

Work reorganization in the neoliberal university: A labour process perspective

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Abstract

This article maps the major changes taking place in academic work within the broader context of the neoliberalisation of universities. Recognising the great variability in the form and pace of neoliberalisation across institutions and national contexts, the article identifies a set of features and indicators to aid in the comparative assessment of the extent and effect of neoliberal processes at different institutions. The authors use conceptual tools from labour process theory to highlight the ways that neoliberalisation has resulted in academic work that is fragmented, deskilled, intensified, and made subject to greater levels of surveillance, hierarchy, and precarity. In doing so, the authors also demonstrate the importance of combining political economy and Foucauldian approaches to neoliberalism, to highlight the way that external structural conditions and subjective processes combine to create new labour processes to which participants find themselves consenting and actively reproducing.

JEL Codes: J5, L2

Keywords

Collective bargaining, faculty associations, labour process, labour relations, managerialism, neo-liberalism, new public management, trade unions, universities

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Introduction

Much scholarly and activist attention has been paid to the transformation of universities over the last three decades as part of a larger process of neoliberalisation. For many, neoliberalism in the university context has involved a challenge to the institution's traditional purpose and form. Neoliberal advocates envision a university oriented primarily towards the needs of employers in a competitive global economy, whether in terms of research and development or the supply of labour markets with particular kinds of workers (Boden and Epstein, 2006; Clawson and Page, 2011; Coté and Allahar, 2011; Ginsberg, 2011; Rhoades and Slaughter, 2004; Smyth, 2017). However, this purpose cannot be fulfilled while the vestiges of a prior and now 'outdated' conception of university life, and the people who defend such a conception, remain in positions of teaching, research and administration. The neoliberal university has thus entailed a thorough reorganisation of a variety of processes and relationships, including strengthening university-corporate linkages, transforming students into customers, and the introduction of corporate-oriented management and decision-making structures.

In general, there are two major approaches to understanding neoliberalism. The political economy approach defines neoliberalism as a set of ideas that came to prominence in policy circles in the 1970s as a reaction against the postwar consensus around Keynesian economic management. Neoliberal policies posit the market as the most efficient (and therefore suitable) means of determining the distribution of economic and social goods and therefore the fate of human beings. Neoliberals seek to suppress or marginalise non-market criteria and forms of decision-making about who gets what and who does what (Harvey, 2005; McBride, 2001). The Foucauldian approach sees neoliberalism as a specific form of governmentality, in which discourses and institutional practices are designed to create particular kinds of self-disciplining subjects, who see themselves as individually responsible for their lives, consent to competitive entrepreneurial culture, and do not require the external discipline of government to enforce these behaviours (Rose, 1990). While these approaches are often pursued by separate communities of scholars, they usefully converge and provide insights into the neoliberalisation of education as a key site for the social reproduction of the labour force (Sears, 2003).

As much as universities are educational institutions, they are also fundamentally workplaces. The construction of the neoliberal university involves a reorganisation of work processes and a redistribution of power within them. In this article, we map the major changes taking place in academic university work within the broader context of the neoliberalisation of universities. Recognising the great variability in the form and pace of neoliberalisation across institutions and national contexts, we identify a set of indicators to aid in the comparative assessment of the extent and effect of neoliberal processes at different institutions. We use conceptual tools from labour process theory, including the work of Braverman (1974), Friedman (1977), Burawoy (1985), and Hochschild (1983) to map the ways that both academic and administrative university work has been fragmented, deskilled, intensified, and made subject to greater levels of surveillance, hierarchy, and precarity. As with their private sector counterparts, universities as employers use labour process reorganisation to concentrate control in the hands of administrators, to reduce workers' autonomy and elicit their active participation in self-disciplinary activity, and to extract greater value from their labour in the delivery of the

commodity called ‘education’.¹ While this paper focuses on research and experiences in the Anglosphere, elements of our discussion may be applicable more broadly to other highly industrialised countries.

Studying the labour process: Some conceptual tools

All workplaces involve concrete labour processes, which denote the specific ways human beings organise themselves collectively to produce goods and services. As Marx (1867 [1976]) defined it, the labour process involves three key elements: ‘the work itself’, the ‘subject of that work’, and the ‘instruments’ used to carry that work out. Concrete labour processes involve which tasks are performed and in which order (content), who performs these tasks (the division of labour), what technology is used, and who controls the production process (relations of authority and control). A key insight from labour process theory is that the *particular* way that human beings organise themselves to carry out this production has an enormous impact, both on people themselves and on their relationships to each other in the workplace and in society more generally. The workplace, and the labour process more specifically, is inherently a space of contestation, power relations, and struggles for control. Concrete labour processes reflect the relative power of those who work and shape who benefits and often, who loses.

