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'If You Put Pressure on Yourself to Produce Then That's Your Responsibility': Mothers' Experiences of Maternity Leave and Flexible Work in the Neoliberal University

Abstract

Women remain under-represented in senior positions within universities and report barriers to career progression. Drawing on the concepts of Foucault and Bourdieu, with an emphasis on technologies of the self, this paper aims to understand mothers' academic career experiences. Interviews were conducted with 35 non-STEMM academics in Scotland and Australia, to reveal the gender dimensions of parents' academic careers, in neoliberal university contexts. The data suggest that there are tensions between organisational policies, such as maternity leave and flexible work, and the contemporary demands of academic labour. New managerial discourses which individualise and make use of moral systems are particularly effectual in driving women to take up marketised research activity and compromise leave entitlements..

Introduction

There is now broad acknowledgement that women face specific structural and cultural barriers in both establishing and progressing within academic careers (Reay, 2004). Academia has been characterised both as a 'chilly climate' for women and as a site of 'subtle and persistent' rather than necessarily oppressive inequalities (Britton, 2017, p. 24). While there are many impediments to women's progress in the academy, such as sexual harassment and exclusion from networks, gender is important for understanding women's experiences of academic work, regardless of their family obligations. Mothering is often implicated in women's marginal position (Britton, 2017). Acker and Armenti (2004) find that women with young children are both exhausted and disadvantaged and so make the well-known claim that mothers are 'sleepless in academia'. Misra et al (2012) argue that mothers must sacrifice their research in order to keep up with teaching and administration demands. In short, the extant literature suggests that academia privileges the 'disembodied worker' (Acker, 1990), and that the closest embodiment to this fiction is a white, male, affluent habitus (Berg, 2002). As a result, an institutional 'care ceiling' (Lynch et al, 2012) exists so that '…those who have been successful in achieving high office are frequently childless' (Bagilhole, 2002, p. 20).

While motherhood in academia is well researched, less scholarship has focused on academic mothers in the neoliberal era. Neoliberalism, as we are referring to it here, is 'a complex, often incoherent, unstable and even contradictory set of practices that are organized around a certain imagination of the 'market" (Shamir, 2008, p. 3). This imagination of the market has permeated almost every part of our social lives so that the distinction between the economy and society is being dissolved by neoliberal epistemology (Shamir, 2008, p. 3). A burgeoning body of literature examines the ways in which academic labour has been altered in this context, but this literature is 'largely de-gendered' (Acker and Armenti, 2004) (see for example, Collyer, 2015; Ball, 2012). This means that little is known about the ways in which neoliberal and, more specifically, new managerial practices, might impact academic mothers' already marginal position in the academy. Indeed, it was not the aim of our own research to examine the neoliberal context, but it emerged

as a salient theme from the interviews we conducted, and so we felt compelled to address the issue.

In this article, we draw upon qualitative research with social scientists and humanities scholars who work in universities in Australia and Scotland to examine the specific ways in which new managerialism mediates parents' access to, and experiences of, maternity leave and flexible work. We chart the ways new managerialism undermines equal opportunity provisions and the 'family friendly' elements of academic working conditions. Making use of Foucault and Bourdieu's scholarship, we show how the academic game is a culture of competitive responsibilisation in which the knowledge production process has intensified and has done so in specific ways for mothers. Foucault and Bourdieu's concepts help us to firstly interpret how the audit culture effects the relationship that workers have to themselves and secondly how it impedes women's career success. They help us to consider how academic mothers engage in self-imposed regulation which may legitimate new managerialism in academic organisations.

Neoliberalism and Academic Labour

Higher education, in both Australia and the United Kingdom, is now increasingly viewed as a 'market commodity' (Lynch, 2015, p. 190) with mounting pressure for universities to take on the cultural attributes of 'for profit' entities as government funding depletes. As part of this process, new managerialism has become a common feature of universities. New managerialism is the term that is used to describe a suite of 'for profit' management techniques, comprising the organisational component to neoliberalism. It prioritises efficiency through the increased surveillance of workers and 'what makes new managerialism 'new' is the deployment of managerialist principles in both public sector bodies (Lynch, Grummell and Devine, 2012), and, increasingly, in non-governmental organisations (McCrea, 2014; Lynch, 2014a). Although its implementation can vary across cultures, key features of new managerialism in the university sector include a shift to conceptualise students as consumers for whom academics must provide 'service' and institutions compete, as well as a focus on outputs that are monitored through the plethora of new performance measures attached to teaching and research. These measurements are in the form of institutional surveys and benchmarking, such as student evaluations of lecturers, as well as national and international league tables such as QS (Quacquarelli Symonds). League tables have become central to the competition for students and academic talent and so are fundamental to the marketisation of universities. Both forms of 'output' assessment quantify and compare academic performance and so encourage regulatory surveillance at both the institutional and the individual level (Lynch, 2014b). Together, these evaluation mechanisms produce what has been termed an 'audit culture' (Holmwood, 2010) in which scrutiny and appraisal are constant.

