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ABSTRACT
This paper explores the experiences of 24 Early Career Researchers working in interdisciplinary and precarious employment conditions in which they are managing collaborations with multiple partners beyond the university as part of the AHRC's 'Connected Communities' Programme. These conditions emerge from conflicting sources – from critical and emancipatory moves in knowledge production as well as from globalising neoliberal education policies. The paper draws on Archer's concept of reflexive identity to identify four different reflexive orientations developed by ECRs in these conditions: the disciplinarian, the freelancer, the worker bee and the social activist.

Introduction

This paper explores the experiences of 24 Early Career Researchers negotiating the changing dynamics of the contemporary university: namely (1) the changing external collaborative relationships between universities and their publics (Jongbloed, Enders, and Salerno 2008; Mahony and Clarke 2013; Strier 2014; Mahony 2013, 2015); (2) the changing internal relationships between disciplines and fields (Strathern 2004; Barry and Born 2013); and (3) the changing employment relationships between universities as institutions and the academics who work in them (Dowling 2008; Martin 2011; Nadolny and Ryan 2013).

In particular we take as our focus the experience of Early Career Researchers working on a flagship UK Research Council programme: 'Connected Communities'. The Connected Communities programme was established in 2010 to foster interdisciplinary and collaborative research between academics and 'communities' ranging from grass roots organisations, to civil society groups, to governmental policy partners (www.connected-communities.org). To date, it has funded over 300 projects lasting between six months and five years, working with around 900 partners in areas that include health, creative economy, environment and cultural heritage. The six years of the programme to date have been characterised by methodological experimentalism at the boundary between arts practice, scholarly humanities and both activist and traditional social sciences, as well as by modest but potentially far-reaching changes in the funding infrastructure to support research. This programme can be understood as one of the largest national experiments seeking to address the global critiques of university-based knowledge production that have emerged from both activist movements and from within the academy (e.g. Connell 2007; de Sousa Santos 2013). At the heart of this programme is a cohort of around 160 Early Career Researchers who are simultaneously negotiating their often-precarious employment status in universities and community

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organisations (Archer 2008; McAlpine 2010) and their epistemologically and politically complex roles in conducting interdisciplinary and collaborative research with multiple academic investigators and partners beyond the walls of the university.

We are particularly interested in the experiences of the ECRs on this programme for three reasons. First, we concur with others (e.g. Barry and Born 2013; Felt et al. 2013), who have observed that the analysis of the changing nature of knowledge production too often remains at a theoretical level and overlooks the messy realities of lived experience; and few are closer to the lived experience of collaborative and interdisciplinary research than the ECRs in Connected Communities. Indeed, they may be bearing disproportionally the risks of the programme as such researchers are unlikely to be sheltered from the risks of interdisciplinary (or collaborative) research practice in the same way as more senior researchers (May 2005; Felt et al. 2013). Second, because these individuals are often those who are living at the forefront of the economics of austerity within the academy (McAlpine 2010) while at the same time working closely with those who are experiencing it in their communities. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we are interested in this group because in the reflexive orientations (Archer 2007, 2012) that they are developing in response to interdisciplinary and collaborative work in conditions of austerity, they begin to offer insights into how a new generation of researchers may seek to shape, adapt and survive the changing epistemological, political and economic trajectories of the university.

The triple dynamic: interdisciplinarity, co-production and early career precarity

The Early Career Researchers on the Connected Communities programme are negotiating a complex set of dynamics in the University. We frame these here as 'interdisciplinarity', 'co-production' and 'precarity'. The first two dynamics can be understood as responses to the dilemmas of conducting academic labour in an institution that increasingly finds itself unable to defend its claim to distinctiveness (May 2005), in an environment in which knowledge production is increasingly understood as the domain of many actors beyond the walls of the university. These actors range from the 'vast industrial complex of communications media, technoscience and knowledge-based service in which the university is but one node among many' (Martin 2011), to the thousands of Ph.D.s and graduates produced by universities and now working in government, civil society and industry (Gibbons et al. 1994), to the civil society groups and social movements producing new landscape of popular and civic knowledge (Jongbloed, Enders, and Salerno 2008; Mahony 2013; Mahony and Clarke 2013; Strier 2014).

This proliferation of actors and recasting of the landscape of knowledge production generates two dynamics: first, 'interdisciplinarity', the internal reconfiguring of relations between epistemic fields within the university, as academics are encouraged to combine their expertise to address complex phenomena that exceed the purview of a single discipline (Jasanoff 2004; Barry and Born 2013). Second, what UK research councils are increasingly calling 'co-production', the closer involvement of external experts, publics and communities in the design, conduct and analysis of research (Nowotny, Scott, and Gibbons 2001; Benneworth and Jongbloed 2009)

Research examining the first dynamic tends to pay particular attention to the epistemological and ontological framings that are mobilised as disciplines jostle for status; to the ways in which different configurations of social actors, institutions and theoretical frames call different ways of knowing into being (Barry and Born 2013); and to the historic material-institutional-discursive arrangements of disciplines as potent forces for framing and driving intellectual inquiry (Strathern 2004; Osborne 2013). A critical concern here for Early Career Researchers is whether the practice of interdisciplinary research enables the creation of 'epistemic living spaces' that offer a secure foundation for the production of academic identity (Bridle et al. 2013; Felt et al. 2013).

