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Nice work if you can get it? The changing character of academic labour in Sweden and England

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Abstract. This paper considers recent attempts to introduce managerial reform in higher education. In exploring the issues the paper draws on an interviewing programme conducted with female and male academics in Sweden and England responsible for delivering change: heads of department, heads of division and principal lecturers. The aim is to examine the implications for the day-to-day work of academics arising from the reforms and to consider the gender implications. The paper conceptualises the areas of academic responsibility along the following dimensions identified by the academics themselves: dog work, tough work, care work, real work and nice work. In bringing into sharper focus the harsher realities of academe, and exploring the overlap and connectivity between gender and academic labour, it is argued that intellectual labour is hard work indeed, particularly for women.
Key words: Higher education, academic work, England, Sweden.

Introduction: Issues and context

Robyn said:
'Maybe the universities are inefficient, in some ways. Maybe we do waste a lot of time argu-

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ing on committees because nobody has absolute power. But that's preferable to a system where everybody is afraid of the person on the next rung of the ladder above them, where everybody is out for themselves, and fiddling their expenses or vandalizing the lavatories, because they know that if it suited the company they could be made redundant tomorrow and nobody would give a damn. Give me the university, with all its faults, any day.'

Well,' said Vic, It's nice work if you can get it.'

(Lodge, 1989:346)

I very much like to work in the university but it has been very hard, since I am from a working-class background, a single mother, with three children. What is so difficult is that you have to build up your self-esteem only by yourself. You get no support, no good words, no good advice… (Swedish female associate professor)

(Morley, 1999:168)

The job of a university lecturer is not what it was 15 years ago… or 30 years ago and we have just got to accept it – it was lovely then, I can't remember it… But it must have been lovely then, it ain't lovely now, it's bloody hard work. (English male head of department)

(Barry, Chandler & Clark, 2001:179)

In David Lodge's novel *Nice Work* two characters are (re)presented for the purposes of narrative. On the one hand a female academic Robyn who, in the quote above, acknowledges the inefficiencies of higher education but who nonetheless values the collegiality and dispersal of organisational power associated with the university. On the other a male industrialist, Vic, who becomes aware as the story draws to its conclusion of the benefits of academic life whilst remaining aware that its pursuit is something of a luxury – poignantly underscored in the novel when he is made redundant. Academic work really is nice work, if you can get it.

This narrative representation captures, to some degree, the reality of daily working life (Knights & Willmott, 1999). The above quote from the Swedish associate professor drawn from our research, for example, refers to the pleasurable aspects of working in higher education. But she also talks of a down side, emphasising the difficulties encountered in the enactment of nice work which derive from her status as a female academic working in what she perceives to be an elitist, competitive organisation centred around an abstract or universal worker who is expected to prioritise organisational demands over all others (Acker, 1990; 1998). For her the consequence is hard work and she is required, as a single mother from a working class background, to adopt special strategies in order to survive. The English male academic cited above would also appear to confirm the stereotypical view of academic life as nice or, for him, lovely work. And, like the female academic, he too emphasises a down side. Though, significantly, he identifies recent change, rather than gendered status, as responsible for transforming academic work into hard labour.

Here then are the themes developed in the paper: the changing character of academic work and its gendered nature. It is these which we will explore through a consideration of the following issues: collegiality, value-orientated rationality, efficiency, managerial control and resistance.

Published research has identified a process of managerial change occurring in the public sector in Sweden and England in recent years, following the introduction of techniques thought to be drawn principally from the private sector (Otter, 1995; Hedlund, 1997; Berg 2000; Hood, 1991; Pollitt, 1993; and Hood et al., 1999). Labelled the New Public Management, or NPM, this phenomenon has been documented as appearing in variable form word-wide (Hood, 1995; Hood et al., 1999; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 1997). And it has been associated, in the work of some authors, with masculine and aggressive forms of behaviour (Clarke & Newman, 1993; White, 1995; and Lowndes, 1997).

In all this it appears that the NPM has been used, as an instrument of policy, to speed up the tempo of work – not least at universities in Sweden and England (Fogelberg et al., 1999; Askling, 1999; Prichard & Willmott, 1997; and Barry, Chandler & Clark, 2001). Here the throughput of work has been increased at little extra cost with more school leavers now in higher education than ever before and enforced competition between universities for students and research funds driving down costs. There is also a sense of quantity dominating academic life, with academics required to process larger numbers of students than in the past, publish more peer-reviewed articles and secure higher levels of external funding from both public and private sources.