While new managerialism practices such as measurement and surveillance might appear as a means to make higher education more efficient and accountable, its use in the sector has been avidly critiqued. Lynch, Grummell and Lyons (2012: 200), for example, argue that the assumption that the sector is only about products 'undermines the very processes that created the products in the first instance'. Prioritising efficiency and effectiveness 'occurs at the expense of more broadly-based moral and social values related to care, autonomy, tolerance, respect, trust

and equality' (Lynch, 2014a, p. 5) and profit is valued over and above education. For public universities, a tension is thereby created between their role as a public good for the local community, and their market ambitions (Lynch, 2014b). In the context of profit making and league tables, human talent is also reduced to 'human resource', workers are viewed in transactional terms (Neave, 2009, p. 20, in Collyer, 2015, p. 328). One consequence of this is a 'relatively silent colonisation of the hearts and minds of academics and students', so that individuals internalise 'an actuarial and calculative mind set' (Lynch, 2014b, p. 149). It also generates precarious employment for workers who are only valued as long as their metrics are viewed favourably in comparison to their colleagues. Unsurprisingly then, research has found that the use of new evaluation systems creates 'uncertainty and anxiety' for academic workers (Collyer, 2015, p. 328).

In her commentary on new managerialism within the Irish higher education regime, Lynch (2014a, p. 8) argues that in theory, the focus on profit rather than tradition would suggest that patriarchy has loosened its hold on the academy. There is some evidence that individual women's careers can benefit from a managerial approach in higher education (Deem, 2003). However, in reality the neoliberal idealised worker continues to be 'disembodied', and so works around the clock, is extremely competitive, mobile and flexible. The neoliberal culture continues to advantage the 'care free' (Lynch, 2014a, p. 8), those who do not have the obligations of childcare or other forms of care. Duggan (2003, p. xiv) suggests that neoliberal policies 'are implemented in and through culture and politics' which has the result of 'reinforcing or contesting relations of class, race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion or nationality'. In many cases, they seem to reinforce traditional gender relations to the detriment of women. For example, O'Connor and Hagan (2015, p. 1949) explore the 'macro-institutional myth' of excellence and argue that the seemingly objective, gender-neutral measures of performance in this context are themselves highly gendered so that the very indicators of achievement in the neoliberal university are masculinised. In their case study university, they found that the subjective and gendered nature of KPIs are mostly ignored and that women, and women's caring responsibilities, were frequently identified as 'the problem'. The authors conclude by questioning whether institutional notions of excellence can ever be gender-neutral.

The intensification of the academic labour process is therefore likely to impact women in specific ways, especially those with caring responsibilities. However, there is limited literature that considers mothering in the neoliberal context. Exceptions include Nikunen's (2012 p. 722) research on the impact of children on the careers of Finnish academics on short-term contracts. Participants in this study commented that children limit job opportunities and even 'ruin' women's careers. Yet, they also reported that universities are family friendly, offer flexibility and are gender-neutral, in that all colleagues are treated equally. Nikunen (2012) therefore proposes that the norms of entrepreneurial universities and the post-feminist discourse of 'can-do' women has been internalised by workers. Klocker and Drozdzewski's (2012) research with geography academics in Australia examine how maternity and paternity is accounted for at a time when track-records are quantified. They found that the concessions for career interruption in the Australian Research Council's grant process are deemed inadequate by their participants, and so attempt to consider how maternity leave career disruption might be better accounted for using the audit system. Asking participants 'How many papers is a baby 'worth'?', Klocker and Drozdzewski found that many participants disagreed with the premise of this question and

refused to answer it, but those who did suggested it might be three papers per year over a two to three year period. The authors therefore propose that the impact of parenting for workplace productivity needs to be explored further. However, as their aim is to explore effective strategies 'within neoliberalism' (Klocker and Drozdzewski, 2012, p, 5), they do not question the system itself. In contrast, Amsler and Motta (2017) critique the neoliberal UK university though the lens of gendered, sexualised, raced and classed politics of motherhood. They problematise 'the choice of assimilation or denial' for mothers in academia and propose that dialogical ethnography can be used to identify capitalist power and to strategise alternative ways of being. They propose that, rather than working with the system, we need to move beyond it, and the corresponding norms of the good mother and good academic, by bringing feminist understandings to bear on the neoliberal academy.

In this article, we aim to build on this literature and further examine mothers' experiences of academia in neoliberal times. While the research outlined above has begun to explore the ways in which new managerialism may exacerbate gender disparities and complicate our responses to these inequalities, we need to better understand how new managerial cultures are differently experienced by parents, particularly mothers.

Theorising the Academic Game

To achieve this aim, we draw on several of the theoretical concepts of Foucault and Bourdieu. The majority of research on women in academia as well as parents in academia has taken up a sex differences approach. This has given evidence to discrimination, focusing on individuals rather than structures (Acker and Armenti, 2004, p. 5), while essentialising gender and limiting possibilities for change. The poststructural theories of Foucault and Bourdieu, allow us to consider the relationship between discourse and practice, their understandings of power enable scrutiny of the ways in which structures, both symbolic and material, are reproduced but also resisted in everyday activities and relationships. Their concepts are therefore perfectly suited to the analysis of the (dis/)connect between policy and everyday experience. Although their analyses are not frequently brought together, a number of authors, including de Certeau (1988) and Eick (2004) suggest that these types of similarities, make Foucault and Bourdieu's theories complementary for analysis (Hannus and Simola, 2010, p. 4).

