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Carelessness: A hidden doxa of higher education

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the implications of new public sector 'reforms' for the culture of higher education. It argues that a culture of carelessness, grounded in Cartesian rationalism, has been exacerbated by new managerialism. The article challenges a prevailing sociological assumption that the character of higher education culture is primarily determined by new managerial values and norms. Carelessness in education has a longer historical trajectory. First, it has its origins in the classical Cartesian view of education, namely that scholarly work is separate from emotional thought and feeling, and that the focus of education is on educating an autonomous, rational person, *homo sapiens*, whose relationality is not regarded as central to her or his being. Second, it is grounded in the separation between fact and value that is endemic to contemporary positivist norms that govern not only scientific and social scientific thought (Sayer, 2006) but the organization of higher education (Grummell et al., 2009a; Lynch, 2006). What is new about new managerialism in higher education is the moral status it accords to carelessness. Given the moral imperative on women to do care work (O'Brien, 2007) and on men to be care-less, the carelessness of higher education has highly gendered outcomes.¹

KEYWORDS *care, carelessness, neoliberalism, new managerialism*

INTRODUCTION

OVER THE LAST TWO DECADES UNIVERSITIES HAVE BEEN TRANSFORMED increasingly into powerful consumer-oriented corporate networks, whose public interest values have been seriously challenged (Davies et al., 2006; Deem et al., 2007; Rutherford, 2005). What is new about the commercialization of university education in the 21st century is its moral legitimacy. Commercialization is normalized, and its operational values and

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purposes have been encoded in the systems of all types of universities (Dill and Soo, 2005; Marginson, 2006; Steier, 2003). Surveillance, and the unrelenting measurement of performance, are institutionalized and normalized in everyday life. Performative technologies, involving auditing and evaluating, have directed attention to the measurable, no matter how inappropriate this may be in educational and research terms. The changes are significant in terms not only of how they refocus research and teaching efforts, but also of how they change the cultural life of the university and other higher education institutions. Incessant auditing and measuring is a recipe for self-display and the fabrication of image over substance; it also leads to a type of Orwellian surveillance of one's everyday work by the university institution that is paralleled in one's personal life with a reflexive surveillance of the self. One is always measuring oneself up or down (Leathwood, 2005). Everything one does must be counted, and only the measurable matters. Trust in professional integrity and peer regulation has been replaced with bibliometric indicators. The arbitrary character of such indices is neither understood nor recognized (Erne, 2007).

When externally controlled performance indicators are the constant point of reference for one's work, regardless of how meaningless they might be, this leads to feelings of personal inauthenticity. There is a deep alienation in the experience of constantly living to perform, particularly when the performance is experienced as being of questionable educational and scholarly worth. Working under constant surveillance also breeds a culture of compliance: there is little incentive to innovate or to challenge prevailing orthodoxies, necessary though it may be. Those committed to independent scholarship and education are asked to live a lie, to sign up to values and practices which they believe are morally abhorrent and scholastically futile. In theory, the focus on performativity is genderless; it is presented as rational, efficient, accountable and giving value for money. Yet those who do most of the surveillance are men-in-power; women are disproportionately surveyed and men oversee the surveying (Morley, 2001, 2003). Higher education organizations are deeply gendered in both their practices and outcomes (Acker, 2008; Bailyn, 2003; Benschop and Brouns, 2003; Deem, 2003; Saunderson, 2002). However, as the control of universities by men is not a new phenomenon, attributing all manner of inequality to neoliberalism fails to explain the persistence of gendered patterns of seniority over time.

WOMEN AND NEW PUBLIC SERVICE MANAGEMENT

Positions of power and decision-making within all areas of education are disproportionately held by men; this is especially true of higher education

