Twitter Thread by Melanie

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APPLYING TO GRAD SCHOOL, POST #19: DEALING WITH COMPETITIVENESS/COMPARISON

There's so much competitiveness during the application process and beyond; how do you handle it?

@OpenAcademics @PhDVoice #AcademicChatter #AcademicTwitter #phdchat #gradschool #firstgen #nontraditional

The unfortunate truth about academia (in its current state) is that it's relentlessly competitive. Motivational quotes abound on not comparing yourself to others, but that's MUCH more easily said than done, especially when other people sometimes do the comparing for you.

So how can you survive the rest of the application process (and hopefully beyond) as gracefully as possible?

Firstly, I want to address "online forums." I won't name any because if you already know them, then you know what I'm talking about, and if you don't know any of them,...

I would personally recommend to PLEASE stay off of any online forums for prospective grad students. From what I've seen, those forums tend to be less of a helpful discussion, and more of a place for people to show off the grades, exam scores, interviews, and acceptances...

they're most proud of. I consider myself quite lucky because I didn't know about any of them when I was applying, so I never had to consciously prevent myself from reading and engaging with them. For what it's worth, I was able to get all the help and information I needed...

throughout the application cycle from directly corresponding with my prospective programs/supervisors/etc., so in the interest of self-preservation, I don't think you'll miss out on much by not checking those forums.

This is ironic, I know, but similar deal with social media:...

With things like Twitter, you have the benefit of *mostly* curating the experience that you want, but it's not always perfect, so if you're finding yourself feeling a bit lousy from some of the posts you're seeing, please take breaks from social media as well.

Now that I've talked about avoiding the comparisons and the feelings of inadequacy, it's worth noting that it's pretty impossible to avoid those completely. My most earnest advice echoes something I've mentioned previously: know who you are, know why you're applying for grad...

school, and take pride in your story and in getting this far. If you catch yourself comparing yourself to others, reason with yourself and remind yourself *why* it's not worth your time or effort to compare. For any comparison to be 100% fair, you need to compare your entire...

life (and past lives, if applicable) to that of the person your mind is trying to compare with, and that's not possible, is it? You've had a completely unique journey to get to where you are today, with a unique set of strengths, weaknesses, adversities overcome,...

and perspectives and skills to contribute. Try your best not to listen to the people who say that you need to fit a certain mould in order to succeed in your field, whether that be in regard to age, education, achievement, or any other aspect of you – and *especially* try not...

to listen to yourself when you start thinking that maybe you aren't as good as the people around you. Strive to do the best you can with what you have (and what you don't), and then applaud yourself for succeeding, because that truly is a success in itself. Be as supportive of...

yourself as you would be of your closest friend!

Something I do recommend is leaning heavily on the support you do receive. "Support" doesn't have to be from your mentors or academics who know exactly what you're going through; it can be from a friend outside academia who...

knows nothing about your prospective field of study, but who will stay up late with you and listen to your rants and cheer you on as you head off to interviews, or it can be a regular customer from your previous/current job who has never seen you in an academic setting, but...

who has so much blind faith in you and always excitedly asks how things are going (I had both of these people in my life, and I'm forever grateful to them). You don't need the entire academic community of your field of study to sing your praises in order to be worthy of going...

to grad school and pursuing a topic you're passionate about!

On that note: Remember those potential supervisors you bravely reached out to earlier in the application cycle? The ones who decided...to support you have most likely not done so lightly. You should remind yourself...

that an actual academic has deemed you worthy of their support and mentorship, and that's AMAZING!

Ultimately, a huge factor in grad school admissions is luck, so if you start doubting yourself, your qualifications, or anything else, and if you're having a hard time...

bringing yourself out of it, try to remember that almost anything is possible for anyone!

And if you need a pep talk or a cheerleader or a listening ear for a rant at any point, please message me. I've got you!