Harry Braverman (1974) focused on the advent of capitalist industrialisation and the origins of management, and described how capitalists sought to solve the problem of getting craft workers, who were used to significant amounts of autonomy and control, to work in ways that maximise productivity and profit for employers. Capitalist management’s key problem was how to get workers to perform work in ways that often conflicted with workers’ own needs and interests. Scientific management was the apex of such strategies. Frederick Winslow Taylor’s (1911 [1922]) schema for the reorganisation of the craft labour process on US railroads synthesised several innovations being used by other industrialists and followed several key steps: the observation and penetration of craft workers’ ‘trade secrets’; the fragmentation of the craft labour process into minute and easily learned tasks; the centralisation and monopolisation of knowledge of the whole process into management’s hands; the reorganisation of those tasks into the most efficient order of operations; the use of time-motion studies to benchmark the physiological maximum at which workers could produce; and the use of incentives and punishments to enforce that level of productivity. Braverman thus described what he saw as an inexorable capitalist tendency: the degradation of work via the reduction of workers’ skills, discretion and autonomy, power over production, and ultimately cost, as their interchangeability undermined their leverage over wages.

The question of who holds the knowledge essential to the labour process is a key point of conflict between labour and capitalist management and bears further comment. In North America and Europe, craftworkers exerted collective control over the production process in their craft, and prices, techniques, and definitions of quality were matters of tradition. Such knowledge was passed down through tightly controlled systems of apprenticeship, in which new generations of craftworkers would be inculcated with these norms and the numbers entering the craft could be controlled so as to prevent the flooding of labour markets and downwards pressure on wages (Hyman, 1975: 43–47; Kealey,

1976). Management, well understanding the power that a monopoly on craft knowledge provided to workers, sought to break that monopoly and centralise knowledge in their hands. The early history of unionism in many places was characterised by craftworkers' attempts to retain that monopoly on knowledge in the face of technological change and the ongoing fragmentation of their work.

In response to Braverman's ideas, a series of (sympathetic) critics argued that the kind of direct managerial control he described was not effective for all kinds of work, that workers' subjectivity and not just the technical organisation of work was a central concern, and that workers themselves continued to have forms of agency that shaped the outcomes of management's attempts at restructuring labour processes. Not all work can be as easily fragmented or the knowledge centralised in management's hands (or, at least, is more resistant to such attempts), and therefore subtler strategies are required. For instance, Andrew Friedman (1977) argued that some forms of capitalist work are characterised by responsible autonomy, in which management allows workers greater autonomy in carrying out their tasks in exchange for loyalty and commitment to the firm's aims. Rather than subjecting workers to the 'sticks' of direct managerial control evident in scientific management, responsible autonomy offers workers the 'carrot' of self-direction, within certain limits, in exchange for consent to overall managerial imperatives. This strategy is particularly important when dealing with 'knowledge-based' workers whose skills are in short supply. Michael Burawoy (1985) similarly explored the ways that workers' games on the shop floor, while strictly contrary to 'efficient work rules' (pp. 37–38), were tolerated as a means to boost morale and productivity, manufacturing consent to otherwise alienating work circumstances. These games also introduced forms of mutual judgement that workers used to assess the relative performance of their workmates and enforce productivity norms on each other. In other words, techniques that elicit the active cooperation of (at least some) workers are often necessary. Further explorations in this vein have used Foucauldian analysis to understand how work processes produce the subjectivities needed to elicit particular kinds of workers who will conform to management prerogatives through self-regulation and personal identity investments (McKinlay and Taylor, 2014).

Finally, Arlie Russell Hochschild's (1983) work helps us understand the dynamics of labour processes that involve emotional labour, an increasingly central component of university work, especially as it becomes feminised. When what is being produced is an experience or service, the construction and delivery of that service is crucially determined by the emotional labour of those who provide it. Emotional labour is waged work that 'requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others' (Hochschild, 1983: 7). That 'proper state of mind' is defined by management, and becomes part of the commodity that is being sold. Insofar as some work requires a certain performance of personality and care, workers must have some scope to shape their responses and must in some ways consent by engaging their selves in the creation of 'authentic' experiences of care. However, this experience is also alienating, in that the worker loses at least some control over their emotional displays, is potentially unable to be one's authentic self at work, or loses track of the boundary between that authentic self and that which is prescribed by management.

