Neoliberalism in the University Faculty-Administrator Relationship

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University Faculty and administrators often find themselves in a battle of us versus them. Thinking more specifically about faculty's relationship with professional administrators, we use duoethnography to explore the experiences of a faculty member who once worked as an administrator and a professional administrator who is currently a doctoral student. As we explored our experiences of the faculty-administrator divide, we delved deeper into neoliberalism's role in today's universities. Inviting the reader to examine their understanding of neoliberalism in the university, we contemplate "What is a university?" From this question, we offer ideas on ways that faculty and administrators may unite to help define the role of today's university in a neoliberal world.

Keywords: higher education, neoliberalism, duoethnography, administrator, faculty, queer theory

INTRODUCTION

If you have worked in a university, you have heard lamentations from faculty about how administrators are ruining the university. You have probably also heard frustration from administrators that faculty do not understand the challenges of running the university. Those of us who have worked at a university for a long time often express nostalgia for the good old days. However, like all nostalgia, we are often reflecting through rose-coloured glasses. Specifically, a divide between administrators and academics has been bumping around universities for over a century, creating friction, challenging relationships, and shaping universities.

We (Trevor and Vicki) have seen and lived this divide during our university lives and wanted to explore how our different perspectives could contribute to how we think about the relationship and the divide. As a faculty member and former administrator (Vicki) and a university administrator and doctoral student (Trevor), we invite you (our reader) to consider your perspectives on the relationships between faculty and administrators. Our individual and shared reflections from conversations over a few years follow. By engaging with our reflections, we invite you into our duoethnography as we explore the worlds of faculty and administrators. On that journey, we will share how we came to contemplate the role that the ill-defined boogeyman of neoliberalism plays in the divide. Perhaps like us, you will arrive at new perspectives and conclusions on the topic.

THE DIVIDE

The divide between faculty and administration is often treated as a modern malady, perhaps sparked by the debated administrative bloat. However, the notion of a separation (or divide) between faculty and administrators is not new. More than a century ago, Veblen (1918) wrote that "a university is a body of mature scholars and scientists, the 'faculty'" (p. 18) distinct from the equipment, caretakers, and assistants that are "not the university, but merely its equipment" (p. 18). He was clear that "no man whose energies are not habitually bent on increasing and providing up the domain of learning belongs legitimately on the university staff" (p. 18). Veblen had a clear notion about the role of non-faculty in a university. While today's university staff extends beyond faculty, Veblen's sentiment continues to seed a divide. Other authors have explored the divide, whether through means of appreciating and mitigating the conflict (Bess & Dee, 2014) or the implications and experiences of crossing the divide from administrator to faculty (Leary & Pardy, 2022) and faculty to administrator (Willis, 2010; Young, 2001). As administrators and faculty, we often fall into the trap of them and us (Dobson, 2000) when discussing the other. If you are a faculty member, you will have your own administrator anecdotes, as will administrators have tales of faculty. We wanted to see what we could discover about the divide through our unique perspectives on faculty and administrators.

> **Trevor:** I initiated this duoethnography with Vicki to bring together an administrator who has breached the liminal boundary between administrator and scholar (me) and a faculty member who has walked an administrative journey (Vicki) to explore how the space of difference and our currere may help bridge and inform perspectives of the divide between academic and administrator. The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers one definition of a bridge as "that which spans a (physical or notional) gap between two things; *esp.* a person or thing which connects, reconciles, or unites different groups, events, periods, etc." ("Bridge," n.d.). While I did not know where our conversation may lead us, I hoped it could connect us with insights into the divide we both had experienced.

DUOETHNOGRAPHY

Drawing on duoethnography's (Norris et al., 2012; Sawyer & Norris, 2013) narrative and social justice groundings, we invite you into the process as a reader. We offer our exploration of difference and lived experience (currere) where you participate through your engagement with our thoughts, discussion, and the literature (Sawyer & Norris, 2013). Through duoethnography, our conversations and spaces of difference facilitated our transformation and understanding (Breault, 2016; Fitzpatrick & Farquhar, 2018) that you can witness and experience.

> **Trevor:** Knowing Vicki as a faculty member of the doctoral program and with mutual connections from her days working in the student services administrative team, I approached her to explore the faculty-administrator divide through duoethnography. This exploration would bring together my experience as a career administrator with exposure to the scholarly aspects of a doctoral program and Vicki's experience in both the administrative and academic spaces.

> **Vicki:** From the time that Trevor first approached me about this project, I was hooked. I respected Trevor as a doctoral student with a strong administrative background who was curious about the organization within which we were situated. His administrative background was a strong fit for our Department of

> Educational Administration doctoral program. As his research question evolved through his coursework, I was intrigued. Does the space of difference explain my journey in the university?

Duoethnography draws on Pinar's (1994) notion of currere as a lived curriculum that looks to the past (regressive) and considers its influences on the present (progressive). By bringing an analytical lens to the past, present, and future, one can take a synthetical approach to explore meaning, insight, interaction, and deeper knowledge (Pinar, 1994). By joining us in this research, we offer insight into our currere, dispelling any illusion of neutral objectivity and highlighting our discussion's subjective and situated nature and your reactions to it. Through our first-person reflections on our conversations, we will consider the divide between faculty and administrators and how we are situated within it. We will then invite you into our journey from initial conversations, disruption spaces, and neoliberalism's role. Like our lives, duoethnographies are only a part of a journey yet to be concluded, so to close, we will discuss our new perspectives and transformed currere.

