

Sanity, 'madness,' and the Academy

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In this article I look at the pressures exerted on academics in England, particularly early career researchers, by the collision of what in many cases is an elitist work culture with the neoliberalisation, metricisation, and managerialisation of the academy. I draw on the work of the radical psychoanalyst R. D. Laing, who argued that to understand madness, we have to first critique our ideas of normality and 'sanity,' which he argues are inherently constructed of 'double binds.' I utilise my own experience working on gender equality in universities, and as an early career lecturer in a geography department, to explore how academics find themselves positioned in a web of neoliberal and traditional, elitist power dynamics and the implications for their mental health.

Keywords: Neoliberal university, mental health, early career researchers, exclusion, RD Laing

Key messages

- The 'epidemic' of mental health crises in universities needs to be understood in the context of academic hierarchies and power dynamics
- Contradictory pressures are exerted on early career researchers by the collision of elitism and neoliberalism
- R. D. Laing's approach to mental illness can elucidate how the work culture of universities interacts with the experience of mental distress.

L'équilibre mental, la « folie », et le monde universitaire

Cet article pose un regard sur les pressions exercées sur les professeurs d'université en Angleterre, notamment les chercheurs en début de carrière, et qui résultent dans de nombreux cas du conflit direct entre une culture de travail élitiste et le néolibéralisme ainsi que la propension à tout mesurer et gérer dans le monde universitaire. Je me situe dans le courant de pensée du psychanalyste radical R. D. Laing qui a fait valoir qu'avant de concevoir la folie, nous devons d'abord remettre en question les idées reçues au sujet de la normalité et de « l'équilibre mental », lesquelles, selon lui, résultent nécessairement de « doubles contraintes ». L'expérience acquise dans le cadre de travaux menés sur l'égalité des sexes dans les universités et à titre de chargé de cours en début de carrière dans un département de géographie m'a permis d'établir les bases de cette étude. Je m'intéresse aux professeurs d'université et comment ils se retrouvent coincés dans un filet de forces élitistes, tant néolibérales que traditionnelles, et sur les conséquences pour leur santé mentale.

Mots clés : université néolibérale, santé mentale, chercheurs en début de carrière, exclusion, R. D. Laing

Introduction

With the development of a global market place in higher education (Marginson and van der Wende 2007) universities are increasingly undergoing a relentless neoliberal onslaught of corporatisation, metricisation, and managerialisation. It has frequently been observed that this trend is concurrent with a growing epidemic of anxiety, distress, and depression (Gill 2009; Burrows 2012; Collier 2014). These issues are intimately related, and people in certain groups in the academy—students, early career researchers, women, and black and minority ethnic peopleⁱ—are taking the strain of the multiple, contradictory forces competing for power in the globalizing market in higher education. This strain is manifesting itself in widespread malaise, disaffection, and in some cases even suicide. In this article, following the work of radical psychiatrist R. D. Laing, I examine the way that academia is structured so that the power struggles that take place within it perpetuate ‘maddening’ systems and hierarchies. Laing’s work on ‘double binds,’ consisting of contradictory demands and expectations, is used here to analyse situations in which people have no choice but to adopt coping strategies that lead them to be constructed as ‘abnormal.’

This article is inherently self-reflexive, and somewhat self-entangled, as it seeks to use scholarship to problematize its own conditions of production. I have found myself adopting a voice acquired in the very institutions that are the subject of this critique, to explore emotional issues that are the constitutive other of the rational, logical argumentation which characterises the distinctive ‘rigour’ of academic work. I draw on my involvement in the issue of gender equality in universities, as well as experiences and observations as a PhD student, early career lecturer, and feminist researcher in geography departments of so-called ‘elite’ English universities. The difficulties of being positioned (as I am) as early career, female, and feminist in universities are well documented (e.g., Reay 2004; Niemann et al. 2012; Fotaki 2013), but this somewhat excluded position affords a view of some of the contradictory tensions inherent in certain subject positions in academia. One particular comment, and one that was by no means isolated, had considerable impact, when I found myself reprimanded by a senior colleague in a position of considerable power over me at the time, with the statement that whilst my work on feminist theory was all well and good, I was to keep my work on gender equality in the institution as a “hobby,” *for the sake of my mental health*. This comment, and the context which engendered it, made me realise the extent to which mental health is used as a method of control, as much in universities as in society at large. It also made me realise that the structural inequalities which have always endured in universities and which are being exacerbated and transformed by neoliberalisation, have to be brought into dialogue with the rise in mental health issues, for which everyone in universities should feel a responsibility for remedying.

