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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Assembling disruptive practice in the neoliberal university: an ethics of care

Puāwai Collective*

**ABSTRACT**

We document and interrogate our collective experimentation with disruptive academic practices as early- and mid-career women researchers in Aotearoa New Zealand. We grapple with our disruptions and attempted interventions to do academic work differently. We find that, in our efforts to resist, and attempts to promote different norms within a neoliberal university setting, we exercise a commitment to care: for colleagues, students, our friends, families and selves. This ethic of care emerged as we interrogated our gendered experiences in a set of experimental interventions designed to disrupt gendered neoliberal practices. These interventions – the formation of a national Women and Gender Geographies Research Network (2013), an interactive seminar (2015), and a panel session at the New Zealand Geographical Society Conference (2016) – generated different experiences of living, working, and relating in academic spaces. In productively disrupting, we learned the value of collectives to generate momentum and build solidarity, and the importance of creating safe spaces for sharing experiences. Our experiments emphasize that mutual trust, especially within our collective, is critical to progress. The interventions' generative work privileged other forms of labour and fostered an active and equitable (knowledge) community in which practices of care for diverse academic communities and ourselves were paramount.

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Ethics of care; slow scholarship; neoliberal university; collective action; feminism; resistance

## Introduction

Geographers' accounts of the neoliberal university have drawn attention to the various bodily, psychological and material effects of the changing nature of academic work (Berg, Huijbens, and Larsen 2016; Gill 2009; Mountz et al. 2015). This research shows intensified feelings of precarity, anxiety and stress in academic staff, and the toll this inevitably takes on bodies and minds when faced with constant metrics of quality and success, and escalating work-loads (Abetz 2016; Gill 2009; Mountz 2016; Mullings, Peake, and Parizeau 2016; Parizeau et al. 2016; Peake and Mullings 2016).

Neoliberal managerialism, with its focus on measuring productivity and ranking performance, generates competition both within and between institutions that threatens to divide rather than unite (Berg, Huijbens, and Larsen 2016; Cupples and Pawson 2012; Morrissey 2013). Moreover, the individualization of academic labour and overwhelming pressure to perform within compressed timeframes can lead to feelings of exhaustion, helplessness, failure, and loneliness. When coupled with exposure to microagressions that cut across intersectional issues such as race, gender, class,

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seniority, and so on, finding ways to survive, much less thrive, can at times feel like an impossible goal that is as elusive as the search for work-life balance (Askins and Blazek 2017; Gill and Donaghue 2016; Mountz 2016; Parizeau et al. 2016; Peake and Mullings 2016). Indeed, rising levels of stress and anxiety within institutions have led researchers to investigate ill-health and mental wellness among academic faculty members and students and their gendered effects on wellbeing (Berg, Huijbens, and Larsen 2016; Mullings, Peake, and Parizeau 2016; Parizeau et al. 2016; Peake and Mullings 2016).

The effects of neoliberalism in universities are not evenly experienced (Davies 2005; Gill and Donaghue 2016; Grant and Elizabeth 2015; Macoun and Miller 2014; Mountz 2016). The inequalities ascribed to the contemporary university (Berg, Huijbens, and Larsen 2016) are even more pronounced for women, who tend to fare less well in an audit culture that emphasizes productivity as research outputs above other forms of academic work such as care-work (Cupples and Pawson 2012; Curtis 2016; Grant and Elizabeth 2015; Parizeau et al. 2016). For women of colour, the effects of neoliberal managerialism are exacerbated by the 'emotionally toxic material spaces' (Mahtani 2014, 360) that enable racist structures to persist. Researchers engaged in applied, community or activist scholarship are also negatively impacted by corporatised accounting structures that have been shown to undermine rather than support long-term research relationships built on trust and care (Evans 2016; Roa et al. 2009).

The gendering of workloads generally, and the gendered construction of women as fulfilling a caring role for staff and students within academic departments means women are likely to bear the brunt of the emotional, psychological and physical effects arising from increased workloads and changes in university cultures (Mountz 2016; Peake and Mullings 2016). Outside of the university environment, caring responsibilities are also most likely to affect women (McDowell 2004) and, subsequently, women's abilities to perform according to the expectations imposed by research quality and productivity metrics. The seeming impossibility of reconciling career and home/family responsibilities can therefore give rise to feelings of selfishness and guilt (Abetz 2016) and compound stress and anxiety.