Research examining collaborative or co-produced research in contrast, has tended to prioritise questions of voice and equity (Facer and Enright 2016; Facer and Pahl 2017). The literature is concerned with questions of representation and of global equity: whose histories, perspectives,

viewpoints, analyses are present in the knowledge that is being produced about the world (Connell 2007; de Sousa Santos 2007; Torres and Reyes 2011) and how are such knowledges shaped by the legacies of colonialism? It examines the nature of academic civic accountability: what is the nature of the solidarity that academics are exhibiting when working with and alongside communities (Burawoy 2005; Fine 2015)? It addresses questions of public pedagogy and democratic learning: what is the legacy for the participants in the research process themselves, how are democratic capacities being built to reimagine futures and effect change (Appadurai 2000)? In this literature, methodological questions are not 'merely' ontological, but political (Strier 2014). Questions of equality, participation and process are not technical matters but are at the core of the normative purposes of the project and of the intimate labour of the academics themselves (Berlant 1997; Brydon-Miller 2001; Tolman and Brydon-Miller 2001). In this field, the distinctive experience of Early Career Researchers remains relatively unexamined as relative power relations tend to be conceptualised in terms of the tensions between 'academic' and 'community' partners in research processes.

The third dynamic, precarity, arises at a time of declining state funding of universities around the world, increasing reliance on international audit as a means of accountability and the growth of a competitive market ethos that positions academics in individualised and competitive relations with each other for increasingly scarce secure forms of employment as well as the proliferation of temporary, 'adjunct', and casualised employment (Birnie et al. 2005; Archer 2008; Hussey and Smith 2010; May, Peetz, and Strachan 2013; Nadolny and Ryan 2013; Schmidt, 2015). McAlpine (2010) has already documented the way in which a culture of temporary project-based employment that requires intellectual relocation from one discipline to another can interrupt or disrupt the intellectual strand of ECRs' identity-trajectories as academics. And there is a substantial evidence of the difficulties associated with the prevalence of fixed-term contract positions which characterise early academic careers at a time when universities are juggling the 'traditional goals of knowledge acquisition' and 'neoliberalist pressures to act as a free market corporation' (Nadolny and Ryan 2013, 13).

Precarity, however, is relative – and the experience of temporary, short-term and fractional appointments in universities, while increasingly familiar, are not yet equal in intensity to the experiences of the mass of workers on zero hour contracts or obliged to participate in mass, illegal migration across continents (Standing 2011). International conflict, environmental degradation and the policies of deregulation (individualism, competition, privatisation and marketisation) have dramatically influenced the redesign of social-welfare, employment policies, labour and industrial relations laws and led to a new way of being within a 'modern' economy and society (Massey 2009). This neoliberal policy reform has contributed to an increasingly generalised phenomenon of flexibility (Peck, Theodore, and Ward 2005; Massey 2009) which many have argued has disadvantaged women, older people, younger people and migrants more than others (Kalleberg 2009; McDowell, Batnitzky, and Dyer 2012; Lewis et al. 2015). The discrepancy in experience of precarity, indeed, is one that all but the least alert of early career researchers are highly sensitive to – and negotiating personal precarity in the context of partnerships with groups and organisations experiencing mass, sustained and intergenerational economic insecurity is a dynamic that is often visible in these research projects.

What we want to understand in this paper, however, is how these three dynamics – interdisciplinarity, co-production and precarity – intersect to produce the conditions of Early Career Researcher labour in the experimental context of the Connected Communities Programme in the UK. We want to explore how these researchers are simultaneously navigating epistemic uncertainty, political and democratic questions of voice and public solidarity, and economic questions of the capacity to build secure livelihoods.

