Resilience, apps and reluctant individualism: technologies of self in the neoliberal academy

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Abstract

This paper is concerned with the deep crisis affecting Universities, as large scale institutional and structural transformations produce a psychosocial and somatic catastrophe among academics (and other University workers) that manifests in experiences of chronic stress, anxiety, exhaustion, insomnia and spiralling rates of physical and mental illness. Elsewhere these have been discussed as the 'hidden injuries of the neoliberal University' (Gill, 2010), highlighting the ways in which such experiences are simultaneously acknowledged and recognised by University staff, yet silenced and exorcised from formal spaces of the contemporary Academy and without 'proper channels' of expression – being the subject of conference coffee breaks but not keynotes, of after seminar drinks but not departmental meetings, committee minutes or Senate or Council documentation. For future historians seeking to understand through such official records something about the texture of experience of current academic life, the archives will offer no insights.

However, in the last few years, this paper suggests, such injuries have moved from being almost completely silenced within Universities to becoming the subject of a variety of new spaces and services designed with 'academics in crisis' at their heart. These include the rolling out of 'wellbeing' services within Universities of programmes for stress management, mindfulness and resilience, the development of new 'apps' designed for busy or overworked people, and the rapidly expanding blogosphere which has become a key site for 'naming' and sharing such experiences of distress/injury. The paper looks critically at these three sites. It argues that whilst they recognise at least some aspects of the subjective experience of contemporary academic labouring, they remain locked into a profoundly individualist framework that turns away from systemic or collective politics to offer instead a set of individualised tools by which to 'cope' with the strains of the neoliberal Academy.

Introduction: Emergency as rule (Thrift, 2000)

There is a deep sense of crisis afflicting universities. Anyone who spends even the briefest time with academics encounters people stretched to breaking point,

restructured to death, victims of speeded up change, accelerating and proliferating demands–seemingly exacerbated rather than aided by information and communication technologies - and a work culture that requires that one is 'always on'. The crisis is not simply a matter of large-scale institutional or structural transformation, but is also a psychosocial and somatic crisis experienced by university workers as chronic stress, anxiety, exhaustion, insecurity, insomnia, and rapidly increasing rates of physical and mental illness. These 'hidden injuries of academia' (Gill, 2010), as we have called them, affect most people but are marked by wider patterns of inequality and injustice that relate to gender, age, class and other social divisions. A loud chorus of distress is increasingly clear to those who are listening, but is still systematically silenced in the 'official spaces' of the Academy, and without 'proper channels' of expression. They are more likely to be the topic of corridor conversations or e-mail exchanges between friends and colleagues, than to appear as agenda items on departmental forums or even union meetings–despite their significance and pervasiveness. Indeed, the proximity of ourselves and many of our colleagues to complete physical and mental collapse seems to be the 'elephant in the room' in most settings within the academy.

However, in the last few years, we will argue, these experiences have moved from being almost entirely silenced to becoming the subject a variety of new spaces or services often designed with academics at the heart. These include the rolling out by counselling/staff development/wellbeing services within universities of programmes for stress management, mindfulness and resilience as a way of dealing with increasing staff stress and distress; the development of new 'apps' designed for busy, stressed or overworked people; and the rapidly expanding academic 'blogosphere', with its proliferating 'survival guides' and 12 step programmes.

In this paper, we want to examine these responses to the problems facing academics. Whilst - importantly - they recognise at least some of the subjective experiences of contemporary academic labouring, we will argue that they remain locked into a profoundly individualist framework that turns away from systemic or collective analyses and politics to offer instead a set of individualised tools by which to 'cope' with the strains of working in the neoliberal Academy. These 'technologies of self' call forth an enterprising, self managed and 'responsibilised' subject who can 'manage time', 'manage change', 'manage stress', demonstrate resilience, practice mindfulness, etc etc– whilst leaving the power relations and structural contradictions of the neoliberal university untouched and unchallenged. In this way they turn the feminist notion that the personal is political on its head, rendering social and political issues into matters of individual success or failure.

Our aims here are threefold: to contribute to understanding the experiences of academics as workers; to illuminate what we see as the individualisation and psychologisation of responses to toxic academia; and, more broadly, to aid explorations of the 'psychic life of neoliberalism' (Donaghue, Gill & Kurz, 2014; Scharff, forthcoming). Neoliberalism has been extensively theorised as a political and economic rationality – characterized by increasing individualization, withdrawal of the state and introduction of market logics and rationalities into ever more spheres of life, however there has been relatively little written about its reconfiguration of subjectivity. In neoliberalism people are exhorted to become autonomous, choosing, self-managing and self-improving subjects who are reliable, responsible and accountable – modalities of subjectivity that, we suggest, are highly visible within contemporary academia and worthy of examination.

