

Symbolic Violence in Academic Life: A Study on How Junior Scholars are Educated in the Art of Getting Funded

Lambros Roumbanis¹

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Abstract It is widely recognized that universities all around Europe have taken on a more market-oriented approach that has changed the core of academic work life. This has led to a precarious situation for many junior scholars, who have to seek research funding to cover their own wages in an increasingly fierce competition over scarce resources. Thus, at present, research funding is a Gordian knot that must be cut by each individual researcher. As a response to this situation, some Swedish universities provide guidance to junior scholars on how to navigate in an increasingly entrepreneurial academia through open lectures by senior and successful professors. In this paper, I study these lectures as socialization processes and the role of symbolic violence in the justification of a competitive academic work ethos as well as a pragmatic acceptance of the prevailing funding conditions. The aim is to explore the role of a subtle form of power wielding that is not immediately understood or recognized as power, but that nonetheless reproduces a market-like behavior and legitimizes a career system marked by uncertainty, shortcomings and contradictions.

Keywords Symbolic violence · Research funding · Peer review · Junior scholars · Higher education · Performance management

✉ Lambros Roumbanis
lambros.roumbanis@score.su.se

¹ Stockholm Centre for Organizational Research (SCORE), Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden

Introduction

“[...] academic life is a mad hazard. If the young scholar asks for my advice, ... the responsibility of encouraging him can hardly be borne”
– Max Weber, ‘Science as a vocation’

The citation above originates from the now celebrated lecture Weber gave at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich on November 7, 1917. His lecture provides us with a professor’s entire testimony on just how uncertain a young scholar’s career could be in Germany at the time. Under the conditions that then governed academic life, it was assumed that an unestablished scholar was willing to endure several years of hard work, without any specific financing plan and without knowing at all whether this work would lead to future permanent employment. What Weber illustrated in a broader sense during his lecture was the profound state of tension that can emerge, for each individual scholar, between the external organizational prerequisites of science and the inner existential meaning of science as a vocation (Weber 1946 [1922]).

Slightly more than one hundred years have passed since Weber gave his lecture, and one of the questions that arise is: In what way have the conditions of academic life changed for the younger generation of scholars who are in the early stages of their careers and who wish to devote their lives to science? This question requires that we begin at the right end. It is widely recognized today that academic science and the university as a public institution have undergone profound changes in most OECD countries during the past few decades (Clarke and Knights 2015; Elzinga 2012; Gläser and Laudel 2016; Nowotny et al. 2001; Shore 2008; Watermeyer and Olssen 2016). University management has moved toward a managerialist model emphasizing accountability and marketization. Entrepreneurship, competition and performance evaluations have become increasingly prevalent in higher education (Ylijoki 2005). To be sure, this is a trend that is still in progress. Nevertheless, the way research is organized today entails, among other things, that each researcher – if he/she is to have any chance of success – has to strive to obtain his/her own external research funding, initiate research collaborations, and publish as much as possible in highly ranked journals. These changes have been facilitated by both university administrations and the established academics themselves, and as indicated by a number of commentators, this has resulted in several value conflicts that go to the very heart of academia (Butler and Spoelstra 2014; Hackett 1990; Knights and Clarke 2014; Lorenz 2012). According to some of them, traditional academic values – such as scientific freedom, boldness, integrity, and collegiality – are being seriously threatened by incipient disintegration, which is partially based on the fact that new kinds of performance management techniques have been forcefully introduced at universities across the world (Kallio et al. 2016; Watermeyer and Olssen 2016).

The issue of research funding, in particular, has become a Gordian knot that every early-stage scholar has to cut if he/she wishes to achieve an independent academic career – at present, obtaining external funding is inescapably marked by unsustainable growth, hyper-competition and continuous evaluation (Fochler et al. 2016). This is the

situation in many European countries today, and Sweden offers a good example. Every year, thousands of applications are produced that undergo peer review, the aim of which is to allocate research grants. But the competition for funding is fierce, and some of the largest funding agencies in Sweden have a granting rate between only 5 and 20 percent. Such a low granting rate makes the peer review processes depend not only on quality, but also on chance (Langfeldt 2001; Roumbanis 2017). The whole funding situation creates a great uncertainty, especially for the junior scholars who do not have permanent employment and who are applying for grants to support themselves in the future. During the 21st century, the career paths for Swedish scholars have become both narrower and less clear; after getting their PhD, many barely manage for several years on part-time positions and periods of unemployment.

As a response to the uncertain working conditions for junior scholars, several Swedish universities have taken the initiative to organize lectures in which employed professors are invited to talk about research funding and the fundamental conditions of grant writing. One can view these lectures as a way of breaking up the high stratification that still exists in many academic work cultures, thus making more available the tacit knowledge about the academic profession possessed by the most successful scholars. But these lectures can also be understood as a special case of internal academic performance management; established scholars are discreetly converted into academic consultants and asked to do the work of communicating evaluative repertoires and coping strategies to junior scholars, so that their colleagues can adapt to the prevailing funding conditions (Lorenz 2012).

In the ethnographic case study presented below, I will demonstrate how lectures of this kind are organized and staged at one of Sweden's largest universities. My aim is to illustrate how the professors involved – by virtue of giving advice – are exercising organizationally framed power upon the junior scholars. The lens on power that will be used here is primarily aimed at the side of the organizational power apparatus that appears dramaturgically, mediating professional academic judgment. More specifically, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *symbolic violence* will be applied to explore and theorize this case of academic micro-politics. This concept represents a development of the Weberian notion of legitimate domination and the implicit idea of “disciplinary practices” within organizations, in which power is to be understood as more facilitative of desired outcomes through the disciplined discretion of the agency of empowered authorities (Bourdieu 1979; see also Clegg 1989). What distinguishes symbolic violence in particular is the focus on arbitrariness, misrecognition and complicity, which typically operate when dominant norms and value regimes are communicated to individuals in subordinate positions. By starting from the concept of symbolic violence, my ambition is to try to shed light on the force that exists in everyday face-to-face interaction and that is not immediately perceived or recognized as power by the involved parties themselves, but that nonetheless helps to promote a specific academic research culture and coping strategies as well as to reproduce pragmatic acceptance, which taken together serve to legitimize a career system marked by uncertainty, shortcomings and contradictions.