Trends towards greater managerialism, bureaucratization, and marketization in higher education are increasingly common across the world, but specific local histories, cultures, and power dynamics are essential to understanding the transformations that these processes entail. This article speaks from the English experience, and whilst the themes with which it engages are common from Chile to Hong Kong, universities in England have a distinctive role in the maintenance of the country’s politics and complex class system (Gagnier 2013). English universities reflect the country’s division between state and private schools. Whilst only 7% of citizens go to private school, people from this background dominate elite universities and influential public bodies (Ridley 2014). The universities of Oxford and Cambridge, known collectively as Oxbridge, remain constitutive of elite culture and dominance (Deslandes 2005), and this power has been extended with the establishment and growth of the elite(ist) Russell Group lobby.ⁱⁱ It is within living memory that women were entirely excluded from universities, and universities dedicated to the working classes were

deemed ‘dangerous’ when they first started up in the 19th century.ⁱⁱⁱ Systems within elite universities are exceptionally hierarchical, and what on the one hand could be seen as the valuing of expert opinion based on experience and judgement, can also be seen as a lack of transparency and accountability. In the current global economic climate, universities exhibit patterns of elites wrestling with the new demands of the market in order to retain the power that historically has been based on more traditional forms of governance (Schulz 2013). The contradictory values that this implies mean that those at the bottom of hierarchical university structures have to produce work that speaks to audit metrics and impact agendas, whilst also being accepted on traditional academic terms—and take on a quantity of work, competition, and scrutiny which previous generations did not have to cope with, whilst developing their research profile early in their career. The result is spaces that are inherently contradictory, and, which place people who find themselves othered by the predominant work culture in vulnerable, negative positions in which anxiety, depression, and stress may be the only available coping strategies.

In this article I will first outline the approach to mental health developed by the ‘radical’ psychiatry school, and propose that this understanding of mental health can shed a progressive light on issues of wellbeing in the academy, in the context of eroding work conditions and increased inequality. The approach espoused by radical psychiatrist R. D. Laing and others, prioritises a critique of what counts as ‘normal’ and analyses the double binds and contradictions that can underpin issues of mental health. It is my contention here that exclusionary academic hierarchies and work cultures, are maintained as much by placing ‘others’ in impossible double binds and enforcing a constrained view of what success in academia means, as they are by any notion of merit or achievement (Reay 2004; Niemann et al. 2012).

Radical psychiatry

To bring political-economic critiques of universities into dialogue with issues of mental health, I draw on work from late 20th century ‘radical’—some would say ‘anti’—psychiatry and, in particular, the work of R. D. Laing, whose book *Sanity, madness and the family* is echoed in the title of this article. Despite being vociferously discredited by mainstream, ‘medical model’ psychiatry, Laing’s work is currently experiencing renewed interest (see, for example, Roberts 2011). His fundamental, and most contentious, argument is that the experience of madness is valid, and can be seen as a reasonable coping strategy when faced with a contradictory, negative environment. He adopts a phenomenological ontology that assumes the self can only be understood in the context of social interactions, and that rather than dismissing the ‘rantings’ of the mentally unwell, meaning can be found in madness that can elucidate pathways to healing (Roberts 2011). This may seem obvious to critical social scientists, but is a dramatic challenge to bio-medical theories of mental illness. This article is not seeking to contribute to these particular debates in psychiatry that continue to divide the discipline, but rather to make use of Laing’s insight that to understand mental illness, you have to also critique what counts as normal. To bring out how arbitrary and politicised the definition of normal can be, he observes, with two world wars fresh in the collective memory, that “normal men have killed perhaps 100,000,000 of their fellow normal men in the last fifty years” (Laing 1990, 24).