The paper is divided into five sections. In the first we briefly review the existing literature about academics as workers, examining casualisation and precariousness, the intensification and extensification of work, surveillance and audit culture. We highlight gender as one of a number of key axes of inequality within universities, discussing the challenge of taking this seriously in a way that does not simply advocate 'adding women in' to an otherwise untouched system, nor falls back on essentialist understandings of gender. In the second section we look at the blogosphere and the burgeoning of blogs– largely written by and targeted at women –which offer advice on how to survive academic life. Section three moves on from this to consider how universities themselves have responded to increasing rates of illness, stress and unhappiness amongst their staff, focusing in particular on the current vogue for 'resilience training'. The fourth section discusses the 'appification' of tools and models promoted to staff– from the widely promoted Getting Things Done to the new mindfulness apps. Finally we bring our arguments together in a discussion about the effects of these technologies of self as a response to the crises experienced by academics.

Part 1: working in the neoliberal Academy

Many countries across the world–but perhaps particularly Australia and the UK from where we write–have seen the rapid and wholesale transformation of universities in recent years, marked by what Ruth Barcan (2013) calls 'massification, marketisation and internationalisation'. In response, a growing body of work examines the 'University in ruins' (Readings, 1996), the 'edu factory' and 'academic capitalism'. Many note the corporatisation and privatisation of universities and the way in which an economic idiom and rationality now colonises understandings of human, cultural and intellectual activities that were previously understood and valued in other terms. As Gigi Roggero

(2011) notes, it is no longer enough to say that universities are like businesses, rather they are businesses, in which students are redefined as 'consumers', now saddled with staggering debts by the time they complete a three-year degree (Lazzarato, 2011; Ross, 2014)

Given both the speed and scale of change, the academic scholarship that seeks to document, understand and challenge these transformations is critically important. However its focus is primarily upon institutional transformation and even at times on using the University as a cipher for 'reading capitalism', rather than on the experiences or labouring conditions of those who work in universities (though see Bousquet, 2008; Krause et al, 2008; Martin 2012; Nelson, 2010; Harney & Moten, 2013). Studies of academics as workers or as an occupational group remain relatively scarce, but there are some emerging themes and issues which we consider below.

Precariousness and casualisation

The notion that academics are privileged above all others, with 'cushy' tenured positions, has a firm hold in the popular imagination. However, in reality, precariousness rather than security is now one of the defining experiences of academic life. Statistical information about the employment of academics shows the systematic casualisation of the workforce. In the UK, data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (2012) reveals that one third of academic staff in universities is employed on short-term, temporary contracts. But this figure excludes more than 82,000 people who are paid by the hour and therefore not counted in HESA's salary statistics, suggesting that the true extent of casualisation is far greater–and increasing rapidly (Fazackerly, 2013). Indeed, the number of teaching-only staff on temporary contracts went up by one third in the two years between 2009/10 and 2011/12. According to the British University and College Union, higher education is one of the most casualised sectors of

employment in Britain; only the hospitality industry has a greater proportion of temporary workers and 'casuals'.

In the US the picture is similar (Giroux, 2002) and in Australia the proportion of staff on short-term contracts rose from 10% to nearly 50% between 1990 and 2008 (Brown, Goodman and Yasakawa, 2010). Again, the statistics may underestimate the real extent of casualisation. Using a 'headcount' methodology, May et al (2011- cited in Barcan, 2013) argue that in fact 60% of Australian academics are on temporary contracts. As Barcan (2013) comments, 'this is an intellectual and social catastrophe, masking as flexibility'. It is also markedly gendered, with women over-represented among 'casual' and 'teaching only' staff (Bal et al, 2014)

Short-term positions are a particular feature of 'early career' academic biographies, as permanent positions are repackaged for lower pay and fewer–if any– benefits. Hourly paid 'teaching assistant' or 'visiting lecturer' positions predominate, frequently only compensating 'contact hours' or, alternatively, seeming to be based upon a purely fictional notion of how long it takes to prepare lectures, run seminars, give student feedback, hold tutorials, and mark assignments. More secure staff are affected by similarly unrealistic expectations, but in the case of the latter this impacts differently in terms of working hours and time pressure, rather than low pay and job insecurity. Despite a nomenclature that implies that their positions are to 'assist' rather than run courses, Ph.D. students and new postdocs often find themselves delivering mass undergraduate programmes with little or no support. As casualisation deepens and expands across the sector, these positions–mostly imagined by those doing them as a 'foot in the door' or as offering some experience ahead of a 'proper job', and therefore 'hope labour' (Kuehn & Corrigan, 2013) par excellence– are increasingly becoming normalised as a routine kind of 'below the line' position (to use an analogy from the

