Symbolic violence and marketing ECRs in the neoliberal University

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\section*{ABSTRACT}
This paper uses symbolic violence as one way of interpreting the lived experiences of early career researchers (ECRs) in the neoliberal University. We focus on marketing ECRs as business schools epitomise the highly market-mediated, performative, and managerialist ideology of the contemporary neoliberal University which facilitates symbolic violence. Specifically, marketing education, with its orientation towards market logic, has been identified as aligning with the neoliberal paradigm. We draw on qualitative narrative interviews with 16 United Kingdom and Australian ECRs in marketing to demonstrate how symbolic violence is produced and reproduced through institutions, ideology, language and discourse, and social relations. We find that while ECRs are not entirely subjugated by symbolic violence in the neoliberal University – with some participants displaying critically reflexive awareness and resistance, we also find that they can be complicit and serve to reproduce the system through seeking to learn and play the game of academia, rather than change it. We argue that symbolic violence offers a framework to help conceptualise the neoliberal University. Further, we submit that instrumental advice to marketing ECRs on how to navigate a life in academia is not enough and that critical reflexivity, resistance, and social action to oppose symbolic violence and the ideology of the neoliberal University is required to achieve emancipation.

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\section*{Introduction}
This paper aims to interpret the lived experiences of Early Career Researchers (ECRs) working in the marketing discipline in the ‘neoliberal University’. Our study draws upon the conceptual framework of symbolic violence and narrative interviews with 16 ECRs in Australia and the United Kingdom (UK) to answer the following research question: How can we interpret the lived experiences of marketing ECRs in the neoliberal University? Our work seeks to extend conversations in marketing and allied disciplines about neoliberalism (Giesler & Veresiu, 2014; Thompson & Kumar, 2018), the marketisation of higher education (Naidoo, Shankar, & Veer, 2011; Thompson, 2017; Varman, Saha, & Skålén, 2011), and the
The concept of the ‘neoliberal university’ (Canaan & Shumar, 2008; Rhodes, Wright, & Pullen, 2018). We argue that one way of thinking about the concept of the neoliberal University is through understanding it as a site of symbolic violence – a system of subtle domination that operates through unconscious processes of socialisation and reproduces an orthodoxy of status hierarchy in which ECRs are subordinated. We consider how symbolic violence in the neoliberal University and its impact on marketing ECRs has negative consequences for the marketing discipline, academics, and higher education at large.

Higher education in the UK and Australia has been subject to increasing marketisation in the last 20 years. The 1997 report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education in the UK recommended the end of universal free higher education and the introduction of tuition fees (Dearing, 1997). In England, tuition fees were introduced in 1998, increased to £3000 per year in 2006, and further increased to £9250 per year by 2019 – creating a marketised structure featuring students-as-customers (Naidoo et al., 2011). Although the Scottish Government abolished tuition fees in 1999, free higher education only applies to Scottish and European citizens aged under 25 and studying at undergraduate level, with all other students paying fees (Student Awards Agency Scotland, 2019). In Australia, tuition fees were re-introduced in 1989 at AU $1800 per year. A three-tier fee structure dependent on the degree course studied was then introduced in 1996, and by 2019 fees in each band were AU $6566, AU $9359, and AU $10,958 respectively (Study Assist, 2019).

Marketisation of higher education has led scholars to pay increasing attention to the concept of the ‘neoliberal University’ in recent years (Canaan & Shumar, 2008). Bourdieu (1998, p. 3) defines neoliberalism as a ‘programme for destroying collective structures which may impede the pure market logic’. Thus, the neoliberal University reflects trends in higher education that focus on marketisation, commercialisation, a focus on efficiencies, a competitive and unstable job market, and Tayloristic managerialism through use of rankings and key performance indicators (KPIs), which all have damaging effects on academia and academics (Firat, 2018; Knights & Clarke, 2014; Rhodes et al., 2018). Business schools – and especially marketing education in universities, with its focus on the pre-eminence of market logic – are particularly aligned with the neoliberal paradigm (Dholakia & Firat, 2018; Knights & Clarke, 2014; Mingers & Willmott, 2012; Tadajewski, 2006).

While marketing and consumer researchers have begun to consider how neoliberalism affects consumers, markets, and the higher education system (Giesler & Veresiu, 2014; Naidoo et al., 2011; Thompson, 2017; Thompson & Kumar, 2018), there has been less attention on the lived experience of ECRs in the neoliberal University or how this negatively impacts marketing academe (Snuggs & Jevons, 2018; Varman et al., 2011). This is despite marketing scholars having long studied neoliberalism and its harmful effects (Khare & Varman, 2017; Tadajewski et al., 2014; Varman, Skålén, & Belk, 2012). We argue that given that the marketing discipline involves the study of markets, it is an appropriate domain in which to critique the marketisation of university education. Our research seeks to understand the instrumental practices that ECRs adopt in the neoliberal University, and which limit their ability to undertake the important work of the academic. We argue this is damaging to academics themselves as well as to the marketing discipline. Our work draws on the concept of symbolic violence – a subtle form of power and domination that does not emerge from hegemonic power but rather emerges through
processes of socialisation and internalised forms of capital, habitus (ingrained habits, skills and dispositions), and doxa (taken-for-granted norms) (Bourdieu, 1979; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. The literature review introduces and considers the marketisation of higher education and the concept of the neoliberal University system and how this affects ECRs, and introduces our conceptual framework of symbolic violence. We next outline the study methodology before presenting our research findings. Our discussion and conclusions focus on some conceptual and practical implications about what our research means for understanding how marketing ECRs experience the neoliberal University, and we make some suggestions for future research.

The neoliberal University and marketing ECRs

Marketing and consumer researchers have drawn attention to how neoliberalism responsibilises consumers (Giesler & Veresiu, 2014), disempowers the subaltern (Khare & Varman, 2017), and leads to the domination of human labour through capital (Zwick, 2018). Scholars have also begun to consider the destructive effects of neoliberalism and marketisation on higher education (Naidoo et al., 2011; Thompson, 2017; Varman et al., 2011). On this line emerges the concept of the neoliberal University – an institution ruled by market logic (Canaan & Shumar, 2008; Rhodes et al., 2018). The neoliberal University refers to how government policies, the university sector, management and administrators, and university life have become embedded in and promote neoliberal doctrine (Canaan & Shumar, 2008; Dholakia & Firat, 2018). Neoliberalism has brought the establishment of market logic and marketisation of higher education (Naidoo et al., 2011). Higher education is now considered as an instrument to supply the capitalist economy and is dominated by a culture of managerialism.

