



Conceptualising the Epistemic Dimension of Academic Identity in an Age of Neo-Liberalism

Raoul J. Adam[†]

James Cook University

This paper explores the epistemic dimension of neoliberalism in the context of higher education. Much critical commentary depicts neoliberalism negatively in terms of knowledge commodification, marketisation, productivity agendas, accountability regimes, bureaucratisation, economic rationalism and micro-managerialism. The paper offers a conceptual model (Binary Epistemic Model) to theorise the implicit epistemic conflict between some academic identities and the neoliberal paradigm. The model is used to support a paradoxical two-part thesis: (1) that neoliberalism, in its naïve form, is a threat to the necessary epistemological diversity of the academy, and (2) that epistemological diversity has a space, albeit a contested space, for neoliberal identities and ways of knowing. The premise for the model is that it offers a dialectical and evaluativistic way of understanding the influence of neoliberalism in the academy.

Introduction

If the academy, classroom, and other educational contexts are not mere institutional sites, but are fundamentally political and cultural sites that represent accommodations and contestations over knowledge by differently empowered social constituencies, then the processes and practices of education lead to profoundly significant notions of self, identity, and community.

(Mohanty, 1997, p. xvi)

[†] Address for correspondence: Dr. Raoul J. Adam, School of Education, James Cook University PO Box 6811, Cairns QLD, Australia, 4870.
Email: Raoul.Adam@jcu.edu.au.

Academics teach and research in complex and often contested epistemological spaces. Indeed, much academic work in higher education involves the construction and application of different ways of knowing and approaches to knowledge. As such, academics and their institutions can be said to have *epistemic identities*, that is, dispositional beliefs about knowledge and the nature of knowledge that are socially and psychologically constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed. Accordingly, these epistemic identities are influenced by periods of *epistemic drift* (Elzinga, 1985) in which the *epistemic climate* (Haerle & Bendixen, 2008) changes to reflect new hegemonies in the conceptualisation and valuing of knowledge and knowing. These periods of drift and change can produce *epistemic conflicts* (Doise & Mugny, 1984) as the balance of power shifts between different ways of knowing and their affiliated academic, discipline or organisational identities. The premise of this paper is that the conceptualisation, representation and management of such epistemic conflicts is important in the *re*-solution of a fundamentally ‘wicked problem’ – the role of neoliberalism in the academy.

The purpose of this paper is to conceptualise the epistemic conflict between some academic identities and the neoliberalism. *Neoliberalism* represents an ideology, even a paradigm, of increased productivity through deregulation, commodification, privatisation, managerialism and marketisation. An increasing amount of research reflects on the relationship between the academy and the market economy. As Johnston and Murray (2004) note: ‘There is potential for the traditional activities of universities in teaching, research, skill development and knowledge management to be rapidly refocused along market lines, with an emphasis on the particular needs of a knowledge economy’ (p.32). Relatively recent literature (e.g., Henkl, 2005; Bleiklie et al., 2000) highlights the influence of neoliberalism and the marketisation of knowledge on academic identities and the potential for epistemic conflict within the academy and between the academy and the market economy.

Many academics are experiencing ‘distress and disillusionment’ (Davies & Petersen, 2005) and ‘alienation and anomie’ (Beck & Young, 2005; Archer, 2008) as a result of the epistemic drift represented by neoliberalism. For example, a recent call for papers for the Academic Identities Conference (2012) notes:

In the neo-liberal academy, under the spotlight of audit and the exigencies of bureaucracy, there is a sense that academic identity is ruined, that the sort of work academics want to do and feel committed to doing is becoming harder to undertake with any real ownership, joy or pleasure.

(para1. <http://aic.education.auckland.ac.nz/call-for-papers/>)

This discontentment poses important questions that are engaged in this paper. First, to what extent should such maladies be considered a necessary cost for the greater good (pragmatic and/or ideal) of the academy and society? Second, how can the epistemic drift represented by neoliberalism and the conflicts and crises it provokes be conceptualised to facilitate more constructive dialogue and debate within the academy and about the academy?

