Psychology education and the neoliberal episteme in Australia

Abstract

This paper investigates some of the ways in which neoliberalism and mainstream psychology intersect to maintain a dominant episteme in psychology education within the Australian context. It is argued that the ubiquity and logic of neoliberalism and the philosophical inclination of mainstream psychology create a 'culture of positivism' and epistemic deceit within psychology education. Some of the features of psychology as it has developed in Australia is offered to more clearly define what mainstream psychology is, before explicating the current regulatory, political and economic forces shaping psychology education and the neoliberal university. The paper concludes by outlining some of the consequences for a psychology education system that does not interrogate the origins of epistemic power and proposes that a greater focus on epistemological ethics and historical-hermeneutic elements in psychology education may offer some resistance to the neoliberal episteme.

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Introduction

Analyses of neoliberalism that lean too heavily toward notions of hegemonic control, risk being unsupported by the ways in which it lands differently in specific contexts. Equally, critiques that lean entirely toward the contextual specificities, raise questions about the validity of neoliberalism as an analytic construct. Peck, Brenner and Theodore (2018) suggest neoliberalism can be separated into, neoliberalism as ideology, and 'actually existing neoliberalism'. Actually existing refers to the "contextually embedded, institutionally grounded" nature of neoliberal transformations (Peck, Brenner, & Theodore, 2018, p. 10). This conception of neoliberalism recognizes that processes of neoliberalisation are contradictory, ongoing, incomplete and uneven but ultimately seeks to identify the change process rather than simply the outcomes (Peck et al., 2018). These contextually embedded processes are however informed by the dominant ideologies of neoliberalism, chiefly those centred around the idea that economic markets are the potential source of human flourishing (Harvey, 2005). But as noted by Cosgrove and Karter (2018) the market under neoliberalism is not simply an economic well to be drawn upon "but is in effect an epistemological machine that produces new modes of subjectivity" (p. 670). Seeing neoliberalism as a range of systems and processes rather than as a singular economic imperative is key to the analysis here, and that the epistemological machine not only produces new modes of subjectivity but also favours certain ways of producing and maintaining knowledge. This paper seeks to investigate both neoliberalism as ideology, and as actually existing in relation to psychology education and training in Australia.

This paper concurs with Adams, Estrada-Villalta, Sullivan, and Markus (2019) that while "psychological science is far from monolithic. The relationship with neoliberalism may be more precisely evident for hegemonic forms of psychological science" (p. 190). Similarly, psychology education is not monolithic, and thus reference to the term mainstream

psychology herein is intended to reflect the psychological knowledge that is most dominant in the education setting, one that is shaped by a particular episteme. Here episteme is defined as “the 'apparatus' which makes possible the separation, not of the true from the false, but of what may from what may not be characterised as scientific” (Foucault & Gordon, 1980, p. 197).

The concerns around the dominance of mainstream psychology is evident in the work of critical psychologists both here in Australia and internationally (see Coimbra et al., 2012; Fox & Fryer, 2018; Kagan, Burton, Duckett, Lawthom, & Siddiquee, 2011; Parker, 2007; Sloan, 2000; Teo, 2009). Critical psychologists have outlined the ways in which mainstream psychology has historically been a cultural product and producer within western capitalism (see Kagan et al., 2011; Ratner, 2014; Roberts, 2015) and more specifically neoliberal capitalism (Ratner, 2019; Sugarman, 2015; Teo, 2018). There is ample evidence to suggest that psychology and psychological knowledge has played an integral role in the production of neoliberal subjectivities, and that neoliberal ideologies have played a role in the shaping of psychological knowledge (Adams et al., 2019; Binkley, 2014; Rose, 1996; Rutherford, 2018; Sugarman, 2015). This dynamic relationship of neoliberal production is self-reinforcing and some of the normalizing and socializing of these neoliberal forms of subjectivity occurs via hegemonic forms of psychological science that are maintained within higher education (Adams et al., 2019; Breen & Darlaston-Jones, 2010).

The impacts of neoliberal ideology has affected higher education systems in a number of ways; ways that are related to the management and marketisation of courses in general, but also to the ways in which these market-focused ideologies favour certain epistemic traditions (Abendroth & Porfilio, 2015; Adam, 2012; Connell, 2013). In addition, the neoliberal university posits students as customers who are replete with choices about their futures, and higher education staff are increasingly required to deliver satisfaction to customers

(Abendroth & Porfilio, 2015; Marginson, 2002; Sellar, 2013). This is further complicated in the Australian context where more than half of universities revenue comes from government grants or the government funded student loan scheme (Norton, Cherastidtham, & Grattan Institute, 2018). And while universities in Australia see themselves as self-governing communities and education ministers have no immediate operational control, federal regulation occurs via conditions on grants, which is currently declining (Norton et al., 2018).

Informed by a social-constructionist perspective, this paper is led by critical psychology approaches both specific and general (Teo, 2009). General in that it seeks to provide critical evaluation of mainstream psychology education's subject matter, methodology, and praxis (Teo, 2009). Specific in that it also seeks to critically evaluate some of the "ethical-political dimensions of praxis" (Teo, 2009, p. 37). It should also be stated that there are multiple conceptions of critical psychology and that an amount of intellectual debt is owed to academics and researchers from global south who fostered many of the ideas which engendered a critical psychology to focus on "transforming the discipline of psychology in order to promote emancipation in society" (Sloan, Austin, & Warner, 2006, p. 42).

