

## **Isolation in Globalizing Academic Fields:**

### **A Collaborative Autoethnography of Early Career Researchers**

#### **ABSTRACT**

This study examines academic isolation – an involuntary perceived separation from the academic field to which one aspires to belong, associated with a perceived lack of agency in terms of one’s engagement with the field – as a key challenge for researchers in increasingly globalized academic careers. While prior research describes early career researchers’ isolation in their institutions, we theorize early career researchers’ isolation in their academic fields and reveal how they attempt to mitigate isolation to improve their career prospects. Using a collaborative autoethnographic approach, we generate and analyze a dataset focused on the experiences of ten early career researchers in a globalizing business academic field known as Consumer Culture Theory. We identify bricolage practices, polycentric governance practices, and integration mechanisms that work to enhance early career researchers’ perceptions of agency and consequently mitigate their academic isolation. Our findings extend discussions on isolation and its role in new academic careers. Early career researchers, in particular, can benefit from a deeper understanding of practices that can enable them to mitigate isolation and reclaim agency as they engage with global academic fields.

Academics in management and other disciplines are increasingly compelled to perform, collaborate, and compete for resources in global research and academic fields (Ryazanova & McNamara, 2016). The globalization of research fields has deeply affected academic careers (Billsberry, Cohen, Köhler, Stratton, & Taylor, 2016; Frost & Taylor 1996) with both positive (Baruch & Hall, 2004) and negative consequences for academics (Richardson & Zikic, 2007). One such negative consequence is the experience of isolation, which can undermine an individual's ability and/or willingness to create and sustain productive relationships in globalized academic fields (Richardson & Zikic, 2007). The purpose of this study is to examine academic careers in the context of global academic fields by offering a rich account of how academics experience isolation at the beginning of their careers and the ways in which they (and others) seek to mitigate isolation to improve their career prospects.

Isolation is generally understood as separation from a group or from group standards (Dean, 1961; Dean, 1968; Kalekin-Fishman & Langman, 2015). Although the terms isolation and loneliness are often used synonymously (Long, Seburn, Averill, & More, 2003), the term *loneliness* references a momentary emotion that individuals experience ("I feel lonely"), while the term *isolation* references a more enduring experience that emerges from continuous disconnection from a particular context ("I am isolated") (Gergen, 2009). Isolation is also conceptually distinct from *solitude*. Solitude is a liberating state of voluntary social disengagement, undertaken for the purpose of self-exploration, problem solving, or decision making (Gunnlangson, Sarath, Scott, & Bai, 2004; Koch, 1994; Storr, 1988), while isolation is an alienating state of involuntary social disconnection from one's communities (Akrivou, Bourantas, Mo, & Papalois, 2011; Dean, 1961; Dean, 1968; Gergen, 2009). Our interest lies in the ongoing, involuntary disconnectedness that contemporary, early-career researchers (ECRs) experience (Bristow, Robinson, & Ratle, 2017).

This understanding of isolation is rooted in a social constructionist understanding of social life (Gergen, 2009).

The systematic association of isolation with undesired alienation highlights a lack of agency: a perceived inability to reproduce or transform social conditions (Emirbeyer & Mische, 1998). Individuals feel isolated because they perceive themselves as lacking the ability to engage with and integrate into a community. As such, we conceptualize academic isolation as *an involuntary perceived separation from the academic field to which one aspires to belong, associated with a perceived lack of agency in terms of one's engagement with the field.*

Academic isolation can be problematic for scholars at any career stage as it may affect productivity, job satisfaction, and even career mobility (Ponjuan, Conley, & Trower, 2011; Smith & Calasanti, 2005). Further, it is particularly challenging to academics in the early stages of their careers, such as doctoral students, post-doctoral researchers, and pre-tenure faculty (Kirchmeyer, 2005). These early career researchers (ECRs) often require additional professional, social, and/or emotional support to integrate into local and global networks (Fleming, Goldman, Correlli, & Taylor, 2016). Furthermore, their long-term productivity largely depends on their ability to integrate into these communities during the early stages of their career (Ryazanova & McNamara, 2016), when they encounter the early rhythms of academic life (Frost & Taylor, 1996). Scholars may engage in many types of scholarship (Boyer, 1990) to integrate into their departments, institutions, and fields. We focus on ECRs' discovery efforts, which comprise research and knowledge generation, and are particularly important for increasing their integration into fields.

Academic isolation of ECRs should be of particular concern to administrators and academic institutions that house business schools. Business schools, in particular, actively seek to build diversified and globalized academic faculties, which are valued by global accrediting

organizations, such as EQUIS and AACSB<sup>1</sup> (Currie, Davies, & Ferlie, 2016), and which influence rankings of programs and institutions. The assumption underlying this type of faculty composition is that academics will be highly agentic in managing their careers (Hall & Harrington, 2004); business schools expect faculty will collaborate with other academics around the world, participate in global networks of field experts and activities beyond their local communities, and speak a global language. If faculty are unable to form or maintain these connections and fail to participate in these globally-structured activities, it reflects poorly on their academic institutions and has highly visible effects on the institution's status or standing in prominent global rankings (e.g., Financial Times), which influence global competition between business schools (Zammuto, 2008). Further, ECRs who feel disconnected from a field may be less interested in or capable of contributing to the field through publishing, reviewing, attending conferences, or service work.

Research on academic careers has examined subjective isolation at the departmental or institutional level, and has identified the negative effects of experiencing isolation (e.g., Fleming et al., 2016; Johnsrud & Sadao, 1998; Pilbeam & Denyer, 2009). Yet, questions remain about how globalized academic fields are implicated in isolation and career progression (e.g., Richardson & Zikic, 2007), and about the experience of being isolated from one's academic field.

The ways in which an individual might seek to mitigate isolation is also likely to be different at the department than at the field level. Prior research has emphasized the importance of proactive behavior in combating isolation and fostering collaboration (e.g. Herzog, 1983; Kemelgor & Etzkowitz, 2001; O'Meara & Stromquist, 2015; Pilbeam & Denyer, 2009). However, most of the proposed solutions are situated at the individual and organizational levels,

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<sup>1</sup> EFMD Quality Improvement System (EQUIS) and the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) are prominent international organizations that provide business schools with quality assessment, improvement, and accreditation.

rather than the field level. Thus, there is a gap in our understanding of the role of individual and collaborative, proactive behavior in shaping the experience of isolation in globalizing fields.

To address these gaps in the literature, we investigate the following research questions: in what ways do ECRs experience isolation in globalizing academic fields? And, how do ECRs and academic communities, themselves, work to integrate isolated scholars in the early stages of their careers? Employing a collaborative, autoethnographic approach, we answer these research questions using a data set that spans four years and accounts for the experiences of ten ECRs in a globalizing business academic field known as “Consumer Culture Theory” (CCT).

Our conceptualization of academic isolation is framed by recent research on career development that brings together sociology of science research, the new careers literature, and social capital research (e.g. Ryazanova & McNamara, 2016). We approach our research questions from the position that actors (i.e. academics) use available resources to pursue their objectives, such as reducing isolation, and that the governance of the field influences their ability to leverage these resources. In our findings, we develop a theoretical framework that combines ideas from the polycentric governance (Aligica & Tarko, 2012; Ostrom, 2010) and bricolage literatures (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Di Domenico, Haugh, & Tracey, 2010; Lévi-Strauss, 1967).

Our study offers two major theoretical contributions to research on academic careers in management and the rhythms of academic life (Frost & Taylor, 1996). First, it complements prior studies of isolation in academia, which have focused on the organizational level, by identifying dimensions of academic isolation overlooked in prior research. In doing so, our study deepens our understanding of early career stages by focusing on a widely experienced challenge faced by academics during the formative years between doctoral studies and tenure. Second, it extends knowledge about the ways in which isolation can be mitigated. Extant research suggests that isolation can be reduced through mentoring, networking, and individual initiatives (e.g. Chism,

Gosling, & Sorcinelli, 2010; de Janasz, Sullivan, Whiting, & Biech, 2003; Hinsdale, 2015). Our analytical lens, however, treats academic fields as polycentric and highlights multiple individual and collective initiatives undertaken by ECRs and other actors to mitigate isolation at the field level. Overall, our findings integrate and complement prior research on isolation in academic careers, and extend the range of actions available to academics who seek to mitigate isolation so as to improve their career prospects. We now turn to a review of literature on academic careers and isolation, and introduce our analytical lens.

## **CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND**

### **Academic Careers in Management & Isolation**

Management and higher education research has explored the importance of integration and socialization in developing successful academic careers (Ryazanova & McNamara, 2016). Few studies, however, have directly theorized the social construction of academic isolation and its consequences. Extant literature has explored isolation at the organizational level, which is what academics experience as a result of feeling disconnected from colleagues in the same department or institution. For example, Smith and Calasanti (2005) explore the ways in which people of different genders and ethnic minorities experience inequality at universities, and Fleming et al. (2016) demonstrate that individual employee characteristics and practices of specific departments within the larger university interact to affect different degrees of faculty integration. Although these studies have highlighted the significance of isolation in terms of the development of academic careers by underscoring its many negative effects, they do not capture the broader complexity of isolation in the context of new academic careers. In these careers, professional identity and progression are increasingly defined at the academic-field level (Richardson & Zikic, 2007) and, as such, experiences of isolation are deeply linked to academics' perceived inability to

connect with their fields. Presumably, field level isolation encompasses a broader and different set of experiences than institutional level isolation.