The implications for the human service workers in the field would appear to be considerable as the pressures to change threaten to intensify their labour and encroach on their professional autonomy (Dent, 1993). It is these issues with which the paper is concerned focusing on the academy, a workplace recently identified as the arena for an attempted reconfiguration of professional autonomy as intellectual workers come under pressure to accommodate to a macho work culture and enhanced managerial control (Barry, Chandler & Clark, 2001; Dent & Barry, 2004).

The choice of higher education in Sweden and England was no accident, with both countries having experienced a relatively strong variant of the NPM (Hood, 1995; Pollit & Bouckaert, 1997). It has been argued, for example, that in Britain, one of the forerunners of the NPM, no less than a 'managerial state' is in the making (Clarke & Newman, 1997). Whilst in Sweden the reforms, which began to make their mark according to the literature from at least the early 1990's, have been equally as insistent (Otter, 1999). There is also in both Sweden and England about the role of gender, given recent advances in the representation of women in academe (Berg, 2001; Whitehead & Moodley, 1999).

There are now more women in universities compared to the beginning of the 1990's. Female senior lecturers in Sweden rose from 17 percent in 1989 to 25 percent some ten years later, with female professors increasing from 6 percent to 12 percent between 1989 and 1999. In England and Wales female senior lectures stood at 15 percent in 1991 rising to 16 percent in three years, whilst female professors increased from 5 percent to 7 percent between 1991 and 1994 (Clark, Chandler & Barry, 1999; Brooks, 1997). Even so women in academia are still a minority and are found pre-

dominantly in lower positions, with the segregation of academic women into the lower grades a pattern common to both countries.

In exploring the issues the paper draws on an in-depth interviewing programme conducted at two universities, one in Sweden and one in England, institutions which were broadly comparable, having achieved university status relatively recently. The interviews were conducted with female and male academics responsible for managerial change: heads of department, heads of division and principal lecturers. The aim was to explore the recent changes in academe, examine the implications for intellectual work and consider whether nice work really has become hard work for those at the sharp end.

In doing this we adopt a social constructionist approach (Berger & Luckman, 1966) to help us examine the experiences of those involved with the changes. This enables us to argue that academics, as social individuals, are involved in the ongoing re-negotiation of their working lives and organisational identities as they re-position themselves in relation to others (Alcoff, 1988; Berg, 2001) – and that in doing this they draw on experiences gained both inside and outside the academy. We accordingly explore their changing organisational lives around five dimensions of everyday intellectual work identified by the interviewees themselves: administration, organisation, pastoral care, teaching and research. For the purposes of the paper we recast these areas of responsibility as: dog work, tough work, care work, real work and nice work respectively, in order to conceptualise the changing character of intellectual labour and the gendered implications.

We use the concept of collegiality to help us analyse the relations between these putative middle managers, their colleagues and their universities, mindful that collegiality is a term used all too frequently in a less than rigorous way in everyday conversation between academics. For the purposes of this paper we use the term as an antonym, in opposition to relations which might be described as hierarchical where orders or instructions are transmitted between organisational members in different positions of authority. This is not meant to imply simplistic models or stereotypes of hierarchy and collegiality. We do not mean to suggest that, by talking of hierarchical relationships, we see orders being issued and accepted uncritically. Nor, by making reference to professional relationships, do we mean to invoke an image of a shared community of scholars at play and at one. We wish instead to make clear that the professional relation between academics renders the imposition of managerial regimes, at the very least, problematic. This is because collegiality is imbued with value-orientated rationality which works, more or less, towards the elevation of cultural and social values rather than economic or technical goals (Weber, 1947). Seen in this way goals assume a considerable importance. From this vantage point the pursuit of goals involving efficiency and managerial control are clearly at odds with goals which emphasise care for students and the development of a critical and intellectual culture. There may be little which is new in all this. Weber, back in 1918, contrasted American and German universities with perhaps unintended ethnocentric and gendered overtones to make the point thus:

> The American boy learns unspeakably less than the German boy… The American's conception of the teacher who faces him is: he sells me his knowledge and his methods for my father's money, just as the greengrocer sells my mother cabbage. And

> that is all… [and] the question is whether there is not a grain of salt contained in this… which I have deliberately stated in extreme with some exaggeration.
>
> (Weber, 1918: 149-150)

Later, in his discussion of 'intellectual administrators and research promoters' and 'academic cliques', C Wright Mills (1959:117-126) cast doubt on the pervasiveness of collegiality in American university life. The former 'can get you the job, the trip, the research grant'. Whilst the latter, the 'academic statesmen', control 'the allocation of research funds' and wield the power to make and break reputations by assigning publications to reviewers known to be either friendly or hostile to the author.