This paper is an investigation of some of the factors within the Australian context that preserve a mainstream psychology episteme within psychology education. It is argued that the ubiquity and logic of neoliberalism and the philosophical inclination of mainstream psychology make it difficult for psychology education to avoid the tendencies of neoliberalism. The paper will outline some of the historical features of psychology as it has developed in Australia. It will then consider some of the ways in which mechanisms of neoliberalism have been conceptualised, both generally and relating to higher education. Lastly, the paper will knit together some examples of the intersections of actually existing neoliberalism in psychology education in Australia and its dangers. It will conclude with

some ways of reconceiving psychology education so that it may be liberated from the neoliberal episteme.

Early Intellectual Streams in Australian Psychology

In 1893 Henry Laurie, the chair of Mental and Moral Philosophy at Melbourne University gave an address to the newly founded Mental Science and Education Section of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science in which he defined Psychology as "the science of the facts of mind'' and described it as "like other natural sciences" (Taft, 1982, p. 31). It has been noted that there were two intellectual streams from Britain that provided the roots for the growth of psychology in Australia (Taft, 1982). The first was around the mid-century philosophies of John Stuart Mill and Alexander Bain (Taft, 1982). Mill was a utilitarian, a liberal, and a naturalist, and his work explored the consequences of a thoroughgoing empiricist outlook (Macleod, 2018). Mill claimed that human beings and their minds are inseparable from nature, and as such, they are subject to the same causal laws as the rest of the natural world (Macleod, 2018). An associate and friend of Mill, Bain was interested in establishing empirical laws with respect to the contents of the human mind and anti-metaphysical inclinations led him to push method in a much more strongly empirical direction (Graham, 2002). The second intellectual stream was one focused on such thinkers as Darwin, Spencer, Galton and saw the beginning of a long held desire for psychology to be positioned amongst biological sciences and medicine (Taft, 1982).

The convergence of these two intellectual streams can be seen in the work of three of Australia's most influential psychologists. Bernard Muscio was a graduate in Philosophy in Sydney and who studied psychology at Cambridge (Taft, 1982). His lectures on Industrial Psychology delivered in 1916, the first of their kind in making the case for the "application of 'the science of psychology' not only to industry, but also to Education (e.g. factors affecting learning), Law (e.g. punishment testimony) and Medicine (e.g. psychosomatic factors in

illness, ‘lunacy’, psychoanalysis)” (Taft, 1982, p. 32). Elton Mayo who trained in both philosophy and psychology in Adelaide and became a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Queensland, and practised clinical psychology after World War I (Taft, 1982). His fieldwork and research went on to gain international recognition and was instrumental in the emerging field of industrial and organisational psychology (Trahair & Zaleznik, 2005). The final psychologist of note was Stanley Porteus who studied at Melbourne University and in 1916 was awarded a research scholarship to work in the department of anatomy on brain size and intelligence (Day, 1988). Porteus became widely known for his development of the Maze Test, a non-verbal intelligence and temperament test that was devised to identify “feeble-mindedness” in children, and one which his Melbourne clinic used for “subnormal and maladjusted children” (Taft, 1982, p. 32). His most notorious publication is *Temperament and Race* (Porteus & Babcock, 1926) in which he sought to develop biologically determined relationships between race, intelligence and a range of characteristics that fell under the ill-defined concept of temperament.

Legislating Against Pseudo-Psychology

One of the defining moments for psychology within Australia was in the state of Victoria wherein 1965 the Psychological Practices Act was passed by the state government (Cooke, 2000). This legislation was fuelled by a growing concern for pseudo-psychological practices, particularly those of scientology. In 1963, the Board of Inquiry into Scientology was founded. The one-man board of inquiry led by QC Kevin Anderson asserted that “Scientology is evil; its techniques evil; its practice a serious threat to the community, morally and socially” and his desire was that the inquiry would lead to the banning of scientology in Australia (Anderson, 1965, p. 1). The concerns about the transgressions of scientology into the realm of psychology represented a broader concern the profession had about ‘fringe practices’ and ‘fringe organisations’ (Cooke, 2000). In his report Anderson

recommended that provisions to protect psychology needed to be stronger than even those governing medicine in order to "curb the emergence of a class of unqualified pseudo-psychologists of whom scientologists are the prime examples" and that "in order to adequately control the practice of psychology, the board considers that measures of a regulatory and economic nature are necessary" (Anderson, 1965, p. 170).

The attack on scientology was about defining and legitimizing psychology in the process: "Of prime importance in any system of registration would be the meaning to be given to the word 'psychology'. It would need to be defined in terms which ensured that scientology techniques came under control" (Anderson, 1965, p. 171). The passing of the Psychological Practices Act was not unanimously endorsed by all psychologists at the time and was seen to have unfavourable consequences such as the loss of professional authority over the defining of psychology (Cooke, 2000).

