A Critical Examination of Barriers to Open Access in UK Academia

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Introduction (1)

- Academy relies on dissemination of research to ensure quality assurance, propagation, prestige capital and engender discourse
  - Traditional publication model configured around *rivalrous* dissemination and rights transfer to industrialised publishing industry
  - Commodified dissemination: unbalanced and exploitive knowledge producer and distributor relationship
- Digital (*non-rivalrous*) dissemination, financial tensions and ideological pressures impacting
  - Publishing hegemony challenged over past two decades by emergent open access (OA) to publications
  - Additionally, shifts from normative modes of intellectual property enclosure

Introduction (2)

- UK policy, infrastructure and practice represents excellent target for cultural inquiry
    - Finch Group (2012) and governmental hearings (2013) reveal importance ascribed to publication
    - Gold publication improving, but only 1/5 publication output available via green OA repositories
- Despite "self-evident societal good" (BOAI, 2002) and academic community's reported willingness to engage
    - Collectively British academy perceived to lag behind comparators
    - Hence, research seeks to address perceived cultural inertia by UK academics towards publication openness
    - Incorporates critique of actors and power-relations, challenges orthodox perceptions around open publishing praxis
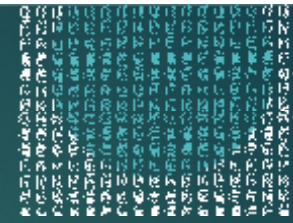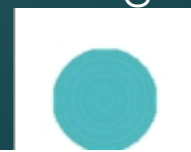
Introduction (3)

- Prior work often predicated on quantitative or a technological deterministic epistemology

    - Insufficient account of complex constructs and actor-relations configuring UK academy

    - Scant consideration of post-*Jarratt* (1985) impacts from neoliberal marketisation

- Subsequent UK governments continued capitalist free market policy ideology to university sector

    - Academy's praxis subverted from **Newmanian** institutional ideal to mass-market **neo-Taylorist** metric-driven education factories

    - Competitive productivity prioritised over authentic scholarship

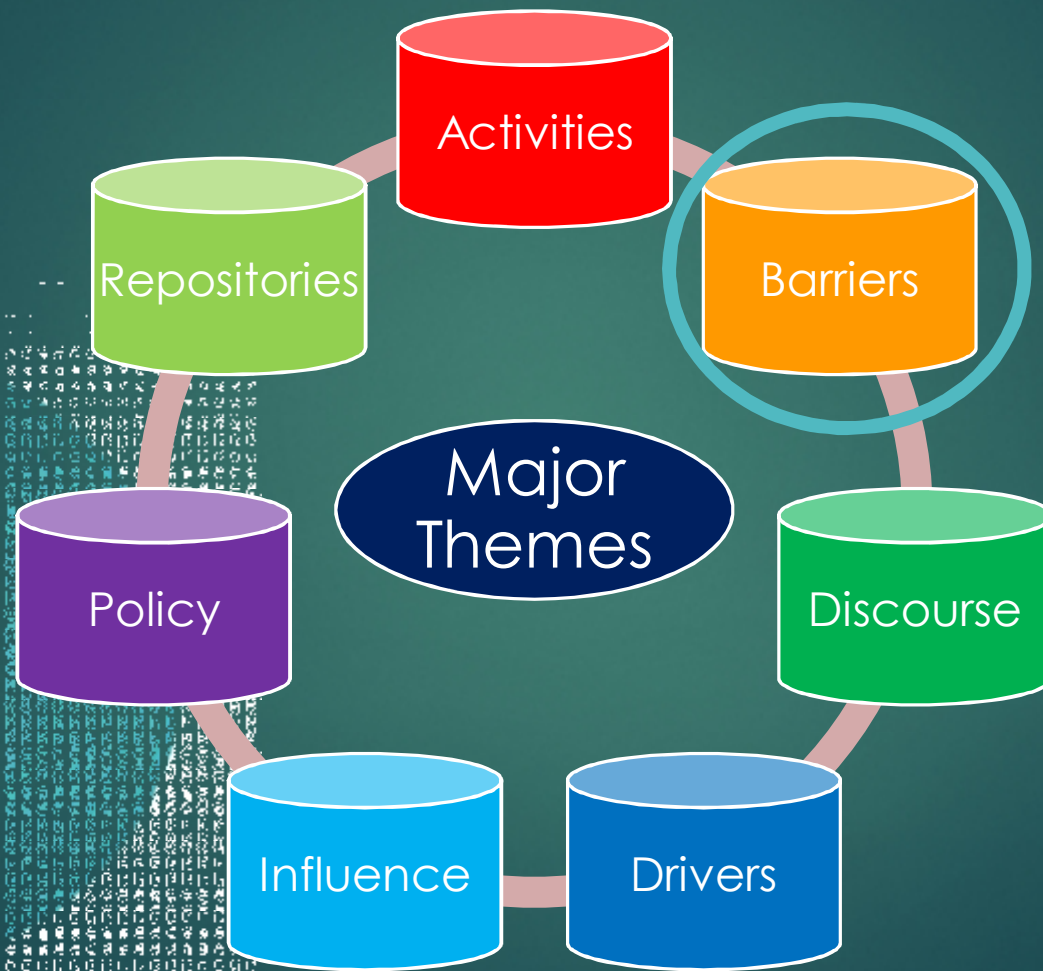   - Generates tensions around potentialities for embracing openness