Understanding ECR experiences in the triple dynamic

The experience of ECRs in the university is, we argue, an instantiation of the broader experiences of social actors in what Margaret Archer calls the 'morphogenetic society', a society in which social and

cultural institutions tend towards the proliferation of diverse and novel forms and structures. In this context, inherited patterns of behaviour (for ECRs a familiar route from degree, to Ph.D., to tenure) are replaced by internal ongoing conversations, reflexivity, that mediate between individuals' concerns, the changing social contexts they confront and the choices they make about how to act in the world (Archer 2007, 2012). Such conversations, as Archer (2012) has demonstrated, are both personal to the individual and patterned by their social and cultural experiences, and provide different resources for responding to change. Different modes of reflexivity, while available to all, are dominant at different times and under different conditions, for different people. Her central thesis in more recent writing is that previous modes of reflexivity (communicative reflexivity – in which community and tradition provide the touchstones for decisions; and autonomous reflexivity – in which rational, future-oriented choice making and planning provides the basis for decisions), are being replaced by more emergent forms of 'meta-reflexivity' that are reliant (when successful) upon values and personal life projects as a means of navigating conditions of uncertainty and spontaneity. A risk in the morphogenetic society, she observes, is a shift towards 'fractured reflexivity', the constantly shifting, constantly adapted and unanchored identity that is battered from pillar to post in changing times, unable to build a secure life project.

Archer's ideas are particularly interesting to us in understanding the experiences of Early Career Researchers for two reasons. First, because the triple dynamic of the university is proliferating highly diverse conditions and contexts for research that seem to require the development of meta-reflexive identities in order to build 'secure' careers and identities. Second, because Archers' observation that the development of a strong 'life project', premised upon values and ethics, is central to the production of a confident 'meta-reflexive' identity. Such an observation seems particularly relevant when we are considering researchers whose research, as is the case with the Connected Communities programme, is often associated with the personal and public narratives of democratisation, research ethics and public accountability.

Our analysis here therefore draws upon Archer's framings of reflexive identity to sensitise us to the narratives produced by and about Early Career Researchers in our wider study of the Connected Communities Programme. This study explores the processes of co-produced and interdisciplinary research in the CC programme. It has comprised, to date, interviews with 100 academics and community collaborators, a survey of 320 participants in the programme, 2 detailed case studies of projects, and a series of consultation events with community partners. The data that we report on here are transcripts of semi-structured interviews of approximately 1 hour, conducted in 2014 with 19 Early Career Researchers, and a two-hour focus group with five Early Career Researchers. The 24 ECRs discussed here reflect the sampling decisions taken for the wider study – namely, sampling to represent the diverse range of projects on the programme. These 19 participants therefore, comprise researchers working on the broad range of topics within the programme – from health, aging and environment to culture and heritage – rather than reflecting demographic factors such as age, gender and ethnicity. The institutional context for these researchers is also highly diverse – from research-intensive universities to teaching intensive institutions; from small, scholarly humanities departments to sprawling, applied faculties in which the individuals work across social science and medical fields. The difference that these institutional factors is likely to make to their experience is difficult to ascertain as for many, their institutional context is mediated by their individual project and the disposition of their Principal Investigator. The participants comprise 15 women and nine men, all white, all but two are British, and range in age from mid-twenties to early sixties. The definition of Early Career Researcher we are working with here is that applied by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (the funders of the programme), namely anyone working as a researcher who is within eight years of completion of their Ph.D. (including those currently working on Ph.D.s alongside their employment in an academic position) or within six years of their first academic appointment.

The interviews were designed to elicit narrative accounts of their route into these research positions; the nature of the ECRs' current work and employment; the relationship with their 'home'

discipline and the ways in which they were conceptualising and negotiating disciplinary boundaries; the extent to which they were creating or being offered 'epistemic living space' through projects on the programme; the judgements they were using to assess the value and contribution of the research; and the ways in which they were negotiating issues of power, knowledge and expertise alongside and with community collaborators. Our analysis proceeded iteratively-inductively (O'Reilly 2005), drawing upon Archers' concepts of four types of reflexive identity, to produce first, a narrative account of the individual career trajectories of each researcher, and then to identify patterns in the types of reflexivity these researchers were using to mediate between their own concerns and the conditions in which they were working. In this analysis, however, we use Archers' modes of reflexivity more as sensitising concepts than as coding frames, as we found it more helpful to produce our own typology of reflexive orientations that more closely reflected the epistemic, political and economic tensions that the researchers were navigating.

The remainder of the paper therefore explores three questions:

1. Who are the Early Career Researchers working in the context of these three dynamics and what is the nature of this work?
2. What reflexive orientations to their research and their careers are they developing in the context of these three dynamics?
3. What are the implications for these researchers, and potentially for universities, of the reflexive orientations that they are developing?

Who are the early career researchers working in the context of the three dynamics and what is the nature of this work?

The participants in the study come from diverse professional backgrounds including nursing, psychiatry, museums and galleries, teaching, design, think tanks, consulting and social enterprise. Two had first become involved in the research through a role as 'community collaborators' on previous projects. A number of the participants continued to maintain employment in sectors outside academia. Six were currently working on their doctoral research alongside their paid employment; one had no plans for a Ph.D. or a career in the university. Of the 10 participants who had followed a more familiar route into academia (from degree to Ph.D. and research employment) five were employed in research outside what they considered to be their 'home' discipline. For all but a small minority of the participants, therefore, working in the university was by definition something that involved collaborations with partners beyond the university and the necessity to move across disciplinary boundaries.