Participants and Becoming a Site of Research

Unlike traditional research methodologies, researchers engaged in duoethnography are also the participants. This dual role does not make the researcher the topic but rather the site of research where the investigation and transformation take place (Sawyer & Norris, 2013). Researchers as sites of research dispels any notion of objective distance between researchers and the place of research. As you read, interact, and reflect on our experiences, you are also a site for potential transformation.

> **Trevor:** Looking at the divide between faculty and administrators through a duoethnographic exploration with an administrator and a faculty member (and past administrator) as sites of research seeks to draw from our currere to explore opportunities to connect, reconcile, or unite the two groups. Vicki and I have shared experiences in our doctoral journey as professionals and have worked as administrators. However, these experiences also make us queer among our peer groups who do not have that experience. Most professional administrators have not done doctoral studies, and most faculty have not worked as professional administrators.

Duoethnography uses spaces of difference to catalyze perspective shifts and evolve our currere. Through our conversations, our unique currere led us to consider our discussions from different perspectives.

> **Vicki:** Thinking about the spaces of difference in our conversations, I understand the big picture of the university better than many others because of my experiences, my committee work, and my areas of research and teaching. I do not share the intimate knowledge of university budgetary matters and what we need to do as an organization to be financially sustainable that Trevor has, providing him with deeper insights into the financial pressures that universities face. The role of administration in a university setting is still a little foreign; what levers does the university have to ensure that academic staff support the priorities of the university?

> **Trevor:** While Vicki and I had shared experience as administrators, we worked in different parts of administration. Vicki had been part of the student services team supporting the university's academic mission. I had spent my career as a financial administrator working behind the scenes of the university's teaching and research mission.

Vicki: Moreover, now being in a faculty position, I understand the difficulties of juggling all the aspects of an academic position, something Trevor has not experienced. There is tremendous pressure before tenure and even after the award of tenure to achieve goals and fulfill accountabilities across the three primary mandates of faculty: research, teaching, and service. To the outsider, though, this work is not well understood and much of it is invisible. We have a level of autonomy (that is often taken for granted), which can contribute to the misunderstanding of the nature of the role. The lived experience of faculty is quite different from the image of a faculty member sitting at their desk and taking time to write a manuscript or standing in the front of a lecture theatre engaging the students in the day's lesson. Berg and Seeber (2016) contended that we needed to slow the culture of speed in the academy and reject the need to achieve efficiency and effectiveness. Although Trevor now has a different perspective on what research looks like, and what supervision of students feels like, he has not had to experience the juggling act among the three commitments of faculty. In my view, the commitments are heavily influenced by the disciplinary culture of different faculties, the tenure and promotion stage of the faculty member, and the member's experience and breadth of knowledge related to their teaching load outlined in their Assignment of Duties.

Trevor: While Vicki and I often found ourselves sharing perspectives, because of our spaces of difference I left our discussions with new ideas, thoughts, and viewpoints gained from our conversations. Sometimes, it was the insight into the pressures and challenges of tenure and promotion, Vicki's experience as a teacher, or the values and beliefs that shaped her currere. Even when we were of similar mind on a topic, her unique currere influenced my thinking.

Literature as Participant

In duoethnography, literature becomes another participant brought in through dialogue and exploration (Sawyer & Norris, 2013) rather than a distinct literature review. As we touched on topics, we looked to academic literature to contribute to our conversations, and you will see that literature appear in what we are sharing here. The path of exploration in duoethnography is emergent and not prescriptive (Sawyer & Norris, 2013), flowing based on the dialogue, including the ways literature shapes and transforms currere. The role of literature was a critical part of the transformation in our discussion about the divide between faculty and administrators.

EXPLORING THE DIVIDE

We started our conversations exploring the relationship between faculty and administrators in April 2021, a year into the COVID-19 pandemic. To kick off our discussion, we looked at recent campus communications about work-from-home expenses and what home office costs the university would pay. The difference between faculty and administrator responses initiated our discussion.

Faculty and Administrators

Defining who we mean when discussing faculty and administrators is essential to ensure we use the same language. In a sentence, faculty are tenure-track professors, and administrators are professional administrative staff, excluding those from the faculty ranks. In other words, within universities, faculty are responsible for teaching and research activities (Eastman et al., 2022). In addition to faculty, the academic staff of a university usually includes part-time instructional staff, non-tenure track faculty, clinical instructors, and graduate students. Supporting faculty in their teaching and research, administrative staff have specialized expertise in an area necessary to the functioning of the university and the achievement of

its teaching, learning, and research mission. Administrative staff includes advising, finance, recruitment, and research facilitation professionals, among others.

> **Vicki:** Having worked as a teacher and then coming to the university, it is difficult to communicate how different the world of primary and secondary schools is from higher education. I came from a work culture where we were expected to work together in professional learning communities to achieve the goals of the Ministry of Education, the school board, the school administration, and the parents. Of course, the most important denominator was the growth and learning of the students. Metrics of all kinds guided the work in schools. Stepping into administration on campus, I had expertise in assessment, strategic planning, and metrics. I enjoyed the relative autonomy in higher education administration, assisting my supervisors in reporting on outcomes and collating data; I understood the work. However, working across the organization toward shared goals did not exist at the university as it had in schools.

