Working Papers on University Reform

Working Paper 10:

Becoming and Being: University reform, biography and the everyday practice of sociologists

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Becoming and Being: University reform,

biography and the everyday practice of sociologists

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Introduction

This working paper explores the potential of a 'practice-informed' approach to understand the implications of university reform for the career biographies and everyday practices of academic sociologists. Two questions underpin my discussion. First how do the everyday activities of individual academics across their careers contribute to the reproduction and transformation of academic life? Second, how do their everyday activities intersect and interact with processes of institutional and policy change?

The focus on intersections and interactions between everyday practices, individual careers and university reform, makes steps to address two quite specific and relatively under-explored areas of social theory. Firstly, how do the dialectics of structure and agency intersect with the dialectics of policy and practice. Secondly, how do the everyday activities and practices of individuals across their career contribute to the reproduction and transformation of society.

The paper begins by outlining the theoretical framework used to explore the questions identified above. I then provide a brief description of the empirical study of academic sociologists, from which the data in this paper is drawn. I introduce the two Professors who form the case studies for this piece and proceed to explore and discuss how the empirical data throws light on the research questions posed. I highlight the strengths and gaps in the current theory, and conclude by making some theoretical suggestions which might better elucidate my empirical findings and which I intend to explore in more depth within my PhD thesis.

Practices, Paths and Projects

By stating that I take a 'practice-informed' approach I refer to both the theoretical underpinnings of the research and the methodological approach of the empirical work. Theoretically, my approach presupposes that it is in the performance of everyday activities that institutional and social structures are reproduced or transformed. Such an approach can be identified in the work of, amongst others, Berger & Luckman (1967), Bhasker (1979), Bourdieu (1977) and Giddens (1979). This work is now frequently referred to as 'theories of practice' by those developing and expanding this field.

As Reckwitz (2002) highlights, the defining characteristic of this epistemological approach is that 'practices' are viewed as the locus of 'the social' and the 'smallest unit' of social theory and analysis. He describes a 'practice 'as:

> a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. (Reckwitz, 2002:249).

Within this field, the most useful theoretical contribution that I have located in relation to this paper is Pred (1981). He identifies and is concerned with a particular gap within 'theories of practice', namely how the everyday practices of individuals *across their careers* contribute to the reproduction or transformation of society (Pred, 1981:7-8). More specifically, he asks how the actions, knowledge build-up and biographies of particular individuals intersect and interact with the everyday functioning and reproduction of institutions.

The synergy between the focus of Pred's theoretical discussion, and the questions I set out at the start of this paper is apparent. We are both concerned with the interactions between the biographies of individuals, their everyday activities and the reproduction or transformation of the social. Pred (op. cit.) takes the two key theoretical concepts of time geography – 'path' and 'project' – and provides an in-depth theoretical discussion of how they relate to 'theories of practice'. Since these concepts form the framework used in this paper, I describe them in more depth in the following section.

Paths

The concept of path refers to the biography of an individual, all the actions and events which compose it, and the temporal and spatial attributes of these actions and events:

> … the biography of a person is ever on the move with her and can be conceptualised… as an unbroken, continuous path through time-space. (Pred, 1981:9).

Each individual has a 'daily path' and a 'life path'. The daily path refers to the consecutive activities that take us through the time-space of each day. This is in dialectic with the 'life path', the long-term institutional roles with which each individual is associated (both inside and outside the workplace). Paths are constantly coupled and uncoupled with the paths of other individuals as well as man-made and natural objects, which have uninterrupted time-space paths of their own. There are always trade offs in the coupling and uncoupling process because it is only possible to be in one place at a time, a space can only be used for one task at a time and all tasks have a duration, but time resources are finite.

Pred notes:

> Because the path concept stresses the physical indivisibility and finite time resources of the individual, it forces us to recognise that participation alterations in one realm of practice invariably bring participation adjustments or changes in other realms of practice – both for self and others. (Pred,1981:10).

This is interesting, as following Pred's logic, we can theorise that if biographies are interconnected to each other and to time and space, then these interconnections form an essential part of the everyday process of social reproduction.

Projects

Working alongside the path concept is the idea of project, defined as:

> …the entire series of simple or complex tasks necessary to the completion of any intention-inspired or goal-oriented behaviour (Pred, 1981:10).

The 'intention' here might originate with an individual or an institution (meant in broad terms, to include e.g. the family). Projects always consist of 'activity bundles', and in general these must occur in a particular order, and involve the coming together of particular paths (of people and materials) at particular points.

Pred suggests that an institution can be said to be synonymous with the everyday and longer term projects for which it is responsible. This point highlights the contribution that a practice-informed study can make to the higher education literature, where the focus has been on essentialist and idealist views of the university, and the *values* (rather than everyday practices) of academics. If we follow Pred's logic here, we can theorise that if an institution is synonymous with the everyday and longer term projects for which it is responsible, then it is at the *intersection* of these projects with

particular individual paths that social reproduction and transformation occurs (Pred, 1981: 10).