In this paper, we interrogate gendered experiences of the neoliberal university through a set of experimental interventions that sought to disrupt undesirable (neoliberal) practices that undermine collegiality and intensify feelings of anxiety. We are women geographers from the University of Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, who are grappling with how to perform as academic subjects in what can feel like an un-caring, unsupportive environment characterized by competition and the pursuit of individual gains. Our efforts have crystallised through the Puāwai Writing Collective (Puāwai[1]), which emerged through a series of events catalyzed by the Auckland Branch of the New Zealand Geographical Society (NZGS) and the Women and Gender Geographies Research Network (WGGRN), described below.

As early-career and mid-career academics, we have each experienced the effects of the neoliberal university; we have become trained to think and act with research quality (and quantity) at the forefront of our minds. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the influence of the Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF), the national audit system designed to measure research productivity, is palpable. The PBRF categorizes an individual's academic worth according to research measures such as quantity and quality of publications, number and amount of funding grants obtained, doctoral completions, invited talks, editorial responsibilities and other research contributions (Grant and Elizabeth 2015). The first round of the PBRF occurred in 2003, with a partial round in 2006 and a second full round in 2012. The third round was completed in 2018. The PBRF has been criticized elsewhere for entrenching managerialism, promoting individualism, undermining collegiality, disadvantaging Māori researchers, and deprioritising activities not valued in the PBRF, among other things (see, for example, Cupples and Pawson 2012; Curtis 2016; Grant and Elizabeth 2015; Roa et al. 2009). Some of the authors of this paper have been put through the scrutiny of PBRF previously (as recently as the last few months), while others are yet to undergo the experience of having our individual worth measured according to a predetermined, externally contrived, and partial set of metrics that sum up our professional contributions with a personal grade. Indeed, the prospect of

future PBRF evaluations influences decisions about when to publish and where because we know we need to make our publications count since our grade contributes to determining government funding and national rankings.

Our experiences and feelings of failure, isolation, exhaustion, trauma, anxiety, stress and fatigue[2] have motivated a desire to resist the deleterious effects of neoliberalism and perform academia in a more collegial, reassuring, satisfying, and useful manner (Springer 2016). Our intention is to find ways to do more than simply 'get through the day' (Mountz 2016) by disturbing the measuring and valuing practices now commonplace in tertiary institutions. Our strategy to accomplish this is through practising collective actions premised on an ethics of care (Evans 2016; Lawson 2007; Mountz et al. 2015; Peake and Mullings 2016). We seek to resist neoliberal tactics by privileging collective efforts, we work to promote different and more care-full forms of scholarship, and we commit to slow scholarship (Evans 2016; Mountz et al. 2015; The SIGJ2 Writing Collective 2012). In our work as the Puāwai Collective, we acknowledge all forms of labour as having value: academic labour; the diversity of labour taking place in the academic context of the university; and, more radically, we value the labour each of us does elsewhere as part of acknowledging the whole person-ness of academics and the embodied nature of work. We also acknowledge the racialised effects of audit culture and adopt an intersectional approach to interrogate the predominantly white and masculinist spaces within universities in Aotearoa New Zealand (Grant and Elizabeth 2015; Roa et al. 2009). This acknowledgement affects our approaches to both practices, interventions and writing.

In this paper, we share three experimental interventions; practices we have undertaken to resist collectively the neoliberalising tendencies within a contemporary university to shift the status quo. These three interventions are: the formation of WGGRN, the development of an interactive seminar exploring unconscious gender bias (NZGS Dialogues), and running of the Gendered Geographies and Academic Work panel session at NZGS 2016. The three interventions occurred between 2012 and 2016, as the authors grappled with engaging both philosophically and practically with a feminist ethics of care. In terms of practical set up, these interventions may not seem innovative or new, but the content in topics covered are pushing against business-as-usual. The three interventions also differ in duration: WGGRN has persisted, gained traction and continues as a thriving network. The other two interventions are one-off, two-hour moments of engagement with lingering traces. All three reflect a commitment to experimenting with ways of doing academic work and an ardent desire to both support others and gently disrupt unhealthy norms. In sharing our practices, and then commenting on our experiences of them in the context of normative theory and practice, we contribute to existing feminist scholarship within geography concerned with the gendered experiences of the neoliberal university (especially, for example, Berg, Huijbens, and Larsen 2016; Mountz et al. 2015; Parizeau et al. 2016). Our addition to this work is our comment on 'doing well', where we offer our insights into what others might learn and take away that is different to the norm, and that represents an ethic of care.