Laing’s work can also be seen as part of the lineage of 20th century scholarship that sought to bring a Marxist analysis to Freudian conceptualisations of human experience. The issue of alienation is central to Laing’s work, not only in terms of alienation from the fruits of one’s labour, but also because of the lack of recognition of identities, wills, and desires in a

society driven by production for capital. As neoliberal managerial and financial systems take hold, the university is becoming a space in which contradictory values and work cultures compete to create a discursive and material context in which labour rights are eroding, inequality is increasing, and traditional hierarchies are defensively shoring themselves up in the face of exposure to the equally, but differently, iniquitous forces of the market. Universities remain privileged spaces, but this privilege is maintained by self-referentially recreating values and norms that have historically advantaged white male elites. These norms range from complacent everyday sexism to be found in the normalised harassment of female students (Kershaw 2009), the disempowerment inherent in the vertical relationships of supervision and mentorship (Mills and Paulson 2014), and the bureaucracies and audit systems that undermine aesthetic judgements of merit in research. This occurs in a context in which, despite producing critiques of such liberal, enlightenment thinking, the values of rationality and objectivity dominate and trivialise discussion of the emotional import of negotiating this terrain.

Procrustean beds and double binds

Laing's framework brings more complexity to the idea, common across Freudo-Marxism, that sees "neuroses and psychoses as mere superstructural by-products of unjust social structures" (Protevi 2009, 91). Exclusion is often presented as a barrier to be overcome. This formulation places the responsibility for inequality in the hands of the excluded, as they are encouraged to build various forms of 'capital' in order to access various forms of resources. Laing makes it clear that unjust structures, barriers and power dynamics are constructed of double binds—irreconcilable demands or courses of action. Exclusion and marginalisation is to be found when people are placed in situations where they are damned if they do and damned if they don't. To briefly illustrate—the woman who is overlooked for promotion at work and told to be more assertive, may quickly be dismissed as aggressive or typically "a bitch"/ "honorary man" if she adopts the same strategies as her male colleagues. These double binds can be uncovered by logical consideration of the values implicit in patterns of behaviour and communication.

It is Laing's contention that "we have all been processed on Procrustean beds," by which he refers to the stringent expectations around what it is to be normal that "create, in short, one dimensional man: to promote respect, conformity, obedience; to con children out of play; to induce a fear of failure; to promote a respect for work; ... to promote respect for "respectability"" (Laing 1990, 61). In Greek mythology Procrustes would stretch and butcher his guests to fit his iron bed—if they were too small they would be stretched; too tall and they would be chopped to size. The phrase "Procrustean bed" has come to mean a situation in which exact conformity is required, as well as the potential violence and abuse that transgression of these tightly defined norms is deemed to justify. Laing developed the idea of Procrustean beds in his book *Sanity, Madness and the Family* (Laing and Esterson 1970) in which he published transcripts of interviews with people who had been diagnosed with mental health issues—all of them young women—and their families. The portrait throughout is of young women who have no way of fitting into the roles assigned to them—and are hence constructed as mad. The demands made of them are more than unattainable, they are double binds—situations that place them in checkmate, from which, if following the 'normal' rules of the game, there is no exit, or ability to remain. And this remains true to the metaphor: in the classical myth, Procrustes had two beds of different sizes, to ensure that no one would fit.

The theory of double binds in mental health was first developed by the anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1956) who observed the impact of colonisation on a traditional society in

New Guinea. People found themselves “caught between the risk of external extermination or internal disruption” (Laing 1990, 94). This work has been brought to bear on psychoanalysis by a range of scholars. For Carlos Sluzki, double binds are constituted of a negative injunction repeatedly followed by a conflicting secondary injunction that are both enforced by “punishments of signals that threaten survival” (Sluzki et al. 1977). Double binds rarely appear in such a clean logical form, and can encompass verbal and non-verbal communication and complexities of perception and representation, as well as ideas of pleasure, prohibition, and authority. The crucial step taken by this approach is that it understands ‘abnormal’ behaviour to be a move that makes sense in a contradictory world where normal behaviour would be self-destructive.