An Industry of Applied Psychology

One of the central features of psychology that emerged in the first half of the 20th century in Australia was an interest in practical applications (Bucklow, 1976; Taft, 1982). Some have claimed that these more applied versions of psychology arose after it was deemed that psychology was overly focused on epistemology (Bucklow, 1976; Taft & Nixon, 1976). By the early 1900s psychological knowledge was being applied in education and medicine, and the 1920s and 30s "saw spectacular developments in the application of psychology to problems of education, mental retardation and other guidance and clinical problems in children" (Taft, 1982, p. 35). The application of psychological and psychometric testing in education became a cornerstone for the development of psychology in Australia, and a way for the relatively new science to strengthen its legitimacy as an applied discipline (Wright, 2011).

It was after World War I that psychology also became increasingly used to assist in vocational guidance and counselling for children in schools (Bucklow, 1976). 1927 saw the establishment in Sydney of the Australian Institute of Industrial Psychology a centre which saw the development of psychological assessments including "physical assessments, biographical, school and parents' reports, and interviews with the child and parent" aimed at vocational guidance (Bucklow, 1976, p. 25). The work of the institute "laid a very sound foundation of psychological practice which, with some modifications, was adopted by the Armed Services during the War and which has since become the dominant feature of vocational guidance in Australia" (Clark, 1958, as cited in Bucklow, 1976, p. 25).

World War II saw a great acceleration of applied psychology in the area of Australian industry, mainly due to the increased number of workers required for expanding munitions and other industries (Bucklow, 1976). Many of the workers were young women entering the workforce for the first time and the government saw a need to control the supply of labor, so established a division which employed 12 psychologists to "work on a program to select and place women process workers for the expanding munitions factories. Programs were later developed for canteen managers, apprentices, industrial welfare officers and other types of workers. This represented the first large-scale use of tests in a wide range of occupations in Australian industry" (Bucklow, 1976, p. 27).

Disciplining the Discipline: Psychology and Higher Education Today

All psychology undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Australia must be accredited by the Australian Psychology Accreditation Council (APAC) (Australian Psychological Accreditation Council, 2019a). The main function of this body is to develop standards around the education and training of psychologists for approval by the Psychology Board of Australia. While they do not provide accreditation for individual units of study, nor recommendations for study or program design, they do publish accreditation standards and

conduct ongoing audits and site visits to ensure standards are being met. Under the domain of 'Program of study' the standards state, "Psychology as a science-based discipline using an evidence-based approach and a coherent educational pedagogy informs the documented program design and delivery" (Australian Psychological Accreditation Council, 2019b, p. 9). Listed under the foundational graduate competencies are the topics which need to make up the "coherent body of knowledge" that students will be able to apply using a "scientific approach" such as: individual differences, psychological health, psychological disorders and evidence-based interventions, learning and memory, cognition, language and perception, motivation and emotion, neuroscience and the biological bases of behaviour, lifespan developmental psychology, social psychology, culturally appropriate psychological assessment and measurement, research methods and statistics (Australian Psychological Accreditation Council, 2019b, p. 11).

There is mention in the standards of the need for "cultural responsiveness" as a learning outcome and that graduates should be able to comprehend and apply "the history and philosophy underpinning the science of psychology and the social, cultural, historical and professional influences on the practice of psychology" (Australian Psychological Accreditation Council, 2019b, p. 11). But as others have noted, this version of history and philosophy of psychology is rarely more than a timeline of the male protagonists and their theories from the past rather than a truly critical engagement with psychology and its epistemic foundations (Harris, 2009; Craig, Newnes & Golding, 2018).

In Australia there are approximately 365 accredited undergraduate psychology programs (including honours level) and at the post-graduate level there are 122 different programs, and of those, 84 are designated as clinical psychology in their focus (Australian Psychology Accreditation Council 2019a). Although clinical psychology is defined in various ways, the two main membership organisations in Australia describe clinical psychologists as

having “expertise in the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of psychological problems and mental illness” (Australian Psychological Society, 2019), and that “clinical psychology is a science-based profession that integrates theory and clinical practice to understand, prevent, and relieve psychological problems or disorders whether they are mild, moderate, severe, chronic, or complex” (Australian Clinical Psychology Association, 2019).

A desktop review was undertaken of the five largest universities in Australia (by total student numbers, ranging from approximately 41,000 to 59,000, Department of Education, 2019)and the accredited undergraduate and postgraduate psychology course content. While this review is not a complete summary of psychology education in Australia, it does point to a discipline which continues to be focussed very much on being clinically applied. Research profiling the training and education of Australian psychologists confirms postgraduate training is largely mainstream psychology in focus and the greatest number of Masters or Doctorate places being made available to students is in Clinical Psychology (Grenyer, Mathews, Stokes, & Crea, 2010).