field of cultural work) – 'adjunct nation', as they might say in the US (see Krause et al., 2008). The experiences of early career academics and others suffering precarity have rightly been the subject of an emerging body of research (Archer, 2008; Krause et al) and activism but too often it can seem that the sole – or at least the most important – problem afflicting the academy is insecure employment – as if restoration of more secure tenure for academic staff would somehow end the crisis in Universities. We wish to contest this view, with a more thoroughgoing critique of the neoliberal academy which also considers more secure academic workers as enmeshed in toxic and increasingly unsustainable work relations. We argue that neoliberal academia is producing new forms of insecurity that hamper sharing and exchange, but instead push us to work harder, sell ourselves better and engage in competition rather than collaboration (Bal et al, 2014)

The intensification and extensification of work, or ,"if I didn't have to sleep it would be all right" (Crang, 2007)

Another emerging theme is time pressure (Crang, 2007) related to the spiralling demands of the job of academic which are a consequence of massive underfunded growth in student numbers; the restructuring of administrative and secretarial roles so that work previously done by others is devolved to academics; the transformative impact of ICTs, and repeated demands to do more (tweet, blog, webcast your lectures, etc etc); and multiplying pressure from research audits like ERA, PBRF and REF to get grant income, publish in top ranks journals, engage with research users, generate 'impact', etc, etc.

This intensification of work is borne out by time use surveys and other official sources. Indeed, as long ago as 2006 the UK's academic union used official statistics to

calculate that academics were working on average 9 extra hours per week–or, to put it another way, were working for free for 3 months per year. This kind of free labour–unlike unpaid internships–is almost entirely invisibilised, and is also increasing. Academics are finding that they are unable to get the work demanded of them done in a normal working week, leading to extremely long hours (underpaid and not treated as overtime), intense stress, anxiety about keeping up, with many spending evenings and weekends working. The cost of the much vaunted and cherished 'autonomy' of the academic is increasingly a volume of work that means people are having to work *all* the time.

The impact of ICTs both on the amount of work and on its dispersal over time and place is also a key topic. Writing about academics amongst other white-collar workers, Melissa Gregg (2011) talks about 'work's intimacy', about the way in which new mobile technologies have become implicated in a requirement to be 'always on', and about the 'anticipatory labour'–much of it on e-mail–that people do ahead of the working day to cope with its demands. There is also a counterpart in 'post-work labour' in which academics, busy teaching or in meetings much of the day, switch on their e-mails in the evening to begin a second shift. The significance of this un-paid extra labour, before and after normal working hours, was illustrated vividly at a staff development workshop one of us attended when a University colleague complained about the volume of e-mails in her inbox on a Monday morning before she even got to work. The trainer commented, 'I understand you are worried about your work-life balance, but if you don't check e-mail over the weekend it will have costs, and will be noticed by other colleagues who do work at weekends. So it's really your choice'. The clear implication was that not 'choosing' to work at weekends would negatively affect the speaker's

career; a discourse of 'choice' mystifying the degree to which this is normatively demanded.

Audit, performance management and surveillance

A further set of concerns focuses on 'audit culture' within universities (Power, 1994; Strathern, 2000). Surveillance of 'high-end' workers like academics has received little scholarly attention, but Roger Burrows (2012) argues that academics are fast becoming one of the most intensely monitored and surveilled groups of workers. He demonstrates that any individual academic in the UK can now be ranked and measured on more than 100 different scales and indices which become the 'qualculations' (Callon & Latour, 2005) that measure academics' value and monetise it. These metrics assess academics grant income, citation scores, esteem indicators, student evaluations, impact factors, Ph.D. completions–to name just a few. This 'metrification of "quality"' (Lorenz, 2015) is a potent example of 'power at a distance' or 'ruling by numbers'. The resulting scores can then be used to do things–to generate funding, to close down courses, to single out people for disciplinary hearings, etc.

Cris Shore (2008: 292) argues that 'auditing processes are having a corrosive effect on people's sense of professionalism and autonomy'. They produce what Chris Lorenz (2012) dubs 'self exploitation' and 'inner immigration'. They also produce distinctive kind of precarity that, as we have argued elsewhere (Gill, 2013), doesn't just go 'all the way down' to each individual's psyche, but also goes all the way up, structurally and institutionally, rendering almost everyone at risk–regardless of their contractual status (Huws, 2006). In one of our own universities, for example, a student evaluation of less than 3.5 (on a five-point scale where 5 is excellent) will automatically trigger the start of the disciplinary process. Increasingly this happens in Universities

without direct human intervention, via software programs that identify and flag 'failing' scores and initiate a standard e-mail sequence. Guy Redden (2008) notes that many parts of audit culture also erase history - indeed any kind of context - the research assessment exercises are typical in this regard: everyone starts from zero each time the clock begins again.