A key premise of this paper is that neoliberalism has an epistemic identity that necessarily interacts with epistemic identities within the academy. Arguably, the modern influence of neoliberalism and its colonisation of many domains of knowledge in higher education has produced epistemic conflicts affecting individual and collective academic identities. Henkl (2005) succinctly describes this interaction between the individual and the collective: ‘academic identity is a function of community membership and, in the case of academics, interaction between the individual and two key communities, the discipline and the higher education institution’ (p. 172). The ways of knowing that characterise the neoliberal paradigm predictably collide and conflict with the ways of knowing that characterise some disciplines, domains and individual identities in higher education. For example, some commentators have associated neoliberalism’s epistemic identity with positivist epistemology (e.g., Hunter, 2002) and the commodification and marketisation of knowledge

(e.g., Caffentzis, 2005). The marketisation and commodification of knowledge can marginalise some domains of academia that identify with epistemologies that are not easily or readily branded, quantified or able to compete with more mass marketable ‘products’.

The thesis of this paper is that the most ‘productive’ academics and higher education institutions are characterised by diverse and dialectical epistemologies that can be applied in-relation to each other and in-context, and that the current naïve form of neoliberalism will pose a threat to this diversity and necessary dialectic unless it is better informed by the nature of epistemes that are most foreign to its own epistemic heritage. In concert with Hunter’s (2002) statement, ‘neo-liberal understandings of positivism and the institutional power that perpetuates them are criticised in favor of epistemological diversity in the academy’ (p.119). However, I argue further that neoliberal epistemologies can be accommodated or re-defined within this epistemological diversity to sustain the necessary dialectical tensions that characterise higher learning. To ignore the epistemic disequilibria that neoliberal epistemologies grew out of and to devalue the epistemologies that neoliberalism represents is merely to swing the pendulum too far the other way - even more insipidly under the mantra of diversity. Accordingly, the following sections offer (1) a description of the epistemic identity of neoliberalism as represented in current literature, (2) a conceptual model (BEM) with which to locate and engage the epistemic identity of neoliberalism, and (3) a discussion of general ways to constructively *re-engage* neoliberalism in the academy.

The Epistemic Identity of (*Naïve*) Neoliberalism

Does neoliberalism have an epistemic identity? The thesis here, as represented in the Binary Epistemic Model (BEM) (Figure 1.), is that *naïve* neoliberalism is characterised by objectivising epistemologies that are loosely affiliated with *positivist, realist, rational, atomistic, descriptive, abstract, empirical* and

quantitative approaches to knowledge in academic discourse and structured, authoritative, unitary, productive, organising, and certain approaches to knowledge in more public discourse.

