

# UNIVERSITIES, ACADEMIC CAREERS, AND THE VALORIZATION OF ‘SHINY THINGS’

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## ABSTRACT

*What is associated with a rise in academic career expectations, and why have levels risen to such levels wherein prominent dissatisfaction is a sustainably generated outcome? This paper examines work satisfaction among faculty in U.S. research universities. At a micro level, I discuss the career patterns of work satisfaction as found in a set of universities, drawing on data from qualitative studies of academic careers. I present findings on four analytic dimensions: the overall modal career patterns of professors, their overall work satisfaction, their work attitudes, and whether they would again pursue an academic career. The data capture variation in careers over time and the type of university in which they work. A prominent and pervasive pattern is transparent: that of ill-content and ill-institutional regard. At a macro level, these patterns are suggestively situated in developments in the social-institutional environment of U.S. higher education. This environment consists of systemic trends in which neoliberalism enables academic capitalism to flourish with its*

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**The University under Pressure**

**Research in the Sociology of Organizations, Volume 46, 303–328**

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**ISSN: 0733-558X/doi:10.1108/S0733-558X2016000046010**

*attendant effects in privatization and marketization. It is argued that a shift in organizational priority brought about by these conditions entails a “valorization of shiny things” – a valuing of market-related phenomena over knowledge of its own accord. This valorization, ritually supported by practices endemic of changed organizational culture, may weaken the ground on which the traditional scholarly role is played and may make precarious a basis for positive work sentiment.*

**Keywords:** Careers; satisfaction; neoliberalism; academic capitalism; markets

I focus in this paper on work satisfaction among faculty in U.S. research universities. I take stock of the institutional environment in which academic careers are presently situated, and then turn to examining the career patterns of work satisfaction as found in a set of universities. Accordingly, we may glean the ways in which academic careers are experienced over time, how this might vary by organizational type, and how the patterns may be nestled in a constellation of forces at play with universities. As framed, a concern with satisfaction in academic careers informs an understanding of the social conditions of universities and the environment in which they operate. Thus conceived, careers serve as a proxy for organizational vitality and social-institutional well-being (Barley, 1989). As data and discussion will indicate, all is not well. Dramatic change in the institutional environment is suggestive of an alteration in the organizational culture of universities, and this by turn may express itself in how academics experience and interpret their work.

As a means to cast light on work satisfaction among academics, I draw upon materials generated from a national longitudinal study of scientists' careers. Data from the study are presented fully elsewhere (Hermanowicz, 1998, 2009a); my discussion here expands and develops a line from this work on the social psychology of organizations (Hermanowicz, 2009b, 2011). To set the stage, I begin by outlining the broader societal climate and institutional environment of universities.

## MACRO CONDITIONS

### *The Social-Institutional Environment of Careers*

Higher education literature provides ample indication that American universities in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have not

only changed but have done so dramatically. The changes are many and varied, but a major source involves the very way by which universities sustain themselves – how their existence is supported and maintained. This points to the repositioning and power of money.

The radical restructuring of American universities has entailed a concomitant shift in which education, faculty work, and the activities of universities, once viewed predominantly as public goods, become the principal matter of free enterprise. These changes, which became forceful especially in the 1980s and were reinforced by influential political figures such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher and by influential policy such as the Bayh–Dole Act, which transferred ownership (and thus royalty) rights of inventions produced with federal funds from the government to universities, have been understood in terms of a philosophy of neoliberalism.

Liberalism, or embedded liberalism, was a reaction to classic liberalism and sought to constrain capitalism to avoid depression, poverty, and social unrest. To achieve these ends, social and political oversight and regulatory planning functions were embedded in the state. The common goals of embedded liberal states were full employment, economic growth and the welfare of the citizenry. If necessary, the state would intervene in market processes to reach these goals ... In contrast, neoliberalism is a “theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade ...” (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). While neoliberalism is presented as the key to freedoms of conscience, speech, meeting, association, and employment, this form of liberalism, as pointed out by Karl Polyani in 1944, also allows “the freedom to exploit one’s fellows, or the freedom to make inordinate gains without commensurable service to the community, the freedom to keep technological inventions from being used for public benefit, or the freedom to profit from public calamities secretly engineered for private advantage,” and generally confers freedom on those “whose income, leisure and security need no enhancing,” leaving little for others (quoted in Harvey, 2005, p. 36) ... Generally, a neoliberal state shifts higher education from a public good knowledge/learning regime to ... an academic capitalist knowledge/learning regime. (Slaughter, 2011, p. 267)

“Academic capitalism,” having itself ascended as a constitutive idea in the higher education lexicon, refers to market and market-like behaviors in universities and among faculty (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Such behavior includes institutional and faculty competition for monies, giving way to a “corporatization of higher education,” in which actors, institutional and individual, are market-oriented (Slaughter & Leslie, 2001).

A broad and increasingly pervasive array of institutional and individual behaviors are indicative of the pattern: the search and competition for external grants and contracts, endowment funds, university–industry

partnerships, spin-off companies, student tuition and fees, patenting and licensing agreements, and the sale of products and services enshrined in logos, sports paraphernalia, food facilities, and bookstores (Slaughter & Leslie, 2001). The search and competition has ancillary effects in which institutions spend monies in order to attract economic returns: in athletics programs, especially intercollegiate football and basketball; lavish sports, recreational, housing, and dining facilities; health centers and transit systems; study abroad programs in not a few but in numerous locations; technology, and the like. To oversee the enterprise, an administration of the contemporary American university has grown multi-faceted and complex, such that it is the source of the single greatest rise in higher education costs (Leslie & Rhoades, 1995).