Foucault

Foucault offers a theory of 'general forms of power' such as governance and self-governance (Hannus and Simola, 2010, p. 5).) and is therefore most useful for understanding the *mode* of governing in neoliberal regimes. As Lynch (2014a: 3) argues, Foucault's theoretical approach is particularly well suited to understanding new managerialism as it explains how 'regulatory values are internalized and operationalized at the individual level', with workers implicated in their own governance. New managerialism operates via what Foucault calls 'technologies of the self'. He suggests that technologies of the self are practices which are 'exercise[s] of the self upon the self by which one tries to work out, to transform one's self to attain a certain mode of being' (Foucault, 1988, p. 2). These practices may be in resistance to dominating power, or they

may be disciplinary practices (Lloyd et al., 2016). In the case of new managerialism, power operates to produce labour practices which benefit a marketised university: 'people internalize the values of efficiency, productivity and outputs, through the twin practices of habitual practice and ideological infusion' (Lynch, 2013, p.3). Academics become 'responsibilised' to be 'good' and 'productive' workers. Responsibilisation, in this culture, is therefore a practice of governance; to be a responsibilised academic is to take up an entrepreneurial disposition, it is to be morally compelled to take up self-governance so as to service the aims of the academy (Shamir, 2008). This process is something that academics can resist by taking up alternative discourses but precisely because power is discursive, neoliberal practices appear as natural and individual.

Bourdieu

According to Collyer (2015, p. 318), there has been limited engagement with Bourdieu's concept of capital along with habitus and field to research academia despite the fact that Bourdieu explicitly studied the French academy in the 1960s. In the present study, we apply Bourdieu's triad of concepts to better understand mothers' positions in the state of play in the academic field. Bourdieu's theory complements Foucault's in that he provides further tools with which to understand individuals' habitual practice and the internalisation of ideology within fields of social struggle. Both theorists view power as generative - the habitus concept relates to Foucault's idea of societal disciplining of the body.

One of Bourdieu's strengths is that, unlike Foucault, he makes explicit links between the system of power and the construction of hierarchies via his understanding of the acquisition and mobility of capital. Bourdieu's toolkit allows us to establish the structure of the field in that it emphasises the kind of resources that key players draw upon and the struggles that take place. In *Homo Academicus*, Bourdieu (1988, p. 78) sees academic capital as 'founded principally on control of the instruments of reproduction of the professorial body', as seen in the capacity of the board of examiners to appoint tenured professors. This 'socially codified power' sits alongside a collection of scientific powers (Bourdieu,1988, p. 78). Scientific powers are scientific forms of cultural and social capital established through factors such as the leadership of a research team, citations, translations, membership on editorial committees and connections with the media (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 78). Bourdieu therefore shows how 'productivity' and competition have long been part of the academic game and have an impact on academic subjectivity. He states that 'competitive dispositions' are 'both required and reinforced by the race' (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 87).

As capital accumulation takes time, younger academics are much poorer in institutional prestige and academic power than established professors. The cultural capitals that each worker brings to the job via familial transmission also impact their position in the field – the occupations of their parents, their schooling (public or private) and birth place (rural or cosmopolitan) all help or hinder a feel for the game. Capacity to compete is further mediated by age. Bourdieu suggests that younger academics are always disadvantaged in this race as it takes *time* to accumulate academic and scientific capital. We would like to add that these temporal requirements would

also impede women's participation in the game if they have significant periods of maternity and caring leave, as would the requirement that individuals 'transcend everyday existence in order to work with ideas' (Reay, 2004, p, 32). That said, the exact makeup of the terms of play, the construction of the university field and the weight of capitals, does not remain entirely consistent: 'struggles for the imposition of the principle of legitimate hierarchization do in fact cause the dividing-line between those who belong and those who do not to be constantly discussed and disputed, therefore shifting and fluctuating' (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 77).

Collyer appropriates Bourdieu to understand exactly how the rules of the game have changed in recent years. She argues that academic capital has been altered by the process of marketisation. This means that while academic capital was once legitimated through scientific capital, through the achievements of quality scholarship, it is now becoming more reliant on marketised qualities such as the quantification of outputs (Collyer, 2015, p. 325). Individual academics are active participants in this process. In their everyday capital accumulating practices, such as publicising their articles so that they might achieve higher citation rates, academics are contributing to the marketisation of the field. Individuals therefore both shape and are shaped by the field, in a process of cultural reproduction. Of course, active resistances to the structure of the field also takes place. Collyer finds that in the struggle of the workplace those with significant scientific capital are able to push back on managerial forces. However, because managers and administrators are positioned closer to the 'economic pole in the field of power' they have greater influence over academic working environments (Collyer, 2015, p. 327-8). Bourdieu's concepts therefore help us to understand how the academy is losing control over academic resources.

In the following sections we make use of Foucault and Bourdieu's concepts to analyse the interview narratives of 25 academics. The concepts of self-governance, responsibilisation, habitus, scientific capital, competitive dispositions, and field are among the explanatory tools that are applied to the analysis and discussion to inform and unpack the common themes, tensions, and contradictions in women's experiences of managing maternity leave, return to work, and flexible work in a neoliberal higher education context.

Methods

Participants

Our qualitative research spanned across a number of young and old public universities in the Australian and Scottish higher education contexts and focussed on the working and family lives of 35 parents (25 who identified as women, 10 who identified as men) who work in the social sciences and humanities. As this article is concerned with motherhood, in the following analysis we examine the women's narratives. The rationale for the disciplinary focus is that much of the extant literature on academic labour has researched the STEMM disciplines where women are more noticeably under-represented.