Universities are now framed by a neoliberal ideology that dictates that the public sector is inefficient unless it is subject to the rules, regulations, and assumptions that govern the private sector (Canaan & Shumar, 2008). The neoliberal University also infers a focus from university management on competition, attracting high student numbers, and investing in buildings and infrastructure over staff, efficiencies, performance targets, and students as consumers (Parsons, Maclaran, & Chatzidakis, 2017). Life for marketing scholars in the neoliberal University is typified by Tayloristic management practices, journal rankings, performance reviews, an audit culture, and increasing job instability and insecurity (Knights & Clarke, 2014; Tadajewski, 2016a). The neoliberal University also features high executive pay and a trammelling of political activism and critical discourse (McLachlan, 2017; Rhodes et al., 2018). We do not argue here that Universities are uniformly neoliberal. Rather, we follow Brenner and Theodore’s (2002) concept of ‘actually existing neoliberalism’ to acknowledge that Australian and UK Universities each have institutional structures, narratives, and practices that align to various degrees with the neoliberal project, but can also be sites of contradiction, fissures, and resistance.

Gill (2010, p. 241) argues that: ‘Neoliberalism found fertile ground in academics whose predispositions to “work hard” and “do well” meshed perfectly with its demands for autonomous, self-motivating, responsibilised subjects.’ As noted by Gill, the structuring
of the neoliberal University plays on the ambiguous relationship scholars have with their work due to:

… inherent pleasures and fulfilment that many people derive from their work (when they find time to do it) or at least the promise of/idea of it, as well as to the seductions of relatively autonomous working lives – though this autonomy is eroding fast, as universities import business models which require for example that all e-mails be answered within 24 hours, or that academics are present in the office five days a week. (2010, p. 241)

The pleasure and promise Gill (2010) notes cause scholars to become complicit in being subjected to symbolic violence.

Yet, such virtues of university life distort the reality that:

… the much-vaunted autonomy often simply means that universities end up extracting even more labour from us for free, as we participate in working lives in which there is often no boundary between work and anything else (if indeed there is anything else). (Gill, 2010, p. 241)

Gill (2010, p. 241) goes on to explain that:

[a] lack of resistance to the neoliberalisation of universities is partly a result of these divisive, individualising practices, of the silences around them, of the fact also that people are too exhausted to resist and furthermore do not know what to resist or how to do so.

The neoliberal University has particular effects for ECRs. As Wöhrer (2014, p. 483) argues, ‘policies enacted by most universities and research institutions are ambiguous’. Research shows that ECRs often experience abuses of power, such as lack of consultation about their work conditions, and are often forced to do instrumental work that is not radical or groundbreaking and which often compromises their own values (Alfrey, Enright, & Rynne, 2017; Wöhrer, 2014). ECRs also face intensive workloads, poor work–life balance, and high publication expectations (Wöhrer, 2014), and are subject to an audit and performance culture that creates a Foucauldian panopticon (Stöckelová, 2014). As Shore and Wright (2000, p. 77) explain, ‘it orders the whole system while ranking everyone within it. Every individual is made acutely aware that their conduct and performance is under constant scrutiny’. Life in the neoliberal University produces considerable stress and anxiety among ECRs, which has harmful impacts on their personal life, health, and well-being (Berg, Huijbens, & Larsen, 2016).

Lack of job security for ECRs often creates feelings of isolation, helplessness, sadness or crisis (Wöhrer, 2014). There are often unrealistic expectations on the mobility of ECRs, which ignores the complex realities of people’s lives (Carrozza & Minucci, 2014; Wöhrer, 2014). The neoliberal University system favours a cosmopolitan, bourgeois masculine subjectivity (Skeggs, 2004) – scholars who are immobile due to family, lack of finances or no desire to move elsewhere are marginalised. Gender inequalities are also inherent, with female ECRs often suffering from lack of career advancement and having the importance and relevance of their work regularly dismissed (Stöckelová, 2014). Academia is increasingly seen as a game played by ‘hypercompetitive and combative “ninjas”, cynical and unmotivated “zombies” and jaded and anxious “nervous wrecks”’ (Barker, 2017, p. 87). In the end, many ECRs quit, leading to a loss of good talent from the academy (Wöhrer, 2014).

Existing research has helped define the concept of the neoliberal University (Canaan & Shumar, 2008) and considers how it creates students as consumers (Naidoo et al., 2011),
generates market subjectivities (Varman et al., 2011), and reframes scholarly research as an entrepreneurial project (Thompson, 2017). However, what is less well understood is how academics, and specifically ECRs, experience life in the neoliberal University and how they may comply or resist its effects. This is a particular concern for the future of marketing academy given the neoliberal order under which marketing departments operate (Snuggs & Jevons, 2018). Our work therefore seeks to address this gap.

**Symbolic violence**

To help extend conceptualisations of the neoliberal University, and interpret the lived experiences of our marketing ECR participants within it, our study draws on the concept of symbolic violence: ‘the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2002, p. 167). Symbolic violence was first conceptualised by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) in their study of formal education in France to refer to unconscious power relations and domination in which there is tacit acceptance and complicity on the part of both those who use it and those who are subject to it (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2002; Žižek, 2008).

Therefore, symbolic violence differs from overt, visible and recognisable violence, such as acts of aggression, or crime or terror (Ayrosa & de Oliveira, 2018). Rather, it is a nuanced way of understanding power relations that work through subtle, invisible and pervasive forms of violence, transmitted through institutions, ideology, language and discourse, and social relations in capitalist market systems in which people play a role in reproducing their own subordination through acceptance and internalisation of ideas and structures that subordinate them (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Zwick, 2018). Symbolic violence ‘manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force’ (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 4). Thus, higher education and the neoliberal University become sites of market-driven violence (Firat, 2018). We follow Foucault (1980, p. 92), who argues that power in the university setting is the ‘multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which agents operate and which constitute their own organisation’; that is, in the neoliberal University, power does not emanate from a fixed centre source and power relations are always in process (Lakomski, 1984).

