Lives in the Making:
Power, Academia and the Everyday

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Abstract

There has been significant attention paid to the corporatization and neoliberalization of the University as an institution in North America. In this article we examine the everyday and corporeal experiences of these processes on the lives of several graduate students in Geography PhD programs across North America. From a feminist perspective, we explore how these students *become* academic geographers through particular articulations of work/life embedded in complex power dynamics within the neoliberalized university. Using information gathered from in-depth interviews and open-ended survey questions we explore the contradictions inherent in academics' efforts of finding 'work-life balance'. Through the stories recounted, we add to the recent theorizing about neoliberalism

and the academy by highlighting the ways that the neoliberalized university plays out on the everyday and bodily scale in the lives of graduate students. We seek to interrogate the making of professional geographers within these neoliberalized institutions due to a concern about the effects of this particular form of discipline and subject formation on the current and future politics of knowledge production in the field. This article is part of a multi-year project following these research participants that seeks to investigate the process of becoming geographers over time[2].

Introduction

The research this article is based on is part of a larger project entitled "Lives in the Making: Power, academia and the everyday". This project was inspired by many casual conversations with geographers at all stages of their careers about the joys, pressures and everyday experiences of academia and the fact that these conversations often yielded recurring themes, inspiring us to think about these issues more theoretically. We see 'Lives in the Making' as an ongoing project that looks at the process of *becoming* academic geographers over time and the way that the corporatized university is beginning to "colonize the lifeworld of academics" (Castree and Sparke 2000: 226; see also Harvey 1998 and Smith 2000). Inspired by feminist theory, we explore how the neoliberal project and the spaces and times it produces within academia play out on our bodies and everyday life experiences as graduate students.

This research project was initially inspired by a complete dissatisfaction with the idea that the coveted 'work-life balance', though officially recommended, was usually not possible within the institutional practices of graduate school that we were experiencing. Instead we were encountering constant obstacles to achieving this 'balance' through professional expectations, practices and policies within this career. Particularly troubling was the commonly held believe that life would begin after grad school (Figure 1) or even after tenure. We were troubled by what appeared to be a typical understanding,

Figure 1: "Snooze Button" Piled Higher and Deeper" by Jorge Cham www.phdcomics.com

within our institution and other institutions in North America that we were familiar with, that graduate students have no life and in some ways are less alive than other
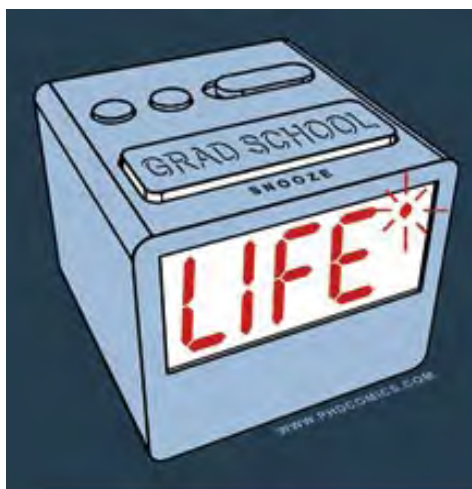
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[2] Original submission received by ACME in May 2011; revised version received by ACME August 2013.

professionals. For example, as we saw it, graduate students are not considered to have full responsibilities, families, needs, non-academic interests, the ability to shop for and eat proper food, or even the ability to visit the doctor and dentist regularly.

Thus, we began to think more thoroughly about the concept of work-life balance and how it played out in our lives as 'geographers in the making'.[3] Moreover, we started to question the classed, raced and gendered dynamics that inform what it means to be a successful academic, a true professional geographer and a productive scholar in increasingly neoliberal university environments. We were inspired to look more closely at our own lives and the lives of our colleagues by Amy Freeman's statement that:

> Many academics… analyze and critique capitalism, its exploitative practices and resistances to it elsewhere, but we are hesitant to acknowledge the way in which universities, and the people who work there, are actively involved in reproducing unequal power relations (2000: 249).

In fact, our findings suggest that a culture of silence is often imposed on these issues, as academic work is increasingly permeated by isolation and individuality.

However, before going further with this discussion of work/life and power dynamics within academia, the privileged position from which we speak must be noted. While we discuss some of the pressures felt by ourselves and other research participants in terms of working within academia below, we also acknowledge the pleasures and advantages of being graduate students[4]: The opportunity to control our own times and schedules for the most part, as well as the luxury of working with ideas, reading and writing and the possibility of questioning what we do are all of great importance. Additionally of note are the opportunities often granted to travel to field sites and conferences, to meet a variety of people from different backgrounds, and often to engage in conversations and debates. We have found though that in many ways these privileges make it more difficult to discuss the downside of academic life, for fear of seeming insensitive to many others in North America and around the world who work longer hours for less pay and are less able to control the direction of their work and time. This privilege also makes it difficult in some ways to think of academia as a job that you can leave at the end of the day and that you can complain about to others. Instead, as our discussion below demonstrates, we are encouraged to think of academia as a life that we chose and that in many ways is all encompassing.

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[3] We are inspired by Barnes's (2001) historical account of geography from the life histories of those who contributed to a discipline in the making. Here, though, we want to make emphasis on how our lives too are in the making.

[4] These pleasures, advantages and privilege of "working with ideas" were noted by all research participants in interviews and surveys.