Two streams of research on academic careers highlight the complexity of academic isolation as experienced by ECRs in globalizing fields today. First, the relational study of academic isolation, or, its opposite, academic integration, focus on socialization, mentoring, and networking (Batistic & Tymon, 2017; Hinsdale, 2015; Oliver, 2001). Studies that adopt this relational approach to academic careers conceptualize isolation as a lack of relationships between academic actors (Gergen, 2009). This literature includes research on social capital, which conceptualizes academic isolation as the result of insufficient relational resources (Coleman, 1990; Lin & Erickson, 2008; Rodrigues, Guest, & Butler, 2017) and identifies the development of resourceful relationships as the main path toward integration. It also includes studies of academic networking, which have explored how academics can succeed by proactively developing social bonds (co-authorship, friendly reviewing, strategic advice, mutual support), or through working in career communities (Good & Cavanagh, 2017) or communities of practice (Holmlund, Tähtinen, & Ryan, 2016; Janson, Howard, & Schoenberger-Orgad, 2004; Ng & Pemberton, 2013; Tähtinen, Ryan, & Holmlund, 2016). Further, this literature includes research on mentoring (Hinsdale, 2015; Norrell & Ingoldsby, 1991; Yun & Sorcinelli 2007), which theorizes the ways in which individual academic mentors, universities, and organizations can support academics in their socialization and integration, especially at the early career stage.

The second stream of research focuses on knowledge communities and various types of capital, including intellectual capital (Vaara & Fay, 2011) and career capital (Silvennoinen, 2014). In these studies, isolation in academia is attributed to a lack of cultural and technical knowledge about the practice of academic research, including research skills, discipline-specific knowledge, and professional norms (Eraut, 1994; Lam, 2007; McCormack & West, 2007; Murakami-

Ramalho, Militello, & Piert, 2011). Building on this body of career literature, we aggregate studies of path dependency that theorize how the socialization process - largely ascribed to doctoral education and early publishing experiences - shapes academics' careers and mobility. According to this literature, strategically managing one's mobility across multiple institutions increases diversity of experiences, enhances professional knowledge and skills, creates role models, and broadens perspectives, which, in turn, enables academics to reach their full career potential. In sum, our study theorizes isolation as a field level problem that originates from a lack of perceived agency in terms of participation in a globalizing field, and we generate insights into the relationship between academic isolation, the structure of academic fields, and individuals' efforts to mitigate isolation.

### **Polycentric Governance & Bricolage**

Theories of governance and bricolage provide a useful analytical lens for studying academic isolation because they foreground the two main social origins of isolation: systemic features of social contexts, and the actor's position in these social contexts (Parigi & Henson, 2014). By combining these perspectives, our approach accounts for scholars' individual and collective agency in the institutional context. First, isolation can be the product of systemic features of the social context. For example, features of Western societies - such as secularization, capitalism, mass society, and urbanism - foster individualism (Parigi & Henson, 2014). This generates the widespread belief that individuals are "bounded beings" (p.5) in a state of "fundamental isolation" (p. 6), and makes experiences of isolation pervasive (Gergen, 2009). Academia is a professional environment that is particularly conducive to isolation because it emphasizes individual over collective performance (Gergen, 2009).

Governance theory attends to institutional systems of coordination and how these allow for the mitigation or resolution of collective social problems (Lynn, Heinrich, & Hill, 2001).



Monocentric governance systems are authoritarian systems of social coordination in which all rules are made by actors at the center (Ostrom, 1972). Polycentric governance systems, in contrast, are participatory systems of social control in which multiple independent actors mutually order their relationships with one another under a general system of rules (Ostrom, 1972). These systems promote diversity as an essential attribute of good social systems, decentralize power in multiple self-directing local, social-control centers, and nest social-control centers horizontally and vertically into an overarching system (Aligica & Tarko, 2012; McGinnis & Ostrom, 1996).

Polycentric governance systems are particularly conducive to developing actors' sense of agency in the system (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) because they allow for room to maneuver (Neef, 2009) and attribute "substantial discretion or freedom to individuals" (Ostrom, 1972: 5). Systematic mitigation of ECRs' isolation could, therefore, entail actions that foster polycentric governance systems, like promoting diversity of research practices in the field, empowering local research centers to help researchers meet their own needs, or facilitating the coordination of the various research centers.

Isolation may also be the product of an individual's position in a social context. For example, social network studies have shown that isolation is disproportionately present at the periphery of social networks because individuals in peripheral positions feel unable to interact with the group in ways they desire (Cacioppo, Fowler, & Christakis, 2009). In academia, ECRs may be more prone to feeling isolated if they do not perceive themselves as being able to interact with individuals in the field's core (Fleming et al., 2016).

Second, individuals on the periphery may engage in bricolage to mitigate their isolation, and aim to take control of their position and achieve inclusion in the field (Gersick et al., 2000). Bricolage refers to the way in which individuals improvise using available resources to work around the constraints imposed by their position and change the boundaries of what is possible

(Baker & Nelson, 2005; Cleaver & De Koning, 2015; Desa, 2012; Di Domenico, Haugh, & Tracey, 2010). Bricolage can be an individual or a collective endeavor (Duymedjian & Rüling, 2010), whereby bricoleurs creatively combine different kinds of resources, such as intellectual resources or knowledge (Lévi-Strauss, 1967), social capital embedded in social networks (Baker, Miner, & Eesley, 2003), self-presentation skills (Hebdige, 1979; Schau & Gilly, 2003), or socio-material resources (Ciborra, 2002; Johri, 2011).

Bricolage enhances perceived agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998), as the iterative process of trial and error allows actors to retain their orientation while adjusting their behavior to current conditions, and the creative reassembling of resources enhances their perceived ability to find solutions to problems, and opens up new future possibilities (Duymedjian & Rüling, 2010). As such, researchers that rely on bricolage practices begin to believe that they can overcome the constraints associated with their peripheral positions in the community, allowing them to better integrate into their academic fields.

## **METHODOLOGY**

We engaged in collaborative autoethnography (CAE) to examine how ECRs experience and seek to mitigate academic isolation. CAE is a qualitative research method in which “two or more researchers pool their autobiographical materials related to an agreed-upon topic or social phenomenon and analyze and interpret the meanings of their personal experiences within their sociocultural contexts” (Chang, Longman, & Franco, 2014: 376). By allowing researchers to explore the self in the presence of others, CAE enables scholars to gain a collective understanding of their shared experiences (Ngunjiri, Hernandez, & Chang, 2010).

CAE is a methodological variation of autoethnography (AE), which allows the researcher to use his or her own autobiographical data as a window through which to view a social

phenomenon (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2013). AE is a post-modern epistemological method that emerged in the mid-1980s in response to the crisis of representation and legitimation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) that sparked the fundamental questioning of the ways in which research accounts were constructed and led to the recommendation that greater emphasis be placed on the ways in which the ethnographer interacts with the culture being researched (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2008; Holt, 2003). AE was developed in the context of a constructivist- interpretivist paradigm that emphasizes reflexivity and recognizes the potential of the research to facilitate transformation and emancipation of the participating individual and his or her other social relations (Starr, 2010). The method thus acknowledges and accommodates the researcher's subjectivity (Le Roux, 2016).

Despite its growing popularity, AE is, at times, received with reservation (Ploder & Stadlbauer, 2016) and critiqued as “self-indulgent, narcissistic, introspective, and individualized” (Wall, 2006: 155). CAE provides a response to this critique, as it encompasses multivocality and intersubjectivity, owing to the multiple perspectives and experiences furnished by multiple auto-ethnographers (Hernandez, Chang, & Ngunjiri, 2017). CAE has been used to study various aspects of scholarly careers including career changes (Barrett & Brown, 2014; Humphreys, 2005); academic identity (Devnew, Austin, Le Ber, LaValley, & Elbert, 2017; Learmonth & Humphreys, 2012); immigrant scholars' navigation of the US Academy (Hernandez, Ngunjiri, & Chang, 2015; Ngunjiri et al., 2010); and mentoring experiences and leadership development in academia (Chang et al., 2014). More broadly, AE and CAE are well suited to situations in which the research requires access to intimate knowledge of sensitive issues (Ngunjiri et al., 2010), and in contexts in which individuals experience marginalization (Hinsdale, 2015) and “trauma or turning points that may led them to be marginalized or to feel powerless” (Lapadat, 2017: 598-599).

We consider CAE to be the appropriate methodological approach for conceptualizing our shared experiences of isolation as ECRs in the global CCT field for three reasons. First, isolation is perceived as a negative experience, hindering career paths (or progress), especially at early stages. As such, it may be considered by many to be a sensitive issue (Ngunjiri et al., 2010; Lapadat, 2017). Second, CAE allows for direct access to our various experiences of isolation by removing one layer of intermediation between lived experiences of research participants and researchers (Baker, Zhou, Pizzo, Du, & Funk, 2017; Humphreys, 2005; Rinehart, 2005). This enabled us to collectively reflect on, compare, and contrast our diverse experiences of academic isolation while at the same time leveraging multiple perspectives (Chang et al., 2013; Hoerber & Kerwin, 2013). Finally, and most importantly, by self-reflecting and digging deeper into our own isolation experiences over four years, CAE allowed us to systematically examine our own situations as isolated researchers. This made us increasingly aware that it is possible to promote change by gradually and consistently seeking to mitigate isolation in various ways (Lapadat, 2017). We now we outline the methodological details of our study following Köhler (2016).