The metaphor of the Procrustean bed, constructed of double binds, underpins Laing’s defining shift in focus: to understand what counts as ‘madness’, one needs to start with a critical exploration of what counts as normal; the problem is not the person who does not fit the bed, but the bed itself, and the distinction between normal and abnormal is a political one. For Laing, normality is being forced to fit in with an alienating world—i.e., to fit the Procrustean bed. The process of alienation is one of not being recognised or affirmed by one’s environment and others, as well as the central Marxist idea of being distanced from the profits of one’s labour. Not only are we being alienated from the fruits of our labour, which is manifest in the exorbitant salaries for managers and the casualization of conditions for those doing the bulk of the income generating work (teaching) (UCU 2011; Grove 2014b), but alienation can also capture a broader sense of a loss of value. With metricisation—the managerial imposition of over 90 audit procedures to measure academic performance (see Burrows 2012)—it is harder to find a space in which academic work is more broadly recognised and affirmed (see, for example, Sparkes 2007). Similarly, the ‘impact agenda’—the assessment of academic research in terms of its impact on non-academic audiences, typically government policy (Jump 2015)—also restricts the space in which academic work is valued on its own terms.

The rising concern for mental well being in the academy, drawing on Laing’s work, needs to be understood in context. The distinctive way that hierarchy is constructed in academia, the way it reflects elite values and reproduces its own criteria for success, echoes work on the maddening double binds defined by critical psychiatrists and others as contributing to problems of mental health. To draw on experiences which are all too common, the Procrustean beds of academia are inhabited variously by the PhD student whose complaints about her supervisor are dismissed on the grounds that she is “delusional”/“over-emotional”/needs to “toughen up”; the post-doc traumatised by experiences during fieldwork but afraid to communicate them for fear the university bureaucracy will revoke ethical approval; the lecturer who has taken on the bulk of department teaching only to lose her job because she hadn’t contributed to the department’s research; or the senior professor whose life’s work has now been constructed as inadequate in the wake of audit exercises which are patently biased. As Laing says, “very seldom is it a question of contrived, deliberate, cynical lies or a ruthless intention to drive someone crazy” (Laing 1990, 96), rather the sustaining factors of such contradictory positions can be found in the values, identities, and power dynamics which define academia.

The academic context in England

In the English^{iv} university system, austerity measures imposed after the financial crisis of 2008 have been particularly harsh compared to other European countries (Grove 2014a). As well as large cuts to the higher education sector, there have been penetrating changes to the way that research funding is distributed, with much of it reliant on the results of institutional

audit exercises^v that increasingly emphasise the importance of the impact of research on non-academic audiences. This period of time has seen a rise in the incidence of, and concern for, mental health issues among students and staff in universities (Guardian n.d.; Horton and Tucker 2014). The London-based *Guardian* newspaper recently had an entire section dedicated to mental health entitled: *Mental health: A university crisis* (Guardian n.d.) following research that found that nearly half of academics show signs of psychological distress (Court and Kinman 2008), and very few are willing to report it (ECU 2014). A *Guardian* survey of 2,500 university students and faculty members who identified as having mental health issues found that 83% had suffered from anxiety, 75% from depression, 42% from panic attacks, and 11% had self harmed (Thomas 2014). Respondents to that survey and other commentaries consistently lay the blame for these percentages with the pressures of the neoliberal university (Gill 2009). In a recent high profile case, a Professor at Imperial College, London committed suicide, stating in a delayed email sent weeks after his death: “This is not a university anymore but a business with very few up in the hierarchy ... profiteering and the rest of us are milked for money... This leads to an interesting spin to the old saying ‘publish or perish.’ Here it is ‘publish and perish.’ (Shuckman 2014).”

Similar sentiments are expressed in Horton and Tucker’s (2014) research specifically focussing on the experiences of human and physical geographers working in universities in the United Kingdom (UK), Eire, the United States (US), New Zealand, and Australia. Those self-defining as having mental health conditions identified the workplace as being a source of mental distress, and being unable to accommodate it. As one of their respondents stated: “spaces of academia may be ‘conducive to poor mental health...[i]t is practically the norm to be sleep-deprived, working until the early hours, behind with deadlines, underpaid, on short contracts, full of caffeine and alcohol” (Horton and Tucker 2014, 76).