In that sense, we do not seek to ignore our own social positionalities, but to acknowledge them hoping to mobilize our privilege to speak up about the complex power relations that inform our life and work as academic geographers. We recognize that countering labor injustices, in their profoundly uneven geographies, requires joint efforts to fight for issues such as better access to health care, maternity and paternity leave policies and the recognition of undervalued work. In our effort to better understand the power relations that shape such labor issues, we hope to contribute to further alliances between different social positions such as those marked by gender, race and class but also between and among staff, faculty, graduate students, and universities.

Below, we briefly outline our research methods and then highlight some of the literature that has inspired us to pursue this research. Subsequently we examine some of the themes emerging from this project including the way in which the pressures of the neoliberal academy are normalized in the lives of the graduate students that participated in this research project, the experiences of these students working within a meritocracy, and the blurring of work and life under a competitive, neoliberal model. Our work draws from critical analyses of neoliberalism's capacity to produce particular subjects (e.g., Dean, 1995; Rose, 1993). It seeks to contribute to the question of how the neoliberal project, its practices and discourses, translates into particular geographies (see Peck and Theodore, 2012 and Castree et al., 2006), focusing particularly on the intimate, bodily scale. Taking this into account, we then illustrate the ways in which the neoliberal university interacts with particular bodies that are deemed *out of place*. Here we follow Tim Cresswell's (1996) and Linda McDowell's (1999) argument on how gendered relations play an important role in the ways in which particular bodies are assigned to particular spaces, deeming certain bodies –e.g. sexualized bodies, sick bodies, pregnant bodies, non-heterosexual bodies, etc– as bodies "out of place". This mutual coding of bodies and neoliberal spaces is of particular importance to us as we seek to better understand the material and symbolic places we are assigned within the political landscapes of academia. In particular, we address the pressures students feel to embody white, masculine and middle-class subject positions. We discuss the production of productive bodies as opposed to nurturing ones, and the perceived impacts that working in the neoliberal university has over health and general wellbeing. We conclude with some thoughts on negotiating and generating alternatives to these processes through our ongoing 'Lives in the making' project.

Research methods

To learn more about these embodied and gendered processes of how we become geographers and academics throughout our time in graduate school and beyond, we decided to use our own lives and the lives of our colleagues, friends and families as inspiration. In our effort to learn more about the process through which graduate students become professional geographers and particular kinds of subjects through university institutions over time, we intend to conduct video

interviews with the participants for this project every five years.[5] Our eventual goal is to post clips from these video files on an interactive website to encourage discussion around these issues and use the life stories of research participants to illustrate processes by which participants become academic geographers. Future research from this study may provide insights into subject formation, changes to the academy, personal strategies for making-sense of work/life negotiations, and strategies for imagining other ways of inhabiting academia over time. This paper draws on the first set of interviews with participants conducted in 2009.

This longitudinal biographical study follows thirteen individuals.[6] Intensive qualitative research methods were favored as the most appropriate methodology for the analysis of processual forms of subject formation over time. In-depth interviews were conducted with all research participants. We included ourselves in these thirteen interviews in an effort to embody an 'autoethonographic sensibility' of "recognizing that clear-cut distinctions among researchers, research subjects and the objects of research are illusory" (Butz and Besio, 2009:1664)[7]. In this (first) stage of this longitudinal study, all of the research participants were graduate students in geography or related disciplines within North American institutions.[8] The participants ranged from first year PhD students to those who were in the process of graduating and about to enter academic jobs. The research participants were very diverse in terms of age, sexuality, gender, race, family status, languages spoken and class. Just over half of the participants were international students. In an effort to foster an open and honest conversation the interview questions were open-ended and encouraged the recounting of life histories and experiences. The hour-long interviews were audio and video recorded and then transcribed. Participants approved of the transcription and, upon request, were provided with a copy of the transcripts from the three researchers' own interviews in an effort to illustrate that many participants were facing similar challenges and feeling

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[5] The inspiration for using video interviews over time comes from watching the 'Up Series' of documentary films, by director Michael Apted.

[6] The challenges inherent in conducting longitudinal, in-depth biographical studies prompted the use of a small sample size.

[7] We decided to use our own lives as inspiration and to include ourselves as research participants, as an ethico-political engagement with our research agenda and with our research participants. Theoretically this was an attempt to disrupt the geographer's 'gaze from nowhere' (Haraway, 1991) and unsettle the artificial boundaries between researchers and participants. We draw on Pratt's autoethnographic approach (in Butz and Besio 2004). This is one of the ways we engage with feminist and postcolonial efforts (e.g., Sundberg 2005) to find 'de-othering' research methods that resist seeing the 'Self' as separated from the 'Other'. Thus, we believe that exploring our own positionalities does not compromise the rigor and validity of our data sample and instead contributes to methodological advances in geography. In addition, more practically, including ourselves as research participants allowed us to move towards a spirit of collaboration and dialog in this project. For a careful discussion of the role of autobiography in geographical research see, for example, Moss 2001a, 2001b and Monk 2001.

[8] We have chosen not to list or describe the institutions in detail in an effort to maintain anonymity for participants.

unnecessarily isolated in dealing with them.[9] The transcripts were then coded for themes, which are examined in more detail and illustrated with quotes below.[10]

In order to complement our thirteen life stories we later conducted 22 open-ended surveys with geography graduate students from institutions around North America. These surveys asked similar questions to the interviews, but focused more specifically on perceived work-life balance, and day-to-day experiences of academic pleasures and pressures. Quotes from survey responses are also included below. In addition to these surveys we discussed our findings informally with colleagues at various graduate student conferences and collective meetings between 2009 and 2011. These conversations emphasized the need to continue to interrogate the impacts of neoliberalism on the academy and their profoundly embodied practices and manifestations. Furthermore, as is outlined below, the issues we identify through our research speak to recent theorizations on these matters in the literature.

