

FEEDING THE GREEDY INSTITUTION: HEARTBURN AND BURNOUT IN THE WORKPLACE

Teresa Moore

ABSTRACT

Workplaces are highly politicised contexts where professional knowledge and personal philosophies intersect. External pressures and a workplace culture are two influences that impact on the workplace. In a context where dominant institutional discourses construct the 'good academic' this means that there are not only certain expectations and performances required of those employed in specific workplaces, but also certain consequences. A transformative textual analysis was employed to analyse the negotiations and performances of four academic women as they navigated formal and informal discourses circulating within their respective workplaces. These 'performances' take place in a globalised environment or context where there are expectations to operate in a 'technoscape' (Appadurai, 1990) with an innovative and entrepreneurial focus. They also signal the gendered nature of academic work. In this paper I take up two associated themes: firstly, the changing nature of the academic workplace and secondly, the notion of the greedy institution. Both of these themes reflect the negotiations happening in the politicised contexts of schools and universities.

INTRODUCTION: PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN CONTEXT

This paper is based on a lecture that I was asked to give linking my PhD research to the notion of professional knowledge in context. My audience were final year pre-service teacher education students who were exploring, conceptualising and formulating their philosophies around teaching or learning management and they were debating the ethical dimensions associated with their future employment. My area of interest concerned the academic workplace and my PhD research, conducted from 2000 to 2002, investigated the negotiation of a regional university workplace by four academic women (Moore, 2003). Although my research focused (necessarily) on the area of one academic

workplace and four women working in that context there were issues present here that are important, familiar, present and encountered across a range of workplaces including schools. My respondents work across different faculties; that means their professional knowledge incorporates different discipline knowledge, curriculum and pedagogy, as well as a professional knowledge regarding broader workplace issues such as working conditions, specific university policies and institutional expectations around being an educator.

Therefore professional knowledge in this instance can be defined as not being limited to what might be taught in a classroom, either in a university or a school, but extends to include both knowledge and awareness of the workplace as a whole, that complex environment that is governed by rules, regulations, policies, strategic plans, budgets and workplace agreements. The reader would no doubt be familiar with equity policies, professional standards and codes governing behaviour. Universities have these kinds of policies, practices and 'professional standards' in place; it is a moot point whether and to what extent these phenomena are also 'in action'. Perhaps for some then, the degree to which these entities are seen as being 'in place' and then 'in action' could be a contestable point. In this paper I take up two main themes: firstly I explore the changing nature of the workplace and secondly I address the notion of the greedy institution.

THE CHANGING NATURE OF THE WORKPLACE

Both schools and universities are influenced by micro- and macro-politics. Macro-politics, in this paper, refers more to the external pressures placed on workplaces. What I mean by this for example, is the talk around technology, the absolute need to have and to use 'high tech' such as the latest computers and software; the move towards on-line delivery of courses using either WebCT, or more recently, Blackboard; and the overt marketing of courses to international and full fee paying students. Micro-politics on the other hand, in this paper, is more about the underlying discourses circulating within the workplace that form a hidden layer of workplace culture. It's more about who are seen as 'good' academics, who does the 'right' kind of research and who is rewarded for what performances. Both the external pressures and the workplace

culture impact on the changing nature of the workplace. I will now address the external pressures impacting on the way in which my respondents negotiate their respective workplace contexts.

External pressures — macro-politics

Universities, these days, are expected to perform more like businesses (Currie & Newson, 1998; Currie & Thiele, 2001; Currie & Vidovich, 1998) and less like places of learning. Universities are being re-shaped and re-structured into streamlined financial operations, what some would call a lean, mean money machine. Anecdotally, a common and consistent discourse circulating concerns the constant and unending change and restructure often establishing heightened competition among academic institutions. There is an increasing focus on vocational courses that give students a job. So the kinds of courses that are being offered are market driven and consumer driven. This is reflected in the comments of Tamaly (the respondents have been given pseudonyms) when she highlighted the type of focus she felt was needed when developing courses/units for her faculty:

It's beginning to change because of the vocational nature now of academia, if you like. I mean the sorts of programs that you are offering. We've got to be very mindful of the marketplace, student numbers, marketing and making sure that the courses we're offering suit today's market.