> **Trevor:** As a first-generation university student with over twenty-five years working in university administration and a current doctoral student, I have spent decades of my life in the university. My administrative career has primarily been as an accountant in central administration, with a brief stint in an academic unit. As an administrator, I live amidst the conflict and the divide between faculty and administrators. Recognizing that faculty and administrators often approach the same issues from different places, I want to better understand how the academic journey of faculty members may shape their perceptions. With this intention, I enrolled in doctoral studies to research and explore that question and spaces of difference. I hope that walking part of the scholarly journey can improve my appreciation of faculty.

The Currere of Working as Administrators and Faculty

Our experiences working at the university shape our perspectives on faculty and administrators, highlighting that these are more than just groups of people in institutions; they are part of our identities. Our conversations revealed the personal impacts of the interplay between the roles of faculty and administrators we experienced.

> **Vicki:** I have transitioned often in my working life and I have never been as puzzled as when I shifted to a faculty role. I brought significant experience as a teacher and administrator in public schools, my learnings as a doctoral student studying higher education, and my role as an administrator in higher education student services but I was confused about expectations for me as a faculty member.

Like the new perspectives Vicki gained becoming a faculty member, Trevor also gained new perspectives as a doctoral student.

> **Trevor:** When I joined the doctoral program, I was interested in exploring the scholarly literature on administrators, having spent my career as an administrator in the university finances. While I often found references to university administration in higher education literature, it was often undefined or unscoped other than being in opposition to faculty and described by what it is

not (Cameron, 2020; Szekeres, 2004; Whitchurch, 2006). I started to think about my work as an administrator through a scholarly lens.

As we stepped into new roles at the university as administrator, faculty, or doctoral student, we gained new perspectives on our past and current roles. You can see the shifts in our currere, as our past experiences shaped our perspectives during those transitions.

Vicki: Moving into faculty, I experienced culture shock. Colleagues tried to be helpful in my transition but I was used to explicitly defined outcomes, strict expectations around the shape of my work days and work life, and I was confused by the unclear and sometimes conflicting messaging. Faculty are given a lot of autonomy and are encouraged to focus on their own reputation and expertise as teachers and researchers. The student experience and individual growth is not top of mind like it was in my student administrator role. The system of rewards and recognition privileges entrepreneurship and individual excellence rather than collaboration and achievement of organizational and student goals.

I had to adjust to being assigned courses to teach where I kept the title, description, and outcomes and could redesign everything else. I had to focus on a research area that was neither too broad nor too narrow. I should determine the right mix of publications as sole author and as a collaborator. I needed to be a good citizen of the department and serve on committees, but I also had to protect my time as an untenured faculty member and not take on too many commitments. It was a strange world where I felt like an anthropologist on Mars (Sacks, 2012), believing that I had to carefully chart my own path and by studying this environment, I stood a better chance of surviving and determining a path forward that I could control.

While Vicki experienced the shock of moving from her role as an administrator to a faculty member, Trevor's addition of doctoral student to his role of administrator seemed to generate a reaction from both his colleagues and the program faculty members.

Trevor: During doctoral coursework, faculty and peer administrators reminded me that I was stepping out of line. They expressed these warnings through snide comments about wanting to "become faculty" or reinforcing that I am "just an administrator." These comments resonated with my experiences of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980) of growing up gay in a rural community on the Canadian prairies. The sense of queerness and pressure to conform to (hetero)normativity was very familiar. This queer familiarity led to my exploration of queer theory and the discovery of duoethnography as a method. I have spent most of my adult life as a student, university administrator, or both. During that time, I wondered whether faculty and administrators on campus could relate to that feeling of otherness and difference that, through dialogue, could inform perspectives of the administrator-faculty divide.

How academic literature discusses universities is shaped by the authors, the complex relationships, and sometimes the political and governance frameworks within universities.

Vicki: The university governance structure is unlike other organizations; for example, universities have been characterized as loosely coupled (Weick, 1976), complex organizations that are highly differentiated. The cultural lens of governance is key to decision making on campuses (Austin & Jones, 2016). The unique culture of each institution is influenced by both internal and external actors who are, in turn, impacted by both internal and external forces (Austin & Jones, 2016); the internal actors mentioned in the literature though are faculty and senior academic administrators/leaders (Austin & Jones, 2016; Eastman et al., 2022) rather than senior administrative leaders.

Vicki's observations of the organizational governance, culture, and descriptions of administrators were echoed in Trevor's exploration of the literature related to administrators.

Trevor: I categorize administration into senior institutional administrators (presidents and vice presidents), academic administrators (deans and other academic leaders), and a cadre of non-academic staff employed to support the university's operations (professional administrators). While I hear the voice of administrators clearly within the university, the voice of professional administrators is but a whisper within the scholarly literature (de Jong & del Junco, 2023; Del Favero & Bray, 2010; Smerek, 2010). More specifically, higher education literature seldom addressed the presence of professional administrators, sometimes called general staff (Dobson, 2000; Szekeres, 2006), professional staff (Curran & Prottas, 2017; Whitchurch, 2006), or non-academic staff (Eastman et al., 2022; Smerek & Peterson, 2006) other than as a diversion of the key attention (and resources) of universities (Cameron, 2020; Smerek, 2010; Szekeres, 2004, 2011).

