaluated on the academic market. Although the social function of an assessor may be described as an "academic mentor," the term does not refer to employment positions and is not limited to formal definitions of mentorship (cf. Eby et al., 2007). Instead, an assessor is any individual – a supervisor, a PI, a colleague, an editor, a reviewer, a friend – who the early career academic perceives as knowledgeable about how scholars are evaluated on the academic market and who are able to produce such evaluations.

By using appraisal devices, early career academics can temporarily reduce uncertainty, enabling them to make informed decisions about their research and careers. However, faced with multiple and conflicting appraisals, scholars must continuously interpret and differentiate between them. This may be understood as a form of boundary work, where early career academics make distinctions between those whose judgment they do and do not trust. In this process, scholars' self-concept and desired identities are key to the reflexive ways in which appraisal devices are used in the course of action.

Introducing the appraisal devices framework to the field of science and evaluation studies, this paper provides a conceptual understanding of how early career academics cope with uncertainties about their future. The ambition is to shed light on how junior scholars orient themselves within highly complex institutional environments by learning how to anticipate future evaluative criteria. Furthermore, analyzing the use of appraisal devices among those who are currently growing into academia opens up for understanding the entanglement of uncertainty reduction and academic socialization. This is because in reducing uncertainty about what counts, appraisal devices also help scholars to organize the world and observe themselves. Hence, the appraisal devices framework offers a novel way of sensitizing us to how coping with uncertainty yields certain ways of reasoning and preferences to act, as well as to build an academic identity.

Early Career Academics: Uncertainty and Worth in Project-based Careers

Although there is no agreed upon definition for what constitutes an "early career academic," the label generally refers to academics in a phase of transition: from recently graduated PhDs to scholars with senior positions and stable employment (Haddow and Hammarfelt, 2019). Considering the difficulty to delimit when individuals leave this career phase, the current study defines early career academics as a group of scholars that have received their PhD within the previous eight years and who are yet to obtain a permanent position. Working under fixed-term contracts, previous research has identified this group as particularly affected by both competition and changes in how academic work is organized and evaluated (Fochler et al., 2016). This includes studies of how junior scholars' research practices and academic selves are increasingly shaped by neoliberal ideals (Archer, 2008b), performance indicators (Müller and de Rijcke, 2018), funding regimes (Roumbanis, 2019), and policy measures such as mobility (Ackers, 2008). Having to deal with a high level of job insecurity and pressing career norms, studies have also shed light on various social and political aspects of working as an early career academic, such as mental health problems (Signoret et al., 2019), emotion-work (Bloch, 2002), and issues of gender discrimination (Murgia and Poggio, 2018). Furthermore, research that focuses on academic mentoring has highlighted the importance of social and human capital in academic careers. Providing junior scholars with training in specific skills, collaboration opportunities, and/or favorable networking opportunities, mentors have been found significant for novices reaching positions within academia (Bäker et al., 2020).

While providing insights into the many-faceted reality of early career academics, these studies tend to deal with the problem of uncertainty rather implicitly. In fact, researchers across different fields have only recently begun to more systematically explore how shifts in the social organization of research produces and legitimizes a career system marked by uncertainty – and how this is experienced and handled by younger

academics. Crucially, this includes scholars' relationship to time, particularly the future (Felt, 2017; Ylijoki, 2016). According to Müller (2014), postdoctoral life scientists' experiences of temporalities in the context of their work and career practices are increasingly shaped by both acceleration and individualization. Future uncertainties are addressed by aiming to improve units of outputs per units of time, fostering instrumental and tentative social relationships. Similarly, Sigl (2016) has shown that epistemic and social uncertainties become interlinked within the project as an organizational form. Focusing specifically on PhD students and postdocs in the life sciences, she argues that within project-based careers, the issue of future productivity comes to tacitly govern the research practices of the present, deeply affecting the rationales of younger scholars' decision-making. Against this backdrop, Fochler and Sigl (2018) claim that the current organization of academic work produces what they call *anticipatory uncertainty*. Described as "the state of being uncertain of whether research processes will be productive in a specific timeframe and of how a specific institutional context defines performance" (Fochler and Sigl, 2018: 350), anticipatory uncertainty captures the entanglement of epistemic uncertainties and social uncertainties. Comparing academic life sciences and biotechnology companies, their study demonstrates how diverse organizational logics result in highly different management of uncertainty in the research process.

Building on these prior works, this paper adds further dimensions to the study of uncertainty and worth in academic life. First, while previous studies have focused on the anticipatory practices of researchers, the appraisal devices framework provides a change in perspective, asking *how* such anticipatory practices are informed. Second, exploring how early career academics come to use and differentiate between appraisals when trying to establish themselves within their field provides an analytical opportunity to study the entanglement of uncertainty reduction and socialization processes. Finally, studies of how scholars are affected by both uncertainty and the growth of research governance are heavily biased towards the life sciences. Focusing on political science and history, where career structures, working routines, and evaluative practices are shaped quite differently, will add new dimensions to our understanding of how early career academics experience and manage uncertainties when growing into academia.

Theorizing Practices of Appraisal Devices

The concept of appraisal devices was coined by Fürst (2018) in his study of how aspiring writers deal with the uncertainty of not knowing whether their work is of the right quality to succeed in an artistic market. Being an extension of Karpik's (2010) concept of *judgment devices*, it is part of the economics of singularities; that is, how the quality of unique and incommensurable "goods" is determined. Examples of singularities are literary works, fine wines, and personalized professional services. Because these goods are characterized by quality uncertainty, judgment devices provide consumers with the

credible knowledge needed in order to make and legitimate decisions. As argued elsewhere, academic evaluations provide a case in point since the quality of academic work or an individual academic's worth is difficult to assess (Hammarfelt, 2017). Similar to a novel or a painting, a scientific article or an academic CV are defined by both incommensurability and quality uncertainty and may thus be understood as singularities (Karpik, 2011). Accordingly, several studies have analyzed how judgment devices are used when making evaluative decisions in academic hiring processes (see e.g. Hammarfelt and Rushforth, 2017; Hylmö, 2018; Musselin, 2010).

While judgment devices are about *consumption* of singularities, appraisal devices are about *production* of singularities. In the context of academic evaluation, this means that rather than focus on how gatekeepers (consumers) use devices such as rankings or the prestige of journals to legitimate judgment, appraisal devices focus on how scholars (producers) navigate the uncertainty of not knowing how they will be evaluated by gatekeepers. As such, appraisal devices focus on scholars' relation to "markets in which they present and represent singularities" (Fürst, 2018: 399), making it possible to theorize how they draw upon different sources of evaluative information as they try to succeed in careers conditioned by quality uncertainty.

Appraisal devices are distinctive in that they consist of evaluations that the producer of singularities can use in order to temporarily reduce uncertainty. In his study of aspiring writers, Fürst underlines that "appraisals only become useful appraisal devices when they come from sources that are both trusted and knowledgeable enough for the artist to assume that the appraisal corresponds to how the artist's work will be evaluated on the artistic market" (Fürst, 2018: 391). Hence, appraisal devices rely upon a *matching logic*. The *matching logic* highlights the anticipating function of appraisal devices. From the perspective of scholars, it is the ability of appraisal devices to turn *uncertainty* into *risk* that may facilitate action and decision-making. Both uncertainty and risk are shaped by the fact that the future is unknown. However, in contrast to situations of uncertainty, in which we cannot predict the possibility of a future outcome, situations of risk allow for such predictions to be made. This is because situations of risk are *calculable situations* (Knight, 1921). Still, appraisal devices do not change the actual status of a situation, as uncertainty cannot be eliminated (Aspers, 2018). Rather, appraisal devices function in so far as they let people act *as if* the future is more certain than it actually is (see e.g. Beckert, 2016).

Consequently, for assessors' appraisals to comply with the necessary *matching logic*, early career academics must *trust* their judgment. Based on personal trust, assessors are able to act as market intermediaries, producing evaluations that inform junior scholars whether their work and they themselves are good enough to succeed in academia. As demonstrated by Bessy and Chauvin (2013), intermediaries tend to have a double function. On one hand, they provide actors with information. On the other hand, they produce valuations on markets. This is particularly true for assessors in academia who, just as literary critics, continuously switch roles between evaluating peers and being evaluated by peers. This social structure underlines the link between subjectivity and

legitimacy in the production of artistic and academic judgment (Chong, 2013). As a result, assessors are not neutral, but part of producing and reproducing definitions of worth in academic fields.

Being primarily interested in mapping sources of appraisal devices, Fürst draws upon Kaprik's theory of judgment devices, distinguishing between different types of devices as well as diverse institutional arrangements that structure the dispersion of knowledge (Fürst, 2018). Whereas this provides him with a robust typology of appraisal devices, it does not let him pay sufficient attention to what I call *practices of appraisal devices*; that is, the process by which actors engage with and interpret appraisal devices, including how they decide the criteria and means for using or disputing them in concrete situations. The devices theory has recently been criticized for its reductive and functionalistic tendencies when applied in studies of academic evaluation (Kaltenbrunner and de Rijcke, 2019). Focusing on practices of appraisal devices, this paper tackles such criticism by emphasizing the reflexive work required by actors using them. Scholars' responses to and use of appraisal devices are not mechanical, nor can they be reduced to mere calculation. Instead, they depend on how scholars interpret the appraisal and use it in the course of action. This may include factors such as disciplinary cultures and institutional conditions as well as personal experiences and the self-concept of scholars. Furthermore, while appraisal devices are part of producing and reproducing definitions of worth within academic fields, "there is no singularity to (e)valuation in academia" (Rushforth et al., 2019: 229). Consequently, the abilities of scholars and the quality of their work may be assessed according to different criteria, depending on the context of evaluation and the social position or taste of the evaluator. In practice, this means that early career academics often face the problems that arise from multiple appraisals competing with one another. In the absence of a clear standard of quality or success, they need to decide whose judgment to trust. Hence, to navigate uncertainty, scholars must not only *interpret* the appraisals from assessors, they also need to *differentiate* between them.

Emphasizing the reflexive ways in which scholars use appraisal devices, the concept of *boundaries* is crucial for understanding how they come to trust and act upon the knowledge that assessors produce. As shown elsewhere, boundary work are often symbolic, consisting of conceptual distinctions we make to "categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space" (Lamont and Molnár, 2002: 168). From this perspective, the *matching logic* is never given in advance, but something that is negotiated in interactions between aspiring scholars and assessors. When established, this logic yields certain ways of reasoning and preferences to act. By studying practices of appraisal devices, I thus provide an understanding of uncertainty reduction that is far from being a technical issue. Instead, I propose to think about the use of appraisal devices as an interpretative and existential practice in which scholars come to make sense of themselves and their world. This includes the many ways in which they shape their own practices and academic selves by deciding whose judgment to trust.

Material and Method

The two disciplines under study share both similarities and differences. On one hand, history and political science are regarded as high-status fields within the humanities and the social sciences, respectively, and as a consequence, the competition for funding and permanent positions is fierce. On the other hand, in the Swedish context, the two disciplines vary in terms of common practices for publishing (such as publication language and genres) and collaboration (such as co-authorship and funding). These factors are known to influence how quality is conceptualized in intradisciplinary evaluations of academic careers (Hammarfelt, 2017) and how researchers try to accumulate credibility (Hessels et al., 2019). While it is important not to underestimate the relative heterogeneity that characterizes most disciplines in the social sciences and humanities, it is equally important not to downplay existing differences. As argued by Paradeise and Thoenig (2013), general trends that are re-shaping the value regimes in academia might produce different local phenomena. From this perspective, political science and history in Sweden provide an interesting case. Whereas the praxis for doing and valuing research in political science have largely adapted to what is framed as "international standards," Swedish scholars in history have only recently begun to adapt to this trend. As a consequence, the current praxis for doing and valuing research in history has been described as *in flux* (Salö, 2017).

With this in mind, the sampling strategy was designed to fulfill two purposes: to allow for a comparative analysis between the two disciplines and to bring as much variation as possible into the material. I therefore included junior scholars working at different universities and with diverse experiences of research, teaching, and administration as well as publishing, mobility, and collaborative work. In total, the study includes two political science departments and three history departments located at four research-intensive universities in Sweden. To build a sampling frame, a list of early career academics in political science and history currently working at the selected departments and who had received their PhD between 2011 and 2019 was constructed. By consulting online profiles and CVs, I gathered information about the scholars' academic age, gender, current and previous positions, track record for funding, list of publications, as well as scholarly awards. Based on a descriptive analysis of the gathered information, early career academics who worked on fixed-term contracts with the aim of bringing as much variety as possible into the material were sampled.

This procedure resulted in 35 interviews, conducted between February and June of 2019. Out of these interviews, 30 were conducted face to face and five were conducted through video link. A close to equal number of historians (9 male and 8 female) and political scientists (11 male and 7 female) were interviewed. A majority of the interviewed scholars worked at least part time in research positions, meaning that they had either received external funding or were employed in someone else's project. The interviews were conducted in Swedish or English and lasted between 90 and 140 minutes. All of the interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. Informed consent was

obtained before each interview, which assured the respondent of voluntary participation and anonymity. Consequently, details that might make a respondent recognizable, such as specific area of research, name of university, or nationality, have been left out of the empirical sections.

The overall aim of the interviews was to gather data on how norms, values, and structures of making an academic career affect the practices and identities of junior scholars in political science and history. Structured as a reflexive-biographical interview (Sigl, 2016), it had a specific focus on retrospective and prospective reflections about their motivation to pursue academic work and how their aspiration to succeed in academic careers influenced their planning and decision-making. Furthermore, I continuously asked the respondents to draw boundaries between what they considered to characterize successful and unsuccessful academics – in terms of epistemic practices, career strategies, and other status traits. Inviting scholars to draw such boundaries from an internal perspective (what traits are the most valued by themselves) as well as an external perspective (what traits are the most valued by others) allowed insights into how scholars' decision-making are negotiated, not only in relation to perceived career expectations and conceptions of worth, but also their social identity; that is, their self-concept and how others define them.

The objective for using retrospective and prospective interview questions was not to reveal how the respondents' lives actually were or will be. Rather, the aim was to use temporal and situational perspectives as interview interventions for studying how early career academics conceptualize their room for maneuvering when growing into academia and what recourses they draw upon when organizing their research and careers. In this regard, a central part of the respondents narrative concerned how to correctly demonstrate one's worth in accordance with what counts in future evaluations. After going through a first cycle of inductive coding, which involved how scholars talked about their aspiration to succeed in academia and how they experienced and dealt with career uncertainties, I therefore moved on with a second cycle of coding using the central concepts of this article – "appraisal devices," "market uncertainty," "career aspiration," and "symbolic boundaries" – to analyze the data. Several sources of appraisal devices were identified. However, in this article, I zoom in on the one that was most frequently used, namely, assessors.

Findings

The findings section is structured around the ways in which early career academics in political science and history deal with the tension between career aspiration and market uncertainty by using appraisal devices in the form of assessors. It begins with a description of how and under what conditions assessors come to function as appraisal devices, including how they are part of structuring the socialization processes differently within the two disciplines. Thereafter, the focus turns to how scholars interpret and

differentiate between appraisals. The analysis demonstrates that identity, morality, and imagined futures are key to the practices of appraisal devices. The findings from the two disciplines are presented separately.

Political Science

Senior Assessors and Vertical Socialization Processes

The experience of uncertainty was a central topic in all of the conducted interviews. Accounts of uncertainty experiences most often referred to the structure of, and the conditions for, qualification. Aspiring to succeed with an academic career, the respondents shared a feeling that there is a need for them to organize their work in relation to future evaluations. When talking about this aspect of being an aspiring scholar, early career academics described different ways in which they actively searched for information about quality definitions and performance criteria; information that may temporarily reduce uncertainty and enable informed decisions about their research and careers. In this regard, what is characteristic for early career academics in political science are the importance and the temporal durability of appraisals given to them by senior scholars. Consider how this postdoc described his relationship to senior scholars during his time in academia:

> I have worked with several professors: as a research assistant, as a PhD, and now as a postdoc. [...] One professor in particular, who I met as a PhD student, he was not my supervisor but more like a mentor. [...] He was the one who gave me feedback on my first article manuscripts, telling me what journals I should aim for. And he explained to me that I should aim for really high-ranked journals, both because that is what really counts when others evaluate your performance and because he thought that I had what it takes to publish there. (PS9m)

The most commonly used appraisal device by early career academics in political science was a senior scholar whose social function may be described as an academic mentor. From the above quotation, we learn that appraisals from a senior assessor can be used to understand what counts on the academic market and for assessing the aspiring scholar's own abilities and the quality of his work. In line with this, several respondents concluded that "without a senior scholar by your side, you're lost" (PS8f). Because of their professional status, senior assessors were regarded as knowledgeable about how political scientists are evaluated on the academic market. Relying on a *matching logic*, they provided personalized knowledge about scholars' chances of success and failure.

However, this relationship was not only supported by formal status hierarchies, but also by the institutional conditions for pursuing academic careers in political science.

Several of the respondents described how they had been recruited by a senior researcher to work as their assistant before being encouraged to apply for a PhD position. This was generally interpreted as a sign of recognition that emotionally charged them to sustain their aspiration of success. Furthermore, senior assessors provided these respondents with a source of information about how to qualify themselves within the field:

> Working together with my supervisor, first as an assistant and then as a PhD student, I learned from the beginning that there is some kind of 'right way' of doing it. Directly, I was instructed to pave the way for the postdoc period, which meant to write in English and not in Swedish, to focus on research, not ending up teaching too much. Ehm... To write my dissertation so that it could easily be re-written and published by an international academic publishing house, and to publish one or two articles during my PhD. Yeah, then I would have ticked most of the right boxes. (PS15m)

Crucially, this also holds true for the time after PhD completion. In Sweden, as elsewhere (Franssen and de Rijcke, 2019), it is a common practice for postdocs in disciplines within the social sciences to work in temporary projects run by a senior researcher. This gives early career academics immediate access to an assessor who may be used as a personal device for self-evaluation and future orientation. A concrete example is this quote from a junior scholar working in a project that runs over four years:

> I had planned for four articles, one article per year in really, really good journals. Since I have teaching duties, I thought this would be a good standard. But my PI said it was not good enough, that we should work on more stuff. And you know, he is really successful, he knows what it takes to make it at this level, so now I have changed my initial plan. (PS6f)

For this scholar, consulting the PI of the project in which she works reduced uncertainty about performance criteria at the postdoctoral level. Based on reputation and a successful track record, she trusted the assessor's ability to anticipate future evaluative criteria and therefore used this knowledge to re-plan her research for the coming four years, aiming to further increase her productivity in terms of publications. While previous studies have focused on how working in temporary projects increases anxiety and career uncertainty (Franssen and de Rijcke, 2019; Sigl, 2016), the appraisal device perspective demonstrates that social relations established within these projects might be used as a resource for dealing with this kind of uncertainty. This was confirmed in the accounts of early career academics working in individual projects and who felt disorientated because of the lack of senior guidance:

> Comparing to when I was a PhD student, I have no one to ask. I do not have a mentor or boss or anything. [...] I can do this project the way I want to, but I am also on my own. And that is hard. I am constantly questioning myself and the work that I do, like, is this the right way to do it? Is it good enough? (PS4m)

While working in individual postdoc projects provide aspiring scholars with independence and freedom, the feeling of being 'on your own' may increase the experience of uncertainty. According to the quotation above, the absence of a senior assessor stands in stark contrast to the resources this scholar had for planning, doing, and valuing his work at the PhD level. Hence, the access to certain sources of appraisal devices varies. Moreover, what sources of appraisal devices individual scholars have access to may change over time.

In producing appraisals recognized as appraisal devices, senior assessors continuously act as intermediaries for gatekeepers on the academic market. Being regarded as knowledgeable and powerful agents, early career academics in political science actively seek their appraisals for recognition and future orientation. Consequently, the socialization processes in political science may to a large extent be understood as *vertically structured*, echoing a Bourdieusian conception of academic socialization in which dominating agents brings stability to prevalent power structures and interests by imposing dominating evaluative criteria (Bourdieu, 1988). According to Musselin and Beckert (2013: 20), "the ability to impose criteria for quality evaluation is important because these become increasingly entrenched by their use." Consequently, in aspiring scholars' use of appraisal devices, the criteria imposed by senior academics become accepted measures of quality and success within the field of political science.

Practices of Appraisal Devices: Symbolic Communities and Notions of Trust

In typological terms, assessors belong to what Fürst (2018) calls *the network-market plus professional authority regime*. Used as a personal and substantial device, assessors are able to act as stand-ins, evaluating scholars as if they were being evaluated on the academic market. When shifting focus from the typology to the practices of appraisal devices, it is evident that not every senior scholar in political science may function as an assessor. Because early career academics in political science are faced with multiple appraisals, they described a need to draw boundaries between different sources of evaluative information. Regarding assessors, these boundaries were often drawn on the basis of *identification* with *symbolic communities*. This provoked an interesting divide regarding the establishment of trust. For some respondents, practices of appraisal devices revolved around their active search for appraisals from academics that they regarded as exceptionally successful and competitive. Consider this quote from an experienced postdoc discussing how he differentiates between assessors:

> For me, it pretty soon became clear that, if I want to be the best, I have to learn from the best. And this may sound cocky, but I do not want to become just an average political scientist who feels sorry for himself because others have had greater success. I want to become a top scholar. Given that, I have always sought the response and recognition from those who are regarded as top scholars. [...] We have a couple of professors at the department who publish in absolute top journals, who work with scholars at the best American universities, who receive the most prestigious grants. You know, they kind of belong to an academic elite. For me, these are the ones that know how to make it. (PS14m)

For respondents to whom this way of reasoning was characteristic, being recognized as belonging to an academic elite was comprehended as a sign of trustworthiness, strengthening the *matching logic* between assessors' appraisals and future evaluative criteria. Confronted with the problems caused by the need to decide between multiple appraisals, these scholars made distinctions between assessors depending on their reputation, understood primarily in terms of formal scholarly merits. In this process, the selection of a trustworthy assessor involved both the self-concept of the aspiring scholar and the symbolic community that the assessor represents.