It would also appear that gender inequality goes back historically not least to the 'invisible colleges' of the seventeenth century (O'Leary & Mitchell, 1990). Indeed it seems likely that the academy has never been the meritocratic place of popular imagery where women, it was once assumed, might succeed unhindered (Acker, 1994). Now there is acknowledgement of Virginia Woolf's (1938) concern about the elite (male) character of the university as institution (Evans, 1997), acknowledged by many of the female interviewees in our research.

In exploring the gendered issues we consider the ways in which those involved weave together experiences drawn from both inside and outside the academy and how, through the renegotiation of meaning (Melucci, 1995, 1997) and everyday practice, they both draw on and seek to move beyond simplistic representations of managerial and gender identity as they position themselves in relation to others. In order to examine the changing character of academic work, the play of organisational relations and the gendered implications, we turn to a consideration of the empirical work. In what follows we conceptualise the areas of academic responsibility along the following dimensions identified by the academics themselves: dog work, tough work, care work, real work and nice work.

Aspects of intellectual labour

Dog work

Undervalued in relation to other areas of intellectual labour, administrative or dog work (as it is often referred to in Sweden) has always been the province of academics, especially during their early years in the job when they take their turn as others before them; with the majority of post-holders at the lower levels being women. Elevation to senior status bestows the somewhat dubious benefits of additional administrative responsibility. Organising courses and attending meetings have invariably characterised the impersonal, bureaucratic, side of academia.

Whilst some of the academics in our research took their turn stoically, others found ways of playing the 'game' to their advantage. Resistance was clearly in evidence as academics sought to avoid the time-consuming nature of dog work, playing one meeting off against another and re-

negotiating their daily routines with one another where responsibilities were shared. But there were limits to their ingenuity in the face of the recent growth in routinised tasks with increasing bureaucratisation and seemingly endless paper trails attending peer review of quality audits as trust in professional discretion recedes (Power, 1997). Indeed bureaucratic control seems to have come almost to dominate working life for some academics in the university studied in England, with one principal lecturer commenting that:

> We have files and if a piece of paper falls out, it is something wrong. It does not matter what it is on the paper, it must be clipped in.

Administration also involves discussion with colleagues about financial restraint and whether cuts should be made in budgets for courses, seminars or conferences. One Swedish female principal lecturer described the implementation of budget cuts 'in economic and administrative terms', something she considered a problem since principal lecturers, now seen as responsible for balancing budgets, did not like dealing with financial matters. Sometimes, she explained, it needed just three students failing to complete their studies for the budget to over-run or crash. The budget was built on the number of courses and students studying at the university with the system built on the principle that individual lecturers were responsible for student progress to ensure continuity of income. Her head of department had also argued that lecturers should generate their own external funding to help meet the cost of travel for conferences and external lectures and that this was now seen as part of the job. She disagreed with all this but had the feeling that her senior colleagues did not listen to her:

> It is hard to control the economy because they delegate it from the top to lower positions… and there are people who take responsibility and see it is an important task. I have not found a way to see this in a positive way.

Most managers are now involved in the annual budgetary process, an element of the New Public Management, which ratchets up levels of work with consequences for lecturers and researchers who are subsequently pressurised to deal with increased assessment marking and to generate funds through research projects. This is exacerbated by the imposition of requirements to report frequently on research projects to the funding body or foundation and the university. It is felt that the process has become more time-consuming than in the recent past with more financial and technical information, about methods and measurements, now demanded. One Swedish female head of division described the process in the following way:

> There is no time to do changes to next semester, no time for reflection. The only thing you do is to satisfy the bureaucracy, their routines, nothing else. It is the same when you evaluate what you have done every year, the goal is to produce the document and the money steers this process. You never discuss research or discuss the research in a larger context.

The administrative work had, they felt, assumed importance over other aspects of academic work and was something they could not avoid in the long term. They had to keep up with the

administrative goals imposed on them lest they experienced problems with colleagues and administrative staff. Two female heads of department in England described their working hours as far greater than the notional 35 hours per week for which they were paid. No one, they remarked, worked 35 hours. Both of them were worried because they were losing valued staff as a result. One of them commented:

> A couple of years ago all the money we supposedly earned for research was taken away from us by central management.