In an academic-capitalist age, economic returns coupled with prestige are the central objects in which institutions and faculty members compete. The competition is fueled at a high degree by public-to-private shifts in revenue streams, but not exclusively so. It is fortified by the crystallization of rankings, particularly the *U.S. News and World Report* ranking of institutions and programs, whose origination in 1983 coincided with the onset of marketization and corporatist developments in U.S. higher education. It has been established that institutions alter their behavior to try to influence the rankings (Ehrenberg, 2002; Espeland & Sauder, 2007). “While some of the actions an institution may take to improve its rankings may also make sense educationally, others may not and, more importantly, may not be in the best interest of the American higher educational system as a whole” (Ehrenberg, 2002, p. 146). The practice in which institutions mis-report SAT and ACT scores of entering freshman (Ehrenberg, 2002), or in which law schools employ their own graduates to count them as employed (Espeland & Sauder, 2007), each in order to garner a higher rank and resource flows (human and fiscal), are but two of many cases in point. Rankings and the seriousness with which they are taken by higher education administrators (not to mention students and parents) have helped to create and reinforce a winning mentality in which academe consists of “haves” and “have-nots.”

Grants, contracts, patents, licenses, logos, dining halls, dormitories, gyms, sports teams, quests for high ranking – and all the other interests of institutions that have come to revolve around money and revenue return – are what we may understand as “shiny things.” The term sets up an implied contrast with the “real” thing; that is, an academic core of institutions, in which priority is assigned to faculty and students, their knowledge, discovery, and learning. These latter elements exist but have, as it were, become

subordinate to the interests of academic capitalism. If it seems obvious and foolhardy to make the point that they exist, researchers remind us that over half of the U.S. professoriate now consists of non-tenure-line faculty members (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006) and that actual learning on many campuses is adrift and limited (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; Arum & Roksa, 2011) – patterns that are themselves consequences of the ways in which institutions may be seen to be exploiting what were once key actors on behalf of financial interests.

One might also argue that clarity of the academic core has always been blurry. But this runs counter to the thesis of *The Academic Revolution* (Jencks & Riesman, 1968), among other historical treatments of U.S. higher education (e.g., Berman, 2012; Geiger, 2004; Kirp, 2003; Mirowski, 2011; Stephan, 2012; Thelin, 2004). Instead, some scholars have recently gone so far as to ask, “what ever happened to the faculty?” (Burgan, 2006). The evidence and magnitude of *contemporary* change in American higher education indicates a social-environmental shift of historical proportion (Chait, 2002); if the academic core was difficult to bring into view in the past, its sight appears clouded by still stronger counter-vailing systems today.

The “valorization of shiny things” constitutes a quintessential alteration of organizational priority. In universities it decenters priority from the intellectual to the market, from knowledge to money. This is not to say that money and intellectual pursuit never go hand in hand, but rather that the pursuit is more often for prestige, not a celebration of knowledge. Desire for recognition may always be seen as a precondition of science and scholarship (Merton, 1973). The point is that, increasingly, prestige operates as a function of market behavior in institutions as opposed to intellectual discovery. Sociologically, change in priority means that new and different behavior is valued, recognized, and sanctioned. Consequently, *valorization shapes culture*. If organizational culture is differently conditioned, the ground likely shifts for experience, attitude, and interpretation of work.

Some have argued that neoliberalism is “the most dangerous ideology of the current historical moment” because civil discourse is seen to give way “to the language of commercialization, privatization, and deregulation.” Citizenship amounts to a privatized affair among self-interested individuals. As a result, such observers have reasoned, “the meaning and purpose of higher education” is thrown into question – words that further mark fundamental change (Giroux, 2002, p. 425).

## MICRO CONDITIONS

### *Empirical Background*

In 1994–1995, I interviewed 60 academics, physicists specifically, employed at universities across the United States about their careers and aspirations. In 2004–2005, I completed another series of interviews with the same people. I researched continuities and changes in careers, including what had developed as satisfactions and dissatisfactions for academics, and how they viewed their progress, or lack of it, toward what had been their professional goals. Fifty-five subjects from the original sample were interviewed as part of the longitudinal study, a response rate of 93 percent. (The response rate for the foundational study was 70 percent; for a discussion about academic fields and generalizability, see [Hermanowicz, 2009a](#), pp. 252–260).

Individuals were originally sampled by departmental rank as measured by assessments of graduate programs conducted by the National Research Council (NRC – [Goldberger, Maher, Flattau, 1995](#); [Jones, Lindzey, Coggeshall, 1982](#)). Top, middle, and tail-ranked departments were selected and built into the study design to permit a comparison of careers that are experienced under different structural and cultural conditions. A major goal of the study was to examine how people’s careers are shaped by the academic organizations in which they work.

To aid comparison and contrast, the academics and their institutions were classified into three types. I call one type *elite* – those universities that place a high premium on research and whose departments ranked at or near the *top* of the NRC assessment. Examples include Cal Tech, Harvard, and Princeton. I call a second type *pluralist* – those universities that emphasize research as well as mass teaching and service and whose departments ranked in the *middle* of the NRC assessment. Examples include the University of Maryland, Florida State University, and the University of Oregon. I call the third type *communitarian* – those universities that primarily emphasize teaching and service, though not necessarily at the exclusion of research, and whose departments ranked at or near the *tail* of the NRC assessment. Examples include the University of Tulsa, University of Toledo, and the University of North Carolina – Charlotte.