Symbolic power in this context operates through ‘injunctions, suggestions, seduction, threats, reproaches, orders or calls to order’ (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 42). However, symbolic violence can only produce its own effects ‘when provided with the social conditions for imposition and inculcation’ (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 7). Furthermore, complicity and acceptance of symbolic violence lead agents to reproduce a reality that is made to appear unavoidable and even beneficial. In the neoliberal University this can involve playing the game of academia to get tenure, publishing according to journal rankings and seeking research income to meet targets rather than for an interest in knowledge production (Thompson, 2017). Under symbolic violence people are complicit in being dominated, but this does not mean they are ignorant of a system of domination, nor do they passively submit. Symbolic violence presupposes that ‘on the part of these who are subjected to it a form of complicity which is a neither passive submission to an external constraint nor a free adherence to values’ and that in effect this ‘defies the ordinary alternative between freedom and constraint’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 168).
In the neoliberal University symbolic violence becomes embedded in the habitus of academics, their mind structure relating to their sensitivities, tastes, dispositions, morals and principles of judgement and practice (Bourdieu, 2001; Saatcioglu & Ozanne, 2013). As such, scholars absorb the dominant structures, hierarchies and discourses of the social settings in which they exist – what Bourdieu would call their field (academia) – into their mental structures (habitus). Ideologies, discourses and social relations transmit normative understandings of power and domination, which are then tacitly accepted and then absorbed into the habitus of individuals. This internalisation helps reproduce symbolic violence, as it becomes part of the doxa – what is taken for granted – and which appears natural and self-evident. In the field of the neoliberal University system, symbolic violence is expressed through marketised institutions and performative, managerialist ideologies, discourses and social relations. As Žižek (2008, p. 1) explains, this symbolic violence is ‘embodied in language and its forms’ and reproduces relations of social domination and the ‘imposition of a certain universe of meaning’. Symbolic violence becomes a form of domination embedded in institutionalised processes that enable and encourage violence through ‘habitual speech forms’ (Žižek, 2008, p. 1).

In the neoliberal University, ideologies and discourses that create symbolic violence coalesce around unending competition, performance targets, probation and promotion benchmarks, and journal rankings that are embedded in contemporary university life (Knights & Clarke, 2014; Zwick, 2018). ECRs (and other scholars) are subjected to this symbolic violence which becomes embedded in their habitus and forms part of their ways of thinking and knowing, creating complicity that is not complete subjugation nor adherence. These ideologies and discourses become established as part of the doxa of academia; they become the way of doing things around here. Under a dominant framework of neoliberalism and its individual responsibility, symbolic violence leads ECRs to blame themselves for their own predicament whilst the role of power and ideology remains opaque (Bourdieu, 2001).

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 170) argue that academics are particularly susceptible to subtle social domination:

Intellectuals are often among those in the least favourable position to discover or to become aware of symbolic violence, especially that wielded by the school system, given that they have been subjected to it more intensively than the average person and that they continue to contribute to its exercise.

Ideologies, discourses and social relations in the neoliberal University are often shaped by directives, benchmarks and ideas rather than strict laws and regulations (Canaan & Shumar, 2008; Rhodes et al., 2018). Thus, in academia, power and forms of social and cultural capital become important resources that frame the status hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1984; Coskuner-Balli & Thompson, 2013). This appears to align with the subtle, invisible nature of symbolic violence. We acknowledge that Judith Butler (1999) and others critique Bourdieu’s pessimism, arguing that symbolic violence subjects us to dominant structures that seem inescapable, thus ignoring opportunities for human agency. However, we argue that the acceleration of the destructive forces of neoliberalism and the impact on higher education in recent years warrants a critical perspective. Furthermore, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) propose that critical reflexivity may offer a pathway for resistance to symbolic violence and a line of flight towards social change and emancipation.
Methodology

In this study, symbolic violence is utilised to interpret the lived experience of marketing ECRs and to help further conceptualise and understand the concept of the neoliberal University. We focus on marketing ECRs as business schools and marketing departments epitomise the highly performative, managerialist ideology of the neoliberal University (Knights & Clarke, 2014; Mingers & Willmott, 2012). Furthermore, marketing departments tend to have the highest student numbers in the business school, serving as a cash cow for the university, yet marketing education is often devalued, and scholars are ranked on journal ranking lists that fetishise publications in selected American outlets (Snuggs & Jevons, 2018; Willmott, 2011).

Qualitative interviews as a form of narrative production were used (Czarniawska, 2004; Lichrou, O’Malley, & Patterson, 2014). Our study featured a sample of 16 marketing ECRs (eight males and eight females) employed across 12 universities in Australia and the UK (see Table 1). The UK and Australia were selected as the sites of inquiry due to sharing the use of the English language, similarities in Anglo culture and the organisation of institutions, and to utilise established networks of potential participants among the research team. Our sample was small and focused due to the discrete participant group and the topic of interest, and also reflects sensitivities for ECRs in sharing their experiences. Participants were deemed to be an ECR if they were within five years of post-PhD completion. A purposive sampling approach was used in which the researchers’ existing networks were used to invite ECRs in marketing to participate in the study. Interviews were conducted face to face in participants’ offices or other locations at their request and lasted approximately 90 minutes.

The focus of the narrative interviews was on encouraging participants to converse about their experiences as an ECR in marketing academia. The narrative interviews began by inviting participants to chart their entry into academia and discuss their experiences of reading for a PhD, including best experiences and highlights as well as challenges and tensions, and to provide some reflections on these. The researchers then asked

Table 1. Participant sample characteristics.

| *Name (pseudonym)* | Sex | Location | Years post-PhD |
|--------------------|-----|----------|----------------|
| 1 Alexander        | Male| Australia| 1 year         |
| 2 Tacita           | Female| Australia| 4 years       |
| 3 Roddy            | Male| UK       | 3 years        |
| 4 Sheena           | Female| UK       | 5 years        |
| 5 Penelope         | Female| UK       | 1 year         |
| 6 Albert           | Male| UK       | 5 years        |
| 7 Surendra         | Male| UK       | 5 years        |
| 8 Robin            | Male| Australia| 2 years       |
| 9 Huey             | Male| UK       | 3 years        |
| 10 Travis          | Male| UK       | 5 years        |
| 11 Mariel          | Female| Australia| 2 years       |
| 12 Rhea            | Female| Australia| 1 year        |
| 13 Tilda           | Female| Australia| 1 year        |
| 14 Ingrid          | Female| Australia| 3 years       |
| 15 Conrad          | Male| Australia| 5 years        |
| 16 Jane            | Female| UK       | 2 years        |

*Owing to the need to protect participant identities due to the sensitive nature of the research, pseudonyms are used and the exact location, age, job title and grade of each participant is not disclosed.
participants to discuss their experiences and reflections as an ECR on their current job, teaching, research, colleagues, collaborations, career progression, mentoring and work–life balance. These conversations followed an interactional form of narrative interviewing (Hill & Lai, 2016; Riessman, 2004) that involved a collaborative sharing of stories between participants and interviewers, creating a dialogical space about the experiences of marketing ECRs. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed prior to being loaded into QSR NVivo 11 software to prepare for coding and analysis.