Research on Connected Communities projects requires a very wide variety of activities as the projects aim to bring publics into the research process from the earliest stages. The ECRs' roles included: recruiting community partners from scratch and through existing contacts; running diverse public and academic events; acting on steering groups; writing newspapers, blogs, social media inputs and creating other forms of innovative dissemination; financial management of projects; designing research plans; securing NHS and institutional ethical approval; conducting field research and data analysis; testing out new participatory, experimental and embodied research methods; writing journal papers with multiple academic and community partners; final report writing; writing bids; developing peer research programmes; and teaching members of the public how to use new technology. The diversity of their work required a range of knowledge and skills, some of which had been developed through doctoral study, most of which had not.

Precarity was also a highly present feature shaping the nature of their work. All but two of the participants were working on fixed-term contracts; all but one of which were due to end within two years. The longest contract was a six-year 0.4FTE (2 days a week) position; the researcher in this case, however, conducted this work remotely while also working for a different University.

Eight of the researchers were on full time but temporary contracts, and amongst the others their time on the projects ranged from a few hours a week to 0.8FTE (four days a week). The shortest contract was for three months, taken by a doctoral student. Two of the interviewees had been successful in securing their own projects as Principal Investigators, one of whom was concurrently working as Project Officer on another CC project. A significant element of their labour, therefore, was dedicated to finding more or new work. The short-term nature of the funding produced a constant focus on the next application, the next project, rather than being able to dedicate attention solely to the current work. As Natalie observed: 'it's just this sort of constant treadmill of writing applications'.

These experiences are often explained by an analysis that positions their experiences in a broader narrative of the changing institutional structure and political economy of the university (Archer 2008; McAlpine 2010; Ryan et al. 2013), a changing structure that is in evidence internationally. What was notable in these interviews, however, was that epistemological factors and employment conditions were deeply inter-twined. A research design that is dependent on fractional appointments, for example, is not simply a consequence of financial constraints, but is often a response to knowledge specialisation. For example, fractional employment contracts were explained as being a product of the demand for researchers with specialised expertise to play specific roles: for example, negotiating NHS ethics procedures or conducting specific forms of quantitative analysis. This, combined with the short-term nature of research funding, militates against employing generalist researchers and training them up in unfamiliar areas. Together, this environment encourages the employment of larger numbers of highly specialised individuals on fractional contracts.

When we look at the nature of the work of these researchers, however, there is a deep paradox in this drive towards fractional and specialised appointments. Given the interdisciplinary and collaborative nature of this work, these individuals, selected for their distinct specialism, are nonetheless required to apply that specialism to unfamiliar areas. They are expected to cross borders. Paradoxically, then, these conditions produce a demand for individuals able to provide an account of themselves as having highly specialised skills to secure employment in the first place, but which they are able to mobilise in complex, interdisciplinary settings. Such conditions meant that some of these often very junior researchers were asked to perform at a high level of intellectual autonomy in areas in which no other member of the research team had any expertise or insight. Not only was the employment fractional and precarious, then, it was also a position of significant responsibility, a position that engenders loneliness or exhilaration depending on the orientation and context of the individual.

The fractional and temporary forms of employment, as well as the interdisciplinary and collaborative nature of the work, means that these researchers often both physically and materially transgress the 'university/public' boundary. They are both part of and outside of 'the university'; they are both 'disciplined' researchers and promiscuous researchers, required to roam across and make connections between different knowledge domains. As a consequence, throughout their work, we find that these researchers were having to make sense of, and then to discursively and materially (re)produce the boundaries between 'academic' and 'public' knowledge. They were experiencing 'the university' less as an institutional and structural 'given', than a contingent and moveable distinction between *practices* that are subject to interrogation as well as (at times) productive renegotiation.

In this way, the definition of 'research' was produced by the researchers on these projects not through institutional or disciplinary structures, but through discursive framing. As such, many of our interviewees were becoming deft in mediation, in occupying a 'sort of bridging space between community and academic' (Hazel), mediating and 'demystifying' the idea of research, a process which in itself comes to constitute what 'counts' as research in these practices:

> I had quite an important role in making it clear what it is that we were doing, why we were doing it on the one hand making them feel comfortable to take part but also to make it clear what we do as academics I suppose. (Peter)

Negotiating 'what we do as academics', as researchers relatively new to their disciplines, working across institutional and disciplinary boundaries, and under fractional and temporary employment conditions, is less a process of a straightforward articulation of a given reality, therefore, than an ongoing negotiation and renegotiation of what it means to 'do research' in these conditions.