The Relationship Between Paths-Projects and Structure-Agency

Pred suggests two 'dialectics' to understand the relationship between, on one hand, the concepts of 'path' and 'project' and on the other hand, discussions of structure and agency. These dialectics are referred to as the 'external/internal' and 'daily path/life path' dialectics. The external/internal dialectic refers to the interplay between the 'external' corporeal actions experienced in the activities of the daily path and the 'internal' mental activities of the individual. It can be viewed as a reflexive process in which knowledge and experience from previous projects is imprinted on current activities, and new knowledge and experience is acquired. This dialectic is conceptually useful as it takes account of the experiential learning that is accumulated by individuals across their biography, as well as acknowledging the agency individuals have in their daily lives.

The daily path/life path dialectic refers to the relationship between the activities of an individual's daily path and the lengthier institutional roles with which they are connected. If we imagine an individual's CV, the roles an individual is committed to *now* have in some ways been enabled or constrained by their roles in the past. It is because of their commitments to particular roles that certain activities are given priority in the allocation of an individual's time – the 'daily path' takes a particular shape. This then has implications for the future institutional roles an individual might be able to commit themselves to – some things will be enabled and some other things constrained.

These two dialectics are very useful later in this piece in a discussion of the everyday practices of two professors. However, within this paper I also want to consider the importance of Government policy and its connection to these discussions of everyday

practice, social reproduction and social change. The theoretical literature in this area is slightly thinner, although Pred (1981) begins to touch on this within his discussion of dominant projects.

Dominant Projects

Pred notes, that not all institutional projects are of equal importance. Rather, different institutions and the projects they encompass compete for limited resources. Some institutions and some projects are more successful at securing these resources than others. In light of the previous discussion, we can see that the individual's daily path is likely to be influenced by the institutions and projects which gain dominance. Building on the hypothesis proposed earlier, if it is at the *intersection* of institutional projects and individual paths that social reproduction and transformation occurs, then one process by which policy may gain influence is by its projects' dominating the daily paths of individuals.

From Pred's discussion we can hypothesise that one way in which 'traces of policy' might be found in the everyday practices of academics is within the activities of the daily path. These activities lend insight into the dominant projects of the institution and also the other non-dominant projects which are given peripheral resources, or are pushed to one side as a result.

Recap

To reiterate, the paper seeks to explore the potential of a practice-informed approach to answer two questions:

How do the everyday activities of individual academics across their careers:
i. Contribute to the reproduction and transformation of academic life?
ii. Intersect and interact with processes of institutional and policy change?
The key concepts used to explore these questions include the idea that everyday practices should form the unit of analysis within the empirical study, in particular,

drawing on Reckwitz's (2002) definition of a practice. The analysis of the paper is framed by Pred's (1981) discussion of 'paths', 'projects' and 'dominant projects'.

Based on these concepts, the hypothesis I have put forward in relation to question one, is that it is at the intersection of individual paths and institutional projects that social reproduction or transformation occurs: firstly, via the interconnection of biographies to each other, and to time and space; secondly through the external/internal dialectic (or reflexivity and the experiential learning of the individual); and thirdly via the daily path/life path dialectic, which both enables and 'hems in' the individual at the pragmatic level, in terms of career biography and future life path possibilities.

In relation to question two, I have suggested that one way in which policy might interact with the everyday activities of individuals is via the 'dominant projects' of policy which subsume the daily path and result in other 'projects' becoming peripheral. In the case of academia, such peripheralised projects might include those aspects of academic work based on more 'traditional values'.

The next section provides details of the empirical study from which the data in this paper is drawn. I then move into a discussion of the ideas above in relation to the case studies of the two professors.

Researching Everyday Practice

The empirical data used in this paper forms a small sample (two interviewees) of the data collected for my PhD. The empirical work for my PhD has consisted of in-depth interviews conducted with academics working in sociology departments at four universities in England. An overview of the universities is provided in Appendix 1. The four institutions were selected for their comparative potential, in the sense that they have been established at different moments in the history of UK universities, and have different traditions, different aims and strategies, and different working cultures.

In-depth interviews were undertaken with four academics at each institution between October 2007 and June 2008. The aim was to interview a variety of individuals at each university, including new, mid-career and long-serving academics and those with a range of backgrounds, and therefore a range of pathways to their current role. This range of participants reflects the broad range of individuals that constitute sociology departments and so the 'discipline' of sociology at the current time. This range also provides points of comparison across the data (e.g. to compare the everyday practices of a new lecturer, a senior lecturer or a professor within each of the institutional contexts, and so on).

The interviews were concerned with the current everyday activities of individuals, their views on these activities as well as their thoughts on what academic work *should* entail, and a retrospective comparison between current everyday activities and those at previous points in individuals' careers. These previous points were identified by individuals, and were generally career 'turning points', for example changing institution, taking on a substantial new role, or promotion. Individuals therefore identified moments within their career when their everyday activities were particularly memorable thus providing points of contrast which could be easily discussed.

The interviews used in this paper were conducted with two professors at 'University 1'. This is a large civic university that was founded and initially funded and governed by the local civic and commercial elites of a then booming Victorian city. During the post war period powers of governance were gradually ceded to the academic staff (Bargh et al. 1996:5). In its more recent history, the university has been involved in a merger, and a subsequent restructure, moving from separate disciplinary departments within a faculty to larger interdisciplinary schools attached to one of four larger faculties within the University.

