'Maybe one way forward': Forging collective collegiality in the neoliberal academy

Abstract

Tension between individual and communal interests is endemic in neoliberal universities. As a group of ten academics from a Business School in an Australian University, we employed the collective research method of memory-work to investigate how collegiality is experienced and learnt by academics. Although collegiality is employed to enable productivity and efficiency in the neoliberal university, our diverse yet intersecting experiences of collegiality diverged from this institutional construct. We shared and explored our memories of collegiality together during the COVID-19 pandemic and learnt how collegiality emerges through acts of care which produce feelings of support, visibility, and equality, thereby improving our wellbeing at work. We propose the concept of 'collective collegiality' as sitting alongside institutionalised notions of collegiality, representing a 'counter space' to performative notions of collegiality and enabling us to learn from each other how to navigate, survive, and even thrive, in the neoliberal academy. By enacting the lived experience of collective collegiality, we bring to light alternatives to neoliberal workplace ideals which may foster more organic, flexible workplaces and ways of working together.

Keywords: Collective collegiality; counter space; care; neoliberal academy; memory work; COVID-19

Prologue

We are ten participants, researchers, and authors, who self-selected into a project about the experience of collegiality in universities. Most of us knew each other, at least somewhat, but had not necessarily worked together. Our group includes nine women and one man; all

academics from the same university department. We range in age, length of employment and career stage, from early career to retired academic, and are diverse in our work backgrounds, place of birth and family/household circumstances. Our project adopted an organic collective approach to organising, informed by differing interests and expertise. We each took leadership over different tasks (coordinating, analysis, writing etc.) at different times throughout the project, but were all actively involved in the various stages of research. As co-researchers exploring collegiality, we engaged in the project with an explicit agreement that we would participate in activities equitably and that any resulting publications would give equal weight to all participants by listing authorship alphabetically.

Despite facing tensions and vulnerabilities along the way, it would have been impossible to learn 'collegiality' and our collective experiences without a diverse group. Such diversity rattled our sense of direction and togetherness at times. For some, finding time to dedicate to different stages of the project was challenging and incurred feelings of guilt for not contributing 'enough.' We had differing views around terms such as 'resistance' or 'survival', and, particularly, we grappled with the definition of 'collegiality'. A lack of consensus on a clear definition led us to focus on *learning* collegiality through our experiences. The project allowed us to work through the struggles of being researchers at all levels, understanding the university context, navigating the challenges of the pandemic, and seeking connections. In essence, the project became a vehicle for forging new understandings of collegiality, not only through discussion, but also through the creation of communal spaces of shared responsibility and care for each other. We *lived* 'collegiality'.

Introduction

"The pains and frustrations of the neoliberal university were counteracted by the small acts of everyday care which makes people feel more valued, included, and human" (Burton, 2021: 28)

The neoliberal university is frequently positioned as being at odds with the communal aspects of academic work life such as collegiality and the free sharing of ideas (Archer, 2008; Fleming, 2020). Under neoliberal reforms in higher education, academics are placed under pressure to meet individual performance targets and compete for scarce resources (Ratle et al., 2020). Performative accountability drives a culture of individualism (Jones et al., 2020) which can alienate academics, including from themselves (Lipton, 2019; Fleming, 2020). Within the neoliberal framework, collegiality is understood as positive behaviours to others which bolster social and professional cohesion (Haviland et al., 2017: 505) and is promoted to be good for academics' wellbeing and furthering the aims of the university (Lipton, 2019; Zulkifly et al., 2021). This can feel like a bizarre contrast to academics who experience a sharp disparity between demanding and competitive institutional regimes and expectations of social cohesion (Fleming, 2020). Nevertheless, collegiality remains a concept of possibility, 'maybe one way forward', within the neoliberal academy. Accordingly, there is a pressing need to understand how academics *learn* collegiality in and through the neoliberal university, in ways which counter despair, isolation, and anomie. This is particularly relevant in a post-COVID context, where working virtually and remotely has contributed to these negative outcomes. The contribution of our paper is to share one possible way forward through 'collective collegiality', which prioritises interdependency, collaboration and group wellbeing. We argue that this form of collegiality emerges through acts of care, as a means of creating counter spaces of togetherness and communality, within and despite these neoliberal regimes.

Often presented as integral to our identities as academics (Macneil, 2016), collegiality is, for the most part, understood as a positive aspect of the working environment of a university, beneficial to individuals, communities, and to the organisation as a whole (Zulkifly et al., 2021). A neoliberal university, however, is characterised by work intensification, casualisation, surveillance, isolation, and competitive individualism. There is much to despair over when gazing on the neoliberal academy (Fleming, 2021). Critical theorists argue that, in this highly pressured and competitive environment, collegiality has taken on new discursive meanings and practices that contrast with the traditional forms of collegiality that focus on democratic participation and group wellbeing (Macneil, 2016; Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016; Selkrig et al., 2019). The form of collegiality idealised within these neoliberal regimes is individualistic: engagement and good relationships with peers remain valorised, but as instrumental to personal or managerial ends, and research outputs (Archer, 2008, Fleming, 2021; Gill, 2016; Ivancheva et al., 2019). We term this 'managerial collegiality.'