Reflexivity and new researcher identities

The role of Early Career Researchers on these projects, therefore, is one that requires deep reflexivity at three levels: epistemological, democratic and institutional. As different practices of knowledge production are brought into dialogue with each other, the question of what 'counts' as research is brought to the foreground. The researchers are required to confront and articulate ideas about what universities are for, what academics do, the nature of their labour, what academic knowledge is and why it is useful, often through discussions about how to design data collection or communicate results.

At the same time, they are required to build relationships and project structures that reflect and acknowledge different forms of voice, ethical responsibility towards participants, organisation of time and resources, and that create spaces for different modes of knowledge production and contribution, often realised through innovative mixed methods engaging body, voice, images and sound. Finally, they are also required to be reflexive about their own position within the academy, the political, economic and institutional conditions of their labour and that of their collaborators, often negotiating the everyday realities of financial inequalities and seeking to mediate relations between large corporate structures (universities) and small scale independent or charitable organisations, while at the same time seeking to build economic security for themselves. As with Felt et al.'s (2013) analysis of transdisciplinary Ph.D. students, the Early Career Researchers we spoke to were largely left to develop their own responses to the risks and opportunities of these conditions.

Our interviewees' responses to these conditions can be broadly categorised into four orientations; The Disciplinarian, the Freelancer, the Worker Bee and the Social Activist, which describe different routes to balancing the ethical, intellectual and economic considerations of this sort of work. These orientations provide a framing for making judgements of value, for planning careers, for negotiating with community partners and universities; they are a way of reflecting upon and making sense of complex conditions. While we do not wish to suggest that any one individual inhabits each of these orientations to the exclusion of all others, we would conjecture that adopting any of these as a dominant orientation will produce very different trajectories for individuals, for the collaborators they are working with, and for the university more widely.

The disciplinarian

Disciplinarians tended to have had a traditional academic trajectory and were concerned with understanding the 'rules of the game' for disciplinary promotion and success. They were concerned with conducting collaborative research only in so far as it did not compete with the requirements of promotion or provided a route towards a future disciplinary career. Their contribution to collaborative and interdisciplinary research was framed along specialist lines, seeking to identify precisely how their disciplinary expertise was valid for the situation or could be enhanced by the work. Their priority was in the production of academic outputs that could be exchanged for institutional security that is, for permanent jobs as lecturers.

However, the competitive nature of academic jobs and scarcity of positions often meant that these ECRs had often taken positions outside their home disciplines. For Disciplinarians, therefore, Connected Communities research was often a 'foot in the door' to a career in academia and although their position may be outside their desired home discipline, it was a means of seizing 'any opportunity to be involved in anything academic' (Ricky) which they would use as a means of return to the discipline where they felt they had most expertise.

These ECRs were using much of their spare time to publish work in their home disciplines. Most of them had considered, or had already, travelled to other parts of the country to pursue more senior or secure academic roles. Their disciplinary perspective, often premised upon assumed rather than explicit reference to what counts in their home disciplines, framed their participation in the collaborative and public facing research of Connected Communities projects through a lens that positioned it primarily as outreach activity; it wasn't seen as 'real research':

> From a historical perspective I don't see it as research, I think its social experience … So I feel in this department it wouldn't be valued … it's never going to count towards my workload or anything I do … . (Amy)

Their intense focus on career progression, on identifying the rules of the game in the existing landscape and planning their route accordingly, and their willingness to embrace geographical movement as a means of securing the right employment, suggests strong links with Archer's (2012) 'autonomous reflexives', with, as we shall discuss later, all the risks of vulnerability to changing and uncertain conditions that such an orientation might bring. It also brings echoes of Gouldners' (1957) cosmopolitans, namely: 'low on loyalty to the employing organisation, high on commitment to specialised role skills, and likely to use an outer-reference group orientation' (1957, 290).

The freelancer

This orientation could broadly be described as an intellectually exploratory position in which each new role is conceptualised as an opportunity for personal learning, and a means of exploring and developing personal skills and experience. The ECRs we characterise as operating mainly with a freelance orientation often come with a longer history of practice and research in organisations outside the university frequently with experience in the creative industries and arts; both industries in which freelancing is a core feature of employment practices. These ECRs were not necessarily concerned with remaining in the university over the long term, and their priority was to protect their intellectual autonomy and to build networks and relationships that were meaningful, challenging and developmental for them.

For these researchers, temporary and fractional employment conditions were not necessarily understood as problematic, but as a means to construct a portfolio of roles that they saw as a protection against too many claims from a single employer. Often working at the edges of disciplines, challenging their constraints, as well as at the edges of institutions, seeking partnerships and networks wherever possible. An important way of establishing security and autonomy for this group was to secure their own research funding thus creating their own 'safe' spaces for activities that they were interested in. Often keeping a keen eye on the games that needed to be played to ensure that new opportunities might be opened up, these researchers would actively seek academic, social media and other public facing outputs.