### **Research Context and Participants**

Our research context is the field of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Coskuner-Balli, 2013, see <http://cctweb.org/about>), which is an international research community of senior and junior scholars who employ cultural approaches to understanding consumption phenomena. CCT is a nascent domain of the established fields of Marketing and Consumer Research, themselves sub-disciplines in Business and Management studies. Its distinctiveness lies in its closer affiliation to interpretivist paradigms and focus on socio-cultural concepts. CCT is a suitable context for studying ECRs' isolation because the paths to participation in this field are still being forged and legitimized, and these emergent properties

can offer insight into polycentric governance and bricolage practices to mitigate academic isolation in other similar fields.

The research team consists of ten ECRs who formed a CCT-focused research group called the “CCT Scrutinizers” in October, 2013. The group emerged in an unstructured way. Individuals who met at doctoral seminars, and others who participated in the membership-controlled CCT Facebook group, initiated a formal study group to learn about the CCT field, discuss current and classic CCT research papers, and expand knowledge of theory and methods in order to publish in high-quality marketing journals. Using digital communication tools and a rotating leadership schedule, the group regularly and systematically analyzes CCT research that has been published in prominent journals. Analysis typically concludes with a virtual meeting with papers’ authors, who are invited to share their experiences conducting and publishing the research.

The group has a formal but somewhat fluid membership, but does not have a formalized approach to membership application and approval. Group composition has remained the same since December, 2015. The members are geographically dispersed across five continents and work in institutional contexts that are distinguished by differing degrees of research intensity, resource access, acceptance of different paradigmatic traditions, and proximity to other CCT scholars. In addition, members have different mobility trajectories and have been socialized, during graduate school, in institutional environments that vary with regard to their orientation vis-à-vis the field. Table 1 provides profiles of the members. The relatively large number of participants involved in this CAE (groups of five or more are rare, according to Chang et al., 2013) translates into greater researcher diversity, which increases the richness of our findings.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

## **Data Collection**

We adopted a full, concurrent model of collaboration (Chang et al., 2013). All members were involved in all aspects of the research process in a concurrent and iterative way by individually writing self-reflective data (divergence step) before sharing and discussing this data with the group (convergence step) (Chang et al., 2013; Ngunjiri et al., 2010). As summarized in Table 2, this process unfolded in five phases, alternating between data generation and analysis, and lasted approximately four years (2014 to 2018).

[INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Academic isolation emerged as our research focus over the course of the CAE. The first round of Phase 3 allowed us to identify and organize data into three emergent themes: (1) dimensions of isolation; (2) practices undertaken by junior actors to mitigate isolation; and (3) practices enacted by established academics and governing institutions to assist ECRs in navigating their field. While this overall categorization scheme was clear, some categories lacked saturation and required further development and additional data. Thus, in accordance with Chang et al. (2013), who propose engaging in an iterative process of data collection and analysis, we wrote self-reflective essays with an emphasis on the diverse aspects of our experiences with isolation as they relate to our career.

The most direct information about group members' experienced isolation, actions, behavior, and feelings was acquired from self-reflective data, systematically generated on a yearly basis since the group was formed. Self-reflective data contain a high degree of interpretation of current and past experiences and sociocultural issues affecting these experiences (Chang et al., 2013). These data form our primary dataset of 107 single-spaced pages of text.

Our written self-reflective data were continuously enriched and expanded through individual and group observations, as well as group discussions via a digital communication platform (Zoom), a Google group, and email threads. These self-reflective data were made

accessible to all co-authors via Google docs to allow sufficient time to read, comment on, and inquire about certain aspects of the data during online group meetings. The latter, all video recorded, focused on sharing individual self-reflections about isolation (4 meetings); and drawing out different issues related to aspects of our experiences of isolation, as they revealed themselves during paper scrutiny cycles and conversations with authors (32 meetings). Twenty-eight additional, video-recorded online meetings, with an average duration of 90 minutes, were held with the specific aims of refining research questions, and analyzing and interpreting collected data. Further online exchanges included probing questions and summaries of the discussions that took place in the online meetings. The self-reflective data were complemented by data systematically extracted from discussions among members of the field through the Facebook page in which all team members also participate, and from a roundtable (2016) and presentation (2017) that our group organized and gave, respectively, to discuss academic isolation at the annual CCT international conference.

### **Data Analysis and Team Collaboration**

We conducted three rounds of data analysis in the context of the CAE. First, we organized ourselves into three sub-groups, each of which was assigned with the task of analyzing one type of data (self-reflective and observation data, roundtable and discussion data, and Facebook data). In each sub-group, we coded data individually, looking for emergent themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Ryan & Bernard, 2003; Saldaña, 2012), before meeting online to compare and contrast the emergent codes (Gibbs, 2007). After reaching agreement within each sub-group, we collectively shared our analysis and cross-examined identified categories across groups. This approach to data analysis was essentially inductive and allowed us to triangulate different sources of data.

The second round of analysis followed Phase 4 of data collection and consisted of an iterative analysis at the individual, sub-group, and collective levels. This analysis was more

structured and followed a codebook, which specified a definition, a brief description, and exemplar quotes for each code. We coded individually, then cross-examined our analysis during online meetings at the sub-group level, before eventually proceeding to the group-level. The cross-examination of an online document accessible to all researchers continued for one month, and was continued in four online meetings, until the group reached agreement on the label, description, and contents of each category. During each round of analysis, one member of the group acted as a project leader to coordinate activities, specify tasks, set instructions and deadlines, and guide the team in the analytical process. Our inductive approach was shaped by deductive endeavors at later stages; unanticipated theoretical concepts were discussed in relation to the codes uncovered in the first two rounds of analysis in order to generate theoretical arguments in a primarily inductive process (see Wilson & Chaddha, 2010).

The third round of analysis was conducted by one subgroup that coded the final set of individual introspections and revisited the entire dataset. We confronted the emerging theoretical framework with preliminary findings, and the data. This final round of analysis was designed to verify whether or not our interpretations of academic isolation and mitigation practices were consistent across the entire dataset.

### **Research Quality Assessment**

Researchers have proposed several criteria to assess the rigor of autoethnographies (Bochner, 2000; Dadds, 2008; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Holt, 2003; Le Roux, 2016; Schroeder, 2017). However, the diversity of autoethnographic orientations (evocative, analytic, and in-between), each with different goals, has led to an unwieldy number of proposed criteria (see Le Roux, 2016 for a compilation). Le Roux (2016) presents a list of five criteria that can be applied to both major genres of AE; we employed these to assess our project. The first, *subjectivity*, refers to the ability and willingness of the researcher to re-enact or re-tell a noteworthy or critical



personal relational or institutional experience – generally in search of self-understanding. We were “self-consciously” involved in the construction of the narratives constituting this research. Second, *self-reflexivity* points to “the researcher’s intense awareness of his or her role in and relationship to the research which is situated within a historical and cultural context” (Le Roux, 2016: 10). As evidence of our self-reflexivity, we were deeply involved in writing self-reflections each year. However, we were also continuously engaged in individual introspection and group discussions related to our situations as isolated ECRs and the changes we experienced and those around us experienced (i.e. in our socio-cultural academic and organizational context) across four years of team collaboration on this project.

Third, *resonance*, echoed in Dadds’ (2008) criteria of “empathetic validity,” is assessed when the research findings and write-up resonate with the experience of the reader so that he or she can identify, at some level, with what is being communicated. For Le Roux (2016: 10), it is a sense of commonality that arises between the researcher and the audience; an intertwining of lives. In this paper, we reflect upon our experiences as isolated ECRs, and on our efforts to mitigate isolation. We contend that our cultural, geographical, and career path diversity, as evidenced by the quotes we include, will resonate with other ECRs in various disciplines, around the world. In addition, evidence of this has surfaced during discussions with other field members during roundtables and seminar presentations.

Fourth, *credibility* comprises evidence of verisimilitude, and trustworthiness of our research. We emphasize transparency in the reporting of our *entire* research process, including the emergence of our research questions, the writing of our self-reflections, recording of our discussions, analysis and interpretation steps, as well as paper writing and coordination. Fifth, we achieve *contribution to the discipline* by means of conference presentations and dissemination of

our research on academic isolation. Our contribution addresses a gap in the literature and may be useful to individuals who themselves feel isolated, and to those who research the phenomenon.

Compared to AE, for which these evaluation criteria were developed, the collaborative aspect of CAE naturally lends itself to greater rigor by reducing narcissism and self-indulgence (Chang et al., 2013; Lapadat, 2017). Due to its dialogical process, CAE enables researchers to be both self-reflexive, as well as more rigorous in the meaning-making process, allowing them to probe deeper into individual narratives and co-construct meaning of unique and common experiences (Hernandez et al., 2017).

### **Managing Challenges of Collaborative Autoethnography**

Similar to other research methods, CAE poses challenges that may affect the research process and research quality. Chang et al. (2013) present a list of six challenges that researchers have to consider during all research phases. Some of these challenges are linked to the collaborative nature of the method, like the interdependence of research efforts, team coordination tasks, and logistical challenges. Other challenges are more serious given their direct impact on research quality. These challenges are related to auto-ethnographers' vulnerability, the other side of multivocality, and issues of relational ethics and confidentiality. A complete description of these challenges and how we navigated them during our research process is presented in Table 3.

[INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

### **FINDINGS**

We begin by describing the dimensions of academic isolation as experienced by the ECRs of our author team. We then describe bricolage practices that our ECRs employ to combat feelings of isolation, along with the mechanisms underpinning these practices that serve to enhance agency. Finally, we identify polycentric practices through which established scholars

engage to help mitigate ECRs' isolation and integration mechanisms that explain their capacity to enhance ECRs' agency vis-à-vis their own inclusion in the field.