Yet, there is cause for hope. Scholars point to the opportunities to find "acts of kindness, generosity, and solidarity" even if that is "in spite of, rather than because of, the governance of universities" (Gill, 2016: 235). Collegiality, underpinned by collective notions of care and compassion, can be reclaimed by academics to 'counter' neoliberal discourses and drivers (Jones et al., 2020; Weatherall and Ahuja, 2021). We argue, therefore, that collegiality is not static, but a concept intertwined with our identities as academics. It is learnt through institutional norms and standards – through both what we accept and reject, and in how we comply and resist – as well as through our interactions with each other.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, rapid structural changes in universities heightened the exclusion of academics from collegial decision-making processes, including processes of redundancy and restructuring (Oldfield et al., 2021). Yet university management increasingly encouraged collegiality by urging academics to support each other and their students in a time of crisis. As individuals, academics felt an intense desire for connection and communal sense-making, made challenging through lockdowns, limited communication while working from home, and loss of informal interactions (see Selkrig et al., 2019; Konstantinou and Miller, 2022). The context of COVID-19 exacerbated the conflict between managerial collegiality and more traditional notions of academic collegiality; between instrumental use of collegiality to 'keep the wheel turning' and collegiality embedded communal values. The conflict, however, enabled opportunities to find new ways of working together grounded in communal values of shared responsibility and care.

In searching for a way forward, we, as a collective of ten academics from an Australian Business School, explored the phenomenon of collegiality as a lived experience to understand how we collectively learn collegiality and what collegiality makes possible in our working lives. In this paper, we use the term 'collective collegiality' to express our overarching understanding of learning collegiality through collective means. For us, collective collegiality refers to the process of socially constructing collegiality in a way that emphasises our interdependency and prioritises group wellbeing and collaboration. It redefines and re-conceptualises institutional notions of collegiality which see collegiality as a means to an organisational end (Alleman and Haviland, 2017). In the context of the pandemic and seeking connection, we selected memory-work (Onyx and Small, 2001) as a collective method to explore the meaning of collegiality while opening up insights into *how* we learn collegiality through the method itself in ways that provide alternatives to individualistic notions of

collegiality. Aiming to understand how we can collectively learn to forge 'counter spaces' (Jones et al., 2020), we were guided by the following questions: *How do we collectively learn collegiality?* and *What does collective collegiality make possible?*

The experience of collective collegiality in everyday working life offers the opportunity to carve restorative counter spaces within the wellbeing crisis of the neoliberal university (Fleming, 2021). The counter space of collective collegiality sits alongside research that examines how alternatives to the neoliberal academy emerge (e.g., Bowes-Catton et al., 2020; Clarke et al., 2012; Hurd and Singh, 2021; Lipton, 2019; Lund and Tienari, 2019; Nordbäck et al., 2022; Smith and Ulus, 2020; Weatherall and Ahuja, 2021). Our contribution to this literature is to understand how collegiality is collectively learned, created, and practised, and to demonstrate how collective collegiality is a form of care that can be embedded in a sense of togetherness and in communal values. As well as attempting to make sense of our changing world during the pandemic, our paper also offers the foundations for others to share experiences of collective collegiality, reflect on how collegiality is learnt, and how we can create the conditions to allow it to flourish and spark alternative futures.

From here we provide an overview of the literature on collegiality and the neoliberal university, reflecting on how collegiality is understood at multiple levels in the neoliberal academy. Memory-work is then outlined, including how the method was used to facilitate collective learning and theorising. We reflect on how the concept and method are inextricably interwoven as the method was a collective endeavour in learning collegiality. We discuss how collective learning was essential for collegiality and how collective collegiality offers possibilities for carving counter spaces (e.g. Jones et al., 2020). Ultimately, we conclude with

a reflection on learning collective collegiality as a form of care and togetherness in the neoliberal academy.