These researchers were producing research-led trajectories that operated, in the main, outside the economy of teaching and lectureship positions of the university; sometimes in pursuit of ethical and public benefits, more often with an eye to continue to develop a trajectory that offered personal intellectual challenge and interests.

The worker bee

This orientation could broadly be understood as operating with the following set of principles: take the work you can get, work hard, keep your head down, build good relationships, hope that it is rewarded. This group often operated outside their own disciplinary area, having taken jobs that were available at the time of graduation in their local area. Many had a strong commitment to the communities that they were working with, were ambivalent about the experience of working in academia and had not yet developed a strong sense of trajectory in relation to the university as an institution or potential careers outside it. Their research agendas and outputs were often

associated with the priorities of the academics and collaborating organisations that they were working with, even when that took them away from their core interests.

In many ways, this echoes Gouldner's (1957) conception of a 'local' identity, described by him as 'Those high on loyalty to the employing organisation, low on commitment to specialised role skills, and likely to use an inner reference group orientation' (1957, 290), albeit that loyalty here tended to be towards home community or principal investigator rather than university. Five of the seven ECRs with a predominant 'worker bee' orientation were working with the same communities they had grown-up in or in which they could locate their family heritage. Cameron explains that his family grew up in the area he now does research in and his parents have close connections with some of the participants, this assists his ability to collaborate with a community that has experienced extremely exploitative attention from the media and misuse from previous researchers:

> [what makes me good at this work] we've put it down to maybe the fact I've grown up in like … a post-industrial area, similar to X [the community in their research] in a way. And my own like personal biography was, I didn't necessarily come from a lot of money. […] it's just these funnily little connections that you've got… it does help you when you're doing this sort of research, having that sort of connection …. (Cameron)

Their commitment to fairness and an ethic of hard work meant that this group were often pulled in different directions by the competing demands of the projects. They did, however, build strong and supportive relationships with their research teams and community partners. Here, the Worker Bees have some similarities with Archer's Communicative reflexives, in their emphasis on 'thought and talk with interlocutors' (33). Such an orientation is particularly valuable in facilitating community-engaged research, enabling them to quickly become enmeshed in local customs and practices (Archer 2012); this commitment to people and to place, however, necessarily brings other risks in a highly mobile labour market within the academy.

The social activists

All but a small number of highly disciplinary-oriented researchers talked of their desire to contribute to the public good, and saw the ability to combine practical, community knowledge with academic, disciplinary knowledge as an important aspiration. A smaller number, however, explicitly talked about academic research practice as a core element of a wider theory of how they might change and improve society. This group saw their job within the university as a way of making a difference, often taking a conscious decision to move into collaborative research with a university after spending time working in community organisations for this very reason:

> I guess it's the time and the space for reflection… it's something about bringing knowledges together from different areas… so it's not just thinking about where do we want our organisation [to be] in ten years' time and chasing tails after little pots of funding. (Ginny)

These individuals tended to see the Connected Communities Programme and universities more generally as a set of resources that might be mobilised to create the longer term social change that they are already interested in achieving. These groups saw the production of academic outputs as an intellectually interesting exercise, but were equally likely to explore other forms of research products that would provide ethical and meaningful outputs for them and their collaborators. Although they showed similarities to the Freelancer orientation, in that they tended to approach the university opportunistically as a resource, they differed in their coherent and clearly articulated aspiration to achieve social change; for many, the intellectual interest was a secondary consideration. Moreover, they tended, as do Archer's meta-reflexives, to use their ethical and normative aspirations to allow them to take decisions on the fly about how to respond to opportunities:

> This [project], working with community partners for me is one of the promises that the work will continue once the university leaves, you know once I go back, once the [project] finishes I know there's a bigger potential for the community organisations to continue with the work. (Carrie)

This group built security into their professional and personal lives by nurturing strong relationships with collaborators inside and outside the academy who shared their political and social projects. What is distinctive about this group, however, is that their broader reference group is organised around a particular ethic or societal commitment, which guided their decisions and approach to research and this ethic often played an important role in them acting as catalysts to bring together different groups around shared practical and intellectual agendas.

What are the implications for these researchers, and for the university, of the reflexive orientations that they are developing?

These different orientations inform the day-to-day judgements these researchers are making as they try to navigate the triple dynamic of the contemporary university. These dynamics became visible in three key areas – the challenge of handling the intense workload associated with these projects; the question of how to mediate between community and academic participants in projects; and the response to the move outside a home discipline.