### **Academic Isolation: A Multidimensional Concept**

We find that ECRs experience academic isolation along four different dimensions: geographic, cultural, relational, and technical. These dimensions reflect participants' perceived lack of agency in terms of integration into the field and can be experienced in ways that are concurrent and overlapping. In the online supplementary files (Table 4) we provide additional illustrative quotations for each dimension of academic isolation.

ECRs experience *geographic isolation* when they perceive themselves to be physically distant from the centers or established scholars in their field. It is evidenced by physical distance or by the perception that crossing a distance to connect with other members of the field is too difficult (Johansson & Śliwa, 2014), both of which implicate a perceived lack of agency. Geographically isolated actors feel that this isolation also diminishes their ability to identify current research standards in the field. For example, Matheus explains: “only those who are in the Southern hemisphere – in the world periphery – know how difficult it is to keep in touch with cutting edge research” (*Matheus, introspection, Phase 4*).

ECRs experience *cultural isolation* when they believe they are not acculturated into the field. Acculturation into a field requires socialization with a variety of agents who help shape the field's culture and transmit it to incoming members through norms, values, and shared codes and understandings (e.g. language and history). As such, entrant or peripheral actors can have the impression that their thoughts and behavior are inadequate, and this produces feelings of insecurity. The CCT field, similar to other globalized academic fields originating in the United States, embraces values pervasive in North American academia, including an emphasis on

individual assertiveness as the path to academic success. ECRs' awareness of this trait as a field norm does not necessarily imply knowing *how* to enact assertiveness. As Alex reflects: "a lot of the knowledge required to become a good CCT researcher is implicit and I should be extra careful about learning all the codes so I can succeed" (*Alex, introspection, Phase 4*). In doing so, he links career success to his ability to learn and employ the cultural codes of the field.

*Relational isolation* is the perception that one lacks familiarity, friendship, or formal and informal social acquaintance with core members of the field. Given the central role that professional relationships play in defining one's academic identity and making knowledge contributions to one's field (Gergen, 2009), relational isolation can be particularly detrimental to ECRs. It may also be experienced more intensely by those who identify as being, or appear to be, different from the core members of the field (c.f. Quinlan, 1999: 32). Relational isolation often manifests at academic gatherings such as conferences, where entrant actors feel like they cannot connect with others, including those in the inner circles with whom they would like to develop relationships. Posts on the CCT Facebook group page can trigger feelings of relational isolation for entrant actors who observe others sharing plans to meet at conferences, "inside jokes," and playful provocations. ECRs who perceive themselves to be relationally isolated can develop the belief that the field is hostile and they may be prone to disengage from it. Informants feel that relational isolation limits their progress and stalls career development: "I think that if I was surrounded by CCT-oriented colleagues [...] I would have been able to make progress much better than I'm doing" (*Alya, introspection, Phase 5*).

*Technical isolation* is experienced by ECRs who believe they lack the scholarly skills necessary to publish research and be recognized as impactful contributors to the field. This is evidenced in our data when Matheus reveals insecurity about his technical ability to effectively participate in group discussions: "sometimes I feel that my skills and academic background aren't

enough to contribute to the group or even to follow the group discussion” (*Matheus, introspection, Phase 4*). This dimension encompasses a perceived lack of field-specific knowledge, such as command of dominant theories, concepts, and methods. Introspective notes, collective discussions, and analyses of entrant actors’ discourses in the field indicate that many participants attribute their technical isolation to having attended a doctoral program in a field other than CCT, or to a lack of available mentors with field-relevant knowledge at their institutions.

The four different dimensions of isolation we identify are not mutually exclusive. ECRs experience them concurrently. For example, geographically isolated ECRs also often express feelings of technical isolation, noting that distance prevents them from attending important field-related events, and heightens their sense that their skills and scholarship are becoming outdated. They can also feel culturally isolated. For example, many non-native English speakers who do not live in English-speaking countries feel that their poor command of English prevents them from fully grasping the norms and culture of the field (Horn, 2017).

Generally, our findings suggest that the more dimensions of isolation ECRs experience, the more intense is their sense of being isolated. In addition, certain combinations seem to have a more profound negative impact on ECRs’ careers than others. For example, the intersection of cultural, relational, and technical isolation seems to produce intense feelings of being subject to symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1984), highlighted by corresponding feelings of intimidation, insecurity, and fear of judgment, resulting in alienation and detachment from the field, as Julia’s account illustrates:

“During my PhD I attended the [Association] Doctoral Seminar on Consumer Behaviour. It was a 4-day seminar led by various academics, most of them positivists and experimenters, apart from [one], who represented CCT. Until then, I wasn’t fully aware of the division between

the different ‘camps’ of consumer research... Since I was at the beginning of my PhD, I used the seminar as an opportunity to talk to the teaching faculty to test the waters with my research proposal. I will never forget the response of a very respected, leading German academic when I announced that I was planning to do qualitative research. With a very condescending look I was told ‘But Mrs. [Julia’s last name], you do realize that it’s almost impossible to publish this kind of research’ and advised me to pursue other methodological routes (experiments, surveys), if my goal was to stay in academia. I was perplexed. That’s when I first became aware of isolation, the full scope of which I was to experience later. What this academic was trying to tell me was that ‘if you go down that route, you are on your own’”(Julia, introspection, Phase 5).

In contrast, combinations of geographical isolation and technical or relational isolation are more frequently viewed as a circumstantial impediment to self-actualization as a professional, as Alex’s experience suggests:

“Being in the UK for the past four years, [...] I am isolated from the American CCT but it does not really matter to me as we have a lot of resources in the UK and Americans do come and visit sometimes. Of course it would be a different experience if I was working at [CCT-oriented institutions], but calling me geographically isolated would be far fetched I think. [...] I also sometimes do not know all the codes of North American academics (inside jokes, knowledge of some universities, etc). But since I do not feel very isolated culturally, I generally see it as an opportunity to have a conversation and connect with people. Generally, I would perceive any inter-personal difference which is not a major source of relational conflict to be an opportunity to connect” (Alex, introspection, Phase 4).

In sum, we find that isolation is a multidimensional concept that impacts the careers of ECRs in globalizing academic fields in various ways. In the next section, we examine the practices in which actors engage to enhance perceived agency and combat isolation in their field.

## **Mitigating ECRs' Academic Isolation with Bricolage Practices**

We find that ECRs employ a variety of bricolage practices to reduce their isolation in the field. We structure our findings according to these types of bricolage work: intellectual, network, communicative, and socio-material. Illustrative quotations are available in online supplementary files (Table 5). We distinguish these types of bricolage, the practices they involve, and how they mitigate isolation in the context of three agency-enhancing mechanisms. Figure 1 summarizes our findings on reducing ECR isolation and guides our presentation of the findings.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

### ***Intellectual Bricolage Practices***

Intellectual bricolage practices involve "disassembling and reassembling past experiences in ways that enable them [the bricoleurs] to understand and respond to new situations" (Hargadon, 2002: 43). Many ECRs feel they are solely responsible for their academic and professional development. Accordingly, they overcome practical limitations by working diligently to access resources available in the CCT field, and develop their own resources using three practices.

Intellectual bricolage practices include (1) *optimizing resources*, whereby ECRs take personal charge of acquiring and maintaining resources that are available in the field (e.g. workshops, conferences, books). This is consistent with the idea from academic career management that "academics seem to be aware of a clear boundary between what they 'must' do (for example, sharing knowledge in the form of presenting a paper at a conference) and what they do 'over and above' what is required (such as sharing knowledge informally in conversations with colleagues during conference breaks)" (Antal & Richebé, 2009: 86). Practices also include: (2) *mapping external resources*, which entails identifying potential research areas, collaborators, and other resources from beyond the field, and (3) *assembling and mobilizing collective resources*, where optimizing and mapping resources are enacted collectively, instead of individually. This

third practice is similar to those undertaken in communities of practice within doctoral programs (Janson et al., 2004), as well as departments and universities (Holmlund et al., 2016; Jackson, 2004; Tähtinen et al., 2016). The distinction is that resources are spread across the field, thereby requiring more coordination regarding who may access these resources, and how and when they may be accessed collectively.

The career literature recognizes that ECRs can share their experiences and cross-fertilize knowledge creation by assembling and combining pre-existing resources, such as prior knowledge or acquired expertise about theories and specific methodologies, and engage in individual practices, such as writing, publishing, and time management. For example, “traveling to conferences and workshops has traditionally offered the time and space not just for formal knowledge sharing but also for deep and wide-ranging conversations outside the official program” (Antal & Richebé, 2009: 92). However, we observe that this knowledge affords ECRs more than just the opportunity to share. It can increase their capacity to deliberate and autonomously execute plans to further integrate their careers into their desired field (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998), thereby mitigating isolation.

By assembling resources immediately at hand (e.g. group members’ knowledge, or experience) with resources from external stakeholders (e.g. senior scholars, an expert in a particular method, etc.) whose contributions they solicit, ECRs can expand their pool of intellectual resources. In our study, ECRs do so, for instance, by inviting authors to online meetings and asking them about details related to their approach to research, paper writing, and publishing. Alex, for example, explains “when I face a challenge and I try to overcome it by being creative with my knowledge or reaching out to my social network for support... it enables me to map what I need to do to become who I want to be” (*Alex, introspection, Phase 5*). The acquisition and optimization of knowledge resources affords ECRs more autonomy and



productivity by increasing their capacity to execute individual plans to further integrate into the field. For example, by acquiring knowledge through workshops, ECRs gain objective knowledge about the fields' norms, and emerging theories, thereby enhancing ECRs' ability to interact with potential co-authors and submit papers more aligned with the norms of the CCT field. When performed collectively, perceived agency is even greater, revealing new possibilities for building productive careers in the CCT field. For additional examples of how this mechanism operates, see Table 6 in online supplementary files.