Learning to forge counter spaces in the neoliberal academy

The term 'neoliberal university' is often used loosely in management and organisation studies (Fleming, 2021). The idea of the neoliberal university aims to capture a range of structural and ideological changes to higher education which have rapidly taken hold in Western countries, as well as beyond, since at least the early 1990s (Fleming, 2021). These changes, which are now institutionalised as the 'new' academia (Huopalainen and Satama, 2019), refer to the "overt commercialisation [of the university so it] resembles a private firm, replete with management hierarchies, customers (i.e., students, industry clients etc.), cut-throat careerism, and a myopic focus on 'outputs' and KPIs" (Fleming, 2020: 1305). Indeed, academics are working in the 'performative university' (Jones et al., 2020) under increasingly autocratic governance (McCann et al., 2020). The neoliberal university is frequently positioned by academics as being at odds with many traditional academic values including collegiality, intellectualism, and criticality (Archer, 2008; Fleming, 2020).

Within this performative context, researchers have been interested in how structural changes are deeply felt by academics (Huopalainen and Satama, 2019). These experiences are primarily negative. The ideological dimensions of neoliberalism, including individualism, competition, accountability, and entrepreneurialism, can transform into painful experiences of vulnerability (Ryan et al., 2021), anxiety, insecurity, self-alienation (Fleming, 2021), bullying (Zawadzki and Jensen, 2020), and poor mental health (Smith and Ulus, 2020). Academics learn through performance metrics, university management goals, and career-focused

colleagues that academia is a precarious place, and it is their responsibility to navigate it through their individual skills and merits to survive and progress.

Such negative experiences, however, coexist as a 'bittersweet symphony' (Knights and Clarke, 2014). They are intertwined with the rewarding aspects of academic life – space to think, explore, research and share knowledge with others. As Macneil comments, "although we sometimes bemoan the changes that have occurred in academic work, there is still a lot that makes it good" (2016: 166). Academics have shown how strong, positive experiences of love, care, compassion, hope, and pride continue to be part of the neoliberal university (Clarke et al., 2012; Huopalainen and Satama, 2019; Ivancheva et al., 2019; Konstantinou and Miller, 2022), even if the 'sweet' experiences continue to be tainted by the 'bitter' ones. Our focus on the experience of collegiality in the neoliberal university continues this tradition of exploring the bittersweet symphony.

Given the documented individualistic and commercialised dimensions of the neoliberal university, there has also been an emergent, yet powerful, focus in the literature on ways we can 'rethink performative practices' (see Jones et al., 2020). In addition to large scale, overt forms of resistance, such as industrial action, there is potential to carve out 'counter spaces' to performativity by engaging in acts of collective care (Jones et al., 2020). A particular focus of contemporary literature has been on the everyday practices of individual academics which create counter communities (e.g. Smith and Ulus, 2020). Archer (2008), for instance, maps a myriad of alternative practices including creating supporting practices with others, protecting the psyche through disengagement, and setting up work-life boundaries.

Counter practices may also be enacted in our 'core' work as academics. For instance, non-traditional collective research methods offer emancipatory ways to 'write resistance together' (e.g. Ahonen et al., 2020), thereby challenging conventions of academic writing and using writing to nurture collective care and connection. In sharing these experiences, there is potential to learn how to forge an ethic of collective care (Noddings, 2013), thereby opening the possibilities of forming counter spaces that reject the institutionalised performative practices of universities. Accordingly, we contribute to recent calls to study how academics collectively learn to forge 'counter spaces' (see Jones et al., 2020) through our core work and through documenting and sharing our experiences with others. We now turn to the concept of collegiality which was foundational in learning collectively to share our bittersweet experiences of the neoliberal academy.

Collegiality in academia

Collegiality is a 'slippery' concept. There is no single agreed-upon definition of collegiality (Kligyte, 2021) and indeed it is "a poorly defined and operationalized concept" (Alleman and Haviland, 2017: 528). Notwithstanding this, collegiality is often positioned as a 'good thing' (Kligyte, 2021), not only in university contexts but in broader professional settings. Existing studies point to apparent positive individual and organisational outcomes that derive from collegial practices, including reduced stress, increased professional satisfaction, higher quality research and teaching, and positive and affirming careers (Alleman and Haviland, 2017). Although collegiality is perceived to support positive outcomes, we do not have a clear grasp on the processes through which it takes effect (Alleman and Haviland, 2017). A broad definition gives us a sense of how collegiality is frequently understood: to "engage in the exchange of ideas, build consensus, make decisions, and maintain social and professional cohesion" (Haviland et al., 2017: 505).

In the higher education literature, collegiality tends to be examined across three categories: governance structure, culture, and behavioural norms (Bess, 1992). *Structural collegiality* is concerned with organisational processes, referring to a system of governance based on mutual decision-making (Kligyte and Barrie, 2014), the sharing of authority amongst colleagues, and democratic decision-making by members of the 'college' (Macneil, 2016). Academics learn collegiality by participating in decision-making across many domains including leadership appointments, promotions and research funding (Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016). *Cultural collegiality* involves shared values and common goals arising from disciplinary allegiance or the guild-like nature of academia (Macneil, 2016). Junior or 'apprentice' academics may learn their craft from more senior academics, facilitated by the communal objectives of accumulating and sharing knowledge (Kligyte and Barrie, 2014). *Behavioural collegiality* refers to mutual supportiveness and prosocial and trusting values that exceed typical workplace norms, or "relating to others in ways that are constructive, supporting and professional" (Cipriano and Buller, 2012: 47). Although this literature provides a strong understanding of the dimensions of collegiality in the academy, there is far less attention given to understanding *how* collegiality is experientially learnt through dialogue and developing relationships with others.