In this section, we share three specific practical interventions and brief comment on how they relate to existing gendered narratives on academic work. Other formal and informal meetings, presentations and interactions have contributed to, and emerged from the events elaborated here. These interventions evolved as our learnings, group capacity, and confidence to intervene, evolved. We are still evolving.

### *Women and gender geographies research network (WGGRN)*

The first intervention reported here is the formation of the Women and Gender Geographies Research Network (WGGRN), a national network of geographers across Aotearoa New Zealand. The work of assembling WGGRN began in late 2012 and was enabled through existing relationships between founding member Karen Fisher and other geographers at universities, Crown Research Institutes, and government organizations across Aotearoa New Zealand (with a significant bias towards universities). The University of Auckland hosted the first web-based meeting in August

2013. This meeting was beamed into videoconferencing nodes in five cities across the country. The intention of the first webinar was to elicit ideas about how a network to connect women and gender researchers working in geography across the country might be constituted, and the kinds of activities that might be organized.

The formal aims of the network, which persist today, emerged from that initial desire to connect and enable geographers (of all genders) with an interest in gender and geography perspectives in teaching, research, and navigating academia. Those aims are to:

- Strengthen and support the visibility of women geographers and researchers;
- Strengthen and support the visibility of gender and geography perspectives through our teaching and research;
- Facilitate opportunities to support our research, teaching and academic career development;
- Support and advocate for women geographers.

The formation of these aims is a direct and clear response to the marginalization of these bodies and their advocates from progression, or indeed, getting on the first rung of the ladder in these academic pursuits (Berg, Huijbens, and Larsen 2016; Mountz et al. 2015).

The WGGRN has a relatively flat hierarchical structure. Members are encouraged to champion projects and initiatives such as organizing conference sessions or advocating over issues that intersect with the aims of the network, with the support of other members. WGGRN is a generative body that fosters shared labour, care and identity as well as providing a recognized platform for collective action, collective voice, authority and academic validity. Importantly, WGGRN extends the boundaries of what are 'valued' academic practices through actively fostering academic subjectivities and performances that do not always fit comfortably with neoliberal academic discourses. Membership is unrestricted and open to any interested individual, and includes undergraduate and postgraduate students, short-term contract researchers or lecturers, as well as early-, mid-, late-career scholars, making it accessible to the prevalent precarious academic. Local WGGRN branches and collaborations have emerged at universities around Aotearoa New Zealand, which pursue complementary research and mentoring agendas. Individuals not affiliated with a university but who are interested in WGGRN's work are also able to connect to the network through videoconferencing, email and online interactions, and are welcome to attend face-to-face meetings and workshops.

The strong institutional integration and autonomy of WGGRN as a network sitting outside of the university system disrupts rather than perpetuates the status quo exemplified by neoliberal managerialism. The WGGRN, as previously mentioned, has important links to the New Zealand Geographical Society (NZGS), the professional organization for geography education and research in Aotearoa New Zealand, through the Women and Gender Geographies Study Group launched in 2016. Membership is restricted to members of the NZGS. The Women and Gender Geographies Study Group formalizes the relationship between WGGRN and the NZGS, and has links to the International Geographical Union Gender and Geography Commission (Watkins and Fisher 2016). The networked nature and connections maintained and generated by WGGRN are important for ensuring WGGRN's vitality and resilience, and for enhancing the membership, funding and national standing and relevance of the NZGS and eSocSci Hui Rangahau Tahi. The institutional scaffolding arising from these connections lend to the endurance of the support to individuals and collectives, and extends the reach of practices aimed at disruption (Abetz 2016; Davies 2005; Mountz et al. 2015).

