Ethical responsibilities of tenured academics supervising non-tenured researchers in times of neoliberalism and precarity

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Abstract

Neoliberal reform of the university sector has resulted in increasing numbers of academics employed on casual or fixed-term contracts. While there is an emergent body of literature on issues of precarity in the academy, relatively little attention has been paid to the roles and responsibilities of those tenured academics who employ and *manage* non-tenured researchers. The work involved in hiring and managing a contract researcher is rarely acknowledged or supported, and managers receive little to no training. In this paper, we draw on Dorothy Smith's feminist sociological approach to analyse interviews with 22 non-tenured researchers to examine how managerial relationships shape the employment experiences of those working precariously. We argue that tenured academics have ethical responsibilities to provide a working environment that is fair, supports the ongoing development and wellbeing of non-tenured staff and challenges dominant discourses of precarious academics as 'other'.

Neoliberalism and the academy

Modern universities across much of the Western world have adapted to function in the context of neoliberalism. Reliance on student fees and research income, coupled with limitations in public funding, notably in the UK, the US, and Australia, have resulted in a significant shift in the focus of university management towards 'academic capitalism' (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004; Deem et al. 2000). In this context, the employment of permanent academic staff for research and teaching is both risky and costly.

The resulting decline in permanent academic positions is a global phenomenon (Acker and Hack 2017). The neoliberal project has paved the way for increasing responsibilisation of workers, as organisations have sought to shift risks and responsibilities from the organisation onto its employees (Lewchuk et al. 2003). Employees bear the risks associated with changing markets and the statutory and financial liabilities of the institution are limited (Brady and Briody 2016). A common approach adopted by universities is to unbundle integrated teaching and research positions, creating additional teaching-only and research-only positions (Holmwood and Servós 2019; Macfarlane 2011). In this way, non-tenured researchers (NTRs) are required to become entrepreneurial and secure employment that is often tethered to external research grants for projects generally led by tenured academics (ILO 2019).

The terms 'non-tenured' and 'tenured' have been chosen to denote the diversity of positions within academia. Across Australia and the UK there are many differing terms regarding employment and employment conditions. Our use of the term 'non-tenured' is inclusive of academics working in casual or fixed term positions, while 'tenured' is used to identify those in ongoing employment. These broad descriptions are used to identify the emergence of a hierarchical 'tiered faculty', at the top of which are a privileged 'core' of tenured staff who are less susceptible to the precarity experienced by their colleagues on the 'tenuous periphery' (Holmwood and Servós 2019; Kimber 2003).

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NTRs overwhelmingly report their relationships with managers are critical in their experiences in tenuous employment (Spina et al. 2020). While there is substantial literature on precarity as a sociological phenomenon and on precarious work (e.g. Baik, Naylor and Corrin 2018; Ryan, Connell and Burgess 2017; Stringer, Smith, Spronken-Smith and Wilson 2018), little attention has been paid to the role of tenured managers of precarious employees. Drawing on interviews with 22 NTRs, we examine the nature of hierarchical relationships that exist within the neoliberal university and the ethical responsibilities adopted by managers in this system. We use descriptions of the 'everyday work' (Smith 2005) of these researchers as the *point d'appui* for our inquiry into how the relationships between NTRs and their managers shape the experiences of those in precarious employment. Given this theoretical standpoint, the perspectives described within the paper are drawn from the experiences of the researchers, rather than of the managers with whom they work. We have chosen to use the term 'manager' rather than 'supervisor' primarily to avoid potential confusion with the role of academic supervision as conceived in higher degree research studies or post-doctoral programs. Additionally, we eschew the term 'academic-managers' as this title infers a specific identity for individuals, who hold values that align with 'managerial discourse' (Winter 2009). Rather than adopting an *a priori* perception of managers and their values, we examine how management practices described by interviewed NTRs align with the tripartite framework of 'ethical leadership' described by Starratt (1991, 1996). The purpose of this examination is to build an understanding of the ethics of managing precarious academics from the perspective of NTRs and to explore how this model of 'ethical leadership' could provide insight into the rights and responsibilities of the institution for supporting their work. While we have interviewed a number of managers for the larger project, this paper examines the impact of managerial relationships for NTRs. We recognise, however, that many of the

issues we highlight regarding institutional norms, discourses and practices are shared by academics regardless of their employment conditions.