Australia and Scotland are the focus of this research because the researchers live and work in these countries and so have a good understanding of the workplace culture, and could easily access participants. Both national contexts are also locations of mostly public institutions and extensive neoliberal regimes. In the UK, managerialist processes have been observed since the 1980s (O'Connor and Hagan, 2015). Australia has been at the 'forefront of the neoliberal experiment' since structural reforms began in the 1980s, and funding cuts began in the 1990s (May et al, 2013, p. 260). Studying the two contexts together therefore allows us to understand how neoliberalism operates across national borders. Additionally, both contexts feature ostensibly progressive gender equity policies. For example, Australian universities have been at the frontline of maternity leave initiatives. In 2001 the Australian Catholic University became a national leader in maternity leave provision when it included 52 weeks of paid maternity/adoption leave and 15 days paternity leave for fulltime staff of two or more years of service (McMahon and Pocock, 2011). The UK university sector has been described as having a more 'patchy' commitment to maternity leave with seven institutions offering up to 26 weeks of maternity leave at higher pay in addition to the statutory six weeks at 90% of the employees pay (Adams, 2018). Although both the Australian and UK sectors have established family friendly policies, research indicates that academics still struggle to keep up with workplace demands. As workloads intensify, it has been reported that women in particular struggle to balance workplace with family (Toffeotelli and Starr, 2016). Within the UK system, it has been documented that less women than men have been included in the REF process, and that the concessions for maternity leave have been inadequate (Jensen, 2014).

Inclusion criteria for the study were that the participant was engaged in academic work (teaching or research), in social sciences or humanities, and identified themselves as a parent. Participants were primarily recruited through social media (Twitter) and as such represent a self-selecting, convenience sample. Such a sampling approach is suitable for research which does not attempt to make generalisations, but aims to understand the lived experiences of particular groups. To protect the anonymity of participants, pseudonyms are provided. The participants were from all levels of the university hierarchy, from PhD students through to professors. However, the majority were at mid-career and so were situated at Level B or C in Australian terms, Grade 7 or 8 in Scottish terms, or Lecturer/Senior Lecturer. All but one of the participants were in a relationship, and all identified as heterosexual. The following analysis features the interviews that comment on maternity leave and flexibility in the most detail. We largely draw on interviews with women who are early to mid-career, are in heterosexual relationships and have children who are under 10 years of age. This does not mean that academics who have older children or are in same-sex relationships do not experience similar challenges, just that, within our sample, this is the cohort who were the most vocal. None of the interviewees within our sample discussed other forms of care such as elder care.

Research Design

All interviews were conducted by at least two members of the research team together. Interviews were digitally recorded, and detailed notes were taken during the interviews. Interviews lasted an average of 60 minutes. Participants were asked three broad questions with a series of prompts as shown below:

1. Tell us about your career history
   Prompts:
   From undergraduate degree to now – progress to current contract/ status
2. Have you had any career breaks?
   Prompts:
   Return to work arrangements - Part-time work? Flexible working arrangements?
   Parenting policies at work?
   Workplace culture re: parenting responsibilities and childcare
   Reflection on career success in relation to parenting (higher or lower than what was expected)
   Future career trajectory?
3. Can you describe your typical working day
   Prompts:
   Spouse/ partner?
   Family support?
   Friends support?
   Resources available? Formal child care? Provision at university?
   School age children? Teenagers?
   How much control do you have over organising your working day (e.g. scheduling of meetings, teaching)?
   Background information (demographics)

Research ethics approval was secured by the employing institutions of the authoring team. All participants were made aware of the true purpose of the study, and were provided with a participant information sheet which detailed the participants' right to anonymity and right to withdraw from the study. In addition, the participants were informed that resulting data may be used to inform publications. To protect participants' identities only pseudonyms are used in the resulting analysis.

An analytical approach was adopted which follows the principles of thematic analysis. Interview transcripts were analysed by all three authors. Each transcript was read in detail, with emerging themes identified, informed by the underpinning theoretical framework as identified above. One member of the team closely read each transcript, undertaking coding for the emerging themes. These themes were then verified by the remainder of the research team. Key themes included maternity leave and flexibility.

Results

Maternity Leave

Maternity leave and return to work arrangements after periods of maternity leave were a point of concern and contention for both the Scottish and Australian academics. The data suggested that normative labour processes under new managerial conditions erode these entitlements for women. Participants talked about discrimination and disadvantage in the form of losing the authorship of articles due to maternity leave, relinquishing ownership of courses or units, and/or

losing the supervision of higher degree students who they had put a great deal of developmental work into. For example, Sarah (Senior Lecturer, Australia), shared her experience of abnegating higher degree supervision status:

> *...because I was leaving for maternity leave at the time that they were to begin, I gave up my allocation as principal* [supervisor]*... and I've had problems getting an equitable percentage on those supervisory panels now that I've returned* [to work] *even though I'm back to where I started with the sorts of demands that students are placing on me in terms of supervision. I feel as though in some ways ... I'm being 'punished' is probably too strong a word but maybe it's not. Maybe it's not, but I feel like I'm being penalised ... in some way for going on maternity leave with the PhD supervisors.*

Here, Sarah talks about the punitive repercussions of maternity leave. Although maternity leave is her right and she is entitled to return to the same job she left, her colleagues are unwilling to equitably share supervision load. This results in a reduction in workload and track record for Sarah. Collegiality is also undermined by the competitive environment in which each worker is quantified, and measured via postgraduate completions and workload calculations.

By far the most consistent finding from our interviews was that women with young children reported needing to continue labouring on academic research outputs while on maternity leave. Some participants even reported working while in hospital. For example, Elizabeth (Associate Professor, Scotland) said:

> *I was in hospital two or three times towards the due date, I do remember sitting in bed with an ancient laptop finishing a report because I thought he was about to be born.*

Despite this erosion of entitlements being a universal experience for our sample, this labour was frequently explained as self-produced. For example, Abigail (Senior Lecturer, Australia) stated:

> *I had to do the entire copy edits on my book while I was on maternity leave and I'm writing another book and my co-author wanted things done. Pressure was coming, but it was not from the university.* ***A lot of it was self-imposed.***

Abigail therefore regulated her practice according to the logic of academic capitalism; submitting to the doxic system, she attempted to continue to accrue scientific capital when she was on leave. In Bourdieu's terms, this is a process of 'symbolic force'. The demands of the marketised university are embodied by the worker, they are absorbed 'as if by magic, without physical constraint' (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 38). Precisely because the pressures Abigail experienced are discursive and productive, she individualised her experience and engaged in 'technologies of the self'.