### *NZGS dialogues*

The second intervention is an interactive seminar held at the University of Auckland in September 2015 to explore unconscious gender bias. By sharing our (anonymised) experiences of gender bias within academia with a broader audience, we sought to explore the extent to which gendered

assumptions and sexism condition women's experiences as academics. By presenting at this *Dialogues* seminar, Puāwai were fulfilling requirements associated with a funding award.[3]

In preparing the seminar, we talked about presenting our (wide-spanning) individual research projects in our 1-hour *Dialogues* timeslot. In amongst that discussion, we also talked about what had been happening in our academic lives, our everyday, and things we had come up against in our work. In the process, we shared stories about things that had got under our skin, things that aggravated, things that troubled, kept us up at night, took us away from what is important to us, or made us question or self-doubt. Sometimes we laughed at the stories, sometimes we complained, sometimes we were angry, frustrated, tired or confused. Some of the stories were familiar, as they had been shared before, and some were said out loud for the first time. Sometimes, in telling the stories, they became more troubled. Or rather, we became more troubled by them. This is how we chose to engage actively and critically with experiences of unconscious gender bias in the academy.

We brought a discussion of unconscious gender bias to the *Dialogues* session in an interactive way. With permission, we collected a number of stories we had shared amongst ourselves or that others had shared with us. We anonymised them, wrote each up in brief and put them in a hat, which we handed around the *Dialogues* audience, read out at random and discussed. The audience of approximately 20 people comprised postgraduate students and staff members, men and women, and human and physical geographers. With the exception of Karen, notably absent were Māori and Pasifika staff or students and other people of colour, which partly speaks to the whiteness of geography in Aotearoa New Zealand (Fisher 2015; Pulido 2002). The *Dialogue* worked to draw attention to the persistence of unconscious gender bias in the academy, and was our first attempt to intervene as a collective to disrupt academic practices.

## The conference panel

The final intervention is a 2-hour panel session organized at the NZGS Conference held in Dunedin in February 2016. The session entitled 'Gendered Geographies and Academic Work' sought to provide a platform to discuss the increasing neoliberalisation of academic lives and the intensification of workloads, and to delve into explicit and implicit institutional and cultural gender biases in academia. Following the *Dialogues* session, we had been encouraged by participants and members of WGGRN to develop a related panel discussion that would position the discourse within a national setting. This panel drew on our previous experiences in the *Dialogues* session, and examples from work and relationships, duties of care, career pathways and strategies, professional and personal development opportunities, travel expectations, and more. Our intention was to bring together critical thinkers to explore some of these norms.

The panellists were five academics of a variety of backgrounds: of differing ethnicity, levels of seniority and tenure in academic positions, gender, and proficiency with the panel themes. The diverse panellists also proffered some experience in thinking through gender in diverse fields of research including children, Pacific nations, activism, development studies and neoliberal economies.[4] We used an independent facilitator, a decision based on our experiences of running the *Dialogues* session, to minimize our exposure and vulnerability and to maximize the experience for all those who were present. The panellists were primed to share an anecdote from their academic experience that exposed explicit and/or implicit gender biases. Their stories and perspectives in relation to the theme were both raw and revealing: Panellists often merged their descriptions of the precarity of academic lives, the intensification of workloads in academia, and the toxic shame that pervades academic pursuits. After the Panel had shared their experiences, we turned the storytelling to the audience to ask what they thought might be the way forward towards a more unbiased, supportive academia. It was important to us that we ended in a constructive way.

## Disrupting by doing differently and doing well

The three interventions sketched out above describe what we did in terms of practice. After the NZGS Panel, we took pause to reflect on what our practices amounted to, and what they counted as. We noted the tensions in attempting experimental interventions, particularly ones that seek to disrupt the status quo: the dangers of disruptive practices (slowness, safety), and the productive side of doing differently and doing well (safe spaces, trust and collaboration). We think of our interventions as explicit strategies and practices in 'doing differently', with a focus on ensuring difference encompasses 'doing well'. English language has a dual meaning for 'well'; here we refer to both 'health and well-being' as well as 'excellence'. This way our disruptive practices have always had at heart both an ethics of care for self and others, and a commitment to our work, as we seek to thrive and not just survive. In the sections below we reflect on the ways that our practices 'do well', and how they represent, for us, an ethic of care.