In the remainder of this paper I outline the everyday activities and career biographies of the two professors, highlighting the key turning points in their life paths as well as their own reflections and interpretations of enablements or limitations in their career

progression. I then discuss this data in relation to the concept of a 'normal career' and the two dialectics of Pred's theory. I highlight some gaps in Pred's theory, and proceed to discuss one of these 'gaps', namely the policy context in which these career biographies have developed, in more depth. Following a case study of the life path and daily path in supervision practices I make some conclusions which highlight how 'theories of practice' might be developed, via my PhD thesis, to better understand my empirical data and shed light on the research questions posed at the beginning.

Introducing the Two Professors

Professor A's Daily Path

Professor A is a female professor who has worked in academia for sixteen years (taking her first post as a research assistant whilst doing her PhD). At present a large proportion of her everyday activity is dedicated to being the Director of a Research Centre. She has also recently taken on the role of School Research Director, to which 30% of her time is allocated. She therefore has very little teaching within her workload. In the week preceding the interview, two days had been spent at a European project meeting in Geneva and one day on activities associated with the Research Director role. As Research Centre Director she was hosting a visiting Professor. She had met with PhD students and research assistants. Other time had been used for emails and administration. A conscious decision had been made not to write this term. For this Professor the weekend was non-work time to be spent with her family.

Professor B's Daily Path

Professor B is a male professor. He has worked in academia for 24 years, taking his first post as a post-doctoral researcher on completing his PhD. He is currently the Director of an ESRC funded research centre that buys out 80% of his time; he therefore does no teaching (apart from one-off lectures). He lives a substantial distance from the University (2 hour commute) which affects his working patterns. In the week preceding the interview, time had been spent on 'research activities', for example meeting colleagues to advise on a funding bid, and meeting with a researcher

about a conference they are organising. He worked from home for two days on a co-edited collection that is soon to be published. For two days he hosted a conference in the Research Centre at which he gave a keynote address and chaired several sessions. In addition to these activities, he would normally meet with PhD students (of which he has '6 or 7'). Once again, the long working hours during the week were balanced by a weekend off work.

These professors provide an interesting comparison. They are both academics with the same title, within the same department at the same university. At face value they are similar: both are Directors of Research Centres with a large management aspect to their role; both have very little undergraduate teaching, but have PhD students whom they supervise.In addition they appear to arrange their working week along similar lines, ensuring that the weekend is always kept free. Of interest for this paper are the qualitative differences between the career biographies, academic ideals and everyday practices of these professors that become apparent within the interviews.

Becoming Professor A

Professor A has a background in Development Studies and Social Policy and Planning (she completed her masters degree in 1987). Her first career was as a researcher in a public sector institution. This comprised desk based research, writing policy-briefing documents and managing research projects that were often commissioned to academics. It was here that this individual's first career 'turning point' was located, she says:

> While I was there I got very fed up of managing academics, who wrote proposals quite poorly and didn't deliver on time and they didn't really understand what a policy world wanted from an academic input… I started to think, well, I can do this. (Prof. A, Interview 1).

This led to day release, under the civil service scheme, to undertake a PhD at the same civic university where she now works. The Professor highlights how this starting point

and 'path' taken into academia has led to an enduring interest in policy and the translation of academic ideas into the policy world:

> …I'm academic enough to see the value of blue skies work… However I do think that there is a space for work being communicated and fed into debates where people aren't going to know who says what about patriarchy theory, I don't think many academics are very good at doing that. (Prof. A, Interview 1).

Two years into her PhD (1992) she was head-hunted by an academic to work at the University as a Research Assistant whilst writing her thesis. In addition to her interest in policy, this path into academic work also set up this Professor for a research career built around European Funding:

> … there is a logic there, because at the time I started there weren't as many people working on a European level and with European funding sources, so I achieved a comparative advantage so to speak by getting in earlier and it kind of comes to you after a while. (Prof. A, Interview 1)

Through this post she experienced a particular career development pathway in which she began as an assistant on a project, increasingly gaining 'voice', in particular during the development of research bids to further the project (and her own job). This career path is something this academic views as 'normal' and 'classic'.

In 1997, after seven years of study she submitted her thesis. She began a lecturing post at another university, subsequently accepting a lecturing post back at the civic university (a strategic decision, taking a pay cut to be based in what she thought would become a 'research-led' institution). The decision was also supported by the 'vague promise' of rapid promotion. Rapid promotion ensued, becoming senior lecturer in 3 years, a one year career break to have a baby, a reader in 6 years, and then professor in

7. This was possible because the institution introduced rapid promotions at this time (between 1998 and 2005). The professor acknowledges aspects of the broader context, which she believes contributed to making her rapid promotion possible, suggesting that mechanisms such as the RAE (Research Assessment Exercise) lead to greater transparency in recruitment and promotion. On this she says:

> I get very irritated with these discussions about the RAE being oppressive for women, because my sense has been that actually many procedures have been more transparent about what you need to get in and be promoted, and it didn't used to be like that. (Prof. A, Interview 1).