This was true for another group of respondents as well. Still, the boundaries produced when they decided whose judgment to trust were different. For this group, belonging to an academic elite cannot in itself result in a *matching logic*. Instead, these scholars made critical remarks on how those belonging to academic elites are "over-achievers" (PS2f), someone that "just works 24/7 and do not have a real life" (PS8f), or individuals characterized by being "extremely unconscionable when it comes to making career advancements" (PS1m). In line with this, several respondents differentiated between assessors by drawing moral boundaries:

> For me, trust comes from being a role model. And I mean this both in terms of being a productive and skillful researcher, but also a good person. Someone that is ambitious, but also cares about others... Not someone that sees everything as a competition. [...] I actually do not care that much about the superstars we have here at the department, because the way that they seem to live their lives... That is not how I want to live my life as an academic. (PS2f)

According to this scholar, being perceived as trustworthy does not only rely on the formal scholarly merits of the assessor. The assessor's ability to signal virtues such as work-life balance and empathy are also key. Because these are virtues that the aspiring scholar wants to identify with when imagining a future life in research, they are used to differentiate between assessors. Hence, whereas reputation was a central mechanism for the selection of assessors among early career academics in political science, what status traits that translated into recognized appraisal devices differed considerably.

In analyzing practices of appraisal devices, we must take into account the reflexive ways scholars use them. Trying to orient themselves in situations in which there is a

lack of clear evaluative standards, early career academics are people who aspire to become something. This means that acts of uncertainty reduction should not be understood as a one-dimensional way of reducing the complexity of choice. Rather, it is an interpretative process in which appraisal devices provide scholars with justifications to decide between competing normative possibilities. Appraisal devices are not neutral but active forces; a form of valuation that establishes the worth of academics and their work. Still, "for valuation, not only do people's views matter; who these people are matters, too [...] conceptualized in terms of identity, each has more or less status" (Aspers, 2018: 140). This is to say that practices of appraisal devices are influenced by how high-status traits are defined within specific contexts or groups, underlining the importance of the more or less stable status hierarchies and institutional role structures that order academic environments. Consequently, the establishment of trust is not simply a question about knowledge, but also identity, and practices of appraisal devices involve the many ways in which early career academics interpret and engage with, as well as morally and culturally accept, the authority behind appraisals.

History

Younger Assessors and Horizontal Socialization Processes

When navigating uncertainty by learning how to anticipate future evaluative criteria, early career academics in history often described their situation as characterized by "big changes" in terms of "how to compete successfully on today's academic labor market" (H9f). Picturing their own conditions for doing and valuing academic work as radically different than the ones under which an older generation of historians were socialized, this had a substantial impact on whose judgment they generally came to trust:

> They [senior scholars] may of course be good historians and I can still get good comments from them at seminars. But it is obvious that they have no idea what it means to be a junior scholar in academia today. [...] In order to evaluate my work and to make decisions about the future, I talk to younger academics, either postdocs or someone who just got an employment. I never, and I mean never, consult senior scholars about these kinds of things. (H1m)

In the field of history, the most common assessor was not a senior academic but a more or less junior one. With reference to a 'generation gap,' the aspiring scholar above has learnt that there is a difference between evaluating research in general and evaluating it in relation to what counts on the academic market. While the former may include helpful comments about archival work, language, or general knowledge about the historical period under study, the latter are appraisals that scholars can use in order to

assess and organize their own work in relation to future evaluations. This distinction was a recurrent theme in the interviews with early career academics in history. In the following, a newly minted PhD describes how she came to learn about this distinction in the course of the daily interactions at the department. After receiving positive comments at a seminar where she had presented a manuscript to be sent to an international journal, she met up with a more experienced postdoc who functioned as her mentor. He evaluated the manuscript differently:

> He said that the text was good and interesting but that it was too book-like. There were too many arguments in the text and the research questions were way too focused on the Swedish context, so it lacked in relevance for an international audience. [...] He said that it would most certainly be rejected, so I decided to rewrite it quite substantially. (H10f)

For this scholar, it was the younger assessor who introduced the distinction between what is 'good' and 'interesting' in general terms from what is determined as 'quality' from the perspective of the academic publishing market. Because the manuscript did not comply with the quality standards of the latter, he determined it not good enough and the aspiring scholar therefore continued to work on it. This means that an effective appraisal device cannot be based on just any other perspective. In comparison to studies demonstrating the variety of support academic mentors may provide junior scholars with (Bäker et al., 2020), the empirical analysis shows that early career academics, just like aspiring fictional writers (Fürst, 2018), differentiate between possible mentors depending on whether or not they are able to produce evaluations according to the necessary *matching logic*. It is with reference to this logic that early career academics in history generally trust the appraisals from younger assessors who they comprehended as "knowledgeable about how things work in academia today" (H8f).

Early career academics in history described their postdoctoral position as being particularly precarious since it was not experienced as a natural continuation from their previous position as a PhD student. Instead, they described how the criteria for qualifying oneself as a successful scholar differed substantially between the two career phases. This particular kind of uncertainty experience often motivated the generation gap narrative:

> From the day I received my PhD, the judgment of my supervisors basically became irrelevant. I still have a good relationship with them, but at this stage, they do not mean anything to my career or my research. This is simply because they do not have the competence... They do not publish peer-reviewed articles, they do not publish in English, or they do not publish at all... They do not compete for funding, so how could they possibly say anything about the quality of my work or how I should do things in order to succeed? For that, I have other, more or less junior researchers, who have both the experience and competence of doing these things (H12m)

In this quote, the aspiring scholar describes his transition from PhD to postdoc as characterized by the loss of trust in the appraisals given to him by his former supervisors. Regardless of the formal status position held by these senior academics, he did not comprehend them as trustable and knowledgeable enough to provide him with information about his chances of success and failure at the postdoctoral level. Instead, to assess his own abilities and the quality of his work, he came to use appraisal devices in the form of younger assessors whose evaluations conform to the *matching logic*. Who are able to produce appraisals recognized as appraisal devices may thus change over time. For early career academics in history, this happens because new gatekeepers, such as reviewers for international academic journals or funding panels, enter the field at the postdoctoral level, shaping the evaluative landscape in which they navigate. In other words, when the conditions for earning recognition change in connection with career progressions, the conditions for using appraisal devices change as well.

According to Salö (2017), the current changes in publication and evaluation practices within the field of history in Sweden open up for junior scholars to invest differently than their senior peers. This is supported by the findings of the present study. From the perspective of appraisal devices, it is evident that senior academics successively function less as market intermediaries. When junior scholars progress in their career, they instead come to rely upon the judgment of younger assessors. This means that new criteria for evaluation are imposed and reproduced. In other words, as junior scholars grow into academia, the socialization structures in the field of history transform: from the vertical socialization processes that dominate the PhD education to the increasingly *horizontally structured* socialization processes that characterize the realities at the postdoctoral level.

Practices of Appraisal Devices: Risk Management and Balancing Identity Positions

The conditions for dealing with uncertainties regarding quality definitions and performance criteria within the history field were profoundly shaped by the problems caused by multiple appraisals competing with one another. Nearly all of the interviewed scholars in history shared a preoccupation with, and somewhat of an anxiety about, the lack of consensus regarding how one should behave in order to accomplish a successful career. This complexity was further accentuated by the fact that, although senior academics seldom functioned as assessors, they may still act as gatekeepers on parts of the academic market. Consequently, 'what counts' was perceived as more person-biased, and thus harder to anticipate, in history than in political science.

What does this mean for the practices of appraisal devices? Faced with multiple and competing appraisals, one way of deciding what appraisal device to actually use, and how to use it, was to interpret it as a form of risk management:

> I have a feeling that it is different things that counts depending on the situation. When applying for funding, it is international journal publications and previous grants. But when applying for a position, the second book can still be very important. So, it is hard to know how to compete successfully in history, I would say. [...] Careers can still look quite different within our field. And because of that, I want to have someone that can evaluate my CV from different perspectives. (H6m)

This quotation underlines the fact that early career academics must be active in their search for information about evaluative criteria. For the aspiring scholar above, this means that the establishment of trust is closely connected to identifying assessors who can act as intermediaries for both well-established and emerging regimes of worth. As such, the practices of appraisal devices are centered on assisting him in his effort to satisfy coexisting, and more or less conflicting, definitions of worth. In the field of history, this was a common strategy for adapting to what the respondents experienced as dominant extra-disciplinary trends of academic evaluation and at the same time act in accordance with more traditional evaluation practices within the discipline. However, in the course of the interview, the above respondent continued:

> I do trust this new generation of historians that are starting to get positions in the field. I think it is just a matter of time, really. We see this transformation in academia, in the humanities, and in history. We start to evaluate academic work differently. And as a junior scholar, you need to be aware of that and act accordingly. (H6m)

In using appraisal devices as a form of risk management, the *matching logic* involves a prediction of how the disciplinary field will develop in the near future. Evidently, this may put more focus on the emerging, rather than the traditional, evaluative criteria within the discipline. While it is important to note that this varied between the respondents in history, some scholars engaged in risk management by paying attention to the evaluative practices within other fields regarded as relevant for the development of their own:

> When talking to other junior scholars in fields such as political science, sociology... fields that have some kind of kinship with history. These disciplines have already gone through this process of internationalization and it is quite clear what pays off in terms of making a career. So, in order to understand where we are heading as a discipline, I pay attention to the state of affairs in other disciplines and how they evaluate academic work. (H1m)

According to Mennicken and Sjögren (2015: 4), much valuation "relies on the projections, estimates, and more or less systematically organized guesswork, which are invested in aspiration and hope." As both of the quoted scholars above make clear, this is also true for the use of appraisal devices. Providing early career academics with

information about what counts in future evaluations, practices of appraisal devices are always anticipatory practices, involving a projection of future value. When experiencing your own disciplinary field as changing, these projections can be informed by comparing one's abilities and work with the evaluation of junior scholars in other disciplines. As a complement to existing appraisal devices, the 'fictionality' of such comparisons may be used in the task to reduce uncertainty when orientating one's action towards the future.

Still, differentiating between assessors is not only a balancing act between competing definitions of worth, but also identity positions. As evident in political science, the self-concept of aspiring scholars and the symbolic community that assessors represent are key to the practices of appraisal devices. For most historians, this translated into questions about the relationship between strategic awareness and adaptability, on the one side, and authenticity and disciplinary identity, on the other. In the following, a post-doc explains why she trusts the ability of an assessor to evaluate her work from the right perspective:

> H8f: I trust her judgment. You know, she has already written three books, she has published in international journals, she has won prestigious awards, she has received funding, and all that... So yeah, by every measure of the book, she is truly a successful scholar... But she is also someone that is honest and sincere, she is not just a careerist.
>
> JN: Ok, is it important that she is not a careerist?
>
> H8f: It is very important... I think you can learn how to do the right things, but you also need to learn how to do it the right way. A way that fits you and the type of academic you wish to be, but also an academic that others will respect, and in history, we generally do not respect careerists [small laughter].

In the account of this scholar, the establishment of trust relies both on formal status traits, such as scholarly awards and track record for funding, and on the perceived moral character of the assessor. This means that assessors must not only be able to demonstrate the ability to predict how scholars will be evaluated by gatekeepers, they must also uphold certain academic ideals, a way of *being* an academic, that junior scholars identify with. Hence, to master the *matching logic*, assessors must be considered as credible in the eyes of the aspiring scholar and in the eyes of a more abstract, idealized disciplinary community by which the aspiring scholar wants to be recognized. This way of reasoning was particularly dominant when differentiating between assessors in terms of a distinction between academics being 'fake' or 'true':

> We got these two very successful younger scholars at the department. They both publish a lot and their track record for receiving funding is impressive. In a sense, they both know how to compete successfully. But one of them, he is... he is kind

> of fake. It is like... he knows what looks good on a CV, he has got all these publications, but he does not know how to produce really good research... When wanting comments on my work or discussing how to make it in academia, I never go to him for answers. (H14m)

Previous research has identified the concept of authenticity as a significant characteristic of what it means to work as an academic (Cannizzo, 2018b). From the perspective of appraisal devices, notions of authenticity were often important for how early career academics drew distinctions between individuals who may and may not function as assessors. In the quotation above, knowledge about how to compete successfully is not enough for the junior scholar to trust someone else's judgment. Instead, an assessor must be able to correctly embody certain high-status traits that signal a shared and valued academic identity. Hence, it is by drawing symbolic boundaries that aspiring scholars come to recognize and act upon the *matching logic* between assessors' appraisals and future evaluations.

Discussion

This paper has investigated how early career academics in two disciplinary cultures use appraisal devices in the form of assessors to deal with the tension between their aspiration to succeed with an academic career and the uncertainty of not knowing how they will be evaluated by gatekeepers on the academic market. As such, the study has provided an analysis of how junior scholars come to orient themselves within highly complex institutional environments by learning how to anticipate future evaluative criteria. Focusing on how scholars in political science and history use assessors as a device for self-evaluation and future orientation, I have argued that the use of appraisal devices should not be understood as a one-dimensional way of reducing the complexity of choice. Instead, the *practices of appraisal devices* involve the many ways in which early career academics actively interpret and engage with, as well as morally and culturally accept, the authority behind appraisals. For the assessor's appraisals to correspond to the necessary *matching logic*, both knowledge and identity come into play in the establishment of trust. This is because appraisal devices do not simply provide an orientation to navigate uncertainty. They also help scholars to observe themselves and to build an academic identity.

The empirical analysis show that the conditions for using appraisal devices, as well as which individuals generally come to function as assessors, differ between the two disciplinary cultures under study. In political science, the most common assessor is a senior academic. With reference to formal status hierarchies and the institutionalized role structures ordering their academic environments, aspiring scholars in political science trust the ability of senior assessors to anticipate future evaluative criteria. In actively seeking appraisals for both recognition and to inform their own research and career

practices, the evaluative criteria imposed by senior academics become accepted measures of quality and success. The socialization processes in political science may therefore be characterized as predominantly *vertically structured*. As a prime example, the empirical analysis highlight how senior assessors are able to act as market intermediaries across different career levels, playing a vital role in the social reproduction of judgment in the field. Due to this temporal consistency, early career academics in political science have a quite coherent notion of how to qualify themselves; that is, how to correctly demonstrate one's worth in accordance with "what counts."

By contrast, the conditions for using appraisal devices within the field of history are shaped by an experience of profound discontinuation between how to demonstrate one's worth in accordance with "what counts" on the PhD and postdoctoral level, respectively. With reference to a growing generation gap in terms of epistemic and evaluative practices, senior academics gradually function less as market intermediaries. As junior scholars in history advance in their career, they instead come to use younger academics as the primary form of assessors. In contrast to the vertically structured socialization processes that dominate the PhD education, the socialization processes at the postdoctoral level may thus be characterized as increasingly *horizontally structured*. However, because of the tension between using appraisals from younger assessors as appraisal devices and the institutional role structures ordering their academic environments, junior scholars in history are accountable to multiple, and conflicting, definitions of worth.

While this observation resembles what Stark (2009) labels "heterarchy," providing aspiring scholars in history with the possibility to switch between different definitions of worth when pursuing an academic career, it also makes future evaluative criteria harder to anticipate. According to Brandtner (2017: 203), "evaluations make essential paths and values visible by providing a cognitive map for social action." Nevertheless, when scholars experience contradictory evaluative practices within their own field, evaluations might not make a guiding cognitive map. In these situations, appraisal devices can be used as a form of risk management. In the history field, practices of appraisal devices often revolved around scholars' effort to satisfy coexisting, and more or less conflicting, regimes of worth. This includes a projection of the future state of the discipline, where imagined futures form the background for valuation. To understand scholars' relation to academic markets, we must thus pay attention to the temporal dimensions of using appraisal devices, in which the orientation towards the future is crucial.

The analysis resonates in several ways with recent studies of the anticipatory practices of researchers, the impact of new monitoring practices, and the projectification of academic work (Felt, 2017; Müller, 2014; Ylijoki, 2010). However, this paper provides a change in perspective, asking *how* such anticipatory practices actually are informed; that is, how early career academics come to learn about "what counts" by deciding whose judgment to trust. From this perspective, the task is not only to analyze what practices academics put in place in order to manage uncertainty (Fochler and Sigl, 2018;

Rushforth et al., 2019), but also how these anticipatory practices rely upon sources of evaluative information that scholars must differentiate between and act upon. This, in turn, opens up for a more complex understanding of how scholars deal with uncertainty and the co-existence of multiple definitions of worth.

Analyzing how early career academics interpret and draw boundaries between appraisals let us pay attention to how they use appraisal devices both to navigate uncertainty and to build an academic identity. According to the empirical findings, the *matching logic* is not self-evident. Instead, it depends on a variety of factors, including how disciplinary ideals, high-status traits, desired identities, imagined futures, and perceptions of morality are negotiated. To capture this dynamic, I have focused on what I call *practices of appraisal devices* which provides an interpretive and existential understanding of how actors deal with uncertainty about their future. In doing so, this article extends previous work on "devices" by showing how these are always *justificatory devices*, providing scholars with categorizations and legitimations of how to correctly *do* academic work and how to correctly *be* an academic. As such, appraisal devices have a double function in helping scholars to organize the world and to observe themselves. By acting upon the knowledge appraisal devices produce, scholars do not simply reduce uncertainty, they also signal their belonging to groups and shape their own identity through these group memberships.

This development of the devices framework provokes new avenues of investigations. First, if scholars' self-concept and the symbolic boundaries they draw are vital to the practices of appraisal devices – how are such conceptual distinctions produced and acted upon in diverse epistemic cultures? And what does this mean for what kind of knowledge likely to be produced? Studies situating uncertainty reduction more explicitly in epistemic terms would help to further crystallize the usefulness of the concept for theorizing the relationship between knowledge production and identity work. Second, because scholars' response to and use of appraisal devices depend on how they actively interpret the appraisals and use them in the course of action, future research should pay attention to how such interpretative practices are influenced by the cultural and social resources actors do, or do not, have access to. This would open up for understanding of how a career system marked by uncertainty relates to institutionalized social differences (such as social class and gender). Third, appraisal devices are not neutral but part of producing and reproducing definitions of worth in academic fields. In the case of assessors, this is further accentuated by the fact that they might continuously switch roles between acting as a mentor, a gatekeeper, an employer, and a scholar. The politics of appraisal devices, including the influence of social relations in academic judgment, needs further explorations. This may include questions about mentoring and networks, academic bias and nepotism, as well as social stratification in higher education. Finally, on a more general level, practices of appraisal devices provide a conceptual framework for studying how actors orient themselves and develop their identity in fields where (i) concepts such as quality and worth are hard to define, and (ii) gatekeepers play a significant role in determining the future of careers. This does not only include

academia, but also artistic and cultural markets as well as sports industries. Comparing how uncertainties of what counts are dealt with in such diverse settings would put more focus on knowledge accumulation, making it possible to refine and develop previous analyzes of uncertainty and worth.

The findings of the present study and its conceptual contribution emphasize the need for a more detailed understanding of how scholars deal with uncertainties about their future. Ways of coping with uncertainties privilege certain ways of reasoning and preference to act, as well as certain identity positions and ways of developing a sense of self. Hence, as we try to make sense of how intensified measurements of performance and increasingly precarious working conditions are impacting the lives of academics, we should not forget that "scholarship is far from being an abstract or disconnected pursuit; instead, it is intimately tied to the image that academics hold of themselves [...] and how they think they should lead their lives" (Lamont, 2009: 195). Trying to capture this dynamic, the analysis of how appraisal devices inform the research and career practices of scholars opens up an analytical opportunity to understand the intricate ways in which valuing, being, and knowing are entangled in academic life.

CHAPTER SIX

MANAGING THE RULES OF RECOGNITION

Introduction[18]

Sparked by the profound change academia have undergone during the past few decades, existing research on academic identities has primarily focused on how scholars make sense of rapid structural changes and new framework conditions. This includes tensions between academic values and policy (Henkel, 2005) as well as a polarization of identity positions (Ylijoki and Ursin, 2013). Under pressure to adapt to a managerialist model emphasizing accountability and entrepreneurship, academic identities have been described as being under threat (Clegg, 2008), becoming increasingly fragile (Knights and Clarke, 2014) and contested (Archer, 2008b). However, while the changing nature of academic identities have been studied in great detail, we still know little about how scholars actually "work" on their identities to navigate normative demands and complex career structures. This is surprising, given that academia is characterized by a general lack of objective evaluative standards (Musselin, 2010). In such status markets (Aspers, 2009), reputation – and thus identity – becomes a key commodity.

This paper adds to work on academic identities by investigating how early career academics negotiate career scripts through identity work. More specifically, I discern four patterns of *identity talk* through which academic identities are constructed and maintained. Defining what to display and how to correctly embody its corresponding values, these patterns comprise identity work strategies junior scholars employ to navigate institutional norms and reward structures. Focusing on the early career level, the intersection of self and worth can be particularly vibrant during this "status passage" (Glaser and Strauss, 1971) as individuals attend to transition from identities and experiences of unestablished to established scholars. While this passage entails movement into a different position in social structure, it is shaped by the possibility of "becoming" and the risk of "unbecoming" (Archer, 2008b). In this process, early career academics must thus learn to successfully interpret and communicate status traits in accordance with the anticipated judgment of others. This involves a negotiation of the normative frameworks and institutional arrangements stabilizing valid forms of self-presentation (Goffman, 1990 [1959]).

Early career academics constitute a group that has recently gained attention in higher education research and science studies. Due to the organization of academic labor

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markets as "tournaments" (Musselin, 2010), aspiring scholars face fierce competition and uncertain career prospects (Sigl, 2016). In particular, the casualization and surveillance of academic work have reinforced their status as precarious knowledge workers (Gill, 2014). These factors have been found to deeply shape the evaluative principles available to early career academics when conceptualizing and proving their worth (Fochler et al., 2016). Still, the conditions are not the same for everyone. Previous studies point to academic careers being pursued in highly unequal contexts in terms of gender (Bozzon et al., 2017), social class (Crew, 2021), and migrant background (Behtoui and Leivestad, 2019).

Against this backdrop, identity has emerged as a key concept for understanding the complex realities of early career academics. Pressured to adapt to a career system increasingly governed by the logics of new public management, several studies have explored tensions between internal and external factors shaping scholars' sense of self. For example, Archer (2008b) demonstrates how notions of "success" and "authenticity" are re-defined in terms of neoliberal ideals. Similarly, studying the relationship between the entrepreneurial orientation of contemporary universities and what motivates junior scholars to engage in academic work, Hakala (2009) shows that while some elements of "traditional" academic identity and its moral framework continue to have a strong cultural position, changing framework conditions impel junior scholars to search for new interpretations and sources of meaning. These observations are part of a larger trend characterized by changing institutional demands and identity fragmentation (Billot, 2010; Henkel, 2005; Ylijoki and Ursin, 2013). In line with this, Ylijoki and Henriksson (2017) point to how junior scholars rely upon very different cultural resources when making sense of their careers and professional roles which, in turn, are becoming increasingly polarized.