### *Resisting conventional time pressures*

In our efforts to engage with multiple interventions, to foster a politics and ethics of care, and to develop our theoretical nuances, occasionally we did not deliver some outputs according to conventional academic expectations of timeliness, deadlines, and efficiency (Askins and Blazek 2017; Gill 2009; Gill and Donaghue 2016; Mountz et al. 2015). Time constraints, heavy workloads, other caring priorities and our concerns for our colleagues' well-being, meant we reported back on meetings or conferences slowly. Our follow-up on comments after the Panel intervention was exemplar of this. After synthesizing the ideas generated by the panel session, we put forward an initial opportunity to all audience members to sign-up to a private group to provide comment on a working paper, which never eventuated. Our process of slow scholarship meant our call for comments from participants was delayed to the point we did not get participation: they felt their input was constrained by their limited recollection of the event, the fact that they felt conflicted, or were no longer interested. We had also moved on in our thinking since putting out our call for comments, and found this difficult to articulate.

So how is this slow scholarship an act of 'doing well' or practicing an ethic of care? The process of writing about, and reflecting on, our experiences of the conference panel (and *Dialogues* seminar), consolidated our commitment to each other and to our collective attempts to re-imagine academic subjectivities. In practising slow scholarship, we had time to think about how we wished to perform as an academic collective including how to make our efforts visible within the university and beyond (Askins and Blazek 2017; Gill and Donaghue 2016; Mountz et al. 2015). As members of WGGRN, we participate in and lead national and local initiatives that support the aims of the network with regard to advancing equity outcomes and intersectional justice (eSocSci 2018). As members of the Puāwai Collective, we engage in more conventional academic pursuits such as writing and critical engagement with scholarship that informs our practice, but we also take time to celebrate achievements (and failures), to 'check-in' with each other, and to take time to share and know each other's lives so we come away energized for the work ahead. While in other aspects of our academic lives, we experience time pressures that often push us to our limits, WGGRN and Puāwai provide opportunities to resist the fast pace that characterizes the metric-oriented neoliberal university (Gill and Donaghue 2016; Mountz et al. 2015).

### *Creating a safe space*

In these collective interventions, we jumped in enthusiastically to challenge spaces of masculinity and of unconscious gender bias in the neoliberal academy. By jumping in and experimenting, things did not always go as expected. Most often, our interventions raised things that are uncomfortable to talk about and that touch on (our and others') vulnerabilities. In some ways, these awkward

encounters worked to cement us as a group and helped us to feel safe to continue our discussions. Sometimes, however, the forum in which we opened up these discussions did not provide a safe space (Macoun and Miller 2014; Parizeau et al. 2016).

We left ourselves exposed in the *Dialogues* session. We had left the format very open, perhaps too open. Despite selecting anonymised stories of gender bias from a variety of sources to go into the hat, the stories chosen were out of our control. The chosen stories were decontextualized; they were independent of the story that went before them, and independent of the audience reaction or membership. We had intended to make the session participatory and democratic by leaving it 'open', but not having control over the encounter exposed us as facilitators. By disrupting and making others uncomfortable (which we intended), we made ourselves vulnerable and suffered from this. On reflection, we realized we needed guidelines for discussion protocol. These were learnings to benefit our future engagements. Our own discomfort and vulnerability spurred us on to take our agenda to a larger audience, the conference Panel, and to do it differently.

Spaces of care had been built through our consequent and evolving interventions. Our built-up trust within Puāwai came from learning and co-producing knowledge together (Askins and Blazek 2017; Lawson 2007). We had developed a group where we could trust in each other to be able to experiment and try out new ideas, talk aloud, and where we felt free to change our minds. Upon reflection, we realized we took this feeling of safety with us into the *Dialogues* session, but did not adequately take into account that the space of the *Dialogues* audience was fundamentally different: a group coalesced on the day for a one-hour session, without any preparation for audience members (in terms of receptivity to discussing gender bias ideas).