The neoliberalization of academia as an everyday, embodied experience

In our work, we draw from scholars who have studied the relations between the neoliberal project and geography as an academic discipline. Following Freeman, we begin with the understanding that:

> The ways in which one experiences the neoliberal transformation occurring within North American universities –and, importantly, consideration of who is absent from these institutions– are inseparable from culture, politics and economics at all scales, reminding us that universities are anything but disconnected from the larger society and geographies in which they operate (Freeman 2000: 246).

Critiques of the relentless and ongoing corporatization and neoliberalization of academia have poured into academic journals in recent years. For example, in their paper on work-family culture in academia, Gina Gaio Santos and Carlos Cabral-Cardoso (2008: 446) contend that: "the current political and economic pressures to deliver a system of mass higher education are bringing to the 'academic production line' the rhythm and the cadence of the old industrial assembly lines". This is what Smith (2000) calls the "academic sausage factory" and what Sharff and Lessinger (1994) have termed "sweatshopping academe" for the case of Anthropology.

Our understanding of neoliberalism, as an economic and political project based on the extension of market relations, privileges its everyday, embodied

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[9] Reversing our positionalities as researchers by exposing ourselves, becoming as available and as vulnerable to the 'gazes' of our research participants as they are to ours, is one of the ways we use autoethnography to try and destabilize unequal power relations between academic researchers and participants. Thus, we seek to use a research methodology that also encourages solidarity between researchers and research participants.

[10] We have paraphrased a few of the quotes used within this paper when the language or expressions used were so specific that we felt it might compromise the confidentiality of the research participants. We have also elected to use the word "they" instead of "she" or "he" in several places to protect participant confidentiality.

manifestations. What we refer to as the neoliberalization of academia are particular mechanisms, practices and processes that include: a fierce competition between an increasing number of PhDs and postdocs hunting for a diminishing number of tenure-track positions on the job market; an increase in non-tenure-track positions, adjunct or temporary teaching positions and other contractual hiring; more responsibilities for professors due to an increase in accountability and cuts in administrative staff and services; and more pressure to become entrepreneurs of knowledge in the competition for grants (e.g. Heyman 2000). We also include the neoliberal notion of "accountability" and "competitiveness" discussed by Berg and Roche (1997) and by Castree and Sparke (2000), among others, where "everything is simply a matter of accounting" (Harvey 1998:115) and research outputs are valued based on potential for monetary gain and relevance for state or corporate interests (Demeritt 2000). These neoliberalizing trends call for more reflexivity within the discipline and inspire us to question the power dynamics inherent in this commodification of knowledge and academia (see Sidaway 2000).

To enact this reflexivity we take note of the ways in which neoliberal processes within academia require certain kinds of subjects (flexible, accountable, professional) (see Archer, 2008; Davies et al., 2005). As such, we see the neoliberalization described above as articulated with other disciplining mechanisms about which types of bodies, knowledges and approaches will or will not be successful in this increasingly neoliberal environment. This politics of self implicated in neoliberal projects has been widely documented as neoliberal forms of rule have been studied in their capacity to produce particular kinds of subjects, shaping conduct and disciplining bodies (Lemke, 2001; Dean, 1995; Rose, 1993). Larner (2000: 13) notes how "neo-liberal strategies of rule, found in diverse realms including workplaces, educational institutions and health and welfare agencies, encourage people to see themselves as individualized and active subjects responsible for enhancing their own well being". Neoliberalism thus convenes a 'free' subject who makes individual, rational choices and is responsible for them, and this freedom is what enables its domination. According to Brown (2003:9), "[n]eo-liberal subjects are controlled through their freedom… because of neo-liberalism's moralization of the consequences of this freedom".

In applying these insights specifically to the discipline of geography, we draw on the work of critical geographers who have recently taken a closer look at the structures and processes of power, hierarchy, and privilege found within academic geography (Purcell, 2007; Bauder, 2006; Castree et al., 2006; Sundberg, 2005; Bonnett, 2003; Kobayashi and Peake 2000). Clearly, these gendered, racialized and classed social processes and practices cannot be reduced to neoliberalism. They are particularly entrenched and performed within the discipline of geography, the history of which is closely associated with European modernity, colonial expansion, and western imperialism (e.g. Bonnett, 2003; Shapin, 1998; Gregory, 1994). For us, it is important to remember that geography is the discipline that produces the global Cartesian 'conquering gaze from nowhere' (Haraway

1991, see also Shapin 1998), and that the geographer's power to represent Others lies in very particular constructions of the disciplinary self as "disembodied, un-located or unlimited by place, and separate" or separable from the 'objects of research' (Sundberg 2005:24).

Following Bauder (2006), we question how this Cartesian vision and these neoliberal trends embody and reproduce a certain type of white, elite, masculine, Eurocentric, neoliberal and corporatized academia in the everyday lives of our research participants within and beyond campus. How we 'perform' geography and embody geographic identities in our everyday life is thus a central concern for us as we question, negotiate and resist the reproduction of oppressive and asymmetrical power relations within academia. We seek to better understand ourselves as the partial and always contested result of the discourses and practices that privilege a whitened, masculinized and productive version of geographer within an increasingly neoliberal academia. Therefore, this intervention and the 'Lives in the making' project is as much about achieving political ends as it is about understanding how academic geographers are involved in reproducing oppressive structures and processes.