With these concepts in mind, we turn now to examine the labour processes, power relations and identities that typified the ‘traditional’ university, before exploring how the neoliberal university has typically been characterised in the literature, and then examining how these changes have created the working conditions we now observe in the contemporary university.

The traditional university as workplace

What is the traditional university and what kinds of labour processes and work cultures characterised it? In answering this question, we must be cautious and note that there is significant variability in the organisation and culture of the university cross-nationally and depending upon the period in which they were formed. For instance, the contrast between the purposes of and working lives in pre- and postwar universities, or in research-focused versus teaching-focused institutions, troubles generalisations about the ‘traditional’ university.

With these qualifications in mind, there remain several key elements of the university that contrast with contemporary trends. First, the traditional university’s purpose was multiple. Universities ensured the reproduction of elites and their power through the development of valuable social and cultural capital and particular kinds of ‘valid knowledge’, while also providing a mechanism of social mobility for those who could access it (Bourdieu, 1986). Through the 20th century, universities increasingly provided training for employment, as part of a process of what C. Wright Mills (1951) called the ‘vocationalisation of education’ (p. 130), but this training orientation evolved alongside conceptions of education as fostering human development, critical thinking, and, especially after the Second World War, democratic and engaged citizenship (Benson and Harkavy, 2002; Harkavy, 2006). These multiple purposes were often in conflict with each other, but created spaces for something other than the mere service of the market. Second, work in the traditional university was characterised by unequal but significant amounts of ‘responsible autonomy’, expressed most obviously as the collegium for faculty. The processes and principles of tenure, peer review, and academic freedom express the norms inherent in the academic craft labour process, of regulation of both the self and the academic community, although these are often cast as ‘professional’ rather than craft values (Barrett and Meaghan, 1998; Miller, 1991). Third, the academics who laboured in the traditional university had self-conceptions of their work as a vocation, which blurred the line between work and leisure time (Anderson and Murray, 1971). However, lest we be too nostalgic, the traditional university was also replete with status hierarchies, inequalities and exclusions, and decidedly feudal forms of personal power, patronage, and decision-making (Duff and Berdahl, 1966; Tudiver, 1999: 29–41).

The neoliberal university: Key characteristics

With the foregoing as backdrop, what then is the ‘neoliberal university’? The political economy approach points to the growing use of market-based practices, criteria and cultural norms to organise the university and judge the success of its components. Market-based practices entail commodification, in which a good or service is bought and sold for

a price. Success in the market – namely success in a competition with other buyers and sellers – determines both a good or service's availability and distribution and which providers survive to participate in such exchanges. Neoliberal advocates thus envision a university oriented primarily towards the needs of employers in a competitive global economy, whether in terms of research and development or the supply of labour markets with workers with the technical skills and behavioural attributes desired by employers (Peck, 1996). The maximisation of success within competitive internal and external markets for both ideas and students becomes a governing aim. Although not new (Mills, 1951; Silbey, 2002: 201), in the neoliberal era this market-oriented tendency significantly displaces the university's other competing purposes, such as fostering democratic capacities and human development, and supplants non-market means of distributing education (as through notions of citizenship or human rights entitlements). This dominant market orientation takes several specific forms in the university (summarised in Table 1).

First, neoliberal universities adopt governance structures that replicate top-down corporate structures, diminishing the role of the faculty collegium and other members of the university community in decision-making, particularly in public universities. Bleiklie and Kogan (2007) have identified a trend across universities in many European and North American countries wherein

the power of academically dominated senates has been paralleled or replaced by councils, boards or trustees who incorporate representation from the world of business, public services and politics. These and their chairpersons in particular reinforce the corporate nature of the reformed university. (p. 479)

The introduction of explicitly corporate-oriented management structures in Australian universities is also well-documented (Goedegebuure et al., 2009; Sims, 2019). Concretely, these trends have resulted in a growing dominance of representatives from the business community on university boards and shifts in decision-making authority away from faculty towards senior administrators (Castree and Sparke, 2000).