Although an important body of work has demonstrated how new evaluative regimes and complex career structures shape the identities of junior scholars in various ways, we still know little about how junior scholars navigate these normative demands *through* identity work. In part, this is because of the previous emphasis on academic identity construction as an outcome of change. However, as studies of other status markets show, identities constitute important resources in the pursuit of recognition and reward (Mao and Shen, 2020). Aspiring actors within art, film, music, and writing must invest time and energy managing their identities in ways that are distinctive while at the same time remaining connected to the field's traditions. In this article, I argue that this also holds true for knowledge workers in contemporary academia. Hence, I explore identity as a symbolic resource that is performed: as something scholars do and work upon when trying to advance in their careers. Shaped through the awarding status of those who perform well, this involves different ways in which early career academics manage their identities according to the perceived rules of recognition. By empirically investigating how this is accomplished through various patterns of identity talk, the paper ends with a discussion on how the concept of *identity labor* may open up new avenues of investigation.

Theorizing Identity Work: Talk and Scripts

Theorizing identity as an accomplishment, identity work is a social activity involving others and consists of ongoing processes of signification (Snow and Anderson, 1987). For an identity to be established or verified, individuals must use signs recognized by desired audiences. This means that identification, of ourselves and of others, "is something that we do." It also means that "we may get it wrong" (Jenkins, 2014: 2). This vulnerable dynamic is captured in concepts such as "self-presentation" and "impression management," referring to how individuals "adapt the public display of their identities in order to create a particular image, or desirable impression, upon the audiences they encounter" (Scott, 2015: 82). However, audiences continuously evaluate individuals' performances and may reject or discredit identity claims. Identity work is therefore a reflexive activity in which individuals consider the anticipated and looked-for responses of others (Goffman, 1990 [1959]: 78-81).

Conceptualized as part of the generic process of identity work, *identity talk* is the verbal constructions of desired identities in relation to others (Snow and Anderson, 1987). Analytically, the focus is on "the role of language in providing reasons and explanations for action, either prospectively or retrospectively, in line with the norms and values of the audience" (Hunt and Benford, 1994: 492). Hence, identity talk is not about rendering "facts" about objective positions. Rather, it encompasses a variety of rhetoric discursive practices that "reflects actors' perception of social order and is based on interpretations of current situations, themselves, and others" (Hunt and Benford, 1994: 492). As such, the notion of identity talk adopts a relational understanding of agency (Snow and Anderson, 1987). Acknowledging that practices of identity work are always embedded in and entangled with normative codes of conduct (Goffman, 1990 [1959]: 244-246), it illustrates how individuals intersubjectively construct meaningful identities and how they try to manage them in a contextually appropriate manner.

This paper analyses how academic identities are accomplished through talks about possibilities and limitations for recognition. In describing how they navigate institutional norms and reward structures, aspiring scholars engage in verbal constructions of desired and non-desired identities. This includes how they negotiate positive and negative status traits in accordance with the anticipated judgment of others. In this form of talk, the concept of "others" is general in nature and refers to any actor whose judgement is deemed important for the valuation of academics and their careers. Consequently, this form of talk has a directionality, conveying how scholars connect events and expectations in a temporal order leading towards a desirable end result. This is an anticipating process which contains a mediation between social institutions and individual actors. I conceptualize this form of anticipation as a negotiation of *career scripts*. In status markets, the relationship between those who perform and their audience constitutes one of the bases for valuation (Aspers, 2009). Understood as collective representations that are subject to individual interpretation (Barley, 1989), career scripts provide scholars with definitions of who is worthy and who is not, generating guidelines

for how to behave in order to be positively evaluated by others. In other words, examining how scholars negotiate career scripts through identity work provides an analytical opportunity to explore valuation as a dramaturgical problem; that is, as something that must be performed.

Material and Method

The analysis is based on 35 in-depth interviews with early career academics in political science and history conducted between February and June of 2019. In line with Haddow and Hammarfelt (2019), I employ a rather extensive definition of early career academics, including scholars that have received their PhD within the previous eight years and who are yet to obtain a permanent position.

The study covers five departments located at four research-intensive universities in Sweden. As argued elsewhere, Sweden offers an illustrative case of how academia has been reshaped by recent transformations of higher education systems (Roumbanis, 2019). Like in many other countries, this includes "a strong shift in both academic career structures and the discourses and practices aiming to define and assess the quality of research" (Fochler et al., 2016: 177). As a prime example, competitive project-based funding has become the main source of funding for researchers generally, and for early career academics specifically (Öquist and Benner, 2012). While the lack of one common academic career system in Sweden makes career paths quite unclear, the postdoctoral phase has nevertheless established itself as a bottleneck in the system (Frølich et al., 2018). This means that junior scholars must juggle between fixed-term contracts for many years and career advancement is highly dependent on their success in the funding market (Roumbanis, 2019).

Indeed, this holds true for early career academics in political science and history. Moreover, these fields were deliberately selected due to them being sites where negotiations regarding "ideal career trajectories" are currently ongoing. As in many social sciences and humanities disciplines, shifts in how research is organized and evaluated have generated tensions between rivalling value systems and junior scholars are continuously mentioned as those most affected by these dynamics (Haddow and Hammarfelt, 2019; Salö, 2017). In a previous study, I pointed to differences between political science and history in terms of how they anticipate the value of their research practices (Nästesjö, 2021). Interestingly, the analysis of identity talk did not render any substantial disparities between the fields. Hence, in this paper, they provide a joint empirical case of how junior scholars navigate heterogenous and conflicting evaluative landscapes.

Regarding disciplinary background and gender, the number of participants is balanced (history: 9 male, 8 female; political science: 11 male, 7 female). Roughly 80 percent may be characterized as middle class or upper middle class and 20 percent as working class. At the time of the data collection, nearly all of the respondents worked in project-based research positions with some teaching responsibility. To bring variation

into the material, I sampled early career academics who differed in terms of academic age (years post-PhD) and with diverse experiences of research, teaching, administration, as well as publishing, mobility, and collaborative work. Additionally, this resulted in variation with respect to the respondents' family situation. The interviews were conducted in Swedish or English and lasted between 90 and 140 min. All of the interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. Informed consent was obtained before each interview, ensuring the respondents of voluntary participation and anonymity. Consequently, some biographical details have been amended slightly or left out of the empirical sections. All names are assigned pseudonyms.

The interviews had a reflexive and biographical character (Sigl, 2016). This included a wide variety of questions, ranging from their initial fascination of research and the unfolding of their careers to future aspirations. Rather than revealing "objective" life courses, the aim was to use temporal and situational perspectives as interview interventions for studying how early career academics conceptualize their room for maneuvering, especially with reference to evaluation practices and reward structures. Focusing on how scholars perform "biographical work" allowed insights into the normative frameworks that guide their presentation of self. Moreover, asking the respondents to draw internal (what traits do *I* value) and external (what traits do *others* value) boundaries regarding what characterizes successful and unsuccessful academics made it possible to shed light on how they negotiate career expectations and conceptions of worth in relation to their social identity as early career academics; that is, their self-concept and how others define them.

The analysis followed an inductive approach. I initially identified situations in which self and identity matters and how such issues were discussed. In due time, two interrelated categories highlighting the importance of identity emerged: identity as sense-making and identity as self-presentation. While the first category consisted of the many ways in which scholars come to understand themselves as they make sense of academic work and careers, the second category focused more specifically on how scholars attempted to display themselves in ways that are likely to be positively evaluated by others. Together, the two categories provide scholars with an orientation for how to act in order to be recognized and obtain status. From this perspective, the verbal construction of academic identities both relied on and tried to enact career scripts. Based on the inductively generated categories, I discerned four patterns of identity talk through which junior scholars construct and avow identities.

Findings

The empirical findings are structured around four patterns of identity talk and focus on what definitions of worth that are enacted in each pattern and how performances of identity work are negotiated to be considered appropriate. Utilized by a majority of the respondents, *achievement talk*, *authenticity talk,* and *loyalty talk* comprise three

dominant ways in which junior scholars perceive the rules of recognition and how they seek to manage their identities accordingly. In addition, female respondents and respondents with working-class background also utilize *personation talk*, aiming to make adjustments to what is regarded as privileged identities. While these patterns are treated separately in the findings section, the relationship between them and the challenge of striking the right performative balance are elaborated upon in the ending discussion.

Achievement Talk

Achievement talk involves strategies intended to present an identity that signals achievement and competitiveness. Emerging from the structural conditions of project-based careers, where individuals frequently have to prove their worth in order to continue competing for symbolic and economic recourses, junior scholars try to manage their identities according to its competitive logics. Scholars must therefore not only *make* achievements, but constantly *demonstrate* them in interactions with others. For instance, Maria stated that:

> Academic life's a pitch. No one knows what you've accomplished unless you tell them. You have to make sure you're perceived as capable of making it at this level. Otherwise, they won't come knocking on your door when future opportunities arise.

About to finish her second postdoc project, Maria underlines the importance of signaling achievement and competitiveness. Because her colleagues not only represent an abstract community of peers, but future job opportunities, she needs to manage her identity in relation to their judgment. Similarly, Peter emphasized the importance of coming across as a "proper investment":

> When applying for funding or a position, you have to present not only your research, but yourself, as a proper investment. [...] This applies in almost every aspect of postdoctoral life. To be picked for a project or an application, you must be recognized as someone others can count on to succeed.

While the reputation-based economy in which scholars compete is not unique to present-day academia, the projectification of research seems to strengthen its importance on academic labor markets. In the narratives of Peter and Maria, the ambition to increase one's visibility is closely linked to the sociality of project-based careers, namely, that "whoever you meet represent a work opportunity" (Gill, 2014: 16). Consequently, self-promotion becomes a key activity for managing academic identities.

However, achievement talk is a complex identity management technique. Whereas competition-judgment relations create conditions for self-promotion, not every way of displaying achievement and competitiveness may be recognized by others. One example

is the tacit rules for telling others about one's success. According to Peter, "you have to be sensitive about these things as you don't want to come across as a braggart." Similarly, Lisa underlined the importance of showing respect to others when she noted that "academic work is hard, people fail all the time, you have to keep that in mind when celebrating your own victories." Furthermore, while competitiveness is recognized as a status trait of high-achieving scholars, coming across as overly competitive may result in damaged social bonds. To manage this tension, junior scholars try to signal *competitive capacity* rather than a *competitive mindset*. For instance, Fredrik distanced himself from individuals who he deemed "too competitive," concluding that "it's not about behaving like everything's a race. Rather, I try to show that I'm a strong candidate in comparison to others, that I have what it takes."

In accordance with the definition of worth emphasized by achievement talk, junior scholars sometime hide status traits not compatible with a career script consisting of a high-achieving academic subject. One example is David, who found himself without an income after finishing his first postdoc project. Beginning to work hours at a library, he was afraid of being labelled a "drop out" or a "failure" since it "was not part of the right story you have to tell about yourself." He thus decided to "keep quiet about it in front of colleagues."

Achievement talk constructs an idealized version of a successful scholar. Since hardly anyone is able to live up to its standards, identity work strategies are employed to navigate the fear of other people's judgment. Indeed, many respondents emphasized the importance of fostering an impression of their individual career trajectory as successful and linear. Often centered on the amount and temporal frequency of publications, this kind of talk also involved the reputation and impact-factor of journals. For example, Anna underlined the importance of continuously aiming "for more prestigious, high-ranked journals, to show progress and future potential."

Recognized as symbolic resources for managing identities, performance metrics provide a form of valuation establishing competition as the primary site where academics and their work are made valuable. By making careers and identities comparable, performance metrics enforce temporal notions of efficiency and expectations of ever-increasing production (Hammarfelt et al., 2020). In everyday interactions, such 'trajectoral thinking' also includes the more subtle expressions of norms associated with future success:

> At the same time as everybody's talking about the importance of slowing down, it seems like it's almost 'ugly' to actually do so... It sorts of signals that you're not wanted or asked for. So, you have to pretend to be this stressed-out academic who works every hour of the day. (Anna)

The discourse of overwork has a powerful status within academia (Gill, 2014). While generally underlining their willingness to find work-life balance, many respondents still acknowledged the significance in displaying individual dedication and aspiration

associated with the overwork discourse. Hence, in face-to-face interactions, they had to negotiate its symbolic power.

Authenticity Talk

Authenticity talk involves strategies aiming at presenting an identity that is perceived as genuine and true to self. As argued elsewhere, academic work often takes the form of "principled projects that embody core values of intellectual labor, ethics, and professionalism," including a passionate attachment to one's working life (Osbaldiston et al., 2019: 260). Furthermore, in status markets, authenticity is key to establish credibility (Mao and Shen, 2020).

One way of displaying authenticity is to demonstrate *consistency* between scholars' internal values and their external expressions. This was especially common when making justifications for conducting research, where the respondents emphasized that its relevance must exceed individual scholars and their careers. Authenticity talk is here a way of coming across as genuine in front of one's colleagues. As Thomas made clear, this is important when constructing a distinctive and credible academic identity:

> I engage with society in different ways, that is sort of my trademark. [...] I think I'm recognized as someone who's genuinely interested in and devoted to contributing to a better understanding of these issues.

The performance of authenticity consists of expressing sincerity and engagement over time. However, consistency is not a value in itself. Rather, identity work strategies must *conform* to a common set of norms structuring the field in which scholars seek recognition. In practice, this requires a certain feel for the game of recognition:

> Of course, publications are important. But you don't want to come across as a scholar from let say medicine, with literally hundreds of publications. That's just not the way to do it in history. Then you're not thorough enough. [...] Do you just care about the number of publications or do you actually care about the research itself? (Thomas)

As is evident in the above quotation, authenticity talk enacts a career script sensitive to disciplinary norms privileging a form of probity, rather than instrumental activities performed through external pressure. This implicates a presentation of self that avoids notions of careerism and calculation. As such, authenticity talk is centered on how well scholars are able to embody the rules of recognition without paying much attention to them. Anna knew about this when she said that "the ideal is not to talk about how to succeed in academic careers, but still act like you know it." Similarly, Peter underlined that "scholars who basically just try to maximize their chances of success are kind of

scorned at." Such tensions between career strategies and coming off as authentic were also discussed in relation to performance metrics:

> Like most scholars, I pay attention to citations, numbers of publications, and all that stuff. But it's not something that I talk about with others. I think paying too much attention to these things is looked down upon. You don't want to be perceived as that guy. You have to communicate other values. (Peter)

While experiences of authenticity may be a motivational factor influencing academic work (Archer, 2008b), the empirical analysis demonstrates that it is something scholars are subjugated to perform in interactions with others whose recognition they desire. From this perspective, authenticity is not a state of mind, but an identity claim that is either accepted or rejected by others. Given the decisive role audiences play in defining the symbols and boundaries of authenticity, displaying its corresponding values is a matter of strategic identity work.

Loyalty Talk

Loyalty talk contains strategies by which scholars construct an identity based on social ties and willingness of helping out. The focus is on presenting oneself as a loyal colleague, committed to contributing to the joint workplace and to the work of others. According to Robert, this may include a wide range of activities such as "do a workload of teaching when necessary, to help out, comment on others' manuscripts" or simply "make coffee for seminars and be friendly." While often described as valuable in itself, the role of a loyal colleague was also pictured as a resource for constructing identities through which junior scholars may realize career opportunities. Having combined smaller research grants with substitute teaching and administration duties for more than three years, Robert knew about this when he said that "I think it's widely known that selection and hiring processes in academia are ... well ... a little biased. It pays to belong." Similarly, Hanna stated that "to be the one they ask to fill in a position or whatever, I try to come across as reliable and willing to help. You can't say no too many times."

Because the working contracts of junior scholars are highly dependent on short term extensions, career trajectories tend to be fragmented and disrupted rather than linear (Hammarfelt et al., 2020). Emerging from these structural conditions, displaying loyalty is closely connected to the importance of networks as tools for recognition. More specifically, loyalty talk draws upon the logic of gift-giving (Bloch, 2002). To come forward when needed and helping out implies a recognition of the status of the giver as a valued member of the group. While reciprocity is not guaranteed by external coercion, enacting the role of a loyal colleague seeks to generate *gratitude* which establishes a reciprocal bond. Hence, in defining group membership, loyalty talk aims to build and

maintain social relationships through which early career academics may access valuable resources.

Symbolically, loyalty talk often utilizes the widespread individualism otherwise known to distinguish an academic culture governed by competition. For example, Sam said:

> There is this discussion about 'publish, publish, publish.' Many have adopted that mindset. But in my experience, acting like a good colleague, that sort of puts you in the spotlight. [...] There are too many individualists in academia and very few team players.

In this quotation, opposing individualism provides Sam with resources to construct a distinctive and credible identity. This involves distancing himself from junior scholars having adopted a narrow set of evaluative principles centered on individual productivity. Instead, enacting the role of a team player, he employs identity work strategies intended to strengthen his attachment to individuals and groups at his workplace. However, there is a symbolic ambiguity in the relation between recognition and the performance of loyalty. Because academic settings are strongly hierarchized, loyalty cannot create symmetrical social relationships. Consequently, it may lead to increased exploitation, where junior scholars carry out largely invisible working tasks not recognized as "merits" (Bird et al., 2004). In such situations, the symbolic effects of loyalty do not follow the logic of gift-giving. Instead, the agency of junior scholars is reduced, negatively affecting their possibility of earning recognition and obtain status.

Personation Talk

Personation talk involves strategies intended to portray or make adjustment to what is regarded as privileged identities in the valuation of academics and their careers. As such, it is a response to existing social inequalities in academia which are well documented in previous research (see e.g., Blackwell and Glover, 2008; Crew, 2021). Providing scholars with identity management techniques for enacting roles which 'naturally fit,' personation talk covers how junior scholars negotiate their social identities in terms of gender and social class background.

In the narratives of female scholars, academic careers were often described as gendered. Demanding 'masculine' norms associated with competition and success, these scholars tried to *diminish* or *alter* their femininity by changing the way they behaved in face-to-face interactions. Talking about research seminars in particular, Maria stated that:

> I talk loudly, I do not tolerate being interrupted, I try to come across as self-confident. I kind of behave like a guy. In many situations, that's how you need to act in order to be taken seriously.

For Maria, enacting the masculine norms of self-confidence constitutes a strategy for coping with a recurrent set of situations characterized by gender inequality. To be recognized as someone who deserves taking up space and promote herself, she needs to perform roles traditionally associated with male academics. This was also present in accounts of female scholars who distanced themselves from low-status roles. Discussing career paths and their gendered boundaries, Steph said:

> Everybody knows teaching and administration is a 'women's trap.' If you end up doing too much of it, you're not recognized as a researcher anymore, and that means that you're sort of out of the game. Even if I've been teaching quite a lot, I've made sure not to be associated with that group.

Under pressure to adapt to a career script favoring research, Steph self-consciously distanced herself from female colleagues representing less credible groups. In terms of identity work, *distancing* is a strategical attempt to foster the impression of a lack of attachment to a particular role or group in order to deny the social identity implied (Snow and Anderson, 1987). Hence, it involves drawing distinctions between oneself and others who tend to be negatively evaluated by a shared community of peers.

While distancing might enable female scholars to assume characteristics of privileged (masculine) identities, personation talk also involves dealing with tensions arising from having to perform several roles simultaneously. This was particularly salient when female respondents experienced conflicts between their role as an academic and their role as a mother, resulting in tactical attempts to keep these social roles apart. For example, Susie described how she came to employ such strategies after receiving negative reactions when leaving a research conference early to go to the park to play with her son:

> It was very clear that they thought my prioritization was deeply wrong, like I was not committed. [...] As an aca- demic, you have to behave in a certain way, to signal the worth academic work has for you [...] Due to experiences like this, I try to keep my private and my professional self apart.

There are strong echoes here with previous studies highlighting the negative impact of maternity on female scholar's career advancement (see e.g. Blackwell and Glover, 2008; Bozzon et al., 2017). For women like Susie, displaying one's role as a mother and caregiver has no exchange-value, generating no benefit in academic contexts. Rather, it is seen as a limitation of dedication to the academic career.

While aiming to make adjustments to what is regarded as privileged identities, scholars must at the same time navigate the risk of being perceived as 'inauthentic.' This was evident in the accounts of scholars coming from working-class backgrounds as they tried to adapt to an academic culture to which they initially felt alien. Crucially, this involved the management of embodied identity identifiers, such as emotions, speech, and clothes. For example, Fredrik stated that:

> In comparison to all these 'professor's children,' I had very little pre-understanding of what it meant to pursue an academic career. To handle the uncertainty, going without a salary for a couple of months, the competition. [...] They seem to be OK with it, they're self-confident, relaxed. [...] At work, I try to do the same. Not talk about how I'm doubting myself and whether or not I fit in.

According to Fredrik, being recognized in a competitive academic culture involves displaying self-confidence and ability. Coming from a different social class background than many of his peers, he had limited knowledge about prevailing career conditions and how to handle them. Feeling insecure and unacquainted, he had to learn how to manage his emotions in front of others. In a similar vocabulary, Navid described his social class background by contrasting himself against the majority of his colleagues. Looking back at his time as a master's and PhD student, Navid explained how he started to "to talk and dress like an academic" in order to "fit in and to be taken seriously." Yet, strategies intended to portray privileged identities always run the risk of resulting in situations characterized by unease rather than ease:

> I remember attending my first international conference as a PhD student [big laughter]. I had bought new clothes, I was super prepared, all dressed up. But when I showed up, I was way over-dressed, it was embarrassing really. I felt like such a try-hard. [...] The problem is, you can't behave like you're reading a manual for being an academic. It has to come naturally.

In the narratives of Navid and Fredrik, attempts to adjust oneself to the rules of recognition are shaped by experiences of 'fitting in' and 'standing out.' Hence, personation talk is about seeking to display a form of naturalness and belonging. Still, given the difficulty of acting in accordance with a career script privileging those who have academic culture as their native culture, such strategies always risk to symbolically express one's distance rather than one's natural feel for the game of recognition.

Discussion

In this paper, I have elaborated four patterns of identity talk through which junior scholars construct and maintain academic identities. These patterns of talk – *achievement, authenticity, loyalty,* and *personation* – are used to navigate institutional norms and reward structures. The analysis demonstrates several contrasting understandings of what it means to act and to represent worth as an early career academic; understandings which the respondents alternate between in their pursuit of recognition. Junior scholars in history and political science thus relate to a more versatile evaluative repertoire than revealed in studies of other epistemic cultures, such as the life sciences (Fochler et al., 2016), or captured in notions like "publish or perish" or "neoliberal subjects" (Archer, 2008b). This is not to say that a culture of publish or perish does not exist, nor that the

pervasiveness of neoliberalism does not shape academic life. Rather, these findings underline the actual challenge the respondents face when trying to manage their identities in a contextually appropriate manner. To navigate the rules of recognition, their identity performances must conform to multiple roles and diverse definitions of worth.