The review also found that most undergraduate courses do not offer a breadth of epistemologies or methodologies as a part of their core subjects. This was found in subjects directly related to research methods, but also within other core psychology subjects. For instance, with a few exceptions (see Fox & Fryer, 2018; Fox, Nic Giolla Easpaig, & Watson, 2019), qualitative methodologies were not a part of the core subjects for undergraduate psychology training. This epistemic dominance has been noted in previous research, including calls for the governing bodies of the discipline to more explicitly address the “enduring hegemony of positivism” so that psychology can “genuinely understand the antecedents of, and provide meaningful sustainable solutions for, complex human issues” (Breen & Darlaston-Jones, 2010, p. 67).

The concern around the dominance of certain orientations has been voiced by the ruling membership organisation the Australian Psychological Society whose executive director at the time lamented there have been, "unintended consequences" to Australian psychology education becoming so dominated by mainstream clinical psychology, and it has been "at the expense of other programs, which has resulted in the closure of non-clinical postgraduate psychology programs" (Littlefield, 2017, p. 8).

The dominance of a mainstream clinical psychology may also be explained by the way in which psychological services are co-funded by the government health care system (Medicare). As a part of Medicare, the Better Access scheme was implemented in 2006 and it enables clients on a mental health plan to claim rebates from Medicare (Parliament of Australia, 2011). Currently, rebates for psychological services offered by a registered clinical psychologist is $124.50AUD whilst for psychologists registered as generalist, it is $84.80AUD (Parliament of Australia, 2011). This has created a two-tiered system which prioritises clinical psychological knowledge and practice as only certain modalities are registered as items in the scheme. This two tiered system has shaped a hierarchy of psychological knowledge in Australia, with clinical mainstream perceived as the most psychological, and the most employable.

Evidence in this context would suggest there is a strong relationship between mainstream and clinical psychology. But perhaps a more accurate assessment would be that mainstream psychology is synonymous with utilitarian thinking (Adams et al., 2019). And that behind the dominance of mainstream, clinical psychology is what Fowers (2010) calls a "quest for effectiveness" an orientation that has been a "ubiquitous and driving aim in psychology" (p. 102). This quest has emphasized a range of methods and strategies that can result in desired effects and "serves the societal and professional project of maximizing control and mastery" (Fowers, 2010, p. 102). This singular focus on effectiveness can be

thought of as means-ends or instrumental rationality and has dominated research, practice, and training discourse within psychology (Fowers, 2010). As the dominant metatheoretical assumption it is rarely stated explicitly and thus it tends to remain almost invisible, as are the positivistic assumptions often underpinning it (Fowers, 2010).

A Culture of Positivism

The term positivism can often become a stand-in for a range of concerns and issues around mainstream psychology but may not offer enough conceptual clarity alone. And while there has been no doubt of its historical emergence (Bailey & Eastman, 1994; Teo, 2005) and its shaping of psychology (Michell, 2003), others have cautioned against its use as a catch-all critique of mainstream psychology (Martin, 2003). Positivism, as defined here, is the philosophical position which understands reality as external, objective and measurable and one that can be captured by natural-scientific, empirical-statistical methodologies (Fox, Prilleltensky, & Austin, 2009). Positivism proposes that through context-free generalisations the true causal nature of human behaviours can be known (Fox, Prilleltensky, & Austin, 2009). Mitchell (2003) suggests that these characterisations of positivism are too blunt, and perhaps what is being described is more akin to what he calls the 'quantitative imperative' one which does not necessarily belong to the positivist position.

The concerns about the reductive nature of positivistic orientations are by no means new. In their seminal work *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Adorno and Horkheimer embarked on a critical assessment of modernity and a "critique of historical progress and civilisatory rationality that they call the critique of instrumental reason" (Grumley, 2019, p. 72). Their overarching argument was that the civilisatory process has produced a dangerous imbalance between the reflective and instrumental aspects of rationality that were perceived originally as a unity (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1947/2016). In it they offer a searing assessment of positivism, "The blindness and dumbness of the data to which positivism reduces the world

pass over into language itself, which restricts itself to recording those data" (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1947/2016, p. 196). It has however been argued that their assessment of society although insightful was excessively one-sided, pessimistic and did not account for the possibilities for resistance and change (Grumley, 2019).

In terms of mainstream psychology, maybe positivism does not strictly represent the philosophical category as it historically understood, and this lack of conceptual clarity may be part of the elusiveness which enables it to flourish. Giroux (2011) makes the distinction between the specific philosophic movement of positivism and a form of cultural hegemony, the culture of positivism (Giroux, 2011). He suggests that this is an important distinction as it "shifts the focus of debate about the tenets of positivism from the terrain of philosophy to the field of ideology" (Giroux, 1997, p. 9). For Giroux (2011) the biggest concern from a critical pedagogy perspective is that a culture of positivism has the effect of obscuring critical consciousness, and it does so through asserting "its superiority through its alleged suprahistorical and supracultural posture. Theory and method are held to be historically neutral" (p. 28). If one consider Giroux's (2011) notion of culture as a legacy, we begin to see a more complex array of elements that coalesce to form a cultural hegemony within education, rather than the more simplistic idea of a ubiquitous epistemology.