Becoming Professor B

Professor B's research career began in History. He took his undergraduate degree in the late 1970s and speaks of his enthusiasm and excitement for academic work. He undertook a full time ESRC funded PhD in the early 1980s, in a Department of Sociology at a 1960s new university (several 'greenfield' campus universities were founded as part of an expansion in the 1960s). He had embarked on his Masters with the aim of undertaking a PhD, though less strategically (in relation to his future career) than Professor A. He moved into Sociology because:

> …a message came round saying that the department of sociology had some quota awards…at that point I thought I might be interested actually, it was different to history. And money for three years, and something to do! (Prof. B, Interview 1)

Several aspects of the PhD experience were important for this professor, which centred on the research community and academic social life that existed in his Department:

> It was very lively… you'd go to departmental seminars, but also there was quite a lot of socialising… it was a great experience collectively in terms of

> feeling valued and part of the research community… And the way they worked
> was to have fortnightly meetings in the unit, usually have a meal, have a drink,
> so it was very relaxed. (Prof. B, Interview 1)

Following completion of his PhD in 1984 he was an SSRC funded postdoctoral researcher (Social Science Research Council – the predecessor of the ESRC – Economic and Social Research Council) for 4 years. He directly links this career decision to the labour market conditions at that time - the time of the Thatcher cuts. There was therefore a lack of new lecturing posts, making SSRC postdoctoral positions one of the only options. This position was at another of the 1960s new universities, and once again a lack of hierarchy and a 'buzzing' research community were emphasised as positive aspects of this position. This Professor views an un-hierarchical approach as being part of the 'culture of sociology' and suggests this is possibly linked to the young and emerging academic body of the time.

He suggests that this 'social approach' to academic work is important for the development of a particular kind of knowledge:

> You got more chat about people you could try out ideas without them being
> formally developed. You know, you could chat to people who you might want
> to include. It's gossiping in a sense. Who people are, who departments
> are…it's a way of learning specifics about particular buzzing ideas, or people
> who may be famous but their reputation's higher than it should be… (Prof. B,
> Interview 2)

At the same time he highlights that although this benefited him, many people were potentially excluded by a predominantly male 'gentlemanly culture' that arbitrarily nurtured some people and excluded others.
Following this postdoctoral post he found that the sociology job market was beginning to 'open up', taking a one year lectureship, then another one year post doc finally

securing a permanent lectureship at the end of the 1980s that he describes as a 'teaching-admin' post. He emphasizes that teaching was important for him at this point as he wanted to be involved in every aspect of department life. This was again at a 1960s new university, but with a different departmental culture to the previous institutions. However, he notes, 'chat' about research took place on the corridors.

The Professor continued his research work, dedicating one or two days a week to writing up the projects he had worked on for the past eight years. He suggests some reasons why this was possible (where it may not be now). Firstly, the division of labour within the department meant academics had little administrative work. Second, a smaller number of students (than today) enabled a style of teaching that had a great overlap and 'spill-over' into research activity, with small, interactive seminar teaching where students set the readings in collaboration with the lecturer. This approach had developed in response to the student protests of 1968, though he notes that it gradually faded out until, at the end of the 1990s, teaching had been completely transformed, in large part due to modularisation. Following this 5 year post he worked for one year as a visiting lecturer in the States before coming to the current institution as Professor, where he has been based for 13 years. The Research Centre that he currently directs was based on a bid made by himself and a team of academics from different disciplines.

'Normal' Career Paths and the Two Dialectics

The first point I want to make is that the professors' different pathways into academia suggest they have different motivations for becoming and being an academic and that they value different kinds of knowledge. Pred's external/internal and daily path/life path dialectics provide interesting tools to understand this situation.

In terms of the external/internal dialectic, Professor A's experiential learning and its subsequent impact on her career choices is apparent in the life path discussed above. For example, she has come to academia after a first career in the Civil Service. This

initial career has lead to a particular view of what she can offer as an academic – a certain kind of knowledge and knowledge transmission that she views as a gap in academic work. She describes the development of this viewpoint as a direct result of her reflections on the everyday activities with which she was engaged (reviewing the research proposals academics offered). She believed that she could do something better herself. Also apparent in her life path, is that through experiencing a research apprenticeship based on research assistant posts, she has developed a particular idea of a career development pathway and an academic division of labour that she refers to as 'normal'. This helps to understand her everyday supervision practices (discussed in the following section). Her idea of academic work is primarily orientated outwards towards the funders and the policy research which they tend to fund.

The latter point also highlights the relevance of the more pragmatic daily path/life path dialectic of Pred's model. This refers to how an individual is both enabled and 'hemmed-in' by their daily path/life path choices interacting across a biography. This Professor's research work provides a good empirical example of this. She speaks of how she has found a niche for herself within the Department, being allocated a high proportion of research time because she is successful at securing external funding. At the same time, this means that she must spend a large proportion of her research time writing funding bids. She is 'hemmed in' to this working pattern for several reasons.

First her research funding is valued for the contribution it makes to the RAE:

> …part of the RAE is about income generation, and bringing on PhD students… in the department... there's a genuine commitment. But it's more appropriate to be tapping money in some areas more than others. The area I've worked in, because it has a crossover with policy, there has always been a tradition of seeking funded work. (Prof A. Interview 1)

It appears from this comment that this obligation to bid for external funds is, in fact, a tie made earlier in her career path, when she chose to move into this research field (rather than simply being a daily decision of the present).