Respondents in this work were also sampled by cohort, in order to include academics at a variety of career stages – early, middle, and late, generally speaking, at the time of the first study. These three cohorts were established by the year in which academics received their Ph.D.s, which is

used as a proxy of their career stage. The eldest cohort consisted of academics who received their Ph.D.s prior to 1970. By the time of the longitudinal study, they were passing from late to post career stages. A middle cohort consisted of academics who received their Ph.D.s between 1970 and 1980. By the time of the longitudinal study, they were passing from middle to late career stages. The youngest cohort consisted of academics who received their Ph.D.s after 1980. By the time of the longitudinal study, they were passing from early to middle stages of their careers. The research design of the study is presented in [Table 1](#).

Age and institutional location provide the structure to analyze individual, subjective careers through diachronic change. Longitudinal data add spatial and temporal dimensions to synchronic study, and we are consequently in a position to address the following questions about academic careers:

- How do academics account for the unfolding of their careers in light of the goals and aspirations that socially situate their profession?
- What continuities and changes – in aspiration, satisfaction, motivation, commitment, and identification with work – mark the careers of academics?
- What knowledge have academics acquired about themselves, their institutions, and the academic profession in 10 years?
- How does this knowledge vary by individual age and type of university?

Since I examined how members of a profession experience work and interpret the career, the interview constituted the primary method of data collection. Interview questions dealt with change and continuity in outlook (such as “What changes have you seen with regard to research?” and “What changes have you seen with regard to teaching?”). Interviews also consisted of questions about satisfaction and dissatisfaction (“What have

**Table 1.** Academics by Cohort and Organizational Type, Longitudinal Study.

Organization	Cohort (by Year of Ph.D.)			Total
	Pre-1970	1970–1980	Post-1980	
Elite	9	6	8	23
Pluralist	5	4	6	15
Communitarian	5	5	7	17
Total	19	15	21	55

developed as the three biggest joys about your job?” and “What have developed as your three biggest complaints about your job?” And, “Would you seek an academic career again, if you were starting all over?” “If so, what would you do differently?” “Have there been ways in which an academic career has been unrewarding?”). Interviewees were also asked about their current aspirations, where they see themselves having come, and where they see themselves headed professionally. In addition, academics who had retired were asked about the best and worst parts of retirement, about how they experienced the transition into retirement, and about what “retirement” means, in order to research how such meanings might vary from one organizational type to another.

### *Objective Career Patterns*

There is little mistaking that the research role in the American academic profession has witnessed significant change as institutions themselves have changed in their favor of research. An indication consists in the normative expectations that govern research role performance in American universities.

Drawing upon data from the study of academic physicists, [Table 2](#) presents publication productivity and promotion timing among scientists across the three types of academic organizations and across the cohorts. To obtain their first academic jobs, the eldest scientists, who would have entered the job market between the late 1950s and late 1960s, published an overall average of 4.0 articles. For the middle cohort of scientists, who entered the job market between 1970 and 1980, the number of articles was 11.1. By further contrast, the youngest cohort of scientists, who entered the job market after 1980, had published an overall average of 14.3 papers.

The number of papers published by the scientists at the time of tenure also varied significantly over time, further highlighting intensification of the research role. To obtain tenure, the eldest cohort of scientists had published an overall average of 11.2 papers, the middle cohort 23.0, and the youngest cohort, 32.0. At the time of their promotion to full professor, the eldest cohort of scientists had published an overall average of 21.1 papers, the middle cohort 41.5, and the youngest cohort, 44.0. Put differently, younger cohorts of scientists typically published at a rate wherein their productivity corresponded to an entire career stage occupied by older counterparts. Presumably academics did not engage in such a marked change in productivity out of a more intense love of science. The press for productivity



**Table 2.** Publication Productivity and Event Timing, by Cohort and Organizational Type.

	Elites	Pluralists	Communitarians	Overall Average
<i>Pre-1970 Cohort</i>				
No. Papers @ 1st Job	4.5	5.0	2.1	4.0
No. Papers @ Tenure	11.0	14.3	8.3	11.2
No. Papers @ Full Prof.	22.0	24.3	17.0	21.1
Time to Tenure (in years)	5.0	4.0	5.3	4.8
Time to Full Prof. (in years)	5.0	5.3	5.6	5.3
<i>1970–1980 Cohort</i>				
No. Papers @ 1st Job	15.0	11.3	7.0	11.1
No. Papers @ Tenure	29.0	24.3	14.4	23.0
No. Papers @ Full Prof.	52.4	46.0	26.0	41.5
Time to Tenure (in years)	3.4	4.5	5.2	4.4
Time to Full Prof. (in years)	7.0	5.3	5.0	5.8
<i>Post-1980 Cohort</i>				
No. Papers @ 1st Job	20.0	12.0	11.0	14.3
No. Papers @ Tenure	46.0	26.0	24.0	32.0
No. Papers @ Full Prof.	54.0	39.3	38.0	44.0
Time to Tenure (in years)	7.0	5.2	5.3	5.8
Time to Full Prof. (in years)	5.0	4.8	6.0	5.3

Source: Hermanowicz (2009a, tables 20, 23, and 26).

intensified across institutions, as apparent in the subgroup differences in Table 2. Individuals changed in their behavior.