Although there has been a corresponding demand for greater support services and counselling in universities for those bodies charged with monitoring equality in higher education (ECU 2014), lecturer and student unions have gone further and demanded a reassessment of the neoliberalisation of the academy in response to the high rates of mental distress (Kinman and Wray 2013). The neoliberalisation of the academy, which entails ‘flexibilisation’ of contracts and erosion of labour rights, which can be resisted by those already in post but are being imposed without restraint on new recruits, has resulted in increasing numbers of short-term, part-time, and hourly paid positions for early-career faculty, whilst the number of permanent jobs is diminishing (UCU 2011). These precarious positions have been termed “para-academia” (Macfarlane 2011)—the army of graduate students, post-doctoral fellows, and early career staff who carry out the low status labour upon which universities depend—including teaching, fieldwork, and lab work. There are estimated to be as many as 77,000 staff on hourly contracts across the sector (UCU 2011). This structure has been compared to Mafioso drug gangs (Alfonso 2013), in which hoards of disenfranchised youth have no choice but to maintain allegiance to a *padrino* in order to have any hope of a future.

Among faculty who have permanent contracts, the statistics on inequality—again, focusing on England but reflecting Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) trends—are shocking. According to a report for the University and College Union (UCU 2013), despite the fact that women obtain higher grades than men at the undergraduate level, only 20.5% of professors are women—and this varies considerably by subject. The proportion of black minority ethnic (BME) staff is even worse—with only 7.3% of UK professors self-defining as BME. Women and BME staff earn significantly less than their counterparts (UCU 2013). Figures on socio-economic class are very difficult to attain, but a wealth of qualitative and theoretical research characterises England’s ‘top’ universities^{vi}

as dominated by class-based elites (key examples include Ryan and Sackrey 1996; Reay et al. 2010; Brook and Michell 2012). It would appear that academia, like government, the military, and the corporate sector in the UK, is a bastion of power for white, upper-class, men.

The UK has also seen a staggering rise in inequality through the rising pay cheques for university management, in particular vice chancellors and senior professors, who in many institutions are on performance-related contracts, at the same time as wages have been frozen and labour rights have deteriorated for most academic staff, even those with permanent contracts. The Times Higher Education [THE] reports that in 2013 “professorial pay [was rising] twice as high as the rest” (Grove 2013), and in 2014 that the astonishing rise in pay of academic “fat cats” was generalised across the sector: “Overall, about one-fifth of universities increased the overall pay and pension package for their vice-chancellor by 10 per cent or more in 2012-13” (Grove 2014b).

In the following section I analyse the social, cultural, and political dynamics that produce such staggering and increasing levels of inequality, and argue that university hierarchies are sustained by placing the academy’s ‘others’ in paradoxical, negative positions. Specifically, the different, and gendered, value accorded to research, teaching, and care work in the academy, and the power struggles surrounding research audits and bureaucratisation, create a complex of signals that certain people, because of their position, cannot negotiate.

Double binds: Elitism, hierarchy, neoliberalism and bureaucracy

The fact that universities are such hierarchical institutions itself indicates that contradictory values and expectations are at play. Academic hierarchies are comparable to those in the military, hospitals, and the church (Fox 2001; Purcell 2007), and yet the public good offered by the academy, for many, is critical thought and freedom of speech, rather than unquestioning obedience. The prominence of rank—to the point that, as in the army and church, promotion means a change in title—is felt throughout these institutions, but unlike in other public institutions structured this way, higher rank does not necessarily imply greater responsibility. The egalitarian self-image of universities, particularly in social sciences and the humanities, can disguise these power structures and render discrimination and exclusion more difficult to name (Gill 2009). The status, respect, and privilege accorded to senior academic positions are justified, ostensibly, on expertise and trust. The mechanisms to ensure this are based on various processes akin to peer review—whether of manuscripts, published reviews, references, or promotions committees. There are good arguments for these mechanisms being “the worse system apart from all the others” (Winter 2015), in terms of ensuring the independence of academic research, but they also create a self-referential environment in which the politics of reputation, and attendant power plays, can count as much as merit or productivity.