### ***Network Bricolage Practices***

Network bricolage refers to the practice of tinkering by combining network resources, such as social capital, that are at hand (Vanevenhoven, Winkel, Malewicki, Dougan, & Bronson, 2011: 54). In our findings, network bricolage manifests in the practice (4) *extending engagement within the field*, when ECRs individually increase their agency by growing their network and seeking collaboration, developing research partnerships, and seeking mentorship beyond their respective institutions. Research on management careers has noted that successful laureates move “across a variety of overlapping intellectual and social networks, internalizing aspects of these networks and, at the same time, leaving indelible marks on the institutions and people they encountered” (Ford, Duncan, Bedeian, & Ginter, 2006: 408). Our data reveal similar patterns and suggest that ECRs may perceive themselves as less relationally isolated when they collaborate with more academics in the field. Individual practices also include: (5) *establishing cross-field conversations*, whereby ECRs adapt their vocabulary and research projects to become more interdisciplinary, and (6) *building community*, whereby ECRs collectively foster sociality by developing common research and learning spaces (Haynes et al., 2014).

Studies of ECRs have shown that “the networker narrative involves accounts of [ECRs] seeking out others, either internally or externally and often secretly or quietly, for one-to-one peer

or mentoring support” (Bristow, Robinson, & Ratle, 2017: 1196). In openly seeking to build peer-based communities at the field level, ECRs counteract these tendencies to seek others secretly, push the limitations imposed by institutional contexts (e.g. myopic doctoral programs), and create opportunities for enhancing understanding of the cultural norms required to successfully navigate the CCT field. In other words, by seeking out others, ECRs promote their "inner witness" (Oliver, 2001); through dialogic interaction, they find a bridge away from their “victimized subjectivity” (Oliver, 2001) and can become more agentic. Further, community-building practices produce a continuous space for learning, evolving, and identity work (Haynes et al., 2014; O’Meara & Stromquist, 2015). In the CCT Scrutinizers group, members regularly and frequently interact in a social learning environment. This enables them to mitigate geographic isolation, partake in a research culture that was initially absent or perceived as being insufficient in each participant’s local institutional context, and to strengthen bonds with the research field. As ECRs, they continuously engage in community-building practices of self-expression, idea sharing, and collaborative production. And, as they socialize into the field and its dominant norms and practices, ECRs can achieve greater agency by clarifying appropriate paths forward, understanding how to maneuver appropriately, and more selectively attending to information and relationships that can help them achieve their integration goals.

### ***Communication Bricolage Practices***

Communication bricolage refers to the creative use of communicative resources to gain an advantage in a field. It enables ECRs to display their capacities to others, thereby mitigating isolation by enhancing perceived agency in the field. Individually, ECRs engage in practices of (7) *increasing personal visibility within the field* to highlight their own research production and academic engagement within their field. In doing so, they seek to construct their field reputation, which is tied to positive career outcomes (Gersick et al., 2000: 1039). For example, group

members increased personal visibility primarily by targeting journals of high visibility in the CCT field and becoming regular participants in field events organized by established academics.

ECRs also display this capacity by working on (8) *broadening exposure to other fields* by reaching more diverse audiences, as they participate in general conferences and other events that extend beyond the CCT field. Rather than perceiving themselves as entrant actors with insufficient command of the CCT culture and technical skills, some of the ECRs participating in this study have developed knowledge, skills, and relationships in complementary fields and have presented themselves as interdisciplinary experts – a valued status in the interdisciplinary field of CCT. By using practices that promote visibility and exposure, ECRs can reduce perceived isolation by making themselves more attractive as collaborators on projects. For example, Gabriela reflects: “Two years ago I attended [anthropology conference], having sent a paper co-authored with Jason. It was his initiative to do so – I hadn’t heard about the conference before. At the conference, we met a prominent scholar in business anthropology who is friends with well-positioned CCT scholars. She recently accepted our invitation to be the discussant in a special session proposal we submitted for the CCT conference” (*Gabriela, introspection, Phase 5*).

ECRs have also developed collective communication bricolage practices. Collectively, ECRs show their capacity by (9) *demonstrating collective action*. The goals of this practice are to publicize and legitimize the CCT Scrutinizers group within the CCT field. The group does this by communicating broadly with the field as a collective. Participants have, for instance, initiated discussions on the CCT Facebook group page and organized roundtables at CCT conferences around the theme of ECR isolation, inviting established academics in the field to participate. Moreover, the group invites senior scholars to online meetings, in which participants succinctly present themselves and their research projects. This work aims to increase collective exposure to established academics in the CCT field, thereby crafting a narrative that ECRs should be

acknowledged as productive members of the field and invited to participate in field-related activities (e.g. journal reviewing, conference organizing, etc.). This practice may also benefit other scholars who perceive themselves to be isolated by motivating them to engage in resource sharing and community building. As the CCT Scrutinizers group matures as an influential set of actors in the CCT field, they aim to publish collectively, as a group, demonstrating action and capacity to gatekeepers and established actors. Established actors tend to be close or have access to the centers of power and decision making in their fields and, as such, can help increase the profile of ECRs and support the evolution of their careers in the field. See table 5 in online supplementary files for additional examples of displaying visibility through communication bricolage practices.

### ***Socio-Material Bricolage Practices***

Socio-material bricolage “encapsulates the idea that practices emerge through the ad hoc use of available artifacts by people often in conjunction with others and while participating in situated activities” (Johri, 2011: 962). This final bricolage practice, (10) *engaging in socio-material bricolage*, operates both at the individual and collective levels, across all three mechanisms. Members are located on five continents and travel frequently. Thus, the group employs a variety of technological tools to overcome coordination problems associated with multiple time zones and to improve overall functionality. The selection and use of communication technologies requires making do with available resources, improvisation, and continuous adjustments (Johri, 2011).

We find that this form of bricolage is an enabling practice (see Figure 1), and one that influences the effectiveness of other practices in reducing isolation. In employing individual and collective practices aimed at reducing isolation, group participants are always on the lookout for technological solutions to enhance interaction and the functioning of the group. The choices of

technologies and their uses within the group have been driven more by problem-solving and trial and error method than by strategic thinking. For example, when the group formed, participants initiated discussion cycles by exchanging emails through a dedicated Google-group. However, it became impractical to use email for lengthy and nuanced discussion with multiple individuals. To address this problem, members investigated video-conferencing platforms. After unsatisfactory trials with Skype and Oovoo, the group moved Zoom, which yielded more stable connections, and better quality audio and video. This made it possible to efficiently host meetings and host guests. Furthermore, the migration from email-based interaction to video conferencing helped strengthen social bonds between group members and facilitated creative discussions. The ability to save video recordings of meetings in a shared online file (using Dropbox) helped to increase resource availability, both for members who might have missed a meeting, and for future use by the group. As such, this bricolage practice played an important role in helping ECRs to reduce their feelings of isolation at the field level. Together, these ten practices describe the ways in which ECRs in our study increase their perceived agency and work to mitigate their academic isolation. However, we find that established actors also play an important role.

### **Polycentric Governance Practices of Established Actors**

In our analysis, we reflected upon the practices that established academics (those who have been granted tenure and hold associate professor, senior lecturer, reader, or full professor positions) use within governing institutions to support ECR integration into the field. Supporting data are presented in online supplementary files (Table 7). We find that established academics engage in three practices that foster different aspects of a field's polycentric governance: encouraging institutional diversity, nurturing polyvocality, and supporting multiple academic roles. These practices mitigate academic isolation through three key agency-enhancing mechanisms. The first mechanism operates as the practices of established scholars and governing

institutions *create points of access to resources* (Dickmann & Harris, 2005) in the field, whether in the form of social, intellectual, or career capital. Increasing social capital can create the expectation that social relationships that are forged in the present will remain valuable in the future when ECRs attend conferences or require feedback on projects. Enhanced intellectual capital can help foster the belief that ECRs can become more sophisticated researchers, with better-integrated careers in the field. Increased career capital can enable ECRs to develop career-relevant competencies associated with knowing the how, whom, and why of their global career paths in their fields (Dickmann & Harris, 2005).

Second, the practices of established scholars *institutionalize an ethos of acceptance*, in which new practices and ideas are treated with more openness. This creates a more welcoming environment for ECRs in which they can work towards further integration into the field, without fear of censure, and can access support. Third, the practices of established scholars can promote and *support a range of acceptable identities* within the academic field. In line with the spirit of polycentric governance, this increases the likelihood that people will find their own niche within the field, mitigating isolation. It also affords ECRs more opportunities to experiment with enacting different identities or paths (e.g. post-doc), creating the sense that they are important authors of their own success in the field. And it suggests that integration is a gradual journey, involving small manageable leaps from one role to the next (conference presenter, co-author, reviewer, track chair, award winner, guest editor) rather than a leap from the periphery to core.

These three agency-enhancing mechanisms explain how established academics' polycentric governance practices help ECRs combat their perceived isolation. Each practice operates by means of several (or all) of these mechanisms to mitigate isolation in a particular way. Next, we elaborate these polycentric governance practices and explain how they serve to reduce

isolation via the different agency-enhancing mechanisms. Supporting data is presented in online supplementary files (Table 8).