Second, administrators have become more important, more numerous, much better compensated, and increasingly given performance-based bonuses that mirror practices in the private sector. In the United Kingdom (UK), for example, Sims (2019) notes that Vice-Chancellors 'earn, on average, between 6 and 12 times more than average university staff, and 35 times more than average workers in the local area'. The related phenomenon of 'administrative bloat', experienced anecdotally as the seemingly endless multiplication of senior administrative positions in an ever more complicated bureaucracy, is reflected in the growing share of university expenditures allocated to administrative functions (Brownlee, 2015: 109; Shore and Wright, 2000). All of this constitutes an upwards redistribution of resources among university personnel, a trend well documented in American universities (Zywicki and Koopman, 2017), but also in evidence across other Anglo-American countries (Polster, 2015).

Third, and relatedly, resources are redistributed to non-academic functions, both upwards to senior administration but also in the elaboration of new service functions, some quite necessary (like student mental health services) and others less obviously so. As Eric Newstadt (2008) argues, the neoliberal university is characterised by

new kinds of offices opening up all the time, or old ones being re-branded as it were – from technology transfer offices to offices of research and innovation, to registrar cum customer-service departments, to in-house legal departments. The growth of this section of the university has been spectacular (squeezing down academic budgets while expanding general administration budgets).

A related phenomenon is the change in the kinds of personnel in senior administrative positions. Increasingly, professional administrators come with credentials and experience more typical of the private, for-profit sector, such as business administration, rather than public administration or educational backgrounds. The orientation of such administrators is quite different from that of people who have made their careers in public education or public service, and constitutes an important vector of market-based ideas into the university (Newson, 2015; Ross et al., 2020: 231). The introduction of such new kinds of administrators goes hand in hand with a ‘cleaning house’, where those with long-standing historical memory of ‘how things were done’ are removed (sometimes quite unceremoniously) to clear the way for restructuring and ‘innovation’.

Fourth, neoliberal universities are subject to and engage in significant budgetary restructuring. As government funding for public universities stagnates or declines, increased tuition and fundraising compensates for lost revenue. This shift in revenue source has further entrenched the neoliberal idea that universities as a whole and their particular units should operate on a cost recovery basis, deriving their funding (and hence budgets) from private donations or from the individuals who use their services rather than relying on government funding or internal redistribution. Related to this shift is the growing use of performance measures as the basis for universities’ continued access to government funding. Performance indicators, subjecting both individuals and programmes to quantitative measures of both quality and accountability, are also on the rise. These dynamics drive the move towards profit-generating programmes and activity-based budget models, thus creating internal markets for programmes and services. Such practices result in redistributions of power and resources inside universities as well as a shift in internal relations and values. The former is best exemplified by review and prioritisation exercises designed to redirect resources towards more revenue-generating programmes (Dickeson, 2010; Heron, 2013).

Fifth, the neoliberal university is characterised by increased internal and external competition. Government funding restrictions have intensified competition for students between universities searching for more tuition dollars. Within universities, resources shift to student recruitment and retention, public relations, marketing and branding so as to better succeed in the market for students. Internal competition between programmes also intensifies, whether for students, resources ear-marked for ‘revenue generating’ programmes that can yield higher tuition, or for donations from private sources. Programmes are pressured to develop and provide ‘job-relevant training’ and credentials rather than critical perspectives and skills as the former is deemed by university leaders as most in demand on ‘the market’ for post-secondary education. Programmes thus experience competitive pressures to become ‘leaner’ and demonstrate ‘good metrics’ as a matter of survival (Ross et al., 2020). Already existing courses are repackaged into ‘new’ and more marketable programmes, and new programmes are created to capitalise on various fads

that will generate tuition dollars. Related to this is the increased pressure on faculty to engage in competitions for external research funding, in the context of constrained budgets for such funding and lower rates of success.

Sixth is the reframing of students as ‘customers’ or ‘consumers’ of education – or more precisely, of a valuable credential – rather than as students engaged in a process of learning, self-development or personal and social transformation (Smallman, 2006: 109). Rising tuition encourages a consumer mentality and the impression that one is buying a commodity, or as Ball (2012) puts it, an ‘educational service’ (p. 18), leading students to want to extract maximum value out of each transaction with faculty and staff and to expect a particular desired outcome. The transformation of students into consumers has significant implications for the teaching labour process and the expectations on faculty to engage in forms of emotional labour that satisfies the ‘customer’.