(Blackmore and Sachs, 2007; Drudy et al., 2005; United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), 2009). The history of universities shows that this is not a new phenomenon; universities have been hierarchical and patriarchal institutions for a very long time (Acker, 1990; Bagilhole, 2002; Morley, 1999; Weiner, 2008). The relative absence of women from senior management and professorial posts is in part a function of inequalities arising from gender-based discriminations, direct and indirect, institutionalized and personalized (Knights and Richards, 2003). It is also an outcome of long-standing inequality regimes in higher education, systems of organization, control and promotion that are more favourable to particular classes of men than to women (Acker, 2006). However, many of the reasons why women fail to be promoted, or are not encouraged to apply for senior posts, are not self-evident. Women may not be part of the key male-dominated networks that anoint some but not others to apply for promotion; or they may not apply because they are made to feel they would not be suitable (Morley, 2003: 146–59). Women are also disproportionately encouraged to do the ‘domestic’ work of the organization, and/or the care work (e.g. running courses, teaching, thesis supervision, doing pastoral care), neither of which count much for individual career advancement even though they are valuable to the students and the reputation of the university (Henkel, 2000). Even in Finland, where there is a higher proportion of women professors than in most EU countries (20% compared with countries like Britain and Ireland, where it is still less than 10%), there is a highly gendered invitational system for promotion that advantages men (Husu, 2000). Moreover, even when women do publish as much as men, the evidence from a ground-breaking Swedish study is that they had to have 2.5 times as many publications as men to be given the same rating for scientific competence (Wenneras and Wold, 1997). One of the issues for those women who do publish at the rate that men do is that their work is not evaluated as equal to that of men because of both what and where they publish. They are more likely to publish on women’s issues and in areas of research which are not mainstream; their work is less likely to be accepted by very well-established publishing outlets and prestigious mainstream journals (the editorial boards of which are disproportionately male). This means even their published work does not have the ‘prestige’ label of male work, even if it is more innovative (Morley, 2003).

‘Restructuring’ and new public service management were represented as gender and care neutral. It was claimed that they would provide new opportunities for women and minorities, that they were more meritocratic than traditional modes of management. While some grosser forms of gender-based discriminations and exclusions have been rectified by the passing of various pieces of employment equality legislation in particular, they have been

replaced by new exclusions, exclusions that were hidden behind gross discriminations in the earlier period. Women remain in second place in higher education (Acker, 2006; Blackmore and Sachs, 2007). The highly individualized entrepreneurialism that is at the heart of the new academy (Slaughter and Leslie, 2001) has allowed a particular 'care-less' form of competitive individualism to flourish. There are now global opportunities for mobile transnational academics, but the expectations of performance that govern these posts, and set the gold standard for leadership at all levels in the academy, are those that only a *care-less* worker can fully satisfy (Benschop and Brouns, 2003). Given the gendered order of caring (Lynch et al., 2009), senior managerial appointments and senior academic posts are most available to those who are 'care-less', those who have no primary care responsibilities, and these are likely to be very particular types of men (disproportionately) and women. Men and women who are care commanders rather than care's footsoldiers (Lynch, 2007)² are best positioned to take advantage of the career and status gains within an individualized capitalist academic system.

One of the things that is new about new managerialism is the intensification of carelessness at the heart of management. The idealized worker is one that is available 24/7 without ties or responsibilities that will hinder her or his productive capacities. She or he is unencumbered and on-call, even if not 'at work'. Much of the work, including answering emails, writing papers and books, is implicitly expected to be undertaken in 'free time', including at nights and weekends. The intensification and elasticization of the working day have been complemented by an aggressive competitiveness and ruthlessness endorsed at leadership levels (Lynch, 2006). New individualized academic capitalism breeds an organizational culture marked by increasing egocentrism, very conditional loyalties (to the university and higher education), and a declining sense of responsibility for others, particularly for students.

THE CARE CEILING

The findings from a study of top-level appointments in higher education in Ireland³ suggest that there is a 'care' ceiling operating in the workplace that is as powerful and embedded an exclusionary device as the various discriminations that operate to exclude women especially (but also men who have primary care responsibilities) from positions of authority. Senior managerial posts in higher education are defined as care-free zones (Grummell et al., 2009a). They represent the pinnacle of masculinized citizenship, being premised on dominance and carelessness (Hanlon, 2009). It is assumed that even the care of one's own emotional wellbeing is incidental. While men can rely on the moral imperative on women to care, to renege on primary care

work (O'Brien, 2007), women have no such option. Being defined as the default carers in society, women are care's footsoldiers while men are care commanders (Lynch et al., 2009).

While the care ceiling has always operated in the public sphere for top-level positions, owing to the assumed flexibility and mobility of senior managerial and academic posts, the growth of neoliberal policies has exacerbated the impact of the care ceiling. The ideal academic is now officially defined (as opposed to more informally in the past) as being capable of working without time limits and without primary care responsibilities. The new capitalist academy (Slaughter and Leslie, 2001) imposes expectations of performativity that only a care-less worker can fully satisfy (Moreau et al., 2007). As women are much less likely to be care-free than men, regardless of their age or status, their capabilities for satisfying performativity demands are lesser within the new managerial regime (Bailyn, 2003; Probert, 2005). Women do not fit the 'shapes' required by higher education organizations (Barry et al., 2006).

While the care ceiling may appear to apply only to women, it will apply increasingly to men, as they are compelled to take up the primary care work women either cannot or will not do. Moreover, the person without immediate care responsibilities is expected to have total time for the organization, as self-care is also marginalized. The framing of academic life as care-less means that the debate about equality in higher education needs to take account of the care status⁴ of academics and senior managers, and not just their gender and/or marital status.

