



Sheer persistence – balancing a PhD with other commitments

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Recurring themes today

- Elements of privilege
- Survivorship bias
- My CV of failure



Keep in mind when listening to advice

☰ BUSINESS INSIDER YOUR MONEY

How one 31-year-old paid off \$220,000 in student loans in 3 years

 Emmie Martin
🕒 Mar. 8, 2017, 12:40 PM 🔥 105,941

Back home in Joliet, Illinois, Horton took a job as an operations manager at the nonprofit her mother runs. The salary was comparable to what she made in DC, but the cost of living was drastically less. She increased her student-loan payments, setting the lofty goal of paying them off entirely in a year.

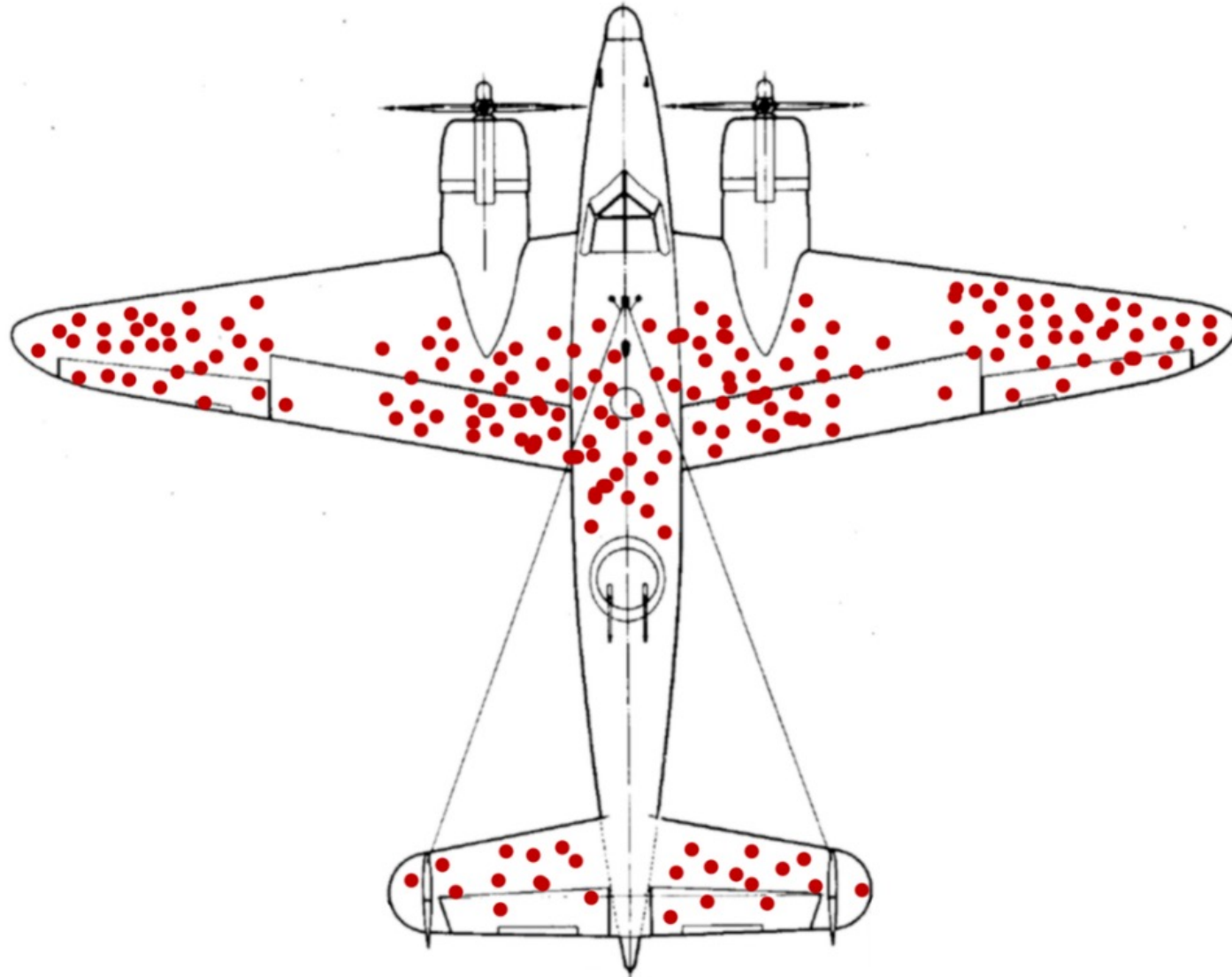
Horton and her boyfriend tied the knot soon after the move. Horton's mother gave the couple a condo that she had purchased at an auction as a wedding gift. It became crucial in wiping away the hefty student-loan tab.