The governance and management structures of the university shape the relationships between faculty and administrators. The distribution of power and influence within the organization is also a factor of what role an individual plays and where they fall within the organizational hierarchy.

Vicki: The impact of governance was starkly highlighted in the years after I arrived on campus. The university experienced high-profile turmoil and leadership change within the context of financial cutbacks and significant numbers of professional staff being let go. Ironically, the same cost-cutting measures were expressed as retirement packages for faculty, resulting in faculty positions becoming available and I was successful in applying for a position. The hierarchical levels of staff and faculty were apparent with that experience demonstrating to me the relative power dynamics between staff, administrators, and faculty. I fully recognized that the teaching and research missions were crucial to the university, but the staff and administrators required to ensure smooth operations were invisible cogs in the machine. As Eastman et al. (2022) expressed, staff play a very limited role in governance, even though many staff roles are becoming more specialized and professionalized.

Trevor: As Vicki observed the different treatment of faculty and administrators, I read it in the literature. Be it Veblen's (1918) reference to anything that is not the faculty being equipment or Ginsberg's (2011) reflections on administration "as an end in and of itself" (p. 2), I found myself reading about my role as an administrator in the words and perspectives of faculty. The whisper of

professional administrators grows louder though, as literature exploring the administrative ranks is growing (see Curran & Prottas, 2017; de Jong & del Junco, 2023; Skaggs, 2015; Smerek & Peterson, 2006; Szekeres, 2004, 2006, 2011; Whitchurch, 2006, 2008, 2012; Whitchurch & Gordon, 2010) to bring to light a segment of the university that may otherwise be rendered invisible (Szekeres, 2004) and unheard.

Our individual currere shapes not only our perspectives of the university but our perspectives on the groups within the university, regardless of our membership. In some cases, our roles within the organization inform those perspectives, and sometimes other pieces of our identities shape our perspectives on the organization around us.

Vicki: I felt that Trevor and I had many shared points of view. We were emphatic about administrators' roles in ensuring financial sustainability in a system that does not lend itself well to being economically efficient. Additionally, we discussed how faculty are taught to be individual entrepreneurs and are rewarded as such. Thus, they may not have an internal loyalty to their institution and potentially not to their home college or department. Many faculty are suspicious of an emphasis on fiscal sustainability and it is easy to critique a system when the details are not explicitly shared; a particular challenge for central administration was determining how detailed the communications should be to underscore the challenges of balancing the budget. However, the impact of faculty salaries on the rising costs of higher education are not faculty's priority considerations when contract negotiations occur and faculty unions can see the workloads increasing. That constant tension of needing to achieve research and teaching success and doing so with fewer funds is a conundrum shaped by prevailing local and global politics, a neoliberal efficiency agenda, and the differing perspectives among the academic and administrative members on campus.

The intersectionality of our identity and group membership extended beyond just the workplace. Trevor also found the divide between faculty and administrators mirroring his queer identity.

Trevor: As Vicki and I discussed our experiences, I found myself relating the dynamics of othering between faculty and administrators to experiences of being gay and ideas embedded in queer theory. While queer theory in higher education has often explored queer bodies and queer sexuality (see Gowlett & Rasmussen, 2014; Gunn & McAllister, 2013; Msibi, 2013; Rasmussen & Allen, 2014; Renn, 2010), it also has the potential to challenge the normative and the invisible by naming that which is different outside queer bodies and queer sexuality (see Allen & Rasmussen, 2015; Dilley, 1999; Gowlett & Rasmussen, 2014; Gunn & McAllister, 2013; Rasmussen & Allen, 2014; Renn, 2010). Speaking of heterosexuality, Halperin (1995) suggested it came with "privileged invisibility and the ignorance" (p. 47) that prevents it from scrutiny. It is with this same notion, that a duoethnographic exploration of the relationships between faculty and administrators by we who may not be a "normal" administrator and a "normal" faculty member invokes the power of the queer to provide potential unique insights. This idea of not being a "normal" administrator is a reverberation of not being a "normal" straight guy growing up.

As we discussed differences between faculty and administrator experiences, we further explored the entrepreneurial expectations of faculty to undertake and pursue their research agendas in contrast to the more structured work expectations for administrators.

> **Vicki:** Politics is a part of any organization and indeed, they do play a part in university life. Because faculty are rewarded for achieving more than their colleagues, collaborative work is under-valued and independent entrepreneurship is awarded. Unless that structure changes, I do not have hope we will be able to develop loyalty to the program's goals or generate investment in the success of the program, department, college, or even the university.

We discussed how mentorship played different roles for faculty and administrators and their perceptions of success.

> **Trevor:** From our conversations about the faculty experience, I started exploring the literature on mentorship. In this exploration, an article on Canadian early career faculty by Acker and Webber (2017) became a transformative participant in our conversation.

DISRUPTED BY THE LITERATURE

Literature's role as a participant in our duoethnography is evident from the shift in conversation that arose from the Acker and Webber (2017) article. It took our discussion and reflections from focusing on our experiences of faculty and administrators to a place of considering the context within which universities operate.