In her comments Tamaly is highlighting the local changes within her faculty/university from what can be perceived as global influences that senior managers within Milton University (MU, a pseudonym) are responding. These global influences, according to Currie (1996, p. 1), come from the 'encouragement' by politicians to "embrace the marketplace and become customer-focus business enterprises". Much politically driven change hinges on an economic discourse; for example the focus on technology, specifically ICT, is seen as a way to make more money more efficiently. This is commonly associated with the discourse 'work smarter, not harder' where, among some academic staff, there is a perception that senior managers believe that by putting courses on-line academics are then freed from teaching to do other activities such as research, writing those grant proposals and increasing that publication

list. Certainly Veronica identifies such a discourse when discussing her concern for the students enrolling for on-line courses:

I think a lot of support is going to be needed for the student who enrolls on those [on-line] courses and providing for it is going to be expensive. I don't see how having stuff on the Web is going to necessarily free people up to do other things and I think there's an expectation that it will.

The use of 'high tech' educational delivery is seen as a drawcard for the lucrative full fee paying market. This brings in the notion of the entrepreneurial university. This kind of university was brought into being in Australia during the 1990s. In the entrepreneurial university there is a specific focus on the consumer through two main avenues: one, the niche marketing of courses and research interests, and two, a valuing of those activities that generate extra funding and that attract those willing to pay full fees (Moore, 2003). In this context the use of such principles as 'user pays' and 'market orientation' shape the meaning of education. In a user pays context education is a commodity that is bought and sold where you get what you can afford. Having set the context of the site I now address the second issue in this section, that of workplace culture.

Internal pressures — workplace culture

When thinking about the contemporary workplace particular trends or patterns of employment are emerging. There is a growing casual, part time and contract sector that is now making up the larger periphery while there is a smaller but more exclusive and selective core of highly paid full time workers. Associated with this is the notion of the portfolio career (Waite, 2002). The term 'portfolio career' refers to a viable and rewarding alternative to full time work with one employer where a job or work can include a number of on-going jobs at any one time. While this idea is not new, it is now regarded as a new approach to 'the way we work' in contemporary Western society.

Associated with this notion is the reality of re-structure, retrenchment and redundancy. In contemporary workplaces the discourse of 'work smarter, not harder' is often a euphemism for the same or fewer staff members, but more productivity. In universities this has seen a parallel

move towards more casual and contract staff with tenure becoming the norm for a small core of highly paid, full time senior academic staff. This is enhanced by the practice of employing non-academic employees/lecturers who are brought in to address the growing vocational focus of many university courses. Many of these employees, specifically those associated with nursing, teaching and business, have extensive practical experience and knowledge minus the doctorate and research profile. Coupled with this is the growing feminization of the workplace where women are increasing their participation in arenas such as the university, *albeit* under unspoken rules. While in reality the situation is rather more complex than this necessarily brief overview can indicate, it is possible to see a developing pattern that results in academic work becoming gendered. I will return to this theme in further detail in the next section.

The final year pre-service teacher education students were asked whether some or all of them might be developing their own portfolio careers at the present time. This brought up some interesting discussion around what they were doing now as students and what they thought they would be doing as teachers in the 'real' world, which, at the same time, constructed some interesting perceptions of what they considered academics 'did' in their roles. There was general agreement that these days people did not remain in the same job or even the same profession for all their working lives but rather built up a mixture of different jobs, changing hours to work around family commitments and taking into consideration different forms of public service and community work (Waite, 2002).

In discussing time management some students stated they simply ran out of time when it came to other activities beyond their part time job and their study commitments. This raised an important issue of how many of them would fit in family commitments when working, especially where childcare was concerned. I believe that this is a significant concern for future employers and employees, especially when considering that stress levels, discrimination and workplace bullying complaints are increasing (Fox, 2003; Odgers, 2002). This paper does not extend to include these issues but rather signals these issues as consequences of the second major theme to be canvassed here — the notion of the greedy institution.