Finally, the neoliberal university is in a state of almost permanent restructuring, with the growing ranks of administrators tasked with leading strategic planning, internal assessment and rebranding, all with the purpose of seeking efficiencies or gaining a competitive edge. While framed as seeking excellence or promoting innovation, such processes of relentless self-examination are experienced as permanent ‘crisis’ or a ‘state of permanent “emergency as rule”’ (Thrift, quoted in Gill, 2009: 238). Faculty are enlisted to help the university overcome such challenges under the guise of ‘responsible autonomy’ by taking on greater workloads, expanding their spheres of service responsibility, and generally doing more with less. Whether mergers of departments and faculties, rebranding processes, or state-driven prioritisation or differentiation exercises, such practices are suffused with the ideology of ‘kaizen’ – the need for constant improvement – taken from lean production manufacturing methods (Lewchuk and Robertson, 1996). Such ideas, which use both psychological and technical means to intensify labour in the service of ‘excellence’, now prevail among university administrators, meaning that university workers are always responding to reorganisation, always insecure and destabilised, and increasingly on the defensive.

The neoliberal university as workplace

The shift to the neoliberal university thus entails a major internal restructuring of power relations, a redistribution of resources, and a reorientation of values. We contend that these above-described practices all fundamentally feed into a reorganisation of the academic labour process. As the purpose of work in the university changes, so too does the process of doing that work necessarily change. This reorganisation resembles the breakdown of the crafts in the 19th century and their replacement with fragmented, deskilled and cheapened forms of industrial labour. In several important respects, the neoliberal university conforms to Braverman’s (1974) description of Taylor’s principles of scientific management. It is first and foremost characterised by the fragmentation of academic labour: the ‘whole job’ of the academic is increasingly broken down into its teaching, research and service components and assigned to different workers, whose labour can be valued differently and whose discretion is uneven. This fragmented work is also precarious, characterised by temporary contracts.

Table 1. The neoliberal university: Features and indicators.

Features of the neoliberal university	Indicators
Introduction of corporate-oriented structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Composition of governing board • Incidence of non-academics in senior admin roles • Incidence of people from private, for-profit sector in admin roles • Composition of senate (admin v. faculty/students) • Relative powers of senate v. board of governors • Proliferation of admin-dominated decision-making bodies
Growth of administrative personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and percentage of admin positions • Admin compensation relative to average university staff compensation • % of salary budget going to admin ranks • Use of performance-based bonuses for senior admin
Redistribution of resources to non-academic functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage of university expenditures allocated to administrative / non-academic functions
Budgetary restructuring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced public funding over time (# and as % of total university revenue) • Increase in private/corporate donations over time (# and as % of university revenue) • Percentage of budget linked to state-imposed performance metrics • Percentage of units operating on a cost-recovery basis • Use of activity-based budgeting
Increased internal and external competition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money and time spent on recruitment, retention, public relations, marketing, and branding • Number and percentage of revenue-generating programmes • Number and percentage of job-relevant programmes • Faculty involvement in recruitment activities • Increased use of paid advertising to promote the university and programmes • Increased demands to compete for external research grants
Reframing students as consumers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University discourses and language that describe students and the student experience • Existence of policies that guide staff interactions with students
Restructuring and intensification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequency of internal strategic planning exercises • Changing distribution of academic hires across departments • Demands for research intensification • Expanding spheres of faculty service responsibility • Expanding number of meetings • Growth in number and percentage of contract academic staff

The most widely documented expression of this fragmentation is in teaching, where the proportion of sessional teachers has expanded significantly (Rajagopal, 2002). Sessional faculty are only responsible for and paid for the teaching portion of a tenured faculty member's whole job, which permits both the intensification and cheapening of such labour required to teach ever-growing numbers of students. A 2019 survey