The (physical and theoretical) locations in which we worked together as a group made our Puāwai spaces, 'spaces of care'. While the *Dialogues* intervention highlighted our own vulnerabilities in sharing our stories, it also emphasized the importance of trust, care and safety in any attempt to challenge gendered norms in an institutional setting. Our enthusiasm to actively challenge spaces of masculinity and unconscious bias was confronted by the unrealized need for safe spaces and the risks (and rewards) of experimentation, but when noticed, we 'did well' and practiced an ethic of care by harnessing these spaces.

We learned from this. We learned from the WGGRN too, where we used the resources of experienced, senior colleagues familiar with negotiating these issues to empower us to create a safe space. We sought to create a safe(r) space in the NZGS Conference Panel by building knowledge and trust in our extended conference session (our panel followed the session called 'Gender, Sex, Space and Place: Gendered Geographical Knowledge'). We retained an interested audience from the previous presentations and discussions and therefore audience participants' thinking had been primed somewhat for the substance of our session. The context of the panel more broadly, was a conference at which there was (unexpectedly) little representation of, or discussion about, gender (or intersectional identities more generally). One of the keynote presentations on New Zealand Geography's academic history shockingly bore no examples of female – or indigenous, for that matter – scholars (WGGRN forthcoming). This was evidence to us, and others, that our agenda was valid and there is a need to produce diverse knowledge on gender and intersectional equity.

We applied further learnings to set up a more productive and positive intervention in the Panel. Our two-hour session gave more time than the *Dialogues* session to trouble some of the thinking around gender and gender bias. As organizers, we tried to make less visible our inputs in the Panel's performance by appointing an independent facilitator, which not only put in place personal safeguards but also opened the space for others to contribute on their terms. While we had these protections for ourselves and can speak of our experiences, we also wonder how successful we were: 'what did the participants of these interventions think?', 'did they feel vulnerable?', 'did they feel trusted and/or trustworthy?' We asked for feedback at the end of the panel session, but this is unlikely to reveal any deep vulnerabilities. Although we do not have answers for these questions, we continue to ask them of ourselves, and try to create practices that have these nuances in mind.

### Trust ('geese on bikes')

We have come to learn that trust is critical to our collective acts of care-full disruptions. This speaks to more than just the safe spaces we hold sacred within our group, but also to working with other people. We trust other Puāwai members will pick things up, and that no one member has to be everywhere all the time. We have visualized this practice of trust as geese flying in a 'V', or slipstreaming cyclists. Our alignment in a close group reduces friction, particularly when we work at a fast pace to reach a particular goal such as the interventions outlined above. This practice involves acknowledging that the guilt we may often feel – about how and when we contribute or not – is unnecessary and unhelpful. We remind each other and ourselves, every time, that we all *do* work hard and our time will come. Practising this and troubling feelings of guilt has been one of the most challenging aspects of 'doing differently and well'. Allowing ourselves to both offer help and to *be helped* is not part of the neoliberal mind-set; however, this approach has important implications for generating a more care-full approach to scholarship. We have come to trust that each 'deliverable' will come together based on our various capacities at the time, and a group commitment, or trust, in each other's contribution.

### Privileging other forms of labour

Our interventions have contributed to developing our capabilities beyond the 'publish or perish' model of academic labour, and built on the political project started by WGGRN to foster other types of academic subjectivity. In doing so, we have sought to privilege multiple forms of labour. A key objective of intervention three (Panel) was to draw attention to, and privilege other forms of (academic) labour and to re-imagine metrics beyond impact factors and funding awards. The stories of the panellists and the discussion that followed emphasized the importance of care of self and others, and care-full scholarship – – broadly understood – as central to collective attempts to do academic labour differently. This intervention was also critical to strengthening our resolve as an academic collective to commit to reciprocal care (Askins and Blazek 2017) and doing academic labour differently.

The WGGRN explicitly set out to strengthen and support other academics who were experiencing a wearing down from the neoliberal academic experience and to prioritize care for individual and collective (Mountz et al. 2015). In our national collective, the WGGRN has discussed what is 'relevant' on CVs, in job applications, running workshops, developing and running classes on gender. In these discussions and in practice we have centralized capacities, efforts and achievements that are not conventional 'outputs', as both legitimate examples of 'doing well'. This has included acknowledging the work done prior to workshops and meetings in terms of organization and food preparation, as well as sharing reflections and resources after running events for use by others in the network.