The New Academic Ethics and the Spirit of the Entrepreneurial University in Sweden

All around Europe, something has happened to the atmosphere at several universities. Increasingly, many early-stage scholars are experiencing anxiety and uncertainty about the future, while many belonging to the older generation of scholars are looking back on their careers with a feeling of nostalgia and moral indignation (Ylijoki 2005). The radical changes that were made at European universities during the 1980s are typically described as being part of a greater wave of neoliberal reforms that swept across the entire public sector in countries all over Europe (Burrows 2012; Whitley 2012). Similar organizational changes were made at universities in other parts of the world, such as in Australia, where some have claimed that the only real response to change was “a mute and demoralized acceptance” (Hinkson 2002: 233). Although some scholars have shown that some forms of resistance against the prevailing neoliberal and managerial culture is taking place in academia, the overall impression is nonetheless that of an intensified careerism and an opportunism which has become almost like “a knee-jerk response” (Clarke and Knights 2015: 1886; see also Martin 2016).

The universities’ strategies often involve strongly emphasizing the importance of researchers putting all their energy into applying for external funding, for instance from funding agencies or through various kinds of private sector collaborations. This also constitutes the framework for what has come to be called “academic capitalism” and to be closely associated with the market adjustments that changed universities into a kind of “entrepreneurial university” (Elzinga 2012; Slaughter and Leslie 1997). This method of managing researchers in an entrepreneurial spirit and the great focus on project-based research have clearly shifted much of the responsibility for dealing with the uncertainty of funding from the organizational level to the level of individual researchers, which means that “they must continually balance the risks they are willing to take” (Sigl 2016: 351).

Since the mid-1990s, Swedish universities have experienced a continuous reduction in block grant allocations from the state in favor of larger shares of competitive project-based funding. Today, around 55% of the government’s investments in research are delivered through external funding agencies, which can be compared with Norway, where the corresponding figure is 30% (Frølich et al. 2018). The consequence of this way of organizing research activities is that most Swedish scientists are forced to spend an increasing amount of time applying for grant money in order to conduct their research. Just as in many other countries, in Sweden external funding has shifted from being simply an additional funding source to being the main source even for well-established researchers (Bégin-Cauette et al. 2017; Benner and Sörlin 2007; see also Laudel 2006). The shift toward a market orientation and a corporate culture in academia has been evident in Sweden; the hunt for money, innovation, prestige and a stronger brand has resulted in widespread career pressure that, in recent years, has even led to cases of gross scientific misconduct with tragic consequences (Hallonsten 2016).

The prerequisites for applying for funding have also changed in several crucial respects: for example, the Swedish Research Council and other important funding agencies now require relatively detailed project descriptions of what the applicants propose to do, how they will do it and what their work will lead to in the form of scientific publications and social impact. This can be summarized as a general trend toward “projectification” (Torka 2018). In brief, the research of the future must be carefully planned in advance, despite the fact that most scholars are well aware that basic research is characterized by epistemic uncertainties and unpredictability. Grant writing has been developed into a separate academic genre, which – in relation to the increased competition for funding – has put more pressure on established senior scholars at universities to advise their junior colleagues on what must be done to achieve success (Mendoza 2007; Müller 2014).

A typical career path in Sweden is to go from a PhD position to a type of recruitment position, and thereafter to a permanent position as associate professor, which in the end would qualify one for a position as professor. However, in reality, the academic career paths in Sweden are in many respects unclear, and at present there is a general “lack of a well-defined career structure and adequate project funding for young researchers...the current practice is a fairly idiosyncratic mix of *de jure* positions” (Öqvist and Benner 2012: 30; Signoret et al. 2018). According to a Swedish Government Official Report (2016: 222), the share of higher education staff with a temporary contract is 31% – a significantly higher share compared to the 12.5% with a temporary contract on the Swedish labor market as a whole. A Swedish Research Council report also noted that it takes a junior scholar from seven to 12 years to reach a tenured position (Swedish Research Council 2015). This relatively long period of time is generally characterized by juggling between several fixed-term contracts, a situation that often has a negative effect on junior scholars’ scientific focus and well-being. Thus, in Sweden the advancement of younger scholars is highly dependent on fluctuations in the “funding market” (Öqvist and Benner 2012: 30).

In other words, the current prevailing conditions place new demands on all of the scholars concerned. But it is primarily the early-stage researchers who are most vulnerable to both this market-oriented model and the fierce competition that predominates in today’s academia. For instance, an interview study with Austrian PhD students and postdocs showed that the latter group in particular “tended to treat the dominant regime of valuation as a quasi-natural order without alternative” (Fochler et al. 2016: 197). According to Fochler and colleagues, a deep crisis exists that is directly tied to, among other things, the fact that today’s scientific production is increasingly being evaluated based on calculating impact factors, journal rankings, number of publications and funding success. These developments have resulted in conformity. The universities provide the organizational force needed to reproduce these new performance regimes and pragmatic coping strategies and pass them on to the younger generation of researchers. But this does not mean that the professors have never experienced internal conflicts or doubts. Or as illustrated in an interview study recently conducted by Ekman (2017: 483):

Several of my interviewees admit that in their roles as editors, research managers or heads of department they end up exercising performance regimes vis-à-vis younger scholars that they are not comfortable with ideologically. With status and resources so strongly dictated by neoliberal values, it is difficult to carve out local and institutional space for those willing to resist opportunism. The elite senior scholars may be spared this pressure given their privileged position in the field. But most junior scholars have to grapple with opportunism to some degree in order to survive.