Managerial relationships and the academic precariat

The rise in casual employment and decreased availability of permanent contracts is an international trend (Acker and Hack 2017). In Australia, for example, those in precarious employment constitute up to 60% of the total workforce and up to 80% of research-only positions in some universities (Spina et al. 2020). The precarious positioning of much of the academic workforce highlights the need for improved structures and processes to better support and develop all academic staff. Percy et al. (2008) argue that sessional teaching staff make substantial contributions to their institutions, yet there is a lack of 'evidence of systemic sustainable policy and practice' (2) to support their employment, induction, management, career and professional development, and reward and recognition. They note the crucial role that management of sessional teachers plays in 'establishing quality processes in teaching and learning' (Percy et al. 2008, 13). Our research has identified that managers of NTRs play a similarly crucial role (authors, 2020) and that all forms of managerial relationships, whether they are transactional relationships that occur solely through email or distanced communication or close collaborations, have an impact on the experiences of NTRs. Nonetheless, there is a dearth of research into the relations between NTRs and their managers, the practices of managers and how their roles might be developed, supported and formalised.

Regardless of whether tenured academics are overseeing teaching or research (or a combination of both), the quality of managerial relationships can contribute greatly to what Archer et al (2013, 14) term the 'broader employment relationship', which includes 'work flexibility, hours of work allocated, income level, certainty of work, facilities provided, and inclusion in social and communication networks'. In turn, these employment conditions have

a significant impact on levels of job satisfaction, stress and future career opportunities for precarious employees. The consequences of precarity for NTRs in what has been called 'the gig academy' (Kezar, DePaola and Scott 2019) have been well researched, from the identity work of 'coping' (Nikunen 2012), to financial insecurities, and mental health implications (Spina et al. 2020; ILO 2019). Insecurity of employment in conjunction with the pressure to engage in visible markers of scholarly productivity such as publishing can impact family life, relationships and even restrict possibilities of female academics (in particular) to have children (Rudick and Dannels 2019).

Managers of NTRs are generally tenured academic staff, who often receive little training for the role of management (Deem et al. 2000; Ryan, Connell and Burgess 2017). It is important to not only understand NTRs' subjective experiences of precarity, but also how these experiences are being navigated and shaped by those who manage their work. The relationships between NTRs and their managers can highlight existing inequities in working conditions and experiences of working in a university. Building an understanding of these relationships, can shine a light on the significant role that managers and forms of management can play for NTRs (Ryan, Connell and Burgess 2017).

Despite the limited research on NTR management in universities, existing literature provides some insights into factors for developing these roles. Collinson (2004), for example, has examined occupational identities of contract researchers across different contexts in the UK. She notes important differences between small academic departments and large research teams in terms of researchers' opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and support. This research cites positive examples of informal peer mentoring and development in those departments or centres in which there are a critical mass of temporary researchers, and in contrast notes the sense of isolation and outsider status of those lacking peer contact. This

study raises key questions regarding the role that research managers play in providing support and building the capacity of the NTRs in their employ.

Nikunen (2012) observes that 'social support is important in an academic career, even though individualistic thinking and the notion of meritocracy tends to make this invisible to some degree' (276). The 'radical responsibilisation' (Fleming 2017) of the academic workforce positions individuals as responsible for their own work and the management, support and training of others. This relationship, however, is mediated by university demands, with all academics and employees in the academy constrained by institutional structures and processes. Decisions on recruitment, employment entitlements, length of contract, pay-scales and so on are framed by these boundaries. Academics in ongoing employment are subject to highly regulated demands of how their own work is managed and how they are able to manage the work of others, particularly those employed on 'soft money' (Kaplan, 2010). Despite a need to navigate institutional processes and systems for managing NTRs, academics are rarely provided with any guidance in recruitment or management.

Tilbury (2007) offers a critical assessment of these managerial relationships, noting the 'ambivalence' of academics and Chief Investigators (CIs) on funded research projects 'at being forced into being "managers" of research projects' (3). This stance does not presuppose that academics will provide unfair or ineffective management. Rather, she suggests that many academics find themselves in managerial roles without any prior aspiration to manage people. While her main focus is 'the position of the hired underlings employed to undertake the research' (Tilbury 2007, 3), her work identifies challenges for academics and funding bodies to ensure that ethical work practices and support for NTRs are implemented. Tilbury (2007) identifies an absence of mechanisms within funding bodies to monitor actual, ongoing participation and commitment and suggests a need for these funders to monitor the management of research staff. Tilbury (2007) concludes that there is 'the need for CIs to

develop a sympathetic and aware stance to the difficulties CRs [contract researchers] face, and a willingness to attempt to address these' (9), also noting that this will depend on a far more systematic and rigorous examination of prevailing institutional academic practices than is currently evident. In this paper, we argue a need for greater understanding of the practices of academics involved in the complex managerial work of overseeing research and researchers and associated ethical responsibilities in support of those they employ.