Yet while the model is more consumer, as well as production, oriented the New Public Management is focused on delivering more complex goals which are articulated through the political democratic process, especially in Sweden. What becomes central for managers in this scenario is of course the economy or finance. But it is a goal that works against the grain of social and intellectual development in universities. One way to achieve efficiency is to delegate responsibility for budgets to middle managers such as heads of department who are forced to drive or 'whip' their colleagues. But the collegiate, value-oriented nature of the academic relationship begs the question as to whether this is accepted uncritically or resisted on some level (even by the heads themselves). This is a relationship after all between social individuals all of whom have minds – and values – of their own.

Tough work

Managing the work of professional colleagues has traditionally been the province of academics and arranging timetables and 'persuading' colleagues to undertake committee work has always been difficult and burdensome for those responsible. This tough work has recently been on the increase as heads of department, now seen by their seniors as middle managers in a hierarchical relationship, are exhorted to manage the work of their junior colleagues (Jarrett Report, 1985). Where enacted in hard or brutal ways the gendered element of tough work comes in to sharp relief (White, 1995).

Certainly from our research study it seemed as if the position of head of department in England was no longer seen, particularly though not exclusively by women, as the attractive and challenging career option it once was – as Jarratt's recommendations, for heads of department to delegate academic leadership as necessary and concentrate on management, began to tell. One English head of department described how he took the job under false pretences:

> I did not realize the political situation and was asked to do this job which was – the poisoned chalice – the bad job to do. And... I was naive to accept it. I should have seen what was happening.

This response can be interpreted as a reaction to the harsher elements of managerialism in academia. In enacting the duties of office this head of department found that his job required him to introduce economic cuts and reduce staff, not something he had expected would be required of him and something he felt very awkward and uncomfortable doing. Some heads of department

found ways around this by attempting to play down or moderate some of the harsher managerial elements of the work over which they felt they had at least some small measure of control, emphasising collegiality (their academic identity) over hierarchy (their managerial identity) and treating junior staff as valued colleagues. In our research we found evidence of heads refusing to undertake an annual appraisal of the work of their junior colleagues, arguing that they did not have the time or did not believe in it. Some regarded the demands of their senior colleagues, to cut resources and the cost of part-time staff, as unreasonable and attempted to find ways of securing funding or making cuts in areas which did not affect the livelihoods and working conditions of their junior colleagues. A finding paralleled in the research undertaken by Goode and Bagilhole (1998:156-157) where they found support for a transformative stance among heads (all of whom were women). But as 'piggy-in-the-middle', balancing the conflicting demands of senior and junior colleagues, the strains on them were considerable. So obvious were the dilemmas for heads of department that many junior staff were busy re-thinking carefully laid career plans. Younger academics were looking to research as the route to promotion through reader or docent and ultimately professor, rather than head; and some were considering careers in the private sector. Whilst many older staff had decided not to apply for promotion and play for time until they sought early retirement.

The increasing use of electronic communication in academe had speeded up and added to the pressures. The academic just quoted tried to keep his work and home life separate, as far as he could. This meant turning off his official mobile telephone at appropriate times:

> I turn it off when I go to bed, I turn it off during weekends, I turn it off when I'm playing golf.

One male principal lecturer from England refused to have a mobile telephone as he felt they were intrusive:

> I do not want them to contact me at any place and anywhere so I refuse to have one. For the same reason, we have a computer at home but I am resistant to having Internet at home so the head of department cannot actually get hold of me at home and send me extra work to do over weekend. I try to avoid technology in my personal life.

Another male principal lecturer, from Sweden, used the same strategy, refusing to take work home. He also tried to keep his personal life separate from his working life. A third male head of department, from England, acted in a similar way, using this as a strategy of stress avoidance:

> Partly by not making the university my entire life. I try to only work here; I do not take my work home. If I work twelve-hour days here, fine, but I try to separate the two halves of my life. So when I am at home I have my own social life and interests outside of my academic discipline.

These instances of resistance to being managed from a distance are gendered, with men more likely than women to seek refuge at home, away from the pressures of university life. Women, who are more likely to face the double-bind of work and domestic responsibility, made little use of this strategy.