The logics of neoliberal academic life

In this section, we seek to critically examine the unequal power relations and oppressive mechanisms that are normalized within our own academic everyday lives. To this end, we identify and analyze the expectations, demands and constraints produced by a neoliberalizing academia and their effects in (re)producing certain academic subjects and institutional cultures. We focus on the ways in which the neoliberal ideals of academia are internalized by the graduate students in our study, how competition and the idea of meritocracy turn up in the everyday lives of research participants, and how our personal lives are interwoven with work in specific and often troubling ways.

A. The embodiment of neoliberal ideals

Drawing from the information gathered, we argue that responsibility is internalized by and placed on graduate students for failing to adequately respond to increasing academic demands, pressure and competition. Instead of viewing these issues as a symptom of an increasingly problematic educational system, these issues become a measure of individual capacity and worth. This mirrors Purcell's (2007) claims that the meritocracy associated with the tenure system legitimizes a kind of devaluation of certain types of people and work. As such, a survey respondent commented that there was way too much work in their grad program but that perhaps it was just an inevitable problem or one of personal laziness. An interview participant that complained of poor work-life balance noted: "I'm not saying that this is due to the PhD program; this is maybe my problem that I'm not able to keep up." Similarly, the following interview and survey quotes also exemplify how neoliberal discourses and practices become embodied:

I have no complains as of now of the actual structure of the program that I'm in… what I would change about the experience is internal, like I need to be, I need to work faster. I can't spend so much time reading and writing because it's just really hard to get everything done.

[Answering the question: Are you satisfied with your work-life balance?] Nope. There isn't much time for anything besides work. But I think that's the point. At the end of all this, we are supposed to be experts on a topic. I think the rigor justifies the proposed end result.

This internalization of responsibility for "falling behind" not surprisingly translated for many participants into a feeling of guilt. This guilt was a pervasive topic in interview and casual discussions. One participant described the guilt:

I think in academia, and this is how I see it, the level of guilt that one experiences sometimes is relentless. I mean, if I am not working on a paper, I'm thinking "oh, I should be working on teaching, or I should be working on finalizing questions for my interview, or I should be working on focus group analysis!" In other words, there is always something you should be doing in academia, I think it is relentless. I've had to work very hard, and I'm still not there, at letting go of some of that guilt.

Our research conversations showed that these feelings of guilt and personal responsibility (and often inadequacy) are commonly intertwined with feelings of isolation. One research participant in particular highlighted the key role that a feeling of isolation plays in the neoliberal academic project, especially for graduate students. When asked what she thought about her experience in graduate school was standard and what was unique she replied: "What's kind of standard is the isolation. Like everyone thinks that they're alone, everyone gets in their head and freaks out, and that's the basis of the project, I think."

Along with inadequacy, guilt and isolation, competition was a theme we discussed with most research participants. While participants appreciated the collaborative opportunities that graduate school provided, most wished collective work was more often acknowledged and valued. Many noted how competition infiltrated their experiences of academic work. As one of the central tenets of neoliberalism, competition permeates our everyday academic life and is accompanied by experiences of isolation, individualism, high pressure, stress, overwork and inner divisions. As one participant describes it:

I don't like the competitiveness, the idea that you should go for the throat of somebody else that happens to be your friend. I don't like the rising stars shit, I hate the idea that some of us are rising stars. I don't think anybody is a star only because they get more grants … I don't like the money thing…

In addition, research participants often spoke of wanting to engage in more collaborative work, especially across perceived divisions in political, theoretical and methodological approaches, but concluded that the pressures of their program or the entrenchments of fields of geography discouraged this. For example:

> They're trying to push us through the program so fast that we also don't have the time to talk to each other and that we're not taking classes with each other, so that form of collaboration doesn't happen.

> What I've seen [in my program] is polarized people. That's how I feel… I value a lot what's done in social sciences and I think it's valuable but I think people are not talking to each other and almost not understanding each other.

Adding to these obstacles towards collaboration, and to this emphasis on competition, is a pervasive culture of 'quantity over quality', as noted by research participants. This highlights the "delusion of meritocracy" Purcell (2007)[11] refers to and reveals the ways in which the corporatized university is embodied by graduate students and scholars in general. As academic knowledge is increasingly quantified and commodified, there seems to be fewer spaces for the kinds of knowledge that can contribute to imagining and building a better world. As work security declines with heightened rates of unemployment and under-employment (or precarious employment) after graduation, increasing competition within academia compels people to work longer hours and make difficult decisions about their work and lives. For example, one survey respondent reflected on the troubling environments that research participants witness their own professors working in, even under tenured or tenure-track appointments. They said: "the lives of the faculty members I see leaves little envy." It is through these insecurity-fed anxieties that graduate students are implicated in an increasingly oppressive and exploitative academic environment.