Methods

Drawn from a larger data set of interviews with contract researchers and research managers in the UK and Australia (*authors*), this paper analyses the in-depth accounts of 22 NTRs as they revealed the nature and importance of social relations between themselves and their managers. Participants were recruited via a snowball sampling technique, involving a general call for interest through Twitter and the researchers' academic networks. Due to the nature of the recruitment, some participants were previously known to the researchers, while others volunteered from a broad range of institutions across Australia and the UK. Semi-structured interviews with participants were conducted by the researchers either face-to-face or via video-conferencing with a duration of between 45 and 90 minutes. The participants worked at a range of institutions, predominantly universities, although some also worked in hospital research and research institutes. Descriptions of the participants' ages, time on contract and work environments has been provided (see Appendix). As part of the deidentification of participants, the specific institutions in which they worked have not been named. There was a diversity of employment for the participants, although many worked across institutions in various roles, according to different employment conditions, including casual hours-based contracts, sessional teaching, and/ or fixed term positions (both part-time and full-time).

Our interviews, method of inquiry and analytic approach draw on the theoretical contributions of the critical feminist sociologist Dorothy E. Smith (1987). Smith's theoretical approach is based on an understanding that objectified forms of knowing formed from the standpoint of those in positions of authority are different from the knowing that is only possible through lived experience. This view encourages research inquiries to start with 'the actualities' of people's lives (Smith 2005, 31) and position individuals as 'active and competent knowers' (Smith 1987, 142). Following Smith, (2005) we saw our discussion with participants as an opportunity to check our understandings, so as to locate their standpoints; making this the entry into our research. We acknowledge that as authors, we were both insiders and outsiders to the research. While we (the authors) have all worked in insecure positions in academia, two of us (author, author) are now employed in permanent academic positions as researchers and managers, two are working on fixed-term contracts (Author, author) and one is on a casual contract (author). As such, we are both insiders and outsiders to the research. Griffith (1998), who worked extensively with Smith in the development of institutional ethnography, has described how a binary insider/outsider dichotomy lacks complexity, and that rather, 'the reflexive character of social inquiry' is critical because as researchers we are always 'both insiders and outsiders to the stories we explore' (362). In talking with participants and analysing our data, it was therefore important that we adopted a reflexive approach, engaging in frequent conversations as a team in which we shared our perspectives as employees in different states, countries and modes of employment. We have sought to reflect on the descriptions offered by participants, without making *a priori* judgements about social and power relations.

Smith's approach to understanding the coordination of the everyday is through an exploration of how texts are taken up, or activated, in local sites. Smith has written extensively (e.g. 1990, 2005) about the role of texts in modern societies and institutions,

explaining how their use authorises particular courses of action, and mediates practices and social relations. As Campbell and Gregor (2002) explain, the capacity of a text to rule depends on how it 'carries messages across sites' (613), engaging readers and sparking activity. Our analytic approach affords an opportunity to bring to light the invisible work, issues and realities to which privileged groups (in this case, tenured academics and managers)—whose perspectives are embedded within dominant discourses and institutional practices— may otherwise be oblivious.

In addition to the use of Smith's sociological theoretical contributions, we draw on Starratt's (1991) tripartite model of ethical leadership to investigate the approaches adopted by managers of contract researchers. Ethical leadership is defined as a social, relational process whereby leaders treat their colleagues and employees fairly and justly (Ehrich et al. 2015). While primarily applied in studies of school leadership, Starratt's (1991, 1996) framework offers a useful heuristic for the exploration of ethical leadership for this study of the role of academic leaders and non-tenured researchers. The model describes three key ethics: an ethic of care, an ethic of justice and an ethic of critique. The ethic of care encourages leaders to be open to all voices and value the diverse opinions, relationships and ideas that occur within a workplace. The ethic of justice is 'understood as individual choices to act justly, and justice understood as the community's choice to direct or govern its actions justly' (Starratt 1996, 163). This ethic focuses on concepts of fairness and legality. The ethic of critique challenges leaders to reflect on the institutions and cultures in which they work in order to identify and redress issues of inequity or exploitation. While described and explored separately in this paper, these three ethics are inextricably linked and work to enhance one another by establishing a focus on fairness (justice), relationships (care) and disruption of the *status quo* (critique) (Starratt 1991, 1996).