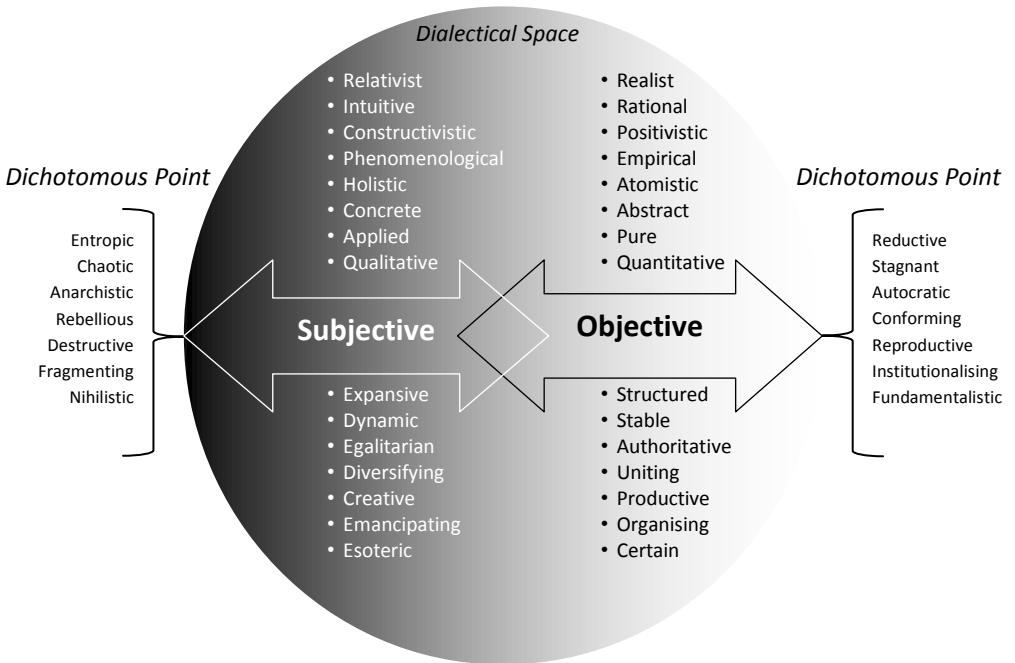


Figure 1. Binary-Epistemic Model (BEM): The BEM represents an epistemological spectrum between the poles of a binary pair (i.e., subjective/objective). These poles represent interdependent and relational ways of knowing. The shaded section represents a *dialectical space* where epistemic choices are made with knowledge of the relationality, contextuality and interdependence of poles. The extremities of each pole represent *dichotomous points* of opposition and exclusion. At these points, epistemic choices are made without knowledge of the relationality, contextuality and interdependence of poles. The *dialectical spaces* are described in terms of their more constructive complements (e.g., creative/productive), whereas the dichotomous points are described in terms of their more destructive attributes (e.g., nihilistic/fundamentalistic).

For example, Berry (2008) identifies neoliberalism with ‘knowledge structures of empiricism, rationalist scientism and productivity’ (p. 8), ‘hard-and-fast quantification’ and ‘rubrics of efficiency and standardization’ (p. 6) and argues that ‘the dominant knowledge system is indissociable from the neoliberal agenda that facilitates it’ (p. 3). Similarly, Caffentzis (2004) identifies neoliberalism with the ‘commodification, privatisation and marketisation’ of knowledge. Elzinga (1985) and Henkl (2005) identify the ‘epistemic drift’ towards neoliberalism in academia with ‘externally defined rules and evaluative criteria, utility and value for money, as well as scientific excellence (p. 167). In an economic context, Davies and McGoey (2012) acknowledge the epistemological character of a form of ‘Chicagoan neo-liberalism’ that is synonymous with ‘hierarchical forms of organization’, ‘efficiencies’, ‘calculative technologies’, ‘self-confident empirical modelling’ and ‘neo-classical rationalisation’ (pp.9-19). Similarly, though in the context of race, Hunter (2002) associates neoliberalism with positivist and objectivistic epistemologies, where ‘positivism is a theory of knowledge that presupposes one absolute truth that is knowable by anyone using the scientific method of inquiry’ (p.128). Hunter argues further that ‘this is the one epistemology that does not acknowledge the existence or influence of epistemologies at all’ (p.130). Collectively and representatively, these characterisations of neoliberalism resonate with the objectivising epistemologies represented in the Binary-Epistemic Model (Figure 1).

The pervasive influence of neoliberalism in higher education represents an epistemic drift that is bound to unsettle some academic identities. As Hunter (2002) shrewdly observes, ‘epistemologies are also not equal in status, in society at large, or in the academic community. Epistemologies are situated within political, historical, and economic contexts that can provide power and legitimacy to their knowledge claims’ (p. 120). Naïve forms of neoliberalism that present exclusive, non-complementary, and absolutising versions of these loosely affiliated epistemologies are most likely to be perceived by their antipodean counterpart (or

complement) in the terms described by the oppositional stance (i.e., *subjectivising* epistemologies) represented in the BEM (Figure 1) as *reductive, stagnant, autocratic, conforming, reproductive, institutionalizing, bureaucratising, and fundamentalistic*. Thus, naïve forms of neoliberalism are bound to antagonise rather than complement or accommodate their epistemic counterparts.