THE GREEDY INSTITUTION

A greedy institution is “a social institution that demands commitment and undivided loyalty from its voluntary members” (Franzway, 2001, p. 3). This is tied up with expectations of the stakeholders associated with these institutions. I see two ‘greedy institutions’ operating in our lives: the first is work or public life; and the second involves family and friends or private life.

What does this mean for academics/teachers?

There are certain expectations associated with these institutions. The perception is that the ‘good academic’ or ‘good teacher’ is someone who can incorporate new technologies in their various formats whether this is new information/communication technologies, new pedagogies or new courses/units. There are pressures to be innovative in educational delivery (often read as putting all lectures onto PowerPoint), to be entrepreneurial in approach to overseas markets and to foster ‘corporate care’ with the customer.

This means that work is never done; there is always another policy document to read and implement. There’s new curriculum stuff to attend to, students wanting help and demanding one’s time, meetings to attend, professional development to fit in. It means that we are constantly striving for something that is always just out of reach and the consequence of this is burnout in the workplace. So for me the greedy institution refers to how the job takes over. With my respondents, no matter how hard they work they never seem to get on top of their ‘work’. In this day and age when there is competition for jobs, to be seen as a good worker you need to devote commitment to, and to demonstrate total focus on, your job. For those people on contracts or casual work; being seen as a good worker often means the difference between working or unemployment.

In a sexually neutral workplace logic would have it that all an academic woman need do to be seen as a ‘good academic’ is to perform as a ‘techno’ teacher and a regional researcher, be innovative and address vocational demands, but it is not as simple as that. As Rowan (2000, p. 166) describes, experience is always embodied; that is, the experiences a woman has in a workplace can and must be read as tied to her body.

My research demonstrates that both formal and informal discourses work to position men and women differently within the university, with discourses around the 'good academic' constructing a symbolic body that is more likely to fit a male body than a female body.

At MU male academics hold senior and tenured positions and most male academics have PhDs and can therefore focus their research on current issues within the regional research niche. These senior academics are in a position to combine research and vocational links with industry partnerships. Many of these same academics are able to buy out their teaching with research grants (Harris, Thiele, & Currie, 1998). The university endorsed research partnerships largely revolve around the 'masculine' and traditionally 'rural' industries where many of the senior academics (Levels C and D) have had longstanding associations owing to their length of service at MU. According to the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) Report (Equity and Diversity Division, 2002), there are more men than women employed as academics, with 73.1% of the senior academics being male and 64% of these men being in management roles. This, then, indicates a patriarchal structure of the university (Grosz, 1986) and implies the patriarchal 'academic body'.

Heartburn for Veronica

The discourses of sexuality (specifically that of heterosexuality) construct 'good women' as nurturing, caring, emotional beings who are attracted to, and are attractive for, men; they have responsibility for the domestic side of life, regardless of whether they are full time/part time in the public sphere. To that end, then, in the Western heterosexual discourse, 'good women' complement the activities of 'good men' in the public sphere, by taking care of business at home. In the academic workplace this discourse positions 'good women' as complementary to male academics in a 'caring' role where 'good women' take care of students' pastoral needs. Veronica believes there is a constant 'caring' message attached to the bodies of women:

You are very conscious of being a woman and you are also very conscious of not wanting to be a stereotypical woman who cares for people, but you don't want to be the bastard who doesn't care. So, I

mean, I think women who are ... in public places are constantly walking that fine line and I think that for many women it's almost impossible and they go over the edge one way or the other.

Veronica finds this negotiation of the 'caring woman' impossible to avoid and one that she believes women in the public sphere continually face. It is not that she objects to being constructed as caring; rather she feels women are constantly judged on how well they fit the 'good woman' stereotype where the notion of 'caring' is omnipresent. This same scrutiny is not readily applied to men in either the public sphere or even the private sphere. According to Veronica, if women within the university do not exhibit caring and nurturing towards students then they are not 'real' women. This same action is not required of men at MU; neither are men judged on their 'caring' performance. This signals a gendered dimension to the academic role.

Indicated here also is Veronica's awareness of a patriarchal discourse that constructs women in a binary relationship as either caring and compassionate or as uncaring and 'bastardly'. She explicitly describes her comfortableness with being perceived as *either one or the other*; as the 'good woman' Veronica sees herself constructed as a nurturer, in order to be seen as a good 'female' teacher. She contends that there is an extra layer of nurturing required of women that is not a prerequisite for being a 'good male academic' at MU.