These processes operate on individuals, provoking fear and shame. They also operate across and between departments, institutions and even countries–with the proliferation of ever more league tables and metrics. Shore (2008, p. 286) aptly notes 'the policy of naming and shaming failing institutions has become an annual ritual and humiliation'. As we have argued elsewhere, more research is urgently needed to explore the institutional, collegial and psychosocial costs of multiplying audit culture.

Gender inequalities in academia

The final issue we want to consider in this section is the emerging research on inequalities in higher education. There are, of course, a range of structural inequalities concerning academics' employment, which relate to class, race, ethnicity, disability and age as well as gender. There is a need to explore what Joan Acker (2006) calls the 'inequality regimes' in academia: 'the inter-related practices, processes, action and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender and race inequalities' (p. 443). An ongoing body of research charts stark and continuing inequalities that relate to the numbers of women employed, their contractual statuses, levels of seniority and pay. In the 27 countries of the European Union, women constitute only 15% of full professors, and their under-representation is even more stark on grant awarding bodies, editorial boards and other powerful fora. Women are concentrated in the most junior positions, and there is the disturbing and tenacious gender pay gap, even when seniority is

controlled for – currently around 15% in the UK. Beyond this, of course, women remain concentrated in lower paid positions at the bottom of the hierarchy. As long ago as 1996, Jill Blackmore argued that the restructuring of UK academia 'has led to the re-masculinisation of the centre or core and a flexible, peripheral labour market of increasingly feminised, casualised and deprofessionalised teaching force' (1996: 345). Diane Reay (2004) distinguishes between what she dubs 'academic capital' and 'academic labour', positing women as the feminine 'lumpenproletariat' of academia, overrepresented in lower grades and temporary positions. In 2013 the Times Higher produced its first ever Global Gender Index which described 'startling levels of sexual inequality among staff' in academic institutions across the world.

As with attempts to understand gender inequality in other areas of the labour market, the unequal impacts of parenting on women and men represents an important strand of research and interest. It appears that gender inequalities are in part mediated by age and parental status in the Academy. Fewer female than male academics have children (Mason, 2011), and the reasons for this are not well understood– though the systematic casualisation of the profession, which means that one may work, after having completed a Ph.D., on repeated short-term contracts for many years, is likely to play a part, as is the 'mobility' increasingly required of a flexible and agile academic workforce. Long hours of work, alongside persistent assumptions about children as women's responsibility are also crucial. In Leathwood and Read's (2012) research, women were significantly more likely than men to highlight overwork and stress, conveying 'a strong sense of endless hours of work and desperation'. An emerging body of research in the US also addresses occupational identity and combining intellectual labour with motherhood – the so-called 'Professor Mommy' issue (e.g., Connelly & Ghodsee, 2011)

Statistical data about inequality only tell part of the story of course. Important though it is to have reliable evidence about the relative numbers, pay and statuses of women versus men in universities, for those working in academia inequality also has to be recognised at a finer grain: in the felt disparity between women's and men's pastoral care or 'emotional labour' in the workplace; in perceptions about how 'admin' is (unevenly) shared out – what Tara Brabazon (2014) has called the 'housework of academia'; in the particular challenges that women may feel in relation to working in male dominated environments; in the ways in which the requirements to 'self promote' may bring out gendered conflicts; and so on. A report for the Royal Historical Society (2015) points to the persistence of 'invisible or unconscious bias', 'stereotype threat' and 'the silencing of women' as major issues in the academy. Concern is expressed about 'a macho work culture of intense competition and peer pressure, with no interest in a good work-life balance, in the context of a sector-wide climate of continuously raised expectations of achievement in research, publications and grant-winning'. There are, as Anna Notaro (2015), puts it 'fifty shades of sexism' in the academy.

In a recent article about the masculine construction of norms for public speech, Mary Beard (2014) 'unpacked' just one –aggressive speaking behaviour - contributing precisely to this finer-grained qualitative understanding. She highlighted interrupting, talking over someone, looking blank when they speak, making reference to previous male speakers but not female ones, misattributing to a man ideas or proposals that meet with approval and were actually made by a woman as various forms of aggressive academic behaviour that are so routine as to be taken for granted. These kinds of topics animate discussion on thousands of blogs and Twitter accounts, but they remain underexplored in research (though see Harley, 2001, Morley, 2003, Deem & Lucas, 2007

on the gendered impacts of cultures of performativity and surveillance; and Scharff, 2015 for a discussion of gender and self-promotion).