This resonates with studies pointing to the multilayeredness of contemporary academia. According to Ylijoki and Henriksson (2017: 1305), "older layers do not disappear when new ones emerge." Instead, "traditional academic values and ideals continue to have a strong cultural standing in the current entrepreneurial university context." Consequently, there are fundamentally different ways to make sense of academic careers (Duberley et al., 2006) and identities (Billot, 2010). For younger scholars, this has been found to be significant as it creates tensions between growing into a scientific vocation and adapting to a competitive selection process guided by entrepreneurial values (Hakala, 2009). While such tensions are evident across academia, they are perhaps particularly salient in social sciences and humanities fields, such as political science and history, whose evaluative landscapes are currently changing due to outside pressure and new framework conditions (see Haddow and Hammarfelt, 2019)

What is less known is how early career academics deal with this multilayered complexity through identity work. Exploring identity as a symbolic resource that is performed, the four patterns of identity talk encompass a range of activities in which scholars give meaning to themselves and others by selectively presenting identities congruent with their understanding of reward structures and their own interest of career advancement. The findings indicate that these patterns coexist as they continuously overlap and clash in situations described by the respondents. For example, there are evident tensions between achievement talk and authenticity talk as they require different ways of presenting oneself. Nevertheless, in order to show tact in competitive relations and appear trustworthy in the eyes of one's colleagues, displaying achievement is often attuned with expressions of authenticity. Likewise, to navigate the judgment of others in settings which are strongly hierarchized, enacting the role of a loyal team player must frequently be combined with self-promoting activities demonstrating one's individual ability to compete. As such, different patterns of identity talk relate to one another in a complex balancing act since they, in reality, are always embodied identity performances (Goffman, 1990 [1959]: 241-243).

Exactly how this is accomplished, interactionally, is beyond the scope of this article and demands further ethnographic investigation. Still, my interview data suggest that this process is shaped by the meaning system structuring the field in which early career academics seek recognition. To manage their identities successfully, they must develop a certain feel for the game of recognition. This involves balancing multiple identity claims while conforming to the tacit rules for how to correctly embody high-status traits. Furthermore, the study points to how scholars' identity work is embedded in broader social and political structures. The narratives of many female scholars and scholars with working-class backgrounds were deeply shaped by the management of their social identities. Centered on the symbolic struggle of "fitting in" and "standing

out," these findings highlight how gender and class origin may constrain the possibility to display privileged academic identities. While this adds to existing literature on academic careers and social inequality (see e.g. Behtoui and Leivestad, 2019; Bozzon et al., 2017; Crew, 2021), future studies should look more closely to the configuration of different aspects of social division. For example, an intersectional lens could open up new perspectives on how the expression or concealment of class identity are gendered in academic settings (Friedman, 2022).

Demonstrating how early career academics engage in identity work to navigate the judgment of others resembles what Bloch (2002) calls "the deceiving game," in which scholars express a staged reality serving as protective measures. Yet, impression management should not be reduced to bluffing (Goffman, 1990 [1959]: 81). Rather, it is a way of adapting to the demands of a career system marked by conflicting normative expectations. For scholars, identity is a key commodity having a powerful pull on audiences and markets (Gill, 2014). Since the responsibility of handling future uncertainties relies solely on individual scholars themselves, they are increasingly required to treat their academic identity as a project; a project through which they may realize career opportunities and obtain valuable resources.

In my view, this points to the need of not just talking about *identity work* when considering scholars' management of academic identities, but also what I call *identity labor*. Whereas identity work is a general social process, identity labor refers to the more specific process of managing identities to fulfil the requirements of a job. Echoing Hochschild's (2012) distinction between emotion work and emotional labor, the former has use value while the latter has exchange value. Correspondingly, identity labor covers how workers are expected to regulate, construct, and display their identities in accordance with occupational demands. This connects to literature in organizational studies emphasizing "the managerial interest in regulating employees 'insides' – their self-image, their feelings and identifications" (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002: 622). Still, while acknowledging identity regulation as a form of organizational control, the concept of identity labor complements such perspective by focusing on the exchange value of identities in occupational settings. This involves the process of identity capitalization which refers both to activities aiming to convert one's identity into a type of "capital" (Mao and Shen, 2020) and how the valuation of present identities relies upon future estimations (Muniesa, 2016). Considering the relationship between identity and employability, identity labor is likely to be most intense among those in career transitions and/or working on temporary contracts. Evidently, early career academics fit both these categories.

While the social relations in academia have always implied a serious amount of identity labor, the transformation of universities along the lines of accountability and marketization more frequently fosters situations which call for identity labor. Indeed, recent studies suggest that the growth of performative expectations within academia have nourished a disciplined culture of self-promotion (Hamann and Kaltenbrunner, 2022; Macfarlane, 2020). This is evident considering how academic careers have become

project-based, creating conditions for scholars to act like freelancers in an enterprise-like economy. Moreover, as a response to these structural changes, the normative demands for visibility requiring identity labor are increasingly organized by universities themselves (see e.g. Roumbanis, 2019). This encompasses arrangements relating to a wide repertoire of academic activities, such as conferencing, writing grant applications, publishing, networking, social media usage, and writing CVs.

By further investigating scholars' management of academic identities in terms of identity labor, identity is established as a key site for the struggle of worth and recognition in academic life. This involves questions about who may (not) claim their identity performances as occupational resources having exchange value and how this relates to social inequalities and role conflicts. While my findings suggest that male academics with higher social origin are privileged in this respect, and that female scholars and scholars with working-class background are penalized, additional studies are needed in order to understand how identity labor are affected by different aspects of social division. This should include how identity labor relates to issues of emotional labor, alienation, and career progression, as well as acts of resistance. Furthermore, whereas my findings are limited to two social sciences and humanities disciplines located at research-intensive universities in Sweden, an important empirical question for further theorizing identity labor is how it depends on contextual factors. For instance, how is identity labor shaped in institutions that are more education-oriented or in other epistemic domains where the work organization differ considerably? Does identity labor manifests itself similarly across higher education systems and academic job markets?

CHAPTER SEVEN

BETWEEN DELIVERY AND LUCK

Introduction[19]

One of the most notable features of contemporary academia is the role played by projects. Projects are the standard format for organizing research activities and the division of labor at departments (Ylijoki, 2016). Moreover, competitive project funding is the most common way to decide what research that is deemed worthy of being provided money and which research that is not (Bloch et al., 2014). This process of projectification has deeply influenced the social (Franssen and de Rijcke, 2019) and temporal (Vostal, 2016) structures of academia with an increase of short-term employment and hyper-competition, especially evident among early career academics (Fochler et al., 2016). For this particular group, projects not only characterize precarious working conditions, but are the very material upon which academic careers are structured, built, and assessed (Bloch et al., 2014; Herschberg et al., 2018).

Centered on the prevalence of projects as "the basic organizing principle" of contemporary research governance (Felt, 2016: 136), previous studies have argued that the project format acts as "straitjackets" or "iron cages" and that academics are increasingly being "trapped" by its temporal and instrumental logic (see e.g. Müller, 2014; Ylijoki, 2015). However, empirical evidence also points to how scholars in project-based research cultures develop different modes of coping (Sigl, 2016). Under certain circumstances, projects might be used as highly versatile and loose temporal "instruments," creating new spaces for crafting agency and managing time (Virtová and Vostal, 2021). Furthermore, in what way disciplinary fields adjust to a project mode of research varies depending on socio-epistemic conditions (Torka, 2018). This suggests that the process of projectification is not as uniform as previously expected.

This article adds to the emergent literature on the projectification of academic life. How do early career academics make sense of their work, careers, and identities becoming increasingly shaped by projectification? What conceptions of worth come into the foreground? And how are such normative understandings of their work, careers, and identities negotiated? To address these questions, I draw upon 35 in-depth interviews with fixed-term scholars in political science and history working at four research-intensive universities in Sweden. Whereas junior scholars employed on temporary contracts form a group that has recently gained attention in both policy and research – not least because they are among those most heavily affected by projectification – the primary

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focus has thus far been on parts of the natural sciences. In addition to extending the literature to the very different contexts of social sciences and humanities disciplines, the article also provides a comparative perspective between disciplines and departments. This let us explore how the meanings and dynamics of projectification are shaped by the context in which scholars interpret and act upon them.

To study how junior scholars respond to their working conditions and academic selves becoming increasingly shaped by projectification, I focus attention to how it functions as a *frame* through which they understand the context they are in and how they should relate to it. Building on, and modifying, Goffman's (1974) initial understanding of frames as interpretative schemes which organize actors' experience and subjective involvement in a given aspect of social life, this is to emphasize how scholars draw on shared frames of meaning in order to respond to institutional demands. As such, the article contributes a novel perspective on projectification as a process constituted on the level of meaning-making. While this entails an analysis of how scholars interpret and align to a narrow conception of worth based on competition and delivery, light is also shed on how they negotiate such normative understandings by envisioning alternate scripts of success and worth.

This article is structured as follows. First, I situate the study within the emergent literature on projectification of academic life, with a particular focus on early career academics. The subsequent section briefly presents the empirical settings of the two disciplines. Thereafter, I introduce a frame analytic approach before presenting the interview study. The empirical chapter is divided into three parts, dedicated to the *content*, *alignment*, and *keying* of what I call *the project frame*. The article concludes with a discussion using the empirical findings as a lens for more general developments in terms of the interplay between valuation and academic socialization.

Impacts of Projectification: Early Career Academics as a Case in Point

While the definition of "early career academics" varies, it generally refers to academics in a phase of transition (Haddow and Hammarfelt, 2019). Due to number of PhD and other temporary staff members increasing at a far greater rate than permanent positions during recent decades, this transition phase has extended in terms of time (Hakala, 2009) and has become subject to hyper-competition (Fochler et al., 2016). Therefore, the present study employs a rather extensive definition, including scholars who have received their PhD within the previous eight years and who are yet to obtain a permanent position.

Working on temporary contracts, previous research indicates that early career academics is a group particularly affected by the projectification of academic work and careers. As part of the re-organization of academic institutions along the lines of new public management, it is a process entangled with increasing career pressures from,

among other things, expanded accountability and performance management (Haddow and Hammarfelt, 2019), heightened precarity (Gill, 2016), and changing temporalities characterized by an acceleration of work pace (Vostal, 2016). The project format is thus not considered "a mere technical organizational tool." Instead, it "challenges and reshapes research practices and ideals" (Ylijoki, 2016: 13), structuring the conditions under which early career academics are socialized (Fochler et al., 2016; Nästesjö, 2021; Roumbanis, 2019).

Focusing on the mechanisms through which project funding affects the social structures of research groups, Franssen and de Rijcke (2019) argue that the rise in temporary positions as well as the extended length of the temporary career phase means that early career academics must interact with the job and grant market much more often. On one hand, this impels junior scholars to continuously try to increase their research time which leads to a differentiation between research intensive and teaching intensive career scripts (see also Ylijoki and Henriksson, 2017). On the other hand, introducing competition as a mode of governance, project funding enforces competitive behavior (Müller, 2014) while outsourcing epistemic authority to funding bodies and project leaders (Herschberg et al., 2018). Taken together, Franssen and de Rijcke (2019: 146) argue that these features of a project-based career continuously "establish and reaffirm the individual as the primary epistemic subject," pushing early career academics "towards entrepreneurial behavior." This, in turn, shapes junior scholars' approach to their work (Hakala, 2009) and how they construct academic identities (Archer, 2008b), although not in a one-dimensional way (Nästesjö, 2023).

These observations are part of a larger trend characterized by the individualization of precarity (Gill, 2016) and narrowing valuation regimes (Fochler et al., 2016). Under the impact of project-based careers, much of the responsibility for dealing with uncertainty about the future, whether in terms of funding or research, has shifted from the organizational level to the individual researcher (Cannizzo, 2018a). Exploring the narrativization of success and failure among fixed-term academics in the UK, Loveday (2018) argues that this shift has resulted in a contradictive sense of agency. While success was pictured as "being lucky," indicating a lack of agency, failure was considered one's own responsibility, thus conforming to the notion of individualized "enterprise subjects." Moreover, studying life science postdocs, Sigl (2016) claims that the project format creates a structural link between social and epistemic uncertainties. As a response, junior scholars develop modes of coping often centered on the reduction of risk and the securing of individual merits. According to Sigl, these coping strategies become part of the tacit governance of project-based research cultures. Similar findings have been reported in numerous studies of life science postdocs. This includes how productivity concerns and evaluative metrics shape research practices (Müller and de Rijcke, 2018), how the impact of prioritizing first-authorship can hinder collaboration (Müller, 2012), and how the competitive structures of project-based careers lead to a narrow conception of worth focused on high-impact publication output (Fochler et al., 2016; Müller, 2014).

With notable exceptions (see e.g. Franssen and de Rijcke, 2019; Haddow and Hammarfelt, 2019; Steffy and Langfeldt, 2022), the life sciences have thus far been the primary focus in studies of how the working practices of junior scholars are influenced by the changing structures and valuation of academic careers. However, an important question is how such changing framework conditions are handled in settings that are shaped quite differently. Hence, one of the contributions of this article is extending the literature to the evaluative contexts of political science and history in Sweden.

Empirical Settings and the Contexts of Projectification

Sweden offers a good example of "how university management has moved towards a managerialist model emphasizing accountability and marketization" (Roumbanis, 2019: 198). Both in policy and within institutions, entrepreneurship, competition, and performance evaluations have gained in prevalence. This includes a shift away from block funding towards competitive project-based funding. For early career academics, these developments have established the postdoc phase as a bottleneck in an otherwise ambiguous national academic career system. Indeed, the lack of a tenure system and "the existence of many different paths to become associate professor or professor" make career paths in Swedish academia somewhat "unclear and less transparent" (Frølich et al., 2018: 41). Additionally, the move towards project-based funding and the increase of competition for positions have extended the time early career academics need to spend working on temporary contracts (Swedish Research Council, 2015).

The empirical settings of this study reflect these changes and includes three history departments (hereafter H1, H2, and H3) and two political science departments (hereafter PS1 and PS2) located at four research-intensive universities in Sweden. Regarded as high-status fields within the humanities and the social sciences, respectively, the competition for funding and tenured positions is fierce. Consequently, early career academics at the studied departments work on temporary contracts for a long period of time and career advancement is highly dependent upon their success in the funding market. Still, as disciplines, political science and history also differ in meaningful ways. While political science in Sweden to a large extent has adapted to what is framed as "international standards" regarding, for example, publishing preferences and favored publication language, the history field has only recently begun to adapt to this trend. Therefore, their practices for doing and valuing research have been described as "in flux" (Salö, 2017; see also Nästesjö, 2021). Moreover, whereas scholars in history almost exclusively work alone or in pairs of two, collaboration is much more common in political science. In contrast to the three history departments, collaborative research groups working in joint projects were considered a standard at the two political science departments. However, the size of research groups as well as the extent to which they influenced the organizational structures of the department differed. At PS1, junior

scholars tended to work both individually and collaboratively, and the research groups were usually rather small, depending on short-term projects connected to specific grants. At PS2, junior scholars more often worked in larger and formalized research groups or centers. Because these were not only linked to a specific project or grant, but a shared epistemic focus and developed infrastructures for research work – such as joint datasets, budgets, practices for co-authoring, seminars, events, and informal gatherings – these groups or centers to a greater extent shaped the organizational structures and working routines at the department. Furthermore, because they tended to recruit junior scholars early in their career, the respondents from PS2 had usually been part of a group or a center for a relatively long period of time when being interviewed.

Both at a disciplinary level and at a department level there are organizational, epistemic, and cultural characteristics that create different contexts of projectification. Hence, not only does the present study extends the focus to the under-studied evaluative contexts of political science and history, it also provides an opportunity to make comparisons between and within these empirical sites. This will provide new insights into the meanings and dynamics of projectification.

A Frame Analytic Approach

This article introduces a conceptual approach to the study of academic work and careers focusing on how scholars navigate institutional demands by drawing on interpretive frames of meaning. More specifically, I argue that *the project* may be understood as a particularly dominant *frame* through which early career academics make sense of themselves and their work; a frame that calls for contextually appropriate actions while also giving rise to tensions and ongoing negotiations.

Initially defined as "schemata of interpretations" (Goffman, 1974: 21), frames organize actors' experience and subjective involvement in a given aspect of social life. The underlying assumption is that social reality is manifold and dynamic. To direct action, actors are in need of shared frames of meaning that helps them to "determine which expectations are applicable in particular contexts" (Fine, 2012: 72). Framing is thus centered on answering the question "What is happening here?". According to Persson (2018: 48), "the idea of posing precisely that question is that the answer is often not a given." Rather, it must be negotiated with others. However, actors do not have complete freedom to negotiate afresh in each situation. While framing involves the interpretation and application of frames, actors are also *constrained* by frames. Following Scott (2015: 76), "frames act as blueprints for social conduct, by providing a set of shared meanings [and] understandings of the rules, roles, and rituals to be followed." From this perspective, the concept of frames answers the additional question "What applies here?" and points to the dynamics between individual's experience, other people's expectations, and the patterning of norms and values across situations that govern orderly conduct (Persson, 2018: 128). Frames are thus never simply personal choices,

but available to people as more or less institutionalized parts of social life – rooted in groups, organizational routines, power, and structures.

The ability to refer to norms is an essential means by which framing occurs (Fine, 2012: 73-75). In fact, the development of frames of reference directing action in a particular context may be seen as a set of constrained responses to institutional forces in which norms are continuously taught, performed, and justified. This involves both the adherence to and the potential contestation of norms in order to draw boundaries and establish what is valuable. Moreover, the prominence of a specific frame is maintained through the use of various procedures that *anchor* frame activity (Goffman, 1974: 247-251). While emphasizing how actors jointly create meanings that come to order their subjective involvement, a frame analytic approach is thus sensitive to how such orders are contingent on the structure of context and the forms of power involved (Fine, 2012; Persson, 2018).

Put differently, the concept of frames focuses attention to how the sharedness of a social world is an ongoing, practical accomplishment. Yet, this does not preclude tension. People may have conflicting understandings of what is going on and what is applied, and these disagreements often implicate asymmetry and inequality (Scott, 2015: 79). Furthermore, Goffman (1974: 45) uses the concept of *keying* to describe how actors can alter the meanings of activities by transforming them into something patterned. In this way, frames can be *laminated* or superimposed upon each other, creating multiple layers of interpretation operating simultaneously (Goffman, 1974: 82). To capture this dynamic, it is fruitful to think of framing as an interplay between *alignment* and *disruption*. While alignment encompasses actors' attempt to act in accordance with a shared definition of a situation, disruption is a perceived misalignment forcing actors to rethink what is going on and what is applied. As argued by Tavory and Fine (2020), both alignment and disruption are linked to culturally shaped expectations and presumptions, and as such, they reflect analytically distinct moments that are crucial for actors' practices and their sense of self.

In order to understand how junior scholars respond to their work, careers, and identities becoming increasingly shaped by projectification, the present article focuses on how "the project" functions as a frame through which scholars understand the context they are in and how they should relate to it. Because a frame is "characterized not by its content but rather the distinctive way in which it transforms the contents meaning" (Zerubavel, 1991: 11), this is a conceptual approach aiming to investigate projectification as a social and cultural process centrally constituted on the level of meaning-making. This entails an analysis of how projectification shapes the working conditions of early career academics and the meanings of their practical engagements. Furthermore, it includes how they strategically attempt to *align* to such a frame and how they, in the face of tensions and contradictions, negotiate or alter its normative meanings through acts of *keying*. In accordance with a frame analytic approach, the narratives of early career academics in political science and history are theorized as constrained responses to institutional forces structuring the evaluative landscape in which they navigate. This,

in turn, opens up a window into the current socialization of junior scholars within these fields.

Method

The study draws upon 35 in-depth interviews with early career academics in political science and history conducted between February and June of 2019. As mentioned, all respondents held temporary contracts. These were mostly project-based research positions limited to one to three years with some teaching responsibilities. However, ranging from newly minted PhDs to scholars having spent up to eight years on the post-PhD level, early career academics are not a uniform category of academic staff. Consequently, the study calls for a diverse group of respondents.

To build a sampling frame, I selected five departments at four research-intensive universities in Sweden and constructed a list of scholars in political science and history having received their PhD degrees between 2011 and 2019. Based on descriptive information from CVs and online profiles,[20] I selected a diverse group of respondents regarding their experience of research, teaching, and administration as well as publishing, mobility, and collaborative work. The selection criteria also ensured variation in terms of academic age (that is, years post PhD). Of the final 35 interviews, 30 were conducted face-to-face and five were conducted online. Considering disciplinary background and gender, the numbers are balanced.[21] The interviews were conducted in Swedish or English and lasted between 90 and 140 minutes. All interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. Informed consent was obtained before each interview, ensuring the respondents of voluntary participation and anonymity. As a result, some details have been amended slightly or left out of the empirical sections. All names are assigned pseudonyms.

The interviews had a reflexive-biographical character and were conducted across three sections. I began with a set of in-depth questions about the respondents' individual trajectories, starting with their first fascination with research and the unfolding of their careers. Second, I asked about their current situation, focusing on their practical engagements and the contexts in which these are embedded. Third, I asked about the respondents' future hopes and dreams, what they ought to do in order to succeed within their field, and what kind of futures that are communicated to them by others. Across these sections, the interviews were constructed to explore how the respondents acknowledged or claimed certain standards of evaluation while distancing themselves from or ignoring others. I continuously "ethnographized" the interviews (Pugh, 2013),

[20] Such as the department's website, personal websites, Google Scholar, and network platforms such as ResearchGate and LinkedIn.

[21] Political Science: 11 male and 7 female. History: 9 male and 8 female.

eliciting talk about specific situations and examples of when evaluative standards come into play. Rather than revealing "objective" life courses, the aim of using reflexive-biographical interviews was to shed light on scholars "biographical work"; that is, how they perceive and make sense of their situation and how they relate to it (Sigl, 2016). Much of these narratives revolved around the implications of projects and project funding for growing into academia as a fixed-term scholar.