One of the ways in which this hegemony has been maintained within psychology education is due to the version of positivism that is perhaps more correctly termed logical positivism. In their review of logical positivism, Costa and Shimp (2011) suggest that "contemporary psychology may still be in an 'unenviable position' in which it is beholden to a former philosophy that grounded empirical science in non-empirical philosophical arguments and is isolated from contemporary philosophy of science" (p. 27). It is proposed that one of the reasons for the dogged commitment to logical positivism is because philosophically logical positivism situates itself as a universally applicable methodology

(Costa & Shimp, 2011). A universality that would fuel the methodologism seen in mainstream psychology education, where more method-oriented course content than even the natural sciences such as physics is found (Costa & Shimp, 2011). This methodologism is the epistemological attitude that gives rise to the notion that logical positivism is appropriate for all psychological research questions (Teo, 2005). An attitude that has been shown to be both particular to, and pervasive within mainstream psychology education (Costa & Shimp, 2011).

In addition, logical positivism is able to appeal to that which is perceived as ‘natural’ or ‘occuring in nature’ with theoretical claims to the biological sciences and medicine (Danziger, 1997). Within a quasi-naturalistic frame it is possible for mainstream psychological constructs to go untheorized as they simply exist as natural objects (Danziger, 1997; Rose, 1998). When in reality, “by the time explicit psychological theories are formulated, most of the theoretical work has already happened – it is embedded in the categories used to describe and classify psychological phenomena” (Danziger, 1997, p. 8). This tautological mechanism of psychology may make it appear more robust in its objectivity, but this may also be the Achilles heel in mainstream psychology that affords neoliberal ideologies a natural partner.

Neoliberal Social Imaginary

The early proponents of neoliberalism sought to embed the ideas that economic markets were a natural occurrence of human nature and removing barriers to those markets was enabling their true nature (Dardot & Laval, 2013; Harvey, 2005). The foundational desires of neoliberalism were never exclusively economic, they were fundamentally about shaping the social world (Dardot & Laval, 2013). This suggests that neoliberalism has a much deeper reach and exists as a series of sociocultural forces that engender a "neoliberal social imaginary" (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 34). The neoliberal social imaginary is largely concerned with the implanting of market-based logic, and in the case of higher education is

also concerned with the standardization and control of education (Abendroth & Porfilio, 2015). Conceiving neoliberalism as a social imaginary is useful in that it situates particular logics, reasoning and practices in a temporal and material space rather than adrift in a macroeconomic one.

A social imaginary can be thought of as the collective thinking shared by ordinary people in society (Taylor, 2007). But it is not simply something that resides in people's heads but is lived and constituted in shared social practices (Brinkmann, 2008). It can be closely linked to the notion of social imagination which Christens, Hanlin and Speer (2007) define as the gaps between individual thought and personal experience and systemic forces. In both instances, imaginary/imagination is not used in the naïve sense of the word, as in merely fictitious, but rather it is "the common understandings that make everyday practices possible, giving them sense and legitimacy. It is largely implicit, embedded in ideas and practices, carrying within it deeper normative notions and images, constitutive of a society" (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 34). The social imaginary influences peoples' subjectivities and how they perceive government and being governed, and engenders ideas about social institutions (Abendroth & Porfilio, 2015).

Harvey (2005) points out that neoliberalisation accomplished widespread political consent across the USA and UK because it was grounded in the Gramscian notion of 'common sense'. This is more accurately translated as the sense held in common (Gramsci, 1985), and in this regard is "constructed out of longstanding practices of cultural socialization" (Harvey, 2005, p. 48). Important to this conception of common sense is the way in which it can obscure or disguise real problems under cultural prejudices (Gramsci, 1985). As Harvey (2005) points out, "political questions become 'insoluble' when disguised as cultural ones" (p. 48). This would suggest that analyses of neoliberalism need to adopt a

critical bifocality (Weis & Fine, 2012) one which enables both the conceptualizing of large sociopolitical formations and the embodied everyday reality of people.

Dominant narratives about what it means to be fit for the 21st century have become culturally normalized (Connell, 2013; Vassallo, 2015) and they seek to not only describe and rationalize market relations in a particular way, but they seek to naturalise neoliberal subjectivities as essentially human (Adams et al., 2019; Rutherford, 2018; Sugarman, 2015). A strong case for the ways in which these subjectivities are maintained via the bidirectional relationship between psychology and neoliberalism has already been established (Adams et al., 2019; Binkley, 2014; Ratner, 2019; Teo, 2018) and there is ample historical evidence of psychology's direct involvement in capitalism (Duckett, Kagan, Burton, Lawthom, & Siddiquee, 2011; Roberts, 2015; Sloan, 1996). What arises from this is that psychology is a socio-cultural product of and for neoliberal ideologies.