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Data analysis involved thematic coding of rich descriptions of interactions between NTRs and managers. We first identified instances where NTRs described their relationships with managers and examples of practices the managers were described to undertake. Following Smith, we made use of the rich descriptions of embodied experiences described by our participants in our analysis, considering the commonalities associated with the management of NTRs in academia as a systemic concern that is evident in multiple sites. In analysing our data, we have looked to understand the actualities of work for people, without making *a priori* judgements of how social and power relations come to be as they are;this included identifying the 'texts' which are activiated in the everyday practices of NTRs. We made use of Starratt's tripartite model of ethical leadership to thematically code the rich descriptions into three categories: ethic of justice, ethic of care and ethic of critique.

Our analysis of interviews with NTRs highlighted practices aligning with Starratt's (1991, 1996) model of ethical leadership. The most frequently cited practices included management behaviours focused on creating a fair and equitable work environment, such as those linked with Starratt's ethic of justice. Examples of managers engaging in critiques of dominant discourses and systemic boundaries that shape the experiences of NTRs, however, were rarely offered. Our analysis examines the texts which managers in higher education have to guide them and explores how the texts that are activated become less transparent and accessible as we consider different elements of the ethical leadership framework.

The everyday experiences of non-tenured researchers negotiating (un-)ethical leadership

The NTRs interviewed reported a wide variety of social relationships and experiences that were highly influential in their work and lives. A common thread throughout these interviews, however, was the role of their managers, typically lead researchers of the projects

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on which they were employed. Given the 'relative paucity' (Deem 2006) of training for managers, it is unsurprising that NTRs' experiences of management were characterised by diversity, even within the same institutions. Starting with the everyday experiences of these NTRs, our analysis highlighted a hierarchy of ethical leadership practices as we uncovered their accounts of the institutional texts activated by their managers (Smith 1987).

Ethic of justice

Managers are often focussed on attending to mandatory conditions of employment as inscribed in key texts such as labour laws and institutional policies. Employment processes provide a form of 'textually-mediated social interaction' (Campbell and Gregor 2002, 29), whereby texts such as national legal requirements and employment contracts transform the actualities of employment into 'standardised, generalised, and, especially translocal forms of coordinating people's activities' (Smith 2005, 101). In institutional ethnographic terms, local employment of contract researchers is orchestrated by a range of texts that coordinate the actions and practices of managers across multiple sites, creating a regime of institutional governance.

Starratt (1991, 1996) argued that an ethic of justice is built on democratic principles and the concept of 'fairness'. The NTRs who we interviewed indicated their managers adhered to this principle of 'fairness' through institutional process-driven, textually-mediated (Smith 2005) practices including ensuring contracts were signed and processed, timesheets were approved, staff logins were acquired, and so on. Given the financial insecurity experienced by many contract researchers, these processes were critical in their experience of employment (Broadbent and Strachan 2016).

The unstructured nature of insecure academic work means there are few textually-authorised requirements in comparison to the formal protections afforded to tenured

academics. The lack of textual protection means that when managers do not exhibit an ethic of justice, NTRs are particularly vulnerable. Jill illustrates this:

> [On a 12-month contract] you get paid for those holidays and Christmas, and you get 17 and a half percent super[1]! But now, he's cottoned on to that, so [my manager would] only give me 11-month contracts. I finish on the 19th of December and come back at the end of January. The thing is he thinks that, "Oh, well, we're gonna be closed then."

Jill's manager reduced her contract term without considering how this period of unemployment would affect Jill. Jill's experience demonstrates one way in which neoliberal industrial policies have enabled budgets to become prioritised ahead of people. It is possible that this decision was taken by the manager with a view to meeting budgetary goals; being ethical in respect to the use of public funding for research. It is further possible that this manager is not aware that this break in employment could have significant financial implications for Jill, where for most academics in ongoing positions, this time could be taken as paid leave. While it may not be legally problematic to use contracts that are shorter than 12 months, it is a questionable practice in terms of the ethic of justice.