At WGGRN meetings, we also foregrounded the professional and personal lives of our members. We made a point of ensuring all members had the opportunity to introduce themselves and their work (as they felt appropriate) to the wider group during the course of our national, video-conferenced meetings. This is a different kind of work (Parizeau et al. 2016). There is space and opportunity to *think*, *reflect* and critically, *care* in an otherwise time-pressured neoliberal environment, not just academically and critically but more broadly about what is going on for other people in their lives (Lawson 2007).

### The invisibility of an ethics of care

Looking across the interventions described above, we note the invisibility of the regular and sustained care work performed within university institutions, including our efforts to care. Not only is this type of care an emotional undertaking, it is also significantly time consuming and gendered

(Askins and Blazek 2017). WGGRN has run workshops on different ways of 'doing' academia that make care practices and politics visible. In these sessions, and other encounters, we deliberated how and if care should be counted. Our disruption extends to valuing, and therefore making visible, previously un- or under-valued aspects of academic and personal care-work: that not noted in PBRF metrics; that which is diverse in the academic context of the university; and, that done elsewhere which speaks to the whole person-ness of academic (and any) work. and the embodied nature of work. Valuing and making visible the work done is an act of care in itself.

## Conclusion

In this paper, we reflected on three interventions to disrupt academic practices and to re-imagine academic subjectivities premised on collective action, care (of self and others), and privileging other forms of (academic) labour. We also traced the emergence of the Puāwai Collective as a situated and local expression of ideals articulated within the national WGGRN network established to strengthen and support academics and to prioritize care for the individual and collective.

The national WGGRN network created opportunities for connections across Aotearoa New Zealand that enable sharing, advocacy, and informal mentoring (Macoun and Miller 2014; Mountz 2016). Our interventions sought to advance these ideals at a range of scales: from individual to national. Our approach to care-full and slow scholarship has evolved with each experimental intervention, and as we reflect on the outcomes of our efforts. At times, our enthusiasm to disrupt neoliberal practises has meant we experienced feelings of discomfort and vulnerability. On these occasions, the ability to take time to learn from our mistakes, and the trust built among members of Puāwai has enabled us to reflect on our practise and to continually learn.

We have demonstrated how spaces of care might be built, some of the vulnerabilities and difficulties in doing so, and the multiple benefits of persisting with such work. The potential to use strategies such as these to continually reshape our immediate environs within the neoliberal university, is worth pursuing. These and other engagements and interventions we have embarked on together are enabling us to do more than survive in the university – we are working towards thriving.

At our core, we aim to recognize the multifaceted nature of academics' lives, and to provide opportunities to trouble the neoliberal systems that attempt to control them. While we acknowledge the persistence of conventional metrics such as publications (such as this one) that our university requires us to complete, we seek to find ways and moments to do differently and to do well. Through care-full experimentation we have formed a supportive collective, and we have performed academic subjectivities that speak to an ethics and politics of care.

## Notes

1. Puāwai is a Māori term. *v.* to bloom, come to fruition, open out (of a flower). *n.* flower, blossom, bloom. www.maoridictionary.com. The Puāwai Collective is an Auckland-based collective that has its roots in the Women and Gender Geographies Research Networks, but which evolved organically as we sought to make sense of our gendered experiences of the academy and to act to do things differently. The authors of this paper constitute the original members of Puāwai (Kate Davies (NIWA, Hamilton, Aotearoa New Zealand), Karen Fisher, Erena Le Heron, Emma Sharp and Roseanna Spiers (School of Environment, University of Auckland, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand).
2. These, for some, are very serious medical conditions, which have a defined screening and treatment process. While individual members follow up their conditions/circumstances clinically or with support in other spheres, we narrate our experiences of care within our own group, as this is our focus in this paper.
3. The Auckland NZGS Branch awarded grants to Auckland-based WGGRN members who were also members of the NZGS, and who were unwaged or did not have access to research and travel funding to enable them to attend a national WGGRN symposium in Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand. Authors of this paper, with the exception of Karen, were recipients of this award.

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