Many critical scholars writing about (neoliberal) reforms within the performative university argue that the introduction of new public management practices undermines all dimensions of collegiality (Fleming, 2021). Performative regimes have increased competition in academic contexts, driving individualised, rather than collective, behaviour among academics (Jones et al., 2020). Interestingly, some critical scholars argue that collegiality has been repurposed or appropriated as a 'fourth' performance criterion (in addition to teaching, research, and administration), designed to further managerial objectives (Cipriano and Buller, 2012). Some

(e.g. Miles et al., 2014) have developed 'faculty collegiality scales' to measure individuals'
degree of collegiality, reducing it to a performance checkbox.

Changes to formal collegial structures over recent decades have been extensively scrutinised
in the higher education literature (see Marginson and Considine, 2000; Rowlands, 2013).
However, the multiplicity of collegial practices enacted by academics 'on the ground' have
not been sufficiently explored (Kligyte, 2021). We note that the individualistic, managerial
form of collegiality, which saturates university life, is not totalising. Academics can, and do,
work together to forge counter spaces, which opens up new and alternative ways of working
together. But how collegiality is learnt, created and practiced, or how the various components
of collegiality interact and are experienced, is not fully understood (Alleman and Haviland,
2017; Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016; Zulkifly et al., 2021). To extend knowledge, we
argue that collegiality can be understood as a collective, restorative process of learning, as a
form of 'collective care' offering a way to 'move forward' from managerial collegiality. We
contribute to understanding how academics learn to create supportive and caring spaces in the
performative university, especially during the unique period of the pandemic. To start this
journey, we outline our rationale for employing memory-work to study collegiality.

Methodology

[A] very distinct feature of this method was the writing of memories, which is often very
personal, and…it came across as people having to talk about their vulnerabilities a lot of the
time. So again, that differentiated it from other maybe group methods, the fact that we had to
write a very personal memory, and then we had to come together and talk about it, I think, it
helped a lot. So that's a feature of the method that I think helps with collegiality. (Tara, Phase
4)

We selected memory-work (Haug et al., 1987; Onyx and Small, 2001) as the research method for this project as it aligned closely with our ontological approach and our focus on intersubjective experiences of collegiality. Memory-work is a social constructionist, feminist method which explores the social, shared meaning of life experiences through detailed and descriptive accounts. Memory-work proceeds upon the perspective that "subjectively significant events, events which are remembered, and the way they are subsequently constructed, play an important part in the construction of self" (Crawford et al., 1992: 37). It recognises these reflective processes as important to the ways that the self is socially constructed, and argues, as a result, for the empirical value of coming together to share and unpack related memories as a methodology of its own. It is through our memories of collegiality that we understand what it means to us, hence the memories became the focus of our discussions during this research.

In memory-work, the barriers between the subject and the object of research are dissolved as participants are seen as experts in their own experiences. Collective theorising and the intersubjective nature of memory-work are key characteristics of the method, helping researchers to make sense of experience together and collectively draw lines of connection between their own lived experiences and those of others (Ryan et al., 2021). The method is valuable in discussing experiences intended to be collective, such as collegiality. Through sharing and collectively interpreting one another's lived experiences, individuals can gain a broadened understanding of the structures and narratives that shape and constrain the possibilities of their social construction (Onyx and Small, 2001). As an "explicitly liberationist" feminist method (Onyx and Small, 2001: 774), memory-work centres attention on women's lived experience in the complex contexts in which they work and live. Indeed, memory-work's capacity for emancipatory insights has been adopted to study a variety of

topics across many disciplines and research contexts (Onyx et al., 2020) including ones relevant to this present study: academics' experiences in navigating the COVID-19 lockdown (Ryan et al., 2021) and collegiality (Hurd and Singh, 2021). Memory-work has the potential of transforming academic practices into more equitable power dynamics to foster care and shared responsibility by incorporating personal and emotional experiences into research and writing (Mandalaki and Daou, 2021). In other studies of the neoliberal academy by business school academics (e.g. Ahonen et al., 2020; Clarke et al., 2012; Ivancheva et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2020; Miles et al., 2014; Nordbäck et al., 2022; Ratle et al., 2020), various collective approaches are used, such as collaborative autoethnography (Chang et al., 2016). Memory-work is aligned with such group methods, offering a way in to studying collective phenomena and resistance to inequality.