Having equal opportunities policies, work-life balance programmes and campaigns to encourage women to seek promotion will have little substantive impact on women's chances of leading universities and higher education colleges when the jobs are increasingly defined as precluding those who have care-full lives outside of work. A care-less academic culture sends out a strong message also to graduate students and postdoctoral scholars as to who is and is not an appropriate candidate for academic life. Women and men who cannot work unpaid hours are likely to be severely disadvantaged within the academy.

CARELESSNESS, CARTESIAN RATIONALISM AND LIBERALISM

The idealization of the 'care-free' academic did not emerge with neoliberal capitalism. Neoliberalism exacerbated the demand for care-free workers, but the origins of carelessness in education lie deeper within the Cartesian thinking that underpins the very organization and scholarship of education itself (Lynch et al., 2007).

The carelessness of education has its origins in the classical Cartesian view of scholarly work, namely that it is separate from emotional thought and feeling and that the focus of education is on educating an autonomous, rational person, *homo sapiens*, whose relationality is not regarded as central to her or his being (Nussbaum, 2001). Further, it is grounded in the separation between fact and value that is endemic to contemporary positivist norms that govern not only scientific and social scientific thought (Sayer, 2006), but also the organization of higher education (Grummell et al., 2009a; Lynch, 2006). What is new about new managerialism in higher education is the moral status it accords to carelessness. The pursuit of unbridled self-interest (rationalized in terms of a 'career') has not only been normalized, it has status and legitimacy.

In both strands of liberalism there is also a denial of the interdependency of human beings, a failure to recognize the vulnerability and neediness of humanity (Kittay, 1999; Nussbaum, 2001). Issues of care and interdependency are confined to the sub-altern (Fraser and Gordon, 1997) and relationality is denied (Gilligan, 1995). Full citizenship is equated with being engaged in the public spheres of politics, the economy and culture, but not with care (Held, 1995; O'Connor et al., 1999). Thus, the arrival of neoliberalism, and its organizational correlate of new public service management, is but a new form of old politics in care terms. While neoliberal policies have exacerbated the carelessness of higher education, they did not so much generate it as reshape it in terms of transnational academic capitalism.

The lack of resistance to neoliberal regimes, and for many the endorsement of its values, are in part explained by the prior allegiance of scholars to the doxas of their own trade, the recognition that being without care responsibilities was a key to having 'a career'. The difference between the past and present is that carelessness was an unnamed assumption in the past; now it is not only accepted, it is expected and morally endorsed. Carelessness is deeply interwoven with the commerce of higher education markets.

DOXAS OF THE ACADEMY — TIME AND THE PRODUCTION OF RESEARCH

Academics' most dearly held intellectual assumptions and values are profoundly influenced by their biographical experience: their domain assumptions are strongly influenced by their paradigmatic assumptions (Gouldner, 1970). Mike Oliver (1992) documented this in his analysis of how academics disregarded and trivialized the research and political interests of disabled people. Similarly feminists identified the ways in which the domain assumptions of male researchers led to the trivialization of all that is feminine, both in theory and in research (Harding, 1991; Smith, 1987). One of the issues

that is deeply influenced by the biographical profile of academics is caring. Caring, and the associated subject of emotional work, have been trivialized and dismissed in philosophy and intellectual thought throughout the world (Kittay, 1999; Noddings, 2003; Nussbaum, 1995, 2001).

The way the social relations of research production and exchange operate therefore exacerbates the neglect of care as a research subject, both because of the domain assumptions of its leading researchers and because academic life itself is constructed on a careless doxa. Academic life is based on the premise that one has much time, personally controlled time and care-free time to think, to write and rewrite: one needs freedom from necessity to be an academic (Bourdieu, 1993). To have mentally free time, and time to cover distances of space (and of culture, through learning other languages) requires disengagement from other consuming forms of labour, one of the most greedy of which is care labour. There is an implicit assumption that the good academic can and will free-ride on other people's care work, both within and without the academy.

Given that not all caring can be delegated without being transformed (Lynch, 2007; Lynch et al., 2009), those who have non-transferable dependency demands on their time and energy either cannot write, or cannot write much. Moreover, self-marketization (the self being synonymous with the product in the case of an academic) is contingent on being able to delegate essential care and love work to others. To globalize one's point of view one must have time to do the promotional work that internationalizing one's work requires, not only writing and research time, but care-free travel time, networking time, conferencing time and general self-promotional time. It is not surprising therefore that those who are well known academically (or indeed in literature or the arts) are disproportionately people who are care-free, namely men.