Similarly, Jenny (Senior Lecturer, Australia), continued to do university labour while on her 'phased return' days, which are intended to be days that are allocated to spend with her child. Universities like Jenny's have an enterprise agreement in place that stipulates that women returning from maternity leave have the right to a 'phased return' - under this scheme, workers can opt to stagger their return to paid employment by working four days per week for the first 30

weeks. Jenny also referred to the labour that she carried out on leave days as self-imposed, she commented:

> *...It's quite difficult isn't it? I think academia is quite a different beast because you have so much self-managed time. In an institution like this they're not going to force you to take leave and not produce. **If you put pressure on yourself to produce then that's your responsibility**, and you do bear the brunt of that. I wonder if any institution would do that. If they would say "you need to be working 21 hours a week, and I want to see you 21 hours a week". Then you can start getting quite funny about that, and "well then I'm only going to work 21 hours a week". It kind of needs to be the reciprocal relationship in some respect, that you've got to manage your own time.*

The data suggest that these practices of self-regulation have considerable impact on academics' broader health. For example, Abigail claimed that working during maternity leave made her very stressed, and as a result, she developed a postpartum illness. However, once again, this experience was individualised – she constructed her experience as unique to her and even pathological and so irrelevant to the institutional context:

> *I think the productive feeling that I needed to work, but I'm not blaming the university for that. Just my own **character traits** at least contributed to that, although I've probably got a **genetic** predisposition to it anyway.*

It was not until later in the interview that Abigail saw her anxiety in relation to her productivity as something that might have been inspired by specific managerial practices:

> *Abigail: I mean, I think at the back of my mind, when the redundancies happened at [University Name] several years ago, it was clear that a lot of the people who were not meeting the publication output requirements were women.*

> *Interviewer 2: Right.*

> *Abigail: The union has confirmed this to me. **Women with children**. It was obvious to me, and even though there was **apparently some concession for that for a year, we all know that the publication pipeline is longer**. I mean, maybe at the back of my mind was some concern that if I didn't **continue being productive during maternity** leave, I would also be affected.*

Abigail's anxiety was therefore compounded by the threat of redundancy in a time of precarious employment, which often occurs along gendered lines, as well as the knowledge that the maternity leave entitlements do not extend far enough to account for the lengthy 'publication pipeline'. Labour is also dichotomised in her narrative: only paid labour is defined as 'productive' labour, and so her maternity leave is devalued as 'unproductive', indicating an internalisation of new managerial values.

For those on contract positions, and those who experienced maternity leave more recently, the pressure to overwork was likely to be applied to the self, by the individual worker, in *tandem* with forceful suggestion from her employers. Amrita (Research Fellow, Scotland), for example,

discussed the subtle ways in which her employers encouraged her to reduce the time she spent on maternity leave and to continue university work while on leave:

> *Amrita: While on maternity leave I was really anxious about work. I was hoping that by the time I went on maternity leave I would have a submittable paper and because I had to go on leave early and wasn't well … …and they said that if you have changes you can send it through. And I found all the emails through that really, really, stressful and I thought 'I don't want to go back'. …We had a conversation before maternity leave and they said if you need to take a year that's fine but if you came back at 6 months then that would be really great…*
>
> *It was expected that I be first author on a lot of papers. The paper I had to give up was because they said 'someone else will publish this if we don't so someone else will have to get it done'. So, it wasn't necessarily an expectation that I work on maternity but more a case that this has to get done in this **competitive environment**.*

> *Interviewer 2: How could you have been better helped?*

> *Amrita: Maybe a discussion about expectations beforehand. Contact with human resources, **not pressuring workers** while on maternity leave. My boss did say that she'd never experienced a research fellow going on maternity leave. …I found myself thinking **'they don't think I'm good enough, they're thinking I'm lazy'**.*

Amrita clearly identifies where the institution and her superiors have failed to ensure that gender equity principles are upheld. Maternity leave is treated as optional and secondary in *this competitive environment*. While pressure to overwork is being directly imposed by her manager, Amrita also internalises these demands. Her inability to deliver is individualised and the moral discourse is also present here: Amrita was concerned that she would be seen as without capacity and *lazy* if she was not able to demonstrate self-motivated productivity and competitiveness in her employment at all times, even while on maternity leave. Unfortunately, this experience has subsequently resulted in this participant abandoning academia and returning to nursing:

> *And it is disappointing because I do feel like it's a step back, but in academia if you are fragile, and you have other commitments, then they don't understand about having a life…*

Her conclusion is that academia structurally advantages those without caring obligations, but in the same sentence she once again individualises and pathologises her experience as it is communicated as a consequence of her fragility.

Sarah also commented on pressure that she received from senior academics, however, in her case it was less subtle:

> *…during my first maternity leave, I had quite a senior person call me and ask me how I could be more productive with my research whilst on maternity leave and telling me he wanted to pick my brains about how we could put forth some plans while in a highly feminized workforce, so that their research could be bubbling along and they could **keep producing…***

Sarah's quote suggests that management are explicit about the expectation that research continues during periods of formal leave. Again, 'producing' is understood as quantifiable labour that directly benefits the university. The forms of regulation that academic women are subject to are therefore multidirectional but discursively similar, in that they operate through neoliberal notions of value and accountability.