### ***Encouraging Institutional Diversity***

We observe that established academics support the existence of different institutions that meet the needs of, bring together, and legitimize a variety of academics from around the globe. They do so, for instance, by offering seminars and workshops to ECRs of diverse backgrounds and welcoming them as visiting scholars. Some gatherings have been developed with the specific goal of training and acculturating doctoral students and ECRs, and introducing them to established CCT scholars. Examples of these are regular theory and methods workshops hosted by institutions and actors that are central in the field, and the annual CCT conference, hosted in the United States and Europe, which has the aim of helping doctoral students integrate into in the field. This practice promotes dissemination of knowledge and field norms, and the creation of relationships across the field, thereby facilitating the emergence of new centers and the development of lasting relationships in the polycentric field.

Diversity manifests in various practices of academic relationships. For instance, diversity can take the shape of a more open mentor-mentee relationship; one that fully embraces the polycentric nature of the academic field. Mentorship is embedded within a context that is full of social and power imbalances (Hinsdale, 2015), so mentoring done with diversity in mind gets us closer to what Oliver (2001) calls witnessing, a political call to move beyond domination to create egalitarian relationships within asymmetrical power contexts. When mentors stimulate ECRs to explore the diversity of epistemologies, backgrounds, and roles, giving mentees the opportunity to consider other ways of thinking and being, they enhance ECR's agency and prepare them to thrive in the polycentric field. This practice creates opportunities to develop social and career capital by fostering the organization of workshops dedicated to training and networking and

getting to know the "explicit knowledge, implicit experiences, soft skills and technical expertise" (Dickman & Harris, 2005: 400) required to succeed in the career. It supports an ethos of acceptance by prioritizing aid to emerging scholars and centers, and it fosters plural identities by creating a variety of roles that ECRs can occupy, like those that represent the voices of different geographic regions. All of these practices systematically promote ECRs' agency.

### ***Nurturing Polyvocality***

Established academics can nurture a culture of polyvocality in the field by acknowledging and legitimizing different approaches to research, thereby recognizing and promoting diversity. Some examples we observed involve recognizing alternative forms of representation (e.g. poetry, film, visual arts) at CCT conferences, publishing diversity-receptive articles and editorials (e.g. Thompson, Arnould, & Giesler, 2013), and developing training and mentoring events related to different theories and methods. Established academics also nurture polyvocality by publicly discussing governance issues, such as norms and directions of the field (e.g. via the CCT Facebook group) to make plain the coexistence of different perspectives in the field, rather than simply discussing these issues in private, exclusively among core actors (e.g. the CCT consortium assembly). This polyvocal approach to governance enhances ECR agency as it can make the field more accepting and welcoming to entrant actors.

### ***Supporting Multiple Academic Roles***

Established academics and governing institutions are responsible for creating institutional roles that can grant legitimacy to those who fill them, such as conference organizer, editorial review board member, post-doc, or award winner. One such role is that of co-author, created when established academics collaborate with ECRs on research projects. Examples we identify from interactions with core members of the CCT field include involving early career scholars in conference or journal reviewing (such as the reviewer mentorship program of the *Journal of*



*Consumer Research*), opening up post-doc positions exclusively to young CCT researchers, and creating CCT-based award competitions. Recruiting ECRs to such roles is a form of seeding, whereby core actors foster the emergence of new centers and ensure that these integrate with existing centers. By generating opportunities to acquire field-specific resources and allowing ECRs to understand the inner workings and governmental logics of their field, this practice serves to enhance ECRs' agency, legitimize career paths, and promote a culture of acceptance.

## **DISCUSSION**

Our research contributes to the literature on academic careers, and, in particular, to that focused on the early rhythms of academic life (Frost & Taylor, 1996; Laudel & Gläser, 2008), which have an enormous impact on research productivity and a scholar's career path (Williamson & Cable, 2003). Prior research has revealed that ECRs are typically deficient in career resources, such as social capital (Rodrigues et al., 2017), intellectual capital (Vaara & Fay, 2011), and career capital (Silvennoinen, 2014). This literature suggests that ECR career development involves the accumulation, alone or with the help of others, of resources through practices such as networking, mentoring, coaching, participating in communities of practice, continuous training, as well as the careful management of mobility and the development of emotional skills (see Ryazanova & McNamara, 2016 for a recent review of this literature). Experiences of isolation have been acknowledged within this literature, but have remained undertheorized; isolation is often a byproduct of another focal variable, such as individual skills (Makarius & Larson, 2017) or the values contained within networks (Cooper & Kurland, 2002).

Isolation is of increasing importance as contemporary academic careers have globalized. New concepts of careers - including that of protean and boundaryless careers (Baruch, 2004) - have emerged to account for these changes and for the corresponding increase in individual

responsibility for career development (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Our research focuses on academic isolation as a perceived lack of agency that hinders success in this increasingly globalized environment. We argue that the concept of academic isolation warrants attention, as it expands prior conceptualizations of isolation by foregrounding the relationship between individuals and the field.

Our research makes two contributions to the literature. First, we empirically develop isolation and its role in globalizing academic careers. By expanding the concept of isolation from the organizational level to the academic field level, we offer insights into the challenges faced by researchers entering into these fields. ECRs, in particular, can benefit from this knowledge as their obstacles include resource deficiency and disconnectedness from the field. Second, our findings extend knowledge about potential career advancement practices by directly discussing ways in which isolation can be mitigated. Our analytical lens illuminates polycentric governance and bricolage practices as efforts that can mitigate isolation, and highlights multiple individual and collective initiatives undertaken by ECRs and other actors to mitigate isolation at the field level. As such, it expands on the proactive behavior perspective (Ryazanova & McNamara, 2016) and focuses on agentic behavior as a key driver of protean and boundaryless careers (Baruch, 2004).

Our research complements extant work (Smith & Calasanti, 2005; Pilbeam & Denyer, 2009) by exploring isolation in academic fields and demonstrating that academic isolation is a more complex experience than has been captured in prior research, as academics who seem well-integrated may be still isolated in some ways (e.g. geographic, relational, etc.). In addition, the multi-dimensional nature of isolation explains why addressing field level isolation can be particularly challenging: isolation that spans across several dimensions can exacerbate researchers' perceived lack of agency and diminish their capacity to build a career that is

integrated in their globalized academic field.

Previous research has discussed the role of socialization and proactive behavior in driving productivity in business schools (Mitchell, 2007; Ryazanova & McNamara, 2016). The focus of these studies, however, has been the impact of early socialization variables on future careers. For example, the prestige of doctoral programs (Bedeian, Cavazos, Hunt, & Jauch, 2010) and intellectual genogram (Dyer & McKean, 2016) are used as predictors of successful careers. The practices of networking, mentoring, and building communities of practice are identified as sources of greater access to information, resources, and sponsorship (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). However, previous research does not explain how these practices actually work to promote careers and mitigate isolation. For example, Ford et al. (2006: 418) concludes that “whereas the chemistry behind the transformation of a collection of colleagues into a hot group is far from clear, the significance of colleagues in shaping careers is undisputable.”

In contrast, our field level approach, focused on polycentric governance and bricolage efforts of field actors acting individually and collectively, brings into relief the mechanisms underlying the practices that successfully integrate people and mitigate isolation. We offer a much more nuanced explanation of when and how individual and collective efforts of socializing (including mentoring, networking, and communities of practice) may work. For example, mentoring can be done with these practices in mind. When mentoring entails an ethos of acceptance to support a range of valued identities, it moves from merely recognizing difference to witnessing the Other, an ethical practice that is necessary to produce “an increasingly inclusive, intellectually open academy” Hinsdale (2015, p. xviii). Consequently, it is not networking *per se* that combats isolation, but the specific forms it takes when enacted by academic actors in a field. This is important because it sheds light on the role of networking in globalized academic fields. There is a tension between the increased opportunity to make connections in globalized fields and

the costs of maintaining these connections (Parigi & Henson, 2014). Technology can lessen some challenges of networking, but the ties formed through virtual networking are likely to be weaker, less meaningful, and, therefore, less likely to reduce perceived isolation (Mulki & Jaramillo, 2011; Turkle 2011). For example, an ECR can virtually befriend scholars on a field-specific Facebook page and effectively communicate with them, yet still feel isolated.

We argue that practices such as networking can be more or less effective depending on how aligned they are with the agency-enhancing mechanisms and bricolage practices we identified. This finding is consistent with research in management education which explains that effective networking is strategic and agentic (Dioszegi & Brusoni, 2016). For instance, if networking is pursued with the intention of extending engagement (a communication bricolage practice) by displaying the scholar's capacity to others (an agency-enhancing mechanism), networking may be more likely to mitigate isolation. The same reasoning applies to governance practices for addressing isolation. In globalized fields, polycentrism can “lead to an increase in interaction under a homophilous process in which people would feel more comfortable around—and thus more likely to interact with—smaller and more isolated groups of people who are more similar to themselves” (Parigi & Henson, 2014: 60). The CCT Scrutinizers group, for example, was formed by individuals seeking others with shared goals and challenges. The creation of the group reduced isolation both by linking people around a specific set of collective practices, and by working to become a center in a polycentric field. Although prior research has accounted for the importance of peer-based groups (McFadyen & Cannella, 2004), it has not accounted for the mediation of these loosely formed collectives, and their capability to shape field structure and mitigate isolation at the field level. Our study offers insight into how these actions mitigate isolation and reveals the underlying mechanisms at play.