In this context, it could be argued that research audit exercises, which are particularly developed in the UK and Australia, can introduce transparency into the values and power dynamics that construct and perpetuate academic hierarchies (Inglehart and Welzel 2010). There are, however, concerns about bias in the way these systems are applied in terms of favouring mainstream, ‘masculine’ research (Skeggs 2008), which in effect exacerbates academic hierarchies, particularly as these systems are implemented in the midst of power struggles over increasingly scarce resources. It seems to many academic commentators that hierarchies, obscurity around procedure, patronage, and nepotism are becoming more entrenched as those with the power to shape these procedures fight to maintain position (de Sousa Santos 2006; Giroux 2011). One of the reasons for the steep rise in pay of those in

senior professorial and management positions in the UK is the latest research audit exercise—the Research Excellence Framework (REF) conducted in 2014 (THE 2013). This audit exercise requires all staff, regardless of seniority, to submit four publications for consideration. A senior professor with thirty years' experience is marked on the same scale as a lecturer with five. There is, therefore, an incentive for universities to invest in REF stars who will yield more 'four star' (the top grade awarded) publications, and therefore funding, than more junior faculty.

The criteria for judging publications permits the panel substantial discretion and, although panels are subject specific, they cannot represent every area of scholarship or even every sub-discipline. As a result, this process is named non-specialist review, trumping specialist anonymous peer review (Sayer 2014). Department deliberations on whether someone's work is submittable have to be based on predictions of the non-specialist panel, leading to a conservative, mainstreaming, risk averse approach to judging merit—hence perpetuating the already elitist biases in what counts as academic research, and marginalising work in critical, 'softer,' or feminised sub-disciplines. This Kafka-esque process, however, does offer academics affirmation that is generally absent, albeit in the form of a disingenuously simple, categorising, grade. Be that as it may, the incentive is to produce work that will appeal to the mainstream of the discipline, and researchers who are not engaged in certain fields of research are marginalised by these processes, creating a necessity that they develop their own, specialised research for publication and peer approval, whilst also conforming to the mainstreaming requirements of a research audit which marginalise certain specific fields (Sparkes 2007).

The way that research has been funded in England since the austerity measures of 2010 has prioritised large scale studies with industry or policy relevance, further exacerbating the verticality of relationships within the academy and the need for patronage (Burrows 2012). In response to severe austerity cuts, Research Councils UK, the bodies which award publicly funded research grants, decided to abolish early career research grants, including funding for post-doctoral students to develop their own research, and instead focus on large grants given predominantly to senior staff who then employ post-doctoral and doctoral students on their projects (Bishop 2015). This decision was made despite objections from international consultants. This contributes to increased precarity among early career researchers, and the rise in professorial pay, as those able to secure such grants, in competition with their colleagues, are more valuable to universities in financial terms. The most financially rewarding academic work is that of grant management rather than research per se. Whilst this system may be suited to teams of scientists, this way of structuring research is not conducive to social science, particularly those adopting a reflexive approach to the boundaries between data and analysis. The strategic foci of public research awarding bodies increasingly speak to government and industry priorities (Boffey 2011), and part of the art of writing a successful application is ticking those boxes whilst also appealing to 'blue skies' notions of academic research in order to develop one's own profile. Researchers early in their career and dependent on research funding are perhaps least well-placed to deal with the contradictions ensuing from the need to develop their own research profiles without having the space to do so, as such a space is curtailed by the pressure to manage rather than conduct research, and have impact on non-academic bodies. This hence increases the dependency of those at the start of their careers on those further up the hierarchy.

A ubiquitous tension in academia is between the respective value given to the two main activities of academics: teaching and research (Fox 1992; Park 1996; Gottlieb and Keith 1997). Ostensibly academic staff members are assessed on research, teaching, and administration, and the majority of income for most universities comes from teaching. Education is also key to the claim of universities that they be a publicly funded public good.

However, it is openly stated that, whilst it is necessary to show competence in teaching, promotion and status depend on one's research profile, for both individual academics and institutions (Fox 1992). This distinction is also inherent in the definition of elite universities, which are also called "research-led." This tension, inherent in all academic careers, varies according to specific context, but there is a constancy to the binary that constructs teaching as the 'housework' of academia: although the institution could not run without it, it is overlooked as the repetitive labour of reproduction compared to the more valiant efforts to penetrate new ground with original research. In terms of career, in an increasingly 'publish or perish' world, academics are often advised not to show any ability in teaching, for the sake of their research career, so rendering this traditionally feminised activity as a 'burden,' rather than a key feature of university life. The perpetuation of this binary is embedded in gendered expectations of vocation, commitment, and care that is part of what constructs teaching as feminised, reproductive labour (Park 1996). Those who tend to have heavy teaching loads will typically be early career, more likely to be women, and be working on subjects that are deemed soft within their subject area (Gill 2009). This varies by institutional and national context, as well as subject areas, and is justified in terms of a continuum from theory to practice. The unequal dichotomy between teaching and research also indicates the classed, colonial, and gendered value system that is behind the construction of ideas of what counts as theory and serious research (Niemann et al. 2012).