Thinking about gender inequality in the academy generates significant issues and tensions. One test for us as feminist analysts is how to think and write about this without smuggling in essentialist ideas about gender, or, worse, reproducing them ourselves. Ongoing feminist discussion highlights the tension between thinking about gender as a variable versus thinking about it as a practice or set of practices (van den Brink & Benschop, 2013). There is a risk too of reproducing binary thinking. A further challenge is how to name and theorise experiences that sound to us like examples of sexism, but which are not framed or discussed as such by others. Elsewhere we have discussed this 'postfeminist problem', in which a combination of growing 'gender fatigue' (Kelan, 2009) alongside a perception that 'all the battles have been won', makes inequality unspeakable or even unintelligible (Gill, 2011, 2014; see also Ahmed, 2012). Indeed, as Christina Scharff (forthcoming) has argued one constitutive feature of neoliberalism is the repudiation of inequalities. These questions are not the subject of this paper but we highlight them here to illuminate some of the difficulties of thinking gender inequality at a moment in which it may be–simultaneously–naturalised, taking into account or disavowed as a problem (McRobbie, 2009).

A further complexity is the way in which aspirations to 'equality' and 'diversity' are themselves increasingly part of the 'mission statements' of higher education organisations, institutionalised by programmes and instruments such as 'brand Athena' or 'Aurora'. Birgit Sauer and Stefanie Woehl (2008) argue that the governance of 'changing social, ethnic and gender distinctions' may become a 'neoliberally modernised form of government and social control' in its own right. Not only are there multiple

critical questions to be asked of these 'new' concerns, but we also need to be aware of feminism's own 'will to power' in the academy. As Sabine Hark (date) has argued, a feminist critical project does not necessarily imply an institutional practice free of marginalisation or segregation. Indeed, a position on the borders, Hark points out, may actually affirm hegemonic orders of centre and periphery. An important body of work examines the particular location of gender studies in the transformation of Universities into neoliberal institutions (Buikema & van den Tuin, 2013, 2014; Griffin, 2010; Hark,2015; Hemmings,2011).

Finally we want to draw attention to one other piece of 'gender trouble': the tendency to 'lift out' gender from all other practices and relations. This has two aspects: on the one hand it is to highlight a point about the importance of thinking intersectionally - the understanding that social positions are relational rather than additive, and the need to 'make visible the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life and the power relations that are central to it' (Phoenix and Pattynama 2006:187) As Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix put it, the concept of intersectionality signifies 'the complex, irreducible, varied and variable effects which ensue when multiple axes of differentiation–economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential–intersect in historically specific contexts. The concept emphasizes that different dimensions of social life cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands' (Brah and Phoenix 2004: 76) On the other it is to locate our position as one that is not simply interested in 'adding women in'–i.e. in suggesting that if parity were achieved the job of criticism would be done–but rather to highlight our contention that a more thoroughgoing critique of the neoliberal university is needed. In this paper, then, we remain attentive to gender and to other power differentials, such as tenure status, whilst also looking at transversal issues.

In this section we have located the 'turn' academic labour in a growing interest in the transformation of universities, and looked at four themes of contemporary research and discussion. The impacts of systemic casualization; the intensification of work, cultures of audit, surveillance and performance management; alongside both entrenched and newer inequalities have yet to receive much attention. These issues remain largely silenced in most of the 'official channels' of academic institutions. Below, however, we look at how issues highlighted by this research are beginning to be addressed in other relevant spaces. We start by examining how discussions around the many pressures of academic work are positioned in the fast growing academic blogosphere.

Part 2: Blogging/ reluctant individualism

Increasingly, some glimpses of the vulnerable side of scholarly life can be seen on academic blogs and in the forum sections of academic news sites (such as *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Education*). These online venues are crucially important sites for making visible the structural problems afflicting academia, and have been instrumental in developing sophisticated analyses of the precarious and exploited labour of sessional academics, which is a rightful focus of efforts to reform the university sectors. But a striking contrast exists in the ways in which the experiences of tenured (or otherwise securely employed) academics are discussed – the sharp economic, political and ideological analysis shifts to a more personal register, with an orientation away from pressing the case for fundamental structural reform of universities in favour of venting, commiserating and sharing strategies for 'coping'. Without wanting to downplay the importance of sharing experiences and building

solidarity, we are nonetheless curious as to why there is so marked a difference here, and what light it might shed on psychosocial experiences of 'secure' academics.