The lack of institutional guidance or policies around employment practices means that the experiences of NTRs may be invisible to managing academics. For instance, Amelia explained a situation where an academic who had employed her on a hourly-paid contract during the year,

> [they] said, "I'm away now and I'm taking time off, so I'm not going to need you till the end of next February," and I was going, "Well, that's just

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[1] 'Super' refers to superannuation. Superannuation in Australia refers to the system where employees and employers set aside money that accumulates and funds retirement.

fantastic… three months off …" You know… th're's probably nobody

nicer than her to work with… she's just gorgeous, you know?

While Amelia described a strong positive working relationship with her manager, which she wished to continue, she explained that she was left without any paid employment during this period of leave. Academics managing research projects may be oriented towards the textual demands of their own projects, including managing budgets and performance indicators. In this way, institutional texts, including fixed-term and casual contracts and the performance expectations of permanently employed academics, textually mediate the work and everyday lives of all academics, including NTRs. These targets, however, are unlikely to include any expectations around the management of research staff (Tilbury 2007). Managers who engaged with the embodied experiences of contract researchers, and adopted an ethic of justice (often in small ways) were frequently praised by NTRs, like Jill who reported:

I know it's only two days a week, but always the contract came... [the]

renewal came well in advance of the other one expiring.

Jill was not alone in expressing her appreciation for managers who ensured that employment contracts were in place before work commenced or before the current contract ended. In contrast, our participants also reported that practices such as reducing hours and scheduling contracts around project demands were common. Many indicated that they did not receive employment contracts until they had completed a substantial proportion of their work hours. The reports of NTRs suggest a worrying trend where minimum compliance with employment relations and conditions is seen to represent a relatively high standard of management. The situated realities of their employment, and lives beyond, were often invisible even, as Amelia described it, to 'nice' and 'gorgeous' managers.

Some of the participants outlined situations where they felt there had been a lack of justice in terms of recognising their contributions to research. An ethic of justice includes fairness in ensuring that opportunities and resources, such as opportunities for future employment through meeting institutional requirementsor authoring papers are provided (Starratt 1996). Being named on papers that they had co-authored was considered surprising by some of the interviewed NTRs, as they expressed that it was not always the case to be named when they had contributed to writing. When offered, the attribution of authorship, however, could raise other issues in terms of the order in which co-authors of publications were acknowledged. Some NTRs provided examples where lead authorship was given to more senior tenured academics, some of whom had not provided substantial contribution to writing or the intellectual development of publications. Riley said:

> I only get a bit cross in the authorship stakes if … others are listed as authors and they've made no substantial contribution whatsoever…
> They're listed before me and I'm listed like last when I've done most of the work. That really annoys me.

Similarly, Emma said that research she conducted for a manager was later used for a successful grant application, "that I didn't get a job on". Laura described a lack of transparency in hiring practices at her research centre, saying that new jobs that are advertised and filled externally "are a surprise to us every single time".

Later in the interview,Laura described an instance where she refused to collect data without first obtaining consent from her research participants, while a colleague decided to remain quiet and follow the directions of the manager. Laura said:

> [My colleague] was the one who got her name put on; who got invited to participate on those publications and ongoing work with [the manager]. So

she's getting… it's almost like a promotion, while I get shut out. And part

of me thinks, well fine, because I don't want to work with someone who's

unethical; but it's cost me.

At the 'tenuous periphery' (Kimber 2003), NTRs are placed in unequal power relationships where they feel they have very little choice but to conform to the dominant institutional norms. Opaque and informal hiring practices and the use of NTRs' intellectual contributions to further the careers of others were just some examples that illustrate the culturally normative behaviour of academia in which NTRs felt they had little option but to allow these practices to continue.

With an ethic of justice understood as 'individual choices to act justly' (Starrat 1991, 163), the above extracts provide illustrations of some behaviours that may be considered (un)just. With a system built on networking as a means for gaining further work (Spina et al. 2020), like Laura, NTRs often felt they had to choose boundaries for what they perceived to be questionable practices of their managers. While there are established guidelines for determining authorship, our interview data suggests that these texts might not always be followed or considered by the managers of NTRs. In comparison to regulatory texts such as employment laws, texts like the Vancouver Convention (http://www.icmje.org/icmje-recommendations.pdf) were not invoked. Given that there is little oversight of those who manage NTRs, this finding is concerning and suggests that institutional attention to such conventions might be useful for those in management positions.