> **Trevor:** When reading Acker and Webber (2017), the first paragraph of the article jumped out at me when it referenced the impact of "neo-liberal university reform on academic practice" (p. 541) and "how academics have been called upon not only to be more productive but also to display that productivity" (p. 541). I was struck not only by the centring of neoliberalism, but also by the fact that they used the passive voice when talking about the call for productivity. It left me wondering who was driving neoliberal reform and productivity. The administrator in me bristled, interpreting this statement as implying that the neoliberal university equated to university administrators. In turn, the scholar in me sought more support for their argument about who and what drove the neoliberal university they were challenging. This conflicting perspective was a moment of duoethnography at work, where I developed "new insights on previously held beliefs" (Sawyer & Norris, 2013, p. 98), in this case, neoliberalism. This insight led me to an exploration of neoliberalism in universities that I brought into the conversations with Vicki.

> **Vicki:** As I thought about my role as faculty, I came to see the influence of politics and neoliberal agendas and the increasing influence (from my perspective) of priorities set by others outside of the university. Additionally, I saw how politics unfolded at all levels of the organization; micro politics of departments, meso politics of colleges, macro politics of the university system and the mega politics, provincially, nationally, and globally. Terms such as key performance indicators and rankings are now terms used on campus to measure ourselves against articulated targets and against others in our field;

furthermore, performance impacts funding directly and/or indirectly. How does this world influence me as faculty?

Trevor: When I started reading about neoliberalism, I realized part of my motivation for exploring the literature was to challenge or refute what I was reading as an accusation by faculty of administrators being the orchestrators of a neoliberal reformation of universities. Personally, I did not see myself as playing the part of what is painted as an oppressive structure. Foolishly, I believed that I could unearth a theoretical canon of neoliberalism to clarify in my mind what it truly meant. However, I quickly found that neoliberalism (not unlike my past exploration of queer theory) does not have a commonly agreed-upon definition or origin (Boas & Gans-Morse, 2009; Nofal, 2023), so I narrowed the exploration to neoliberalism in the university context.

This inflection point led us to look more closely at neoliberalism in universities and how it influenced our conversations. The insights into the literature and our personal transformations from these discussions follow.

UNIVERSITIES AND NEOLIBERALISM

Duoethnography as a transformative methodology became apparent as we explored how our currere informed perspectives on neoliberalism. Consider your perspectives on neoliberalism and universities as we discuss how our conversations, literature, and personal reflection evolved our currere around neoliberalism, universities, and our place among them.

Literature: Neoliberalism and Universities

The notion of the neoliberal university and audit culture are recurrent in higher education literature as drivers of the unwinding of the traditional university. In academic fashion, a citation provides legitimacy to a statement. However, the discussion of neoliberalism in universities is often not cited; instead, it treats the neoliberal university as popular knowledge. Additionally, authors often leave the statement "neoliberal universities" undefined and rarely connect it to the societal and economic contexts of neoliberalism. Acker and Webber's (2017) use of the passive voice illustrates the absence of a neoliberal actor. What remains unclear is who is creating the neoliberal pressure on faculty. Is it pressure from university administrative leaders? Is it government pressure? Is it market forces? Without answering this question, faculty are left railing against neoliberal forces that lack a face or a name. At the same time, administrators are working within (or with) the same neoliberal forces to build structures and solutions to support the work of faculty and the university.

While neoliberalism may not have a fixed or specific definition (Boas & Gans-Morse, 2009; Brown, 2015; Nofal, 2023), Olssen and Peters (2005) contrasted a liberal and neoliberal governance framework. They describe a move to neoliberalism as a move toward auditing, monitoring, competition, and maximizing output. Neoliberalism is not just an economic policy; it integrates the role of markets into all spheres of life, including individual human capital (Brown, 2015). Neoliberalism within the university has not resulted from a coordinated effort but from a focus on the individual rather than the social and the moral (Davies et al., 2006). This focus on the individual has even been effective in creating a sense of acceptance of neoliberalism:

> Neo-liberalism's heightened focus on the individual and its de-emphasis of the social and of the moral combine with the sense of vulnerability to job loss and to institutional demise to persuade individuals that, if they have problems with the changes, the problems are strictly their own. (Davies et al., 2006, p. 308)

Vicki: Reflecting on Neoliberal Impacts

What I find fascinating is the use of the term neoliberalism to criticize everything about the current structure of universities. In many faculty members' minds, neoliberalism is linked with reduced funding to universities, increased numbers of administrative positions, the use of key performance indicators, and the increased presence of words such as efficiency, effectiveness, return on investment, and accountability when talking about higher education. Yet explanations of what neoliberalism means are not usually given.

The neoliberal paradigm came to the forefront during the Reagan presidency (Mintz, 2021) and the concurrent Thatcher era. The philosophy of the public good was gradually replaced by free market ideals and an emphasis on individual responsibility (Mintz, 2021). The framework of return on financial investment and students as customers and consumers replaced education for broadening the mind and developing citizens focused on improving the global state (Mintz, 2021). Efficiency and effectiveness are key neoliberal values, resulting in a competitive environment with demands to prove financial and economic benefits accrued through higher education. The emphasis on skills and competencies overshadows broader educational outcomes. The resulting decreased government funding and increased dependence on other revenue sources have profoundly impacted higher education (Mintz, 2021). Moreover, the private good rather than the public good leads to greater social inequality. Whereas access to higher education may have improved, differing tuition costs and a stratification of the universities in terms of reputation amplify the economic divide (Mintz, 2021).