The researchers read and re-read entire transcripts several times and met regularly during an iterative process of analysis. Following Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998), a holistic content analysis approach was first followed, which focused on the content and meanings of each individual narrative in its entirety. This involved a thematic analysis that focused on the text as a whole to identify emergent themes without losing context from the overall story. Next, these emergent themes were used to create categories to aid analysis across all interviews. This involved extracting and classifying parts of stories into defined categories in line with the categorical content approach to qualitative analysis (Lichrou et al., 2014). Our analysis of the qualitative data here focuses on providing examples and interpretations of symbolic violence. All personal information in the data was de-identified, and pseudonyms are used throughout.

Findings

Illustrating the experiences of marketing ECRs and identifying how symbolic violence governs their experiences in the neoliberal University, the findings presented here offer vignettes from our participants across three key themes: institutions; ideology, language and discourse; and social relations.

Institutions

Institutions are a key channel through which symbolic violence is transmitted (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). In our study, the market system for higher education and the institution of the university performs this role and acts to socially dominate ECRs. Huey, a UK ECR, illustrates this when discussing the commercialisation of academia:

I think my perception of academia and competitiveness is, was slightly jaundiced from when I was a marketing practitioner. If anything, I think it’s getting far more competitive in academia now than it was when I was going through the process myself as a student. So, I think if, in a way, it’s just become much more commercial. In effect, it’s just got back to what I would see as being the norm in practice. I think it’s more of a shock to people who have long been in academia to seeing how commercial it’s getting. I mean it’s so competitive now, the ranking tables, even the cohort of students [is] a challenge to what people have had before you know. And the job uncertainty. We’ve got privateers coming in and, so I think it’s just become a much [more] competitive marketplace.

Huey’s reflections on competition, commercialisation, KPIs and rankings as being no different to his experiences working in the private sector offer a clear indication of how far neoliberalism and market logic has permeated contemporary universities (Dholakia & Firat, 2018), creating the conditions for symbolic violence to occur. While Huey appears aware of and somewhat jaundiced by neoliberalisation, he refers to the market-mediation
of higher education as normative, suggesting that he has internalised this state of affairs and it becomes part of the doxa of marketing academia. His experience in commercial practice perhaps means Huey is used to a marketised structure. But there is no real questioning or contestation of the neoliberal logic. Rather, the inference is that marketisation is something that people in higher education need to become accustomed to. In this example, the pervasiveness of neoliberal ideology in the modern university becomes apparent.

Our participants had a strong awareness of the impositions from institutional power, supporting the assertion by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) that people do not simply passively submit to symbolic violence. For example, Tilda, an Australian ECR comments on the lack of agency that people in her career stage have in the University by discussing how decisions are made on what she should research:

Q: What influences the topics that you research?

Um, well right now it’s what I’m given. Basically. Um, so it’s basically whatever I’m allocated to. Fully, so that would be, that’s fully the case, you know, the research topic areas are wholly determined by, yeah the research centre. Or the department, yeah.

Here, Tilda illustrates that decision making in the neoliberal University often works without the voice and input of ECRs present. In having her research agenda dictated to her by the research centre, or departmental management, the notion of academic freedom for ECRs like Tilda is absent (Bristow, Robinson, & Ratle, 2017). Thus, the disciplinary power of Universities (Foucault, 1980) is established early in the career of scholars.

Tilda critiques the power that universities hold over ECRs like her:

I just feel like … [Universities] are in such a position of power relative to me … I think, well they’ve got ten others that they could potentially get to do this job … maybe that’s just my perception, but I definitely have that feeling of well, if you want the job, this is what you have to do. It’s not fair. It’s not fair but at the same time, you know, I at least went in to this, I guess, with my eyes open because I knew that realistically there’s a very limited number of places that I can work in my region. And I … from the start realised that that is going to cause problems – when you only have a couple of institutions that you can work at within the region. Unless you’re able and willing to move, it makes it so that you are not in the position of power. So, I guess I had that expectation right from the start, that I was going to struggle, and that has been the case, yeah.

Tilda’s critique of the power of universities suggests a more aware and resistant agency in the face of her struggles and the struggles of ECRs more generally. She appears to be reflexively aware that she is subject to institutional power domination and status hierarchy. There is also some contestation here that is apparent through Tilda’s complaints, demonstrating that she is not completely subjugated. These reflexive utterances align with Bourdieu and Wacquant’s (1992) ideas that critical reflexivity offers a pathway for escaping symbolic violence. However, Tilda makes a telling comment that, despite the situation seeming to be unfair, she went in with her eyes wide open and knowing that it would likely be a struggle to establish her career. Here, Tilda is not being coerced by a hegemonic power. Rather, Tilda seems accepting that these are the power relations she is subject to, and this is the way things are – the doxa of neoliberal academia (Bourdieu, 2001). Despite her complaints, she still appears to be predisposed to play the game and appears to internalise the existing hierarchy and her lower status within her habitus. The
soft power of symbolic violence in the neoliberal University shows its face in this example, through internalisation and justification of the status quo, reference to a limited supply of institutions and jobs in the market, an endless supply of potential replacement staff, and self-perceptions and high expectations regarding work performance. Here we begin to see the effects of symbolic violence as experienced by ECRs in the neoliberal University, in which scholars internalise and accept the status hierarchy despite some criticism, rather than openly challenge it.