Neoliberalism as Ideology and Actually Existing

There have been criticisms about the way ideology has been conceptualized and therefore its usefulness (Montenegro, 2002). Perhaps some of the calls to disregard neoliberalism as an ideology have merit (see Klein, 2017) in that it may cloud the ability to see it as something that has actual impacts. In political psychology research it has been suggested that the abstracting of ideologies serves to disconnect ideology from politics itself (Weltman & Billig, 2001). Montenegro (2002) proposes not only critically reviewing the concept of ideology but calls for the need to connect it with the concept of hegemony. Kincheloe and Mclaren (2011) similarly propose that "Ideology vis-à-vis hegemony moves critical inquirers beyond simplistic explanations of domination that have used terms such as propaganda to describe the way media, political, educational, and other sociocultural productions coercively manipulate citizens to adopt oppressive meanings" (p. 291). Critical theorist Catherine Besley (2002, p. 48) believes that ideology should not simply be

considered a “system of ideas in people’s heads” but rather that it has both real and imaginary components. Real in that speaks to the ways in which people understand their relationship to the social relations which govern them, and imaginary in that it deters a full understanding of these “conditions of existence and the ways in which people are socially constituted within them” (Besley, 2002, p. 48). Conceptualizing ideology in these ways attempts to understand it not as a concrete, singular set of meanings and practices, but rather that those meanings are part of social relations in a process of constant flux where certain elements are privileged in particular contexts (Montenegro, 2002).

In terms of neoliberalism, this contradictory process is captured in the concept of ‘actually existing neoliberalism’ (Peck et al., 2018) which differentiates between neoliberalism as an ideology and as actually existing in the following way:

> While the ideology of neoliberalism defers to the sovereignty of a singular, transhistorical, and uniquely efficient market, the inescapably murkier reality is that actually existing programs of neoliberal transformation are always contextually embedded, institutionally grounded, and politically mediated—for all their generic features, family resemblances, patterned dynamics, and structural interconnections (p. 10)

Actually existing neoliberalism is better understood as an uneven, open-ended, frustrated process of neoliberalisation that seeks to name it as a series of processes rather than a single outcome (Peck et al., 2018).

The Neoliberal Episteme and Higher Education

The current political and economic climate in many western liberal democracies is such that universities are being administered more and more like corporate businesses and shaped by the ideologies of neoliberalism (Connell, 2013). Connell (2013) details what she terms a “neoliberal cascade of ‘reforms’” in the Australia higher education sector around the

mid-1980's which "brought every institutional sector under the sway of market logic" (p. 102). This has not only impacted the administration of universities, but has dramatically changed the relationship between students and education, with market-oriented ways of thinking fostering notions of meritocracy, competition and choice (Savage, Sellar, & Gorur, 2013). Within this climate of competition and choice and the ongoing manipulation of funding arrangements, universities have undergone shifts which have seen the expansion of managerialism (Connell, 2013). This has seen an increase in the power of deans and other central management whilst at the same time instituting the decline of departmental decision-making, and the repositioning of students as customers, which has resulted in an "undermined academic democracy" (Connell, 2013, p. 102). There are indications that western liberal democracies other than Australia are also facing concerns around the impacts of neoliberalism in higher education (Abendroth & Porfilio, 2015; Gillies, 2011; Liu, 2011; Peters, 2011).

In the neoliberal university structural or systemic changes are often sold as economic imperatives that are objectively separate from epistemic and pedagogical considerations. However, Adam (2012) suggests that neoliberalism has an 'epistemic identity' which is characterised by "objectivising epistemologies that are loosely affiliated with *positivist, realist, rational, atomistic, descriptive, abstract, empirical* and *quantitative* approaches to knowledge in academic discourse and *structured, authoritative, unitary, productive, organising,* and *certain* approaches to knowledge in more public discourse" (pp. 73-74, emphasis in original). Put simply, neoliberalism supports conditions and cultures by which certain epistemologies are more likely to thrive which has had a direct impact on certain disciplines seeing the decline of critical disciplines such as philosophy (Connell, 2013). This is echoed by Adam (2012) who argues that the market ideology of neoliberalism results in the commodification of knowledge and that "some types of knowledge and ways of knowing

may not be as easily quantified, commodified, mass produced, mass marketed and short-term desirable, prescribable, or consumable as burgers and benzodiazepines" (p. 78).

There is, however, a strange tension inherent within the marketization of higher education, between the neoliberal position (which lauds the ability of the competitive market to find solutions educative dilemmas), and a neoconservative one (which proposes a return to more traditional forms of knowledge and knowledge production). Ideologically, neo-conservatism proposes that the only way out of educative dilemmas is to return to "real knowledge", and knowledge that sits outside this that belongs to and represents the lives of the more marginalised communities is disregarded and delegitimized (Apple, 2001). The delegitimizing of indigenous and community knowledges within the neoliberal university has been noted by those working toward epistemological resistance and decoloniality (Carolissen et al., 2017; Dudgeon & Walker, 2015; Moreton-Robinson, 2004).

The tension between these neoliberal and neoconservative values have been highlighted by Foucault when he identified "the grand contradiction of neoliberalism was its passion for intervention in the name of non-intervention" (Miller, 2010, p. 56). This tension is evidenced in Australia by the recent submission of the Psychology Board of Australia to extend a national exam to all provisionally registered psychologists (Psychology Board of Australia, 2016). Despite students having completed a postgraduate degree in a specified area of psychology they are required to complete an extensive exam which covers four domains: ethics, assessment, interventions and communication (Psychology Board of Australia, 2016). While much of the discourse surrounding the exam is about professional standards, the cornerstone of the exam is content knowledge with large sections being about the specifics of psychological tests and measures. In other words, it represents that which can be standardised and which Abendroth and Porfilio (2015) note, that "standardization and accountability in

education are emblematic of the neoliberal social imaginary for educational institutions" (p. 164).