The neoliberal agenda underscores many policies and practices of all organizations, whether they are tightly tied to a market economy. While members of post-secondary institutions understand they need to be responsible stewards of the resources, the metrics and measuring of effectiveness and efficiency and the 'student as customer' viewpoint are very contentious among the academic staff. Additionally, the governance processes in universities especially arose from centuries-old models and are not well suited to the current complexities of higher education.

Many faculty have a negative view of neoliberalism and a scan of the academic literature reveals many critiques of following that paradigm in higher education. Moreover, phrases such as neoliberalism being a challenge for future civilization or the scourge of neoliberalism (Giroux, 2010) as a threat to our universities are scathing rebukes of embedding the neoliberal agenda. Amongst the literature is a strong theme of resisting neoliberalism and its ideals of a corporate and technocratic approach to higher education. From that perspective, corporate terms such as efficiency and return on investment are dismissed by faculty as foreign to our culture. Intense critiques of this nature are not well understood by the broader campus community, such as students and parents who see their education as an investment in the future (private good) and the broader public who need to know that government investment in higher education will have a positive impact on society (public good).

Literature: Neoliberalism and Administrators

Looking at the role of administrators and neoliberalism, Slaughter and Rhoades (2000) referred to administrative staff as managerial professionals who could develop alternatives for public higher education but are instead linked to a shift toward corporate and market frameworks. This contention goes beyond the implication that administrators facilitate neoliberalism to explicitly label administrators as part of the neoliberal machinery. This perspective resonates with Veblen's (1918) century-old implication that all that is not faculty is equipment. While Veblen's statement predates the shift toward neoliberal ideologies, it highlights a long-standing undercurrent of making clear distinctions between faculty and administrators. But how do we see neoliberalism manifest in the divide?

Trevor: Coming to Terms With My Internalized Neoliberalism

From an initial visceral reaction to the phrase "neo-liberal university reform on academic practice" (Acker & Webber, 2017, p. 541), my exploration of the topic disrupted my thoughts about the relationship between universities and neoliberalism. The first discovery was understanding the linkages between neoliberalism's impacts on liberal democracy (Brown, 2015) and the chorus of faculty calling out the parallel transformation in universities. During my career, I have heard and felt the pushback from faculty

on administrative processes, systems, and regulations that are often considered corporate or business-like. This viewpoint opposed university efforts to operate with efficient and effective business processes. Having responsibilities for meeting the auditing, regulatory, or external accountability requirements, I saw our administrative efforts supporting the university's accountabilities. However, as I further contemplated the implications of operating in a neoliberal society, I started to recognize these neoliberal forces at work within the university. While I have felt the adversarial reaction of faculty to my work, much of their reaction could also be connected to the reverberations of neoliberalism within the institution. A drive to measure research output in publications, grant funding, and output was exacerbated by the administrative requirements driven by the *Tri-Agency Guide on Financial Administration* (Natural Sciences Research and Engineering Council, n.d.) that drive university processes. This guidance became a source of internal conflict between faculty and administrators. This tension has always been frustrating since I felt I was doing my best to help faculty avoid the painful details of the rules, regulations, and restrictions. I thought I was being helpful by creating processes that shielded them from tax matters or accounting standards. I often felt that they were frustrated and upset with the wrong people because, as administrators, we were doing our best to manage the various accountabilities of the university and its activity. While I recognized growing accountabilities in many areas of the university's work, I had not contemplated the driving forces behind these activities. I had accepted the neoliberal environment in which we worked and was attempting to normalize it as support for faculty. Reflecting on the idea of compulsory heterosexuality, was I complicit in facilitating a normative neoliberal environment, even a compulsory neoliberalism?

As my perspective on the neoliberal university shifted, I became skeptical that the pushback of faculty against university leadership could change the university's bargaining power with provincial government funders, national granting councils, and a national (or even global) competition for enrolment. Collini (2012) argued that faculty were better off making their arguments with university administrators than politicians, as it was the administrators who would be stuck implementing problematic public policies. This argument assumes that administrators have a persuasive voice with the politicians and bureaucrats setting neoliberal public policy. I was left wondering against whom faculty are fighting, whether that fight is effective, and where the power rests. When sitting in university resource allocation discussions, I saw a desire to pursue the lofty goals of faculty. However, an environment of constrained resources means difficult decisions in distributing resources. This tension is not just happening within universities; it is a public policy issue for public goods such as health care and social services under the neoliberal shadow of the value of market forces and privatization.

Vicki: Coming to Terms With My Internalized Neoliberalism

Politically, the education landscape locally, nationally, and globally is based on neoliberal ideology; recruiting faculty and students in a very competitive environment, measuring employment rates of graduates, calculating research dollars awarded, running donation campaigns, and increasing tuition fees are all examples of key performance indicators used to measure the success of the university and reflect the values of neoliberalism. My administration background means that financial sustainability is crucial to me, but my social justice beliefs and beliefs in access and equity are a source of dissonance when I consider such a broad range of metrics and measurements. The metrics collected are centred on what is countable; however, students' sense of belonging, development of self-reliance, growth of knowledge and analysis skills, and attainment of personal goals are also important. Measuring social impact of research and teaching is rarely part of the narrative.