To address this fundamental crux, we need more empirical studies that can identify and capture the various academic contexts in which these conditions are generated, spread and socially established. Only in this way can we sharpen our understanding of the maelstrom that today's researchers have ended up in and that drives them to adopt new attitudes toward scientific work.

Theorizing the Concept of Symbolic Violence

By adding the concept of symbolic violence to an organizational perspective, I wish to try to explore how academic power and domination can be hidden in well-intended lectures on the conditions of research funding. Complicity, arbitrariness, and misrecognition are the most important aspects of this particular form of power. In an effort to provide a clear definition, Bourdieu wrote: “[s]ymbolic violence, to put it as tersely and simply as possible, is the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 167). In that respect, symbolic violence concerns a subtle form of power that can make its way into human relationships, and do so in a relatively indiscernible manner. To be sure, symbolic violence differs from the Foucauldian theory of decentered disciplinary power (although there are some similarities); Bourdieu's concept is clearly based on the fact that power is always connected to identifiable social agents with distinct positions and dispositions in a hierarchized field. Symbolic violence operates inside organizations by virtue of the fact that individuals with less powerful positions in the field must eventually learn to respond, through modes of thought and feeling, to that which they perceive as the self-evident and legitimate rules of the game (Emirbayer and Johnson 2008). Accordingly, symbolic violence is reinforced by the fact that the involved parties themselves essentially take the situation for granted and learn to play the game.

Bourdieu also describes symbolic violence as “a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible, even to its victims” (Bourdieu 2001: 1). This meaning, however, does not necessarily imply that symbolic violence is impossible for the involved parties to detect, only that it is difficult to detect. All symbolic violence is fundamentally based on organizational structures of domination and asymmetrical social relations – an idea that Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) started from when they conducted their now famous study on the French educational system. In their study, they showed how teachers, by virtue of their given authority, reproduced class differences, that is,

how they perpetrated symbolic violence through their everyday interaction and communication with their students.

Following Max Weber's concept of legitimate domination, symbolic violence can therefore be further understood as "the power to impose (and even inculcate) instruments of knowledge and expression (taxonomies) of social reality, which are arbitrary but not recognized as such" (Bourdieu 1979: 80). Symbolic violence is, in other words, a form of power that is not actually perceived as power, but rather based on *misrecognition*, because "Of all forms of 'hidden persuasion', the most implacable is the one exerted, quite simply, by the order of things" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 168).

To acquire a deeper understanding of how symbolic violence may function in everyday life, it is also important to consider the concepts of habitus, field, and capital, which taken together serve to illustrate the complexity of power relations in society. According to Bourdieu, the habitus comprises perceptual structures and embodied dispositions that organize the way people see the world and how they act in it. Habitus denotes a system of dispositions, structured by a number of repertoires that an individual has internalized through socialization (Bourdieu 1990). The habitus generates a specific "sense of the game" that is closely tied to certain values at stake in a field. Symbolic violence is not, however, involved in all forms of socialization, because every process of socialization and knowledge transfer is obviously not a matter of exercising power. Still, symbolic violence plays an important role in the imposition of arbitrary rules, such as those involved in grant writing practices and advice on how to make an academic career.

A field is defined as a "kind of arena in which people play a game which has certain rules, rules which are different from those of the game that is played in the adjacent space" (Bourdieu 1991: 215). A field is a system of relations that has its own special hierarchies of positions and that is heavily dependent on the amount of capital that agents embody. There are four different forms of capital: social capital (family, friends, colleagues, networks), economic capital (money and resources), cultural capital (education, knowledge, skills), and symbolic capital (status, honor, respect). A person's habitus is a composition of these different forms of capital, which generates an objective position in the field. For example, when senior professors advise junior scholars on how they should deal with the issues of research funding and grant writing, they do this with a given authority, status and power, depending on the very position they occupy in the field by virtue of their endowment (volume and structure) as regards "academic capital" (Bourdieu 1988).

Although I think Bourdieu's way of explaining social phenomena using the concept of habitus sometimes tends to be overly structuralistic as well as semi-deterministic, I do agree with Sarah Robinson and Ron Kerr, who wrote: "symbolic violence is a way of conceptualizing legitimate domination, the habitus conceptualizes how structural domination is mediated at the interpersonal level" (Robinson and Kerr 2009: 881). This is an important point, and I believe there is room to theorize Bourdieu's concepts in a slightly different way. Dispositions are indeed crucial, but so is the creativity and continual interpretation of meaning that are ongoing in everyday interaction. Still, there can be no creativity without habit (Tavory 2018: 119). For the purpose of the present study, I would therefore like to advocate a "weak"

notion of habitus, avoiding viewing all social practices as strongly internalized habits and institutionalized meanings. As I see it, doing this is primarily a matter of *not* understanding symbolic violence as a uniform or all-embracing force. Instead, I would like to adopt a more interactionist position, taking into account the tension between the dispositional and the situational approaches. Because, as sociologist Iddo Tavory recently stated in an article:

[...] even if we accept that meaning is always made in a particular situation, it is not clear how important what happens in the situation is for shaping meaning. Do we need to primarily understand the actors' pasts, when potentials to act were inculcated, habits formed and crystallized? Or, alternatively, is the present-progressive unfolding of interaction and its endogenous pressures "where the action is"? (Tavory 2018: 118)

By using a "weak" notion of habitus, I wish to emphasize the fact that the question of the extent to which meaning and practice are intertwined in academic work life remains a relatively open one.

In the present case study, I start from the university as an organization and from how professors – by giving their lectures – may partially justify an academic work ethos that to a certain extent perpetrates various degrees of symbolic violence on junior scholars, many of whom find themselves in a more or less precarious situation. The fact that the organization furnishes employment positions, rules, knowledge and resources enables symbolic violence. Symbolic violence is especially related to the power of expectations; the communication of expectations can be seen as a capacity to influence someone to act in a certain way (Bourdieu 1988: 89). However, symbolic violence is certainly not equivalent to mere social influence, because the organizational framework gives it a more distinct character and direction, whereas social influence is generally more free-floating and may transcend boundaries between different fields.