It is also worth noting that the pathway to this kind of legitimized knowledge comes at a great financial cost to students. To obtain general registration students must complete a four year sequence of undergraduate study. This is followed by either two years internship of supervised practice, or two years of postgraduate study during which students can obtain provisional registration. Upon successful completion of this second stage students are required to shoulder the financial cost of the exam ($450AUD) and upon successful completion to moving toward general registration attracts a further $947AUD for application and registration (Psychology Board of Australia, 2014). On top of these are the increasing costs of a university degree in Australia whose average is around $10,000AUD per year, plus increased interest rates on student loans and lowered wage thresholds for repayment of those loans (Universities Australia, 2016). The economic burden for students, including the financial constraints being encountered in their lives, is then coupled with the neoliberal discourses that position them as consumers of higher education (Cassell & Nelson, 2013). In addition, higher education is increasingly being presented as a means-ends pathway to the labour market, and students (consumers) need to make economic choices about courses which will lead them to a successful job. While it would be foolish to suggest that these educational choices should not be made on some consideration of a job prospect, it is also worth noting that this environment would seem to favour a psychology which can sell itself as instrumental and utilitarian and is buttressed by a neoliberal episteme that favours measurable, standardized types of knowledge.

Epistemic Deceit and Discriminatory Impacts

What is perhaps most alarming about the neoliberalisation of psychology education is that the processes begins to constrain epistemic possibilities and does so largely without the

students' knowledge or consent. With logical positivism running through textbooks and undergraduate courses where it has been found that both terminology and concepts of positivism are widely used but are not explicitly acknowledged as doing so (Costa & Shimp, 2011), it becomes a pedagogy of epistemic deceit. A deceit which reduces the possibility for students to not only critically approach, but to perhaps even reject the underlying philosophical foundations of mainstream psychology and to be supported in finding other psychologies. This would be particularly salient for students from non-western cultural backgrounds who may find it difficult to reconcile the acultural position of mainstream psychology, or for its inability to deal with issues such as racism (Adams et al., 2019). For instance, it has been found that for indigenous Australian undergraduate students studying psychology, culturally resonant content is in fact central to their success and wellbeing (Ranzijn, McConnochie, & Nolan, 2009). However, this deceit should not rest with individual educators, but rather be located as the product of a number of forces currently governing higher education which legitimise what some have termed neoliberal pedagogies (Mccafferty, 2010).

This is not to say that psychology educators are not continually grappling with ways to creatively insert critical aspects within psychology education both in Australia and elsewhere (see Carolissen et al., 2017; Reyes Cruz & Sonn, 2011; Fox & Fryer, 2018). Nor is this to suggest that textbooks do not address critical thinking as an important skill for psychology students. But as pointed to by Fox and Fryer (2018) and others (Newnes & Golding, 2018) there is a difference between critical thinking as a kind of systematic cognitive process and providing space to engage in critical psychology which politicizes, historicizes and questions epistemic foundations.

In the South African context, Carolissen (2017) and colleagues have suggested that it is not simply a matter of advocating for change in curriculum content, but the "social,

historical and contemporary factors that frame curriculum" (p. 502). This is an important case study that draws attention to the impacts an ahistorical and apolitical psychology has for students of colour, one which has been echoed here in Australia with discussions around psychology and "the negative impact that certain disciplinary theories and practices have had on Indigenous Australians" (Dudgeon & Walker, 2015, p. 276). These examples suggest that knowledge is not simply a means-end process to skill acquisition, but that knowledges intersect with personal ontologies and the lived experiences of students. And therefore, a pedagogy underpinned by epistemic deceit should not simply be seen as a philosophic sleight of hand, but as a very real infringement on the opportunity for students to develop critical consciousness (Freire, 1965).

One of the concerns of a psychology that fails to engender critical consciousness is also the propensity for it to reproduce epistemological violence (Teo, 2010). Epistemological violence does not simply refer to the inappropriate or unethical use of research in general but to a hermeneutic process that has harmful consequences for people and communities who are made 'other' through the ethical blindness of "interpretive speculations can be done with good or bad intentions" (Teo, 2005, pp. 57–58). Importantly, critical consciousness seeks to dismantle dominant, mechanistic ways of thinking to empower people through knowledge, and knowledge production, and as such is a deeply sociopolitical project (Freire, 1965). Epistemological violence is therefore more likely to occur when the mechanisms and impacts of knowledge and knowledge production are obscured, ignored or denied.

The way in which certain epistemologies have been afforded greater status, at the expense of others particularly those arising from non-white, female sources, has been highlighted by indigenous feminist and critical race theorist Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2004): "since the Enlightenment, the dominant epistemological position within the Western world has been the white Cartesian male subject whose disembodied way of knowing has

been positioned in opposition to white women's and Indigenous people's production of knowledge" (2004, p. 76). Psychology has been denounced for the racializing of certain groups via "hereditarian race researchers" engaging in "scientific racism" (Teo, 2011, p. 242). This othering has in part been possible due to the pursual of objectivism, which obscures reflections about the racial implications of such an epistemology (Teo, 2011). Dutta, Sonn and Lykes (2016) have detailed the ways in which a lack of interrogation about the origins of epistemic power have led to structural and cultural violence, and the continued colonization of knowledge.