Neoliberalism in Higher Education

The logic of neoliberalism is that the emancipation and democratisation of knowledge is best achieved by the naturally selective (i.e., competitive) processes of a free market. Knowledge that is valuable to the market will be consumed and knowledge that is consumed by the market will be produced (i.e., supply and demand). Here, the market is a democratising vehicle that distributes power to the masses (i.e., consumers). The natural selection of the free market forces producers to be more efficient and productive in order to be competitive. I have argued earlier that the nature of neoliberalism resonates relatively with more objectivistic, reductionistic and positivistic ways of knowing. How do these principles function in academic contexts where the primary commodity is knowledge?

Arguably, neoliberalism begins with epistemic freedom as an ideal – it *ideally* represents a democratisation of knowledge. However, naïve neoliberalism fails to recognise that the very mechanisms it chooses to deliver this freedom (i.e., the free market) and measure this freedom (i.e., positivistic and quantitative accountings) have an epistemic identity linked to a particular epistemic heritage. Arguably, the ‘free’ market has an epistemic character and the ‘commodification of knowledge’ changes the nature of that knowledge. Davies and McGoey (2012) raise a related question that reveals an underlying tension: ‘The beauty of competition for the neo-liberal is that it offers both freedom as a principle and efficiency as a consequence but which comes first?’ (pp.71-72). For example, the marketisation and commodification of

knowledge in academia can pressure academics to take short-cuts, aim for quantity over quality, produce knowledge that re-produces funding, spend more time accounting than producing, and become marketers of knowledge rather than primary producers of knowledge in a ‘publish or perish culture’.

Neoliberal metrics (efficiency formulas) that either do not continually evolve better measures of the nuances of complex and changing realities, or naively separate themselves from the realities they describe - will fail to measure some of the realities they create. For example, in academia, naïve publication metrics can effect reality shifts by (a) inadvertently rewarding departments that stack research code classifications, (b) journals that increase rejection rates by expediently increasing undergraduate manuscript submissions, and (c) academic book publishers that operate more efficiently by reducing editorial expenditure (to name a few). None of these shifts *necessarily* constitutes a threat to academic ways of knowing as they can improve departmental expertise and focus, journal readership, and monograph availability, respectively. However, to ignore the dialectic and co-dependence between metric (a perceptual framework) and reality/realities is to risk overlooking the more destructive effects of a market mentality. Eventually, market pressures may naturally select a particular type of academic and fundamentally change the epistemic identity of academia. Archer (2008) calls these identities ‘spoilt subjectivities’ and cites Davies and Petersen’s (2005) characterisation of ‘competitive individuals who strive to produce the products desired by government and who are at risk of losing the capacity to fulfill (or even to feel) the desire to carry out significant creative or critical intellectual work’ (p. 268). While academic diversity could embrace and even find relative value in some competitive neoliberal identities, the over-valuing (or devaluing) of any identity type would seem to disrupt the ability of the academy to constructively create and reflect the ways of knowing that give voice to broader social diversity and life.