The Ethnographic Fieldwork

The present study began during the fall term of 2012 when I conducted my first ethnographic observations of lectures on research funding and grant writing. The observed lectures were arranged by the Office of Research Funding (fictive name, henceforth ORF) at one of Sweden's largest universities. I had been invited to the same kind of lectures as a PhD student and also during my time as a postdoc, but never attended them myself. I had heard both positive and critical comments about the lectures. However, this made me curious, not least owing to my own sociological research interest in the peer review system and the organization of scientific knowledge. For this reason I decided to sign up via e-mail to attend my first lecture and to investigate this case of academic micro-politics.

Working at this administrative office is a group of approximately 15 research officers and economists who help the university's research faculty find, apply for and administrate external research funds. Part of ORF's duties involves actively informing researchers about new calls for grant applications as well as the various

criteria that must be met to apply. This administrative office provides a crystal clear example of a strategic and proactive response on the part of the university to address the increased competition for a limited amount of research funds. Thus, it gave me the opportunity to take a closer look on this managerial activity that has emerged and that has been caused by the changed funding conditions that now mark how research is organized. Every time I observed a lecture, I sought to be as open-minded as possible, while at the same time trying to grasp the social dramaturgy with a critical eye on the asymmetrical power relations from a broader perspective on academic work life in Sweden. Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence did occur to me early on in the analysis of my observations; I found it both suitable and fruitful, enabling me to link the seemingly innocent communication strategy presented in the lectures to the dominant funding regimes and entrepreneurial values that prevail in modern day academia.

In practical terms, the lectures involve the invited professors talking about their personal experiences, both in their role as researchers and in their role as expert reviewers engaged to evaluate research grant applications. The lectures were held in English and were about two hours in duration, and lectures are offered on a few occasions a year. During the period 2012-2016, I have observed a total of 10 lectures. The lecture hall in which they were given can seat approximately 100 people; actual attendance varied from 40 to 95 people. Two administrators from the ORF were present at each lecture.

The professors holding the lectures were all highly successful within their respective research fields and had extensive experience of both writing and evaluating research proposals. This was also something that they talked about in their lectures. Four of the professors came from the social sciences, five from the natural sciences and one from the humanities. The lectures are available for anyone working at the university who feels he/she needs to learn more about research funding and peer review. The audiences were transdisciplinary, with a mix of junior scholars from all different fields within the natural sciences, the humanities, and the social sciences.

During each lecture, I took my seat somewhere in the middle of the lecture hall. My role as an audience member was that of a "passive participant observer," not asking any questions, only focusing on the social dramaturgy. Observational notes were always made *in situ* in a notebook. I first considered recording the lectures, but for ethical reasons (some people in the audience might not wish to be recorded) I rejected the idea. Moreover, obtaining permission is complicated and may have affected the lecturer's performance. My primary focus has been on the professors' general message delivered face-to-face to the audiences. I have also observed the administrators and audience members during the lectures. Observing the junior scholars' questions and responses, enables me to study some aspects of their role in this context.

At the very beginning, I told the administrator responsible for the lectures that my intention was to make observations and that those would constitute the data for my ethnographic study on the kind of lectures the university arranges for junior researchers. I have also had the opportunity, on subsequent occasions, to talk about my study with other administrators and I have been met with cautious curiosity.

In previous studies, early-stage scholars (Bristow et al. 2017; Loveday 2017; Müller 2014; Sigl 2016) as well as senior professors and research managers (Clarke and Knights 2015; Ekman 2017; Ylijoki 2005) have been interviewed to gather data on their subjective experiences of academic working conditions. I have not taken this approach in the present case study. Instead, I rely solely on observations and base my study on the messages the professors conveyed during their respective lectures and the face-to-face interaction during these lectures between them and their audiences. In some cases, observations can be as effective a method as any of acquiring knowledge about a phenomenon or event, meaning that interviews are not always necessary (Merriman 2017). At the same time, the fact that the subjective experiences of the people involved are not elucidated may seem to be a limitation. Still, I think there is methodological value in conducting “natural” observations in order to find out what is going on in a particular context: “where the action is” (Goffman 1967). The main focus of the present study is on *how* the senior professors are exercising symbolic violence upon the new generation of scholars during these encounters. A key advantage of conducting observations is that the researcher can observe what people actually do or say, rather than how they present themselves retrospectively. Furthermore, people are not always willing to tell a stranger what they “really” think or feel during an interview. Nevertheless, in future research on the long-term consequences of socialization processes related to funding issues, conducting interviews would be a valuable complement to the observational findings from the present study.

The most frequent pieces of advice I interpreted as constituting the exercise of symbolic violence have been categorized into three themes: (i) *productivity and credibility*, (ii) *respect and hard work*, and (iii) *pragmatic acceptance and handling failure*. It is important not to see the single themes in isolation, but rather as part of a collection of different rules that make up the game of research funding and show how it should be played. How, then, did I arrive at these three themes? I basically focused on the professors’ pieces of advice that urged the junior scholars to embrace often contradictory career imperatives as well as on how the professors legitimized the power relations inherent in the peer review system. To be sure, much of what was said during the lectures has not been interpreted as being symbolically violent. To exemplify, information concerning how peer review is organized in practice does not contain symbolic violence *per se* (rather such violence emerges from advice on how the junior scholars should adapt to their precarious working conditions). I did not find many of the more anecdotal narratives about research funding in the past, or general remarks on how different funding agencies are organized, to be directly relevant to the present study. Furthermore, advice such as asking a colleague to read and comment on one’s research proposal has not been interpreted as having anything to do with power of any kind.