For us, memory-work stood out as a powerful method for our project for several reasons. Our project was a response to our experiences of the neoliberal university, exacerbated by COVID-19, and an urgent need to resist the inequalities within the academy which were shaping our lives. As a feminist method, it both seeks to give voice to individual (often marginalised) voices and connect these voices to the collective group. The process of group analysis connects the individual to the collective and the collective to the social context. The focus of memory-work is on working as a group through several mechanisms including: sharing individual memories and vulnerabilities through group processes; emphasising differences and similarities, and how these shift and change; and the ability of memory-work to bring together the collective past and present as well as imagined collective futures. Accordingly, the collective dimensions of memory-work played a central role in understanding how we collectively learn about collegiality.

Memory-work phases

The project was carried out with institutional ethics approval. We shared, discussed and analysed our insights over three phases, as per the memory-work method (Onyx and Small, 2001), with an additional fourth phase: collective writing and revising. Phase 1 (June-August 2021) involved each participant writing a one-page memory based on a defined cue/trigger before meeting as a collective group. In our case this was a memory of *a collegial experience as an academic*. Participants wrote their memory according to the set of rules traditionally used in the method (Haug et al., 1987): (1) write in third person using a pseudonym (to 'stand back' from the memory and limit judgement); (2) write in as much detail as possible; (3) describe, rather than interpret or justify the experience. Table 1 includes details of the project participants.

Table 1: Participant details (anonymised)

Pseudonym	Gender Female (F), Male (M)	Career stage (at project time) Early Career Academic (ECA), Mid-Career Academic (MCA), Retired (R)
Anouk	F	MCA
Ellie	F	ECA
Emma	F	ECA
Fleur	F	MCA
James	M	ECA
Karen	F	R
Lucy	F	ECA
Mira	F	ECA
Natalie	F	ECA
Tara	F	MCA

Phase 2 (September 2021) involved collective theorising. We came together as a collective group via Zoom due to the pandemic lockdown restrictions. We read the memories and then

discussed them according to memory-work guidelines. We looked for commonalities and dissimilarities across the memories, then identified clichés and contradictions in the memories, and finally articulated the gaps or what was 'unsaid' in the memories. As a collective we drew out both our shared social understandings and our different interpretations of the topic. During this interpretive phase, to enable detailed discussions, two groups of five were formed. After reading the memories of all ten participants, each group held a two-hour online discussion in accordance with the guidelines above, then re-convened to report the main themes and further analyse commonalities and differences. All meetings were recorded and later transcribed.

Phase 3 (November 2021) involved further theorising of the material emerging from Phases 1 and 2. In a face-to-face meeting (post-lockdown) we read the transcripts from Phase 2 and analysed these in the context of the academic literature on collegiality and the neoliberal academy to enable recursive theorisation. The discussion was guided by our research questions and structured to enable each participant to offer ad-hoc reflections and engage with the emerging ideas, enabling collective exploration of our reflections. A sub-group of five researchers analysed the transcripts according to the research questions and the emerging themes from the discussions. We generated themes inductively upon multiple readings and reflections of transcripts before collating them based on commonalities and differences (Braun and Clarke, 2006). A draft synthesis of the subgroup's recursive insights was reported to the wider collective, and revisions were made accordingly. This process of peer debriefing helped assure the dependability and credibility of our findings (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007).

Phase 4 (from December 2021) involved several collaborative meetings for collective writing and revising. Collective writing is a process that challenges disciplinary norms and the neoliberal academy (Jandrić, et al., 2022; Pławski et al., 2019). Writing collectively empowered us to "release – and possibly free" our voices (Einola et al., 2021: 1601), facilitating empathetic dialogue (Zawadzki and Jensen, 2020), resistance (Ahonen et al., 2020), and multi-vocal intersectionality (Einola et al., 2021). By letting our voices to "sit alongside each other" (Einola et al., 2021: 1601), our aims for writing collectively were to create a sense of togetherness, through our similarities and differences, to safely share our vulnerabilities, and forge communal values including shared responsibility and care. As noted in the Prologue, while there were some difficulties in this process, our commitment to collegiality and resistance to writing for instrumental ends (i.e. purely for publication) helped to shape our positive experience. In practice, we took turns to address various sections of the paper, all the while discussing changes to the text in real-time or asynchronously. Throughout the findings, quotations from the collective discussion are italicised; quotations from individual written memories are non-italicised.