For theories pointing to the social construction of realities as perceived and understood by actors, language is central. Through their choice of words and gestures, actors define situations, accomplish social actions, and perform identities. Hence, "language constitutes the world(s) it purports merely to describe" and "can be studied in terms of what it does [..] for people and situations" (Scott, 2015: 80). Following this line of reasoning, the analysis of the respondents' biographical work and their narratives about academic careers focused on identifying features of talk that indicate the frames through which they view their world. Given the emphasis on projects and project funding in structuring their day-to-day activities and how they made sense of which expectations are applicable in the context of being an early career academic, I began by coding instances in which respondents talked about the significance of projects and project funding. Whereas this involved specific practices (such as writing grant applications and conducting project-based research), situations (for example, when receiving a grant or when failing to), and structures (of the project format or project-based careers etc.), it also included more general accounts of working as a fixed-term scholar and adjusting to career demands. Thereafter, I considered variations in the sample depending on contextual factors such as disciplinary background, workplace, group memberships, and academic age.[22]

The coding procedure allowed me to analyze how the meanings respondents attributed to themselves and their practices were shaped by projectification; that is, how they depended on a project frame that was put around them. While the narratives entailed different attempts to align to such a frame, they also involved experiences of conflicts and contradictions, opening up possibilities for negotiating its normative meanings.

The Project Frame

During the interviews, early career academics in political sciences and history tended to highlight two interpretive orientations according to which they made sense of their current situation: *competition* and *delivery*. Together, these make up what I call *the project frame*. Deeply intertwined in shaping scholars' understanding of career structures and their social identity as fixed-term scholars, competition primarily concerned

[22] Although not included in this article, I also considered variations in terms of class and gender.

meanings attributed to social relations and status, whereas delivery mainly involved meanings attributed to research practices.

Competition and Status

In both disciplines, the respondents talked at length about their frequent job and grant market participation. About to enter the final year of her externally funded position, Steph (H1) explained how the "the life of a postdoc is all about competing for resources that will enable you to stay a couple of more years in academia, getting the chance to strengthen your CV before applying again." Similarly, Eric stated:

> Since the completion of my PhD, everything is about projects and the competition involved. Coming up with projects, writing project applications, learning how to compete for project funding. And if not getting any money, work on someone else's project and be better prepared the next time. (Eric, PS2)

Across the interviews, respondents continuously talked about their situation as characterized by competition. From the perspective of project-based careers, almost everything seemed to concern competition and whether or not they would be able to handle it. Such a frame defines academia as a state of rivalry, pushing early career academics to constantly think about how to increase their competitive performance by strengthening their CV. Indeed, many respondents described entering the postdoc phase as adapting to a competitive project work mode in which "you can always *do more* and *be better*" (Amy, H2).

Competing successfully for project funding was pictured as the main, and sometimes only, way to build an academic career. However, rather than the aspect of securing an income, this was primarily talked about in terms of the symbolic status projects and project funding represent. Consider this quote from an early career academic in political science who had spent several years on the post-PhD level:

> Today, research is carried out in projects. Having ongoing funded projects is therefore extremely important. I would say that it's the main factor deciding who you are at the department. Your role, how you're perceived by others. […] When I got my first grant, I became someone here. I became a *researcher*; I was someone to count on. (Peter, PS1)

According to Peter, obtaining project funding shapes the identity and worth of people at his workplace. As a status trait, it serves as a symbolic attribute of success separating those who may rightfully claim the identity of a researcher and those who may not. Whereas previous studies have shown that the move towards competitive project funding changes how academics think about who has the right to research time (Franssen and de Rijcke, 2019), my findings suggest that the normative meanings established by

the project frame more deeply changes how research, as a legitimate and recognized practice, symbolically exists. For example, William (H3) stated that "if it's not a funded project, it just feels like it's something I do in my spare time, it's not *real* in the same sense." Nedeva (PS2) supported this view when she said that securing funding for a project "makes it recognizable to others. […] You have survived the competition and now people expect you to deliver. If you talk about projects without funding, people tend to not take you very seriously."

Throughout the interviews, the symbolic value of projects relied upon a strong hierarchization between research and teaching, representing two very different career paths. According to Thomas (H1), "it's about positive and negative circles. As soon as you get a grant, you can publish, get citations, apply for more money. All the things you struggle with when stuck teaching." Furthermore, the function of grants as a distinction was supported by various ceremonial rituals which effectively *anchored* the project frame (Goffman, 1974: 247-51). For example, Philip (PS2) told me about the pressure he felt due to the custom of "funding cake" at the department, rendering his "own work as a teacher, and that of others, invisible, worth nothing." Likewise, Maria emphasized that grants equal visibility and recognition:

> It's something that is communicated very clearly, from the head of department and others with influence. It's all about getting grants. […] As soon as someone receives money for a project, everybody gets an email about it. These emails, they sort of state that this is success, this is what counts. And of course, everybody wants to be a name that is mentioned in those emails, getting everybody's attention… So yeah, money is important, very important. Because people tend not to know how much you publish and they certainly don't know what your research is about. But everybody knows if you got funding or not. (Maria, PS1)

These rather mundane ceremonial rituals were mentioned by a vast majority of the respondents, especially the emailing routine, and were referred to as shared signs of success and recognition shaping the everyday talk and interactions at the departments. Hence, whereas there are multiple ways for early career academics to act and to represent worth in interaction with others (Nästesjö, 2023), the project frame entails a narrow definition of what constitutes worth in academic life. This includes not only a strong hierarchization between working tasks, but a specific characterization of research as something that symbolically exists in funded projects.

Delivery and Pace

While respondents in both disciplines acknowledged the symbolic power of projects and how they framed academic life as competition, their understandings of their identities and research practices also referred more specifically to the socio-temporal structures of projects. In virtually every interview, the 'funding circle' was a recurrent topic,

referring to the cycle of publications-grant-data-publications-citations needed in order to sustain a research-intensive career; or indeed, sustain an academic career at all. In this way, the principles of delivery and pace were unremittingly evoked as junior scholars made sense of what was expected of them. Reflecting upon his past and present project work, Thomas stated:

> Thomas (H1): Working in these temporary projects, it's all about being able to get things out there. When I first got funding, it was a three-year project, I said to myself that I have to make this count.
>
> Jonatan: What did that mean to you, 'make this count'?
>
> Thomas (H1): Frankly, it meant to get as many peer-reviewed articles published as possible. It sounds bad, I know. But that was how I made sense of it. Just trying to get things out there.

Similarly, Anna talked about the importance of "keeping up the pace" and to avoid "working on projects that won't be profitable for a long time." When asked if she could be more specific, she stated:

> I need to prioritize some sort of certainty that a project pays off. I need publications. That's just how it is. Therefore, I try to avoid being part of projects or collaborations that are slow and where the outcomes are uncertain. […] At the end of the day, working as a postdoc is about adding things to your CV, showing others that you can deliver. Because in one-two years, I am up against all these great scholars again. (Anna, PS1)

The narratives of Anna and Thomas revolve around a specific type of project performance relating to career demands shaped by project time. Accordingly, their research practices and academic identities must be adjusted to the individual need for visible and measurable results to be used as 'capital' next time there is a funding call or a position available. Hence, by privileging competition and delivery, the project frame makes up a "dominant regime of valuation" as well as "one of accumulation" (Falkenberg, 2021: 426). Still, the ability to ensure the accumulation of academic capital involves aligning to the project frame.

Aligning to the Project Frame

On a general level, alignment refers to how actors coordinate actions in line with a shared definition of what is going on and what is applied in a particular context (Tavory and Fine, 2020). Thus, aligning to the project frame involves attempts in which scholars seek to ensure accumulation of academic capital within limited timeframes, acting

in accordance with the interpretive orientations through which they make sense of project-based work and careers.

Respondents from both disciplines jointly described projectification as an epistemic condition according to which they made adjustments in their research. Given the previous emphasis on strengthening one's competitive performance by delivering measurable outputs, these adjustments mainly concerned the reduction of risk and to focus on publishing peer-reviewed journal articles. For example, in order to "make things count," Thomas (H1) explained how the need to "get things out there […] meant playing it safe, trying not to take too many risks." In practice, he "recognized how many papers might come out of this rather limited empirical material" and then he "just started working." In a similar fashion, Nedeva described how "the need to quickly demonstrate results" made it obvious that "books are a bad investment." While this privileged the short journal article as publication format, she also described how it was tailoring her research process:

> Looking back, it has pushed me towards questions that can be answered by the existing methods and the existing data quickly and still be publishable in a good journal. In that sense, it affects what questions I work with, how I work with them, and how I present the results. Because the publication comes first. Something has to come out of it. And after a while, you sort of learn that, ok, this is too explorative, engaging with too big questions, or this is too risky, no journal cares about this. (Nedeva, PS2)

The accounts of Nedeva and Thomas are illustrative examples of how early career academics attempt to align their research practices in accordance with the project frame. These attempts concern what types of research questions to be pursued, what methods to be used, and decisions about publication formats. While these findings are in line with evidence from studies of how junior scholars in, for example, economics (Steffy and Langfeldt, 2022) and the life sciences (Sigl, 2016), cope with the demands of project-based careers, there are important differences in how this dynamic played out in the empirical settings in this study. When comparing the two disciplines and the five departments, efforts to align to the project frame were shaped by contextually bound challenges in terms of how to accumulate worth.

In history, the same epistemic behavior that was incentivized by the project frame challenged certain ideals rooted in their discipline. Talking about the temporal structures of projects, Gary stated:

> A high ideal within our discipline is to carry out large and detailed archival work, where you really dig deep, going through a lot of source material. That's what a really *good* historian does. But the way research is funded today, in these small, short projects, there's no possibility to live up to that standard. No way. (Gary, H2)

Similar tensions between project time and disciplinary conceptions of worth were a recurrent topic in the interviews with junior scholars in history and point to how frame alignment is an ongoing and contingent activity. When subject to conflict, action is necessary. Within the history field, two strategic responses are noticeable. First, respondents who had earned several grants of different sizes described how they started to modify the 'funding circle' by collecting data before applying for funding; that is, collecting data for project B when working on project A. Being an example of what Virtová and Vostal (2021: 365-367) call "temporal stretching," in which "the research *project* and the research *process* do not share the same temporal window," it is a tactical repertoire also used in political science. However, while political scientists mainly used it as a strategy to secure continuity between projects, historians specifically tried to manufacture the temporal structures of projects in a way that would enable them to carry out extensive archival work while securing a steady flow of publications. Second, to meet the demands of productivity, some respondents in history described how they had started to 'team up,' beginning to co-author journal articles and book chapters. While this was framed as a way to increase their overall productivity, they also commented on the uncertainty of the routines for, and the valuation of, such publications:

> There is little to no experience at the department of working in joint projects or publishing together. That gives us a lot of freedom I think and I kind of like that. However, it also means that no one really knows how it will be evaluated in the future. Other disciplines, they seem to have very clear rules for this, first and last name and all that. But in history, does it matter if your name is first, second, third, or last? I don't know… There is no knowledge or established praxis. (Susie, H3)

In political science, in which co-authoring is a well-established practice, the dynamics of aligning to the project frame differed. This was especially evident in interviews with young political scientists working in large collaborative research groups. Relying on project leaders to bring in funding to the group, these respondents described how their individual opportunities to accumulate worth heavily depended on how well they matched up with the research focus of dominant agents at the department. Talking about a particularly successful research group at his workplace, Victor (PS2) explained how he, during his PhD education, "got a sense of what questions and methods were highly valued" and that he therefore tried "to focus on working in that specific area of research." Likewise, Rachel stated:

> My future in research depends very much on being part of this group. It gives me access to data, expertise, and collaborations on publications and stuff like that. So of course, I do my best to fit in and make a valuable contribution. I really want to stay. (Rachel, PS2)

What comes across in these statements is that aligning to the project frame equals aligning to the epistemic focus and social codes of the group. As argued by Franssen and de Rijcke(2019), one way in which project funding shapes the social structures of academia is by outsourcing epistemic authority to project leaders, and indirectly, to funding bodies. Still, from the perspective of career advancement, this type of alignment was not as easy as it may sound. At the same time as respondents talked about the importance of continuously 'teaming up' with members of the research group, they also mentioned the importance of 'splitting up' in order to demonstrate independence – a highly recognized trait of status and worth. One example is Helena (PS2), who had been working in the same research group for a long time. While she stated that "my biggest challenge right now is to start publishing on my own rather than collaborating on every paper, because that is needed in order to have the chance to succeed within the discipline," she underlined that the informal rules of the group did not make it easy:

> I'm funded within the center and that makes my work more collaborative in nature. And because of that, it is hard to start writing and publishing on my own. Both because it's fun and intellectually rewarding to collaborate, and it sure gives me the possibility to be more productive, but it's also hard because it's just how you work here, collaborating is the norm. I don't want to break the rules and be viewed as keeping things to myself. (Helena, PS2)

These aspects of group memberships were linked to more formal aspects of working in joint projects:

> It's also a question of authority and ownership. I mean, can I publish on my own using the data we have collected within the group? I'm not sure if that would be OK. (Helena, PS2)

Comparing how junior scholars in history and political science talked about how to respond to institutional demands of project-based careers suggests that practices of alignment are shaped by the contexts in which these are embedded. Whereas the interpretive orientations making up the project frame are well-defined across the empirical settings, alignment is surrounded with contextual-specific conventions and challenges, making it subject to ongoing reassessments. On one hand, this reminds us that "there is no singularity to (e)valuation in academia, but rather a multiplicity of (e)valuative practices and infrastructures." (Rushforth et al., 2019: 229). On the other hand, these observations point to how the experience of such multiplicity might produce tensions that open up for rethinking situations and what is expected of those involved.

Keying the Project Frame

Privileging a narrow regime of valuation and accumulation, the project frame defines academic work as a state of rivalry pushing fixed-term scholars towards entrepreneurial behavior (Franssen and de Rijcke, 2019) and an entrepreneurial self (Loveday, 2018; Müller, 2014). However, the project frame also yields contradictions and tensions. Visible in some of the above accounts, this section focuses specifically on how early career academics in political science and history deal with such tensions by *keying* the project frame; that is, by altering its normative meanings to something patterned which creates multiple layers of interpretation (Goffman, 1974: 45).

Identification and Luck

While the principles of competition and delivery provide a highly individualistic career script recognized by the respondents, they commonly described it as damaging for peer-to-peer relationships. As newcomers, junior scholars depend on each other's help in learning how to, for example, apply for funding, commenting on each other's applications, as well ongoing research projects. Furthermore, networks and social relations are valuable resources in project-based careers since job opportunities might depend on others' success in the funding market (Gill, 2014; Herschberg et al., 2018). Yet, "activities that involve shared space and competition for limited resources require that participants adhere to norms that attempt to preserve harmony" (Fine, 2012: 80). How is this achieved?

To curb their competitive relationships, early career academics often talked about themselves as a particularly vulnerable group in the science system. If such narrative was shared intersubjectively, it modified the experience of competition by tying junior scholars together. Still, differentiating themselves from others was often not enough. To alter the meaning of competition within the group of early career academics, respondents also reframed the outcome of grant applications as a matter of *luck*. Describing how he and his colleagues had been "helping each other out for years," Thomas concluded that:

> Nobody knows who will receive funding, the competition is ridiculous. It's like a lottery, nobody knows and no one can influence who will get money in the end. So yeah, we're in the same boat. Might as well help each other. (Thomas, H1)

Likewise, Douglas talked in length about the emotionally charged situation project funding creates and how to handle it:

> Douglas (PS1): It's sensitive, talking about who got money and who didn't. But I think we're rather good at sticking together, we don't want it to take over too much. In a negative way, I mean.
>
> Jonatan: How do you do that; can you give an example?
>
> Douglas (PS1): Yeah sure. Ehm… When I got my recent grant, everybody congratulated me and stuff like that. I said thanks and that I was proud of it, but it's like, I was lucky. Luck plays a deceive role here. Yes, it' s a competition, yes you need to have a strong application, but it's also a matter of coincidence. Who sits in these panels and stuff like that. And if we acknowledge that it becomes easier.

According to Douglas, this let him and his peers create conditions for cooperation:

> Douglas (PS1): We help each other out, in informal meetings and at seminars and stuff. […] When you think about it, it's a fucking strange situation, sitting there, trying to strengthen the application of your competitor. But it's like, you give and you receive. That's the rule. One time, you help someone and the next time you're the one getting help.
>
> Jonatan: Ok, but what if you're not helping others?
>
> Douglas (PS1): Then you become kind of isolated, you're not really part of the group. […] I feel like those who don't contribute to the work of others are also those who usually keep things for themselves, you know, as a competitive advantage, and that's like, it's not really fair. People don't like that. You become isolated.

Framing the outcome of project funding as luck, while at the same time altering the meaning of competition through identification, helps early career academics to establish a working consensus according to which they can simultaneously compete and support each other. As is evident in the above quotations, this involves junior scholars adhering to certain informal rules on how earning the help of colleagues depends on one's own investment in commenting on the work of others. While such moral commitments do not eliminate or erase conflict stemming from the competitive structures of project-based careers, it provides strategies for temporarily resolving it through the negotiation of action based on common values. Indeed, conceptualized as acts of keying, the project frame is not broken or replaced, but *laminated* (Goffman, 1974: 45). In this process, new interpretations of what is going on and what is applied are established.

Imagined Futures and Slowing Down

Respondents frequently commented critically upon the regime of valuation structured by a projectified academic landscape. In particular, they described the feeling of unease when adapting their practices and identities to such a narrow script of success. When probed about their own aspirations and notions of success, the respondents therefore *envisioned futures* that combined tenets of hard work and adaptation to institutional demands with wider definitions of worth. This would let them *key* the project frame, transforming its meanings and their own subjective involvement. For example, when asked to reflect upon what is needed of him in order to succeed in academia, John stated:

> It's a struggle of course. It feels like I need to do as much as possible but I have no idea what's enough. […] At times, I feel like such a typical postdoc, absorbed by this instrumental mindset. […] But it's like, ok, if I do this properly, if I can deliver results now, playing this game really well, then I will get the chance to do it differently in the future. Slow down, focus on the things I really like the most. (John, H2)

According to John, short-term contracts and the constant competition on the basis of individual merits create immense pressure to achieve and maintain a high pace while delivering measurable results. However, nobody seems to know what is good enough. To deal with the tensions involved in this process, John defines his current situation as temporary and the future as different. In this way, he connects his short- and long-term goals in academia while at the same time creating a moral distance between them. This lets him balance between adapting to instrumental career demands and validating his sense of self.

Alternative ways of visualizing and conceptualizing the future was a recurrent topic in the interviews. Still, it was most widespread among the group of respondents having spent several years at the early career level. These scholars felt exhausted by pressures to achieve narrow definitions of success and the competitive attitude associated with it. For example, Amy (H2) stated "I have done this for many years now, I feel exhausted. If I am going to continue working as an academic, in the long run, I need to start doing things differently." In a similar vein, Peter elaborated upon his future life in research:

> I've been part of this postdoc race for a long time, I have published a lot and been able to obtain funding for some projects. You know, I have done the right things, I think… So recently, I've felt like it's time to slow down a bit, try to focus more on impact than on quantity. I mean, If I'm honest, I'm not very proud of everything I've done in recent years and I would really like to change focus a bit. (Peter, PS1)

Often, these *imagined futures* had certain epistemic aspects:

> I feel like, fuck this. I've done these obligatory postdoc publications and now I can slow down. Before, I had two, three, four articles under review almost all the time, but now I have one. So, it's about slowing down and to increase the quality. Involve more empirical work, be more systematic in my approach. Instead of dividing things I want to think things together, you know, synthesize. That's the goal for the next couple of years. (Peter, PS1)

As we learn from other studies, imagined futures are not about actualizing what is yet to come in any objective sense (Mische, 2009). Instead, future-narrating is a practice of the present; a kind of problem-solving embedded in structures inviting people to imagine different futures in specific moments (Zilberstein et al., 2023). In the above statements, imagined futures are narrated when scholars face certain tensions or contradictions within their day-to-day activities, especially with regard to identity conflicts. Conceptualized as acts of keying, this involves attempts to renegotiate the meanings of project-based careers, making imagined futures a vital part of how early career academics make sense of their situation and how they should relate to it. However, neither imagined futures nor a desirable sense of self are to be understood as strictly an individual endeavor or as a heroic trait of agency. Instead, they are linked to culturally shaped expectations and presumptions (Tavory and Fine, 2020). Given that scholars are increasingly accountable to multiple regimes of worth (Rushforth et al., 2019), keying the project frame is as much about justifying self-worth as it is about balancing the contradictions of recognition and reward in academic life (Nästesjö, 2023).

Discussion

In this article, I have explored how early career academics relate and respond to institutional demands structured by projectification. Contrary to much earlier research, the study includes two social sciences and humanities disciplines – political science and history – and adopts a partially comparative perspective between and within these empirical sites. Findings reveal that respondents jointly refer to *competition* and *delivery* in order to make sense of their current situation, making up what I call *the project frame*. This frame feeds into a dominant regime of valuation and accumulation (Falkenberg, 2021; Fochler et al., 2016) and has an impact on respondents' research practices and their social identity as early career academics. While this is in line with previous work on how junior scholars cope with the demands of project-based careers (Sigl, 2016; Steffy and Langfeldt, 2022) as well as studies highlighting the potentially colonizing effects of projectification (Müller, 2014; Ylijoki, 2015), findings suggest that scholars understandings and responses are more diverse than sometimes assumed. Shaped by the context in which they are embedded, attempts to aligning to the project frame varies

across the interview sample. For instance, although challenging certain disciplinary ideals within the history field, the project frame also opened up for new collaborative epistemic practices. Interestingly, under certain circumstances, this logic was reversed in political science. Among respondents who had worked in project-based research groups throughout their careers, the need to "split up" rather than "team up" was emphasized. Yet, access to data and the informal rules of the group did not always make this an easy endeavor. By adopting a partially comparative approach, the article thus demonstrates that projectification is far from being a monolithic process. Instead, its meanings and dynamics are molded by conventions and challenges present in the evaluative landscape in which junior scholars navigate. However, although different strategic responses and interpretations of joint tactical repertoires are present within the studied disciplines, the organization of research around the project format also entails that they converge to some extent. Not least is this evident in how career structures are perceived and the way in which co-authoring becomes an important practice in order to increase scholars' productivity within limited timeframes.