The Ethnographic Observations

All of the observed lectures started from the general question of how applicants should behave to deal with the conditions that guide research funding today. Or, more specifically, as one professor put it during his lecture: “How to pitch your

project and yourself.” The professors placed great emphasis on innovation and, naturally, the fierce competition for research funding was also a given leitmotif during all of the lectures. Below, I wish to show how these senior professors, by virtue of being the most important members of the academic profession, tended to exercise subtle forms of power upon the junior scholars when they passed on the values, norms and criteria of the academic elite and the funding agencies. The concept of symbolic violence can help us visualize how power is reinforced when the professors promote a certain kind of scholar – one that must act in a certain way and make the right kind of impression in order to survive professionally.

Productivity and Credibility

The first issue I would like to highlight, which was brought up by several professors during their lectures, is that of *productivity*. One approximately 60-year-old professor working in the natural sciences provided an explanation of how scientific quality is judged in the peer review process:

It’s always about individuals with ideas. There must be a good idea. But the quality is primarily judged on the basis of number of publications and citation frequency. You *have to* have a few really good publications to have a chance of getting funding. Preferably as many as possible.

According to this professor, the reason bibliometric criteria play such a great role is related to the large number of applications the reviewers in the panel groups are required to evaluate. These criteria constitute the first “filter” used for weeding out the applicants who have very few publications. When an audience member asked what it is that really counts, the professor replied that the research idea is always of greatest significance, but that the bibliometric aspects nonetheless establish the boundaries for which applicants have any chance at all of obtaining funding. Another 50-year-old male professor working in the natural sciences did also emphasize the issue of productivity: “as a young researcher, you must show that you are productive. So you *must* publish. But it is not enough to say that you are productive, your research must also be important.” Several professors talked about the performance regimes connected to the calculation of research outputs used by the universities and research councils, such as impact factors and citation indexes. During one lecture, a young researcher in the audience related how he had received comments on his application in which the reviewers mentioned not being familiar with the journals he had published his work in. The young man wondered whether he should include the impact factor and citation index the next time he submits an application, whereupon both the professor and one of the research office administrators simultaneously exclaimed, “Yes, of course, do that!” Previous research has pointed out that these metrics are part of the ongoing crisis within academia (Burrows 2012; Fochler et al. 2016; Shore 2008). The strong emphasis on productivity is a good example of performance management being exercised by an established academic elite; “this elite plays a role in the regulation of the academic profession by imposing its norms and criteria on it” (Musselin 2013: 1170). The talk about publications

makes a social distinction between those who are productive and those who are not. The general expectation on junior scholars (many of them struggling to survive on different part-time positions and periods of unemployment) are that they must be highly productive even without funding and that they must spend their spare time on writing proposals. When the professors advise their audiences to be as productive as possible, they reinforce a value by virtue of their power as expert evaluators and reproduce the official policy of the entrepreneurial university and the funding agencies. In addition, they also reproduce a “publish-or-perish culture” which may have negative effects on scholars and their well-being. This is an example of symbolic violence, which indirectly may force the new generation, depending on their individual possessions of capital and their positions in the academic field, to ask themselves whether being a researcher really is a good career option for them and at the same time urging them to stick to the system if they wish to succeed. Previous studies have shown that the “publish-or-perish culture” has many downsides. This culture might, for example, conflict with the objectivity and integrity of research, and it forces scholars to choose opportunistic strategies that might go against their own personal convictions (Frey 2003; Rekdal 2014; Van Dalen and Henkens 2012). Symbolic violence is embedded in the way the professors exercise performance regimes vis-à-vis junior scholars by virtue of their privileged academic positions. The somewhat paradoxical aspect of promoting a productivist regime, where metrics and numbers are highly valued, is that many junior scholars in the audience are attending these lectures precisely because they lack publications and citations, and they need funding in order to deliver on what academia is asking of them.

Another issue that was touched upon, both directly and indirectly, by many of the professors was *credibility*. This issue was almost always mentioned together with other advice concerning expectations for the creation of new research proposals and for learning the art of seducing the reviewers at the funding agency. A professor from the social sciences, probably around 60 years of age, explained her views on what is most crucial: “A grant application has to be exciting and interesting to read, otherwise you don’t have a chance of getting funded. What’s best is if you can tell a really good story.” Several of the professors argued along the same lines, that is, that the applicant must try to attract the reviewers in various ways, and that this is a matter of making the right kind of impression. What is crucial, as another professor pointed out in his lecture, is the following: “You must be credible. You must be interested in your topic. Don’t write an application about something just because you think it can be funded.” Accordingly, this is a question of scientific trustworthiness or “authenticity”, that is, writing an application on something one truly, deeply wants to do research on. At first, this advice may not seem to be problematic at all; in fact, the professors addressed the old Humboldtian discourse of originality and the passion for independent critical thinking. Is that an expression of symbolic violence at all? Not necessarily, but it does lead to the critical issue of personal risk-taking in relation to an idealized expectation in a market-oriented context. How uncompromising can a junior researcher afford to be with his/her limited amount of “academic capital”? If the likelihood that an application will be rejected is perceived to be too high, researchers may instead reduce the epistemological risk by choosing a project that seems more fundable and/or more doable. The double-edge

character of the advice to be credible is that this advice represents a fair view of what research is truly expected to be all about and, in the prevailing academic context, it can also be viewed as perpetuating a somewhat “maladjusted expectation” (Bourdieu 1988: 168). To apply for funding for an unorthodox or unfashionable idea in a research proposal may be counter-productive if it leads to unemployment, but to abandon such an idea may cause considerable stress and agony. For a successful professor with a strong position in the field, the meaning of scientific credibility may be taken for granted, but for a junior scholar it might actually be the crux of the matter. The advice shows how certain expectations are transformed into a mechanism of symbolic violence in that they force junior scholars to gamble with their ideas in the chance process of peer review. As Kallio and her colleagues rightly pointed out, “the Humboldtian ideal is even more difficult to live up to than before, and the new market-driven and managerialist university is likely to feed insecurity among scholars” (Kallio et al. 2016: 691; see also Cannizzo 2018). Furthermore, the suggestion that one should follow one’s own ideas and be creative contradicts, at least to some extent, the fact that funding agencies usually favor projects that are less risky and more predictable.