Perhaps, in the longer term, the market will self-correct the premature valuing of knowledge that is epistemically palatable, easy to access, easy to mass produce and easy to quantify. The argument should also be noted that neoliberalism may well have succeeded historically as a necessary *re*-correction to the decolonising deconstructionist hegemonies of the epistemic left that had themselves responded to the preceding colonising and structuralist hegemonies of the epistemic right. However, both as an over-correction or a naïve form, the false-efficiencies of the neoliberal knowledge economy may eventually produce a similar threat to the epistemic health of individuals, organisations and societies as the commodification and false-efficiencies of fast food in the free market have to the physical health of societies. The point here is that the domain-transference of big ideas like neoliberalism never occurs in an epistemic vacuum and some domains of the academy are more likely to be more compatible to change than others simply because of the types of knowledge they work with. These academics are rightly wary of the transference of an ideology that had its primary application in markets that deal with *relatively* quantifiable goods and services. It is to be expected that the drift of neoliberal ideology into the academy will bring some unwanted epistemic baggage from its preceding contexts. Some types of knowledge and ways of knowing may not be as easily quantified, commodified, mass produced, mass marketed and short-term desirable, prescribable, or consumable as burgers and benzodiazepines.

An imperative of neoliberalism is that the academy becomes more responsive to the consumers of knowledge (*i.e.*, students in terms of teaching; industry, company, or general public in terms of research). In higher education, this imperative facilitates a shift of power to the student that, in theory, may be realised through the innovation of student-centred pedagogies (e.g., inquiry-based learning), flexible study options (e.g., block mode delivery), and technologically relevant delivery (e.g., online learning). However, naïve neoliberalism leaves more malevolent mechanisms of competition unchecked. Firstly, it operates on a false assumption

that there is independence between producer and consumer, when selection actually favours producers who can control the appetites of their consumers. In academia this means that (1) the marketing of a consumable reality takes considerable resources from the creation of that reality, (2) in the short term the market favours consumable illusions more than creatable realities and (3) the accounting for the consumable reality also takes considerable resources from the creation of that reality. So, while potential students may encounter an increasing number of advertisements promoting the consumable ease, accessibility and flexibility of study (i.e., knowledge and knowing), academics who work with knowledge that may be difficult to produce or consume (e.g., due to technical or qualitative complexity) or take time to produce or consume (e.g., deep conceptual understanding versus superficial reproduction) may not survive long enough to see a self-correction in a market with a more sustainable long-term vision. Similarly, if the effort expended to commodify and package knowledge for consumption yields short-term gains (e.g., increased student enrolments) there is a risk that the yields be reinvested into sustaining the illusion rather than helping the reality catch-up by investing in the everyday resources (e.g., time and materials) of academics and tutors who work most directly with students.

The competitive principle of naïve neoliberalism also has implications for academic identity. The commodification of knowledge allows the quantification of knowledge which allows the audit of knowledge productivity. Given the complex nature of knowledge in academic environments the principle of competition can be as destructive as it can be productive. As Archer (2008) notes in her study of age-related academic identities, ‘the marketisation of higher education was poisoning the idealised space of academia (as collegiate, collaborative) through the rise of individualistic and competitive practices’ (p. 273). Again, this dynamic may self-correct over time as there is a gradual breakdown of the dichotomy between competition and collaboration (i.e., collaborative academics can be competitive). However, the divisive elements of neoliberal strategies (i.e.,

competition, commodification, and audit) will remain so long as naïve neoliberalism fails to address and break down the epistemic dichotomies between quantity and quality, competitive and collaborative, and positivist and relativist.

Naïve neoliberal democratisation of consumption also raises the possibility that the biggest market may represent the basest commonality. In academia this can result in lower entry standards, increased pressure to pass students, fewer prerequisite subjects, and increasingly fragmented degrees as a by-product of flexibility. While the short term result may be increased enrolments, the long term result may be credential inflation – a need for more qualifications for the same job. The academy becomes more efficient as a producer of knowledge. All things being equal, the producer who survives will have more and better products than the producer who does not. Thus, consumption drives efficiencies in the production of knowledge. If, as Davies and McGoey (2012) suggest, efficiencies may come before freedom in the naïve neoliberal model of competition, then it may be expected that academics and higher education institutions feel pressure to cut corners to cut costs. For example, this pressure can affect the quality of publications and PhD completions. While a more nuanced and sophisticated form of neoliberalism could potentially improve this quality, the epistemically naïve form of neoliberalism needs more time and consultation to come to terms with the nature and measurement of knowledge products and productivity in academic contexts. It is not the ideals of neoliberalism that fail some domains of academia, rather, it is the precocious transposition of meanings and learnings from one market to another considerably different market. Arguably, naïve neoliberalism has a tendency to value quantity over quality, short-term success over long-term success, simply because the former are more quantitatively measurable and auditable than the latter.