Care work

Care work has been thought traditionally to be a significant factor in supporting students at university and reducing the wastage rates associated with systems of mass higher education (Halsey, 1995). The pressures to massify into a New Higher Education system, or NHE, (Parker & Jary, 1995), appear to have had a deleterious effect on staff facing conflicting pressures to care for their 'customers', teach, administer and publish research, and on students – particularly those from previously under-represented (and disadvantaged) sectors of the population. Those most affected would appear to be women, both as tutors and students (Cotterill & Waterhouse, 1998). These are the staff forced to deal with the harder realities of daily life on campus for the newly (dis)possessed student 'customers' who are struggling to make ends meet on reduced grants and burgeoning loans and themselves seen and heard from within the bewildering sea of faces confronting their erstwhile mentors. Interestingly this issue was raised more frequently by female lecturers in England, where the managerial reforms have had longer to make their mark, than male. One English female senior lecturer described the experience of her students in the following way:

> Many of our students seem to have intense problems. When you look at the notice board every year not many students seem to follow through years one, two and three and get their degree. The workload isn't the same because we still have three years, and there are two members of staff. If we had six staff, we could have a first year tutor, a second year tutor, and a third. We have to be tutors for all three years, and order books. The administrative work is quite a lot and there are more courses to teach because we have to offer a certain number of course modules to ensure the degree is validated.

Another English female lecturer explained:

> Very little counselling takes place, but now they are quite demanding, the students have higher expectations. Carried over from… changes in political ideology and now a sense of consumers, people have rights. Where I think traditionally students took much more of a subordinate role in relation to academic authority – except over politics, you know, it was the Vietnam war, that was totally different – but in terms of academic matters you really had to get on with it yourself. Whereas the modern student on the whole requires much more support.

It transpired that our interviewees were seeing a greater increase of ill-prepared students on campus than at any time in the past. They considered that students were not as ready for the rigours of higher education as they once were, that now they had to help their students to develop study skills, and that they had less teaching hours in which to do this. They also saw many of their students taking paid work to help with their finances and considered that some of their students felt that they were being forced to study because they needed a degree qualification to secure even low-level administrative work, with the result that some resented being at university. One English female academic, a course co-ordinator, put it this way:

> In the 1970s the norm was 8 students to one lecturer in a group, today it's 22 students. If you look at the unit costs, we spend only half on each student compared to 1979. Tremendous. Partly it is that staff is working harder, but partly as well I think I'm not sure the students get the quality. We pretend that larger seminar groups are as good as the smaller ones but there is not any evidence. I think the students have to work harder, longer, and they also have to work [paid employment] at the same time so there is more, quite a lot of, pressure on them.

Similar processes are at work in Sweden, with student numbers increasing by 83 percent between 1989 and 1998 and the number of lecturers increasing by just 17 percent during this time. The result is an increase in student numbers from 10 per lecturer to 15.

It was female rather than male lecturers at both universities who raised issues of care work in the interviewing sessions and they all recounted cases where students had experienced considerable difficulties. At one of the departments a female principal lecturer mentioned that about fifty percent of the students were mature students. In her experience they were more likely than other students to have family problems, financial problems, problems of single parenthood, care responsibilities for elderly parents or travelling difficulties because they found it more difficult to move home when they became students. It was also thought that students from minority ethnic backgrounds might also experience problems which required cultural adjustments. Where they were the first generation in their family to go to university it was thought that they would be less likely to have the backing from parents that a white middle-class student would have. There were a whole range of problems that students might face at a university when they came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds.

Students were able to obtain extra resources if they were disabled. They could ask for extra funds from their local authority to buy things like word processors. But as one female principal lecturer in England explained there were pressures on universities to find additional resources too:

> We are expected to cover it within our budget. We have a central learning services unit who give extra support for students with dyslexia, for students for whom English is not their first language. So there is central provision for that, but it is fairly limited. They can't give them huge amounts of support so you still find that the tutors… I mean in the first year each student is in a group of about six students with one tutor, and they meet every week. That tutor marks their course work so there is a kind of intensive support system. None of us are really trained in supporting literacy problems but we try and help them through. We refer them to central services if we feel that they need extra help that we can give. But we don't have any extra resources for that.

For these lecturers it is the short-term goals which are emphasised. But they are also pushed to achieve long-term goals, to undertake research, as well as extensive reading just to keep up with developments in their academic disciplines. In addition they are asked frequently by senior managers to provide information as a matter of urgency. And during term-time they are under constant pressure from students to supply information, to act as academic consultant, to deal with recurring

administrative queries relating to their courses and to provide a willing and sympathetic ear for their troubles.

Real work

Real work has historically characterised the role of academic labour, as lecturers seek to develop the spirit of intellectual enquiry and joy of learning in their students. Whilst seen as demanding, the task of teaching was highly valued by the lecturers in our research. Acknowledgements from authors who are grateful to eager students who have helped to shape the development of a book, by participating in the intellectual endeavour, have been almost commonplace in academe. Yet changes in recent years, which have witnessed an attempt to intensify the work of academics as increasing numbers of students enter the hallowed halls of academe bringing ever-growing burdens of teaching and assessment in their wake (Prichard & Willmott, 1997), threatens to alter this relationship as academics lose sight of individual students who sink from view in a growing sea of faces.

