

## Exposing Moral Practices within Academic Governance

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*The purpose of this article is to explore that role that subjectification plays in shaping the relationship between academics and their work. Using Miller and Rose's theory of 'Advanced Liberal' governance, this paper demonstrates how neoliberal discourses which seek to govern academic labour enact the 'self' of academics to achieve their goals. Through performance evaluation, interdisciplinary research programs and Graduate Certificates of university teaching and skills development, particular conceptions of the academic self are fostered and valued. A Foucauldian interpretation of the relationship between practices, institutions and the production of self allows for a broad conception of the techniques and practices through which subjects of academia come to relate to their selves and reflect upon the construction of self within their scholarly endeavours as performing, accountable and marketable identities. It will be argued that the centrality of a sense of self within academic pursuits not only characterises neoliberal approaches to academic governance, but may potentially produce strain within academics who come to relate to their disciplines through identification, but fail to close the psychological distance between their selves and their*

*discipline. As social theorists, our first task is to expose the practices through which identification and individualisation have become norms.*

KEYWORDS: Academia; Advanced Liberal Governance; Analytics of Government; Governmentality; Identity; Techniques of the Self

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Today I would like to explore some local changes to academic governance through the theoretical lens Miller and Rose's (2008) theory of 'Advanced Liberal governance'. Their theory proposes that the activity of government in present societies has become decentred, operating through a series of mechanisms, strategies and expertise which seek to govern citizens through enticing them to 'govern their selves' in the name of self-interest (also see Rose, 1999). Strategies of power are intimately linked with techniques of subjectification, or "*techniques of the self*" which allow self-knowledge and self-examination to form an image of one's self as a subject of modes of self-formation (Rose, 1999: 245). I will present three discourses of governance through which academics actively reflect and act upon their selves, and through which the "ambitions of government might become the ambitions of the subject" (Bansel and Davies, 2010: 133). An analysis of neoliberal strategies of government must begin with a recognition of our location within power relationships, and our investment in and collusion with these strategies.

**Governing the Self in Advanced Liberal Democracies**

The cultural turn in social theory was marked by what Blackman et al. (2008: 3) have described as “the turn to language, signs and discourse as the site through which subjects are formed”. How do individuals come to know themselves, judge themselves, plan their trajectories and act upon their selves? In the Foucauldian frame, power is not conceptualised as a structure or a strength that is possessed by agents, but rather the name attributed to “a complex strategical relationship in a particular society” (Knights and Vudubakis, 1994: 93). This analysis will begin with a broad conceptualisation of the subject of the current ‘Advanced Liberal’ regime of governance as theorised by Miller and Rose (2008).

Central to Miller and Rose’s (2008: 211) theory is the claim that neoliberal states do not seek to scale back the activities of government, but rather retain an *a priori* assumption that the real is programmable by authorities, but require new strategies for intervention. The identification of the subject of neoliberal politics with the ‘consumer’, whose primary faculty is choice, becomes central to guiding reformations of the mechanisms of government and a range of practices of both workers and citizens. The worker is conceptualised as “an individual actively seeking to shape and manage his or her own life in order to maximize its returns in terms of success and achievement” (Miller and Rose, 2008: 49). Expertise may hence assist workers as much as managers, imparting them the skills to enable self-realisation and align organisational goals with individual career progress and personal development (Miller and Rose, 2008: 50).

Contained within Miller and Rose’s exposition of Advanced Liberal governance is a blueprint for reimagining the university – not as a Leviathan seeking to consume academic autonomy, nor as a bureaucratic shell which houses a multiversity of disciplines, but as a conduit of governance. In a recent book entitled *Academic Governance*, Jenny Lewis (2013) has suggested that the institution of reforms promoting transparency and accountability,

described as New Public Management, have flourished as both policy paradigms and control technologies. The embedded technologies of audit (Power, 1997) operate alongside a second mode of governance which relies upon the capacity for academics to forge and nurture their own research networks, which Lewis (2013: 13) describes as “network governance”. Where New Public Management institutionalises market-like mechanisms promoting competition between academics, departments and universities, Network Governance encourages the creation of policies and funding which promote collaborations, both between academics and between academics and industry partners, such as the Centres of Excellence in Australia (Lewis, 2013: 39). University policy may be understood as a site where data and policy are constructed, where strategies for governance are forged and problematised: as the locus of an imagination which seeks to capture, order and program the labour of academics and affiliated actors.