A corollary to the marginalisation of teaching is the way that emotional labour—the labour that goes into maintaining positive relationships among staff and students, that can include anything from arranging a coffee morning to being a shoulder to cry on—is viewed within universities (Ogbonna and Harris 2004). Universities, unlike schools, are communities of adults, but there is nevertheless a duty of care owed to students, and certainly expected by their parents. The apparent increase of cases of mental illness points to the further need for caring for people in this exceptionally isolated profession (Gill 2009). Care work is nevertheless an overlooked, feminised, and yet essential element in how universities function and research is produced. Furthermore, in the current wave of neoliberalisation in universities, entailing metrics that render care work invisible, caring for students or colleagues is being further marginalised, compounding the inequities of university communities.

It is by no means unique to academia that women tend to take on the burden of care and emotional labour (Reay 2004; Lynch 2010). Moreover it is expected that women take on this role, with negative consequences for their student evaluations and esteem of their peers, if they do not; if male tutors are caring and easy to talk to it is explicitly praised, but not so for women (MacNell et al. 2015). Explanations of why women take on the majority of emotional labour in work situations tend to compound these expectations by drawing on maternal constructions of femininity, which imply that such a role is natural, and hence under-appreciating the labour involved. Despite the necessity of emotional labour to the good functioning of any institution, and perhaps particularly universities, early career women academics are warned off getting on to the 'mummy track' of university life, which would in effect detract from their research time and reputation for being research focused (Gill 2009). Women in academia, as elsewhere, are hence in a double bind—damned if they're good at their caring role, damned if they're not.

The complexities and contradictions inherent in the dynamics of expectation, reputation, hierarchy, and status in the academy frame the identities that academics are permitted (Fotaki 2013). Following Laing's approach, issues with mental health experienced in such a context can be understood as a reaction to the contradictory, negatively defined nature of these positions. This is not an affirming environment, in which the desires that underpin academic work are reflected in the hierarchical politics of reputation that frames

interactions and communications within the institution. For academics, whether students or staff, who are driven by a desire for teaching, scholarship, and writing, it is not clear that the 21st century university is the right place for these desires to be developed. There is much debate about the relationship between rigour, restriction, and creativity, but with the increase of measurement and audit in the academy, even this creative tension is becoming more difficult to navigate, as the fuzziness of academic values, the politics of hierarchy, and the need for increased accountability collide. Affirmation in one's identity as an academic is hence difficult to attain.

There are a number of other bureaucratic procedures that follow the patterns of reinforcing the hierarchies and elitism of the academy, and constructing double binds that keep those in power at the expense of others. PhD students are now funded for a maximum of three years and submission is required in four—else universities may face financial consequences. This is a result of cuts to university funding, but is being enforced (draconianly in some cases) by senior staff who may have spent a decade on their doctoral thesis, if indeed they have one. So called ethical approval and risk assessment procedures are as much about institutions' insurance policies as they are about support for empirical research, and while senior staff can use these procedures in the context of already acquired professional expertise and experience, those earlier in their careers may see these forms as definitive of ethics and care in research (Dyer and Demeritt 2008). Although indemnified by risk assessment procedures, universities take little to no responsibility for what happens to students and staff on fieldwork, despite encouraging undergraduate students to undertake independent research projects overseas (Monaghan et al. 2013). The 'impact agenda'—the recently introduced stipulation in audit and funding procedures that research be seen to have relevance beyond the academy—may potentially open up possibilities to challenge the exclusionary, elitist nature of what has counted as research in the past by encouraging engagement and co-production of knowledge with non-academic institutions (Pain et al. 2011), but it also resonates with an agenda to curb the independence of the academy (Slater 2012). The path to becoming accepted as a successful, or even 'normal' academic is increasingly strewn with contradictions, and feels for many like a series of entrapments in a very alienating environment (Gill 2009).