Influencing the social (Franssen and de Rijcke, 2019) and temporal (Vostal, 2016) structures of academia, the rise of project funding and the evaluations produced in funding decisions have been described as "status-bestowing events" (Edlund and Lammi, 2022) with long-lasting status advantages for individual scholars (Bloch et al., 2014). By adopting a frame analytic approach, the present study adds another layer of understanding, focusing attention to the symbolic meanings of projects and project funding in the everyday life of early career academics. Respondents in both disciplines described project funding as a distinction. In addition to monetary value and the certification that their research is better than others, they thus emphasized the symbolic value of project funding for being recognized as a full-worthy member of the research community. Such framing was *anchored* by shared narratives of how to succeed in academic careers as well as ceremonial rituals such as "the funding cake" and emailing routines at the studied departments. Understood as a social and cultural process centrally constituted on the level of meaning-making, this is to say that projectification takes place around the creation of shared categories and classifications through which scholars make sense of themselves and the social world of early career academics. As a frame, it sorts out people and practices, distributing both material and nonmaterial resources, becoming an integral part of the early career as a distinct "status passage" in academic life (Laudel and Gläser, 2008). Still, the project frame also gives rise to tensions and conflicts. In particular, early career academics struggle with the entrepreneurial and competitive logic enforced by it – both in terms of research practices and identity positions.

While much empirical work on the consequences of projectification focuses on the alignments and misalignments experienced by researchers, the present study contributes a perspective on how early career academics actually deal with such tensions by *keying* the project frame. Drawing upon Goffman (1974: 45), frameworks are keyed when their meanings are transformed into something patterned on them. In this way,

frames are *laminated*, creating multiple layers of interpretation. Two different forms of keying have been identified.

First, in order to curb their competitive relationship, respondents framed the outcome of project funding as "being lucky." Whereas attributing success to luck have been interpreted as a lack of agency among fixed-term academics (Loveday, 2018) or as evidence of the contingencies shaping both knowledge production and the trajectories of those engaged in it (Davies and Pham, 2023), my findings point to a very social form of luck. For the respondents, attributing success to luck created conditions for identification and cooperation; a kind of moral commitment central to their understanding of their work and their sense of self. To further explore the role played by luck in academia, future research should be attentive to the many ways in which luck might be evoked by scholars and what representations of legitimacy are thereby produced. This does not just involve attempts to alter the meaning of competition. Luck may be used as a strategic resource to justify how scholars qualify for the positions they obtain (see e.g. Ye and Nylander, 2021); strategies that are likely to differ depending on academic age, gender, and social class.

Second, as a response to the narrow script of success privileged by the project frame, respondents drew on imagined futures. This would let them work toward a future in academia, adapting to certain institutional demands of the early career, while committing to wider definitions of worth. This adds to previous analyses of the postdoc period as characterized by a narrowing of valuation regimes toward a single form of academic worth based on high-impact publication output (Fochler et al., 2016; Müller, 2014). While such tendencies are present in the respondents' narratives about what makes up a successful academic career, they nevertheless refer to a more versatile evaluative repertoire when making sense of their current situation and how they should lead their lives in the future. Paying more attention to how scholars draw on imagined futures in order to define their identities, aspirations, and goals could broaden our understanding of scholars' ability to keep several definitions of worth in play and how this is both a practical and a moral project. To better understand how such abilities are shaped by disciplinary cultures and the social position of scholars is critical for advancing our knowledge of the interplay between valuation, temporality, and identity in contemporary academia.

Overall, the study aligns with recent works on academic socialization focusing on how junior scholars navigate the multiple and sometimes contradictive demands of academic careers. Rather than signs of "incoherence" (Hakala, 2009), scholars' diverse response to career pressures are here conceptualized as a kind of pragmatic problem solving. For example, Steffy and Langfeldt (2022) have shown that skillfully drawing on cultural repertoires help junior economists to respond to certain challenges within their field. Similarly, Ylijoki and Henriksson (2017) identified a diverse set of collective career stories available to junior scholars when making sense of how to build an academic career. Still, my findings offer an important extension in pointing to the productive aspects of tensions or conflicts. Forcing early career academics to rethink situations

and their own practical engagements – including who they are and who they wish to become – tensions and conflicts serve as critical moments in socialization processes. They are crucial for scholars' projects, their sense of self, and the building of relationships. This is evident in the empirical examples of keying, in which rejected or criticized elements of the project frame become sites of boundary-making, defining and envisioning alternate identity positions and scripts of success. In particular, these examples stress the importance of morality as a site of, and motivation for, pragmatic problem solving as junior scholars deal with tensions from having to balance multiple career demands and competing conceptions of worth.

In this regard, the frame analytic approach developed in this article offers a conceptual perspective that pushes back against totalizing tendencies in some of the accounts of how junior scholars are affected by the reorganization of contemporary academic landscapes. Although shaped by competition, uncertainty, and institutional constraints, early career academics in political science and history do more than passively accept their situation as a given. At times, they make attempts to define or alter it, including the scales of valuation involved. To obtain more detailed knowledge about how this is achieved and the conditions making it (im)possible, requires further research of the interplay between *framing*, *alignment*, and *keying*. Extending the analysis to new institutional and disciplinary sites will indicate the usefulness of these concepts for understanding the processes of sensemaking, valuation, and socialization in academia.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DISCUSSION

What counts? What is valuable? And by what measures? These are questions that every junior scholar must deal with as they are confronted with the uncertainties of academic careers. They relate both to what junior scholars assume counts by others – in future evaluations by gatekeepers as well as in daily interactions with their peers – and what is valued by themselves – what they desire and hold dear. As social practice, the negotiation of worth at the early career level manifests itself in the interaction between these poles and is shaped by scholars' practices of anticipation and calculation as well as their emotions and self-concepts. Throughout this thesis, I have shown that navigating the uncertainty about what counts is closely interlinked with how early career academics make sense of the world of academia, their identity, and the situation they share with others. This requires an analysis of worth acknowledging how "acts of estimation entail practices of esteem" – they are as much about recognition as they are about rewards (Stark, 2009: 9).

In the following, I will discuss the findings of the present thesis and how they contribute to a better understanding of the interplay between valuation and academic socialization. This will include a summary of the key findings in each of the three articles and how they answer the research question that has guided the dissertation. Thereafter, the main empirical and theoretical contributions to the study of academic careers will be discussed, as will fruitful ways to extend our knowledge on valuation and careers, both in academia and beyond. Finally, I will consider the wider implications of the thesis, focusing on the need to broaden narratives of worth.

Aiming to explore the interplay between valuation and socialization, the thesis has focused on how dealing with issues of what counts as worth relates to the incommensurable nature of the work that scholars produce and represent. Academic evaluation processes are not predetermined by the object of evaluation, but always involve a measure of contingency (Lamont, 2009). As singularities, they are – just like a piece of art or a novel – multidimensional, incommensurable, and of uncertain quality. As such, they are in need of judgment in order to obtain value (Karpik, 2010). These conditions shape the reputation-based economy in which scholars compete for positions, grants, and visibility. Because status orders are "made up of actors' identities, and these are more stable than what they give off," for example in terms of a decision or a verdict, "it is more difficult than in cases based on a standard to know what to do to reshape one's status" and move up the status ladder (Aspers, 2018: 141). This puts junior scholars in a position in which they continuously try to decode the environments they are in and the situations they encounter – a *framing challenge*. As demonstrated in the empirical chapters, this challenge is shaped by disciplinary cultures and organizational routines as

well as the structures and conditions of project-based careers. It involves how to decide whose judgment to trust when evaluating the quality of one's work and make future predictions (Article I), how to balance between more or less contradictory identity positions and learn how to perform these identities in legitimate ways (Article II), and how to negotiate the meanings of institutional career demands and individual aspirations (Article III). According to these findings, academic socialization should not be reduced to simply the internalization of norms and values of a field. Instead, it is a more dynamic – and to some extent more contingent – process of learning how to perform norms and values that align with certain institutional demands and definitions of worth as well as with junior scholar's own habituated interpretations of their experiences. Such a pragmatist perspective on academic socialization puts focus on social orders as negotiated orders (Strauss, 1978) – they are in need of continuous confirmation in order to be effective and stable. This does not mean that early career academics act without constraints. Rather, it emphasizes the interplay between organizational structures and the patterned creation of meaning in socialization processes, effectively linking micro-level interactions to macro-level forces and vice versa (Guhin et al., 2021).

As argued by Fine (2012: 79), external features of the life world are linked to the micropolitics of negotiated orders as these are "based on how group members perceive the rules of structure in which they are embedded." In academia, where there is no fixed standard to which those who ascribe worth and those who are ascribed worth can consult, the orientations of early career academics are increasingly directed to one another and the many moments of valuation that occur in their day-to-day activities. Hiring decisions, journal acceptances, rejections, appraisals, gossip, seminar comments, and funding pronouncements are all evaluative procedures that point at what and who is valuable and by what measures. Together with larger evaluative trends constituted by, for example, research policies, evaluation systems, and rankings – they are all part of making things valuable. They sort out, classify, categorize, and legitimatize the social world of early career academics. Through chains of interactions, they feed back into their understanding of themselves, their context, and their work. The outcomes are open-ended and uncertain, but all part of socializing them into their field.

In other words, the interplay between valuation and socialization is tied to the process in which early career academics learn to orient, observe, and evaluate themselves and others. In a situation framed by harsh competition and precarious working conditions, early career academics are exposed to intensified regimes of valuation. Not least, this is because of the role played by the projectification of academic work and careers. Structured in accordance with a certain entrepreneurial and output-centered logic, this enforces a narrow conception of worth based on winners and losers. Together with the proliferation of measures and indicators of research performance, the evaluative landscapes of both political science and history have been subject to change. Still, if we think of these landscapes as entirely different than before, we would be mistaken. While the rise of a metric and project-based academic culture represents an amplification of measuring and counting, entrepreneurship and acceleration, these landscapes are also

riddled with traditions, norms, and values that offer institutionalized frames for how to act and how to think. This is to say that these evaluative landscapes are characterized by the multilayeredness of contemporary academic cultures (Ylijoki and Henriksson, 2017) and the radically different ways that exist for making sense of academic identities (Bristow et al., 2017) and careers (Duberley et al., 2006). Indeed, whereas the heterogeneity of the evaluative landscapes of political science and history vary, they are both sites of rivalling orders of worth and the sovereignty of interpretation is contested.

This study is guided by the question of how early career academics in political science and history navigate evaluative landscapes. While all three articles focus on the ambiguities involved in this process, trying to better grasp how early career academics orient themselves in situations characterized by multiple career demands and conflicting standards of evaluation, they do so in distinctive ways.

Valuation as a Problem of Uncertainty: Navigating Evaluative Landscapes through Practices of Appraisal Devices

The first article (Chapter 5) studies valuation as a problem of uncertainty; or, more specifically, as a problem of uncertainty about what counts by gatekeepers in future evaluations. In the absence of clear evaluative standards, gatekeepers play a significant role in determining the future of academic careers. Still, precisely because this structure is based upon judgment, junior scholars are uncertain about how their work will be evaluated. By comparing how early career academics in history and political science use appraisal devices in the form of assessors to deal with this kind of uncertainty (Fürst, 2018), I draw attention to how scholars' anticipatory practices are informed by trusting the judgment of others. Previous research has pointed to how acts of anticipation gain in relevance under the impact of short-termism (Ylijoki, 2010), acceleration (Müller, 2014), project-based funding (Scholten et al., 2021), and intensified measuring of research performance (Felt, 2017). In a similar vein, the present article shows that the specific social and temporal conditions of early career academics mean that expected future value increasingly comes to govern academic practices of the present. However, it also extends the body of research on both uncertainty and anticipation by providing a change in perspective, asking *how* such anticipatory practices are informed. By making this move, uncertainty and anticipation are studied as distinctive parts of academic socialization processes. Moreover, the comparative design makes it possible to understand how scholars' disciplinary context and their position in larger evaluative landscapes shape these processes in more detail.

The empirical findings demonstrate that the conditions for using appraisal devices, as well as which individuals generally come to function as assessors, differ between the two disciplines under study. In political science, the most common assessor was a senior academic. Supported by formal status hierarchies and institutionalized role structures, the evaluative criteria imposed by senior assessors became accepted measures of quality

and success. Of course, the judgment of senior assessors varies and what counts as worth may be the object of both negotiation and struggle. Nevertheless, the temporal consistency of senior assessors acting as a kind of "market intermediary" across different career levels – from PhD to the early career – brings some stability to the field of political science. By contrast, the conditions for using appraisal devices within the field of history were shaped by an experience of discontinuation between what counts and whose judgement to trust at the PhD and the early-career level, respectively. Described as a "generation gap," historians more often used appraisals by younger assessors – that is, peers at the same or similar career level – to evaluate their performance and to guide their future work. However, because senior academics still act as gatekeepers on the academic market, there is tension between using appraisals from younger assessors as appraisals devices and the institutional role structures ordering their academic environments. This brings some instability to the field of history.

On a general level, these findings point to the socialization processes in political science being more *vertically structured* and the socialization processes in history being more *horizontally structured*. Additionally, an important contribution of the empirical analysis is that the *matching logic* upon which appraisal devices depend is not self-evident. Rather, it involves the self-concept of early career academics and the symbolic boundaries they draw when deciding whose judgment to trust. These *practices of appraisal devices* point to how dealing with uncertainty about what counts is both an interpretive and existential endeavor: appraisal devices provide scholars with means by which they can orient themselves and legitimate decisions, at the same time as guiding the cultivation of a desirable academic self. This is because, by acting upon the knowledge appraisal devices produce, scholars do not simply reduce uncertainty, they also signal their belonging to groups and shape their own identity through these group memberships.

Valuation as a Dramaturgical Problem: Navigating Evaluative Landscapes through Identity Work

The second article (Chapter 6) explores valuation as a dramaturgical problem. Investigating how early career academics negotiate career scripts through identity work, it focuses on identity as a symbolic resource that is performed: as something scholars do and work upon when trying to make sense of, and advance in, their careers. Whereas the transformation of universities in recent decades has sparked a growing literature on academic identity, it has primarily been studied as an outcome of change (see e.g., Archer, 2008; Henkel, 2000; Ylijoki and Ursin, 2013). Such a perspective captures identity conflicts and value tensions rather well. However, it does not fully recognize the role that identity plays in academic careers. Thus, Article II contributes to the existing literature by showing how early career academics navigate institutional reward systems and rules of recognition by engaging in different forms of identity work.

Similar to Article I, Article II emphasizes the role played by uncertainty and anticipation in academic socialization processes. Yet, rather than deciding whose judgment to trust, the anticipating process is more generally connected to the relationship between those who perform and their audiences (Goffman 1990 [1959]). Constituting one of the bases for valuation (Aspers 2009), this relationship connects to how early career academics experience institutional reward structures and the possibilities and limitations for recognition. In Article II, political science and history make up a joint empirical case of early career academics in the social sciences and humanities. This is not to overlook the importance of disciplinary cultures for academic identity; rather, it is to point to some of the shared circumstances and challenges that shape the interplay between valuation and identity more generally within these disciplines.

The empirical findings elaborate four patterns of identity talk: *achievement*, *authenticity*, *loyalty*, and *personation*. Shaped by the institutional structures and insecurities of academic careers, these patterns convey contrasting understandings of what it means to act and to represent worth as an early career academic. Moreover, these patterns consist of tacit rules for how to correctly embody their corresponding values. For example, achievement talk is not simply about being a competitive and efficient high achiever; it is about being a high-achiever in a respectful and legitimate way. Similarly, while authenticity talk involves distancing oneself from careerism, it always risk signaling a form of naivety rather than genuineness. As such, authenticity talk is about embodying a *sincere* form of career-making which contrast with *shallow* career thinking. Because different patterns of identity talk may be in conflict with one another, the analysis points to the challenge for early career academics to combine them while striking the right performative balance.

On one hand, these findings demonstrate that junior scholars in political science and history relate to a more versatile evaluative repertoire than captured in notions such as "publish or perish" (De Rond and Miller, 2005) or "neoliberal subjects" (Archer, 2008b). This is not to say that a culture of publish or perish does not exist, nor that the pervasiveness of neoliberalism does not shape academic life. Instead, it highlights that the actual challenge early career academics face when trying to manage their identities in a contextually appropriate manner is to conform to multiple roles and diverse definitions of worth. I argue that this approach captures the complexities of the interaction between institutional reward structures and the rules of peer recognition. On the other hand, these findings indicate how patterns of inequality shape academic career-making. Balancing multiple identity claims while conforming to the tacit rules for how to embody high-status traits requires a certain feel for the game of recognition (Bourdieu, 1998). For many female scholars and scholars from working-class backgrounds, this involved managing their social identity. Centered on the symbolic struggle of "fitting in" and "standing out," female scholars devoted considerable energy to navigating gendered schemes of evaluation and working-class academics continuously made adjustments in order to pass as insiders and to signal their belonging. Because gender and class origin may constrain the possibility to display privileged academic identities, the

article underlines that the interplay between valuation and socialization are conditioned by disadvantages connected to social division.

Valuation as Framed by Projectification: Navigating Evaluative Landscapes through Frame Alignment and Keying

The third and final article (Chapter 7) investigates valuation as framed by projectification. Article I and Article II both highlight the importance of academic work and careers becoming increasingly project-based, setting the scene for how uncertainty, worth, and identity come into play at the early career level. Article III takes a broader perspective and explores how valuation is tied to the way in which projectification frames the social world of early career academics. Investigating how such a *project frame* is negotiated among junior scholars in political science and history, the article utilizes a partly comparative perspective between and within these sites. This includes local variations on the level of departments and research groups.

The empirical findings reveal that early career academics in political science and history jointly referred to *competition* and *delivery* in order to make sense of their current situation. Confirmed and sustained by the symbolic function of project funding in organizational routines and peer interactions, these interpretive orientations fed into a narrow regime of valuation and accumulation. Comprising what I call *the project frame*, these orientations shaped scholars' research practices and their social identity as early career academics. This involved decisions about what questions and methods to work with as well as how, where, and with whom to publish. Still, attempts to align to the project frame also differed in meaningful ways. For historians, the temporal structures of the project format challenged certain evaluative standards that are central to their discipline. For political scientists working in larger research groups, the project format generated tensions between one's loyalty to the group and the individual need to publish by themselves. Hence, whereas previous research on projectification has pointed to its standardizing effects across disciplines (Felt, 2016; Ylijoki, 2015), these findings complement such picture by showing how the organization of research and careers around the project format means both convergence and divergence. This is to say that the meanings and dynamics of projectification – and the challenges produced – are bound by context, emphasizing the significance of disciplinary cultures, group memberships, and wider evaluative landscapes.

While much research on the projectification of academic life has focused on the misalignments and tensions experienced by scholars, an important contribution of the article is that it empirically demonstrates how early career academics deal with such tensions by negotiating the normative meanings of the project frame. In order to curb their competitive relationship, respondents framed the outcome of project funding as *being lucky*. This created conditions for identification and cooperation; a kind of moral commitment central to their understanding of their work and their sense of self. Moreover,

as a response to the narrow script of success privileged by the project frame, respondents drew on *imagined futures*. This would let them work toward a future in academia, adapting to certain institutional demands of the early career, while envisioning alternate scripts of success and worth. Conceptualized as two forms of *keying* (Goffman, 1974: 45), in which the meanings of frameworks are transformed into something patterned on them, they are responses to certain tensions and conflicts that scholars face when navigating a projectified evaluative landscape. Furthermore, both luck and imagined futures represent a kind of moral commitment, central for how early career academics validate a sense of self and justify their actions.

Identity and Morality as Sites of Negotiation: Contributions to the Study of Academic Careers and Beyond

During the past decades, we have seen a steep rise of neoliberal virtues shaping definitions of success and worth. Across social segments, "entrepreneurship, competitiveness, economic success, and self-reliance are increasingly equated with deservingness and merit" (Lamont, 2023: 32). These criteria of worth have gained influence as "model of ideal selves," encouraging people to measure their own worth and that of others by these narrow ideals. Accordingly, people are increasingly expected to take responsibility for their own success and failures, leading to the internalization of the blame "for the precarity of their lives" (Lamont 2023: 31; see also Sweet, 2018).

Certainly, this development has had a great impact on the ideologies, discourses, and management practices in academia (Benner and Holmqvist, 2023). While setting the scene for all members of academic staff (Burton and Bowman, 2022), the dynamics of neoliberalism are arguably most intensified during the early career phase (Archer, 2008a). Characterized by precarious working conditions and the need to quickly demonstrate worth and merit through continuous participation in competitions, junior scholars are pushed into entrepreneurial activities and personas (Cannizzo, 2018a). For example, studies of postdocs in the life sciences indicate that junior scholars are socialized into "one regime of valuation in which the worth of individuals is defined by their ability to succeed in competition based on productivity in terms of acquiring internationally accepted and transferable tokens of academic quality, that is, indexed publications, grant money and recorded citations" (Fochler et al., 2016: 196). This affects knowledge production and social relations, as well as how project-based careers are perceived and coped with more generally (Sigl, 2016). On a similar note, Müller (2014: 13) argues that a dominant academic culture of speed, productivity, and competition forces life science postdocs to nurture an "entrepreneurial self;" that is, a self that understands and conducts itself in accordance with "continuous self-improvements and

adaptations to market needs and trends." In this process, postdocs "develop social and epistemic habits that allow them to accommodate these demands" (Müller 2014: 40).

As demonstrated in the empirical chapters, these dynamics have gained importance in the social sciences and humanities as well. Junior scholars in political science and history referred to similar dominant measuring sticks and model of ideal selves when talking about their practices, identity and their likely future. Shaped by the logic of capitalization, making sense of the early career often followed an investment perspective that enacts a particular relation between the present and the future (Muniesa, 2016). This suggests that the institutional arrangements of the early career, and the narratives surrounding it, provide junior scholars across disciplines with an increasingly narrow script for success and worth. The more that such a script feeds back into shared understandings of what makes an ideal academic career, the more powerful it becomes as a tool for benchmarking and judging self-worth, shaping what it means to become a part of the scholarly vocation today.

However, this thesis contributes to the existing analyses of the interplay between valuation and socialization by demonstrating that this is not the only way early career academics make sense of their work and careers, nor is it the only way they measure the worth of themselves and others. By focusing on how early career academics in political science and history navigate evaluative landscapes, I have drawn attention to the plurality of such landscapes. While shaped by neoliberal virtues and performance measurements, they are also structured by the weighty traditions and moral economies of disciplines, vocations, and local orders. These key features of the early career do not always act in concert. Instead, they can make up different frameworks for how to assess and measure worth. Moreover, learning about what counts and acting upon evaluative knowledge involves signaling one's own identity and group-belongings as well as imagining futures that scholars find more or less desirable. This is to underline the importance of identity and morality as sites of, and motivations for, navigating evaluative landscapes. Faced with the uncertainties and pressures of academic careers, junior scholars in political science and history engage in a form of pragmatic problem solving centered on how to legitimately claim, reject, perform, and balance between conflicting notions of worth. This kind of dissonance means that although they are *exposed* to a narrow regime of valuation, their response is not mere adaptation, but *negotiation*.

