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Title

Unsustainable growth, hyper-competition, and worth in life science research : narrowing evaluative repertoires in doctoral and postdoctoral scientists' work and lives / Maximilian Fochler ; Ulrike Felt ; Ruth Müller

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Abstract

There is a crisis of valuation practices in the current academic life sciences, triggered by unsustainable growth and “hyper-competition.” Quantitative metrics in evaluating researchers are seen as replacing deeper considerations of the quality and novelty of work, as well as substantive care for the societal implications of research. Junior researchers are frequently mentioned as those most strongly affected by these dynamics. However, their own perceptions of these issues are much less frequently considered. This paper aims at contributing to a better understanding of the interplay between how research is valued and how young researchers learn to live, work and produce knowledge within academia. We thus analyze how PhD students and postdocs in the Austrian life sciences ascribe worth to people, objects and practices as they talk about their own present and future lives in research. We draw on literature from the field of valuation studies and its interest in how actors refer to different forms of valuation to account for their actions. We explore how young researchers are socialized into

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different valuation practices in different stages of their growing into science. Introducing the concept of “regimes of valuation” we show that PhD students relate to a wider evaluative repertoire while postdocs base their decisions on one dominant regime of valuing research. In conclusion, we discuss the implications of these findings for the epistemic and social development of the life sciences, and for other scientific fields. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)