Freeman (2000) examines this exploitative environment in relation to graduate student employment and the pressures that graduate students have to deal with as they have to take seriously the two jobs they have for the price of one: research, teaching or staff assistants in addition to their own studies and work towards graduation. The difficulty of working two (or more) jobs was apparent in our research conversations as well. When asked to describe her 'typical' day, one research participant described getting up at three o'clock in the morning in order to

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[11] Bagilhole and Goode (2001) contribute a feminist perspective to the discussion on meritocracy in academia by highlighting the contradictions within the myth of individual merit. They argue that isolation/collaboration is highly gendered and that men benefit from a much wider support network than their feminine counterparts due to the deeply entrenched patriarchal relations that permeate academia. Heward (1994) also notes how a single hegemonic masculinity has informed a particular conceptualization of academic merit, one that has resulted in the underrepresentation of women in senior positions in higher education. She argues that what explains the "failure" of many women's careers is the "stone floor", that is, the segmentation of labor markets, rather than the "glass ceiling".

finish his/her own readings before starting work on her professor's research assistantship work at nine o'clock in the morning. Many others described working hours that extended over fifteen hours a day or typical days that included an "almost complete devotion to academic work."

Along with working more hours, research participants worked to make themselves more competitive through other means such as purposeful actions to make themselves more "marketable". This included letting go of their real research interests in order to pursue more marketable ones:

> Certainly here at [my institution] I think I've actively sought out different things that would make me more marketable…I've taken up those opportunities again because I felt that the important lesson that I needed to learn was "well, how do I write a publishable paper?" and I think that's independent of content.

> I am planning to relate what I'm doing to social issues. This is also why I wanted to come here but it didn't really work out because it's complicated. It's not an easy thing and I've come to the conclusion that to move fast, it is better to advertise myself as a GIS remote-sensor, which is something I'm good at.

Other research participants described how they perceive the pressures and goals of graduate school and academia through these (undesirable) measurements of productivity and merit:

> I think the pressure we have in this academic world is over the top, and is often destructive. I think there is unfortunately an overvaluation of performance, of fame, of profit even, within academia, where the more you receive grants the more you have money available to do your research and the better you are as an academic. The more articles you are able to publish the better you are.

> I think that I feel there's a lot of pressure…we need to be really productive, I mean, [if you want to get a job in a good school]…there's like these requirements of what you're supposed to do and… sometimes I think more about those pressures than actually the process of gaining knowledge which I think is that the whole idea for a PhD is that you're supposed to have gained a certain level of knowledge.

Under such cultural and political economy, academic work becomes regulated by an ethos of individualism, competition and measurements of productivity instead of one that would privilege significant knowledge production, politically engaged work, collaboration and care. As will be seen below, the pressures felt by research participants based on the culture of neoliberalism within academia play out in the everyday lives and on the bodies of graduate students and academics.

B. Work and life within the neoliberal academy

Our interviews show how we, as graduate students, embody the logics, values, and norms of an increasingly neoliberal and corporatized academia in our everyday life. This blurring of work and life and an ideal of a work-life balance were recurring themes in our research conversations. We found that being isolated, guilty and inadequate academic subjects inevitably spills over into our non-work life, as much as it exists in our work life. While we recognize the arbitrary, and often problematic, distinctions between work and life (see Katz et al. 2004), we aim to show how the realities of neoliberal academia are part of the intimate, personal, embodied scale, as much as they are about the political-economic sphere.

In one sense this was demonstrated through worries that the inability to keep up with work was affecting non-work areas of our lives, a process that was once again normalized as an individual (as opposed to an institutional) problem. For example one participant stated: "[P]eople say that I don't spend enough time outside [of work], that I always spend too much time on my computer, so that's one reason why people say I don't have a boyfriend (laughs)." Participants also worried that their inability to manage the demands of academia and move quickly through a degree was causing them to delay other personal goals such as getting a permanent job, buying property, starting a family or getting married. For example:

> [This degree] catches me at a stage in my life when many people in my generation are going through some typical life cycle stuff like having kids or getting married and every time I go back to [my home country] I sort of get to encounter that those friends and those family members are not frozen in time. That sort of feeds back into my own personal reflections of what I am suppose to be doing with my life at this stage and that becomes difficult to handle because there's a lot of like existential issues that you deal with while you're trying to design research, while you're trying to deal with school, while you're trying to justify your academic existence.

In another sense, the pressures of work infiltrated research participants' lives through the personalization of work-related demands. While this may be a problem in a variety of jobs, the gusto with which graduate students felt they must 'throw themselves into their research' may cause additional anxiety on this front. One participant described how decisions over where to situate one's research theoretically and methodologically were personal and political ones as much as professional ones. As some participants note, these decisions often determined how quickly one could move through the program, leaving little room for long-term, politically engaged types of work. Another participant described the personal nature of research decisions through an anecdote:

> Every time that I would bring up the uh the kind of critical stance on my research, [my advisor] would be so condescending. He would not only criticize my approach but me, as if, hmm… I don't know how to

say that, as if my willingness to want to engage in those types of research was making me a lesser person.[12]

One of the more positive aspects of academic work however was the sense of freedom that it provides, an aspect highly valued by research participants. This freedom generally allows graduate students' and professors' flexibility over the subjects, times and spaces of their labor. However, ideals of freedom and autonomy are profoundly entangled with the neoliberal logic that saturates those 'choices'. In particular, participants' responses hint at ways in which a colonization of everyday life by neoliberal logics can be identified. For example, the encroachment of a certain work ethics within academia makes activities perceived as non-work (e.g. "me-time", caring for others, exercise, etc.) become important, not for their own sake, but as mere instruments for improved academic work performance, competitiveness and success. Some responses illustrate this: "Over time, I've come to realize that I'm actually more productive if I allow for more free time, "me-time" as I call it".