We illustrate our argument with a selection of posts from the popular Canadian feminist academic blog, *Hook and Eye.* This blog is written by a shifting team of academic women occupying a range of different positions in the academic labour matrix, including a senior academic administrator, a tenured professor, some contract faculty members, sessional teaching staff, "alt-academics", and graduate students. We begin with a recent post from a tenured associate professor. In it, she crystalises a widespread sentiment expressed in the academic blogosphere: constant overwhelm.

> I feel it's possible, at this point, that I could burst into tears at any moment. It's not that I'm over scheduled, although I am. It's that I can't seem to get on top of everything.... It's that I'm so busy assessing everyone else's awesome research (job candidates, grad student chapters, student papers, faculty colleagues, conference proposers) that it makes me super itchy to get back to my own at the same time that it's nearly impossible to do so. It's that our hiring process is such a big deal but such a terrible rush, and I don't know how I feel about definite term lecturers (it's complicated; I'm really thinking about it). It's that I try to do a little research in bed at night between collapse and sleep, but then the insomnia hits from not having enough blank space in the day.
>
> There's nothing exceptional here. This is just my job and my life and there are months or semesters that go like this and it is what it is. Still. The personal is the political; the professional is the affective; sometimes, never letting them see you sweat, as the ad used to have it, means none of us have permission to feel overwhelmed and competent at the same time. [*Hook and Eye*, 12th February, 2014]

Sharing experiences is an important basis for solidarity, and the writer alludes to this in the final sentence of her post. But the politics she identifies is a politics of affect rather

than of labour, focusing on what we are allowed to feel, rather than what we might do. Furthermore, she distances herself from any direct complaint ("it is what it is"). A week later, in a follow up to this post, the same blogger suggests that a solution to her problems might be found were she able to resist the urge to multitask and to mindfully place limits around when work is done:

> So today I'm asking myself: What if I walked across campus to class without using that time to eat my lunch? What if I could wait at the bus stop without reading all the top stories in the *New York Times*? What if I could walk the dog without having to stop to scribble notes from the podcast I'm listening to? What if I could just watch *Magic Schoolbus* with my daughter instead of also trying to answer student emails at the same time? [*Hook and Eye*, 19th February, 2014]

The identification of personal time-management strategies and other forms of self-management and self-care as the remedy to the problems of overwhelm is echoed in another extract from the blog, this time written by a woman securely employed in an "alt-academic" position:

> Things have been, shall we say, stressful. As someone who scores pretty damn high on the privilege scale, I feel like a jerk for enumerating those stresses because they are totally the problems of the privileged.... It doesn't help that we work in a culture that tells us that work should come before everything else. Or that that same culture subtly reinforces the idea that our bodies are just vehicles for our brilliant brains and deserve only as much care as we need to give them to keep functioning. But after Saturday's meltdown, I realized that I needed to do better. Waiting to treat things once they become problems doesn't make much sense, and practicing some self-care is the best way for me to prevent something mostly manageable from become major.

> So, little by little, I'm trying to regain the practice of self-care that my body and mind forcibly reminded me I need. [Hook and Eye, 17th April, 2014]

As in the earlier post, the writer clearly identifies the demands of "the [academic] culture" as a substantial source of the problem, but the solution that she proffers is an individual matter of better self-care. This writer is also at pains to recognise her own relative privilege when enumerating the stresses created by her overwhelming workload, writing that she 'feels like a jerk' for complaining. This apology for feeling burdened by the demands of a job that others want but can't have is a common trope from the securely employed – the sense of guilt that it expresses seems a pervasive part of the psychosocial experiences of academics writing from this position. However, this guilt can be silencing and paralysing – maintaining a situation in which the only intelligible and legitimate critique must focus on casualization – thereby missing so much else within the neoliberal academy that needs interrogation. There is a parallel here with the way in which unpaid internships have become the focus of criticism in research and activism in the cultural and creative industries – almost as if anyone who is not working for free has no right to complain, let alone launch a political critique.

Posts on *Hook and Eye* illustrate a paradox that is apparent throughout the academic blogosphere: securely employed academics who produce piercing structural critiques of the agendas and practices of neoliberal universities when applied to the contingent workforce eschew these forms of analysis of their own experiences. In these spaces, the amorphous, multi-faceted "crisis in academia" materialises in one particular form – insecure employment -- crowding out the many other devastating effects of the dramatic changes in the university sector. When grievances are shared by those with secure employment, they are prefaced with acknowledgements of privilege (and often

guilt), and the solutions offered involve work to change the self, in one form or another. It seems as though it has become illegitimate to spend any political capital on those who have found a place "inside" the system while so many continue to struggle outside.