A common theme that emerged amongst participants was the heavy burden that marketing ECRs bear in relation to teaching administration, as explained by Huey:

The big thing that you will, I think most people, underestimate is that it’s not about the amount of time you’re actually in the lecture theatre or in the seminar rooms. It’s all the stuff that goes around on the outside of it … administration is absolute, I can’t believe there’s so much of it. Plus, you’ve got your academic advising then you’ve got tutes and stuff like that. And that again takes up a lot of time. I mean the amount of email[s] you get, and traffic just generated from one student can wipe out your morning. Compared to when I was at university. It seems to be much more handheld than it ever was. I mean that’s just a reality. Well it’s just a norm, isn’t it? It’s the norm for us. But whether it’s the norm for people higher up is, is another issue isn’t it? I think that’s an inevitability isn’t it? That [professors] definitely do more research. And they have less teaching. So, it goes with the territory.

Here, Huey reflects on the strains caused by a heavy administration workload from teaching and his perceptions that this has increased in universities in recent years. The high volume of administrative work in the neoliberal University that is required to deal with increasing student numbers created through marketisation and a focus on growth in higher education, complex pastoral care needs and intensive demands for support in their learning experience from students-as-consumers (Naidoo et al., 2011) become clear in this example. Huey refers to this as a norm, again demonstrating that this way of working has become embedded within the doxa of life in the neoliberal University. This administrative burden removes time, space and investment from doing the – arguably more – important work of an academic, such as research and teaching in the classroom, for ECRs.

Huey also gives the impression that there is a status hierarchy in which ECRs bear the brunt of this administrative load, and professors appear to teach less and have more time for research. His argument suggests that he is aware that those who are lower down in the status hierarchy are dominated. However, he hints at a belief that the fault lies with those more senior staff. He does not seem to be reflexively aware that the fault may really lie with the system of symbolic violence in the neoliberal University that creates these status hierarchies. We can interpret here that the system creates a divide-and-conquer situation, which results in the players in the field of academia playing against each other. It could be argued that both ECRs and professors are subject to symbolic violence; while the latter enjoy increased status in the hierarchy, they are also subject to additional KPIs, such as securing external research funding, maintaining high publication outputs, achieving teaching excellence and mentoring junior academics. Despite Huey’s complaints, he also appears complicit and accepting of this state of affairs by referring to the situation as a ‘reality’ and a ‘norm’. Huey’s tacit acceptance reflects Bourdieu’s (2001) identification of symbolic violence as something that becomes established as normal and routine. From this example, we could argue that reflexive vigilance in response to life in the neoliberal University is an important concern for academics.
Ideology, language and discourse

Ideology plays an important role in the function of symbolic violence as it embeds rules and norms in the dispositions of those subject to it (Bourdieu, 2000). Žižek (2008) places particular importance on the role of language and discourse in symbolic violence. Language helps to operationalise ideology and establish the norms and habits that become embedded in the neoliberal University. Academia becomes a game, as Rhea, an Australian ECR, explains:

There definitely is a game. When you’re first starting out, you don’t know. No one told you that, you sort of just bumble your way along and then in hindsight, you go, ‘Oh, probably should’ve negotiated that a little differently.’ I think that maybe [the onus is] on senior academics, or you know, the training that you get when you commence HDR, you know, someone has to tell you … You do eventually learn those things but it’s like having a set of guidelines that you operate by and somebody pointing those things out to you that they are actually important … You get into this game and you don’t really know what all of the rules are? So, I think some of those things could be highlighted a little bit more.

Rhea’s struggles in figuring out the game and its rules and her suggestions that these could be explained to ECRs draws attention to how academics can be complicit in symbolic violence. Rather than critique the game and the rules, Rhea seeks to figure them out so that she can play the game better. The received wisdom is that this is a game, there are rules you must figure out and there is no option but to play. The game becomes part of the doxa of academia, which Rhea internalises into her habitus and which she seeks to play better to improve her position in the status hierarchy. Rather than challenging the fact that there is a game, or questioning what academia and life in a university should be about, Rhea criticises that the rules are not clearly explained and that those higher in the status hierarchy should share knowledge about this with ECRs. A lack of critical reflexivity becomes apparent in this case. Furthermore, this internalisation of the natural order of things provides an almost taken-for-granted legitimacy to the system of symbolic violence in the neoliberal University and leaves it entirely unchallenged. Like Huey, Rhea focuses on criticising some of the details of the game of academia, rather than its entire existence.

While Rhea talks about the rules of the game in general, Mariel’s quote below about the rules is more specific to research. Ideology relating to research was another focus for our participants. Mariel, who is an Australian ECR, discussed her gradual realisations about how the ‘game’ of research works:

Initially it didn’t really bother me, ‘cause when you don’t know what to expect, you just do whatever that’s required of you. But as time moves by you start to talk to other people and you realise that maybe you need to drive a lot of your own research. So, yeah, then you start to feel like, oh, maybe you should be doing something else instead.

Mariel’s comments that you do whatever is necessary but then talk to people and realise you perhaps need to do something else infer the subtlety of power relations in the neoliberal University. The rules of the game are not clear, and this creates instability and doubt in the minds of ECRs like Mariel. The torpor that often permeates the higher education market and university life for ECRs, we argue, creates the social conditions of the imposition and inculcation of symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Firat, 2018).
Another major concern for marketing ECRs was the research publication expectations, as explained by Tilda:

That’s not something that my supervisor and I have discussed. There’s definitely an, an implicit pressure. But nothing that’s been formalised in, in terms of you need to have x number of publications by the end of the year. I just more think of it from my own perspective, like, for me to have the best chance at getting the next contract, or getting a permanent position.

By referring to implied pressure and concerns about job precarity and securing a new contract or gaining a valuable permanent position, Tilda also creates pressure on herself. This reflects Gill’s (2010) analysis of how neoliberalism has found fertile ground among academics like Tilda, who have a propensity to work hard and be a self-motivated and responsible subject. Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that we find a tacit acceptance of neoliberal ideas, power domination and status hierarchy among several of our ECR participants. The symbolic violence experienced by Tilda becomes embedded in her habitus and is reflected in her stated dispositions to be goal-oriented and to work hard (Bourdieu, 2000). The idea that scholars like Tilda have merely become responsibilised subjects under neoliberalism (see Giesler & Veresui, 2014) forces us to reflect on and perhaps re-engage with the idea of academics as intellectuals who question and critique things, including the power relations within the university (Barnett, 2003).

