

**A new model for academic identity [Abstract only]**

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#21-abstract

Type: Paper

Theme: Being and becoming academics: lived experiences, subjectivities, academic identities, and academic career paths

### **A new model for understanding academic identity**

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How do new academics form their professional identities within the complexities of the current higher education context, alongside a pervasive discourse of 'excellence' as both expectation and aspiration for individuals and institutions? What do their experiences look like? In the shifting cultural and political landscape of higher education today, understanding how new academics can be supported to develop and inhabit a stable and confident academic identity is essential for both individual well-being, career development, student achievement and institutional success.

This paper explores the formation of academic identities and is based on longitudinal research within in a large, modern UK university. The background to the work includes Clegg's (2008) notions of 'hybridised academic identities', and Smith's (2010) ideas in relation to resonance, dissonance and rejection as responses to becoming an academic. The commonality of imposter phenomenon is central, linking to Ennells et al (2016) work exploring the challenges of experts becoming novices for new 'professional' academics, and the importance of 'doing and becoming'.

The research participants were academics who were undertaking or had recently undertaken a Post Graduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. Longitudinal semi-structured interviews were carried out over the course of a year, together with a separate set of one-off interviews with course alumni. The research is situated within a constructivist paradigm and adopted a reflexive, interpretative approach to data collection and analysis, with both the voice of the researcher and participants remaining visible throughout.

Thematic analysis of the data and theorising of emergent concepts resulted in the development of a new framework, which provides a distinctive contribution to knowledge in the field of professional identity formation. This framework includes the new concept of pedagogical agency, and highlights previously unexplored interdependencies between self-efficacy, pedagogical agency, mattering, and belonging, as factors influencing the development of academic identity and practice. Key literature used to theorise individual components of the model included Bandura's (1997) research into self-efficacy and agency, and May's (2011) work in relation to belonging. However, whilst the existing literature enabled theorising of the individual concepts in relation to identity, the findings from this study identified the crucial intersectionality of the concepts as embodied or experienced by new academics. This model, the 'new academic identity nexus' has significant implications for leaders and managers in academic institutions, as well as for new academic staff themselves as they attempt to make sense of their experiences in becoming academics. This 30 minute session would present the background to the research, the research process, analysis and outcomes (20 minutes). The remaining 10 minutes would be

focused on the new model of academic professional identity formation and engage the audience in comment and critical discussion.

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