What is more, these productivity changes occurred in only modest changes in the time to tenure and to promotion to full professor. It took the eldest cohort of scientists an overall average of 4.8 years to achieve tenure. It took the middle cohort 4.4, and the youngest cohort 5.8 years. Thus, comparing the cohorts on the outer ends, the younger scientists published an overall average of 20.8 more papers compared to their eldest counterparts, and did so in only a one year greater span of time. A similar pattern is observed in time to promotion to full professor. For the eldest cohort, it took an overall average of 5.3, for the middle 5.8, and for the youngest 5.3 years. Thus, at this juncture, strikingly different productivity patterns were established within roughly similar intervals of time. (It should be noted that the post-doctoral stage of scientific careers became institutionalized after the eldest cohort obtained their first academic positions. This also partly accounts for why one observes large productivity differences across the cohorts. However, it should also not be forgotten that while

benefits may be derived from the stage, the stage itself points further to an additional set of hurdles on which subsequent career success is contingent.)

In light of these general conditions, how do academics perceive their careers and the quality of professional life in academe? Specific generalizations can be drawn about careers that represent the major distinctions across cohorts of academics in the three prototypical organizational contexts. Twenty dimensions of academic careers surfaced from data analysis and coding to ground these comparisons (see [Hermanowicz, 2009a, 2009b](#)). I focus here on four such dimensions because they are the most overarching and provide a general accounting of research findings. These include: overall modal career patterns, overall satisfaction, work attitudes, and whether professors would again pursue an academic career.

### *Subjective Career Patterns*

#### *Overall Modal Career*

In passing from early to mid-career, elites stabilized and rededicated themselves to academe – to fulfilling the institutional goals of higher education by continuing in their research productivity. An individual put it in the following representative terms:

The dream is to discover some fantastic new effect that knocks the socks off my friends and colleagues, that knocks the socks off the community, so that when I walk down the corridor, the young students know me and say, “There goes [Silverman], he invented the [Silverman] effect.” That’s what I want; I want my effect. I want to be the first person to predict such and such an event. ([Hermanowicz, 2009a, pp. 86–89](#))

By contrast, pluralists experienced a reversal. They questioned their interest and commitment to the profession. They grew disillusioned with academic research, even projecting a disavowal, as illustrated by the following scientist:

My attitudes about the job, about me, and about the university have undergone tremendous changes in the past ten years ... I’m not sure I want to even submit things to published journals anymore ... I’m disgusted by the whole thing ... I got tired of getting referee reports ... that spend a page talking about the bibliography; they were entirely concerned with whether I cited their work or their friends’ work, and they hadn’t read the paper ... I’m in a setting where the last thing people want is honesty ... You guys play your game; it’s fine. There are more important things in life than getting grants from the National Science Foundation, getting Nobel Prizes even or any of that stuff. That’s all just a game .... ([Hermanowicz, 2009a, p. 105](#))

By mid-career, most communitarians ceased in research. For communitarians, cumulative disadvantages accrued to the point of shutting down interest and motivation to continue in scientific research. Their career pattern may best be described as succumbing to a stasis – there was no forward progress. An academic, just at mid-career, said:

I certainly have had a lot of distractions around here, and I think I could have been much more successful ... I think there's a lack of support, actually obstacles. I think there's been an orchestration of people not wanting people to succeed, not wanting to succeed in the department because there are things they can't do. I see it happen to other people. (Hermanowicz, 2009a, p. 119)

In their mid to late career transitions, elites remained consistent in their identification with science and in their scientific productivity. Their publication productivity continued to accelerate. Pluralists either attempted to regenerate themselves following earlier fallow periods, or continued in the research that they had been doing. Communitarians entered into a demise; they decreasingly identified with research. In ways consistent with the last passage above, they became increasingly disaffected with their departments and universities, which they saw as having crippled their research aspirations.

In moving from late to post career phases, elites for the first time lessened their intensity and embrace of research. Pluralists characteristically withdrew from work. Communitarians separated themselves completely from it, usually severing all ties with work and their employing organizations. Overall modal career patterns of academics by career stage and institutional type are summarized in Table 3.

*Overall Satisfaction*

Patterns in modal careers are in turn associated with patterns in satisfaction and in attitudes about work. Among elites, satisfaction begins high and rises through the career. It then drops at the end. Among pluralists, satisfaction starts out on a high, drops, and levels off. Finally, it rises at the end, coinciding with a time at which they withdraw from work. Among

**Table 3.** Overall Modal Career Patterns of Academics.

Phases	Elites	Pluralists	Communitarians
Early to Mid	Stabilization and rededication	Reversal	Stasis
Mid to Late	Continuation	Regeneration or continuation	Demise
Late to Post	Attenuation	Withdrawal	Separation

**Table 4.** Overall Satisfaction of Academics.

Phases	Elites	Pluralists	Communitarians
Early (1994–1995)	Medium	High	Low
Mid (2004–2005)	High	Low	Low
Mid (1994–1995)	High	Medium	Low
Late (2004–2005)	High	Medium	Low
Late (1994–1995)	High	Medium	Low
Post (2004–2005)	Medium-Low	High	Medium-High

communitarians, there is a low in satisfaction throughout their careers, until the end. At the end of their careers, for the first time, communitarians experience the greatest high. Coincidentally, it is a time at which they are separating themselves altogether from work. Patterns in overall satisfaction of academics by career stage and institutional type are summarized in Table 4.