Collegiality was meaningfully informed and learnt through the contexts within which it was grounded and experienced. We consider ourselves a *relatively* homogeneous group of academics, living in a contemporary, Western culture with proximal experiences of collegiality in the neoliberal academy, although we comprise, too, of researchers whose backgrounds, identities, and privilege differ in individually important ways. None of us experienced collegiality in exactly the same way, whether in our past memories or present-day reflections. We are aware that academics from other cultures and contexts may experience collegiality differently; we have attempted to discuss our findings here with this in

mind, but also in hope that the collective production of our lived experiences resonates with those living elsewhere navigating similar issues.

Collectively learning collegiality

Through the memory-work process, we collectively explored the ways in which collegiality was enmeshed in our working lives and was a pathway to collectively forge counter spaces (no matter how small!) in the neoliberal university. Collegiality was experienced in different forms; many reflecting managerial collegiality as well as collective collegiality, and across the structural, cultural, and individual levels of collegiality. As the literature suggests, these experiences were sometimes conflicting and resulted in bittersweet accounts of working in the academy (Knights and Clarke, 2014).

Our collective approach to exploring, and learning, collegiality through memory-work proved valuable for understanding our experiences. This process was fundamental to understanding how we formed counter spaces and found (maybe) a new way forward for collectivist approaches to collegiality. Practically, these insights were embedded in the uncertainty of COVID-19 lockdowns and our urgent need to create new ways of working together during this time. Our experiences of collegiality were united by stories of trust and care, as well as group support for nurturing self-development. We did not seek a general definition of collegiality or a series of universal markers of the experience of collegiality. Instead, we found that focussing on what collegiality *makes possible* was far more useful than discussion of what it *is*. As both a deeply felt personal experience and an organising principle that structures how we interact with one another (Hatfield, 2006; Macneil, 2016), we found that collegiality creates possibilities for ways of learning togetherness which diverge from the normative contexts from which they emerge.

For such reasons, this section explores several interconnected themes, as represented in Table 2. Firstly, in relation to our question of *how we collectively learn collegiality* in the neoliberal university, we discuss two experiences: (1) collegiality stemming from acts of care at work; and (2) collegiality facilitated by certain spaces or times. Secondly, in answer to our question of *what collective collegiality makes possible*, we explore its role in (3) enhancing wellbeing at work; and (4) surviving or countering the neoliberal academy.

Table 2: Thematic structure

Research Questions	Emerged themes	Contexts	Example quotes
How we collectively learn collegiality	Through acts of care	Helping others to progress at work	"They also took the time to give her a pep talk to strengthen her belief in herself." (Lucy, Phase 1)
		Acknowledging others' work	"She felt amazed that someone had read her paper and knew her name." (Anouk, Phase 1)
		Sharing emotional workplace experiences	"Messaging a group of her colleagues during a meeting to share annoyance at another task dropped on their already overflowing plates." (Natalie, Phase 1)
	Facilitated by certain spaces or times	At a conference	"The women met up again the next day on a boat trip to one of the islands and sat together on the path above the beach talking and continuing the conversation." (Karen, Phase 1)
		On a field trip	"On one drive out to conduct an interview with a research participant her colleague's car broke down and they spent a whole afternoon waiting for a tow truck." (Fleur, Phase 1)

		At a writing retreat	"Cooking for her colleagues who are sitting around a table after a day of writing, laughing and chatting with birds and the ocean as the background noise." (Natalie, Phase 1)
		In an online chat group	"We laughed with each other over the group chat thinking about what our 'alt-careers' and future lives would be when we would eventually lose our jobs [due to redundancy processes during the pandemic]." (Ellie, Phase 1)
		In the office kitchen	"Often they would just say to each other, "Hi, how are you?" while using the kettle to boil the tea in the kitchen area." (Emma, Phase 1)
What collective collegiality makes possible	Wellbeing	Friendship, support, safety, solidarity	*"He introduced me to other people and then feeling that belonging...it felt really comfortable and absolutely safe."* (Mira, Phase 2)
		Balancing the individual nature of academic work	*"A common purpose that brings you together to feel like you're achieving something as a group rather than on your own."* (Anouk, Phase 2)
	Surviving or countering neoliberal practices	Learning how to navigate the system	*"Finding others to help them play the game and navigate these systems...helping everyone to have those tangible and intangible resources to play the game if that's what they want to do."* (Natalie, Phase 2)
		Learning about ourselves, others and our work	*"We are hungering for seeing what other people see and having that collective understanding of things and that's comforting to us."* (Tara, Phase 2)

Collectively learning collegiality through acts of care

As illustrated in Table 2, collegiality was often learnt through an act of assistance or care.