As academic production is speeded up so intellectual workers resist through trade union action, collegial support for one another and control of working patterns, taking work home where they can at least manage their time to some degree, and maintaining responsibility for content of lectures, seminars and tutorials. Even so the amount of teaching has been seen to intensify, making the job, already difficult if rewarding, harder. One principal lecturer from Sweden, echoing the comments above, argued that academics could not take time off when they felt sick:

> We are in the front line because we are delivering service to the students and we know what our responsibilities are. If we do not come to work, the students do not get taught and their education suffers.

In many respects this can be seen as the front line of academe as middle managers allocate the growing burden of real work among their flagging work-force, hampered as some see it by the limitations of their not always willing 'subordinates' to play their part. Here the greatest pressure is invariably brought to bear on the most junior lecturing and short-term contract research staff, who are predominantly women (Davies & Holloway, 1995:12-15). It is this group of staff who are also facing the growing number of students in the classrooms and who are the first to be turned to in cases of difficulty, adding to their caring responsibilities. They are in addition the ones who have to mark or grade the burgeoning number of assignments and examination scripts. They are the ones relied on by local and centrally organised administrators in their universities to make endless returns on student attendance and grading to enable the construction of statistical data. And they are often women.

As we have seen the work situation of academics requires them to deal with both short-term and long-term goals. This is exacerbated by the short-term, and often pressing, needs of students who seek urgent solutions and the immediate attention of their lecturers, believing that they are there just for them. Pressure to treat them as customers who, in the vernacular, 'are always right'

only serves to make the situation more difficult for individual members of academic staff. Student demands, as with administration, are as we have seen invariably short-term whilst the demands of research are long-term – goals it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain simultaneously. Inevitably, perhaps, it is the needs of students and administration as well as the immediate demands of teaching that are prioritised, with long-term goals, including the aspiration for research, put to one side. As one Swedish male lecturer explained:

> Education and research are dependent on each other but it is not realistic to even think that you can do both in an equal way. Of course it is necessary to do both, teaching and research, we – who lecture – must have the opportunity to do research. Some of the money from undergraduate studies should go to research for the lecturers.

An English professor described her teaching as important, something she considered rewarding, providing students enjoyed what she did:

> This semester I shall be teaching eight or nine hours to undergraduates, plus I supervise about five PhD students. So at the moment it's quite a heavy load. I used to teach one undergraduate unit a semester, then I did a little bit less but put quite a lot of work into an MA course. Now I have to come in and do some new teaching, partly because our staffing has reduced. There are new units for which I have to find people to teach. I like teaching though, although it is quite difficult when you also have quite a lot of management responsibility.

The tendency, in the face of such conflicting demands, has been to specialise, to focus on perhaps two aspects of the job at the expense of others. We found a number of academics commenting on this. Some indicated that they had taken a decision to avoid administration as it had begun to interfere with their teaching and research; though some found it difficult to shed the responsibility as others were unwilling to take it on. Others that they had abandoned research because teaching and administration had come to dominate their work. Whilst some mentioned different combinations and priorities suggesting a process of differentiation in academic labour. Frequently, though, it was research that was sacrificed. And this was a sacrifice that was not undertaken willingly, with those involved regretting the loss of scholarship and professional autonomy that this entailed. Research was seen as nice work. Nice work if you can get it.

Nice work

Nice work has traditionally offered sanctuary, an escape route to the pleasures of reflection where a fund of knowledge is drawn upon to enrich the intellectual experience and professional autonomy is considered untainted by the excesses of managerialism. And it is here that men outnumber women in senior research positions where the greatest autonomy resides. Working with fellow intellectuals through the conference circuits and electronic networks of the global campus, there is nonetheless something of an illusion of independence as academics come under pressure to generate income through research grants and strive to publish ever more papers for a dwindling

audience who have less and less time to read the work of others. Even so some academics, notably their immediate colleagues with whom they come into contact on a regular basis, rely on them to secure a 'good score' in the academic market place. Here their pursuit of professional success as an established intellectual in the brave new world of academia, where notable publications and successful grant applications govern resource allocation and future institutional and career prospects, makes even the role of research harder than it was before. It remains, despite this, nice work if you can get it, perhaps the final refuge of beleaguered, predominantly male, academics keen to maintain professional autonomy. But it is increasingly difficult to get. A Swedish assistant professor bemoaned the loss of time for research, commenting:

> I'm trying to do research because I want to do it, there's not very much money available to do research... unless I can find money somewhere. I have to find time to write the application and now and then I'm lucky and get the money.