Handling the workload

ECRs were often the only people with a significant proportion of their workload dedicated to the research project with the consequence that some were left feeling that they had to 'steer the ship' (Ally) of highly complex, large grants despite the (sometimes) best intentions of senior colleagues. A common characteristic of their accounts of their work was the frequency with which they reported working significantly beyond their contracted hours. This was felt to be essential in order to meet dual academic and community expectations, from writing journal papers to attending community events and showing support for the projects they were collaborating with. This was treated as part of a contagious culture of over-working in academia; 'I'm told that's the norm for academia… it's something which is engrained into you' (Cameron).

Moreover, in some of these cases where researchers were more systematically embedded in community organisations to conduct the research, there was a duel mechanism of control and responsibility: on the one hand their academic supervisors expected them to produce academic data and outputs and on the other hand, the community partners required them to be available, responsive to on the ground demands and may rely on them as translators, mediators and brokers of tricky relationships with the larger project.

The ECRs' different reflexive orientations are critical in helping them navigate and make judgements about how to respond to this dual set of accountabilities. Worker Bees' communicative reflexivity encourages them to negotiate this tension with their research team; whether such a negotiation is ultimately supportive or exploitative of the researcher depends therefore primarily upon the Principal Investigator and the way that they mediate their institutions' orientation towards early career researchers. Disciplinarians' clear understanding of the priority of academic outputs, sets their agenda clearly to prioritise academic facing work. Freelancers are drawn to the most exciting, intellectual or personal challenge – how does this move them forward? For each of these positions, the demand to manage workload means that there is the potential that the needs and aspirations of the community collaborator will be 'shelved' with all the consequences for personal relations and social harm for participating organisations and groups that this engenders.

The most difficult challenge is faced by the Social Activists, particularly when the researchers were working with community partners with whom they had pre-existing relationships, and to whom they were emotionally and ethically committed. For these researchers there are sometimes significant tensions created by trying to maintain these relationships under new and sometimes conflicting conditions and demands created by the project and the new 'academic' role the researcher was required to play. When the researcher concerned is also positioned by the normative participatory imperative of many of these projects as being in a 'privileged' position as an academic (as compared

to community collaborators) such concerns may also be hard to express and address in the course of the working relationship. For this group, the landscape of risk they were negotiating was particularly complex and any decision often involved the loss of important allegiances.

Mediating and translating

A core element of ECR work on collaborative and interdisciplinary projects involved being the fulcrum for communications between a range of different actors in the projects, a role that required not only translating between languages and priorities, but producing a common understanding of what the work was aiming to achieve. This mediation role presents particular challenges for Workers Bees and Social Activists working in their own communities or communities who risk personal isolation or rejection from their own support systems if the project goes wrong:

> I'm going and seeing people face to face and they're investing in our project. And so you feel commitment to them, whereas for the PI and Co-Is, they're not there every day, they're not meeting people – they're faceless I guess to an extent, whereas if I go to Wrexham on the weekend I'll bump into people that I know in the research. So it's more, I don't know, I feel like I've got more to lose… if something goes wrong. (Layla)

This set of relationships and deep personal commitment troubles the idea of the collaborative research relationship being conceived, as it sometimes is in the literature on democratisation of research, as between two distinct entities: academic and university. Indeed, their pre-existing relationships and the urgent need to reduce this personal risk makes these researchers particularly strong, persistent and credible advocates within the university for the interests and issues of the partnering communities.

The interdisciplinarity challenge

The challenge of working with community collaborators for some, however, was less problematic and less exciting than the need to work across and between academic disciplines. The ECRs on these projects, after all, need to mediate between the highly diverse disciplinary concerns of the academics leading the projects. This was both challenging and invigorating for ECRs at the beginning of their careers, some of whom, as we have flagged, were still completing their Ph.D.s. Here, their reflexive orientations were critical. Disciplinarians tended to view the demand for cross-disciplinary working as a distraction, struggled to identify how to make connections with their own research priorities. Freelancers, on the other hand, thrived, describing the pleasures of playing with and learning from different disciplinary practices and identities, and describing temporary research positions as a 'learning step' and a way of 'trying on' a new discipline to see 'whether it's a group I would like to keep working with'. They enjoyed taking their previous experience and trying it out in different settings, a disjunction that both enriched their own practice and developed the repertoire of ideas and resources for the new field they were entering.

Discussion

An Early Career Researcher on this sort of research programme is engaged in a high stakes, experimental research practice in which the rules of the game for academic employment are becoming less clear. As research councils increasingly encourage interdisciplinary and collaborative research, these researchers may find themselves placed advantageously to exploit these opportunities through their hard won and often unique experience of the pitfalls and potential of combining public and academic knowledge. At the same time, however, they are well aware that they are developing their careers in a culture in which permanent employment seems ever more hard to secure and which is premised, in particular in the Arts and Humanities, on the ability to publish and to teach to a 'core disciplinary agenda'. There are also high emotional costs to this sort of work, not least because many of these

researchers are trying to maintain ethical and committed public relationships in a context in which the discourses of 'participatory' and 'democratic' research tend to obscure the fragile economic position and potential for exploitation of this group, identifying them, above all, as 'academics' and therefore in privileged positions vis-à-vis their community collaborators.