Conclusion

To echo the tone of exasperation audible throughout Laing's work, in light of the astonishing inequities and contradictions inherent in the very constitution of academia, *is it honestly any wonder* that people who are check-mated by the double binds of 'normality' decide to adopt 'abnormal' coping strategies, manifesting themselves in anxiety, stress, and depression? The reactions to this malaise too often involve blaming the victims in some way—challenging those excluded by the inherently elitist, hierarchical dynamics of the academy to take steps to overcome rather than criticise these barriers. This approach entirely misunderstands the nature of these exclusionary double binds, as illustrated by the example of women and emotional labour. The original formulation of 'double binds' drew on anthropological work on the modernisation and colonisation of community relationships, and the neoliberal modernisation and metricisation of the already hierarchical and elitist academy is having the same effect. These tensions are recognised—there is ample academic and journalistic commentary on both the injustices of neoliberalisation and the crisis of mental health issues. However, the Procrustean beds constructed of these double binds—the vertical relationships that, by creating dependence, enable bullying as much as mentoring; the elitist values framing how research is judged, despite the ostensible importance of criticality in scholarship; the

imposition of inappropriate audit procedures; and the bureaucratisation of the academy—continue apace. A cynical conclusion is that they continue because it is in both the career and financial interests of those in power to influence these processes so that they do continue. As in the case of Procrustes, power, prestige, and control are being maintained by placing others in impossible positions that in turn render them more dependent on those in power. The double binds illustrated here are fundamental to the way that power, progression, and value are constituted in the academy.

There are many in academia who will not recognise the portrait painted above; they will recall the way their lives were transformed by their undergraduate degree, the support of their PhD supervisors, and the advice of their mentors. Debates on neoliberalisation in universities has focused on the way that competitive individualisation is eroding community in universities, and indicate the need to maintain traditional academic values ensured by systems of peer review and esteem in defining the quality of scholarship. Analyses of changing university structures risk underestimating the exclusionary and elitist nature of the academic community, and the verticality of structures that underpin traditional notions of mentorship in the academy.

Despite these various apparent impasses, discussions on how to address the dual crises of neoliberalisation and mental health in the academy could engage with critical approaches to education that emphasise the importance of solidarity, mutuality, and respect in pedagogic practice and scholarship, and challenge the necessity for vertical relationships in education or research (e.g., Hartman and Darab 2012). It is also necessary that these discussions engage with policy, and, crucially, that institutions including universities, funding guidelines, and audit procedures, facilitate a more supportive approach to research. As universities are currently caught in a pincer movement of elitism and neoliberalism at a time of diminishing resources, it is difficult to see how a less competitive approach to research could be adopted politically. There is however resistance to these pressures to be found, and social movements across the world, including in the UK, are arguing for a public university and critiquing the dominant political strands that are shaping our universities.

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ⁱ “Black and minority ethnic people” is the most generally accepted terminology within race equality discourse in the UK—see The British Sociological Association’s *Equality and Diversity: Language and the BSA: Ethnicity & Race*. Available at: <http://www.britisoc.co.uk/equality>.

ⁱⁱ The Russell Group was formed in 1991 and is currently an association of 24 British universities. The self-selecting group defines itself in terms of academic excellence, selectivity, and research focus, but is criticised for being elitist and oligarchic (BBC 2014).

ⁱⁱⁱ See for example the history of Birkbeck, University of London, established in the early 19th century to provide education for London’s working classes. Available at: <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/about-us/history/>.

^{iv} I am specifically referring to ‘England’ rather than the UK, as universities in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland have distinct governing institutions, policies, histories, funding parameters, and roles in the political context of those nations.

^v The UK is at the forefront of developing such research audit exercises, the most recent example being the 2014 ‘Research Excellence Framework’ (REF), but such exercises are also used in other countries, including Australia and New Zealand, and their implementation is being discussed in North America and elsewhere (Burrows 2012).

^{vi} The UK’s ‘top’ universities are currently defined in policy and the popular imagination by membership in the Russell Group.