We have come to think of this lack of a structural, political analysis as a kind of 'reluctant individualism' – reluctant, because individualism is not the usual mode of analysis for either these writers or these spaces. It seems to us that this individualism is fallen back on by securely employed academics looking for ways to speak of our injuries because of a fear that extending a political analysis to these conditions might somehow diminish the claims of those who we know have it worse. Yet, in drawing such a hard line between "secure" and "insecure" workers in the academy, we run the risk of making visible/speakable the problems on only one side of the line and creating an impression that a whole class of academic workers are unaffected by the wrenching changes to this sector. This is not the case. Moreover, although these individualistic analyses might be understood as reflecting the political priorities currently structuring the academic blogosphere, such analyses are not confined to these spaces – they can also be readily seen in the forms of 'help' that are offered to employees by the various career development and health and counselling services within universities. In the next section, we explore some of the forms of individualised 'technologies of self' that are offered by the university sector to its academic workforce.

Part 3: Self-management and resilience as technologies of self

Back by popular demand: we are now running an extra Developing Resilience Lunch…

Over the last decade, rates of physical and mental ill-health among academics have soared. A series of articles in The Guardian newspaper in 2014, entitled 'Mental health: a university crisis' variously point to increasing levels of stress and depression among

staff and students, University counselling services unable to cope with demand, and to the detrimental effects of excessive overwork. A repeated theme across the series is the sense of pressure and isolation being experienced, and the tendency of academics to feel they have to deal with this alone. Articles in this series also highlight the disturbing fact that this 'epidemic' of illness, stress and distress is an open secret: something we all 'know' yet which is rarely taken seriously.

One place which is at the forefront of universities' response to this–indeed might be said to constitute their *only* response–are the variety of services clustered around 'staff development', 'counselling', 'occupational health' 'disability' and 'wellbeing'–to use the current mot de jour.[i] These services, singly or together, design 'programs' and 'solutions' to deal with the avalanche of staff stress and distress being experienced, which is increasing year-on-year. Typically these focus on various forms of self-management: managing stress, managing conflict, managing time, managing difficult colleagues, and so on. They use familiar techniques from self-help, constituting part of a therapeutic turn in what might otherwise (or formerly) be understood as industrial relations–a notion with a distinctly dated feel today. These workshops and training sessions are often experienced as useful by academics and other staff who participate in them–less, it would seem, for the strategies they teach, than for the way they break isolation and provide a space for discussing shared difficulties and frustrations. Many of the practitioners who lead such courses are sensitive professionals who do an excellent job and are all too aware of rising levels of distress across universities, often speaking of their interventions in terms of 'sticking plasters' or 'fingers in dam' (personal communications).

Nevertheless, it is worth looking critically at the growth of these programs as the key institutional response to the growing crisis among university staff. One particularly

popular set of interventions are those focused around 'developing resilience '– a notion that has replaced stress management, with a new focus on the ability to adapt and cope with change and to 'bounce back' from crisis or trauma. At the university where one of us works, the 'Developing Resilience One Day Workshop' now runs twice every week– giving an indication of the difficulties staff may be facing, as well as highlighting the vogue for this particular concept. It comes from ecological thought, denoting the ability of the system to return to a previous state or recover from the shock. Within universities, however, the focus is on developing individual resilience.

The training focuses upon '4 dimensions of resilience' (physical, emotional, mental and spiritual) and it explicitly distances itself from what is now characterised as 'traditional', 'acceptance oriented' approaches to managing stress. Instead it promotes more action and emotion-oriented responses that also involve cognitive-behavioural techniques, such as interrupting negative thoughts (e.g. "I can't cope", "I'm going to have to stay up all night to write my lectures for tomorrow", "They are not going to include me in the REF"). A battery of different tests is on offer to measure your 'Resilience Quotient' (RQ)–something in which employers (including universities) are showing great interest. (Be very afraid!)

Much more could be said about this, but here we seek to highlight the way in which such courses address alarming levels of staff stress, unhappiness and overwork through a focus on individual psychological functioning. These interventions systematically reframe academics' experiences as problems of a psychological nature–a deficit in resilience quotient–rather than structural consequences of a system placing intolerable demands upon its staff. As Mark Neocleous (2013:) argues:

> ‘Good subjects will “survive and thrive in any situation", they will “achieve balance" across several insecure and part-time jobs, they have “overcome life's hurdles" such as facing retirement without a pension to speak of, and just “bounce back" from whatever life throws, whether it be cut to benefits, wage freezes or global economic meltdown’

In this sense, resilience workshops become the perfect training for life in neoliberalism, offering technologies of selfhood for dealing with uncertainty, precariousness, stress, crisis. They marry the wholesale transformation and restructuring of universities, with the new forms of labouring subjectivity (resilient, creative, entrepreneurial) needed to survive in contemporary academia. They represent and underpin the psychic life of neoliberalism, turning away from any possibility of collective resistance or change – let alone a reimagining of Universities - in favour of a remodelling and upgrading of the self. Is it any wonder that Universities want ‘resilient’ workforces, who adapt to constant change, work ever harder and longer, and who, when the going gets too tough to bear, try to improve their Resilience Quotient rather than organising for change?