Both New Public Management and Network Governance engage with our present governmentality. A neoliberal political rationality rests upon the assumption that ‘choice’ is a fundamental human faculty, while entertaining the behaviourist claim that modifications in behaviour may follow from the remodelling of environment (Dean, 2010: 72). In academia, this remodelling has occurred through, for example, the commodification of intellectual property, evaluation of teaching and research ‘performance’ and policy reforms which encourage new modes of collaborative research through Network Governance. Implicit within policies which seek to encourage behavioural modification are model subjects which these policies seek to measure, evaluate and optimise.

### **Three Discourses of Academic Governance**

Viewed through the lens of Advanced Liberal governance, the programs which university departments enact to promote effectiveness or efficiency of funding may also be understood as broad programs for the modification of behaviour of academics. Table 1 briefly outlines three discourses which can be found within the mission statements and strategic plans of three Australian Universities: Monash, the University of Melbourne and the University of Sydney. This table does not provide an extensive list of all programs designed to encourage behavioural change in academics, but is rather a selection of typical discourses which can be identified within the strategic plans and mission statements of universities Australia-wide.

**Table 1: Discourses of Governance<sup>1</sup>**

Discourse	Mechanism	Programs
<b>Enact Accountability</b>	Performance evaluation	Performance Development Process (Monash); Performance Development Framework (Melbourne); Performance Management and Development System (Sydney)
<b>Foster High-performing Staff or Research</b>	Fellowships or Grants	Professorial and Larkins Fellowships and Research Accelerator Program (Monash); Interdisciplinary Seed Grant (Melbourne); Sydney Research Networks Scheme (Sydney)
<b>Improve Teaching or Research Quality</b>	Training and Certification	Graduate Certificate in Academic Practice (Monash); Graduate Certificate for University Teaching (Melbourne); Graduate Certificate in Education Studies (Sydney)

The first of these three discourses, of ‘enacting accountability’, is realised through the transformation of those being managed into managers themselves, or as Steven Ward (2012: 57) describes the strategy, as the enabling of “autonomy for accountability”. Leaders within higher education institutions, responding to a changing policy and research environment,

<sup>1</sup> This table is compiled from documents from Monash University’s *Strategic Plan* (available at <http://monash.edu/about/who/ambition/>), the University of Melbourne’s *University Plan* (available at <http://www.unimelb.edu.au/publications/>) and the University of Sydney’s *Strategic Plan* (available at <http://sydney.edu.au/strategy/implementation/>). All data was obtained from publicly accessible sources and therefore does not present a comprehensive account of *all* strategies or techniques used within these institutions.

have been encouraged to define institutional strategies and missions, some reconstructing their “*institutional* identities” (Stensaker, in Henkel, 2009: 88). As Henkel (2009: 88) suggests, the higher education institution may rival identification with an academic discipline, as the push for greater control over components of universities to achieve mission goals has created more pressure to pursue ‘top down’ forms of governance. One key strategy through which accountability to the institution’s identity and mission is ensured is through the management and evaluation of staff performance against institutional goals.

Performance evaluation technologies have been enacted across Australian universities to “align the performance of individuals with the strategic directions of the university”<sup>2</sup> and “better support the university’s performance and development needs”<sup>3</sup>. In each of the three case study universities, accountability is achieved through a yearly performance planning and evaluation cycle which appeals to academic’s assumed desires and goals for career development and advancement:

The performance development process is a planning and review cycle that supports staff to reach their full career potential and to achieve their work goals<sup>4</sup>

[The objectives of performance review discussions include: to] develop a plan which includes future performance objectives, and professional development activities to be agreed between the supervisor and the staff member<sup>5</sup>

[Academic staff are eligible for promotion if] they have completed an academic planning and development or performance management and development review in the past fifteen months<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Melbourne University’s *University Plan*, p.13.

<sup>3</sup> See Sydney University’s *Strategic Plan*, p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> See Monash University’s webpage: <http://www.adm.monash.edu.au/workplace-policy/staff-development/performance-development-process-acad.html>.

<sup>5</sup> See Melbourne University’s webpage: <http://policy.unimelb.edu.au/MPF1147>.