Horton and her husband lived in the condo for three months, but then they decided to move in with her grandparents down the street and started renting out the condo to bring in extra income.

To anyone who feels overwhelmed by the prospect of taking on student loans — or paying back any debt they've incurred — Horton has a simple message: "I just want them to feel empowered that they can pay it off. If I can do it, anybody can."



Keep in mind when listening to advice



My background



N Nottinghamshire Live

This is when new Travelodge will be complete in Mansfield town centre

Plans to open a new 63-bed Travelodge in Mansfield are nearing completion after developers announced it will be finished next month.

20 mins ago



N Nottinghamshire Live

Inside two-bedroom Mansfield home that's being auctioned off for just £25k

At £25,000 this two bedroom family home is a steal, although you'll probably have to spend that again (or more) on bringing the property ...

1 day ago



N Nottinghamshire Live

Mansfield Town CEO Carolyn Radford spills all in TV documentary Millionaire Age Gap Love

Despite 10 years and three children together, Mansfield Town power couple John and Carolyn Radford are still plagued by unfounded rumours ...

1 day ago



My background



- It seems to have improved, but my school was really bad (special measures in my last year)
- My A-levels: B,C,D,D

Lesson #1: Opportunity from disappointment

- My original choice* was Keele to study human biology and psychology, but they wanted a B in biology
- This meant I went to my insurance choice: Coventry University

#CVofFailure

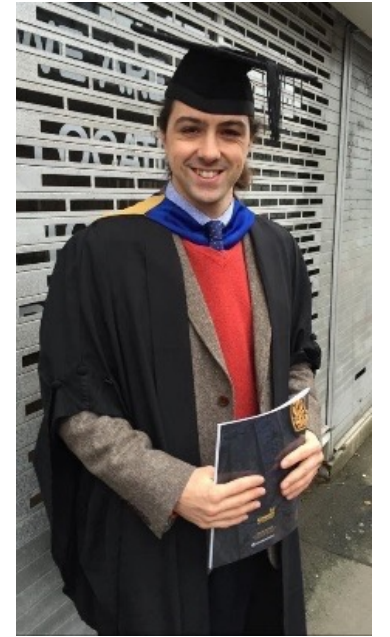
* I actually wanted to study physics first...



2012-2015: BSc Psychology

- Key events
 - Keeping busy with university and club hockey team
- Voluntary work:
 - Coventry Mind drop-in center
 - Research assistant for my now supervisor
- Award for highest degree classification

#Privilege – my mum and grandparents gave me money



Part-time job: Wetherspoons

- First job in my third year of university to save up for an MSc
- I worked in the same pub 2-4 nights per week for two years
- Observations:
 - Most staff were students
 - Most customers liked hearing about your degree



2015-2016: MRes Psychology

- Key events
 - Offered teaching roles for seminars and workshops (until this point I had no interest)
 - Completed a Higher Education teaching qualification
 - Starting focusing on research methods and statistics