Second, the institution is supportive of this income generation as part of its research strategy. RAE money alone cannot sustain (or grow) the levels of research within the Department. Alternative sources of research funding are therefore viewed as essential within a broader departmental research strategy. So in the case of this Professor, her daily activities appear to be in synergy with a particular 'institutional project'.

Linked to this, and also a third motivation to bid for funds is her commitment towards her PhD students and contract researchers. Once one funding stream has been secured and staff/students appointed, she feels a personal obligation to ensure these continue:

> That has pay-back for my PhD students and contract staff, because then there's regular money, so they become a consideration, you know, you can't turn around and say 'oh this year I'm not doing any funded work', well you can, but a lot of us would be concerned if we knew there was someone [student/research assistant] looking for money and we were closing the gate down. (Prof. A, Interview 1).

Finally, her involvement and status beyond the department in various European and policy networks means lots of research 'comes her way'. She is always keen to accept this work to maintain the relationships and the potential future projects they will bring, despite the fact that she sometimes experiences this negatively, feeling that she is 'rewriting her PhD' over again.

So it is possible to see here that the Professor is enabled in some ways by the previous intersections of her daily path with longer term projects. For example, she has been promoted to Professor, she has several funded research projects, she has established a particular niche within her department, and she has a broad network of contacts

beyond the institution (especially in the European Policy world). However, these intersections also 'hem her in'. For example, some institutions may not recognise or provide a niche for an academic with this particular profile, her current daily path is dominated by research management and administration, rather than undertaking research or producing academic publications, and she partly feels that constantly accepting projects and invitations to keep her networks alive restricts the publication of academic articles, or the development of new areas of research.

In contrast to Professor A, Professor B's discussion of his career is far less strategic. He has almost 'fallen into' sociology because of a general liking for academic work. His early career has been framed by a broader context in which there were limited academic positions (discussed in more depth in the next section). Nevertheless, the external/internal dialectic is still present. For example, similar to Professor A, he takes his own socialization into academia as being normal. What is 'normal' here is different to the division of labour described by Professor A. Instead of discussing a hierarchical division of labour, he emphasizes the 'buzzing research community', and lack of hierarchy and *social* academic life that forms the 'culture of sociology'.

Once again Professor B's early career seems to have contributed to a valuing of a particular kind of knowledge. As might be expected, this is different to the kind of knowledge valued by Professor A, and reflecting his views about the 'culture of sociology', he emphasizes the importance of socializing and 'chat' in the development of informal knowledge, which he views as an important aspect of socialization.

When considering the daily path/life path dialectic for this Professor, it is interesting to note that he at times distances himself from his career moves, especially in his early career. This is possibly due to the external constraints noted above. However it is interesting to note that much of this academic's career has been spent in a particular part of the sector (the 1960s new universities), and the majority of his research work has been funded by ESRC. If we contrast this to Professor A, who's research work is

mainly funded by European funding, this suggests that enablements and constraints might possibly be accumulative. For example, gaining ESRC funding builds a reputation that enables more ESRC funding to be secured, and so on.

Understanding the Differences

At this point, we can see that the two professors have very different career biographies that have brought them to their current role. As part of these biographies the 'external/internal' and 'daily path/life path' dialectics have meant different experiential learning, as well as different things becoming 'enabled', or not, further down the line. The implications of this for the everyday practices of the Professors are discussed in more detail in the section concerned with 'supervision practice'. Here I want to consider the importance of two potential 'structuring' factors on the career biographies of the Professors, that are more peripheral in Pred's theoretical framework, but of potential significance. These are namely, policy context and gender.

Intersections With Policy Contexts

In 1997, Professor A submitted her PhD thesis and applied for her first lectureship. This is also the year that the Labour Government was elected, and in September of the same year they announced £165 million funding for higher education. This money aimed to bridge the 'funding gap' that had developed with the increasing student numbers and relative decline in funding that had occurred throughout the preceding years of the Conservative Governments. In the 1998 budget a further £250 million for education was announced, and then £445 million as part of the comprehensive spending review (Trowler, 2003:62-74). Overall during the period 1997 to 2001 there was a real terms increase in government spending on higher education of 18% - from £4.7 billion to £5.8 billion (Trowler, 2003:77-79). It is quite possible that this additional funding for higher education., combined with the requirement for more staff at all levels within the academic body (to meet the increasing student numbers)

made it possible for institutions to offer the rapid promotions from which this academic benefitted.

Another aspect of the broader context that has been vitally important in this professor's career is the availability of European Funding. Once again, this is not something that has been available at all times and places. Her first research assistant post in 1993 coincides with the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, and the beginning of a new period of research- informed policy at the European Level. This was reinforced in 2000 with the establishment of a 'European Research Area' which emphasised joint programmes and collaborative work, and established the Framework programmes (http://europa.eu/index_en.htm).

At the same time as these sources of funding became available (both the Government funding for higher education. and the European Commission's research funding), definitions of university research within UK Government policy was changing. For example, the 1993 White Paper 'Realising our Potential: A Strategy for Science, Engineering and Technology' encouraged 'systematic' exchange between industry, scientists, engineers and science policy makers. Shove et al. (1998) note the influence this had on, for example, the ESRC's strategy (which itself commissioned a report on the 'exploitation' of research knowledge) and also the research practices of individual researchers. The point is that maybe the context of available funding (from the emerging European presence), combined with a changing policy emphasis that legitimised these 'new kinds' of research made it possible for the career pathway of this Professor to even be possible in the first place.