The collection, assemblage and presentation of an individual's performance is not in itself a technique for governing academics, but when combined with the assumption that academics want to use their evaluation feedback to support career advancement, performance evaluation takes on a moral character. At the University of Melbourne,

Where a supervisor can demonstrate that a staff member's performance is unsatisfactory, they will schedule a review and feedback session to discuss with the staff member the elements of performance which are unsatisfactory. Where discussions do not resolve the matter, the supervisor may develop a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) in consultation with the staff member.<sup>7</sup>

Performance evaluation utilises both surveillance and normalising judgement in a manner similar to Foucault's (1979) description of 'the examination'. When viewed as a technique of power, performance evaluation individualises the academic and makes them visible through the documentation of conduct. In other words, performance evaluation is only a force of external surveillance and discipline for those who fail to approximate the model of the enterprising self. For the neoliberal subject, this process is a tool which enables self-realisation within a labour marketplace. This governmental strategy allows the development of an academic identity to become much more closely aligned with "an evolving individual sense of value and aspirational priorities" (Henkel, 2009: 91), or as Giddens (1991) suggests, as a reflexive project of self-formation.

The second discursive strategy, of 'fostering high-performing staff or research' may be interpreted as an attempt to further enable the enterprising subjects expected within performance development. Programs which seek to enact 'high-performance' research further

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<sup>6</sup> See Sydney University's webpage:

<http://sydney.edu.au/policies/showdoc.aspx?recnum=PDOC2012/268&RendNum=0>

<sup>7</sup> See Melbourne University's webpage: <http://policy.unimelb.edu.au/MPF1147>

specify how academics might express their entrepreneurial character. Monash University's Larkins and Professorial Fellowships are not only based on an applicant's achievements and competitiveness against other candidates, but also their "strategic alignment with Monash priorities" which includes the institution's goal to "increase capacity for major interdisciplinary research endeavours".<sup>8</sup> The University of Melbourne and Sydney have also encouraged interdisciplinarity by offering opportunities to seed projects, including the Interdisciplinary Seed Grant at Melbourne, which offered research teams up to \$60,000 over 12 months, and the Sydney Research Networks Scheme (or SyReNs)<sup>9</sup> which offered up to \$200,000 per annum for up to two years. These initiatives require applicants to compile teams of active researchers from across disciplines and faculties to be considered for funding. These initiatives not only offer funding to research that is perceived to be likely to produce results, but ask academics to consider the trajectory of their research and their ability to adapt to an ecology in which an academic discipline is not a boundary but a node within a multi-disciplinary nexus of knowledge, or as epistemologies which can be used to supplement one another.

The intensification of funding towards interdisciplinary ventures may provide opportunities for new forms of research, but also challenges as academics must confront disciplinary boundaries which contain not just epistemic communities, but social ones. In Tony Becher's (1989) study, *Academic Tribes and Territories*, academic disciplines are described as 'tribes' with their own sense of identity, loyalties, (intellectual) territories and relationships with other academic tribes. Disciplines are local cultures which are reproduced by endogenous myths, socialisation processes, and regulatory practices which promote the social cohesion

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<sup>8</sup> See the Larkins and Monash Professorial Fellowship details at <http://intranet.monash.edu.au/research/tes/larkins-fellowship/index.html> and <http://intranet.monash.edu.au/research/tes/prof-fellowship/index.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Details of the SyReNs scheme available at [http://sydney.edu.au/research\\_support/funding/sydney/syrens.shtml](http://sydney.edu.au/research_support/funding/sydney/syrens.shtml), also see Rickards, 2012: 7.

of its members (Henkel, 2009). Krauss (2012) extends Becher's analysis to include interdisciplinary academic groups. Krauss claims that academic tribes and territories are still 'evolving', as some interdisciplinary and problem-based academic groups such as 'tourism studies' develop their own practices and discourses within the current higher education policy environment, becoming more like the disciplinary tribes in their modes of social organisation. Through tribe-like practices, academics engage in a form of identity-building which is beyond the managerial imperatives of university policy. Disciplinary boundaries are more than epistemic territories: they guide the production and reproduction of communities of scholars with their own myths, ideals and values which may inspire or engender an ethics which exists alongside the entrepreneurialisation of academics.