#### *Work Attitudes*

Elites possessed positive attitudes toward their work throughout most of their careers. Only in the end do their attitudes turn ambivalent – about what they have done, how much they have achieved, and where they stand professionally. Unlike any previous period in their careers, there is a sense of disappointment and frustration about their efforts and what they have achieved. One academic put it in the following terms:

Maybe there is some self-delusion in feeling that you're being a significant contributor to science. It's just [pause] you have been trained, you know this field, when you're an expert in something, you tend to take pride in it, and you tend to continue doing it. But I don't think it's always very significant in the grand scheme of things ... I could have worked harder to become a better professional physicist ... At some stages of my career, I could have easily done better. It would have made a difference. It might well have been a significant difference ... If I had worked harder, it would have given me a little more status. I would have accomplished more in the field .... (Hermanowicz, 2009a, pp. 192–193)

Pluralists are, by turn, positive. Asked about a particular period in their careers thought to be the most positive, the following illustration was given:

... Now. This is it. Yes, absolutely. There's no question about it ... I'm a little older, and I've had the opportunity to look back and see how great it has been over the years, to see the whole career collectively and appreciate how lucky I've been to do all the

things I have done. That’s a good feeling, and it’s like, wow, this has been great. (Hermanowicz, 2009a, p. 200)

Communitarians feel detached from work and institution. Their attitudes are far from the negative ones that were most common among them at earlier points in their careers.

There really wasn’t much else to look forward to. [Right now, I’m] not working as hard. I’m not doing research anymore. I had two or three pretty good ideas during the course of my career, and I haven’t had any since. I really don’t keep up with the literature ... I think early on, even though I did some fairly decent work, both as a graduate student and in the beginning of my career, I never was satisfied. I always thought that I could have done better or sooner or more. In more recent years [near and in retirement], I have become content, not only with what I was doing, but also how much. I think this is a reflection of my coming to like myself more. (Hermanowicz, 2009a, p. 207)

Patterns in the work attitudes of academics by career stage and institutional type are summarized in Table 5.

*Would Academics Pursue an Academic Career Again?*

Many would not. The notable trend is not that many would, as is also the case: one might anticipate that long training and preparation for a profession would coincide with commitment and satisfaction, indicated by a strong desire to pursue the same profession were people given the chance to start over. By contrast, what is noteworthy is the large fraction of faculty members who say they would pursue another line of work, an indication of a profession’s lack of vitality, conditioned by the circumstances that faculty members confront in their institutional environments.

Elites are most adamant in desiring an academic career again, despite the leveling in satisfaction they derive from their careers in late and post stages, as indicated above. Their sentiments evolve only slightly, and then only in late to post career stages, when positive adamancy turns into a milder “yes.”

**Table 5.** Work Attitudes of Academics.

Phases	Elites	Pluralists	Communitarians
Early to Mid	Positive	Preponderantly negative	Preponderantly negative
Mid to Late	Positive	Ambivalent; Positive	Neutralized
Late to Post	Ambivalent	Positive	Detached

**Table 6.** Would Academics Pursue an Academic Career Again?

Phases	Elites	Pluralists	Communitarians
Early to Mid	Definitely	No; Maybe; Yes	No
Mid to Late	Definitely	Maybe; Yes	No; Maybe
Late to Post	Yes	Maybe; Yes	No

Pluralists indicate a greater variation in attitudes. They are most variable in the transition from early to mid-career, but remain ambivalent throughout the duration of their careers.

Communitarians are the most in agreement about not again pursuing an academic career. Also notable is the pattern of this attitude emerging strongly in early stages of their careers. The pattern is slightly variable as communitarians pass from mid to late career stages, perhaps owing to greater career stability. Their attitudes about academic careers turn wholly negative in late to post stages. They perceive their institutions as blocking an ability to realize professional goals. Patterns in academics' attitudes toward pursuing an academic career again, by career stage and institutional type, are presented in Table 6.

Diachronic change across the three prototypical academic organizations evinces *reversals*: reversals of career orientation, outlook, attitude, and desire to pursue the career again. Elites may be most dedicated throughout their careers, but most devastated at the end. Communitarians may be less dedicated throughout their careers, but most satisfied and positive in their outlooks at the end. Pluralists exemplify the greatest variability in their careers; they may find a satisfaction in the end that overcomes previous ambivalence, but the timing is what may be taken as especially remarkable. As with communitarians, relief comes from exiting the career and letting it go. Why might these patterns take their specific shapes?

## DISCUSSION

In taking stock of the micro patterns of how academics experience and view their contemporary careers, notable motifs are apparent and worthy of examination. They are the recurring sentiments of disappointment and frustration; at greater intensities they are bitterness and disavowal. In one light, these are particularly odd findings. To what other line of work could one turn and find the autonomy that characteristically marks academic

labor? In this respect, it might seem surprising to see the patterns above, when one might otherwise expect to find more resolute satisfaction with academic work and the organizations that enable it. Even in the academic sciences, work may be viewed as artisanal and craft-based, providing further self-discretionary ground on which to build an apparently strong, positive occupational and organizational set of sentiments.

But this is not what the data suggest. Nor is this to claim that satisfactions do not exist or are not apparent. They are reported in the data. Faculty who work at elite institutions are more satisfied more of the time. *This suggests a stratification in the possible effects of macro forces.* Such stratification is magnified by the fact that most faculty work, not in elite institutions, but in pluralist and communitarian institutions. Thus, rather more remarkable and meritorious of attention are prevailing themes of ill-content. Put differently, sentiments of ill-regard have permeated the most concentrated quarters of the academic profession (cf. Paradeise & Thoenig, 2013). Given the scope of these sentiments, their occurrence does not seem to be random, but instead indicative of other social forces.