Methods (1)

▶ Research draws on cultural, social and political economic theory

  ▶ Seeks to better understand academic behaviour and cultural praxis relating to openness in publication

  ▶ Aim to enhance OA cultural praxis through deeper understanding of the UK academy's publishing practice, power relationships and discourse

▶ Marx, Gramsci, Autonomism and Foucault provides suitable intellectual infrastructure

  ▶ Systematising and understanding extant tensions, power relationships and discourses

  ▶ Free culture scholars offers potential resonances with OA but reservations over liberal, positivist and technological deterministic epistemology

Methods (2)

81 universities interviewed
(125 approached)

▶ Establishing a baseline of the current discourse and praxis

　▶ Semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted with OA practitioners

　▶ Cultural natives provided insights into local praxis, permits generation of *authentic narrative*

▶ Four interview themes: (**activities**, **engagement**, **influences**, **obstacles**)

　▶ Qualitative content analysis used to construct a narrative representing current UK academy's OA praxis

　▶ Multi-faceted account of cultural conventions, behaviour and activities

　▶ Additionally: quotations used to present genuine insider-insight

# Results & Discussion (1)
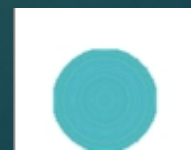
Results & Discussion (2)

Theme: Barriers to Adoption

Results & Discussion (3)

- Multiplicity of obstacles itself represents significant challenge
    - UK Academics **not heterogeneous monolithic** culture even within a institution or discipline
    - Advocacy strategies typically uniform within institutions
- Orthodox OA discourse typifies science positively, arts and humanities as reticent/resistant
    - Rationalised consequence of journal focus, lack robust OA monograph models and learned societies' influence etc.
    - Results challenge orthodoxy; exemplars of good or poor engagement demonstrated across *all* disciplines.
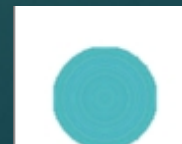
Conclusions (1)

- Interviews may prejudice practitioner working difficulties over academic
  - Perceived low academic OA awareness may represent role valorisation within competitive environment
  - Veracity of perceptions and power-relations needs further context
- UK academy unable to escape from pervasive influence of capital
  - Capital-research link (mandates) increasing institutional OA priority
  - Institutional financial health priority subsumes broader ideological goals
  - Creeping practitioner ideological shift from *idealism* to *pragmatism*

Conclusions (2)

▶ Perception while OA advances, normative cultural praxis not yet established

▶ Further interviews with scholars required to contextualise results

  ▶ Expose misconceptions between perceived obstacles by institutional actors

  ▶ Problematizing network of actor power-relations requires dialogues with publishers, learned societies and research funders

  ▶ Generate rationalised contextual picture of forces shaping UK academic response

▶ Perhaps, reframes research question: *how has OA succeed at all in such a neoliberal capitalist environment?*

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