The advice to be productive and the advice to be credible are certainly two important components in the “art of getting funded” (Laudel 2006). Given the fact that the promise of security rests on project-based and entrepreneurial values, the academic atmosphere is very centered on playing the game. The ORF and the senior professors reproduce an academic work ethos in which the mechanisms of symbolic violence emerges and is spread, and where much of the responsibility for dealing with the uncertainty of funding has shifted from the organizational level to the level of individual researchers.

Respect and Hard Work

Part of the context of symbolic violence can be tied to the norms and the hierarchy the professors relate during their lectures. In consequence, what this represents is the academic ethos and the research work culture, which is directly related to things that concern peer review and how one writes a grant application. This is based on, among other things, the respect the junior scholar must show for the people reading the applications, or as one professor put it: “Reading an application *must* be a pleasure.” Esthetic value is of great importance; it is not only a question of formal communication. At first glance, this may not seem to be an expression of power at all. But after a closer look, the very meaning of symbolic violence slowly appears. I will try to give some further examples to illustrate what I mean. During another lecture, one professor in the social sciences said, the applicant must “make the right kind of impression on the reviewers and avoid annoying them at all costs.” Another professor working in the natural sciences made it clear to the audience that a carelessly written application can make a reviewer feel highly offended: “It’s perceived as nonchalant and disrespectful.” What most of the professors were very keen to convey were the great demands placed on the person writing the application – the fact that he or she must put an enormous amount of hard work into the text in order to have

a chance of being funded. Or as one professor put it: “Don’t take any shortcuts. Be as meticulous as you can when you’re writing.” On the other hand, several of the professors maintained that reviewers often read carelessly and that applicants should never expect reviewers to make any great efforts. Another professor explained his view: “Make sure that the first sentences are attention catchers. Many proposals are not read. Have something in it that makes me surprised or excited, because we get bored reading all those proposals.” The senior professor urged the early-stage scholars in the audience to put all their time and energy into writing their proposals, making their best effort to convince the expert reviewer, but he made it clear that the professors themselves (in their role as “gatekeepers”) do not exactly have the same moral obligations. This expectation, namely the expectation not to expect the professors to read carefully or be interested in your proposal, is a good example of what Bourdieu would have seen as an expression of symbolic violence from a person in a dominant position in the academic field. There were other similar examples of this kind of symbolic violence during my ethnographic observations. For example, towards the end of her lecture, one professor in the social sciences explained that reviewers often feel stressed and tired, which means they sometimes read applications with a certain degree of reluctance. She also pointed out that reviewers seldom read “between the lines,” which is yet another reason why applicants must offer them something very special. The same professor had previously stated that use of a certain kind of jargon in an application could make a very bad impression. On that occasion, I witnessed what was probably the most serious criticism aimed at any of the professors I observed during the study. A member of the audience asked the following question: “But what exactly do you mean when you say jargon?” The audience member then followed up on her own question by claiming that she had definitely noticed use of jargon in the application the professor had just presented and praised to the skies. If that was not jargon, she wondered, then what was? The professor seemed nonplussed for a moment. But after collecting herself, she quickly dismissed the audience member’s arguments as an attempt to relativize the issue of jargon and instead provided examples of what it could be in an application: Use of “buzzwords,” i.e., fashionable words and phrases, should be avoided in grant applications. Reviewers immediately see through such superficialities, she stressed. But do reviewers always immediately see through jargon? What is or is not perceived as jargon can often be traced to differences in academic group affiliation and cognitive particularism. In this situation, the professor used her authority in the way she answered the audience member; symbolic violence was expressed in how she used language, in what Bourdieu calls the “symbolic efficacy of speech,” where asymmetrical power relations are manifested (Bourdieu 1991: 11). Now, did this situation present us with an example of resistance against the rules of the game? One could interpret the audience member’s reaction as an act of protest against the academic elite and the arbitrariness of academic judgment – an act that could reduce the degree of symbolic violence exercised in this particular situation. Nevertheless, the professor managed to make her case very clearly, and the rest of the audience remained silent.

Symbolic violence appeared in different forms. During one lecture, a female junior scholar around 35 years of age, asked the older male professor from the natural

sciences to reflect upon the tension between doing research or writing proposals; “If you teach, say, around 80 percent, then you can use the rest of your time on trying to write proposals. But if your proposal is rejected, then you spent your time in vain.” The professor replied: “I never experienced this problem as a young researcher... But the truth is that I worked really hard.” In this situation, one can see a particular mechanism of symbolic violence related to the question of work-life balance that may influence academic career advancement. When the senior professor mentions that he “worked really hard” in the illustrated example above, it may hit a nerve for some of the scholars in the audience who struggle to keep a reasonable work-life balance, pushing them into an even greater workload.

During the lectures, the existence of hierarchy and power was not always directly noticeable; the professors were typically relaxed and friendly. Nonetheless, symbolic differences between the established and the unestablished were discernable in the way in which the professors sometimes took the peer review system for granted or in the way they presented certain issues. During some of the lectures I observed, grant writing was presented as an almost natural part of academic life, as preparatory work and an inevitable part of the research process. One professor exercised a form of symbolic power when he told his audience that most of them would probably not get a grant from the Swedish Research Council or the European Research Council, demanding them instead to “be more flexible” and to submit their proposals to smaller funding agencies. Recognizing this fact, this professor legitimized a system of precariousness and promoted an entrepreneurial ethos of flexibility, in the same time drawing a symbolic line concerning what kind of expectations junior scholars actually should have from the funding system. To urge junior scholars to search for all sorts of available funding opportunities is indeed in line with the type of entrepreneurial scholar that the university organization wants to foster for the future in order to produce more research.