A final epistemic consideration concerns the neoliberal paradox between the democratisation or deregulation of knowledge and its privatisation. It could be argued that naïve neoliberalism wrests control of knowledge from staid academies, with the noble aim of

redistributing it to the masses through the market, while inadvertently handing it over to corporations more concerned with the short-term profitability of knowledge than with an intrinsic quest for knowledge. My thesis here is not that neoliberalism cannot in theory reconcile short and long term interests, quality and quantity, product and process, profitability and the intrinsic quest for knowledge; but that to be fully realised neoliberal ideals need to be deeply synthesised with the nature and reality of the *stuff* it seeks to commodify and exchange. As the *stuff* of higher education is knowledge, this means engaging deeply with the diverse epistemologies that represent the academy. The model presented in the following section offers a way to conceptualise the epistemic dimension of naïve neoliberalism in order to develop more sophisticated form of neoliberalism that may appeal to more epistemic domains of the academy.

A Conceptual Model

The Binary-Epistemic Model (BEM) (Figure 1) offers a conceptual model for representing epistemic diversity in the academy and critiquing naïve forms of neoliberalism. It aims to conceptualise the spectrum between the epistemological poles (i.e., *subjective* and *objective*) that contain the diversity of the academy. Described in structural terms, the model represents a spectrum of epistemological positions between these binary poles. Whether these poles are seen as dichotomous or opposing points, dialectical complements, or both is a matter of epistemological development and complexity. Naïve ways of knowing tend to organize information a priori solely in terms of opposition and contradiction (i.e. *dichotomous points*). Transitional ways of knowing tend to organise information in terms of compatibility, complementarity and diversity that excludes opposition and contradiction (i.e. *interdependent points*). Sophisticated ways of knowing tend to engage knowledge relationally and contextually in ways that encompass both oppositional and dialectical relationships between binaries (i.e. *dialectical spaces* between *dichotomous* and/or complementary points). Thus the model

represents both, epistemic locations (i.e. left and right) and epistemic developments (i.e., naïve to sophisticated).

The core subjective/objective distinction represents perhaps the most persistent and perennial epistemic binary. In subjective epistemologies, ‘truth (lowercase *t*) is personal and individual, all opinions are equally valid, and everyone’s opinions are right for them’ (Clinchy, 2002). In objective epistemologies, truth (capital *T*) is universal, fixed and discoverable, reality exists beyond perception and faulty perceptions should be challenged. The premise of the Binary-Epistemic Model is that *subjective* and *objective* are interdependent terms – one exists only in relation to the other. While there is no necessary contradiction between these ways of knowing, they are often framed in binary oppositional terms to contest contingent epistemic spaces. In the epistemic spaces of higher education institutions and in the epistemic spaces within and between individual academic identities, the subjective-objective dialectic facilitates movement and choice, much like *left* and *right* in physical spaces. This dialectical space should not be mistaken as an argument for balance or a middle-way in all contexts, rather it represents a commitment to contextually and relationally responsive choices informed by a spectrum of different epistemologies.