On one hand, these findings relate to the specific ways in which institutional reward systems and the more tacit rules of recognition intersects in various settings. Political science and history – like many fields within the social sciences and humanities – are heterogenous and the organization of research and careers differs in meaningful ways from the life sciences. This echoes established insights in the sociology of science (Whitley and Gläser, 2007) and science and technology studies (Rijcke et al., 2016), "which are attuned to the fact that the significance" of certain practices and devices of evaluation "varies across national, institutional, and disciplinary contexts" (Rushforth and de Rijcke, 2023: 11). Therefore, to further explore identity and morality as sites of negotiation in career-making, it is important to extend the empirical focus to new settings

and actors. For example, comparative studies on disciplines could be combined with comparisons between young and senior faculty as well as with respect to variances between national labor markets and career systems. The role played by academic age would certainly benefit from longitudinal studies in which moments of valuations (such as applying for funding or a position) and changing conditions (such as obtaining funding or stable employment) can be studied in more detail. Here, interview research would benefit from ethnographic methods as well as statistical analyses of transitions into, within, and away from academia. Furthermore, the importance of identity and morality points to the need to explore inequalities in academic careers more systematically. For instance, in an academic culture tinted by meritocratic beliefs, how do individuals make sense of their class background, both in terms of privilege and disadvantage? Does changes in evaluative landscapes create new barriers for already disadvantaged groups, or opportunities for more? While much has been written on gender, we still know quite little about the role played by social class and ethnicity – and the intersection between class, ethnicity, and gender – in academic careers. Because disciplinary cultures (for example, in terms of being pure or applied) and universities (such as top- or low-ranked) demonstrate varying degree of diversity, it is important to widen the empirical scope.

On the other hand, the observed differences also concern how certain theoretical perspectives sensitize us to different aspects of valuation. The pragmatic approach developed in this thesis – evident in the concepts of *practices of appraisal devices*, *patterns of identity talk*, *frame alignment,* and *keying* – focuses on valuation as social practice, shaped by the relational nature of social life and the importance of not losing face. It involves continuous consideration of how individuals learn to produce and act upon evaluations in appropriate ways. Crucially, a pragmatic approach emphasizes the role played by the self-concept of actors who are part of (e)valuation processes. Referring broadly to "the narratives that individuals tell to themselves and the world about the types of people they are," research shows that these self-understandings "contribute to actors intersubjective construction of reality and shape their evaluative practices" (Beljean et al., 2015: 41). In careers, self-understandings matter for what they want to be and how they can act, explaining why "people spend so much time and effort trying to become what they want when the risk of failure is high" (Aspers, 2015: 252).

Whereas sociological work in this tradition primarily has focused on the self-concept of evaluators, such as book reviewers (Chong, 2020) and funding panelists (Lamont, 2009), this thesis draws attention to how it matters for aspiring individuals who are continuously evaluated in the context of their careers. Indeed, early career academics in political science and history not only navigate evaluative landscapes by recognizing and handling evaluative plurality. They also navigate evaluative landscapes by drawing boundaries between people, practices, and objects who, according to them, represent different notions of worth and diverse symbolic communities. As I have shown throughout this thesis, these boundaries are often moral, concerning what early career academics wish to become and how they think they should lead their lives. Of course,

these boundaries are part of the rules of recognition since it is by drawing boundaries that junior scholars signal or claim a valued academic identity that may be recognized by their peers. Still, the importance of boundaries for navigating evaluative landscapes also points to career-making more generally being a practical and moral project that is shaped by the interplay between individual's own aspirations, hopes, and sense of self, and the institutional frameworks and demands that structure career fields. While neoliberal virtues and the means to enforce them promote certain hierarchies of worth that change the notions of who and what is valuable in academia, they do not do so in a totalizing sense.

In this regard, the thesis has implications for the study of valuation and identity that goes far beyond the context of academia. Empirically, it suggests that a more thorough understanding of how neoliberalism works demands less theory and more description, to paraphrase Besbris and Khan (2017). If neoliberalism is to be understood as a major cultural, political, and economic tendency in our present society, which heavily influences criteria of worth and model of ideal selves, its meanings and dynamics are not the same everywhere nor for everyone. Depending on the specificity of social settings and the individual and collective actors involved, the dominance of neoliberal virtues on self-worth, group boundaries, and belonging, is surely the object of both struggle and compromises. Yet, we know rather little about such varieties and how they shape the interplay between valuation and identity. A more inductive and open-ended approach could increase our understanding of how certain measuring sticks and model of ideal selves come to matter and how they do not. Crucially, attention should be given to how individuals and groups combine them in alternate scripts of success and worth.

Theoretically, the implications of my analysis and the conceptual developments made in this thesis might be helpful for understanding the interplay between valuation and identity across a range of contexts. This involves different evaluative procedures and actors within academia, as well as athletic, artistic, and financial fields. These fields share many similarities regarding the role played by singularities, gatekeepers, capitalization, and imagined futures. However, it is far from clear how actors navigating these settings are existentially involved in learning about what counts while developing identities that may be recognized by others. Comparing how this is handled in different domains of human activity would put more focus on knowledge accumulation, making it possible to refine and develop previous empirical analyses and conceptual innovations regarding the pragmatics of (e)valuation. Finally, evaluative landscape is a metaphor that has mainly been used descriptively in this thesis, sensitizing us to how different orders of worth and conventions operate simultaneously within academic settings. Yet, it is possible to develop it to a more saturated and explanatory concept that would be able to account for how practices, moments, and devices of (e)valuation become folded into each other (Helgesson, 2016). As recent contributions to the field of valuation studies suggest (Désirée Waibel et al., 2021; Hylmö et al., 2023), such a relational view could be complemented with a perspectival view on how the position of the evaluator and evaluatee come to matter for the establishment of such interrelations as well as the

struggles this could involve. Such a development of the concept of evaluative landscapes does not mean to discard the phenomenological perspective. Rather, it could more systemically theorize the intersection of affordances that channels and limits action and peoples' ability to work through them.

Narratives of Worth: An Epilogue About Wider Implications

This thesis opened with four stories from early career academics interviewed in the spring of 2019. As Eric, David, Michèle, and Paul spoke about themselves and their work, they also talked in length about the network of uncertainties, struggles, and tensions surrounding the question of what counts as worth in academic life. The reader might remember my suggestion to think of these stories as *narratives of worth*. In different ways, this applies for the stories encountered in in the empirical chapters as well. But what are narratives of worth? And how can they inform a reflection about the current challenges we face in academia?

Narratives of worth concern who and what is valuable and by what measures. When these narratives are shared, they set the term for who belongs and who matters. Thus, narratives are more than stories. In a broad sense, "they are perspectives about society and social relations that allow people to make sense of the world" (Lamont 2023: 51). They are vital for group-making (Fine, 2012: 82-88) and are one of the driving forces of action (Polletta, 2013). In academic life, narratives of worth can inform scholars about how to make decisions in their work as well as how they view themselves and others. They are part of social hierarchies and ideal career trajectories. In various ways, narratives of worth dramatize the link between institutional reward structures, rules of recognition, and how early career academics make sense of the world of academia.

If we consider the empirical analyses in this thesis, it is evident that narratives of worth function in very different ways. For instance, they can provide scholars with narrow scripts for how to define worth and career success. Narratives have the power to shape the identities of successful and unsuccessful scholars as well as the very practices and content of research. Virtually all of the early career academics interviewed in this thesis described, in one way or another, how the need to secure publication output and increase one's chances to obtain project funding had an impact on what kind of questions and methods they worked with. This involved how they dealt with risk, made decisions about whom to work with, and where to publish. Of course, strategic thinking is nothing new to the university field nor is it intrinsically good or bad. Nevertheless, recent empirical works demonstrate that a combination of short-termism, competition, and rigid evaluative schemes have had strong homogenizing effects. Investigating the emergence of a standardized article format within the field of science and technology studies, Kaltenbrunner et al. (2022: 762) show that the efficiency gains can "systematically limit or foreclose certain sources of intellectual originality." Similarly, Pardo-

Guerra (2002) demonstrate how efforts to quantify the value of social science research homogenize knowledge production, careers, and what is regarded as the core of disciplines. Although strategic thinking is nothing new, we do need to take it seriously.

This is to state the obvious: the conditions under which scholars work and how they are evaluated have consequences for what knowledge that is produced and who is included or excluded from the academic vocation. We know this, because just as narratives of worth might narrow our sense of who and what is valuable – sometimes to such an extent that we end up with career scripts hardly anyone can live up to – they can also feed our sense of agency; that is, "our capacity to shape the world we live in, as well as our *social resilience*, our collective capacity to respond to the challenges we face" (Lamont, 2023: 52). In addition to narrow scripts of success, the interviews demonstrate that narratives of worth can help the group of early career academics to imagine different futures, responsible research practices, and to mobilize alternate scripts and principles focused on matters such as cooperation and care. In many respects, these narratives were vulnerable and fragile, still they existed. They too must be taken seriously.

In her book about how recognition works, Lamont (2023: 52) argues that the capacity to respond to the challenges we face "are grounded in the environments we inhabit, including the narratives we are exposed to, and the institutions that structures our lives." The question, then, is what sustains narratives of worth in academia and how they are made powerful? My ambition is not to declare the state of things nor how they should be fixed once and for all. Instead, I will try to close this thesis by open up opportunities to reflect upon these questions from one particular perspective: what we do as scholars matters for what academic world there is.

But first, a more structural perspective. The world of academia is partly one of tacit knowledge and numbers. It is permeated with invisible yet weighty normative systems for how to act and how to think as well as the not-so-invisible evaluative machineries of indicators, rankings, citation indexes, and other kind of performance measures for distributing prestige. For early career academics, it is a world without stable employment, but constant participation in various competitions and entrepreneur-like activities. Although some of these features are not good or bad in themselves (such as metrics), others are (such as social insecurity). Nevertheless, through complex feedback loops, these features of the academic world tend to strengthen each other in ways that echoes long-lasting forms of prestige and inequality (Ackers, 2008). This enables some to play the game better and at lesser cost than others, while also generating increasingly unsustainable and unkind academic lives. These dynamics certainly shape academic socialization processes, but they are not set in stone.

All of these features – career and employment structures, cultures of over-work, naïve meritocratic frameworks, gendered or class-based schemes, funding arrangements, performance indicators, and evaluation practices – make some narratives of worth more likely and more durable than others. Because these narratives shape how we perceive the world of academia and how we participate in it, we must ask how we can work for a system that is more forgiving to diversity, curiosity, and the intersection of

professional and personal biographies. How would such a career system look? What funding systems and what research policies do we need? How can higher education institutions support early career academics without simply fostering them into a game that is already broken?

When we ask such questions, we must not forget that all of these narratives, hierarchies, devices, and schemes are "produced by humans and thus changeable" (Lamont, 2023: 54). As Pardo-Guerra (2022: 174) so emphatically shows in his book on how research evaluations transformed the British social sciences: "*how* we utilize metrics and other devices, *how* we engage with and make sense of quantification as either an instrument of equality or an echo chamber of prestige – these are choices made through the proactive institutional practices that fundamentally constitute and reconstitute our workplaces." Rather than the rituals of evaluations, Pardo-Guerra points out that it is our vocational imaginations that call for intervention. Because we, as scholars, are evaluated and judged by other members of the same professional community to such a large extent, we can often choose how we approach the various tasks and situations in which narratives of worth are reproduced. Consider the examples of supervision and peer review, seminars and courses, when editing journals, mentoring, and organizing and participating in conferences. In these contexts, we have a large degree of freedom to choose the scripts and criteria used to decide who and what is valuable. We can also choose *how* we mobilize and *how* we communicate these scripts and criteria and *to what end*. Although our careers force us to be individualists, scholarship might still be a team sport.

Additionally, I believe that an intervention of our vocational imaginations should lay the ground for an intervention of the rituals of evaluation as well. For example, studies on peer review (Lamont, 2009) and bibliometrics (Nederhof, 2006) indicate that disciplines and research fields shine under different lights. Yet, the way we go on to evaluate research impacts not only the extent to which disciplines might *shine,* but also the degree to which they are made *visible* at all. In times of blunt quantification and market fundamentalism, this is a real issue. At my own university, for example, there is, at this very moment, a bibliometric assessment to be carried out across all faculties. Aiming to climb in international performance rankings, the assessment exercise, as things currently stands, only cover about 20-30 percent of all outputs of scholars at the joint faculties of humanities and theology. The other 70-80 percent are made invisible by the standards used, and as such, they do not count. Certainly, Espeland and Sauder's (2016) description of academic rankings as *engines of anxiety* is still accurate.

As initiatives such as the "responsible assessment movement" have demonstrated, it is possible to recognize the diversity of output practices and activities that make up quality and impact of research in different fields (see e.g., COARA, 2022). This might require a combination of qualitative judgement and supporting quantitative indicators that are able to take the specificities of disciplinary contexts into account. It might also involve the developments of new qualitative approaches to assess research and careers. One only needs to think about how the academic CV has radically transformed since

the 1950s to understand that how we do things is not self-evident and can be changed (Hamann and Kaltenbrunner, 2022). And when we think of *how* we evaluate scholars and their work, we should also ask *what* it is that we decide to evaluate in the first place. In addition to the quality and impact of research, we could, in academic careers and hiring decisions, evaluate teaching and service work as well as care and community involvement. It is possible. We just have to use our vocational imagination.

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As a PhD student entering one of my first courses, I met a renowned professor whom I had the utmost respect for. His lectures were splendid and he pushed me and my fellow course participants to think harder and read more carefully. By the end of the course, we had a lecture on the theme "academic careers." I was intrigued. However, during those two hours I learned this: PhD students should co-write three journal articles with their supervisor and other successful professors before writing the final one by themselves. PhD students should only aim for the highest ranked journals within their field, be a visiting scholar at a prestigious university abroad for at least a year, and minimize their involvement in teaching and other meaningless tasks at the department. Moreover, PhD students should be careful about whom they cite, aiming for the inclusion in "citation circles." After the PhD is completed, it is time to go abroad again. "And now," the professor told us, "it is time to deliver. If you have a family, which I assume most of you do at this point, please do not take them with you. After the postdoc years, make it up to your partner somehow, but now it is time to focus on your career." I left the course anxious and with a bad taste in my mouth.

The significant thing here is not that the professor was wrong. For all I know, he was probably right. This is one of the scripts that definitely pays off in the current academic landscape. Nevertheless, it is a script that uncritically homogenizes research and careers in a very narrow sense. More importantly, it is unempathetic and unkind in that it regards the professional and private lives of academics as incompatible. It takes no notice of peoples' experiences of scholarly labor and their lives. When confronted with inequalities, precarities, and mental health problems reproduced by the institutions where we work, *that* experience is what really matters.

The example of the professor who held the course I attended as a newly minted PhD student is a good illustration of how narratives of worth come to matter in our daily lives. He could have talked about the meanings and practices of PhDs and postdocs in numerous ways, but he chose this one. If narratives are about how we describe reality to ourselves and others – shaping our identities, experiences, and involvements – we are more likely to buy into them when they are already embraced by our peers, especially when these are located higher up the status hierarchy. Hence, while it is important to reflect critically upon the structural conditions reproducing narratives of worth and how they might be transformed, we must not forget how we – as members of the same academic community – sustain them in our daily interactions and practical

engagements. This is where we have the power to make academia a slightly better and kinder place today.

SAMMANFATTNING

Vad är det som räknas? Vad är värdefullt? Och vilka normer och kriterier används för att avgöra det? Det är frågor som varje forskare konfronteras med i sitt sökande efter erkännande och framgång. Men hur upplevs och hanteras dessa frågor av dem som befinner sig i början av sin akademiska karriär och som arbetar under allt osäkrare förhållanden?

I denna avhandling utforskas samspelet mellan hur akademiskt arbete (ut)värderas och hur unga forskare utan fast anställning lär sig att arbeta och leva inom dagens akademi. Med andra ord står samspelet mellan *värde, värdering* och *akademisk socialisation* i centrum. För att undersöka detta har 35 djupintervjuer genomförts med unga forskare inom historia och statsvetenskap. Sammantaget omfattar avhandlingen tre historiska institutioner och två statsvetenskapliga institutioner vid fyra forskningsintensiva universitet i Sverige. I den intervjuade gruppen har samtliga avslutat sin forskarutbildning under de senaste åtta åren och erhåller tidsbegränsade anställningar med varierande längd och villkor. Genom att jämföra hur dessa individer på olika sätt försöker att visa sitt värde för att bli erkända av andra och, i vid mening, avancera i sina karriärer, försöker jag att förstå deras värld. Detta är en viktig uppgift. De som socialiseras in i akademin idag kommer ofrånkomligen att forma dess framtida kulturer och praktiker, inklusive de symboliska och sociala gränser som definierar vem och vad det är som räknas. Samtidigt är tiden mellan avslutad forskarutbildning och erhållandet av fast tjänst – vad som ibland kallas för *den postdoktorala fasen* – understuderad. Den befintliga litteraturen om akademisk socialisation handlar nästan uteslutande om doktorandtillvaron, vilket innebär att den postdoktorala fasen och dess funktion som ”status passage” i dagens akademi i hög grad har förbisetts (Åkerlind, 2005; Fochler et al., 2016; Laudel och Gläser, 2008).

Givet de senaste decenniernas strukturella förändringar av akademin – gällande finansieringssystem, anställningsmönster, yrkesroller och konkurrensdynamiker – har den postdoktorala fasen kommit att bli en flaskhals i många akademiska karriärsystem runt om i Europa, inklusive Sverige (Frølich et al., 2018). Dessa förändringar har även givit upphov till diskussioner om en akademi i kris, där betydelsen av publiceringshets (Hasselberg 2013), en ökad användning av kvantitativa prestationsmått (Burrows, 2012), otrygga arbetsförhållanden (Schwaller, 2019) och ett ständigt ökat tempo (Vostal 2016) stått i centrum. Flera empiriska studier har visat att sådana tendenser på olika sätt etablerar nya förväntningar och snävare kravbilder på unga forskare (se t.ex. Fochler et al., 2016; Müller, 2014; Roumbanis, 2019). Samtidigt är akademin genomsyrad av relativt statiska institutionella ramar för hur forskare ska agera och tänka (Degn, 2018). Detta talar för att akademiska karriärer och identiteter är mångtydiga sociala fenomen. Vidare innebär det att unga forskare i allt högre grad behöver förhålla sig till olika värderingsregimer; regimer som kan stå i mer eller mindre konflikt med varandra (Rushforth et

al., 2019). I synnerhet inom många human- och samhällsvetenskapliga discipliner har nya normer och praktiker för att (ut)värdera forskning upplevts som främmande (Hammarfelt and de Rijcke 2016; Nelhans 2013).

I denna avhandling undersöks hur denna tvetydighet – dessa olika definitioner, standarder och regimer av värde – upplevs och förhandlas av unga forskare i historia och statsvetenskap. I centrum står frågan: hur navigerar unga forskare utvärderingslandskap? Begreppet *utvärderingslandskap* är myntat av organisationssociologen Christof Brandtner (2017: 208) och beskriver "the universe of relevant practices in the environments of a set of organizations that aim at evaluating and comparing these organizations' performance. [This means that] many organizations face not a single social order but a diverse set of competing rationales". När jag började att intervjua unga forskare stod det snart klart att en av de främsta utmaningarna de möter när de ska etablera sig inom akademin är att orientera sig i situationer som kännetecknas av multipla "social orders" och en uppsättning "competing rationales". I deras berättelser om sig själva och sitt arbete hade frågan om vem och vad det är som räknas sällan ett entydigt eller bestämt svar. Istället omgavs kriterier för erkännande och framgång av oklarheter och spänningar.

Mot denna bakgrund har jag valt att studera hur unga forskare navigerar utvärderingslandskap, snarare än hur de reagerar på specifika praktiker eller moment av utvärdering. Detta kräver en vid förståelse av värderingspraktiker och värderingsprocesser. Teoretiskt är jag influerad av två perspektiv inom sociologin: pragmatism (Boltanski och Thévenot, 2006; Dewey, 1922) och symbolisk interaktionism (Fine och Tavory, 2019; Goffman, 1974). Gemensamt för dessa perspektiv är att de betonar den kollektiva och praktiska aspekten av socialt liv och sociala ordningar. Fokus ligger på den grundläggande relationella karaktären av att befinna sig i en meningsfull värld (Schütz, 1967) och hur situationer och deras aktörer skapar strukturer för tolkning, koordination och handling (Goffman, 1974). I avhandlingen riktas fokus mot de konkurrerande nät av mening som unga forskare väver samman för att förstå sig själva och sin akademiska vardag, samt hur de förhandlar fram ramar som förlänger individuella uppfattningar till gemensamma förståelser (Lamont, 2009). Värde, värdering och värderingsprocesser betraktas som något som äger rum genom erfarenheter och situerade praktiker; genom latenta eller explicita dialoger med specifika eller generaliserade andra (Lamont, 2012: 215). Medan en sådan teoretisk position tar individers och gruppers agens på stort allvar, så innebär det inte att vikten av sociala strukturer eller olika former av makt ignoreras. Snarare är det ett perspektiv som utgår från att även om strukturer och makt formar handlingar och identiteter, så sker detta formande genom förståelser och preferenser hos sociala aktörer (Fine, 2012: 2).

Frågan som står i centrum för avhandlingen är hur unga forskare i statsvetenskap och historia navigerar utvärderingslandskap. I tre artiklar utforskas de meningsskapande praktiker och spänningar som omgärdar denna process.

Vad är det som räknas i framtida bedömningar? Hur unga forskare navigerar utvärderingslandskap genom att lita på andras omdömen

I den första artikeln studeras hur unga forskare hanterar osäkerheten gällande hur de själva och deras arbete kommer att bedömas av ”grindvakter” (eng. *gatekeepers*) i framtida utvärderingar. Precis som inom konst och litteratur så karakteriseras akademin av en avsaknad av objektiva bedömningskriterier. Därmed spelar grindvakter en väsentlig roll för akademiska karriärer. I delstudien jämförs hur unga forskare inom historia och statsvetenskap använder sig av vad sociologen Henrik Fürst kallar för ”appraisal devices” (Fürst, 2018) – det vill säga tekniker eller verktyg för värdering – för att hantera denna typ av osäkerhet. Medan unga forskare använder sig av olika typer av ”appraisal devices” så fokuserar jag på den som var mest förekommande i intervjumaterialet, nämligen *assessors*. En assessor är en person som ingår i unga forskares nätverk och som fungerar som en mentor. Osäkerhet hanteras således genom att unga forskare litar på omdömet hos specifika assessors vilka anses vara kapabla att producera utvärderingar som *matchar* med framtida bedömningar inom deras fält. Därmed blir det möjligt för unga forskare att temporärt reducera osäkerhet och göra olika typer av förutsägelser.

