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Author

SMITH, Katherine

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Fools, facilitators and flexians : academic identities in marketised environments

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Abstract

Employing the interdisciplinary field of health inequalities as a case study, this paper draws on interviews to explore subjective accounts of academic identities. It finds widespread acceptance that academia is a market place in which research-active careers require academics to function as entrepreneurs marketing ideas to funders. Beyond this, two contrasting aspirational identities emerged: academics seeking to work collaboratively with policy makers (?policy facilitators?) and academics seeking to challenge dominant discourses (?Shakespearean fools?). Most interviewees identified strongly with one or the other of these identities and few believed academia sufficiently supported their preference, although there was some consensus that recent changes were aiding ?policy facilitator? roles. In interviewees' accounts of trying to pursue ?Shakespearean fool? type roles in marketised environments, a further, chameleon-like identity emerged (?flexians?): academics producing malleable ideas that can be adapted for different audiences. In exploring these identities, the paper challenges the popular distinction between mode-1 and mode-2 research. (HRK / Abstract

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