At a broad level, the funding that is available, and the way it is channelled reflects what might be conceived as the 'dominant project' of a particular political context. Although described as a personalised story, this academic has made her way through a particular context which enables some things and not others. It has enabled an academic career that may not have been possible in previous higher education

contexts, and as such, the intersection of policy trajectories with academic career biographies may be one way in which the everyday practice of academia is changing. This perspective is not quite captured by current theory and will be developed further in my thesis.

In contrast, Professor B completed his PhD thesis in 1984, as he notes this was at the time of the Thatcher cuts. The cuts he refers to were announced in the 1981 Expenditure White Paper, which appointed the University Grants Council (UGC) to apportion a total cut of around 15% across the sector. Platt (2002) notes that:

> … these cuts fell more heavily on humanities and social sciences. In response there were redundancies, and early retirement was encouraged. Sociology was out of favour with the government… (Platt, 2002:190)

Professor B notes how jobs began to open up in the latter part of the 1980s, and he secured a permanent post in 1989. This period of Professor B's career parallels changes associated with the 1985 Green Paper 'The Development of Higher Education into the 1990s'. Within this paper, Trowler notes that there was '… a move towards accepting the expansion of the higher education system after the cuts of the early 1980s, but within clearly limited spending' (Trowler, 2003: 51).

Whilst in his permanent post, the Professor notes a change in the teaching practices at the institution, with a move away from a more liberal approach to a modularised curriculum. Trowler (2003) notes the drives for 'cost effective expansion' associated with the 1991 White Paper Higher Education: A New Framework' which '…concentrated on the "human capital" functions of universities rather than their liberal ideas and stressed the need for strong management in the pursuit of effective and efficient provision.' (Trowler, 2003:56). He also notes the context of the 1980s and 1990s in which modularization was introduced:

> … new, more economical and efficient modes of delivery were required and modularity, together with other aspects of the credit framework, appeared to offer this. (Trowler, 1998:5)

One justification for the introduction of modularization was that it 'freed up individual choice'. This is interesting in the context of this professor, where modularization replaced a progressive educational model where students defined the topics and readings of their own seminars (in discussion/collaboration with seminar tutors), thus shaping the curriculum around the interests of students.

As with Professor A, during his career this professor has made his way through a particular context. The challenges and restraints posed by this context have at points been in conflict with his desired career (e.g. the desire for a permanent lectureship). This is one possible reason why Professor B emphasises the lack of choice and strategy at certain points.

Gender

Another perspective on the Professors' accounts is that of gender. Of relevance to a practice-informed approach is West and Zimmerman's (1987) work on 'Doing Gender'. Their perspective conceptualises 'doing gender' as an ongoing activity embedded in everyday interaction, arguing that:

> …gender is not a set of traits, nor a variable, nor a role, but the product of social doings of some sort (West and Zimmerman, 1987:129).

Their discussion is about how gender is 'done' so that at all times and in all circumstances the '…outcome is seen and seeable in context as gender-appropriate' (West and Zimmerman, 1987:129). Rather than being a conscious project of the self, this is rather about the adoption by an individual of approaches, actions, activities –

or, we might say, *practices* – that ensure gender is 'done' as an inherent aspect of all activity.

In relation to the discussion above, and also apparent in the different supervision practices discussed later in the paper, it is easy to pass off these different ways of being as a reflection of different personalities. So Professor A's discussion of her career is very strategic, whereas Professor B's is more 'happy go lucky'. But another interpretation might be that Professor A's approach is rather the work of being a woman in the interactional context of the university.

One reason Professor B has been able to take a 'happy go lucky' approach is because he has been 'mentored' and looked after by his supervisors and the research communities of which he has been a part. Such a way of talking about his career – as 'falling into' academic work, as continuing with it 'because it seemed an interesting thing to do', finding positions 'come your way' – are stories that are frequently present in the interviews, though notably, only in the interviews of the male academics. Professor A has not been mentored in this way but has built up her own networks with a community that spans both the academic and policy world. She has not 'fallen into' academic work, it has been strategic decisions all along to make her way into, and 'up' in this world.

An interesting example how Professor A has to be more strategically conscious as a female in this world can be found in her discussion of supervision practice. Here she talks about adhering strictly to the fortnightly meetings set out in the university's supervision guidelines. One reason she gives for following this model, is that she has been mentored to ensure she does not take on the more 'pastoral role' that female academics might find themselves taking. West and Zimmerman (1987) draw on Hochschild (1983) to make a similar point, highlighting that amongst the flight attendants in her study there was a tendency for women to perform more 'emotional labour' in order to produce an enactment of their essential femininity. This Professor

shows that not to do this is something that must be achieved in practice – in her case by not having an 'open door'.

I would now like to provide a more in depth discussion of one area of practice – supervision – to discuss the external/internal, daily path/life path dialectic in more detail.