VALUES, RESEARCH AND THE DENIAL OF EMOTIONAL NEEDS

Understanding the carelessness of higher education also involves understanding the indifference to values that is endemic to the social sciences and to positivist-led research and thinking (Sayer, 2005, 2006). The social sciences, including education, have lacked the capacity to critique and evaluate 'carelessness' as their own work is premised on the assumptions that values, or what Sayer (2005) has termed 'lay normativity', are outside the realm of academic analysis. There is an assumption in scientific analysis that social actors are interest-led, power-led but not evaluatively led (Sayer, 2006). Yet in everyday life people are evaluative beings, they are aware of likes and dislikes, good and

bad, right and wrong in all social actions and interactions. People judge social situations in terms of secular or other norms. By virtue of our vulnerability and need for others, and our capacity to do good or harm, we are evaluative beings. Through our interdependencies and vulnerabilities we exercise judgements, judgements that are deeply affectively driven. Yet there is limited intellectual space in the academy to analyse how inevitable human interdependencies shape social actions beyond issues of status, power and materiality (Fineman, 2008). Scholarly understanding of work has been equated with economic self-preservation and self-actualization through interaction with nature (Gurtler, 2005). There is a blindness to the centrality of nurturing for the preservation and self-actualization of the human species.

The neglect of what people value, and their way of valuing, has led to a poor scientific understanding of the emotions and sense of what gives meaning and purpose to many people within social life.

LIBERAL TRADITION – EDUCATING THE RATIONAL
CITIZEN AND THE PUBLIC PERSONA

The model citizen at the heart of research and of liberal classical education is rational and public. It is a person who is being prepared for economic, political and cultural life in the public sphere but not for a relational life as an interdependent, caring and other-centred human being (Lynch et al., 2007).

Education was and is about the development of the autonomous rational actor encapsulated in the Cartesian dictum *cogito ergo sum*. The prioritization of reason is evident in the policy sphere in the way Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of educational objectives for the cognitive domain set the agenda for evaluation and testing in a very wide range of countries in the postwar era. His equally important taxonomy of educational objectives for the affective domain (Krathwohl et al., 1964) was never taken seriously, either by educators or governments.

Contemporary educational thinking continues to draw heavily from Cartesian thinking, emphasizing the development of logical mathematical intelligence and abstract reasoning (Gardner, 1983, 1999). It has inherited from classical liberalism an indifference to the affective domain and an allegiance to the education of the rational autonomous subject. The net outcome of educational acceptance that formal education is about enhancing the development of (increasingly economic) rationality is that there is little or no formal education or preparation for the informal, unpaid caring and loving that all people do for one another at some time, and that women in all countries do almost all of the time (Noddings, 1984, 2003). People are neither educated for care and love work (unless they want to become professionalized carers in

some respect), nor assessed in terms of their capabilities in this sphere.⁵ Given the fact that much of human mental health and wellbeing is dependent on having supportive and rewarding personal relationships, and that nurturing affective relations are central to this, the neglect of care as a subject for research and teaching is a serious educational deficit.

The work of educators is premised not only on the primacy of the *rational autonomous subject*, but also on an acceptance of the core liberal view that the citizen to be educated is a *public persona*. The citizen carer and the care recipient citizen (and most people are both one and the other simultaneously) are only recognized in the educational arena when professionals are being trained as social workers, nurses, therapists, teachers, psychologists, social care workers and/or counsellors/therapists.

NEOLIBERALISM AND RATIONAL ECONOMIC
ACTOR (REA) CITIZEN

Although classical liberalism focused attention on the education of the public citizen as an autonomous subject, within new liberalism the ideal type of human being is increasingly defined as a self-sufficient, rational *economic man* (sic). What neoliberalism does which old liberalism did not do is glorify 'homo economicus' above the cultural or politically engaged citizen (Archer, 2000). The focus of the Lisbon agreement on preparing citizens for the 'knowledge economy' exemplifies this: knowledge is reduced to the status of an adjective in the service of the economy. Within the Lisbon framework, no serious account is taken of the reality of dependency for all human beings, both in childhood and at times of illness and infirmity. The dependent citizen is left outside the frame in the Rational Economic Actor (REA) model.