Social-psychological theory indicates strongly that recurrent and pervasive disappointment and frustration occur when expectations are high, and often so high as to be unachievable (Turner & Stets, 2006). An expectation can exist only if it is communicable and socially understood. Thus, it is theoretically unsatisfying to conclude that individuals, embarked on their careers, have created high expectations on their own. It is likely that a relationship exists between the work attitudes of professors and the expectations in which they work, since evaluative assessments are but responses to socially established criteria of purpose and performance. *What is associated with a rise in academic career expectations, and why a rise to such levels where prominent dissatisfaction is a sustainably generated outcome?*

### *Sets of Considerations*

There is more than one plausible set of conditions to address the question. One is that work expectations are, in fact, no higher, and work sentiments no more negative, than at any other historical time. That is, were I to have conducted my study in 1970 or 1950 or 1925, I would have found the same patterns. This argument holds that academic work is always arduous, that there is always inequity in the outcomes of work and in careers, and, consequently, that there is always disappointment and frustration in such work. The argument further holds that high expectations are a precondition for

the advancement of knowledge in all times and, as such, ill-content will always be found among those who try to “move a frontier,” because few prove able to do so in ways that are consonant with high expectations.

There are problems with the argument. If indicated only by objective career measures, expectations for research and publication productivity have increased, and they have done so across a spectrum of institutional types (Table 2). This indicates that a press for achievement has intensified, particularly (but not exclusively) achievement in research and scholarship. Expectations for research achievement may historically have been high at the most research-oriented institutions, but they are now higher even at those institutions and have arisen and intensified at other types of institutions over time.

What is more, the sheer number of U.S. institutions and individuals oriented to and working in research has increased over time. This also speaks of intensification of competition and a climate of expectation for performance institutionally and individually. As interest in research and publication productivity increased within and among a growing array of institutions, universities increasingly formalized policies governing advancement in academic careers. The institutionalization of “the dossier” arose, in which achievement in research, teaching, and service activities are elaborately documented; this usage has become commonplace at a broad array of institutions, including those that had made virtually no use of it prior to the 1980s (Hermanowicz, 1998).

The practice of soliciting external letters that assess candidates for promotion is now also widespread, but it was once confined (and carried out in a more ad hoc fashion) to a limited number of the most research-oriented institutions (Hermanowicz, 1998). External letters are unnecessary to evaluate teaching and service; these are local matters. Rather they are most directly concerned with research achievement. Desires to get “good letters” bespeaks a specific mindset in which high expectation is part and parcel of achievement.

Finally, while academic work may always be difficult, different historical periods evince varying conditions of professional opportunity (Geiger, 1999). Prior historical periods have occurred generally in a context of expansion, not only in the number of higher education institutions or of the funding to support them, but also in individual opportunity to realize professional goals (Thelin, 2011). This was a mark of the “academic revolution,” raised previously, seen to be in place by the end of the 1960s. Supported by their institutions, professors ascended in their power from status secured through research achievement in specialized fields (Jencks &



Riesman, 1968). Everything else equal, would a physicist rather try to get a major grant in 1965 or in 2015? Would a Ph.D. in the field of English rather attempt to get an academic job in 1969 or in 2015? Would an assistant professor of sociology rather “go up” for tenure in 1972 or in 2020? The contemporary scene of American higher education involves greater competition among institutions and individuals. The stress is on adaptation to *greater scarcity* rather than to plenitude. These several patterns point to three interacting dynamics: a rise in expectation in careers, an intensified competitive climate in which these expectations circulate, and a greater difficulty in achieving goals.

A second set of considerations contends that contemporary academic career expectations are strikingly high because graduate school training at elite institutions – those universities that house the top programs in a field – inculcate in students aspirations for great achievement. It is an argument I have developed in prior examinations of academic careers (Hermanowicz, 1998, 2009a), and others have turned to schooling in order to account for a conditioning of orientations and outlooks on the future (cf. Becker, Geer, Hughes, & Strauss, 1961; Cookson & Persell, 1985; Miller, 1970; Willis, 1977). By a systemic view, if graduates of elite programs took jobs in departments that were comparable in stature, career expectations may be high in those settings but also concentrated and circumscribed by them. But this, to be sure, has not been the reality of the academic marketplace, especially in arts and sciences fields, since approximately the early- to mid-1980s (Bowen & Sosa, 1989). Instead, graduates of elite programs have taken academic jobs at an increasing variety of institutions. For example, regardless of where they eventually landed an academic job, the majority of respondents for the study described in this chapter earned their Ph.D.s from top 10 physics programs.

When graduates of elite programs are more widely dispersed among institutional types, taking with them strong scholarly commitment and identification with roles in research and publication, an environment of expectation is also wider-ranging, and can condition a more pervasive climate of competition for scarce rewards. More people playing the game at more places makes it more difficult for almost any given person to win.

What is more, not all places are the same; they vary in both the structures and cultures that shape scholarly and professional opportunity. Disappointment and frustration may be produced when individual ambitions exceed, or are significantly different from, institutional ways of life – a pattern conveyed by qualitative data discussed in the previous section.

Yet we have established that more institutions of varying kind have latched on to the research bandwagon. A greater array of institutions increasingly welcomes research achievement and the visibility that publication productivity and grants bring to their campuses. In this vein, advanced degree programs outside of the elite have increasingly assumed characteristics of the major graduate departments, not the least of which includes numerous faculty trained in touted programs and a press for research and publication that they in turn impart to students in these institutions. One need no longer go to only a limited number of programs to find a culture of research, the press for publication, and people – both faculty and graduate students – engaged in the rituals of these ways.