Pragmatic Acceptance and Handling Failure

One important example of symbolic violence was touched upon during several of the observed lectures. This advice concerns the pragmatic value of learning to understand and accept the uncertain and cynical conditions of research funding. And this is very much in accordance with what Bourdieu has stated in his book *Homo Academicus*, namely that: “according to a very common mechanism which persuades people...to love their fate, however mediocre it may be” (Bourdieu 1988: 167). There is an emotional dimension involved in the advice to accept the rules of the game that must be understood in relation to the full spectrum of symbolic violence in organizational life.

Perhaps the most interesting observation clearly demonstrates a justification of how difficult it can be to obtain grant money and what this may be based on. The 60-year-old professor in question began her lecture, in a rhetorical manner, by asking why she herself had failed to obtain funding on so many occasions. Perhaps it was because she had too little knowledge in the area – for a fun idea is almost never enough. Moreover, the applicant must be able to sell his or her research idea,

something the professor admitted having failed to do in several of her applications. This had often occurred because she had not had enough time to think through her application several times. However, despite her failures, she was not sad, and she added:

You always learn something anyway, even if you feel depressed for a while. Several of you have certainly experienced this. But don't be sad. You must be focused. When you fail, it often has to do with a lack of focus. You're going to be disappointed many times in academia.

Inherent in the above statement is a challenge to junior scholars to accept the situation and maintain their focus, which of course can be difficult if one is facing possible unemployment. In Bourdieusian terms, this is a way of making the junior scholar participate in the game, trying to convince them of the importance of conforming emotionally in order to achieve the goals of interest. This tells us something essential about the construction of the "academic habitus" and the social reproduction of valuation practices. Another professor brought up the problem of applicants transitioning from their doctoral work to something entirely different, stressing that it can be very difficult to get grant money for research in an area where one has not previously published. But, one audience member wondered, how can the applicant convince the reviewers that his or her idea is good anyway? The professor then answered half jokingly, half seriously: "My only advice is smartness. But it is hard to say what that is (laughs)." During several of the observed lectures, symbolic violence was often supported by a subtle form of cynicism; several of the suggestions seem paradoxical in nature given the fact that many junior scholars in Sweden struggle in vain to survive in academia.

Another aspect that is directly related to the peer review process itself, and that many of the professors brought up, is the "luck of the reviewer draw." When writing a grant application, the applicant must be aware that the people in the panel group cannot possibly be experts in all areas. For this reason, it may be highly counterproductive to write a complicated text, especially if the reviewers are feeling tired or stressed. Instead, the applicant should aim at writing for "a well-informed reader." This might seem to be a fair advice. On the other hand, as one professor pointed out, reviewers typically read much more carefully when applications are closer to their own area of expertise. If the applicant has very bad luck, he added, the reviewers may be neither knowledgeable about nor interested in the content of his or her application. Later in his lecture, the same professor pointed out that there is a measure of randomness in the review process that cannot be avoided: "In the end, it's humans making the decisions, and there will always be slightly different outcomes." Academic judgment is the crux of the matter in research evaluation; there is always an evaluator-specific idiosyncratic "noise" in the process regarding intellectual distance (Boudreau et al. 2016). Therefore, as one professor in natural sciences said during his lecture: "a reviewer close to your own field might not be as easily excited." He also added, "Don't be sure that someone who knows your field well will be more friendly."

The professor cited earlier, who talked about possible explanations for why she had failed to obtain funding on several occasions, later turned the discussion

around by stressing that she had actually received many grants during her 40 years as a researcher: “I’ve actually been quite lucky!” Toward the end of her lecture she asked the following question: “What is the worst case scenario?” And then proceeded to answer it: “Even a super-application can be rejected” – adding that the best approach is to “use the refusal to sharpen your argument and try again.” During the lectures, several of the professors brought up the notion that applicants should not take rejections personally, which would seem to imply a kind of acceptance of the power of circumstances. One professor started his lecture by telling the audience that he was going to talk in particular about “handling rejections.” And he underscored that: “You have to handle rejections; this is the key to being successful.” Moreover, he gave the following advice:

Be disappointed for five minutes. If you indulge too much, you are going to be grounded by your feelings. Move on. Relate the outcome of your proposal to the approval rate. If it is less than 12-15 percent approval, then luck becomes important. Wait a few days, and try to re-read your proposal with the eyes of the reviewers.

Taking the perspective of the reviewers may quite literally be difficult, given that reviewers are usually anonymous and may evaluate a given proposal very differently (see, e.g., Pier et al. 2018). Symbolic violence is tied to how the rules of the game are conveyed and legitimized within the organization in relation to the given circumstances. The socialization of a pragmatic belief and acceptance of an ambiguous funding regime certainly hide a power structure. Even the lifting of taboos, e.g., failures and disappointments, might in fact contribute to enforcing the legitimacy of the everyday struggles associated with getting research funding. As Bourdieu stated in *Homo Academicus*: “Academic power...consists in the capacity to influence on the one hand expectations – themselves based partly on a disposition to play the game and on the investment in the game” (Bourdieu 1988: 89).

Discussion and Conclusions

What, then, is the actual purpose of the lectures I have discussed in the present study? The first, rather trivial answer is of course that the lectures are the university’s way of trying to help young, unestablished researchers at the beginning of their career. But there are other purposes as well – purposes that, from a critical sociological perspective, would seem to be less trivial. In light of the fact that universities today are being guided by a market-like approach, in which academic entrepreneurship, hyper-competition and performance management have become so important, we can see these lectures from a different angle. Researchers are being encouraged to obtain external funding, sell their ideas, form strategic networks, and to be constantly productive in order to survive in academia.