Ethic of care

An ethic of care is built on a belief in human dignity that 'requires fidelity to persons, a willingness to acknowledge their right to be who they are, an openness to encountering

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them in their authentic individuality, a loyalty to relationship' (Starratt 1996, 163). Social

relations are at the heart of care ethics, guiding practice and shaping everyday realities. While

we do not suggest that it is the case for all managerial relationships, our research found many

examples among our participants where strong, caring relationships had been established

between managers and NTRs.

Often care-related practices led to important outcomes that changed the subjectivities,

everyday realities and trajectories of contract researchers. These practices can be described

broadly as 'capacity-building', comprising three main elements: building the skills and

publications of NTRs, networking, and mentoring. For instance, Stacey said:

> Actually [my manager] has been quite a mentoring role, she has been very
>
> supportive and, kind of I guess, helping me to build connections as well
>
> that she thought might lead towards other grants. I think she's been
>
> basically supportive.

Collaboration on grants or research papers were important for NTRs, and typically only

accessible when their managers afforded opportunities for them to be (and feel) part of a

research community. Opportunities for co-authorship, professional development and grants

were highly valued, although when these occurred, they were often accompanied by a sense

of surprise. One possible explanation for this sense of surprise is that institutional policies

and processes do not require academic managers to undertake supportive, mentoring roles.

The time pressure experienced by many academics, both in ongoing and precarious

employment, means that the level of support offered by these managers are viewed as

generously going beyond the required managerial relationships in ways that are not always

recognised or rewarded by the institution.

Caring managers were often described as those who took opportunities to talk to

NTRs to learn about their career goals and research interests. These managers often provided

opportunities for contract researchers to extend their knowledge or build their resume. To illustrate, we draw on Sandra's experience:

> They're so generous with their knowledge and their time, so when I applied for some funding to do my own project, they were really supportive of that and gave me lots of advice. Really, really nice because they're really busy people but they always make time for that, which is lovely, I think.

This support is characterised by Sandra as the generosity and care of individual managers. Her response supports the notion that the provision of time, knowledge and advice is not viewed as a necessary component of the managerial role. Rather, spending time to develop the capacity of a more junior researcher in precarious employment is considered an unexpected positive attribute of the individuals involved, who are referred to as 'generous' and 'supportive'. This discourse was common across our dataset and suggests that activities grounded in an ethic of care - i.e. sharing of knowledge and resources, an interest in researchers' trajectories and so forth – was important but could not be taken-for-granted. Managers demonstrating an ethic of care was viewed as an individual act of generosity and kindness.

The lack of this ethic of care between managers and contract researchers left many feeling unsupported and vulnerable. For example, some researchers experienced far more distant relationships with their academic managers, which resulted in them being left without clear instructions about institutional policies or even what work they should be doing. Felix said:

> I keep getting emails from HR asking me about putting together things with my supervisor. I'm like, "I can't, I don't know..." Someone said to me at

the end of last week, "So what have they got you doing?" I'm like, "Who's

'they'? What do you mean?". No one's really come and spoken to me yet.

Rachel similarly described a project led by a manager as toxic, saying that some days she felt:

I'd probably rather jump in front of a bus than get on it to come to work.

Terrible. It's horrible. I can remember catching the bus to work some days

thinking, "Gee, I wish we'd crash".

These experiences were not only isolating, they were also reflective of the modern neoliberal university in which individualisation has become commonplace, and social relations are organised by textually-mediated institutional expectations. Any management practice that has a collective focus is considered to be 'above and beyond' (Rawlins, Hansen and Jorgensen 2011).

Dominant discourses in the neoliberal university comprise notions of individualisation and competition (Hey 2001). Within these discourses, NTRs are positioned as the 'other', who must engage in competition and adopt the risks of precarious employment. Perhaps reflective of individualising policies, reports of "backstabbing" were common, including practices that used NTRs' work to advance one's own career with limited or no acknowledgement. Managers who worked against these ideals of individualisation and acted with an ethic of care were considered to be doing so outside of institutional norms. This is reflective, perhaps, of the lack of guiding texts which managers can 'activate' to undertake in management roles. Texts that managers can access are usually focused on employment practices, such as employment laws, rather than on social relations which are at the basis of an ethic of care.