conducted by the University and College Union (UCU) in the UK revealed ‘around 70% of the 49,000 researchers in the sector remain on fixed-term contracts, with many more living precariously on contracts which are nominally open-ended but which build in redundancy dates’ (University and College Union (UCU), 2019). In the United States, the share of faculty in tenure-track appointments has been in decline for decades. Despite the fact that undergraduate enrolment increased significantly from 12.2 million in 1995 to 18.1 million in 2011, 94% of the net increase in faculty hired to teach these new university students was non-tenure track, precariously employed academic labour (Carey, 2020). In Australia, the share of casual contract-based appointments has also been on the rise and is estimated to represent roughly 50% of the country’s university teaching capacity. In some Australian universities upwards of 70% of courses are taught by sessionals (Klopper and Power, 2014: 102). Even in Canada, where the sector has arguably best weathered the storm of neoliberalism, as of 2017, the proportion of all faculty appointments that are contract jobs is 53.6% (Pasma and Shaker, 2018). The introduction of teaching-intensive appointments has further differentiated and splintered faculty, further facilitating the emergence of research ‘stars’ with lesser teaching loads bolstered by teaching workhorses with little to no expectation of research output.

A less visible but equally important form of fragmentation has been the growth in research administration and coordination staff, often PhD holders who take on elements of the research projects of tenured faculty and are increasingly dependent on project-based funding. Although such project-based positions are now a permanent feature of the university research enterprise, the jobs themselves are increasingly unstable, given the regular turnover in research projects and lower success rates in publicly funded granting competitions (Broadbent et al., 2013; Lewchuk et al., 2011). As with Taylorist reorganisations of industrial labour processes, such moves are designed to reduce labour costs and centralise control in management’s hands.

Work demands for frontline university workers are also intensifying, resistance to which is made more difficult by precarity and stratification. Fewer staff face the requirement to accomplish more work, whether servicing ever-growing numbers of students or satisfying the multiplying ‘accountability’ processes that require extensive documentation of both activity and output. Pressure for faculty and staff to participate in recruitment and retention initiatives, which often take place on weekends, is escalating. As with labour process reorganisations in other industries, technological change facilitates both the redistribution and intensification of workload (Crompton and Jones, 1984). The ubiquity of desktop computers, email, the web, and easy-to-learn software has shifted elements of work once done by administrative staff onto individual academics, vastly increasing workload and eroding the barrier between time at work and away from work. The heightened expectations of faculty to pursue external research funding – referred to as research intensification, the aim of increasing per faculty research dollars – ignore the onerous application and grant administration processes that crowd out the actual conduct of research. Jacques Barzun’s (1991) famous phrase ‘scholarship at gunpoint’ is more relevant than ever as ‘research intensification’ heightens already existing overwork tendencies among university professors.

Crang (2007) reminds us that all of these work demands are also subject to time constraints and spatial complexities that rely on faulty linear assumptions about career

development and blurred lines between what constitutes work and home time. As EP Thompson (1967) demonstrated in his discussion of the advent of industrial capitalism in England, task-oriented production interwoven with the rhythms of non-work life was displaced by time-oriented production that imposed industrial discipline and sought to extract maximum value out of every unit of labour time. In that sense, capitalist labour process restructuring has always involved struggles over the organisation and experience of time, who controls it and how it is experienced. In the neoliberal university, as Dowling (2008: 815) puts it, the 'clocks and rhythms that characterise academic work' clash with other life processes that are essential but seen as 'unproductive'. Academic labour also increasingly tears down important spatial boundaries between work and home, and requires a kind of mobility that clashes with 'the greater spatial fixity of familial relations' (Crang, 2007 in Dowling, 2008: 815). These tensions have become more salient since COVID-19 forced university workers to labour from home while juggling heightened family responsibilities due to the pandemic's disruption of childcare and eldercare services. While this tension over time and space has always been part of academic life, and particularly acute for those who do not fit the classed, racialised and heteronormative model of male faculty freed up from family responsibilities by their wives' social reproductive labour, neoliberal processes intensify these inequalities.

University workers are also subject to greater surveillance and upwards accountability,² in the form of performance metrics and upwards reporting (Acker and Webber, 2016; Shore and Wright, 2000). These metrics, whether in the form of teaching evaluations, annual reports on one's output, or programme reviews, are themselves labour-intensive exercises. This can be seen, for example, in 'ethics sprawl', the intensification of ethics requirements for the conduct of research (Robson and Maier, 2018). Ball (2012) argues that the rise of these regimes of performativity in universities forces faculty

to re-orient pedagogical and scholarly activities towards those which are likely to have a positive impact on measurable performance outcomes and are a deflection of attention away from aspects of social, emotional or moral development that have no immediate measurable performative value. (p. 20)

However, the exercise of benchmarking that typified Taylor's scientific management has the effect of creating dynamics of competitive pressure, in which the ever-increasing maximum of output is set at the norm against which all are judged.