Finally, previous research has alluded to the role of knowledge and knowledge-based resources in shaping academic career success. In particular, research has focused on the quality and reputation of PhD programs (Bedeian et al., 2010), access to career and capital resources, and the language of such institutions (Horn, 2017) as predictors of successful careers. Research has also implicated knowledge brokering in learning and innovation, and has linked it to combating isolation (Hargadon, 2002). However, the specific mechanisms by which knowledge resources foster agency, and the specific practices that mobilize these resources have not been discussed in the academic careers literature. Interestingly, some of these dynamic mechanisms give us an indication of how to take advantage of the resources available to help ECRs succeed in their careers (c.f., Bedeian, 1996; Mitchell, 2007). This tends to be overlooked in these studies, as authors generally do not take the extra step of explaining how and *why* these mechanisms, and practices work. In contrast, our study explains how academics engage in bricolage to mobilize field level resources, including intellectual, career, and social capital, and how established actors engage in governing practices to help shape the polycentric field so as to facilitate the integrating role of these field level resources.

### **Practical Implications**

This study calls attention to the important role that academic isolation plays in the globalized careers of management academics. It offers insights for ECRs, and more established academics, as well as for the administrators of doctoral programs and PDW (professional development workshops), and field level professional associations, such as the AOM and EGOS.

#### ***Implications for Individual Scholars and ECRs***

At the individual level, this study offers two implications for ECRs. First it calls attention to isolation, and how important it is to mitigate in order to have a successful global academic career. We demonstrate that isolation is a multidimensional construct that may affect people in

different ways. As such, an ECR may have multiple contacts in a field (and, therefore, not be relationally isolated), but lack sufficient understanding of social norms leading to feelings of cultural isolation. By being aware of the various dimensions of isolation, ECRs can purposefully engage in practices to mitigate it. As identified above, not all bricolage practices perform the same function. Some practices are especially helpful for building intellectual capital (Vaara & Fay, 2011), which can help combat technical and cultural isolation. We argue that intellectual bricolage can be promoted in three ways: individually within the same field, individually across fields, and collectively. Similarly, other practices are helpful in terms of promoting networking to combat cultural and relational isolation. We suggest that network bricolage (Vanevenhoven et al., 2011) can also be executed at three levels and that an ECR interested in increasing his or her social capital can choose from these multiple pathways to mitigate relational and cultural isolation, depending on the individual and collective resources at hand and his or her individual goals. The same thinking applies to socio-material bricolage (Johri, 2011), in which the goal is to mitigate geographical isolation, and communication bricolage (Takahashi, 2010), in which the goal is to create visibility in the field, and in doing so, mitigate technical and cultural isolation. In relying on our CCT Scrutinizers experience, we emphasize the benefits of engaging in collective practices over individual practices, as collective practices tend to increase the effect of individual practices as a result of group support, which, in turn, creates more room for agentic behavior (Emirbeyer & Mische, 1998; O'Meara & Stromquist, 2015; Ryazanova & McNamara, 2016).

### ***Implications for Doctoral Programs and Professional Development Workshops***

Our findings have practical implications for training management academics at the early stages of their careers. We recommend that training targeted at ECRs (PhD programs and mentorship programs) approach isolation as a challenge that is inherent to a globalized career, incorporate self-reflective activities to help ECRs become more aware of their own experiences of

isolation, and share the practices identified in this paper as a toolbox to help ECRs identify, generate, and mobilize resources to mitigate their own isolation. Mentoring and mentor-training can focus on issues of academic isolation and practices that stimulate us to open ourselves up (Oliver, 2001), especially when it involves groups at the periphery of academia. More importantly, these programs can use the agency-enhancing mechanisms identified here to innovate further. They can shift the messaging from generic encouragement to network to specific direction such as, “it is important to engage in both individual and collective forms of networking with the aim of enhancing your sense of agency.” This separates networking for the sake of building connections only – which will not fully address relational isolation in the field – to networking to gain access to resources, extend knowledge across fields, and assemble collective resources. Further, this knowledge may help ECRs make decisions around conference attendance and meeting participation (e.g. choosing to attend a large, institutional conference when seeking to build visibility, or attending a smaller, field-based conference when the goal is to accumulate resources).

Administrators of doctoral programs and business schools can support ECR career development in other ways as well. While success is often linked to issues of departmental or institutional socialization and integration (Gardner, 2008; Pilbeam & Denyer, 2009), framing it more broadly in the context of globalized academic careers will help administrators make decisions that better meet the needs of their doctoral graduates. As noted above, PhD programs can provide resources that enable doctoral students to engage in various types of bricolage within the field. Administrators should also embrace the polycentric nature of academic fields. For example, they can invest in hosting conferences that encourage the integration of academics into their fields, in the hope that this practice may bring their institution closer to becoming a new center in a polycentric field. These conferences might also support more multi-faceted

conceptions of scholarship (Boyer, 1990) to promote a broader range of pathways into the field (e.g. focus on the scholarship of teaching and learning in the field). In addition, administrators can fund visiting professorships at the institution to expand access to career and social capital. They can focus on hiring diverse faculty who reflect the plurality of the field, and support more flexible publication lists to help retain these faculty who may pursue less-traditional research topics or approaches that are, nevertheless, considered legitimate at the field level. Our work suggests that these activities play an important part in helping doctoral students and ECRs integrate, offering more evidence that such programs should continue to receive backing in business schools.

### ***Implications for Field-Level Professional Associations and Organizations***

Our findings indicate that mitigating isolation requires the support of senior academics and field level institutions in cultivating polycentric academic fields. Robust polycentric fields can reduce isolation by creating more opportunities for participants to engage with the field, and by providing more room for maneuvering within such fields. One example of this support is the creation of access points to field level resources, which include field level institutions such as the EGOS network, which promotes training for ECRs that focuses on methods as well as career and intellectual resources for integrating into the field (e.g. a better understanding of the genealogy of existing theories within a field; the knowing how, who, and why of a field). Another example involves sharing field-relevant information via computer-mediated technologies, such as social media. The Strategy Practice Interest Group, organized by members of the Strategic Management Society, created a video series on YouTube that features leading scholars in the field. These videos serve as an example of how established actors can provide access to knowledge, career, and social resources for scholars that may be geographically, culturally, technically, and relationally isolated. Field level institutions should also strive to reinforce an ethos of acceptance of all kinds of ideas and identities within the field. The same associations can create specific roles



for ECRs to stimulate participation and acceptance. The HR division of the Academy of Management, for example, has designated representatives for Latin American and the Asia-Pacific region, which promotes work of researchers from these regions. By identifying the mitigation of isolation as one of their explicit goals, these institutions can help ECRs establish stronger careers.

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**Table 1 - Research Team**

<b>Participants' Self-Descriptions</b>
<p><b>Alex</b> is a lecturer in Marketing at a business school in the UK. The university is research-focused. He is in his early-30s, and married. He identifies as bi-national: French and English. He was born in France, has lived in several European countries and India. Alex completed his PhD in marketing at a non-CCT research-focused university in the UK in 2015. He was invited to join the group in 2015.</p>
<p><b>Alya</b> is a tenure-track assistant professor in Marketing, in a Faculty of Economics and Management at a non-CCT, teaching- and research-focused university in Tunisia. She is in her 40s, and identifies as Tunisian-North African. Alya grew up in Tunisia. She completed her PhD in Marketing at a non-CCT research-focused university in France in 2011. She joined the group at its inception in 2012 after expressing interest through the CCT Facebook group.</p>
<p><b>Ana</b> is a lecturer of Marketing and Operations at a business school in the UK. The university is research-focused. She is in her 40s, married, and identifies as Brazilian. Ana grew up in Brazil. She worked in industry before completing her PhD at a research-focused, a CCT-center, university in the UK in 2016. Ana joined the group at its inception in 2012.</p>
<p><b>Emma</b> is a PhD candidate in Marketing at a business school in Canada. The university is teaching and research-focused. She is in her mid-30s, and is married with a young child. She identifies as mixed-race and French-Canadian. She expects to complete her PhD at a teaching-and-research focused, CCT-friendly university in 2019. She joined the group at its inception after expressing interest through the CCT Facebook group.</p>
<p><b>Gabriela</b> is recently tenured professor of Marketing at a business school in Chile. The university is research-focused. She is in her late-30s, and is married with two young children. Gabriela grew up in Brazil, and has lived in Canada. She completed her PhD in management at a research-focused, a CCT-center, university in Canada in 2012. Gabriela joined the group in 2014, upon invitation from a co-author/founder.</p>
<p><b>Julia</b> is a post-doctoral researcher in Marketing at a University in Germany. The university is research-focused. She is in her mid-40s, and is married with a young daughter. She identifies as German. Julia has lived in several European countries. She worked as a marketing practitioner before completing her PhD in Management Science at a university in Belgium in 2011. She joined the group at its inception after expressing interest through the CCT Facebook group.</p>
<p><b>Jason</b> is a senior lecturer of Marketing at a Business school in Australia. The university is teaching- and research-focused. He is in his mid-40s and is married with one child. He is South American but having lived in many countries identifies as a global citizen. Jason was born in South America, and completed doctoral training in Australia and Canada. He worked in management and marketing before completing his PhD in 2012 from a research-focused university in Australia in 2012. Jason was one of the founders of the group in 2012.</p>
<p><b>Katie</b> is a tenure-track assistant professor of marketing at a business school in the USA. The university is research-focused. She is in her late-30s, and is married with three young children. She identifies as Canadian. Katie grew up in Canada, and did her Masters training in Ireland. She worked in finance before completing her PhD in Management from a research-focused, CCT-friendly university in Canada in 2013. Katie joined the group in 2014.</p>
<p><b>Matheus</b> is a tenure-track assistant professor of marketing at a University in Brazil. The university is teaching and research-focused. He is in his mid-30s, and is married with two young boys. He identifies as Brazilian. Matheus was born in Brazil, and has spent periods of his life in France, Portugal, and the UK. He completed his PhD in Management at a CCT-friendly and research-focused university in Brazil in 2013. He joined the group at its inception in 2012.</p>
<p><b>Tyler</b> is a tenure-track assistant professor of marketing at a business school in the USA. The university is teaching-and-research focused. Tyler is in his mid-30s, and is married with two young children. He identifies as Canadian. He grew up in Canada. Tyler obtained his PhD in Management from a research-focused university, a CCT-center, in Canada in 2014. He joined the group after discussions with other members in 2015.</p>