Practices of Supervision

In relation to PhD supervision, both Professors A and B refer to their School's guidelines. The expectation of these is that a contract is signed at the start of the PhD agreeing the parameters of the student supervisor relationship. Supervisors are expected to meet with students once a fortnight, and students are expected to provide a written log of each meeting in a workbook, which the supervisor should sign. Alternatively students might send minutes of the meeting and actions agreed to the supervisor. Interesting in the discussions with Professors A and B are the different ways these guidelines have been put into practice, and the different values-in-action that come to light through these discussions.

Professor A

Professor A directly refers to the guidelines in her description of supervision:

> …we sign a contract at the start, what that translates into is that as a rule I would meet my students once a fortnight, and you can relax that at certain periods of writing of course, but that's kind of the marker and you have to be clear why you're moving away from that. I have them in my diary (Prof. A, Interview 1).

This professor also uses these guidelines as a marker to protect her own boundaries, emphasising the formalisation of the relationship:

> I don't tend to see PhD students much in between. Some are located in a different building, and frankly if I'm in and they catch me that's fine, we don't have a lot of corridor chat… it's not really a drop-in culture (Prof. A, Interview 1).

This is linked to her view that it is important to protect her own time, something which she has picked up from a mentoring experience:

> I've always been quite conscious at the start of protecting my own time, and I was mentored very carefully that women do too much pastoral work, so I try to have clear lines. I've had needy students in the past, it's strange the amount they expect, to be their mother and everything and I find that emotionally draining after a while with friends, let alone students. (Prof. A, Interview 1).

Interestingly, she also discusses how her own practices have become more formalised over time. She inherited and implements a practice from a previous co-supervisor, where the student is expected to complete a 2-page form prior to each supervision. She views the role of supervision as making the PhD structure explicit, helping students manage their PhD as a project, and having formal structured meetings as part of this process. As with the other areas of her work, she is very clear of the boundaries between work and social life:

> …we're not going to be friends. Or if we are … that's not a presumption at the start. (Prof. A, Interview 1)

Professor B

This is very different to Professor B's response to the University guidelines and approach to supervision. He recognises that his supervision has become more formalised and views this partly as a result of the University regulations, but also because of his personal life, which means his time at the office is limited. Although aware of the University regulations and formal contract he states that 'it doesn't

always happen'. This is because he doesn't believe this is always the best way to supervise:

> …minutes of the meetings are meant to be kept by them, but to be honest I don't worry about it too much, I don't always think there's a need for them… I don't think it's necessary, and it definitely isn't my style. (Prof. B, Interview 2).

At the same time he recognises that the formal procedures are sometimes useful, and describes them as a 'safety net', though even then he thinks there are better ways to handle things:

> On some occasions a bit more formal is useful, yes, if I'm worried about them, are they doing the work, are they going in the right direction, but then I think the better way to do it is to talk to them about it! If they want to [keep formal records], some of them have wanted to do it and that's fine (Prof. B, Interview 2).

Another reason his supervision style has become more formalised is because of his limited availability on Campus. He still emphasises the importance of the informal aspects of academic life, which he thinks should be retained and nurtured in new ways:

> …informally it's partly because of my personal life and the nature of the University, the thing where we used to meet in the evening and get together doesn't happen… the PhD students here do have their own seminar, which they run every 3 or 4 weeks and present papers, which I try to go to, so we try to keep the informal collegiate thing going… the thing with a PhD is that it can be a very lonely enterprise, and you do need to find mechanisms to get people collaborating and feeling part of a community. (Prof. B, Interview 2)

Supervision and the Two Dialectics

In comparing these two approaches to and practices of supervision, Pred's concepts are useful once more. The current practices of both academics are an interaction between their current daily path, the institutional context and their previous daily path/life path dialectic. In terms of the latter it is apparent that these academics have reflected on their own experiences and want to recreate the things that have benefited them in their own careers. For Professor A this is a formalised and transparent process, for Professor B a social environment supportive of research. At the same time Professor B is critical of aspects of the culture that benefited him – that it excluded some and was arbitrary in who it supported. He therefore recognises that formal procedures can be useful to overcome these problems. However, for him the formal procedures alone are not enough.

Professor A is concerned with protecting her time, whilst giving students what they are entitled to. In large part this is due to her involvement in European Projects, she is therefore frequently away, making meetings difficult to schedule. She therefore strictly adheres to the university guidelines, not meeting with students outside the fortnightly model. It is a way to negotiate supervision within her current daily path. At the same time, her supervision practices encapsulate her general approach to academic work. The adoption of the university procedures is not only due to time management, but also reflects a general belief in the formalisation of processes – her own development of supervision practice is in fact *more* formal than the university guidelines. This in itself is something that has developed through previous events in her biography: being mentored against adopting too much pastoral work, and inheriting aspects of her practice from a colleague. It may also quite simply be a preferred style of working. It reflects a particular view of what PhD supervision should be, and results in a more hierarchical approach than that of Professor B.

For Professor B, his daily path effects supervision in different ways – living away from campus means he cannot offer the social aspects experienced in his own PhD study. At the same time he tries to create new spaces for this kind of work, and encourages his students to do so. For him academic work is social, and for individuals and ideas to thrive it requires a certain environment and culture.