This description of the relationship between subjective and objective epistemologies represents an epistemic position with which to conceptualise and address neoliberal epistemologies. Indeed, the identification and critique of an epistemological identity and a ‘naïve form’ of that identity presupposes a particular epistemological position. The Binary-Epistemic Model is a representation of epistemologies that critiques developmental forms of knowing (i.e., naïve *to* sophisticated) without valuing one type of epistemology (e.g., positivist or relativist, subjectivist or objectivist) over another a priori. It is a ‘meta-epistemology’ that is aware of the irony of the sense in which a ‘meta-epistemology’ is *just another epistemology*. Arguably, the model could be defended on empirical grounds. For example, empirically, the

dialectical approach of BEM is supported by an increasing amount of contextualised research in epistemological development that describes longitudinal trajectories of knowing within and across domains. In a field that has expanded significantly since William Perry's seminal study of epistemological development in Harvard graduate students, the core consensus of related research describes epistemological development from *absolutist* to *multiplist* to *evaluativist* ways of knowing.

Development proceeds from (1) "absolutist" – the conception of knowledge and knowing as objective and absolute; to (2) "multiplist" regarding all knowledge as subjective and relative and, therefore, indeterminate because of multiple points of view; to (3) "evaluativist" – the acceptance and integration of subjective and objective aspects of knowledge that would permit a degree of evaluation and judgement of knowledge claims. (Tabak & Weinstock, 2008, p. 178)

This development is closely aligned to the dialectical approach to the subjective-objective distinction. For example, as Kuhn and Weinstock (2002) describe:

Initially, the objective dimension dominates to the exclusion of subjectivity. Subsequently, in a radical shift, the subjective dimension assumes an ascendant position and the objective is abandoned. Finally, the two are coordinated, with a balance achieved in which neither overpowers the other. (p. 123)

The general direction of development from objective to subjective to a relational and contextual reconciliation of *both* ways of knowing may well help frame the present and future of neoliberalism. It may be that the first naïve form of neoliberalism represents a natural tendency to over-objectivise and simplify the subjectively messier realities of the academy. If possible, the developmental task is to avoid a *radical shift* that *abandons* the objective and coordinate the two ways of knowing in a more sophisticated form of neoliberalism that is (a) responsive to the nature of knowing in the academy and (b) reflexive of the ways of knowing implicit in its heritage.

I have earlier characterised the naïve form of neoliberalism as ‘relatively’ *positivistic* - that is, it has an epistemic identity that represents the more objectivistic side of the subjective-objective binary. The ways of knowing that it represents tend to align more with *realistic, rational, atomistic, descriptive, strategic* and *quantitative* epistemologies - than with *relativist, intuitive, holistic, interpretive, pure* and *qualitative* epistemologies. The danger of the naïve form of neoliberalism, as with any naïve ideology, is that it seeks to colonise deep and expansive epistemic spaces (i.e., higher education and academic identities), with little dialectical humility. It represents acontextual domination rather contextualised dialectic. Unless neoliberalism develops into a more sophisticated form that is reflexive of its own epistemic character and history, it will provoke epistemic conflict with its irreducible epistemic counterparts and the individuals and disciplines that represent them. In the terms of the Binary-Epistemic Model, the more naively neoliberalism is imposed top-down in the academy, the more it will be characterised in popular discourse as *reductive, autocratic, conforming, subjugating, reproductive, institutionalising* and even *fundamentalistic* (Figure 1).

Epistemic Re-solutions

Nor should the pressures of massification and creeping managerialism be interpreted purely negatively.

(Becher & Trowler, 2001, p.18)

The critique of neoliberalism has so far focused on the weaknesses of its naïve form. However, the thesis ‘that epistemological diversity implies a place for neoliberalism and its associated epistemologies’ requires some description of what that space might look like in theory and how naïve forms of neoliberalism may be engaged in practice within higher education institutions. My argument is that the epistemic ideals of neo-liberalism are only a threat to academia in their most naïve and exclusive forms.

If they can be understood and realised in a more sophisticated form that fully accommodates its epistemic counterparts or at least acknowledges its necessary tensions, then it can help correct rather than *overcorrect*, the necessary epistemic equilibrium and diversity of the academy.