Ethic of critique

An ethic of critique involves an understanding of power relations within dominant discourses and how these privilege certain groups and create groups of 'others'. In practice, an ethic of critique means managers speaking out against unfair policies which create exclusionary practices for NTRs. Our research suggests that despite the precarity faced by NTRs, their managers did not often seek to mitigate risks for them. As this research has examined the perspectives of NTRs, we cannot say that managers did not undertake activism in ways that were not observed by those in their employ. The overwhelming majority of NTRs in this research, however, reported that they had not experienced managers engaging in activism to improve the employment conditions of precariously employed workers. We recognise that both tenured and non-tenured staff are subject to power relations in universities and it can be difficult for managers to find effective ways of pushing back against the prevailing discourses within their institution's policies and practices.

One systemic issue discussed by NTRs was specific rules regarding who could and couldn't be assigned a lead role, or at times a role at all, on a funded project. For example,

> [There was] a grant bid which was bigger and I put a lot more work into it
> [than others on the team]. [When we got the grant], I tried to be the PI
> [Principal Investigator] for it, and I was told I wasn't allowed to. I was only
> allowed to be a co-invesitgator. And then it went from bad to worse, my
> time got reduced on it because all the permanent people on the bid – nine
> out of ten – there's a way of costing them. Because my time's fixed I was
> becoming too expensive, so my time got reduced massively so I'm doing
> the least out of everyone (Neil)

In this scenario, translocal policies prevented Neil from being named as lead investigator on the project, despite Neil providing a large contribution to the formation of the grant. In

another example, Emma was excluded from a funded project due to the budget not being sufficient to accommodate NTRs who hold a PhD:

> It was actually quite annoying… when your supervisor gets an ARC [Australian Research Council grant] that is roughly in your area, you are like, "YES!" Then they ended up with not enough money to employ people with PhD's! So all the research work went to people who had not yet finished the PhD. Which was really like "Oh! Ugh!" Very annoying.

Invoking Smith (2005), we see that the guiding text for managers in this scenario is the allocated research personnel budget. This text is central to the regulation of fixed-term and casual research employment contracts. An ethic of critique 'reveals that the organisation in its present forms is a source of unethical consequences' (Starratt 1991, 190). Industrial agreements typically specify a higher pay scale for contract researchers who have completed a PhD. In this case, Emma was not hired due to the extra cost associated with her qualification. Her example illustrates the authority of budgets as a key institutional text that mediate and coordinate social relations (Smith 2005). This process also signifies the current limits of the management of researchers, which make it possible for tenured academics to make *ad hoc* decisions regarding their own projects, without *having to* consider the impacts of this upon the NTRs they employ. There is limited guidance available for managers, who seek to challenge dominant discourses of NTRs as 'other' or 'disposable commodities' and support the ongoing employment and capacity building of academics. We did not encounter any examples in our interview data describing managers practising in an ethic of critique. This is not to say that managers *didn't* engage in practices critical of university employment policies. If this occurred, however, their practices did not feature strongly in the experiences described by NTRs.

Discussion

Researchers who secure funding and lecturers teaching large courses frequently seek support from those employed on a contract basis. Many find themselves with responsibilities to manage NTRs and sessional staff without prior experience (Percy et al. 2008) or any prior aspiration to engage in management practices (Tilbury 2007). While managers play a critical role in shaping the experiences of those they employ, the literature reports they are provided with limited training (Nadolny and Ryan 2015; Qualter and Willis 2012). There is wide variation across faculties and institutions, however, training is often limited to statutory or practical requirements, including anti-discrimination legislation or managing pay claims (Baik, Naylor and Corrin 2018).

Descriptions of everyday experiences of ethical leadership of NTRs are characterised by a diverse and sometimes unsettling set of management practices. Many interviewees within this study ascribed unethical behaviour by their managers to culturally normative behaviour, as the 'way things are done' within the institution. In contrast, the ethical leadership practices of some managers were praised and they were considered 'good' managers – yet the benchmark against which managerial conduct was judged in these cases was often very low. The limitations of training and support for managers and the activation of specific institutional texts, including policies and processes, offer some rationale for the differing characterisations of management practices. Our interview extracts provide an illustration of ethical, supportive management practices within academia that are 'notable' in the descriptions of the everyday experiences of NTRs.

Within the neoliberal university context, minimum requirements unsurprisingly define the expectations for some managers. The application of Smith's sociological approach to interviews for this study has highlighted how textually-based practices mediate and shape the ethical practices of managers. Aspects of ethical leadership, particularly in terms of the ethic

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of justice, are driven by 'boss texts' that authorise particular actions by managers. These 'boss texts' are largely related to employment practices and are mediated by texts such as anti-discrimination legislation, employment contracts and salary scales. The majority of ethical practices described in these interviews can be characterised as aligning with the ethic of justice, in which employment principles around just and equitable treatment are applied to the management of NTRs. This is not to say that we did not hear multiple stories in which precariously employed academics had been subject to unjust treatment, for instance, not being paid on time, or not having signed employment contracts.