Part 4: How to survive in the neoliberal Academy: “we’ve got an app for that!”

Within universities another prevalent response to increasing overwork, stress and unhappiness is the turn to online applications that promise to give back time, control or peace of mind. The lifeblood of the academy is increasingly lived out online–as more and more aspects of our lives become governed by computational networks–lectures, marking, and of course e-mail. The new employee’s, ‘induction’ or ‘orientation’–previously an informal and sociable experience involving interaction with colleagues–has become a series of online programs, completed in private, involving everything

from adjusting your 'workstation' to comply with health and safety mandates, to learning about 'risk management' and even 'ethics'. Increasingly, academics turn to mobile applications to help them cope with every aspect of their working lives in pressurised and de-socialised environments.

The use of time management and productivity software has reached epic proportions in the Academy, spanning a gamut of programmes from those which 'lock you out' of desirable sites (or even e-mail), to those which constitute a new secular religion of 'Getting Things Done (Gregg, 2013). These encourage confession and cathartic self-cleansing ("I used to check my e-mail 50 times a day"), self-discipline (including enforced abstinence), pithy maxims and suggestions (such as cutting your 'to do' list in half every day), and affirmations about the productive and creative subject you will become through following these efficiency programs.

Amongst the many problematic features such apps is the way they render all but scheduled social interactions as 'interruptions', further diminishing the conviviality of academic institutions and creating a climate in which students and colleagues routinely become regarded as a 'nuisance', getting in the way of achieving goals. More perniciously still, they are complicit with a view of academics (and other workers) as 'inefficient' and 'failing', suggesting that it is our relation to work that needs to be improved and upgraded–and obscuring the systemic nature of the crisis in the work itself. It seems to us astonishing–and perhaps also profoundly revealing–that these technologies of self have been taken up with such alacrity by both academics and their managers, instead of being regarded as vicious and offensive mechanisms of super-exploitation.

Less widely discussed are the proliferating array of mindfulness-based mobile applications available, and often promoted by University staff development

departments who are unable to cope with the demands of staff and students. There are currently more than 50 of these available to download, part of the multiplying range of 'psycho technology mobile apps'. These apps include features such as meditation practice, mindfulness training, assessment or tests of stress or conscious level, strategies to improve attention and–by far the most common–reminders, alarms and bells to prompt pauses, reflections and attempts to stay 'in the moment'. These sound at predetermined intervals (from minutes to hours) and are the equivalent of the well-known elastic band on the wrist idea, used to 'snap out of' negative thoughts and stay focused on the present. Quite aside from the subjective experience of being repeatedly subject to bells, beeps and alarms on one's computer or mobile devices, it is striking to note the irony of a set of techniques and practices developed from a tradition that is critical of Western achievement orientation, now being enthusiastically embraced in an effort to soothe some of the harsh psychic consequences of the always-on, constantly striving, contemporary academic culture.

Conclusion

This paper has located gender inequality within a matrix of other features of the contemporary neoliberal university, including precariousness, overwork and increasing surveillance. We have argued that–despite the pervasive myths and nostalgia about universities–they are often toxic workplaces, marked by growing rates of stress, distress and physical and mental illness among those who work and study in them. For the most part this remains silenced or an 'open secret' within universities, but in the last few years a number of responses have developed, designed to speak to these–still largely hidden–injuries. Here we have looked at examples from the rapidly multiplying feminist academic blogosphere, at the development of 'resilience training' programs

within universities, and at the 'appification' of strategies designed to help workers cope with multiplying demands and increasing stress. The analysis has–by necessity–been selective, but we have sought to highlight some shared features of all these responses: their individualism, their psychological focus and their turning away from political and structural interventions towards increasing work on the self. We have suggested that universities interpellate and constitute us as ideal neoliberal subjects–hard-working, self disciplining, entrepreneurial and responsibilised. It is striking to see this psychic landscape of neoliberalism also reproduced in the very spaces and places designed to respond to the growing crisis.

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[i] In true Orwellian fashion we fully expect to see ‘Happiness Departments’ springing up soon in Universities, in inverseproprtion to the levels of anxiety and depression being reported.