This academic found the pressures on her growing over time. In over twenty years at the university her workload had increased considerably as more and more students entered higher education. The demands of course administration and marking of assignments had gone up dramatically. But, perhaps, she reflected:

> The biggest change I think is that we have very little time to do what I would call creative thinking, time where you can go over to a colleague's room, start discussing things and get an idea, let it continue, because you always have... deadlines to meet... you have to finish that course, you have to finish that project. There is now very little time for free thinking which I think is the biggest change and I think it has been gradual.

It is not just those staff who have worked in academia for many years who complain about the lack of time for reflection, it is also lecturers on the brink of their careers who express amazement at the demands on their time to prepare lectures and cope with administrative tasks which detract from research. Notably some academics in our interviews who were at the beginning of their careers were at a loss to understand how they would find time to complete their unfinished doctoral thesis given the pressures of work they faced.

Whilst the narrative view of academic life, presented in David Lodge's earlier novel *Small World* (1984), is of jet-setting academics taking full advantage of the global campus and satisfying their wanderlust at the expense of public resources, research funding has always been a contentious issue. Universities in Sweden and England, as in many other places, have been and remain largely dependent on external foundations for research funding, through which government money is channelled, as well as private business through consultancy activities. There is currently a debate in Sweden about the lack of resources for research with researchers competing with each other for limited funds (SULF, 2002); and whilst more money has been made available during the 1990's for research more universities have had to share the resources. External funding has gradually made universities aware of the importance of the need to manage their resources strategically and to penetrate new markets of higher education (Askling, 1999). There is also much discussion –

especially in England – about distinctions between traditional and new universities with some of the lecturers who have worked at the so-called 'old' universities expressing the view that staff in the older universities teach less and have a lighter workload. In 'new' universities it is considered difficult to undertake research at all, unless lecturers can be 'bought out' of their teaching responsibilities. This is because contractual duties can include fifteen hours of class contact – or more according to some of our interviewees – each week. A female professor from England talked about university procedures for monitoring research:

> We have a research committee that monitors progress, so people do have to produce outputs to remain in the category 'research active'. Since the last research assessment exercise (RAE), we have increased the proportion of research-active staff so that there are only one or two who are not. But again, one of the problems is the administrative load preventing people from producing as much research work as they would like to. These staff often end up being in rather the same situation as a head of department, most of them are principal lecturers.

It is still possible to work primarily as a researcher or an administrator and different career paths were available at the universities we studied. In Sweden it is those professors who secure research money from their university who have the opportunity to become heads of division whose responsibilities include administration and sometimes teaching. Professors who hold a personal chair are not normally allocated research money and have to find ways of 'buying' themselves out. One male professor in Sweden, for example, unable to secure university or external funding, effectively 'bought' his research time by undertaking teaching – which his department 'counted' as income. His was a constrained choice, although his experience was not typical. Different universities in Sweden have different rules about this with some providing research money to professors holding a personal chair and others not. Whilst other researchers who are not professors can, if they apply direct to foundations or engage in consultancy activities, secure research money; though, as we have seen, it is a scarce resource.

The result is that many researchers, frustrated in their endeavour to maintain their research activities at work, seek to continue the practice of their craft at home. But this is something of a double-edged sword, at least for female academics, since it is here, the domestic sphere, where they invariably suffer a pre-existing disadvantage through their responsibility for family and home. This is an issue already highlighted by English academics who have studied the situation of women in higher education, with Davies and Holloway (1995:14) noting the 'particularly detrimental effect on those women academics who are mothers'. The gendered implications are clear with women disadvantaged in contrast to men who are less likely to assume responsibility for home and family.

In England our interviewees talked of research professors and readers. In some departments in England it transpired that research groups had been successful in generating a great deal of income. They had been able to buy staff out of much of their teaching and organise extended periods of absence for the purposes of research. There were also staff who aspired to a managerial

career, seeking perhaps to become a dean and then pro-vice chancellor. But whilst this was possible at the new university we studied, where staff were appointed to positions of career responsibility, this was less the case in old universities where managerial positions rotated.

One English principal lecturer saw this as indicative of a significant difference between the new and old universities. She explained:

> In the old universities they use a lot of their academic staff to do short-term management roles – for perhaps three years they might, for example, be pro-vice chancellor for student affairs. Then they might be given a sabbatical year to return to research. I much prefer that system, I must say. I quite like management, I quite like administration and I think I'm reasonably good at it but it also gets me down and I feel frustrated at not being able to research and teach as much as I'd like. It's hard to juggle to the thing.