This performance of caring, involving both staff and students, is both on an institutional level, where teaching areas must be cared for, and on a personal level, where the pastoral care of students is intimately connected to the bodies of women academics. While both levels are professional, the action of caring is associated with the 'personal', constructing caring as emotional labour (Jarzabkowski, 2001) rather than as academic labour. For Veronica, discourses of embodiment strongly influence how she performs as an academic and how she sees her own position within her faculty. This narrative provides a striking example of how personal responsibility has been subtly transferred by her male colleague from himself to Veronica, while, at the same time, this personal responsibility has changed to 'caring' where Veronica takes up the care and protection of her own teaching network and colleagues within that network:

I work with two other people. I have to negotiate my position with two males and then negotiate my position both as a member of that group and as an individual in the larger faculty. One of my male colleagues had a number of situations that developed because of the e-mails that he sends. Now he will often read them to me [before he sends them]. I don't want to see myself as having to monitor anyone's e-mail, but the difficulties that have developed have impinged on me as well because I'm part of that network.

In this instance Veronica has to negotiate her own embodied location as part of two groups within her faculty. She sees herself as a woman, with this sexual difference enhanced by the fact that she has assumed the role of carer, but Veronica also sees herself as an individual academic within the faculty. The actions of her immediate group impact on how both her group and she are perceived by the rest of the faculty.

As Smith (1987, p. 219) explains, the reputation of an academic woman is intimately connected to how she is seen in her own academic environment as well as in external settings. At the same time, her individual standing in her professional area contributes to the overall standing of the institution, highlighting a mutual and interlocking relationship (Smith, 1987, p. 219). In the relationship between Veronica and her immediate colleagues, I argue the transference of care from the personal to the institutional level is evident. Veronica can be seen as a mother protecting her baby — that is, her teaching network and research area — and cleaning up the mess made by her academic colleague. She is taking on the responsibility of monitoring his behaviour to negotiate/preserve their area within her faculty.

She has assigned herself the role of caring to make sure that her area does not get cut back in uncertain times of economic pressures at both the faculty and the university levels. The embodied negotiation that Veronica acts out can be clearly identified in the goals that she is currently pursuing: "I guess my goal is, at the moment, a pragmatic one — to protect my work area and hopefully maintain a vigorous identity for that area".

This statement indicates some insecurity associated with the academic workplace where economic decisions inform the bottom line. Indeed, the indirect effect is one of maintaining conformity and expected normative behaviour, as displayed by Veronica. By assigning

this role to Veronica this, in effect, absolves her male colleague of any blame if decisions about this particular network are negative. These subtle shifts enable Veronica's male colleague to continue his habits and behaviour while Veronica is required to monitor and clean up in the wake of any unruly behaviour.

Burnout for Alice

Nurturing and caring are not confined to colleagues; they also include students. A second example of caring involves Alice as she considers the ways in which she is called on to conduct student consultation:

They [the students] talk to you more, they come and consult with you where they wouldn't consult with the 'fellas' and yeah, they become quite personal with you and quite different. The guys [male lecturers] seem to go in and do their class and come out and sometimes I feel they have a blatant disregard for students, whereas I think we almost take on a nurturing role with some of the students, and can spend inordinate amounts of time with some of them when I know my male colleagues have said, "Our 20 minutes is up — go".

Alice sees herself as having to take on a nurturing role with some students. Here she sees herself as a counsellor as well as a teacher, while her male colleagues appear to view their teaching responsibilities as a small function of their overall expectations associated with being an academic. There are two points I wish to highlight here. Firstly, Alice has taken on this role because of two reasons. One reason is that she feels that some of the students will benefit from the type of learning environment that she is attempting to provide. The other reason is that she feels that she has to take on this role because her male colleagues ignore this role.

Secondly, she has also been assigned this role by the actions of others — firstly by the students and secondly by her male colleagues. Alice believes that her male colleagues do not see counselling with the students as part of their role, and that her male colleagues are quite aware of this role but have seen it as an extension of women's 'natural' abilities.

