

How did I choose my research direction?
Battling shyness and introversion
Having a child (perspective of a secondary caregiver)

My career journey – much luck involved

2008–2012		Undergraduate at University of Oxford	
2012–2015		DPhil (Biochemistry) in Oxford – Matt Higgins Lab: Malaria host–pathogen interactions	
Oct 2015–Nov 2022		Postdoc in MRC-LMB Cambridge – Andrew Carter Lab: Dynein	
Oct 2017		Our child was born (thanks again to Grace)	
Jan 2021		Started applying for Fellowships F & Jobs J	NB: On the shorter side of average!
Jan–Aug 2021	F	Fellowship sponsorship search: Oxford & Cambridge	
July 2021	J	Edinburgh WCCB; Group leader (not shortlisted)	
Nov 2021	F	Wellcome CDA (Interviewed May 2022; Awarded Aug 2022; started Nov 2022)	
Jan 2022	J	Warwick University; Assistant Professor (not shortlisted)	
Jan 2022	F	ERC Starting Grant Jan 2022 (not shortlisted)	
Feb 2022	J	Glasgow WCIP; Research Fellow (“reserve candidate”; formally rejected in May 2022)	
April 2022	F	MRC CDA April 2022 (application withdrawn before shortlisting)	
Nov 2022		Lau Lab	

“Into the unknown” *Frozen II*

a.k.a. How did I choose my research direction?

Criteria

Novel; separate from PI & Feasible

The idea

- Stemmed out of an initial question I had about the malaria cytoskeleton
- Expanded this idea to cytoskeletal organisation

Development

- Preliminary data (thanks to Catherine Merrick and Andrew Carter)
 - Fellowship idea changed based on the preliminary experiments
- Chose techniques, including some new ones
 - Established collaborations for new techniques
- Talked to a lot of people about this idea (15–20, excluding friends)

“Don’t ask; don’t get” *Girish Mali, University of Bristol*

a.k.a. Battling shyness and introversion

Speaking to new/important people; asking for help

- Super important for pitching applications to jobs or fellowships
- Networking is easiest when I have objectives in mind
 - Check the reputation of other group leaders in the field
- The worst they can say is no/they’re too busy
 - I’ve never gotten this answer
- Mindset: They want the best for me
 - Helps with dealing with criticism

Public speaking and presentations

- Nervousness before presentations never goes away
- Things that help
 - “Practice [still] makes perfect”
 - Science outreach

“There is no good time to have a child” *Sjors Scheres (MRC-LMB)*

a.k.a. What I wish I'd known before having a kid

“There is no good time to have a child, but there are worse times” *Sjors Scheres (MRC-LMB)*

Privilege check

- Being secondary caregiver & a man
 - Supportive wife, not in academia.
- Having a supportive, understanding boss and lab

Get ready for...

- EFFICIENCY
 - I won't/can't spend as long in the lab
- a long period of adjustment (but it's worth it in the end)
 - First 1.5-2 years were really rough
- childcare costs: expensive and long waiting times
 - 2018 in Cambridge, UK - £1100 per month.
 - Some help available (Tax-free childcare; 30 hours free at 3 years old)
 - Got on the waiting list before child was born

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