Flexibility?

The parents we interviewed are entitled to, and take up, irregular employment hours. Such arrangements included working from home on certain days of the week. One particular feature of the Scottish data were informal arrangements for parents to work 'regular' hours with a half day on one day, for example, Friday. Such arrangements were used to accommodate hospital appointments for children, formal childcare availability and the desire to have 'fun' with children. Leisha (Lecturer, Scotland) experienced these patterns of working, noting:

Pick her [her baby] up, take a walk. When she naps I work. Then after 7pm when she's in bed, more work in the evening.

A similar working pattern was reported by xxxx (Lecturer, Scotland) who reported keeping clear distinctions between work activities during the working day in addition to not working on a Friday afternoon. Caroline reflected:

Usually teaching on one day. On Mondays have a three hour teaching block and just focus on teaching. On Tuesday just keeping up with emails and admin – I do admissions. On Wednesdays I tend to just do PGR [PhD student] meetings. And Thursday is supposed to be clear but it tends to just be catching up. Weeknights and/or weekends tend to be teaching preparation.

However, this does mean that work is deferred to the evening and weekends which has the effect of stretching out the working week. Working into evenings and weekends was common for the interviewees. Such an approach has associated impacts on family life. As Amrita (Research Fellow, Scotland) commented, flexible working arrangements, although argued to support caring responsibilities, can actually result in less time spent with family: *it's not fair on my family*.

The women academics in particular communicated that they struggle to cope with the competing demands of employment and family. Sarah (Senior Lecturer, Australia) stated:

Once you come back from maternity leave, you're not in the clear. It's not like you've finished your mothering duties and you're ready to take on the world. That's not how it works at all. Quite often your kids are still very young and highly dependent, mostly on you.

Role Reversal

Some of the women workers we interviewed pre-empted the impossibility of the demands made on those who take on the dual roles of academic and mother. In their ambition to be 'successful' workers, they consciously chose not to take up flexible work arrangements and established

egalitarian or 'role reversal' parenting in order to respond to new managerial discourses. For example, when describing how she copes with the competing demands of family and work Abigail (Senior Lecturer, Australia) highlighted the importance of her partner's commitment to household labour and his willingness to take on flexible paid work while she maintains a fairly normative, masculinised, working week:

Abigail: He does all the pick-ups and drop offs from child care. I don't think that's very normal. He's really willing to make it work and support my career. A lot of my friends who were on maternity leave at the same time are super stressed because they need to leave work really early to pick up their kids and I don't do that at all. That's not my job in the household. I think that makes a huge difference. He would be completely fine with me coming back later at night. I just don't always want to do that because of the breastfeeding.

Interviewer 2: Right.

Abigail: Yeah. I think that that is ... I think I said to my Head of School as well, "I think there's a lot of emphasis on what the university could do or what it's not doing well." I remember reading on Women's Agenda once that the biggest career decision you will make is who you marry or who you decide to partner with. Universities, of course, they can do more but a lot of it is also about partners. Frankly, the women who are married to men or coupled with men or coupled with women who are in corporate work or also academics seem to have it harder than ones who've got a partner who's more flexible with their work. ...I think it's always been implicit in our relationship that he would be very active.

Here we see that Abigail has made a tactical decision to structure her family life so that it does not compete with her university work. This non-traditional way in which she does family allows her to commit and 'succeed' in an audit culture in a way that many of her women colleagues cannot. This case study therefore shows that family culture is reinforcing the disadvantage that women experience in the academic workplace. Those who have traditional gender relationships in the home appear to experience much more stress in keeping up with the demands of the labour process. However, Abigail's narrative also shows how nuanced the operation of power and agency across the home and the university can be. Abigail resists gender norms within the family as well as gender norms in the academy while at the same time reproducing the academic careerist habitus, the 'ideal worker', that is, in fact, based on masculinist norms and so exclusionary of women in particular and carers more generally.

Discussion

Our data reveal the ways in which the new managerial culture works to the detriment of parents, especial mothers of young children. The participants' experiences of maternity leave show how institutional approaches to equity neglect the realities of academic labour. What gets in the way here, is the culture of competitiveness which coexists with extensive performance output surveillance. Academic workers are unprepared to be collegial in an environment where higher degree students amount to workload points and PhD completions earn status which elevates an individual above their colleagues. This is because, in this field, more than ever, individual

academics are attributed with 'rankings' and pitted against each other. The stakes in the academic game are therefore higher and those who are absent for periods of time experience temporal disadvantage and a loss in social capital. On an interactional level this results in the diminishment of academic collegiality, it serves to marginalize 'forms of social interaction that are not assertive or self-congratulatory (Ball, 2003a)' (Lynch, Grummell and Lyons, 2012, p.198), and does not leave much space for considerations of fairness and empathy. On a structural level, it leaves women consistently disadvantaged in the academic game.