The third discourse of governance I identified earlier, of improving teaching and research quality, conceptualises teaching and research as pan-academic activities with generic skills which can improve the quality of teaching and research across disciplines. Academic skills training and certification programs such as the Graduate Certificate of Academic Practice at Monash, the Graduate Certificate of University Teaching at Melbourne, and the Graduate Certificate in Education Studies at Sydney aim to act upon the teaching, research and leadership skills of academics across their respective universities.<sup>10</sup> These programs appeal to a conceptualisation of academics as "human capital" – as repositories for skills which can help boost research rankings and gain more resources" (Moran, 1998: 68). As the University of Melbourne have stated of their Graduate Certificate in University Teaching:

Past graduates from the GCUT have reported many positive career outcomes, including enhanced knowledge of effective teaching and learning, improved student evaluation

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<sup>10</sup> See the following websites for information on these Graduate Certificate programs: <http://opvclt.monash.edu.au/educational-excellence/gcap/index.html> (Monash University); [http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/prof\\_dev/uni\\_teachers/gcut/](http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/prof_dev/uni_teachers/gcut/) (University of Melbourne); and [http://sydney.edu.au/education\\_social\\_work/future\\_students/postgraduate/higher\\_education.shtml](http://sydney.edu.au/education_social_work/future_students/postgraduate/higher_education.shtml) (University of Sydney).

scores, increased promotion opportunities, publication in academic journals, and success in winning teaching awards and grants for educational research and development.<sup>11</sup>

Those academics are able to demonstrate their ability to enhance the status or value of a department are in a significantly better position to compete in the academic field than those who do not. As van Krieken comments, “the core problem becomes one of turning one’s self into a brand and adapting one’s persona to the ever-changing demands of the labour market” (2012: 73). The recognition of one’s self as a commodity – a product that can be valued, compared and selected by institutional bodies – is essential to the operation of programs designed to improve teaching and research, such as the Graduate Certificates identified here.

### **Strained Identification: An Impact of Self-centred Academic Practice?**

The common theme uniting the three discourses of governance identified here is the centrality of the self to academic labour. As Metcalf (2013: 533) argues in his paper, ‘Sociology Teaching as a Vocation’, the abstract style used within many first-year sociology textbooks seems to encourage students to identify themselves as sociologists, resembling Foucault’s account of subjectification. Quoting Weber, Metcalf (2013: 533) argues that this form of identification is a vanity, “the deadly enemy of all matter-of-fact devotion to a cause, and of all distance, in this case, of distance towards one’s self”. For Metcalf, as for Foucault, subjectification relies upon objectification – in Metcalf’s argument, this is the objectification of the discipline of sociology and the desire to become one with the object:

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<sup>11</sup> For details about the Graduate Certificate of University Teaching, see [http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/prof\\_dev/uni\\_teachers/gcut/](http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/prof_dev/uni_teachers/gcut/).

On the one hand, this is a claim of being a sociologist, at one with sociology, the same as sociology. On the other hand, the very act of pointing shows that the thing that is desired is not where the subject is. It is an aspiration, outside them, set in the future.

(2013: 537)

Identification with one's discipline entwines the pursuit of knowledge with the pursuit of self-esteem and recognition. Rather than addressing the subject at hand, the lecturer talks through their discipline to represent themselves to their students and their students may become too self-conscious to learn, aware that they lack the closeness to the discipline which the lecturer embodies (Metcalf, 2013: 539). The anxious uncertainty about one's ability to perform, to demonstrate closeness to the discipline, is reminiscent of Rosalind Gill's (2010) account of the 'hidden injuries of the neoliberal university', most notably, of the "toxic shame" which accompanies some individuals' experiences of playing the publishing game. As Gill (2010: 240) argues, academics tend to be enterprising subjects, perfectly emblematic of the neoliberal movement, so that a lack of success, in publishing or other academic pursuits, appear as individual moral failings.

This individualising discourse devours us like a flesh-eating bacterium, producing its own toxic waste – shame: I'm a fraud, I'm useless, I'm nothing.

(2010: 240)

The self which is central to practices of scholarship are visible in the anecdotal interpretations of both Gill and Metcalf, and point to a need to expose practices which individualise and moralise academics, and question the outcomes of these practices. If, as Gill (2010: 241) claims, the lack of resistance to the neoliberalisation of universities is partially a result of such individualising practices and our silence about some of their effects, then our first act as reflexive intellectuals must be to open the doors to our own experiences.

As Foucault (1977: 208) suggests, the role of an intellectual who recognises the marginalisation of truth because of the orthodoxy of academic discourse is not to further marginalise, but to engage in theory-building, to “sap power” alongside those who struggle. Theory-building is a local practice to struggle against power through which assumptions and silences may be conjured and exposed to alternative visions of academic labour and its relation to the self.

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