In a broad array of institutions, then, graduate education has itself undergone significant cultural shifts. It is not only that it is no longer concentrated among a relatively small set of elite departments, but that even in those programs and increasingly elsewhere, graduate education has become highly professionalized. Graduate education across the arts and sciences – and across institutions – is now set up as a means to maximize the likelihood of tenure in an assistant professorship (with or without a consequential post-doctoral appointment, depending on the field): by establishing a significant record of publication even before the degree; by collaborating with faculty members, even if at the expense of developing individual creative work; by learning how to apply for major grants, and possibly even being listed on one; by attending and often times presenting work, even if unfinished and underdeveloped, at national and international conferences; by trying to win awards for the “best graduate student paper” or the “best teaching assistant” or the “best graduate student instructor”; by becoming, in so many words, enamored of status and status distinctions. In these respects, the graduate education argument turns the originating question onto itself: why have expectations for academic careers risen, evidence of which now flourishes even in the graduate training for them?

The historical conditions of academic careers are not constant but have changed (by way of argument one); graduate education may be more consequence than cause of these changes (by way of argument two). As such, *macro conditions* have appeared to *raise ambitions* of aspiring and incumbent faculty members, and then *thwart them*, by a lack of opportunity: in the paucity of faculty positions combined with increased Ph.D. production, the expansion of the search for prestige to a broader range of institutions, and an intensified climate of competition.

*How the Macro and Micro Communicate*

What is the mechanism by which a macro environment of neoliberalist academic capitalism may condition the work attitudes and experiences of professors in a micro environment? I suggest that a key possibility, operating at a meso level that can link force and sentiment of the macro and micro, is the *operation of reward systems* in universities. Reward systems structure the allocation of resources and, in so doing, embody values of the principals who have the power to control both the terms and the ways in which people and their activities are sanctioned.

There are two principal domains in which the operation of reward systems likely conditions faculty attitudes. One consists of change in the allocation of resources among entities within universities. We may refer to this as *distribution by unit type*. The other domain consists of change in the allocation of resources in direct support of faculty work. We may refer to this as *distribution by work type*. In both domains, reward systems operate to reveal preferences and priorities in the types of activities that an organization most covets.

Examples of patterns indicative of the first domain include the de-funding of the humanities and the academic core of the arts and social sciences; a centering of programs that strengthen university–industry ties, such as biotechnology, engineering, pharmacy, law, medicine, and business fields; elaboration of development, patent, and intellectual property offices; heightened support and creation of a complex infrastructure for athletics; the building of well-appointed facilities for students and athletes, and; an expanded administrative structure to oversee institutional accretion. In all of these changes organizations are restructured such that the interests of money and revenue return are given greater priority to knowledge and intellectual discovery. Even the rhetoric of university presidents has been found to change, shifting from “fruits of research” narratives that emphasize the benefits of basic science to “orders of magnitude” narratives that celebrate technology and commercialization (Slaughter, 1993).

What is a scholar to make of a university that ostensibly assigns greater importance to money and money-making ventures than to knowledge? (cf. Hackett, 2001). It is possible that, for many, the answer is tied up in disfavorable, critical, and alienated sentiment. It is also possible that, for still others, detachment, disengagement, and apathy are apparent. These latter sentiments may be but the consequences at the extremes of an organizational condition. They are normally indicative of people having “given up.”

The system appears so powerful and all-encompassing as to make resistance seem futile.

As for the second domain – the distribution of rewards by work type – compensation constitutes the central datum that informs how reward systems operate. Up until the 1970s, little differentiation within rank was evident in faculty salaries across fields (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Full professors of English were roughly comparably paid to full professors of finance. What happened? Here again we confront marketization, beginning in the 1980s and intensifying thereafter. Fields, such as business and law, that supposedly have large alternative labor markets to which academics in these field could turn if not rewarded with comparatively high university salaries, create significant internal disparities. But a “star system” also emerged in which value on revenue generating activity assumed priority over quests for knowledge in and of themselves. Professors who publish, at one point in time the mark of notoriety, but who are not stars are thereby de-centered in the contemporary status system of American universities.

During the past two decades ... some professors have acquired a star status that enables them to bargain with universities for salary and other perks in the same way that major-league sports players bargain for multimillion dollar contracts ... Popular conceptions about the market value of professors' expertise and societal endorsement of the intrinsic value of money help the relatively small number of star faculty to negotiate large salaries with their universities ... Faculty who make commercially viable discoveries are not the only stars. Professors at research universities who bring in large amounts of federal funds are also treasured by administrations, many of which depend on these “million-dollar-a-year men” for a substantial proportion of their institutions' operating costs. Faculty members who achieve reputations through scholarship are similarly valued, particularly if they are courted by other universities. Professors who simply publish are less esteemed, because so many professors now publish, and journals proliferate. The power to generate external funds or command offers from other universities is what distinguishes stars from other professors. (Slaughter, 2001, p. 23)

The way in which a faculty reward system operates is undergirded by the rise of the institutional “audit.” Universities now require faculty members to account for themselves by engaging in rituals of verification – documenting and recording their activities on an annual basis (Power, 1997). Administrators are charged with generating evaluations of how individuals and units are performing (Miller & O'Leary, 1987). This can create the sense that administrators govern faculty rather than govern *with* them (Tuchman, 2009). In addition, these practices encourage what has been called an “accountability regime,” wherein academic work gets reconfigured in a metric reality (Hopwood, 1987; Tuchman, 2009). Professors become auditable commodities, and the system comprises a “new

managerialism” that undercuts faculty authority by implementing change from the top down (Tuchman, 2009, p. 11). The practices create a new standard of economic rationality in university decision-making (Geiger, 2004). “Rather than universities being subordinated to the production and transmittal of knowledge, knowledge is now subordinated to the needs of universities for profit and recognition” (Tuchman, 2009, p. 11).