While the centralisation of university governance, rules, and procedures in the hands of senior administrators implies reductions in faculty autonomy, it is also a process in which autonomy is mobilised to effect intensification, willingly, on the part of academics. Gill (2009) usefully reminds us that

in reality, the much-vaunted autonomy often simply means that universities end up extracting even more labour from us for free, as we participate in working lives in which there is often no boundary between work and anything else (if indeed there is anything else). (p. 241)

At the other end of the spectrum, exclusion from governance, especially of precarious academic workers who generally are neither paid for time engaged in service nor have rights (either to voice or vote) in decision-making bodies, reflects a more general

centralisation of knowledge and division between conception and execution typical in Taylorist organisations.

Labour processes have always involved related processes of subjectification, particularly when changing from one production regime to another. Labour history is replete with examples of how the subjectivities associated with a prior mode of production must be ‘broken’ and remade or replaced for workers to fit within the reconfigured production process (Lewchuk, 1993; Thompson, 1967). In the case of the neoliberal university, these processes are creating entrepreneurial neoliberal subjects (Archer, 2008; Morrish, 2019) who come to accept, feel responsible for, and actively participate in the practices of self and programme promotion, rebranding, research intensification, student engagement, experiential learning, community engagement and knowledge mobilisation – all things that people invest their time and identities in, even as they are increasingly overworked by it all. Pre-existing academic subjectivities that prize individualism, competition, relative status and external rewards are reinscribed in these new work and accounting processes that are designed to maximise and minimise in the ways that market discipline does. Such a person ‘requires little management, but can be accorded the “autonomy” to manage herself, in a manner that is a far more effective exercise of power than any imposed from above by employers’ (Gill, 2009: 231). As Ball (2012: 18) puts it, neoliberalism is both ‘out there’ and ‘in here’:

neoliberalism gets into our minds and our souls, into the ways in which we think about what we do, and into our social relations with others. It is about how we relate to our students and our colleagues and our participation in new courses and forms of pedagogy and our ‘knowledge production’, but it is also about our flexibility, malleability, innovation and productivity in relation to these things.

Ball (2012: 19) specifically identifies performativity as a ‘specific policy technology’ essential to the work that neoliberal academics must do, noting that faculty

spend increasing amounts of our time in making ourselves accountable, reporting on what we do rather than doing it. There are new sets of skills to be acquired here – skills of presentation and of inflation, making the most of ourselves, making a spectacle of ourselves.

A similar technology is the *curriculum vitae*, which is not merely an “‘objective” record of achievements’ but rather a ‘technique for disciplining the self, to align the body with the objectives of the institution’ and its rewards and punishments (Dowling, 2008: 813). The *curriculum vitae* is the academic’s benchmarking stopwatch, which they use to track their own productivity. In the UK context, Keep et al. (1996) argue that academics have been ‘ahead of their time’ (p. 36) in terms of self-management. The irony, they point out,

is that just as cutting-edge practice in the private sector moves towards the ‘self-managing’ model, UK universities undermine their own version by imposing a fragmented set of practices which are sufficiently intrusive to erode mutual trust but not all-encompassing enough to provide a sustainable alternative.

New and deepening forms of stratification among faculty are, as a result, everywhere. The fragmentation of academic labour further reinforces the academic ‘star system’ that

privileges researchers over teachers and service workhorses and is dependent on the downwards mobility of PhD holders whose knowledge and skill command a lower price in a flooded academic labour market in which supply exceeds demand (Smyth, 2017). Moreover, the structure of precarious work and of reward in the neoliberal university reinforces pre-existing forms of marginalisation. For example, as Birnie et al. (2005 in Dowling, 2008) point out, 'fractional workers risk professional marginalisation through, for instance, being unable to attend meetings, participate in activities outside formal work hours, and being subject to audit cultures that assume that academics work full-time' (p. 816). In such competitive and contradictory conditions, already existing hierarchies among faculty are magnified even as everyone is experiencing more overwork. As Eric Newstadt (2008) explains,

a small cadre of elite academic 'stars', who are nonetheless terrifically over-worked, are offered high levels of academic and financial support, they enjoy relatively smaller teaching loads, social-status, and an ability to access some level of control within the institution. A much larger cadre of part-time and/or contract faculty are denied even basic – or any – perks, even as they undertake a terrific – and increasing – proportion of undergraduate teaching.