The ideology, language and discourse promulgated by universities in strategic documents and journal ranking lists creates clashes in ontology and logic, as discussed by Roddy, a UK ECR:

If you look at all the different strategic documents, over all of [the] university submissions and mission statements, stuff like that, usually they highlight interdisciplinarity. But, in the everyday running of things, a lot of structures and organisational initiatives actually counteract interdisciplinarity. I co-authored a paper in [the] British Medical Journal, which measured by impact factor is incredibly influential. It has an impact factor of 14-point-i-don’t-know-what-it-is. But on the ABS list, it is only ranked as a one star [publication]. Meaning that, from the internal point of view, it’s a crap publication. So that kind of interdisciplinarity is definitely counteracted by the way we rate research quality. Well, before I came here I didn’t even know about the ABS list, right? Then all of a sudden, it determines all of what I’m doing. Which is quite ironic, but of course, I was aware that there are a number of different ranking lists, alright. And the system which I’m kind of brought up in does kind of have a ranking list, but it’s just more, much more generic and broad. And as I said, overall, I think it’s a good thing to try to rate, I mean, research quality. I would just like to see, that, the things you take into account would be, would have a wider scope.

Again, we do not find evidence of complete subjugation by Roddy, who is critical of the clash in logic between university strategy documents promoting interdisciplinarity and the narrow discipline journal ranking lists. There is an absurdity here: what matters are artificial rankings of quality rather than any discernible assessment of the meaning, contribution and impact of academic research. Here, Roddy identifies an institutional fissure, a contradiction in the neoliberal order of the University that may offer a pathway for resistance. However, Roddy also mentions that he thinks it is a good thing to rate research quality, in a sense accepting the ideology but merely arguing over the terms of reference, suggesting that he has internalised ideas into his habitus that subordinate him to symbolic violence. A pattern of tacit acceptance among some of our participants seems
to emerge, in which ECRs may grumble about their status and argue about some of the specifics of the system (in this case journal rankings), but do not enlist their critique to attempt to change the system.

Specific language and terminology relating to research were also referred to by some of our participants. Here, Albert, a UK ECR, discusses the language and discourse surrounding the UK Research Exercise Framework (REF) and how that shapes his experiences in the university:

I wanted to be applying for a promotion this year, but there’s no point. Obviously, they can’t discriminate against me for not being REF-returnable, but [the] sort of the unwritten rule is if you’re not REF-returnable you don’t apply for a promotion . . . at the end of the REF period. Wait until the next one starts. Um, but yeah generally the university made a decision to return three-star or four-star publications only. I think again as, as a lecturer, as an early career researcher, I don’t think it’s, it’s not really viewed as that serious if I’m not REF-returnable. It’s nice if I am but yeah, it’s not really my role to be REF-returnable, I think. For the professors, the readers and the senior lecturers I think there is much more of a, ‘well, of course you’re a professor. Of course, you’re going to be REF-returnable’. If you’re not, then I think that would be a disaster if you’re a professor and you weren’t. Maybe not four-star publications but certainly you should have four- or three-star. Professors, they would be looking at more four-stars, maybe two of each, or four four-stars, something like that. And they say well probably you’re talking, you should at least be REF-returnable.

Albert refers to being REF-returnable numerous times, demonstrating how pressure, expectations and perceptions on performance and one’s worth as an academic are embodied in the ‘language and its forms’ and fosters the imposition of a ‘certain universe of meaning’ (Žižek, 2008, p. 1). Here, seductions, reproaches and calls to order, rather than overt manifestations of power, are inherent in the system of symbolic violence in the neoliberal University (Bourdieu, 2001). Albert does not seem to question the language or power logic here in any meaningfully critical way – he accepts his low status in the hierarchy, suggesting his subservience to symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Power is also faceless – the university and the accepted discourse decree things, not necessarily people. The meaning of what makes a good academic in the neoliberal University becomes reimagined. It is about numbers, ticking boxes, rankings and measurable output – not ideas, knowledge creation and discovery.

**Social relations**

Social relations in the neoliberal University also reinforce a system of symbolic violence. Academics often work according to a competitive, individualistic perspective that aligns with neoliberal ideology, rather than a collective and collaborative orientation (Thompson, 2017). This logic helps foster symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2000; Zwick, 2018). The effect this can have on health and well-being was also raised by Albert:

Probably when I first started here work–life balance was not particularly good. Just working a lot and not really having much of a social life. But I think, especially in academia, that seems to be almost, it’s seen as normal, I guess . . . These days everybody wants to be a professor by 40 or something, so they will finish their PhD. They get their lectureship, and they work themselves to death trying to get promoted. And you see a drop in citizenship around the place from among those that are content to progress at whatever pace, and those that want a promotion now because, ‘you know, I want this lifestyle’. ‘You know, you don’t pay me
Albert reflects on a lack of citizenship, intense competition to get a promotion and a masculine culture of long hours that is established as normal and just the way you must do things. Thus, the doxa of academia in the neoliberal University is established as a game of snakes and ladders, with achieving status in the hierarchy superseding teaching and research quality or impact. This creates the conditions for symbolic violence to which ECRs like Albert are subjected to. Albert identifies a cognitive dissonance between not liking the idea of working long hours and the reality that things have to be done, with sorry not being a good enough excuse for not doing something.

The significant health impact on ECRs from life in the neoliberal University is also illustrated by Tacita an ECR in Australia who explains:

The first year I was so stressed what did I do wrong and my supervisor didn’t approve this [pay increment] for three months and can you believe that I’ve been asking what’s going on and actually I had the meeting with him before he said everything’s fine but he didn’t, ‘Just click reply,’ and yes that’s all, he didn’t do it.

Here, Tacita illustrates the performance expectations on ECRs and the disciplinary gaze from supervisors in the ultra-competitive landscape of the neoliberal University. Tacita’s affective intensities about her increment, and the loss of pay due to the delays in having it approved, are experienced as stress and anxiety. Academics like Albert are putting internal pressures on themselves to work long hours, while those such as Tacita are also subject to the disciplinary power and the subjective interpretations about performance by supervisors, creating stress and anxiety for ECRs (Berg et al., 2016).