Resistance and Justifiable Epistemologies

Bourdieu (1998) in *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market* suggests that a central feature of resistance must be exposing the idea that neoliberalism is an unavoidable, natural path. This does raise the question of what are the qualities of justifiable epistemologies of a psychology for such a resistance? If uncovering that which is assumed, normalised and socialised is a necessary part of the resistance then critical self-reflection must be a central quality. And not simply at the individual level but at the epistemological and disciplinary level, an idea that is central to the notion of epistemological ethics (Teo, 2015). An ethics which seeks to engender ongoing questions about the impacts of any given epistemology and to recognize that knowledge production has repercussions for people and communities (Teo, 2015). An ethics which does not distance itself through objectivity.

Habermas (2005) goes into some detail critiquing the concept of objectivity in the empirical-analytical sciences, but central to his critique is that this kind of ahistorical objectivism "hides the interests as well as the life-world realities that constitute its very meaning" (p. 143). This obscuring of interests results in a false consciousness of the methodological importance and impact (Habermas, 2005). While this false consciousness

might offer a "protective function" in that it bolsters an aepistemological objectivity, it actually does the desire for rigorous empiricism no favours (Habermas, 2005, p. 319).

Justifiable epistemologies would recognize the importance of the more historical-hermeneutic aspects. A self-reflective, empirical-analytical psychology which looks at the ways in which it co-constructs psychological objects would have to be a more justifiable epistemology than one that is wilfully ignorant to these. "One could argue that psychologists obtain a 'more objective' understanding of objectivity in psychology when they look at the cultural, social, and political contexts in which this term was developed as well as at the meanings of this concept in other disciplines" (Teo, 2015, p. 139). Feminist philosopher Sandra Harding (1992) has argued that 'strong objectivity' can only be truly obtained when the objects and subjects of knowledge are located within the same critical frame, and it is this framing necessitates 'strong reflexivity'.

While some of the arguments and critiques put forward here belong to a substantial history of theorising and reflection about the impacts of mainstream psychology, there also seems to be renewed calls for more justifiable epistemologies within the Australian context. The scientist-practitioner model, emphasis on individualism, psychopathologies, and expert-driven interventions that underpin clinical psychology training is being seen by some as insufficient to deal with issues facing Australian societies such as: refugee, migrant and indigenous health and wellbeing (Rhodes & Langtiw, 2018). Calls have arisen for a clinical psychology that is able to respond to "the sociopolitics of human distress and lend itself to social action for complex problems" (Rhodes & Langtiw, 2018, p. 377). Clinical psychology educators Rhodes and Langtiw (2018) suggest if a clinical psychology is to ever adequately address the needs emerging from non-western cultural communities there ought to be a shift in curriculum and pedagogy in psychology training that works from a foundation of decoloniality. In addition, they suggest an engagement with a wider range of paradigms such

as those from community and critical psychology and expanding the philosophical and epistemic content so as to question "the expert-driven individualism" of clinical psychology and "recast psychopathology as the product of social structures as well as personal experience" (Rhodes & Langtiw, 2018, p. 380).

While the accreditation and regulatory systems in Australia make this difficult, interdisciplinary and collaborative work within and between universities is being fostered through both formal (e.g. conferences, special issues, journals, and workshops) and informal avenues (e.g social media and social spaces outside institutions). There is also currently one postgraduate course in community psychology offered in Australia which offers some examples of work from a broad range of epistemic and methodological positions and highlights a number of interdisciplinary relationships (e.g. decoloniality and critical praxis (Sonn & Quayle, 2013, 2014), displacement, migration and identity (Sonn, Ivey, Baker, & Meyer, 2017), everyday multiculturalism and local geographies (Oke, Sonn, & McConville, 2016)).

Conclusion

It is the multiplicity of factors and changing nature of neoliberalism that makes it difficult to pin down and it has developed a cultural position in which it is seen as a natural part of life. This paper has offered some ways to conceptualise and piece together some of the contradictory, creative, destructive processes that are impacting psychology education generally and specifically in the Australian context. The philosophic tendencies already within mainstream psychology, the forces of accreditation and registration, and the market demands of the neoliberal university are maintaining an epistemic dominance. A dominance which has discriminatory impacts for students, which is in danger of reproducing epistemological violence, and which maintains a coloniality power.. However, psychology is in a unique position to foster some resistance to the neoliberalisation of its discipline by

prioritizing epistemic plurality through these very accreditation and regulatory system that currently constrain it. This would require the governing bodies of the discipline to acknowledge the importance of epistemological ethics, and to deliberately foster spaces within institutions to advance critical psychologies and a more robust awareness of the historical-hermeneutic elements of the discipline. As we face increasingly complex sociocultural and sociopolitical issues, the epistemic blindness of a neoliberalised, instrumentalised, quasi-objective psychology would seem to work against many of the ameliorative intentions of modern psychology.

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