Despite the appearance that overwork is an expression of a labour of love or vocation, burnout, poor mental health, and disengagement increasingly characterise the work lives of university denizens (Butler et al., 2017). This is especially true for the growing number of precariously employed contract academic staff who are expected to continuously demonstrate their worth to the university for fear of not being renewed (UCU, 2019: 12–13). According to Butler et al. (2017), 'the personal and professional lives of academic staff are deeply affected by such changes in the structures of higher education, leading to increased stress, alienation, feelings of guilt and other negative emotions' (p. 468).

University workers of all kinds also experience escalating demands for emotional labour, particularly from students, making relationships more fraught. Students' anxiety about their future labour market prospects, the spread of the consumer mentality, and increased levels of tuition and personal debt fosters the development of a culture of entitlement. Faculty members experience this in the form of students' lobbying for higher grades, driven by the view that 'I paid for my A'. This can result in increased adversarialism between students and faculty, with the latter either disengaging or spending more time on emotional labour and expectations management. Students are also experiencing higher rates of anxiety and diagnosed mental health problems at university age (Pedrelli et al., 2015). Often ill-equipped faculty are called upon to accommodate those difficulties (not least because of the university's obligations under human rights codes). Front-line support staff also experience such tensions in the form of strident demands for immediate or greater service (like responding to emails, looking up contact information, or interpreting programme requirements), and they also bear the brunt of decisions that place roadblocks in front of students (like a shortage of enrolment spaces). In this context, university workers are expected to engage in

performances of more public, emotionally managed, identities. Relations with students are explicitly understood as performances, involving emotional expressions such as pride and the

repression of emotions through acting “nice” and “keeping one’s cool”. Relations with superiors necessitated creating an “image” of the willing professional. (Ogbonna and Harris, 2004, in Dowling, 2008: 815)

Tensions generated by emotional labour processes in the neoliberal university heighten conflict between employee groups, who are responsible for different moments of the production of education and who often see each other’s needs as a burden that adds to one’s own workload.

Conclusion

In sum, we have argued that a labour process perspective helps highlight the nature, purpose and effects of the neoliberal transformations in university work. Mirroring labour process reorganisations in other sectors, we can observe several important trends: (1) the fragmentation of work that was previously organised as a holistic craft; (2) the intensification of work for all, through both external and internalised pressures and the cheapening of some people’s labour as reflected in deepening forms of stratification; (3) the introduction of new technologies of surveillance and the reduction – although not elimination – of responsible autonomy; and (4) because much university work still relies on the consent, personality and personal engagement of workers, processes that intervene in workers’ identities to create consenting subjects to the new neoliberal model, whether through reinvestments in status hierarchies, emotion management, internalisation of new productivity norms, and other shifts from external control to internal self-control. In doing so, we also demonstrate the importance of combining political economy and Foucauldian approaches to neoliberalism, to highlight the way that external structural conditions and subjective processes combine to create new labour processes to which participants find themselves consenting and actively reproducing. Our mapping of major neoliberal restructuring in universities thus provides a solid base from which to understand the changes universities are undergoing, but also sets the stage for future research aimed at exploring how these dynamics shape strategies of resistance to neoliberal work reorganisation and intensification.

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Notes

1. This discussion is based in part on the authors’ respective experiences in university workplaces over the past 20 years. These experiences have provided us with the opportunity

to observe closely the evolving neoliberalisation of the university and its effects on people in these institutions. In particular, Ross has served as chair of an academic department, programme coordinator and academic advisor to undergraduate students, a member of the University Senate, and elected executive member of both a faculty union and a teaching assistants' union. Savage has served as Vice-Chair of Senate, chair of an academic department, grievance officer and chief negotiator of a faculty union, and vice-president and chief steward of a teaching assistants' union. Our experiences in these roles are drawn upon in the analysis.

2. It is important to note that upwards accountability is not to be confused with all forms of accountability. Indeed, the accountability that comes from democratic processes in which the governed ensure that leaders exercise their roles in the general interest remain valuable. However, neoliberal ideas elide the qualitative distinction between these forms of 'accountability' and mobilise positive associations with the term to reinforce hierarchical relations rather than democratic ones.

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