How do I come to terms with my very different perspectives on the need for financial sustainability in juxtaposition with the altruistic goals of higher education? Frankly, it can occasionally cause me some angst, especially when I have conversations with colleagues and friends about the realities facing higher education. I have difficulty explaining that rising tuition costs are meant to balance the reduction of public funding (proportionally) and inflation rates not being accurately accounted for in the submitted budgets partly because some of the costs are unpredictable. If we have learned one thing from the pandemic and emerging geopolitical conflict, our small piece of the world is not isolated and the future is unpredictable.

My administrator side says universities need to remain financially sustainable and faculty should not need to see the minutiae of the budget. Yet my faculty side knows that we pursued institutional enrolment goals by adding new programs and the increased activity did not translate into more money for our college; at the same time, retiring faculty members were not replaced. These experiences create suspicion of faculty toward administrators when the support of institutional goals does not benefit the faculty in the college. In trying to come to terms with my two perspectives, I now occupy a space of being skeptically optimistic about the future.

Literature: Accountability and Neoliberalism

In our discussions on neoliberalism, we explored the role that measures and metrics play in accountability, particularly concerning the stewardship of public resources. Looking at the literature, Olssen (2016) supported forms of accountability in the operation of universities but highlighted that market-based competition is not necessary for accountability. Olssen (2016) encouraged treating higher education as a public good rather than a competitive marketplace as a relief to the pressures of neoliberalism. However, if we argue that higher education is a public good backed by public financing, the government controls higher education decisions (Clark, 1983). With governments acting as a neoliberal force on universities (Vernon, 2018), how can the forces of neoliberalism be loosened when neoliberal governments control the funding? For governments and taxpayers, this neoliberal paradigm measures universities through economic growth and increased prosperity, thereby driving what is valued and measured (Collini, 2012). As a result, it still holds true that "he who has the gold has the rule" (Clark, 1983, p. 121), and in a competitive market, governments and students write the cheques. Governments are buying an economic return on investment, and students are investing in their private human capital (Brown, 2015).

In the literature on neoliberalism in higher education, the topics of managerialism, audit culture, marketization, new public management, and corporatization of universities are often connected (Davis, 2023; Dougherty & Natow, 2019, 2020; Kallio et al., 2020; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Shore & Wright, 2000). A common theme among these topics was the evolution of universities from some form of ideal organization to something more akin to a corporate entity selling education and research. Often written as critiques of modern universities, the literature on the topic points to the complicity of university administration as either an agent of these neoliberal forces or university leaders' failure to push back on the government and consumerist forces at play (Ginsberg, 2011; Gray, 2015; Szekeres, 2006). What is often unanswered is what that ideal university was then and what a university is today.

MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS: WHAT IS A UNIVERSITY?

As we discussed the plight of the neoliberal university, we found ourselves asking what the university of today is. Is it a factory mass-producing human capital in the form of job-ready students? Is it a place of knowledge creation, dissemination, and preservation? Is it an ivory tower with its head in the clouds? The answer is yes in each case, depending on who you ask.

Davis (2023) addressed the question of the university's purpose by highlighting the need to refocus on the university's resistance to academic neoliberalism. He suggested that "to resist academic neoliberalism is to re-evaluate the purpose and structure of the Western public university in its role as a home to diverse, globally connected intellectual communities" (Davis, 2023, p. 13). Framed in the context of humanities and critique, Davis (2023) also challenged whether critique often stopped where the work needed to start and that critique needed to offer a creative and appreciative approach. To this end, our duoethnography offered a critical look at the divide between faculty and administrators and provided a transformative and generative shift in our outlooks.

As we contemplated the journey of our duoethnography, we wondered how our transformations and insights could lead us forward in bridging the divide. Unlike traditional research, "there are few or no conclusions in duoethnographies" (Sawyer & Norris, 2013, p. 93). Instead, duoethnography draws out and shares the transformations of the duoethnographers through their currere. As we discussed where our conversations had taken us, we questioned whether there could ever be agreement on what a university is

and its purpose. The neoliberal market forces guide a university to create human capital by enhancing students' value in the marketplace. Others, such as Daniels et al. (2021) offered four main functions for universities: social mobility, civic education, knowledge dissemination, and exchange of different ideas. For individual faculty, particularly those seeking tenure or promotion, the university is a drive to publish or perish. Senior university leaders may seek to grow research and achieve global pre-eminence. All of these may be the number one priority for different groups within a university; should we be surprised by a sense of forces pulling in all directions?

If we narrow our focus to the forces on faculty and administrators, we can see how neoliberal forces may cleave the divide further. Administrators run corporate services to operate a campus, run retail and food services, deliver services to students, manage reporting and accountability to funders, and generally operate in a market-driven neoliberal context. Faculty are encouraged to drive their individual entrepreneurial research agendas while teaching students and engaging in service. However, every aspect of what the university asks faculty to do is infused with neoliberal market forces or measurement and accountability. Competition for research grants with incentives for commercialization while being asked to teach more students in each class with syllabi that can generate a profit for their department are areas that consume faculty energy. Governments and third-party ranking regimes then judge, monitor, measure, and rank the work of faculty and administrators to help governments allocate resources, to influence faculty research decisions, and to help students select where to invest their tuition.