**Table 2 - Summary of Data Collection and Analysis**

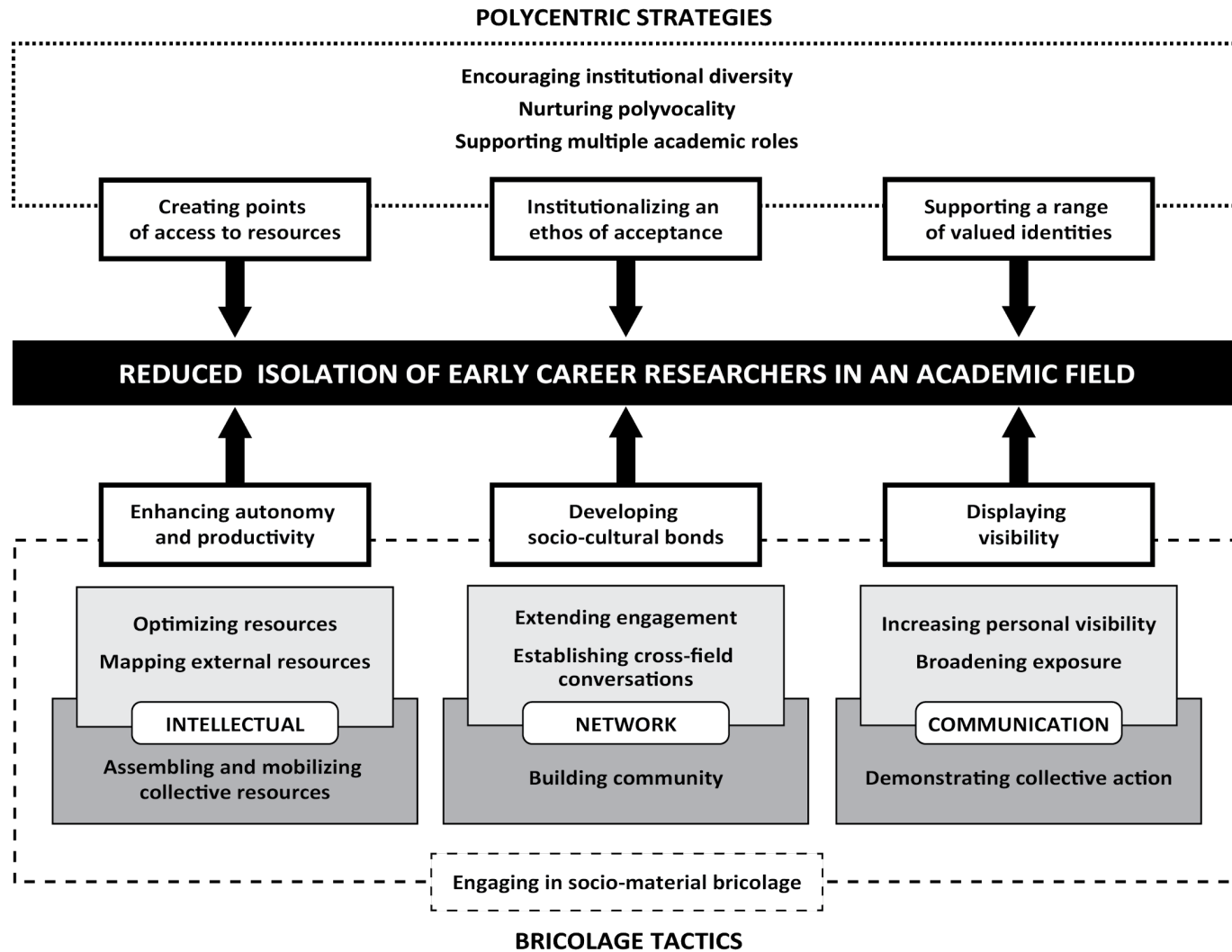
<b>Date</b>	<b>Reflection Level</b>	<b>Focus</b>
<b>Phase 1 Sep. 2014</b>	Individual	Our experiences within the Scrutinizers group after one year of activity
	Group	Shared experience revealed our need to engage in common projects and expose our group activities to the wider CCT community
<b>Phase 2 Aug. 2015</b>	Individual	Sub-themes to cover: What is the most surprising thing you learned while participating in the group? How has your participation helped you advance your personal work? How do your own background, those of the other participants, and group characteristics (size, composition, frequency of meetings, media of interaction, vibe) influence your learning experience in the CCT Scrutinizers?
	Group	Experiences were shared within the group and further details were collected. Collective sense making of the learning experience within the CCT Scrutinizers and the emergence of experienced isolation as a common theme.
<b>Phase 3 May - July 2016</b>	Individual	Themes to be discussed during a roundtable for the CCT conference entitled: <i>“From Fish Tank to the Open Ocean: Navigating the Institutional Field of CCT”</i>
	Group (pre-roundtable)	Sub-themes to cover during the roundtable: In your opinion, what kinds of actors are isolated in the field of CCT and why? How can isolated or entrant actors succeed in this field? What opportunities exist for institutional entrepreneurship, and what resources are required to seize those opportunities? What are the challenges for junior scholars in the transition from the protected community of CCT to potentially different institutional dynamics? How to handle these challenges?
	Group (post-roundtable)	Clarification and final formulation of research questions to address (for the current project)
<b>Analysis round 1: Individual – Sub-groups –Collective data analysis (August – October 2016)</b>		
<b>Phase 4 April 2017</b>	Individual	Personal experience of isolation (description, evolution, actions undertaken to mitigate it) and the role of the group and field in mitigating this isolation. Prompts: When you first became aware of a sense of isolation? What that experience(s) was like? How you have attempted to mitigate it? To what extent those efforts have been successful? How conditions in the field and/or actions of other actors have contributed or mitigated your experience of isolation
	Collective	Some probing questions after sharing the individual narrative essays
<b>Analysis round 2: Individual – Sub-groups – Collective data analysis (May-July 2017)</b>		

<b>Collaborative writing (June-August 2017)</b>		
<b>Phase 5 Nov. - Dec. 2017</b>	Individual	Deepening understanding of personal experiences of isolation after developing conceptual and theoretical understanding of it. Prompts: Are there any advantages for you of being isolated? Think about the dimensions of isolation, how do they relate to other aspects of your academic career and life? Think about your doctoral program and the other institutions (school, university, associations) how did/do each of these contribute (or not) to ameliorate isolation? Did/Do you participate in any initiatives targeted at reducing isolation (or promoting integration?) Did/Do you perceive value in these initiatives?
<b>Analysis round 3: Re-analyzing data iterating with the emerging theoretical framework</b>		
<b>Collaborative writing (January-March 2018)</b>		

**Table 3: Managing Challenges in Collaborative Autoethnography**

<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Addressing the Challenge</b>
Vulnerability and trustworthiness	The degree to which participants in a CAE project are willing to be transparent with each other and willing to explore issues deeply and honestly.	In line with Chang et al. (2013), trust was established by working together for more than four years, thereby engaging in different activities and sharing anecdotes and stories of academic and personal life. The issue of isolation has been a topic of discussion during the majority of our meetings.
The other side of multivocality	The challenge of representing multiple voices in CAE and clearly distinguishing between consensus building and coercion.	We engaged in multi-round, multi-level work, i.e., first, sub-groups were formed and assigned different tasks. Discussions occurred within these subgroups until reaching consensus. Second, all authors met and shared their perspectives on theoretical lenses, methodological choices and interpretations. Discussions continued until reaching consensus at the group level. In addition, our non-hierarchical group structure allowed us to openly share our experiences and points of view.
Ethics and confidentiality	Protecting privacy of involuntary participants (actors connected to our stories i.e. other professors, supervisors); co-authors; and autoethnographers.	We use pseudonyms for authors; cite only verbatim quotations that do not involve other involuntary participants; formally documented our collective ethics guidelines for CAE; and established Responsible Participation & Informed Consent agreement, which each author signed.
Interdependency of research effort	In CAE, the interdependency of authors' efforts is high, which make collaboration difficult.	We set and agreed on clear expectations as to deadlines and commitments. In advance, authors were requested to indicate their availabilities for each week, so they can determine the amount of time dedicated to the CAE project without detriment to their other individual academic and personal commitments.
Logistical challenge	The difficulty for a group of researchers to collaborate from distant locations.	Being located in eight countries across five continents, we extensively relied on a variety of technological media to facilitate our interaction, including Zoom for hosting and recording meetings, Dropbox for cloud storage, and Google Docs for collaborative writing.
Team efforts	The need to clarify how members will work together and their different roles during the research project.	Our use of a full concurrent model of collaboration implied the involvement of all authors during all stages of the research. To ensure progress along assigned tasks before deadlines, one author volunteered to coordinate the workflow for the research project.

Figure 1 - Approaches to mitigating early career researchers' isolation in academic fields



  Strategies 
   Agency enhancing mechanisms 
 Bricolage: 
   Individual tactics 
   Collective tactics 
   Enabling tactics 
   Bricolage categories by resources