Several memories included offers by others to help prepare for job interviews, promotion or

an important presentation, or more general career advice. Other experiences involved reciprocal acknowledgement of colleagues' achievements and interests; or the sharing and validating of work-triggered emotions and difficulties. Through these acts, we learnt collegiality as a form of care, support, and emotional work. The interpersonal dimension was fundamental. Collegiality is, in its many forms, a relational concept. Importantly, in collectively learning collegiality, the memories we shared emphasised that the priorities of this form of collegiality were group wellbeing and interdependency. Yet, at the same time, acts of collegiality were often aimed at facilitating or recognising individual progression through the neoliberal academy. The paradox of collegiality is difficult to escape, perhaps reflecting the 'Jekyll and Hyde' of our identities as academics as we simultaneously resist and play the career progression 'game' (Archer, 2008; Learmonth and Humphreys, 2012). Collegiality was not just in relation to others, it was essential for us to form our identities as academics whilst developing a sense of trust, care, and belonging.

Collegiality was often 'sparked' through kind, unprovoked gestures: *"When I moved to level 5, it was actually Anouk who was the first person talking to me and she came to me and introduced herself"* (Emma, Phase 2). Some participants actively sought opportunities to form relationships with their colleagues, while others did not. For others still, collegiality was learnt 'accidentally', in unexpected moments where a connection was made with another, and a sense of interdependency was felt. It was evident in the memories that participants were mostly 'recipients' of an act of care, sometimes from more senior colleagues, but also from peers, through which they learnt collegiality. Our discussions highlighted the importance of relational dynamics to establishing a sense of collegiality. As with other research on collegiality (see Macneil, 2016), 'demonstrative caring' fostered opportunities for collective ways of learning what it means to be a collegial academic with other members of academia.

Unfortunately, these moments of collectively learning collegiality were considered remarkable; out of the ordinary. Acts of care and support were understood as a counter to the individualistic, instrumental, and competitive norms of the neoliberal academy. There was a consensus among the group that our understanding of collegiality was not the 'institutional' use of collegiality (i.e. managerial collegiality), which we perceived as 'superficial' and 'tokenistic':

> *...they [the institution] want collegiality because it helps with efficiency, with productivity, it helps with competition across institutions…But is it the same collegiality that we are talking about? Is it that superficial tokenistic collegiality that they're referring to or is what we're talking about here different? And I think it's the latter, ours is definitely different.* (Tara, Phase 3)

This institutional notion sees collegiality as a means to an organisational end (Alleman and Haviland, 2017). It positions collegiality as essential to successful faculty governance but does so because of its capacity for normative prescription (Macneil, 2016) instead of any collective ethic.

Importantly, we discussed the difference between 'collaboration', where individuals work together in ways that can reinforce unequal power relations (Lipton, 2019), as opposed to 'collective collegiality' which involved working together, but for and through a group: *"For me that friendship and caring, I think, that makes it different. That caring, they care, they have your back and maybe even without expectation"* (Tara, Phase 2).

'Without expectation' was seen as a counter to instrumental, neoliberal collegiality. Rather than an individual benefit gained from a 'positive' relationship with others, the collective

dimensions of collegiality emphasise the care for the person and their relationships with others, without career-oriented goals. Collegiality also was collectively learnt through sharing of knowledge, experience or vulnerabilities, as Karen explains: *"you're sharing something, aren't you, in a collegial experience, the give and the take or the watching the other person's back, caring for them"* (Phase 2)*.* Sharing was understood as a collective process, through which we learnt our interdependency of the give and take and the fostering of wellbeing. Nevertheless, acts of caring could benefit an individual's careers. The fundamental difference was the *collective* focus on our experience of collegiality; care without expectation or ulterior motive, care without careerism, care for sharing experiences.

Collectively learning collegiality in certain spaces or times

As summarised in Table 2, our memories highlight the important nuance of space and time in the collective learning of collegiality in the form of various settings within and outside our academic institution. Some of these spaces and times were framed as a 'bubble' outside of the neoliberal hierarchy and internal competition with direct colleagues, such as at conferences or on fieldtrips, or in the online spaces to which we were pushed during COVID-19. Reflecting on our memories, Karen (Phase 2) said:

> *[A]t a conference you're in a bubble and time is not so important, you don't have as many pressures on you and you're taken completely outside of your normal life, even more so than on holiday. I think, you're in this very tight, very intimate bubble and it allows experiences to happen.*