Trevor: Forward From Here

When we started our conversations, I resisted the arguments about the neoliberal university as they always felt like a personal attack. Through our duoethnography, I now look at the epic struggle facing universities. Not only are universities operating in a market environment competing for faculty, students, and government funding, but they are also trying to reconcile the various identities of a university within a neoliberal context. All levels of government funding in Canada have stagnated, driving Canadian universities to focus on tuition as a growing funding source. This focus on tuition has transformed students into consumers shopping for price and value and has focused universities on marketing to and recruiting international students to supplement income under provincial domestic tuition caps. Universities are corporate entities whether we like it or not, and they continue to be driven to think and operate within market forces. However, people like Brown (2015) and Daniels et al. (2021) suggest that society must contemplate how universities have shifted higher education from a public good to a private good. Perhaps this is a battle cry that faculty and administrators can unite over. Where can our universities' constituents and the advocates find a common interest and strategies to advance the public good served by universities? It is a monumental challenge, not only due to neoliberal forces but also in a society with a growing distrust of knowledge, science, and research. My reaction to the chants of the neoliberal university has dramatically changed through this duoethnography and has given me a new language to engage in my administrative role (as well as my researcher-in-training role).

Previously, I commented on our queerness as individuals outside normal faculty and administrators. Spaces of queerness, breaching liminal boundaries between faculty and administrators, may offer insights into the challenges of neoliberalism as well. Mahn et al. (2022) edited a volume that brings a queer sensibility to operating in the neoliberal university and embodied Davis's (2023) suggestions of going beyond critique. Drawing on queer and feminist perspectives, the authors in the collection look to challenge the marketized (neoliberal) university. Using the tools of neoliberalism, like publishing critically framed research in high-impact journals (Caravaca et al., 2022), can advance critique within normative neoliberal values. Employing a queer sensibility also encourages those of us within universities to think beyond a fractured binary of faculty versus administrator.

The shift in my currere on neoliberalism and its impact on faculty and administrators further queered my administrative identity. I find myself contemplating where, as an administrator, I may be propagating neoliberal forces within the university and whether I have any influence to manage or disrupt that propagation. I find myself less critical of faculty resistance to neoliberalism and instead look for the queer space that exists in the divide between the administrator and faculty perspectives. Sawyer and Norris (2013)

said “duoethnography is in its own right a milestone that marks a significant event of reflection and reconceptualization” (p. 109). In this way, the method becomes praxis, and the researcher truly is the site of both research and praxis.

Vicki: Forward From Here

Ironically, my doctoral dissertation focused on organizational change in higher education and I clearly remember one committee member saying that I was looking at universities through rose-coloured glasses. In reflection, I recognize that I did not understand all the machinations of trying to run an organization that is the size of a small city with two very distinct groups of employees, students, and the broader community. With these multiple experiences as teacher, faculty, and administrator at many levels, I feel I am uniquely qualified to look at higher education through several pairs of unfiltered glasses.

Through our journey, I reflected more on what I have learned. Neoliberalism has become so embedded in our global discourse that the ideologies and values of neoliberalism are often assumed and unquestioned. Teaching in schools, curricular outcomes are clearly articulated and assessment and reporting have always been a part of that culture; accountabilities are evident. Teachers are first and foremost accountable to supporting the learning and development of their students and they would not characterize students as customers. However, neoliberal agendas have had an impact on primary and secondary education as well.

The impact is more evident on higher education campuses though because of the relative autonomy post-secondary institutions, especially universities, have traditionally had. My transition to administration at a university meant that reporting, assessment, and accountability were understood as necessary to set goals and determine progress. It truly was not until I became a faculty member that I realized my unquestioning approach to gathering data to inform decisions and policies. I did not understand why faculty members would approach presentations on fiscal restraint and measuring outputs and achievements as antithetical to academia. I gradually understood that the shift in public funding, the conversation about rising tuition and the growing dependence on donors and international student tuition were also underpinned by neoliberal ideologies adopted by governments globally.

Where from here? My belief in an educated society is unshakable, but I am more skeptical about metrics leading to better overall outcomes for all. Evidence-informed decision-making is only as good as the inputs and does not work well in a continuously shrinking level of public funding. The costs of running large, complex organizations must be considered and campuses with large footprints will be especially concerned with these costs. My conversations with Trevor assured me that fiscal realities mean we must be accountable to the broader community and participate in teaching and research agendas that support a flourishing, inclusive, democratic, and healthy society. If universities hope to maintain their reputation and value, the balance between financial reality and the public good must be our focus.

YOUR CONCLUSION

When we started our conversations about the divide between faculty and administrators, little did we realize it would lead to a discussion of neoliberalism. However, through this duoethnography we came to see the role of the neoliberal context of universities in the dynamics and relationships between faculty and administrators. That insight has shifted how we view our places within the university and our relationships with those around us.

Having witnessed and potentially participated in our duoethnography via your reflections, the value of this work lies in where we each take it. We shared how this duoethnography has shifted our currere and established new lenses to consider the divide between academics and administrators.

As a participant in our duoethnography, what transformation and self-reflection have the insights into our currere, dialogue, and transformation offered you? Faculty and administrators will continue to work together in universities; the onus rests on us within those groups to shape that relationship. Having spent this time together, we now recognize the role of the neoliberal context in the relationship between these two groups. This duoethnography has shaped our future interactions in these spaces; how has it impacted you?

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