My future ambition is to produce good research that inspires my students and fellow academics, but that also reaches out to an interested, non-academic audience. And of course, my ambition is also to become a professor eventually.
“Research is about broadening your horizons, even if this involves asking uncomfortable questions.”

Christina Marie Scharff chose to study for an undergraduate degree in a UK university, and is now carrying out research into engagements with feminism, and young women’s experiences of working in the cultural industries, in two capital cities – Berlin and London.

“I grew up in Germany but came to the UK for my Bachelor’s degree in Politics and Sociology at York. Having developed an interest in politics in my teens, I chose to study in the UK because of its excellent research culture and teaching. I thoroughly enjoyed my studies and felt passionate about them, as well as feeling privileged to engage in issues I was interested in.

During the last seven years, I have conducted research on engagements with feminism amongst young women, feminist academics and in the media. Recently, I have expanded my area of expertise to research gender issues in the cultural industries. Work in the cultural industries, such as classical music and art, is frequently described as “work that you can’t help doing”. However, research has shown that such work is often precarious, involves low pay and is marked by gender, and other intersecting, inequalities. My current project aims to add to our understanding of cultural work by conducting in-depth interviews with young, female classical musicians in Berlin and London.

I also teach on several courses and supervise a number of PhD students, as well as sharing the role of admissions tutor to our postgraduate programmes, dealing with the 850 applications we currently get. Teaching consists of developing the syllabus, constructing a reading list of books and articles that students should be aware of for each module, lecturing, running seminars and marking work. Apart from my teaching and administrative responsibilities, I do my research which involves publishing, writing grant applications and going to conferences, both in the UK and overseas.

A key factor in determining my career choice was meeting the person who was to become my PhD supervisor during my Master’s degree. She was both rigorous and encouraging, and a very good role model. I did my PhD in a very supportive environment with strong intellectual and social ties to my colleagues. I value the friendships I’ve formed with colleagues and am sure that these experiences informed my career choice as well.

More generally, I feel that the social side of doing academic work is very important. Although it is true that I spend a lot of time working on my own, the moments I feel passionate about my research tend to be social situations, such as going to a lecture and being inspired by it. I would also say that researchers rely on each other in order to produce good work. I regularly provide feedback on my colleagues’ work, and draw on their opinions when it comes to reading journal articles or grant applications that I plan to submit.

For me, research is about a willingness to embark on an intellectual journey without knowing where it will take you. The process takes a long time and is a good antidote to the speed at which we live our lives. Research requires hard work, application, careful thinking, but its benefits include generating new ideas - innovations that help society in general.”

Christina’s research project, Young women and feminism: Disseminating findings from an international study on young women's attitudes towards feminism, was funded under ESRC grant reference PTA-026-27-2725

This resource was produced by Research Councils UK’s Careers in Research programme. Visit www.rcuk.ac.uk/careersinresearch for more information.