In her book *How Economics Shapes Science*, economist Paula Stephan described how money and prestige are affecting today’s academic world:

Universities strive to be highly rated, basing their position in the reputational hierarchy on metrics such as faculty research productivity (measured by citation counts or research dollars), number of Nobel laureates, or members of national academies. Their pursuit of status is undoubtedly one reason that, despite complaints that they routinely lose money on research grants, universities continue to urge (some would say pressure) faculty to bring in the grants (Stephan 2012: 6)

At present, trying to obtain funding adds a real element of uncertainty that generally hits the early-stage scholars without a permanent position hardest. For this reason, the universities ask their professors to function as a kind of consultants who conveys knowledge about the conditions surrounding research funding. In brief, this involves a proactive operation that also conveys an academic ethos concerning what must be done in order for the system to function. However, through this staging of organizational power, we can also discern some mechanisms of symbolic violence that reproduces and upholds the new rules of research funding, thus extending these rules into the future. All of this occurs by means of a dramaturgical effect that is not particularly easy to reveal, not least because the lectures are understood as a welcome service in today's precarious situation. The administrators' and professors' intentions are friendly and based on a desire to inform and help younger generations of researchers. What is more, the entire lecture series is based on voluntary participation – no one is forced to attend.

All of this, however, is in good accordance with Bourdieu's definition of symbolic violence as something that is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity. Moreover, identifying symbolic violence in these lectures is based on an understanding of how this type of power is exerted precisely by virtue of being hidden behind the professors' pleasant manners and symbolic capital. All of this is essentially based on the fact that a great deal is taken for granted by everyone involved, namely to get research money and to be highly productive in order to make a successful academic career. Herein also lies an inescapable instrumental rationality. Things are simply the way they are; if you want to be a member of the academy, you will have to accept the rules of the game. This is a game that neoliberal policy has superimposed over scholarship, but "with substantial help from within the university walls" (Lorenz 2012: 627).

The professors that I observed in this study play an important role in the social reproduction of the entrepreneurial research culture and the norms of peer review; they take part in the internal organization of science by adding their own status and legitimacy to the rules of the game, and to the official policy of the university and the funding agencies, without really offering their audiences any substantial critiques against the current funding crisis. Perhaps the professors I observed in the present study feel obliged to give these lectures – perhaps they see doing so as their duty. Yet it is not that simple; surely they can refuse. Or is it perhaps the case that belief in the funding system is so strongly rooted in the professors that they have failed to reflect on their own role in the process? All of the invited professors must be well aware that academic life is a risky career path; several members of the audience will probably never get their own research grant, and some will suffer from

stress-related illness in their pursuit of a tenured position. Is it unfair to claim that the lectures even hide a trace of cynicism? Some of the professors appeared to be more comfortable with the new entrepreneurial climate in academia than others did. Still, they are all members of an academic elite that embodies several powerful positions at universities, funding agencies and in research committees. The ORF administrators would presumably not invite a professor who is known to be an “academic outsider” or who has a highly idiosyncratic critical attitude toward the current funding system, because that could jeopardize the entire performance. They would probably also not invite a professor with a small amount of “academic capital,” because that would not have the same legitimizing effect on the audience.

All the pieces of advice that I focused upon in this study can be interpreted as a direct or indirect exercise of symbolic violence with regard to the present funding regimes and the competitive research culture in Sweden. However, the magnitude of this subtle form of power depends, theoretically speaking, on the positions that the early-stage scholars possess in the academic field. What may be symbolically violent for some individuals in the audience may not necessarily be so for others, because academic careers are pursued in highly polarized contexts, including both beneficial early career positions offering more security and support (i.e., more economic and social capital) and low-status positions that generate experiences of marginalization and precariousness. To be sure, as anthropologist Cris Shore rightly pointed out, “Some academics clearly benefit from the new regimes...as they disrupt old hierarchies and provide new avenues for rapid promotion” (Shore 2008: 291).

Because the present study is based on ethnographic observations, clear-cut evidence concerning the actual scope and/or degree of symbolic violence cannot be presented. This brings me to my methodological reason for adopting a “weak” notion of habitus, namely that the present study focuses on direct observations of *how* the professors exert symbolic violence, not on the junior scholars’ subjective perceptions. My understanding is, however, that experienced professors who are invited to give lectures on research funding are equipped with the proper amount of cultural and symbolic capital in the academic field and have internalized an academic habitus sufficient to allow them to play the academic game successfully. When these senior professors speak to an audience of junior scholars, one must assume that it will affect how the junior scholars subsequently adapt to the game of research funding and peer review. In fact, the junior scholars are already aware of what is at stake, namely getting research grants in order to have an opportunity to do their own independent research. In fact, this is the reason they attend the lectures in the first place, which, in a way, makes them complicit. But if we are to better understand the long-term consequences of this form of socialization process in academia, interviewing junior scholars about how they perceive the funding system, in general, and these lectures, in particular, would be a fruitful complement to the present ethnographic study.

The mechanisms of symbolic violence inherent in the pieces of advice presented here may be understood in relation to how they could potentially marginalize certain types of junior scholars, while promoting those more willing to conform. But those junior scholars who more easily follow the rules of the game are also subject to symbolic violence. Being highly productive and pragmatic may have its own price.

My point is that both junior scholars who find it easy to conform and those who do not are part of the same situation, just in different ways. The situation pressures conformists and careerists to think even more about the game. But it also subtly pressures those who would deviate from the prevailing rules to conform in certain ways if they wish to make a career in academia. It is difficult to carve out local and institutional space for scholars who are willing to resist opportunism when faced with the harsh reality of research funding. Weber's analysis of academic life, which he presented in his celebrated lecture in 1917, is essentially still relevant, as it captures the tension between the researcher's scientific vocation, on the one hand, and an inevitable organizational selection process, on the other. Today, this selection process revolves around how well junior scholars adapt to the entrepreneurial and market-driven academic world.

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