For her male colleagues, consultation with students is limited to a set time for specific questions. Sexed scripts (Elsdon, 1999) have represented the role of teacher either as neutral and unemotional

(associated with the masculine) or as caring and nurturing (associated with the feminine) in this context. An oppositional reading in this instance is that, by offloading student consultation to Alice, her male colleagues have more free time to pursue research activities. Either way, what this means for Alice is that more time is taken away from her own research and finishing her PhD. By taking on this role, Alice can again be perceived as more suited to teaching and student contact than to research.

In this role the academic woman is being constructed as the 'good woman' who complements the male academic, constituting evidence of a patriarchal discourse. In other words, gender segregation sets up male academics as 'naturally' suited to such activities as research, while women academics are 'naturally' suited to support roles. As a consequence Alice finds herself with extra 'caring' duties:

I have been told students apparently are having, or feeling, a great sense of ... a lack of belonging in the School, so now I send each student in our School, and there's over 300, individualized birthday cards.

Implicit here is an expectation by her male colleagues that Alice will attend to the nurturing requirement identified by her male colleagues. As Burton (1997, p. 30) suggests, there are pressures to conform to particular faculty environments and the overall university culture. This is particularly so if the academic woman is on a short-term contract or, as in Alice's case, on tenurable track. This compulsory caring becomes part of the unseen and extra work that Alice is performing as an academic woman. Alice feels the normative expectation is that women will look after the needs of students, establishing caring or nurturing behaviour as an extension of women's work and an extension of women's 'natural' attributes.

In this discourse there are expectations made of women that are not required of their male colleagues. Women's bodies are seen as a site of maternal care — while this is valued in women it is certainly not valued in male bodies. It is possible to identify here the ways in which women academics are being positioned as complementary to male academics in the construction of heterosexuality, femininity and masculinity. These constructions are played out through the practices of real bodies, as illustrated by Veronica's and Alice's story.

CONCLUSION

Contemporary employment practices at MU create the academic workplace as a site of multiple bodies; however within this site the 'good academic' is constructed as a specific body, with this profile more likely to be associated with a male body. This does not necessarily mean that male academics are 'good academics'; instead it means that men are more likely to fit this 'symbolic' as opposed to 'real' body (Braidotti, 1994). Taken together these points signal a significant arena where contesting discourses (both formal and informal) are played out that have consequences for the ways in which academic women experience their workplace.

While academic women have been positioned the same as men by legislative discourses such as equity policies, because of cultural messages attached to women's bodies, a traditional (and often less formal) discourse continues to circulate within MU that positions academic women as being different from, or complementary to, academic men. Traditional discourses attach meanings that construct women's bodies as sites of nurturing, caring and emotional labour rather than sites of academic labour. It is important to make visible this embodiment because it has material consequences played out in the workplace. According to Gatens (1992, p. 131), socially appropriate bodies are produced by the micro-political operations of power. These operations of power work through the dominant discourses, producing the kinds of academic bodies appropriate to signify a particular institution. When coupled with specific university agendas that mirror the corporate world and economic rationalist approaches, this makes for uneasy times when only certain kinds of bodies have value in this workplace or when only certain performances by particular bodies are valued.

The greedy institution demands more of our time because we are constantly striving to keep up with change. Changes imply cutting edge research, scientific discovery, leading the field — all of which are highly valued in our society. External pressures in the form of macro-politics are driving this change, while internal pressures work to construct a particular workplace culture that values specific

performances by certain bodies. The consequences of this can materialise in stress, burnout and ultimate collapse, often leading to a high turnover of staff. Often when this happens to keep costs down those who leave are not replaced. This results in an increased workload, with a greedy institution demanding more from those who remain. It is also creating a gendered workplace where certain gendered expectations are placed on academics, resulting in material differences regarding tenure, promotion and position.

Coping strategies used by my respondents include reflecting on their own philosophies, and implementing practices that support their own convictions as educators. This helps to reconcile dilemmas in the workplace when there are clashes between the expectations of the institution and expectations of the other stakeholders. This is tied back to how the women on my study see themselves as educators and practice their teaching philosophies, points not lost on the final year pre-service teacher education students.

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