The encroachment of neoliberal ideals of competition, efficiency and individual responsibility are evident in many of the 'typical daily schedules' participants described. Aspects such as the pervasive guilt of academia, the pressure that competition places on research subject choices, and the effects of this pressure on research outputs are all ways in which our work-life as scholars is being shaped. Those unable to fulfill and succeed within academia are de-legitimized by neoliberal narratives instead of being testimonies for the need of structural and institutional changes towards a more just academia.

The quotes and themes addressed in this section demonstrate some of the ways in which the neoliberal aspects of academic institutions, and the particular geography programs that research participants are involved in, influence the everyday experiences of graduate students. The logics of neoliberalism are pervasive in the lives of research participants not only in terms of time, but also in terms of space in regard to academia's situatedness. This was often pointed out by participants who reflected on the particular geographies of pursuing a PhD and an academic career. Most of the time, becoming a geographer had significant flexibilization demands that included moving away, leaving networks of family life and friendship behind, and negotiating the impacts of these changes over family members. The next section identifies how these neoliberal ideals play out on the actual diverse and unique bodies of the geographers in the making in our study.

Academic bodies out of place

In this section we explore how a neoliberal and corporatized academia is marked by processes of differentiation and domination based on class, race and

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[12] This anecdote mirrors Purcell's (2007:129) claim that the process of including and excluding certain bodies within the institution "gets narrated—in the halls, at conferences, in search committee meetings—as a measure of worth".

gender. The processes by which we perform an assumedly neutral professional and productive academic are explored below through the experiences of graduate students. In particular, we are interested in the ways in which academic life is closely associated with masculine characteristics such as being aggressive, competitive, rational and individualist, which end up drastically affecting our experience, 'progress' and 'success' within the neoliberal academy As such, academics are often thought of as bodiless individuals, a process which has been coined "the head on a stick syndrome" (Gruner 2008).

Akinleye (2006) draws from her personal experience to examine the close relations between race, gender, family status and class, and success in the discipline of geography. She states that in geography "research on social equity issues has not necessarily led to a more equitable treatment of those within the discipline who have historically been marginalized" (2006: 28). She continues: "In geography, I was made to feel either conspicuously visible, invisible, or like a square peg in a round hole". Similarly, we focus below on how bodies that are *out of place* (e.g. marked as non-white, feminine, non-professional, etc.) within academia are devalued and sometimes erased and disposed of by the academic system. Through conversations with research participants, and drawing on the idea that "knowledge [is] embodied, engendered and embedded in the material context of place and space" (Duncan, 1996: 1), we highlight whose bodies are excluded from and included within academic spaces and how this affects the everyday lives of the graduate students in our study.

These experiences of being in or out of place are influenced by power asymmetries at work in academic spaces, some of which became evident in conversations with research participants. These asymmetries were not always brought up as a point of criticism though, for example:

> I tend to be the person whereby I'm very respectful of the distinction between a faculty member and a student, I mean I think there is some worth to that distinction and some worth to that relationship and I try to never over-step those boundaries because I feel that they are there for a reason. And I'm quite happy with them existing...I don't see [power asymmetries or struggles] as big and burning issues, because one day the roles will be reversed…

This quote shows how hierarchical relations of power and the spaces of exclusion and inclusion they (re)produce become normalized and institutionalized. Their embodied dimension is made evident by the way in which they get internalized and accepted. The process through which they are replicated is demonstrated with the notion that eventually "the roles will be reversed" thus assuming that this research participant will eventually take up the subject position of professional and academic gatekeeper. However, as we show below, not all research participants felt as if this 'professional body' was available to them.

A. The 'professional' body

As critical geographers, we aim to convey how these positions of power, authority and prestige are socially constructed, profoundly oppressive and not inevitable so that more graduate students start questioning, criticizing and resisting the reproduction of such unequal power relations within academia. Many research participants commented on the pressures to become more productive, professional and rational students within their graduate programs. Often indirectly, their notions of what being a 'good scholar' entails revealed principles deeply informed by masculine, white, middle-class and anglocentric ideals. This follows an understanding of whiteness as historically constructed as a position of normalcy, power, moral superiority and privilege: "In such a system, whiteness is embodied and becomes desire in the shape of the normative human body, for which 'race' provides an unspecified template" (Kobayashi and Peake 2000:394).[13] This was demonstrated in the lives of graduate students through pressures to dress and speak in particular ways, for example:

> I don't like that you're supposed to be professional and professional means to edit yourself, not to have an accent –that was reminded to me, at some point during one class the professor said "oh that accent of yours is not taking you anywhere".

> I don't like that academia loves men in business suits. Not the tie. The tie is kind of too much but, you know, these slick looking guys that are white and speak English perfectly. Those are the ones that are the famous good academics. …Hopefully that will change because it's really appalling.

> Once a professor told me that he would never trust whatever came out of my mouth because of how I look, because I don't look professional [laughs] and I should change the way in which I dress which I didn't do. I wanted to ask him, "do I look too Latina for you?"

Research participants also commented more directly on race relations and how they played out in everyday interactions with advisors and other graduate students. For example:

In terms of power, with [my advisor] I was just so dammed stubborn… I guess I have the privileged position of the white male who thinks he wasn't oppressed and he had the opportunity to do the things the way he wanted.

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[13] Drawing on Kobayashi and Peake (2000: 393), we define 'whiteness' as a wide socio-spatial process which occurs as "the normative, ordinary power to enjoy social privilege by controlling dominant values and institutions and, in particular, by occupying space within a segregated social landscape". Thus, the whitened academic body is one that – through academic everyday life– becomes the hegemonic standpoint from which the dominant self and other subaltern bodies are looked at and placed in specific locations.