Imbued in the talk of the contract researchers was the reality that tenured academics' work is increasingly organised through a focus on achieving specific key performance indicators or targets. The focus on such texts coordinates relations between tenured and non-tenured academics. Working under managers who have not adopted an ethic of care in managing these relations typically meant NTRs found themselves in a vulnerable position as they sought to build the academic capital needed to maintain continuous employment. However, as described above, there were instances in which tenured academics had adopted an ethical stance in which they attended to both the short and long term needs of NTRs. While relations of rule were focussed on meeting KPIs, individuals used their agency to work outside of textual realities, for instance by offering co-authorship opportunities, advocating for ongoing employment, funding professional development and so on. This work is likely to be invisible to universities, as it is not evident in textually-produced versions of how academic work is constituted. As a result, the NTRs interviewed as part of this study who experienced managers that engaged in practices aligned with the ethic of care generally ascribed these behaviours to individual generosity and kindness.

Finally, we found little evidence of an ethic of critique where tenured academics might challenge dominant discourses and institutional structures that negatively impact the careers

of NTRs. We suggest that while tenured academics may feel prepared to operate outside of textually-mediated relations to undertake caring work on an individual basis, they may not feel that they are in a position to question existing structures and ruling relations. Indeed, many tenured academics may have lived through significant periods of unstable employment themselves, and therefore be highly aware of the dangers of precarity. Remaining silent about policies and discourses that disadvantage and exclude NTRs may be a means of safeguarding their own employment in unstable times. While 'caring for' NTRs can be undertaken informally by managers, formal acknowledgement of institutional structures that limit their ability to engage in the ethic of care is required to disrupt dominant discourses and engage with the ethic of critique. This individualisation of risk and responsibility is precisely the outcome to which neoliberal regimes are oriented.

The relationship between managers and NTRs is a crucial point of focus because of the increasing divide between the tenured 'core' and the precarious 'periphery' (Kimber 2003). This divide is operationalised by a split labour market in which the core is recruited and employed in respect to formal standards, while the periphery must learn to negotiate a variety of informal means to gain and maintain employment. Furthermore, the informal nature of the casual job market means that administrators and core academics can make hire and fire decisions for which there are no formal obligations regarding the inclusion of the peripheral academic. For these reasons, Mauri (2019, 186) refers to core academics as 'proxy-employers' upon whom the 'reserve army' of casual labour depend for employment. This position of mediation between informal and formal economies invests core academics with great power. Just as employers have a duty of care to their employees so core academics have a duty of care to their casual staff. Yet in the relative absence of formal standards and texts according to which such a duty might be discharged, this becomes a matter of ethics.

References

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Appendix

Name	Age (approx)	Countries	Institutions worked for	Length of time in research
Amelia	40s	Australia and New Zealand	Universities; research institutes	10+
Amy	40s	Australia and United States of America	Universities; think tanks	10+
Ashley	20s	Australia	Universities	5-10
Billie	30s	Australia and United States of America	Universities	5-10
Blake	20s	Australia	Universities; research institutes	0-5
Stacey	30s	United Kingdom	Universities	0-5
Charles	50s	Australia	Universities; community organisations	10+
Chris	40s	Australia	Universities; community groups	5-10
Elaine	30s	Australia and United States of America	Universities	10+
Ethan	30s	Australia	Universities; community organisations	5-10
Emma	40s	Australia	Universities; community groups	10+
Jill	50s	Australia	Universities; research institutes	5-10
Jordan	30s	Australia	Universities; government research centre	0-5
Julia	40s	United Kingdom	Universities	10+
Kathy	30s	Australia and United States of America	Australian and American universities	6-10
Laura	30s	Australia	Universities; government research centre	10+
Neil	40s	United Kingdom	Universities	10+
Penny	40s	New Zealand and Australia	Universities; research institutes	10+
Rachel	30s	Australia	Universities; hospitals; research institutes	10+
Riley	30s	Australia	Universities	0-5
Sandra	30s	Australia and Canada	Universities; government research centre; hospitals	5-10
Sam	30s	Australia	Universities	5-10
Felix	50s	Australia	Universities	0-5
Taylor	30s	United Kingdom	Universities	0-5