One way to develop the naïve form of neoliberalism is to decouple its terminology from its familiar market of relatively concrete goods and services and re-couple it with the new ‘goods and services’ of a knowledge economy. This would represent a re-coupling with epistemologies that may be under-represented and poorly understood in the familiar market that lends meaning to neoliberal terminology. There may be nothing wrong with the ideals of neoliberalism a priori, rather it may be that these ideals are just poorly *realised* in a failure to engage the complex realities of the knowledges it seeks to commodify and produce. Given that neoliberal ideals are mostly born out of particular disciplines (e.g., economics and business) and implemented by particular professions (e.g., managers and administrators), it may be that those with the best knowledge of the actual ‘products’ to be valued, produced and marketed have not yet been adequately consulted. Therefore, rather than reject (perhaps futilely) the discourse of neoliberalism a priori academics who feel epistemically marginalised could:

- *Re-engage productivity measures* by (1) contributing to better definitions and differentiation of knowledge ‘products’ and (2) requesting better means of production to suit these products. Academics may also want to argue for *process* as a valuable product.
- *Re-engage scientific calls for evidence and validation* by further differentiating the forms of evidence and validation that are applicable to the types of knowledge they work with.
- *Re-engage accountability measures* ‘that account’ for how well particular accountability measures actually facilitate and define the production of worthwhile knowledge.

- *Re-engage alignment measures* that homogenise knowledge for marketing efficiency by ‘aligning’ a space for the diversity and disalignment that helps to produce worthwhile knowledge.
- *Re-engage marketability* by contributing to more complex definitions of the *market* that may resist short-termism and the need to measure a valuable market purely by the quantity or economic wealth of its consumers.
- *Re-engage contract flexibility* by arguing for the flexibility to have some stability.
- *Re-engage quantification* by insisting on and contributing to the quality of quantification and the quantification of uncertainty.
- *Re-engage impact measures* by contributing to the differentiation and definition of impact to better account for complexity and entanglement in the measurement of impact.
- *Re-engage strategic and applied research* by arguing for the strategic applicability of pure research.

Collectively, such re-engagements of neoliberal priorities from the individuals and fields most alienated by its epistemic identity could help to develop its naïve forms into more sophisticated and nuanced forms that are more responsive to epistemic diversity within the academy.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to conceptualise the epistemic dimension of the encounter between neoliberalism and the academy in relation to the global epistemic drift towards neoliberalism. The paper identified *the goal* of neoliberalism as the democratisation and emancipation of knowledge and *the mechanisms* of neoliberalism in terms of knowledge commodification, marketisation, productivity agendas,

accountability regimes, bureaucratisation, economic rationalism and micro-managerialism. It then identified an epistemically naïve form of neoliberalism that is characterised by objectivistic and positivistic ways of knowing. The case was made that a naïve form of neoliberalisms fails to represent the complexity and diversity of epistemic identities that necessarily constitute higher education. The case was based on the naivety of a one-for-one transposition of one market context to another.

The paper presented a conceptual model (i.e., *Binary Epistemic Model* [BEM]) to acknowledge and affirm existing critical commentary on the current neoliberal drift in academia. The model also acknowledged that the diverse epistemologies that characterise individual and institutional identities in higher education are likely to produce a range of responses to the global epistemic drift represented by neoliberalism. Thus, the model accommodates the critiques and counter-critiques of neoliberalism on the premise that they represent an irreducibly necessary tension between different epistemologies in higher education. The model identified the potential for conflict and/or complementarity between interdependent approaches to knowledge and knowing that define academic identities. Finally, the model was used as a way of *re*-conceptualising neoliberalism in the academy that could encourage a more expansive, accommodating and epistemically sophisticated transformation of its naïve forms. Hopefully, this model enables a less dualistic and more evaluativistic, reflexive and contextual analysis of academic identity in response to the modern neoliberal drift in higher education.

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