Tidigare forskning har påvisat att anteciperande praktiker har blivit allt viktigare i en akademi karakteriserad av kortsiktighet (Ylijoki, 2010), acceleration (Müller, 2014), projektbaserad finansiering (Scholten et al., 2021) och ökade krav på att leverera mätbara resultat inom allt snävare tidsramar (Felt, 2017). I linje med tidigare forskning visar min studie att de sociala och temporala strukturerna av den postdoktorala fasen gör att framtida antaganden om vad något är värt i allt högre grad styr akademiska praktiker i nuet. Samtidigt erbjuder artikeln ett nytt perspektiv då den även undersöker *hur* sådana anteciperande praktiker är informerade, det vill säga vilken typ av utvärderande information de vilar på. Genom att anta ett sådant perspektiv blir det möjligt att studera osäkerhet och förväntan som utmärkande drag av akademiska socialisationsprocesser. Vidare bidrar artikelns komparativa upplägg till att förstå hur unga forskares disciplinära sammanhang och dess position i större utvärderingslandskap formar dessa processer.

Den empiriska analysen visar att förutsättningarna för att använda ”appraisal devices”, samt vilka aktörer det är som generellt sett fungerar som assessors, skiljer sig åt mellan de studerade disciplinerna. Inom statsvetenskap var den vanligaste assessorn en senior forskare. I kraft av erfarenhet, formella statushierarkier och institutionella rollstrukturer antogs seniora assessors ha mest kunskap om hur akademiker och deras arbete utvärderas. Därmed accepterades också deras kriterier för att bedöma värde som dominerande mått på kvalitet och framgång. Medan omdömet hos seniora assessors inom statsvetenskap naturligtvis kan variera – utvärderingskriterier är föremål för såväl förhandling som kamp – så är det slående att samma grupp av personer fungerade som assessors över olika karriärnivåer: från doktorandutbildning till den postdoktorala fasen. Detta ger en viss stabilitet till statsvetenskap gällande frågan om vad det är som räknas i framtida bedömningar.

Detta kan kontrasteras mot historia där frågan om vad som räknas och vems omdöme som ska avgöra det karakteriserades av en upplevd diskontinuitet mellan den doktorala och postdoktorala fasen. Med hänvisning till en växande ”generationsklyfta” beskrev unga historiker hur de primärt använde sig av omdömet hos juniora assessors, det vill säga kollegor på samma eller liknande karriärnivå, för att utvärdera sina egna prestationer och ta beslut gällande sitt arbete. Eftersom seniora akademiker fortfarande kan fungera som grindvakter i olika typer av utvärderingssituationer omgärdas emellertid användandet av juniora assessors som ”appraisal devices” av både spänningar och osäkerhet. Detta ger en viss instabilitet till historia gällande frågan om vad som räknas i framtida bedömningar.

På ett övergripande plan pekar artikelns empiriska resultat mot att socialiseringsprocesser inom statsvetenskap är mer *vertikalt strukturerade* och att socialiseringsprocesser inom historia är mer *horisontellt strukturerade*. Vidare understryks det att *matchningen* mellan omdömet hos en assessor och framtida bedömningar på intet sätt är given på förhand. Vem som helst kan inte agera som en assessor. Tvärtom: att lära sig att lita på någon annans omdöme innebär att *urskilja* vems omdöme man litar på och vems omdöme man inte litar på. Den process inom vilka dessa gränser dras formas av unga forskares självuppfattning såväl som av de distinktioner de använder för att avgöra andra forskares värde och betydelse. Att hantera osäkerheten gällande vad som räknas i framtida bedömningar genom att lita på någon annans omdöme har således tolkningsmässiga likväl som existentiella dimensioner. Det är en process inom vilken unga forskare lär sig att agera i enlighet med en viss typ av utvärderande information samtidigt som de signalerar sin identitet och grupptillhörighet genom att urskilja vems omdöme det är som gäller.

Vem och vad är det som räknas? Hur unga forskare navigerar utvärderingslandskap genom identitetsarbete

Medan den första artikeln utforskar värdering som ett slags osäkerhetsproblem så handlar den andra artikeln om värdering som ett dramaturgiskt problem. Mer specifikt studeras hur unga forskare förhandlar ”karriärskripts” (eng. *career scripts*) genom identitetsarbete. Identitet förstås här som en symbolisk resurs: som något som unga forskare *gör* och *hanterar* när de söker efter belöning och erkännande. Mot bakgrund av den förändring som akademin har genomgått under de senaste decennierna har det vuxit fram en omfångsrik litteratur gällande akademiska identiteter. Ett gemensamt drag hos merparten av dessa studier är att de behandlar identitet som ett resultat av strukturella och institutionella förändringar (Archer, 2008; Henkel, 2000; Yli-joki och Ursin, 2013), vilket innebär att dess mer specifika betydelser för att göra akademisk karriär har förbisetts. Avhandlingens andra artikel bidrar således med ett nytt perspektiv och med nya empiriska insikter genom att analysera hur unga forskare navigerar olika typer av karriärkrav *genom* identitetsarbete.

I likhet med avhandlingens första artikel betonas den roll som osäkerhet och förväntan spelar i akademiska socialiseringsprocesser. Snarare än att bestämma vems omdöme

man ska lita på riktas emellertid fokus mot hur anteciperande praktiker är kopplade till vad vi i dramaturgiska ordalag kan förstå som förhållandet mellan den som uppträder/agerar (eng. *perform*) och dess publik. (Goffman 1990[1959]). Förhållandet mellan aktör och publik är grundläggande för värderingsprocesser (Aspers 2009) och relaterar till hur unga forskare upplever institutionella belöningsstrukturer samt mer eller mindre informella regler för erkännande. I delstudien anläggs inte ett komparativt perspektiv utan statsvetenskap och historia fogas samman i en gemensam fallstudie av de förhållanden och utmaningar som formar samspelet mellan värdering och identitet mer generellt inom dessa discipliner.

I den empiriska analysen av unga forskares identitetsarbete urskiljs fyra mönster av *identitetsprat* (eng. *identity talk*) inriktade mot *prestation*, *autenticitet*, *lojalitet* och *personifiering*. Infogade i mer etablerade karriärskripts förmedlar dessa mönster skilda förståelser och definitioner av vad det innebär att som ung forskare agera och representera värde. Vidare består dessa mönster av identitetprat av en uppsättning mer eller mindre ”tysta” regler för hur identitetsanspråk ska göras i interaktioner med andra. Till exempel handlar *prestationsprat* (eng. *achievement talk*) inte endast om att signalera konkurrenskraft, effektivitet och prestation, utan om att vara en högpresterare på ett respektfullt och legitimt sätt. För att nå kollegors erkännande behöver även prestationsprat kombineras med *autenticitetsprat* (eng. *authenticity talk*), trots att de premierar väldigt olika definitioner av värde. En betydande utmaning för unga forskare inom historia och statsvetenskap är följaktligen att växla mellan olika typer av identitetspositioner samtidigt som de kan slå an den rätta performativa balansen.

Å ena sidan visar delstudiens empiriska resultat att unga forskare inom historia och statsvetenskap relaterar till en mer mångsidig värderingsrepertoar än vad som ofta görs gällande i populära begrepp likt ”publish or perish” (De Rond och Miller, 2005) eller ”nyliberala subjekt” (Archer, 2008b). Därmed är det inte sagt att dagens akademiska kultur inte präglas av vare sig publiceringshets eller snäva neoliberala värden. Istället understryks den faktiska utmaning som unga forskare står inför: att anpassa och lära sig att gestalta flera roller och definitioner av värde på ett sätt som kan generera både belöning och erkännande. Å andra sidan pekar delstudiens resultat mot akademiska karriärer som formade av ojämlikhet. Att balansera olika identitetsanspråk samtidigt som man följer de tysta regler som finns för hur statussignaler ska gestaltas kräver en viss fingertoppskänsla för hur erkännande fungerar inom akademin (Bourdieu, 1998). För många kvinnliga forskare och forskare med arbetarklassbakgrund innebar detta att de var tvungna att hantera sin sociala identitet genom *personifieringsprat* (eng. *personation talk*). I kampen mellan att ”passa in” och att ”sticka ut” ägnande kvinnliga unga forskare avsevärd energi åt att navigera könade karriärskript medan unga forskare med arbetarklassbakgrund beskrev hur de på olika sätt försökte att justera sitt tal, sin klädsel eller manér för att passera som ”insiders”. Kön och klass begränsar således individers möjligheter till att anta och gestalta priviligierade akademiska identiteter. Detta talar för att samspelet mellan värde, värdering och akademisk socialisering är inramat av mer övergripande former av ojämlikhet.

Vad är det som räknas i projekt-baserade karriärer? Hur unga forskare navigerar utvärderingslandskap genom att följa och förhandla projektramen

I både den första och den andra artikeln betonas att akademiskt arbete och akademiska karriärer har kommit att bli alltmer projektbaserade. Projektformatets sociala och temporala strukturer är starkt normerande för hur samspelet mellan värde, värdering och socialisation tar form under den postdoktorala fasen. Den tredje och sista artikeln undersöker därför hur värderingspraktiker är knutna till hur projekt *ramar in* unga forskares tillvaro. För att undersöka hur en sådan *projektram* upplevs och hanteras anläggs ett delvis jämförande perspektiv där såväl likheter som skillnader mellan disciplinerna samt lokala variationer kopplade till institutioner och forskargrupper studeras.

Artikelns empiriska resultat visar att unga forskare i statsvetenskap och historia gemensamt hänvisade till *konkurrens* och *leverans* för att förstå vad som förväntades av dem. En sådan projektram bekräftades av den symboliska funktion som erhållandet av externa forskningsmedel hade inom såväl organisatoriska rutiner som i vardagliga interaktioner mellan forskare. I enlighet med en sådan projektram förhöll sig unga forskare till en ytterst snäv värderingsregim, vilket formade deras forskningspraktiker likväl som deras sociala identitet som ung forskare. I intervjuerna kunde det handla om beslut gällande frågor att undersöka, metoder att arbeta med samt hur, var och med vem man skulle publicera. Samtidigt fanns det betydande skillnader i hur unga forskare anpassade sitt arbete till projektramen. För många historiker innebar projektformatets temporala strukturer att vissa kriterier och standarder som är centrala för deras disciplin kom att utmanas. För statsvetare i större, kollaborativa forskningsgrupper kunde projektformatet skapa konflikter mellan den unga forskarens lojalitet till gruppen och hens individuella behov av att publicera själv. Medan tidigare forskning om akademins projektifiering ofta har framhållit dess standardiserande effekter (Felt, 2016; Ylijoki, 2015), visar mina resultat på både konvergens och divergens mellan disciplinerna. Med andra ord: innebörden och dynamiken av projektifiering är delvis bundna till de sammanhang inom vilka forskare upplever och hanterar dem.

Merparten av de studier som ägnats åt projektifiering av akademiskt arbete har fokuserat på de konflikter och spänningar som forskare upplever. Ett av artikelns viktigaste bidrag är att den empiriskt belyser hur unga forskare inom historia och statsvetenskap hanterar sådana konflikter och spänningar genom att förhandla den normativa betydelsen av projektramen. Genom att exempelvis rama in erhållandet av externa forskningsmedel som *tur* skapades förutsättningar för unga forskare att inte bara konkurrera, utan även samarbeta och identifiera sig med varandra. På ett liknande sätt konstruerades *föreställda framtider* (eng. *imagined futures*) genom vilka unga forskare tilläts att anpassa sig till snäva kravbilder samtidigt som de knöt an till vidare definitioner av värde och erkännande. Teoretiskt kan vi förstå betoningen av tur och formuleringen av föreställda framtider som två former av vad sociologen Erving Goffman kallar för *keying* (Goffman, 1974: 45). Keying, i bemärkelsen ”nyckel”, ”nyans” och ”tonart”, är en slags nyansförskjutning som resulterar i att betydelsen av en etablerad ram delvis omvandlas. Därmed

kan keying förstås som ett svar på de spänningar och konflikter som unga forskare möter när de navigerar projekt-baserade karriärer genomsyrade av konkurrens, produktivitetskrav och entreprenörskap. Betonandet av tur och föreställandet av framtider är också ett slags moraliskt arbete där unga forskare kan validera sin självuppfattning och rättfärdiga sina handlingar i en situation karakteriserad av allt snävare värderingsregimer.

Avslutande reflektioner

Vad är det som räknas? Vad är värdefullt? Och vilka normer och kriterier används för att avgöra det? Hur unga forskare i statsvetenskap och historia upplever och hanterar dessa frågor i takt med att de växer in i akademin är det problem som stått i centrum i avhandlingen. Resultaten visar att dessa frågor relaterar till vad unga forskare antas *värderas av andra* – i framtida utvärderingar av grindvakter såväl som i dagliga interaktioner med kollegor – och vad som *värderas av dem själva* – vad de önskar och håller kärt. Som sociala praktiker förhandlas definitioner av värde och dess kriterier i skärningspunkten mellan dessa två poler. Denna förhandlingsprocess formas av disciplinära normsystem, konkurrensdynamiker och institutionella ramverk såväl som av unga forskares förväntningar, beräkningar, känslor och självuppfattningar. I avhandlingen framhålls genomgående att processen av att navigera utvärderingslandskap är intimt sammankopplad med hur unga forskare förstår och skapar mening kring sitt arbete, sin identitet och den situation de delar med andra unga forskare. Detta kräver en analys där den moraliska aspekten av värderingsprocesser tas i beaktande; värderingsprocesser handlar lika mycket om *belöning* som om *erkännande* (Stark, 2009: 9). Avhandlingen belyser därmed aspekter av samspelet mellan värde, värdering och akademisk socialisation som tidigare forskning i hög grad inte fäst avseende vid. För att förstå detta i mer detalj ska vi först zooma ut och placera akademin i en vidare samhällskontext.

Under de senaste decennierna har ett mer utpräglat neoliberalt synsätt kommit att bli dominerande för hur värde och framgång definieras och förstås. I olika sociala grupper och sammanhang likställs konkurrens, entreprenörskap, ekonomisk framgång och oberoende med värdighet och meriter. I sin bok om hur erkännande fungerar beskriver sociologen Michèle Lamont (2023) hur sådana definitioner av värde har kommit att etablera sig som en modell för ett ”idealt jag” och hur människor uppmuntras att mäta sitt eget och andras värde genom dessa begränsade ideal. En konsekvens av detta är att människor i allt högre grad förväntas att ta ansvar för sin framgång och misslyckanden, inklusive skulden för sina allt mer prekära liv (Sweet, 2018).

Denna utveckling har haft stor inverkan på de ideologier, diskurser och styrningspraktiker som formar dagens akademiska landskap (Benner och Holmqvist, 2023). Medan detta har förändrat förutsättningarna för alla de som arbetar inom akademin (Burton och Bowman, 2022) så gäller det i synnerhet för unga forskare utan fast anställning (Archer, 2008a). Deras situation präglas av otrygghet och osäkerhet likväl som ett ständigt behov av att visa sitt värde genom att konkurrera med andra. Studier av postdoktorala forskare inom exempelvis livsvetenskaper (eng. *life sciences*) har argumenterat

för att de socialiseras in i *en* värderingsregim inom vilken "the worth of individuals is defined by their ability to succeed in competition based on productivity in terms of acquiring internationally accepted and transferable tokens of academic quality, that is, indexed publications, grant money and recorded citations" (Fochler et al., 2016: 196). Vidare påvisar teknik- och vetenskapsforskaren Ruth Müller (2014) att en dominerande akademisk kultur kännetecknad av snabbhet, produktivitet och konkurrens driver unga forskare inom dessa discipliner till att utveckla ett slags ”entreprenöriellt jag” där de ständigt försöker att förbättra och effektivisera sig själva och sitt arbete.

I avhandlingens tre artiklar framgår att den dynamik som beskrivs ovan även har kommit att påverka human- och samhällsvetenskapliga discipliner. Unga forskare inom statsvetenskap och historia hänvisade till liknande kravbilder och modeller av ett ”idealt jag” när de talade om sin postdoktorala tillvaro och om vad som krävs av dem för att göra akademisk karriär. Sammantaget tyder detta på att de strukturer och ramverk som präglar den postdoktorala fasen, samt de narrativ som reproduceras kring den, skapar snäva skript för framgång och värde; skript som unga forskare använder för att utvärdera såväl sig själva som andra.

Samtidigt visar avhandlingen att detta inte är det enda sätt som unga forskare förstår sig själva och sitt arbete. Inte heller är detta det enda sätt som de bedömer värdet av sig själva och andra. Genom att fokusera på hur unga forskare inom statsvetenskap och historia navigerar utvärderingslandskap har pluraliteten hos dessa landskap på olika sätt uppmärksammats. Även om dessa landskap genomsyras av en nyliberal logik så formas de också av de mer eller mindre subtila normer, värden, traditioner och myter som ramar in en akademisk tillvaro. Detta innefattar såväl disciplinära och yrkesmässiga normsystem som lokala statushierarkier och gruppdynamiker. Med andra ord, vad avhandlingen belyser är hur de strukturer och praktiker som formar den postdoktorala fasen inte alltid agerar i samklang med varandra. Snarare kan de förmedla relativt olikartade definitioner och förståelser av vem och vad som är värdefull. Vidare understryker samtliga av avhandlingens tre artiklar att processen inom vilken unga forskare lär sig ”vad det är som räknas” inbegriper att signalera sin identitet och grupptillhörighet samt att föreställa sig framtider som de finner mer eller mindre önskvärda.

Om vi tror att unga forskare navigerar utvärderingslandskap endast genom att försöka maximera sin position så misstar vi oss. Avhandlingens resultat pekar istället mot att sådana kalkylerande praktiker måste kombineras med ett slags moraliskt arbete där såväl identitet som moralitet fungerar som viktiga motiv *för att* navigera utvärderingslandskap. Konfronterade med den osäkerhet, press och snäva värderingsregimer som är förknippade med akademiska karriärer ägnar sig således unga forskare åt en form av pragmatisk problemlösning kopplad till hur man på ett legitimt sätt kan hävda, förkasta, utföra och balansera mellan olika föreställningar om, och definitioner av, vem och vad det är som räknas som värdefull.

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APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. I understand that you work as a __ here at the department, can you tell me about your position?
   - What do you spend your time doing?
   - How did you get this position?
   - In this position, who are the most important people to you?

2. Looking back, can you describe your way into academia?
   - When did you start to think about pursuing an academic career?
   - Can you take me through the process of when you decided to apply for a PhD position?
   - Can you tell me about your time as a doctoral student?
   - Was it obvious that you would continue with an academic career after you had finished your PhD?
   - Have you always felt at home in academia?

3. Can you tell me a little bit about your background…
   - Where did you grow up?
   - What do your parents work with?
   - What is your parents' education?
   - How did your parents/people near you react when you decided for a career in academia?
   - What type of support have your parents/people near you offered you during your time in academia?

4. How would you describe your relationship with your job?
   - Guide me through a normal work week, what do you do? How much do you work? What is important?
   - What do you like/dislike with your work?
   - Is there something about working as an academic that you find particularly difficult?

5. How would you describe your workplace?
   - Research focus, teaching, and working routines etc.
   - Competition/cooperation
   - Who are the most influential people at the department?

6. How would you describe the early career academics here at the department?
   - Similarities/differences

7. Do you feel that there are any expectations of you as an early career academic at the department?
   - How and when have you felt these expectations? From whom?
   - What do you think a "typical" early career academic at the department is like?

8. What type of activities are important for you in your work?
   - How do you prioritize between activities?
   - How do you prioritize in your research?
   - As an early career academic, what are you encouraged to do? How, when, and by whom?

9. How would you characterize a "successful" scholar in your discipline?
   - Has your understanding of "success" changed over time?
   - According to you, is there an agreement among you and your colleagues about what signals "success"?

10. How would you characterize an "unsuccessful" academic"?
    - Has your understanding of "lack of success" changed over time?
    - According to you, is there is an agreement among you and your colleagues about what "being unsuccessful" means?

11. What should a "typical" career in your discipline look like?
    - Can you give me an example of someone with such a career?
    - How does your career compare to the "typical" career you just described?
    - From the perspective of your career, what do you think has been the most important factors for reaching your current position?
    - Is there something in particular you need to do in order to advance further?

12. With whom do you talk about career issues?

13. It has been said that time is the most important resources for researchers, do you have enough of it?
    - With regard to time, what are the main challenges in your work?
    - Has your experience of time changed in the course of your career?

14. When you decide how to publish your research, how does it usually work?
    - Can you guide me through the process of writing and publishing your most recent article/book/book chapter?

- What factors are important to you when taking decisions about publishing?
- Looking at your CV, what would you regard as your most important publication(s)?

15. Are there any expectations of how you should publish?
    - How do such expectations become evident? When and by whom?

16. How would you describe the publishing practices at your department?
    - In terms of publishing practices, are there any important differences between your discipline and other disciplines?

17. Are you familiar with different indicators or measurements for evaluating research?
    - How are such indicators/measurements discussed at your departments?
    - Do researchers use them? How?
    - In what way do they matter for you in your work?

18. When having published your work, how do you make it visible to others?

19. When talking about visibility and recognition. At another level, as a scholar, how do you want to be perceived by others?
    - Can you describe a scholar whom you admire?
    - Can you describe a scholar whom you do not like that much?

20. Looking towards the future, what will be the focus of your work the next one-two years?
    - What are the main opportunities?
    - What are the main challenges?
    - Do you talk much about the future with your colleagues?

21. To phrase the question differently, where do you see yourself in five years?
    - What do need to do in order to get there?

What counts? What is valuable? And by what measures?

These are questions that every scholar confronts while seeking recognition and rewards. But how are they experienced and dealt with by those who are currently growing into academia?

Drawing upon 35 in-depth interviews with early career academics in political science and history, Jonatan Nästesjö explores the interplay between valuation and academic socialization. By analyzing the many practices, discourses, and moments of valuation surrounding academic life, he shows how the key features of the early career do not always act in concert. Instead, they can make up different frameworks for assessing and measuring worth. This kind of dissonance means that although early career academics are exposed to an increasingly narrow regime of valuation, their response is not mere adaptation, but negotiation.

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