A final point is that, with both these Professors the different external/internal, daily path/life path dialectics of their career biographies mean that they reproduce very different things that lead to different academic lives and different types of work. This brings into question characterisations of academic work found in studies of sociology of science where the shared norms and motivations of individuals are emphasised. Merton's (1987) 'institutional imperatives' of universalism, communalism, organised scepticism, and so on provide the classic example. A more useful representation of the empirical situation is Bourdieu's (1984) suggestion in *Homo Academicus*, that lecturers within the academic and disciplinary field will have different political positions (Bourdieu, 1984:66), which may lead to their valuing different kinds of knowledge and also, we might assume, different perspectives on and reactions to policy change. Bourdieu also suggests that within the academic field there is a plurality of principles of hierarchization and that:

> …agents can exploit the plurality of principles of hierarchization… in an attempt to impose their vision and modify their position inside that space. (Bourdieu, 1984:14)

This 'plurality of principles' helps to explain why it is possible for two such different ways of being to sit along side each other in the same Department.

This discussion raises several questions, in particular surrounding which practices gain precedence, how and why. In the context of changing practices of sociologists, it is interesting to consider if particular practices lead to the production of particular kinds of knowledge and if so, does it matter if a practice fades out? Can we really say

Prof. B's ideals of supervision can be upheld in current contexts and if not, then is another practice becoming dominant and does this matter?

Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to explore the potential of a practice-informed approach to understand the implications of university reform for the career biographies and everyday practices of sociologists. Two key questions have been explored throughout the text:

How do the everyday activities of individual academics across their careers:
 i. Contribute to the reproduction and transformation of academic life?
ii. Intersect and interact with processes of institutional and policy change?

In relation to question one, I put forward the hypothesis that it is at the intersection of individual paths and institutional projects that social reproduction or transformation occurs. The data supports this idea in several ways.

Firstly, when reviewing the career biographies of Professors A and B it is possible to identify an 'external/internal' dialectic, or process of reflexivity and experiential learning that has, at a broad level, influenced the valuing of different kinds of knowledge and different motivations for becoming and being an academic. At a more detailed level, this dialectic has also influenced the supervision practices of the different Professors. Secondly, the data supports the idea of previous daily path/life path interactions acting both as constraints and enablements, the current research practice of Professor A providing one empirical example of this point. Thirdly, the interconnections of individuals to each other and to time and space (that is that time spent on one area of practice means less time spent on another) is also evident in the discussions of the daily path. For example Professor A's time spent bidding for research funds is time not spent writing academic publications. Professor B's time

spent commuting to and from home is time not spent informally with PhD students, and so on.

A further point that the data highlights that is *not* incorporated in Pred's theory is the plurality of the academic body. It would appear that the developing policy context of recent years is enabling the creation of new kinds of academic careers, which means that new kinds of academic are becoming part of the academic body. This is significant, especially as this paper highlights that as paths and projects intersect, these two professors reproduce very different things. The implications of this plurality will be explored further in my PhD thesis.

This point bridges the two questions which this paper posed. The analysis suggests that one mechanism by which changing policy contexts intersect and interact with everyday practice is through the enablements and constraints that they place on academics as they make their way through their careers. So for example in the case of Professor B the historical period of his career meant that in the early stages there were lots of constraints, and his career biography was based on jobs available. For Professor A it meant that a new kind of academic career was possible, (though not predetermined) - she has strategically made her way through various changes in the policy context to develop her career. It is interesting that this is not something that Professor A appears to be consciously aware of. She has harnessed opportunities to build a career that she wants, and is now in many ways reproducing this in her daily practice.

Another point to note from the discussion is that academics do not reproduce exactly the same *practices* as those they have experienced (so Professor B cannot exactly reproduce the research culture of his own PhD experience). Rather they create practices which are based on the same values. Professor B is attempting to keep alive those aspects of his PhD that he valued, but he is doing this within a changed university context – there are lots of PhD students, they are in a much bigger department where staff and PhD students live separate lives. His personal context is

also different - he lives away from campus and so his daily path is restricted by, for example, commitments to home and family life. So it might be more realistic to say that academics attempt to reproduce the same 'values-in-practice' rather than the same practices. Whether this reproduces or transforms the institution is another question to be explored.

To conclude though, it is possible to see from this working paper the potential that a 'practice-informed' approach offers. In particular the consideration of everyday practices across the career biographies of individuals builds a time perspective into the analysis not previously considered. The approach offers new ways of thinking about how the practices of academics across their careers contributes to the reproduction or transformation of academia, and drawing on the structure-agency debate offers alternative ways to understand the policy/practice dialectic.

Acknowledgements

Appendix

University 1	Large Civic University (1880)
	Recent Merger
	Number of Staff in Sociology: 29
	2001 RAE (Sociology): 5*
	'World Class Research'
University 2	Ex-polytechnic (1992)
	Number of Staff in Sociology: 35
	2001 RAE (Sociology): 3a
	'For World Class Professionals'
University 3	Small Civic University (1903)
	Sociology located with Social Policy
	Number of Staff in Department: 26
	2001 RAE (Social Policy): 4
University 4	Merger Institution (1967) (A merger of a small civic university, college of advanced technology & school of nursing)
	Number of Staff in Sociology: 21
	2001 RAE: 4
	'Bursting with Choice'

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