Within the neoliberal perspective, the ideal type of citizen is the cosmopolitan worker, a person unencumbered by care responsibilities, be s/he a migrant labourer or a market capitalist (Giroux, 2002). There is a deep disrespect for the relationally engaged, caring citizen. Incessant consumption and competitive individualism become idealized features of human identity, not least because transnational capitalism is dependent on them (Sklair, 2001). Within education, competitive individualism is no longer seen as an amoral necessity; rather it is seen as a desirable and necessary attribute for a constantly reinventing entrepreneur (Ball, 2003; Peters, 2005). New liberal thinking in education has succeeded in doing what classical liberalism did not do: it subordinates and trivializes education that has no market value. Education within the humanities has already been subjected to this devaluation (Rutherford, 2005). While education about care and love work was not even on the educational table in the Cartesian tradition, it is even more easily trivialized

in the contemporary era as it has no immediate commercial relevance in an age of marketization. Unlike the expunging of the humanities by deliberate downgrading, it is made irrelevant by omission.

The care-less model of citizenship inscribed in neoliberalism also offers a Hobbesian perspective on social and educational life, focusing on creating privatized citizens who are educated primarily for themselves (Giroux, 2002). A study of student values in higher education in the US found that students now prioritized making money as a major goal of education in a way they did not 30 years ago; the commercialization of education has led to a commercialization of interests and values among students (Harkavy, 2006).

Despite the moral acclaim granted to the autonomous, market-oriented, consuming and self-interested citizen, a large part of humanity at any given time are not self-financing consumers; these include young children, very old people, people with significant disabilities and those who are ill. Moreover, all people are dependent for some part of their lives (Lanoix, 2007). While people are undoubtedly rational economic actors and consumers, neither their rationality nor their economic and consumer choices can be presumed to be devoid of relationality (Gilligan, 1982; 1995). For most of humanity, much of life is lived in a state of profound and deep interdependency and, for some, prolonged dependency (Kittay, 1999).

CONCLUSION

What is manifested in higher education now is a very particular and new form of carelessness. It is not driven only by the doxas of the trade but by principles of individualized academic capitalism (Slaughter and Leslie, 2001). Care is only valued in the academy when it is professionalized. Caring in one's personal life is not valued, and top-level positions within higher education are substantively if not formally defined as care-less positions. This unforgiving carelessness has been endorsed as morally worthy. It is enacted daily in the lifestyle of senior managers and an increasing number of academics with a 24/7 culture of availability, and migratory and transnational lifestyles. In itself this might not matter except that what has become defined as the pinnacle of all virtue, unbounded work, is now making its way down the academic employment chain. Academics at all levels expect and are expected to work unregulated and long hours; it is part of their apprenticeship. To be a successful academic is to be unencumbered by caring.

NOTES

1. The author has been a lead investigator in two major studies on the subject of paid work and care and the relationship between the two. Findings from a study of senior appointments

in higher education in Ireland suggest that there is a 'care' ceiling operating in the workplace which is as powerful and embedded an exclusionary device as the various discriminations that operate to exclude women from positions of authority (Grummell et al., 2009b; Lynch et al., 2006).

2. Care commanders are those who can afford to pay others, or command them via their social and moral power, to do their primary care work for them. Those who are care's foot-soldiers are those who are morally impelled by society to do their own and others' care work (women of all classes), and people who must do care work for others to survive (poor people, especially women, including those who are economically vulnerable through migration). Some people would claim that they have no primary care responsibilities, no one dependent on them in any way. While a very small number of people are in this position, many others have no care responsibilities because they have offloaded them onto others (care for elderly parents for example, or siblings in need of care) or because they ignore, or engage minimally with, the care needs of those to whom they are related or connected.

3. The studies involved investigations of seven top-level appointments (at the level of Vice Chancellor, President, Vice-President, Provost, Director) in the higher education sector in Ireland. Three of the cases involved recently appointed male senior managers and an assessor from their selection board, while the others involved recently appointed female senior managers and an assessor from their selection board (except in one case study where the senior appointee was the only person interviewed): 14 interviews in all. The institutions involved include three universities, two institutes of technology, one further education college and one other education body (although these details are generalized to preserve the anonymity of respondents from this small educational field). Similar studies of senior managerial appointments at primary and second level education have also been conducted, and these are analysed elsewhere (Grummell et al., 2009b; Lynch et al., 2006).

4. Care status is referred to as 'family status' in Irish equality law (Equal Status Acts, 2000, 2004). It refers not to marital status but to whether the person has primary care responsibility for a dependent person. While care overlaps with gender, it is by no means synonymous with it; care status exercises its own distinct forms of inequality (Lynch et al., 2009). There is a need to disaggregate gendered identities from care identities as the two are not synonymous although they are deeply overlapping.

5. It is an entirely separate question as to whether or not one can be assessed in an educational institution in terms of one's capabilities for caring and loving – psychologists such as Sternberg claim that it is only through the doing or functioning of things that one can be truly assessed across all spheres.

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