[S]ometimes I do feel like race does count, maybe people don't do it intentionally but sometimes it happens and maybe people don't realize that. … I would not prefer to tell any particular examples, but sometimes, it has happened to me.

These quotes reveal how the professional body of an academic is inscribed with constructions of an idealized white subject, illustrating, as Berg (2012:515) argues, that "within the context of (neo)liberalism, white supremacy gets (re)enacted all the time."   The experiences of these research participants demonstrate how this reenactment occurs both more overtly, through direct experiences of privilege or oppression, and more subtly, through suggestions to edit one's self to fit a white model.   Under (neo)liberalism, it is the individual's personal responsibility to assimilate to the white/masculine culture in order to be seen as a professional body. These examples only begin to illuminate the ways in which students saw the far from power-neutral standards of the discipline of geography demanding changes of many of them in terms of performance, decisions and actions. These demands were also present when participants raised issues of simultaneously being an academic and family member.

B. The nurturing body

Many researchers have noted that "the difficulties of combining academic success with commitment beyond campus life will fall hardest on women, parents and those caring for others" (Wills 1996: 300). The challenges that those wishing to engage in nurturing roles at the same time as pursuing an academic career were common lines of discussion within our research conversations, particularly for women. Many worried about timing children so as not to "damage" their academic careers:

I'm trying not to think about post-PhD attempts to have a dual-academic career with a family. I'm trying to time many children in relation to my academic work. I'm constantly anxious and have trouble sleeping.

As a woman in academia who wanted to have a child, I had to make a complicated decision as to the timing of my pregnancy and childbirth that has had implications for my experience on the job market that would not be an issue for a male also expecting a child. I felt like if I ever wanted to have a child I had to do it before getting into a tenure track position, where I felt it would be frowned upon, if not completely debilitating, to have a child early in my career.

Once I got here [professors advised me] "you should never have kids if you plan to be a good professional" …so you know [there are] questions because we do want to have kids but it's like "when?"... It's just like, taking a risk, I'm just like ok, we'll do it later, hopefully later there will be time.

In sharing the results of our 'Lives in the Making' project in graduate student conferences we learned of cases where women had refused to tell their advisor and committee that they were pregnant for 'fear of being sentenced to academic death'. In other cases, participants worried about other caring and nurturing roles, such as caring for parents and their inability to fulfill these roles if they are unable to return to their home region or country with prosperous academic jobs. One participant stated:

> Actually I worry about my parents, you know, they're getting older…[W]hat's going to happen when they need help? How that can completely change everyday type of duties you need to attend to, you know?... It's hard to maintain relationships from a distance.

A common complaint was the way in which the neoliberal academic culture encouraged students to be considered commodities, workers or 'famous geographers in the making', such that they were not understood as part of families, collectives and communities. For example:

> It has been difficult because [my institution] doesn't understand you as part of a family or a kinship or anything else. It's you, publish the most you can… and you're supposed to be famous and graduate quickly and to me, coming here, I was going to do it right, taking the time I wanted, and I came here with my family and we were in this together.

> I think the general public's perception of students "passing through" rather than as "members of a community" gets a bit frustrating too. ...I think this is a bit of a power game: belonging vs. not in a community.

In this way, respondents found fault with the ways in which the neoliberal academic culture in which they were immersed did not understand them as nurturing bodies or members of families and at the same time influenced their abilities to engage in these nurturing tasks while having to remain a legitimate, competitive and effective member of the workforce.

C. The sick body

A troubling and common theme throughout our research conversations revolved around the way in which the neoliberal academic culture directly affected the bodies of graduate students around health issues. While not an overtly 'risky' job compared to more manual or precarious labor, it appears that the pressure of academia nonetheless affects the bodies and mental state of graduate students in important ways. Many participants highlighted the unhealthy aspects of the work and their dissatisfaction with the [United States] health care system within which they work:

> I don't believe that capitalism promotes lifestyles that are healthy for people and academia is included in there, it's just an unhealthy way of living. To stare at the computer all day, to be sitting all day,...

Here [in the USA] I am always scared of my health and I always think that if something happens to me I don't know what I'm going to do, I'm not – I don't have enough money to go to the doctor and things, I just want to go back to [my home country] where I don't have to deal with these worries.

Many others described specific anecdotes of how they feel the academic lifestyle affects their health:

Since I moved here there has been lots of problems that I've never had before, like if I get an infection it doesn't seem to go away and last semester I actually thought that maybe academia was so stressful that I was making myself sick and I had to leave, and I was really sad because I really like it. So I was wondering how something I like so much could be like turning against me and make me sick.

I become totally obsessed about my work and then I overwork and then I overwork so much that I have health problems…Last year I was in this very stressful kind of, uh, re-questioning my research orientation and my approach to research and to academy. So it was a very exhausting and challenging year and at the end of that year I, one time I just collapsed. And I was in bed not able to do anything and I was having all kinds of health problems, like problems with my eyes and I couldn't read anymore and I was so stressed because I was supposed to defend at that time. And I had much emotional instability, kind of like depression…but the worst was the fatigue.

Based on our research conversations, we argue that the culture of neoliberalism within some North American graduate geography programs plays out significantly on the embodied experiences of graduate students. The types of bodies and subjectivities that are valued in academia matter for how students fit into and deal with the pressures of academic work/life. These pressures, as we have shown, play out in the intimate realms of health and family decisions.