Whether seen as a career move, or an onerous job bestowed through a process of 'buggins turn', it remains the case that men predominate in senior positions. There are fewer women as professors, or indeed senior managers.

Concluding thoughts: Hard work or hard labour?

This paper has considered the changing character of academic work in recent years, following the emergence of the new public management, and examined the gendered implications. In particular we have focused on themes of collegiality, value-orientated rationality, efficiency, managerial control and resistance, through areas of work characterised as dog work, tough work, care work, real work and nice work. What can we conclude?

To begin with that that the composition of the academic elite has changed in recent years with more women at work in the academy, albeit in predominantly lower organisational positions. Also that whilst many academics responsible for delivering change have resisted the imposition of harsh forms of managerialism and a managerial identity, preferring instead to emphasise collegiality over hierarchy and avoid the position of head of department, the work of academics has intensified in recent years. In the face of a declining unit of resource lecturers are required to process more and more students who bring with them increased levels of work, manifested through demands for pastoral care, study skills, teaching, marking and administration. Academic work is being transformed into hard labour as both female and male lecturers find themselves speeding through their daily work in an effort to keep pace as they respond to a growing series of demands from others – students, colleagues, managers who monitor their output, and peers in the wider academic community who evaluate their teaching and research output. The only nice work remaining in academe now appears to be research and even this is becoming harder to get and harder to do.

Our research has also revealed that there are no rigid demarcation lines between the areas of work identified above. They are rather characterised by overlap and connectivity, with women on the receiving end of the harsher realities of university life in many areas of contemporary work.

Female academics are to be found predominantly in junior and insecure organisational positions, taking the strain of increased levels of administration, pastoral care, teaching and marking/grading. And women rather than men are the ones suffering most from the intensification as research activity is squeezed out of their daily work routines into the domestic sphere where they have traditionally been disadvantaged in contrast to men.

Yet female academics, as male, do at least have some control over the direction they wish to go, the path they wish to tread. Some choose to separate home and work life, others to take work home where they have some measure of control, albeit refracted by gender. Others simply work harder, pushing themselves to the point of exhaustion while they plan their escape, either to the greener pastures of the private sector where they believe their efforts will at least be rewarded financially, or as they see it the relative calm of retirement. There are also those who seek the sanctuary of research. In these individual – in contrast to collective – actions, in their individual attempts to retain distance and autonomy we see their resistance to the recent changes. For it is by enacting their work collegially, by emphasising the importance of value-oriented rationality over the logic of the market and managerial control strategies, and by helping each other to maintain some measure of professional autonomy in the face of pressures to bend to the sway of managerial control, that academics make their greatest mark on the NPM.

Yet it is also here, paradoxically perhaps, that the NPM has had its greatest impact, in bringing to the surface the tensions and contradictions which may always have existed in university life, not least in respect of gendered relations. In bringing into sharper focus the harsher realities of academe and revealing it as hard work indeed, the limits of narrative representation, encapsulated in the characters from David Lodge's novel *Nice Work* quoted at the beginning of the chapter, become clear. Universities are organisations, as similar and dissimilar to others as they are to themselves. It seems likely, therefore, that degrees of collegiality and gender (in)equality will reflect separately (re)negotiated organisational settlements and that these will vary between universities. And it will be on the contested terrain of academic life, where adaptations to the intensification associated with managerial control are worked through in a context of pre-existing (male) vested interests, that the variegated character of intellectual labour will be established. In this sense managerial colonisation of the hallowed halls of academe seems less likely a prospect than academic differentiation, with women bearing the brunt of the reforms.

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Resumo. Este artigo revê as recentes tentativas de reformar a gestão na educação superior. O artigo baseia-se num conjunto de entrevistas efectuadas com académicos homens e mulheres responsáveis pela implementação de mudanças: chefes de departamentos, chefes de divisão e docentes. O objectivo é explorar as implicações para o trabalho corrente dos académicos resultantes das reformas, assim como avaliar as implicações em termos de género sexual. O artigo considera as seguintes áreas de responsabilidade académica, as quais foram identificadas pelos próprios académicos: trabalho de cão, trabalho duro, trabalho de ajuda, verdadeiro trabalho, e trabalho interessante. Ao realçar a dura realidade do mundo académico, e ao explorar a sobreposição e relações entre género sexual e trabalho académico, o artigo argumenta que trabalho intelectual é, na realidade, trabalho árduo, particularmente para as mulheres.
Palavras-chave: Educação superior, trabalho académico, Inglaterra, Suécia.