Market logic in the neoliberal University creates winners and losers in a game of competition, with ECRs at the bottom of the status hierarchy. This is explained by Ingrid, an Australian ECR, on how she negotiates her role as an academic:

Whether it’s trying to make your timetable work, so that you can spend time with children, whether it’s working three or four days and there’s some women who I work with who do that. I don’t see any men working part-time. Once you take a year off with a child, you’re almost going down a certain path where you are the primary care giver. I’m an ardent feminist, but you know, I see that I very much am the primary care giver and that has certain expectations and burdens that come with it. So, it is incredibly liberating and lovely, but when you’re trying to navigate full-time work at the same time it can be very, very challenging. So, seeing how other women have done that, and the choices that they make, I think there’s also that role of, the very successful male academic, who is a bachelor who moves from country to country, institution to institution and that’s what his credibility is staked in. And I think that lone-wolf figure of the successful academic still perpetuates. I’ve had colleagues from overseas ask me ‘why are you taking jobs in Australia, you’re better than that’, and they don’t see
that there’s something beyond just your job, which is your life, you know? That I’ve got family, that I’ve got friends here, that I’ve got a child who wants to know his grandparents.

In contrast to some of our other participants, Ingrid does not internalise the practices associated with symbolic violence in the neoliberal University into her doxa. Rather, she has a high level of reflexive awareness that leads her to contest domination. Here, she identifies the gendered nature of the university system that makes life challenging for her but rewards male lone-wolf academics who hold greater status in the hierarchy. Her experiences reflect a dominant masculine subjectivity in academia (Skeggs, 2004), and how becoming a mother as an ECR in neoliberal academe creates challenges to be both a good parent and a good academic (see also Huopalainen & Satama, 2018). But Ingrid also breaks free from domination by suggesting there is more to life than playing the game of academia, referring to the importance of friends, family and a balanced lifestyle.

Ingrid goes on to explain how she subversively pushes back against the system to achieve work–life balance:

I mean, I love writing you know. When I’m writing at night and I’m working on a paper, I don’t, I almost don’t feel like it’s work, because just the act of writing is this, real beauty in that for me and I get lost in it. I love my job so much that it never feels like a burden, no, research is just incredibly liberating, I love teaching, but the research is what drew me in and what will always stimulate me the most. So, spending the time writing at night, it’s not a bad thing for me. I could happily live my life like that but what I try to do is make a stance within my department that I am leaving early, you know, four o’clock, thirty. I think, other people who are coming up through the PhD ranks or other Postdocs in the department they can see that you can make this work–life balance, yet still be successful in this career. Because, at the end of the day, everyone is judged by the same measures, so how you use your time is up to you. You still need to produce the outputs.

After Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) we find critical reflection, contestation and subversion from Ingrid opens up a pathway to resist symbolic violence. It could be argued that her comments about the beauty of the act of writing and her passion for research align with Gill’s (2010) observations on how pleasure and promise entice scholars to subject themselves to the symbolic violence of the neoliberal University. However, Ingrid also recognises how normative discourses shape life as a marketing academic and discusses her determination to leave work early some days and make time for her life outside the university. Ingrid refers to a positive female role model who helped her negotiate this. This is suggestive of how alternative norms, discourses and social relations could challenge the status hierarchy that the system of symbolic violence in the neoliberal University imposes. Ingrid demonstrates that ECRs may be able to resist symbolic violence in the university, yet this is balanced by the late nights she spends writing and her need to still produce outputs. In a sense, symbolic violence can seem like an almost inescapable situation (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), but we argue that it is in the interest of marketing ECRs – and the marketing discipline – to consider how this conundrum may be resolved.
Discussion

**Conceptualising the neoliberal University through symbolic violence**

Our work seeks to extend existing research that is alive to the violent and destructive effects of neoliberalism on markets and consumers (Firat, 2018; Giesler & Veresiu, 2014), the higher education system (Thompson, 2017) and students (Naidoo et al., 2011; Varman et al., 2011) to consider the lived experiences of ECRs in the neoliberal University. Although there is a growing critique of the neoliberal University, work is needed to extend our conceptualisations of the idea (Canaan & Shumar, 2008; Rhodes et al., 2018).

We argue that symbolic violence offers one useful way to conceptualise life in the neoliberal University and understand how it imposes social domination. We argue that life for ECRs in the neoliberal University can be conceptualised as a form of symbolic violence in the higher education market that functions through institutions, ideology, language and discourse, and social relations (Firat, 2018; Zwick, 2018).

Our findings illustrate how the lived experiences of our participants reflect how symbolic violence is transmitted through the institutions they work in. This illustrates how universities in the UK and Australia are now typified by marketisation, commercialisation, a focus on measurable productivity, competition, efficiencies and heavy administrative burdens (Knights & Clarke, 2014; Naidoo et al., 2011). The institutional structure and processes of the neoliberal University help to create a system of symbolic violence that frames contemporary academia and establishes normative understandings of a status hierarchy and a way of doings things (doxa) in the habitus of ECRs, leading to their domination (Bourdieu, 1979; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Žižek, 2008). The neoliberal ordering of the University supports a system of symbolic violence, challenging us to reconsider and reimagine how higher education is institutionalised (Naidoo et al., 2011; Thompson, 2017).

We also foreground how ideology, language and discourse transmit symbolic violence. Due to their low status in the hierarchy, ECRs are disadvantaged in their early career due to their lack of knowledge about the normative ideologies, discourse and language. Ideas and practices about academia being a competitive game, research and teaching performance, targets and monitoring, productivity, work–life balance and job precarity then become familiarised, internalised and adopted by ECRs into their habitus, reproducing the doxa of neoliberal University life. Some ECRs may lack critical reflexivity and are concerned about learning the rules and competing in the game, therefore reproducing, rather than challenging, the system (Varman, 2011). The dominant ideology, language and discourse also create stress and anxiety as well as potential for staff turnover (Berg et al., 2016), meaning that good marketing scholars could be lost to the system. The ideological and discursive framings also take ECRs away from important academic work, such as critical thinking, quality teaching and learning, research discovery, and intellectual and ideological edgework that can advance marketing knowledge (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2014; Tadajewski, 2016a; Thompson, 2017). The very people who are well placed to critique and help destroy the neoliberal order are instead co-opted.

The experiences of our participants also suggest that symbolic violence in the neoliberal University is transmitted through social relations. Our participants drew attention to how social relations in the neoliberal University are individualistic (not collective),
characterised by a lack of a collaborative and collegiate environment, and gendered by a frame of masculinity. Some of our ECRs complained of receiving little support or mentorship. We argue that these social relations subject ECRs to symbolic violence through reinforcing the status hierarchy, creating asymmetric power relations, restricting critical reflexivity, and leading to isolation. Our findings here build upon prior research that identifies market subjectivities (Varman et al., 2011) and dysfunctional social relations in universities that fail to create an encouraging environment in which ECRs can flourish (Stöckelová, 2014).