As we have seen, however, not all researchers in these positions respond in the same way. The 'disciplinarian' may successfully navigate the games and hierarchies of the conventional university; should the trajectory towards interdisciplinary and collaborative research continue, however, she may find herself playing a game that is no longer valued. At the same time, the often deeply individualistic nature of this orientation may prohibit the creation of supportive personal relationships and networks. The 'freelancer', in contrast, may be more secure in changing institutional conditions; experimentally and creatively maintaining independence while building security through external professional networks and relationships. It remains to be seen whether such a position will allow those who adopt this orientation to build secure economic and intellectual trajectories. Is it possible to create 'epistemic living space' in a portfolio career? Whether such a position generates security for these individuals within the university may also depend, in part, on whether these diverse interests are able to coalesce and crystallise around agendas that form the basis of a reconfigured curriculum that will create teaching opportunities.

Arguably, the 'worker bee' might seem most vulnerable in changing conditions; like Archers' 'communicative reflexives' (2012), this individual seems highly dependent upon the patronage and priorities of others, their skills lie in realising and working on existing projects, rather than carving out new ones, and, perhaps because of economic dependence but also personal disposition, they are less well placed to take a lead in constructing and carving out a space of security. At the same time, however, these individuals are often building strong interpersonal relationships and commitments in which good will and reciprocity may be rewarded through friendships and solidarities that extend beyond the professional and the economic. Employment practices and HR procedures in Universities that militate against re-employment of Early Career Researchers who have previously worked successfully with Principal Investigators, will be of significant harm to those for whom this orientation predominates.

Finally, those Social Activists pursuing their own longer term social projects, in building networks across universities and communities, may begin to invent their own institutions and structures that enable the divides between university and community to be overcome through collaborative research and action that addresses common goals. How this relates to the current structures of the university, and whether the university will be able to adapt and make space for the ethical and agentive orientations of these researchers, remains an open question.

These different orientations amongst ECRs have implications both for the future of the university and for future relationships between the university and its communities. A university shaped by a 'freelance' orientation we might conjecture, for example, would become radically more dispersed and highly networked than one shaped by 'disciplinarians'. Equally, a university that is characterised by 'worker bees' and 'Social Activists' may produce more sustained, reciprocal and long-term relationships and networks within its local community than one led by 'freelancers' and 'disciplinarians', whose engagements with community collaborators may tend to be treated as secondary to other goals and aspirations.

This conceptualisation of different individual orientations towards their future trajectories, however, ignores the latent potential for disruptive change that may be present in a more structural analysis of ECRs' position on these projects. These individuals after all, would not be easy to replace. While their positions were seemingly economically precarious, the nature of the intellectual labour and human relationships upon which these projects were dependent, potentially puts these researchers in a position of relative power in relation to their more senior academic colleagues who would be hard pressed to do without them in mid-project. At the same time, these researchers' positions were, as we have already noted, in many ways closer to the precarious and contingent funding and employment conditions of many of the civil society organisations that they were working alongside.

To date, these similarities are often obscured in the discourses surrounding participatory and democratic research. What might happen should this group of researchers begin to identify

themselves as a potentially powerful collective force in the contemporary landscape of project-based research funding while at the same time identifying themselves structurally with the activists, civil society organisations and communities with whom they are collaborating? That such a shift in self-identification is possible is evident in the growth of the adjunct movement in the US and initiatives such as 'adjunct walk out day' (Schmidt 2015). Making the connection between these groups and similarly 'precarious' workers would pose very challenging questions for the senior salariat (Standing 2011, 2014) of the university. Indeed, it is arguably the case that this form of identification across precarity is already happening as some of these researchers are precisely and intentionally holding down two 'precarious' modes of employment in the university and community precisely to build such allegiances. To date, however, these possibilities are only present as latent potential in our analysis of these interviews and have not yet become fully articulated strategies by these interviewees – indeed, as we have discussed, these researchers were still playing to institutional rules or personal agendas, the potential for collective self-organisation was absent in their own analyses of their situation.

It is through the day-to-day practices of these ECRs that the triple dynamic of the university is being contested, articulated and renegotiated. ECRs are embodying the fundamental complexities and contradictions of the contemporary university. They are being forced to negotiate the tensions between competitive, short-term funding models and an impetus towards an ethics of care, sustainable relationships and responsibility towards civil society. The choices that they make in these conditions (whether to continue to pursue collaborative research or to focus in on disciplinary priorities), the alliances and allegiances that they choose (to community partners or academic colleagues) and the responses of university faculty and management to these choices, may set the agenda for university research for the long term.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

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