Morrish and Sauntson (2010, p. 8) suggest that, as individuals invest so much of their identities into their research, competitive research cultures very effectively direct academic behaviour. This was certainly evident in our data. Maternity leave was frequently compromised by participation in research work. The narratives made clear that a worker is expected to 'manage' the conflict between leave entitlements and the demand to produce research outputs. The pressures of the workplace (rather than the home) tend to win out in this struggle and so the realities of the labour process undermine the leave entitlements that are in place. As work culture encourages the competitive production of research outputs, individuals will 'self-impose' overwork. Institutions and managers can make direct and indirect demands of workers on maternity leave and be free from accountability, as the employer-employee relationship is 'reciprocal'. The issue of worker 'responsibility', that is highlighted in our interviewees' narratives, is commented on in the literature on new managerial power processes. For example, Clarke and Knights (2015, p.1868) argue that new managerial discourses rely on the validation of worker responsibility, they '…rely on ideal members, rendering employees wholly responsible to meet the ever-inflating demands of the organization and to go the 'extra mile' – although of course it is never enough (Davies and Peterson, 2005a: 90)'. To use Foucault's concept, individuals discipline the self to keep up with the changing environment. In Bourdieu's terms, a competitive disposition comes to dominate the academic habitus as individuals adapt to the state of play within the field, suggesting that competition discourse is close to achieving '*orthodoxa* or hegemonic discourse' (Hannus and Simola, 2010, 7). New managerialism is therefore given authority and moral legitimacy at both the individual and institutional level through productive discourses of responsibilitisation and competition.

It is important to note however that discussions of changes to academic working patterns and workloads may rely on nostalgic views of a past where academic was free and workloads were lower. As Ylijoki (2005) has pointed out, these perspectives on the past may not be accurate. Mewburn (2015) has also drawn attention to this nostalgia. Many of the participants in this paper were relatively young and as such may be reflecting on a past which did not exist. In particular in that imagined past, there were far fewer women. However, the changes to academia are well established and as such the rise of new managerialism has been identified as a driver to the worsening of working conditions of academics. Castle and Woloshyn (2003) reflect, motherhood may lead to a desire to be collegiate with those who have shared (motherhood) experiences. As further research is undertaken on motherhood and employment it will become possible to determine if these new managerialist approaches have changed collegiality for academic women.

For the women we interviewed, responsibilitisation had real bodily implications, and they paid a price for continuing to 'compete' in the academic 'race', with poor mental and physical health. Pregnancy and early motherhood is taxing, there are sound medical and social reasons for why

maternity leave exists, and the participants' narratives show the ways in which ignorance of this threatens maternal health. 'Responsibilitisation', ironically, therefore has very irresponsible outcomes. However, because power is productive, harmful discourse is naturalised and the state of play is misrecognised. The women internalised the doxic system, adopted the normative competitive disposition to their labour, and so tended to be complicit with the management culture that devalues reproductive labour and demands ever increasing research outputs. In this way, instead of presenting 'resistant' selves, academics are inclined to comply with or conform to the demands of the performance culture (Clarke and Knights, p.1879). This finding helps to further explain why previous research has found that gender inequities are felt more keenly at some moments rather than others and is viewed as subtle rather than oppressive (see Britton, 2017). In this organisational context, women internalise the game and do not always question the mechanisms that erode their entitlements and make claim on their family time. Women individualised their need to keep up with research outputs as a product of their own pathology (via reference to personality or genetics) or morality (not wanting to be seen as 'lazy'), rather than seeing overworking and constant self-improvement as dispositions of the field and a regulatory effect of new managerialism, even at a time of mass redundancies. Berg (2002) suggests that this is how neoliberal organisations work - achievements are viewed as the outcome of individual accomplishment rather than any structural or cultural advantages or inequalities, and so failure to achieve is also individualised and pathologised. Neoliberal institutions therefore only take up equal opportunity discourses in so far as they promote the myth of meritocracy, hide the inequalities that exist and protect institutions from criticism; 'when inequalities around race, gender, or sexuality are raised, they are often then dismissed as cultural, private or trivial (Duggan, 2003)' (Morrish and Sauntson, 2010, p. 9).

Abigail commented on how women might be particularly vulnerable in neoliberal universities as it was women with children who were most effected by the redundancies at her university. This reflects a 'confused commitment' (Bagilhole, 2002: 31) to equality on the part of her university as the merit principles that protected workers from redundancies were masculinised. Recognition of their vulnerability in such a biased system make women exceptionally prone to overwork. As children interrupt career progress, women often have less academic and scientific capital than their male colleagues, and so must work harder and give up leave entitlements to keep up with the race. The same narrative shows that the deficit in scientific capital that women experienced as a result of career gaps was not offset by the equal opportunity policies in place; the concessions that management offered for career gaps did not appropriately account for the 'long' publication 'pipeline'. Gender inequities therefore appear to be exacerbated or receive inadequate policy response in a new managerial culture that only conceptualises its workforce in transactional terms (Lynch, 2014a), and addresses human problems with quick-fix auditing systems. It is perhaps for these reasons that Sarah's manager contacted her, unsure of what to do about women's research productivity while they are on maternity leave. Sarah's narrative indicates how the feminisation of the non-STEMM disciplines is treated as a problem in a neoliberal work environment. It is only when feminisation can be exploited to make profit – for example, when it comes to the flexibilisation via feminised casualisation (see Reay, 2004), that it makes sense in an audit culture system.