Towards a post-neoliberal future?

Returning to Bourdieu and Passeron (1977, p. 7), we are reminded that symbolic violence does not represent complete subjugation and is only possible ‘when provided with the social conditions for imposition and inculcation’. The question, therefore, becomes what can be done to change the social conditions that expose marketing ECRs to symbolic violence in the neoliberal University? First, we should acknowledge that while neoliberalisation is a powerful force in the contemporary Universities, it is not universal. Indeed, contestation and acts of resistance against the neoliberal order always exist to some degree. Furthermore, symbolic violence in the neoliberal University is subtle and nuanced, never becoming complete domination. Many of our participants display some critical reflexive awareness and rejection of their subjugation. Therefore, we must consider how can the idea of the neoliberal University, and a system of symbolic violence within it, be disrupted for a post-neoliberal future to emerge?

We argue that we should focus on changing the institutions, ideology, language and discourse, and social relations in contemporary universities. If ECRs are to escape symbolic violence, then the very nature of the university as an institution must change. Some suggestions include trammelling the power of university Vice Chancellors, increasing the power of the senate and ensuring membership is rotated around a broad range of stakeholders, including ECRs (Woolcock, 2018). Opening up strategic decision-making to a broader range of university staff, including ECRs and not just senior management, is another possibility that would give them a voice and influence on decision making, that as our participant Tilda identifies, is currently absent. This could help reframe how universities are institutionalised, moving away from neoliberal market logic (Zuidhof, 2015).

It is also important to acknowledge that ECRs will be the senior Marketing Professors, Heads of Departments, Deans and Vice Chancellors of the future. If they adopt the dominant ideology, language and discourse of the neoliberal University, then the system of symbolic violence will be constantly reproduced in marketing departments. Much existing discourse regarding ECRs merely focuses on giving tips and advice on how to play the game (Bazeley, 2003). However, we challenge marketing ECRs to be more than just survivalists (McLachlan, 2017) but to be critically reflexive (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Žižek, 2008). Zuidhof (2015) challenges academics to critique, protest and envisage a post-neoliberal future for higher education as we see with some of our participants such as Ingrid. After Alfrey et al. (2017), we argue that ECRs in marketing academia need to employ reflexive vigilance – a production through which they critically analyse power relations in the academic field that forms their ‘direct interest … in which they are deeply invested … no matter how painful it may be’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 88–89).
Critical reflexivity can inform a challenge to the dominant and a shift to the alternative post-neoliberal ideology, language and discourse in university meetings, and through teaching (Tadajewski, 2016b) or by speaking openly about the issues at workshops, conferences, events and in the media, and through further research and writing about ECRs in the neoliberal University (Samuel, 2013). Public protest and social activism offer another path of resistance (Rhodes et al., 2018). ECRs could be encouraged to join unions and become active in organised protests and collective social action, such as the strikes recently witnessed in the UK (Weale & Topping, 2018). Another possible form of resistance is that of the slow scholarship movement (Thompson, 2017). Slow scholarship can be described as ‘engaging with ideas through deep reflection, experiential learning, and reflexivity, ultimately resulting in critical insight, creativity, and innovation’ (Hartman & Darab, 2012, p. 58). However, there may be questions as to how able ECRs may be to adopt slow scholarship due to their low status in the hierarchy.

In terms of improving social relations, we suggest that creating and nurturing a collective and collaborative culture in universities should be a strategic priority – not instrumental KPIs. Proper mentorship and support for ECRs are vital yet some of our participants such as Tilda do not appear to be getting it. Senior marketing academics could be challenged to be more critically reflective of their moral responsibilities to support ECRs and foster improved social relations, but those who do engage in mentorship should be appropriately recognised for such contributions given the significant pressures also experienced by senior academics. ECRs could also be encouraged to create a different form of social relations among their peers as they rise through the ranks of marketing academia by forming mentorship and support groups. We argue that there should be a greater relational focus in which marketing ECRs collectivise through networks, associations and social groups to discuss how to critique and challenge the system (Samuel, 2013; Thompson, 2017). Open discussions with other members of marketing academe about workloads, working conditions and work–life balance should be encouraged. ECRs can also be encouraged to resist with the support of their colleagues through formal avenues such as workload discussions, career development reviews and in negotiating terms of contracts.

**Study limitations and future research**

There are some study limitations that we should acknowledge. First, our study sample is small as our focus is on developing rich narratives. Further research is required to quantify, understand and interpret the experiences of marketing ECRs. Our study only focuses on UK and Australian academics; insights into the experiences of marketing ECRs in other countries would be welcome. Furthermore, an interpretation based on the emic perspectives of ECRs represents a limited source of insights about how to change institutional structures. Future research that analyses institutional conditions and the fissures and contradictions within – such as that between the supposed promotion of interdisciplinarity and the narrow definition of journal outlets that are favoured, could help offer academics some insights on how to mount resistance. The neoliberal University system and life within it are complex and multifaceted. Through our conceptual framework of symbolic violence, we focus on institutions, ideology, language and discourse, and social relations. However, further research that focuses on how other factors, such as
government policy, human relations, macroeconomic discourse and public narratives, shape the neoliberal University and how this affects the marketing discipline will also be important to understand the issues.

**Conclusion**

This article has examined the lived experiences of ECRs in the marketing discipline and highlighted how life for them in the neoliberal University can be understood as a system of symbolic violence. Our work adds to conceptualisations of, and growing critical discourse about, the neoliberal University (Caanan & Shumar, 2008; Rhodes et al., 2018). Addressing how people might escape symbolic violence, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 198) argue that critical reflexivity and agency offer a ‘chance of knowing what game we play and of minimising the ways in which we are manipulated by the forces of the field in which we evolve’. This is not simply about ECRs being aware of power and symbolic violence and then learning how to play the game. Rather, academics are challenged to call out violence, engage in critical reflexivity and resistance, and recast marketing academe towards a post-neoliberal future (Bristow et al., 2017; Zuidhof, 2015) – one in which ECRs are valued, supported, encouraged and can more readily focus on discovery. Doing so can only benefit the future of the marketing discipline.

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