Conclusion: Towards some alternatives

Above we have described some of the findings from our ongoing project "Lives in the Making: Power, academia and the everyday". The research conversations that we highlighted here are intended to provide a more embodied and situated understanding of how the process of neoliberalization plays out in the lives of the graduate students participating in this research project. What we argue is that the neoliberalization of academia has a deep impact on the lives of these students, leading us to question the assumed separation between work and life and the seemingly impossible ideal of obtaining a work-life balance. Additionally, these neoliberal practices and discourses play out on the ways in which students are produced as academic subjects. This is particularly evident in the everyday, intimate, bodily scale as students are often encouraged to follow white, masculine,

middle-class and anglocentric constructions of what it means to be professional, productive and worthy. Often too, the possibilities to nurture and care for one's self and others are constructed in direct contrast to academic success, leaving little room for sick, nurturing or less-mobile bodies. While we acknowledge that the processes noted above cannot be reduced to neoliberalism, we argue that the deep neoliberalization of academia often reinforces the uneven geographies of entrenched gender, race and national privilege, and the way in which they play out in the production of the proper, ideal, professional-enough, successful geographer.

In our conversations we asked students to suggest some of the ways in which they deal with the pressures of working and living within such a high-pressure environment. Students who felt that their work-life balance was more satisfying for themselves (often upper-level students) suggested creating boundaries, to make spaces free from academic pressures:

> It has to be... for me it's like you have to make a point to set aside time…[because academic work is] so constant, you can just be doing things all the time… so you got to make boundaries.

> I keep my Sundays for me, I don't do anything. At some point in the beginning it was very disorganized and I would just work and do work every single day so I wouldn't mind if it was Monday 8am in the morning or it was Saturday at 2am in the morning. It would be the same for me. But that wasn't working so I now keep Sundays for just whatever, hanging out, I don't know, we don't do much but I don't study on Sundays I don't check my emails usually on the weekends. And I hope to be like that always. We'll see what happens [laughs].

We agree that taking sporadic time-off from academia gives us a certain feeling of life balance. It would thus seem to make sense to try and resist oppressive academic practices by creating more 'personal' times and spaces through a more dedicated engagement with leisure, relationships, commitments and other activities beyond the workplace; by expanding a sense of life outside work. However, as Nadine Schuurman (2009:312) reminds us, "change to our working environment –and work-life balance– will come from within the system". We argue therefore that we cannot resist the reproduction of oppressive corporatized academia solely by expanding non-work times and spaces. What we perceive as our 'personal life' is in a constant dialectic relation with our 'work life'. Since they are not separated, the former cannot be profoundly changed without transforming the latter and vice-versa. For instance, taking more time off will not improve our 'personal life' if the same power relations, work conditions and work ethics are maintained and reproduced in our 'work life'. The same oppressive relations, normalized and internalized behaviors and ideologies found in our workplace, will be reproduced in other realms of our lives. So, as Bauder (2006:63) contends, our most pressing endeavor is "changing the rules of the game in the first place".

One such method for changing the rules of the game, we suggest, is through understanding work and personal life as the one encompassing process that is *life*. This may allow us to start to see how injustices and unequal power relations at work, as well as the increasing neoliberalization of academia, are deeply entangled with our non-work practices, as demonstrated throughout this paper. Thus, we argue that it is *also* within these spaces of work and academia that life must be produced and enacted differently. Our task as academics against neoliberal academia is not merely to seek work-life balance so that the work part of the equation can continue its oppressive and exploitative function. Instead, our efforts must go towards rethinking how life should be lived within and outside of work.

Resistance to the neoliberalization of universities must begin from within the academy and in collaboration with other workers in the university and beyond. It is urgent to continue imagining and working towards a more just academia. It is time to rethink the path through which we become geographers as a process, not as an end; as a part of the basic and collective right to education, not as a commodity; as a place for collaboration and care, not as a place for competition; and as a means for politically relevant knowledge production, not for profit. Examples of this resistance may include actions such as: supporting faculty, student and university staff unions; fighting for better maternity/paternity care policies; attributing more traction to collaborative (rather than single author) research in tenure and hiring decisions; including community engagement and activism as a matrix for evaluating students/faculty; encouraging open and constructive article review processes and open access publishing; prioritizing quality of published ideas over quantity of publications and fostering environments where students, faculty and other allies can reflect on their own roles in (re)producing these competitive neoliberalized environments.

These changes would have significant impacts over the politics of knowledge production. As Mitchell (1999) warns us, the commodification of learning and teaching puts the communal project of education, and community itself, at risk. In Castree's and Sparke's words, what is at stake is the possibility of collectively "building critical, intellectually informed communities of research, writing and action" (2000: 228).

In our efforts to resist the neoliberalizing of geographic academia by disrupting the reproduction of everyday normalizing practices, we must begin to identify and analyze the mechanisms by which some of our efforts and daily practices (around graduate student work, attitudes, guidance, collegiality, etc.) may in fact be reinforcing — instead of destabilizing — the present academic system. We hope this is one contribution made by our 'Lives in the Making' project. As we continue our research over time, and as we continue encouraging open conversations and collaborative reflection on the ways in which the culture of neoliberalism within universities 'makes' us into geographers, we hope to identify and disrupt some of these processes. We trust that we will keep finding more and

better ways of being scholars, ways that are based on collective work and solidarity.

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