Flexible work practices are common in academia and many of the parents we spoke with took up formal or informal flexible work arrangements. However, the narratives also revealed how the

practice of self-management in this work arrangement is double-edged. It can provide the worker with autonomy, for example, to manage family commitments alongside work commitments, but, at the same time, in a new managerial culture it can intensify labour and render some of the power processes and corresponding work pressures invisible. If labour operates outside of an institutional workplace and specific hours, it is much easier to stretch out working days and weeks, especially if the productive demands on the worker are without limit. Higher education institutions enforce minimum outputs, mostly in the form of publications and research grants, however, the real problem is that there is not a limit to what academics might produce. As academic outputs are intellectual and mostly individual, there are very few material and relational constraints on production (as is the case when an organisation is reliant on a direct customer base or supplies). Added to this, academics' identity investments in their work tend to become implicated in, and intensified by, new managerial processes. Each academic is both the worker and the product, they are essentially their own brand and this brand is a constant work in progress. As academics are subject to ever increasing performance measures 'individuals transform themselves into 'subjects that secure their sense of meaning, identity and reality' through engaging precisely in the very practices that power invokes (Knights, 2002: 582)' (Clarke and Knights, 2015, 1868). Foucault is relevant for understanding these processes, he proposed that individuals maintain their self-discipline via 'the dividing practices of normalizing judgements and techniques of individualization. These techniques turn subjects in on themselves so that they come to depend on their own identities for a sense of social significance (Foucault, 1982, 1991), transforming the individual into an object for purposes of self-improvement (Miller, 1987; Townley, 1995; Winiecki, 2006)' (Clarke and Knights, 2015, 1868). Again, a competitive 'academic habitus' results from this identity work whereby academic individuals are so invested in the game of the field, that their labour can become all consuming. 'Flexibility' encourages this preoccupation rather than tempering it, because it proliferates the working day, blurring the boundary between work and leisure, making the quest for academic self-improvement a vocation rather than mere employment.

While our institutions have put in place family friendly employment policies, and make use of equity rhetoric, the reality is that, as long as the institutional demand for our product is limitless, the unencumbered worker continues to be the ideal. The valorised academic habitus, is free to make the temporal commitment required to accrue academic and scientific capital, and is unaffected by dual demands or 'competing devotions' (Chesterman and Ross-Smith, 2010) of work and family. This makes our institutions difficult work environments for parents. It is only women who release themselves of caring duties and men who choose not to be involved fathers who can compete for top positions within the field. In this way 'neoliberalism is also characterised by a very particular and constrained conceptions of 'the family" that marginalise women and non-heteronormative family formations' (Morrish and Sauntson, 2010, p. 9). As a consequence, our interviewees expressed concern with work pressures and while many made use of flexible work arrangements to 'balance' work with family life, in the current climate, this is clearly not an easy task. As has been recognised by a number of authors, both families and universities 'make total claims on their members' and 'attempt to encompass ... the whole personality' (Coser, 1974: 1). However, as with other studies (see for example Lynch et al 2012) we found that care obligations are still felt more keenly by mothers than fathers. The family's claim on women tends to be greater than its claim on men in that women are regulated via 'good mothering' discourses and the domestic division of labour in ways that fathers are not (Goodwin

and Huppatz, 2010). As Jensen (2014, p. 348) points out, both motherhood and academia have 'insatiable appetites for time and energy, both saturated with toxic fantasies of effortless perfection'.

This study has highlighted the experiences of academic mothers, however, the dataset is predominately white, middle class and heterosexual. In this sense, the participants are relatively homogenous, and research with those who are not white, heterosexual or middle class may find different experiences. As previous research has illustrated, experiences of academic careers can be understood from an intersectional perspective (Sang 2018). As Sang et al (2013) revealed, an intersectional analysis also allows for migrant status to be considered in academic women's careers. Future research would therefore benefit from an intersectional approach which would allow an analysis of how academics' experiences of parenthood is affected by standing at the intersection of multiple sources of oppression (Anaya, 2011). It is suggested that future research could build on this paper, by undertaking studies with academic Women of Colour, LGBTQI academics and those from working-class backgrounds. Doing so will ensure a more nuanced understanding of the experience of academic motherhood and that resulting policy is tailored to the needs of a heterogenous group.

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted some of the everyday tensions that social sciences and humanities academics who are mothers negotiate when accessing maternity leave and flexible work arrangements in a culture of new managerialism. We demonstrate that, for this group, gender equity policies are routinely undermined by the audit culture that works on a merit system that is conceptualised as gender neutral but is essentially masculinist. This conflict results in either a failure to adequately implement policies or an unwillingness from women to take up career breaks or slower progression for fear of being left behind or cast out of employment. Foucault's concepts of self-discipline and governmentality help to explain how women might become complicit in this audit culture and play a part in its reproduction, giving new managerialism authority and legitimacy. We have found that discourses which individualise and make use of moral systems are particularly effectual in driving women to take up marketised research activity and compromise leave entitlements. Bourdieu's concepts of scientific and academic capital help us to explain what is at stake for women as well as how the academic race is intensifying. Women in particular are temporally disadvantaged in the academic game, and therefore mothers have fewer resources with which to resist the status quo.

These factors combined resulted in our participants displaying a patchy, ad-hoc awareness of gender inequities. Yet, where there is power there is always agency and as Bourdieu argues, the field is always in flux. Women have attempted to respond to the disadvantage they experience by rearranging the division of labour within their families, with limited success. What is clear from our data is that we need to continue a dialogue about how those with caring obligations (regardless of their gender) can be better supported in neoliberal times. As one of our participants, Sarah, stated, a fruitful start would be "*an alternative narrative around productivity for women that have had babies. That needs to be taken as seriously as the dominant narrative around productivity*". This narrative would need to take seriously reproductive labour as well as workplace labour.

Our analysis has attempted to think through the 'subtle and persistent' ways in which women academics are disadvantaged (Britton, 2017). Future research needs to generate further understandings of how discursive new managerial power operates in our universities in order to help us to work towards more successfully implemented equal opportunity policies (Bagilhole, 2002, p. 21). In doing so, the temporal dimensions to our labour need to be a central concern. Our research has demonstrated that policies that feature career breaks might be unrealistic in a culture that so highly values speed and quantity in research outputs. We therefore need to further consider the importance of time for the generation of academic and scientific capital and what this means for equity policies.

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