What is more, it is not only that knowledge is de-centered and displaced for money, but also that interest in and seriousness with knowledge is weakened in the culture of academic capitalism. This minimizes intellectual behavior in universities. Commensuration, the process of attributing meaning to measurement, “changes the form and circulation of information and how people attend to it” (Espeland & Sauder, 2007, p. 333). For instance, administrators might note that a professor published 100, 200, or 400 articles, but not explain why the articles mattered (Tuchman, 2010). Similarly, they elevate student evaluations of teaching, like citation counts and impact factors, among numerous other metrics, even if they do not know what they mean, or how to explain the difference between 3.8 and 4.2. The quest to be number 1, or in the top 10, or the top 25, or the top 50, or at least above average – instantiations of market behavior – can seem largely devoid of meaning; that is, unrelated to ideas, and hence repugnant to those who understand themselves as scholars and educators.

As in the first domain of change in the allocation of organizational resources, shift in the valuation of faculty work produces an institutional environment of haves and have-nots. Creative competition is supplanted by a celebration of money-making ventures. While these trends are evident throughout the U.S. system of higher education, they are intensified in the public sector, where institutions confront more stringent conditions to generate their own operating revenue. The inequality in higher education institutions, now pervasive, appears as but a microcosm of American society, where a neoliberalist orientation has likewise ascended in both policies and practices characterizing the distribution of rewards.

It stands to reason that such a conditioning of culture could adversely affect the attitudes and experiences of people attempting to engage in scholarly work. “The star system and academic entrepreneurship pit one group of professors against another in the struggle for resources. These skirmishes often create institutional climates of contention, bitterness, and cynicism, especially among the have-not segments of universities” (Slaughter, 2001, p. 24). The “have-not” segments of universities are highly populated; thus the consequences are wide-ranging. Among other segments, this consists of the liberal arts, once the scholarly backbone of academic organization, but

now treated largely as an instructional service unit for the rest of the university.

In this regard, contemporary academe may ironically be viewed as a *culture without community*. Professors increasingly understand themselves and their work in terms of free agency, geared to a market, and interested especially if not exclusively in themselves. The idea of a *collegium*, once the organizing principle of the academic profession (Ben-David, 1972; Krause, 1996), is obliterated. One can thus realize a relationship between the ways of neoliberalism and the deprofessionalization of academic work.

## CONCLUSION

If academic career expectations have grown significantly higher, and if this has rendered satisfaction in academic work more precarious, it seems reasonable to ask if larger conditions of universities have changed, since these are the organizations that structure academic careers. Have universities changed in ways to elevate expectation and thereby create unsteady ground for satisfaction in faculty work? Because expectation and satisfaction are fundamental components of careers, in the absence of which work is greatly compromised if not implausible, it seems equally reasonable to search for change in universities that is similarly fundamental, that is, which strikes at the core of how universities are constituted.

This paper has evaluated the micro conditions of faculty work satisfaction and the macro environment of universities. The micro conditions of faculty work, indicated by modal career patterns, overall work satisfaction, work attitudes, and whether professors would again pursue an academic career, evince permutations by career phase and the type of organization in which academics work. But this variation notwithstanding, the data expose prominent and pervasive attitudinal themes among contemporary academics: those of disappointment, frustration, bitterness, and disavowal.

A larger social-institutional environment consists of macro level trends wherein neoliberalism enables academic capitalism to flourish with its attendant effects in privatization and marketization. It has been suggested that the shift in organizational priority brought about by these conditions entails a “valorization of shiny things,” that is, a valuing of market-related phenomena over knowledge of its own accord. This valorization, created and ritually supported by practices endemic of changed organizational culture, may weaken the ground on which the traditional scholarly role is

played, and thereby throw into unsteadiness a basis for positive work sentiment and institutional regard.

The operation of reward systems in universities is presented as a messenger by which workers interpret and understand organizational culture. Two domains in which reward systems operate have been examined for the chief parts they play in communicating neoliberal values and priorities of universities. These include systems in which rewards are allocated differentially by types of units in institutions and those that allocate rewards differentially by the type of work performed by faculty members. In both cases, reward systems have come to sanction most affirmatively those activities that are thought to serve the financial interests of higher education institutions. This manner of operation makes reward systems structurally and symbolically consequential, a direct conduit for the valorization of shiny things.

The contemporary university has come to embody a deep chasm between money and knowledge, both now conferred as pursuable rights of institutions and individuals forging careers in them. It involves a contest that arguably many scholars, given their values and priorities, have had no interest in entertaining. For scholars the consequences are real, conveyed and constrained by an organizational culture that embeds actors, and felt tangibly by structural systems of reward. "Between two rights," Marx purported, "force decides" (1967 [1867], p. 225). "Obliged to live as appendages of the market and of capital accumulation rather than as expressive beings, the realm of freedom shrinks before the awful logic and the hollow intensity of market involvements" (Harvey, 2005, p. 185).

But the articulation of visions of what a university is or should be, as well as struggle and resistance, remain ways in which academics, through their collective organization and in the interests of their own work, help to constitute the values embodied by institutional culture. Critical reflection, engaged writing, and considered discussion of the "corporate university" are self-demonstrative. These possibilities will thus endure insofar as institutions subscribe to a belief in the advancement of knowledge, a component of their culture on which the future of the university is dependent.

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