#Privilege – I paid for the MRes with help from my mum and grandparents

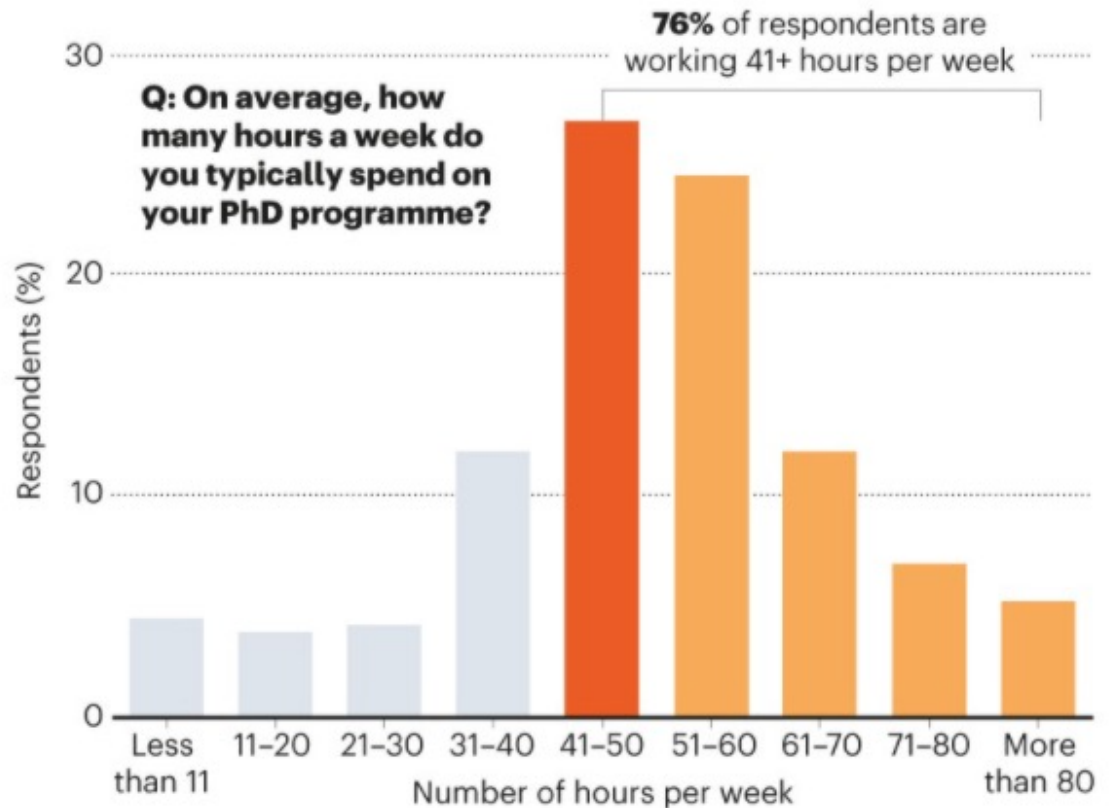


Lesson #2: Don't let your job/degree become all consuming

- During my Masters, I stopped playing hockey to “concentrate” on my degree
- Although you need to make sacrifices, you need *some kind of* escape
- Family / hobbies / sports?

OVEREXTENDED AND STRESSED

Long hours in the laboratory and other demands have taken a toll on PhD students' well-being and mental health.



Nature.com. PhDs: the tortuous truth



Applying for PhD positions

- Applied for a fully funded PhD at Coventry University, offered a fees only studentship
- Applied for my dream PhD at Bristol University, but not even an interview
- Main motivation: settled for fees only as I was terrified of taking time out and never coming back

#CVofFailure



2015-2017: PhD years one* and two

- In years one (MRes) and two, I completed the PhD full-time
- I taught at Coventry and worked on my PhD in the day
- I worked at Wetherspoons at night from Thursday-Saturday
- Moment where I nearly gave up #1
 - End of second year as I felt burnt out without making progress



Part-time job: Aldi

- To make more money and avoid working at night
- I usually worked super early 3 – 4 days per week
- Observations:
 - I was the only staff member who was student
 - Most customers treated you like an idiot
 - It changed my perspective on jobs



2017-2019: PhD years three and four

- I converted the PhD to part-time to avoid burning out and give myself more time
- I still taught at Coventry University, but fewer hours
 - Best “there at the right time” opportunity – stepped in as module leader for a blended learning research methods module
- Moment where I nearly gave up #2
 - End of year three: warned in my progress review I should focus on my PhD



Finding an academic job

1. Research Assistant Oxford ✘
2. Lecturer / teaching assistant
 - a) Leicester ✘
 - b) Birmingham ✘
 - c) Coventry ✘
 - d) Coventry (funny story) ✘
3. Psychology technician
 - a) Northampton ✘
 - b) Arden... ✘
 - c) Arden ✔

Fifteen to one: how many applications it can take to land a single academic job offer

Survey finds that standard metrics of success can't completely explain why some candidates get offers and others don't.

Nature.com.



Lesson #3: Find your own motivation

- I'm driven by intrinsic motivation – I just want to learn something I did not know yesterday
- You need to put food on the table, but when you are struggling, all you have is your own drive
- You will fail, but most people hide the losses and only talk about the wins
#CVofFailure
- This means the most important thing is learning what helps pick yourself back up



Experience as an academic

Articles:

- Bartlett et al. (2020) ❌
- Bhogal & Bartlett (2020) ❌❌❌❌✅
- Charles et al. (2019) ✅
- Coleman et al. (2019) ✅
- Margana et al. (2019) ✅
- Farias et al. (2018) ✅
- Bhogal et al. (2018) ❌❌❌❌❌❌❌✅

Grants:

- Prolific ECR grant ❌

Awards:

- PsyPAG teaching award ❌

#CVofFailure



Top tips if you are interested in a PhD

1. Try not to compare yourself to others – it's your journey
 - a) Imposter syndrome after reading someone's CV
 - b) Watching others in your cohort finish before you
2. Complete a standalone MSc before – give yourself time to develop
3. Choose your university and supervisor carefully
 - a) Does the university have the same interests?
 - b) Are there enough researchers with the same expertise?
4. Prepare for alternative career paths – permanent academic jobs are ridiculously competitive



Talk on a slide (TL;DR)

- Lesson #1: Opportunity from disappointment
- Lesson #2: Don't let your job or degree become all consuming
- Lesson #3: Find your own motivation
- Failure is a when not an if. The key is learning what helps pick yourself back up



Thanks for listening!

Any questions?

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