Other spaces and times were in high-pressure situations, prior to job interviews or doctoral presentations. These high-pressure situations, with their attached neoliberal ideas of 'success', required collective support to navigate and construct alternative academic

identities. As Lucy explained, she learnt collegiality through "*the time [they took] to give her a pep talk to strengthen her belief in herself [before the interview]*" (Lucy, Phase 1). In a similar vein, James articulated that *"He deeply appreciated the time and consideration given towards his preparation [for an examined presentation]"* (James, Phase 1). Whether in a bubble or in the depths of the neoliberal academy, collegiality was most clearly felt in smaller groups or more local environments (e.g. conference special interest groups, department or discipline groups) rather than in a university-wide environment (Kligyte and Barrie, 2014). Time (or lack of it) also influenced how collegiality was learnt. With intensification of work and high workload in the sector (Jones et al., 2020), collegiality was often learnt when we could find the time and space to specifically build relationships in the context of the neoliberal university. However, collegiality was also learnt through incidental moments, small pockets of collegiality in an otherwise intimidating environment. Even in a short-lived 'bubble', the collective engagement with others could have a profound influence on how we understand collegiality and its lasting impacts. As stated above, for some, it was academic conferences where we were able to feel collegial and meet others with similar interests. The focal point of collegiality could therefore be outside any specific organisation (Kligyte and Barrie, 2014). Then we could extend this space beyond the fixed time:

> *The conferences where you might spend three or four days living with somebody in the same apartment and writing together and you still connect with them every now and then, and it might be a year or two that passes, but nothing's forgotten, it's almost like no time has passed between those interactions...I mean, because you're all in the same boat maybe at different institutions, you know how busy the other person is, and so you understand the others.* (Fleur, Phase 2)

Collective collegiality can therefore manifest outside of fixed time and place boundaries. Our account of collective collegiality demonstrates that spaces and times outside of our university, and associated institutional hierarchy, were often opportunities to develop a sense of collegiality. For instance, those in the group who had earlier been doctoral students at the same institution noticed that, where we experienced supervision as a collegial relationship, these collegial dynamics continued to the present day, with senior colleagues having invested time with promotion advice and invitations to join research projects. These memories highlight collective collegiality *despite* hierarchy; here we see the guild-like ethic of academia which includes a collegial culture of mentorship (Macneil, 2016).

Moreover, within the COVID-19 environment, during the experience of remote working, online forms of communication, such as a WhatsApp group, replaced the collegiality that could emerge in the physical space, and provided a different kind of space; perhaps even a safer place enabling 'solidarity and refuge' (Bowes-Catton et al., 2020). Thus, the university, as a physical place, does not limit the spatial boundaries of our collegiality; collegiality is much more fluid than managerial, institutional or structural accounts might suggest.

Collective collegiality and wellbeing

Collegiality makes things possible. Collective collegiality contributed to our wellbeing at work, thus supporting previous studies in this area (Hurd and Singh, 2021; Smith and Ulus, 2020). Collective collegiality offered us friendship, support, safety and solidarity. It was within such collegial moments that we felt like equals, respected, valued, safe, and not judged. As explained by Mira in our reflective discussions:

> *I have been working with people with whom I felt I belonged and accepted. Although*
>
> *the pandemic disrupted on-campus teaching and gatherings, I felt that I could rely on*

my colleagues' support. They are the kind of community where I can talk and share
when I am in need. They make time for me to bounce ideas off when I am feeling on
my own. (Phase 2)

Our account of collective collegiality "alludes to an affective relation" (Kaufman, 2021: 1743) and connotes the idea of caring-*about*, as opposed to the "hierarchical power relation of giver and receiver" inherent within the concept of caring-*for* (*ibid.*). It aligns more closely with Bess's (1992) conceptualisation of behavioural collegiality which reflects "prosocial and trusting values that exceed typical workplace norms" (Alleman and Haviland, 2017: 530). More than values, however, it was the processes of care through which we learnt collegiality and embedded the wellbeing of the group beyond instrumental engagement. However, as with many social constructs, collegiality (McGaughey et al., 2021), is often noticed in instances when it is missing (Kligyte and Barrie, 2014). For example, during COVID-19, the rapid and reactive structural reforms hindered and disrupted emotionally-laden forms of collegiality (Oldfield et al., 2021). Indeed, many of us first understood collegiality in its absence, whether it was through feelings of isolation, exclusion, alienation or carrying out our work physically separated from others (during pandemic lockdowns):

> *... in my memory, I understood collegiality through loneliness because I know what that*
> *was, so I wanted to experience the opposite...Loneliness, feeling invisible, being a*
> *means to an end for other people, insecurity, like not sure if you belong, judgement and*
> *isolation.* (Natalie, Phase 2)

Worline and Dutton (2022) emphasise the compassion that can be shown in management schools which can help to negate any suffering that academics face. Learning collegiality through sharing experiences of the 'opposite' helped to create a collective sense of what was

and was not collegiality. We constructed a sense of the collective through finding mutual, sometimes painful, experiences, and offsetting or balancing these experiences to connect and create counter spaces of warmth and support.

Collective collegiality as a means of surviving and countering neoliberal practices

In our efforts to make sense of our experiences, it also became very apparent that collegiality was essential to navigating, countering, surviving, or even thriving in the neoliberal academy. Although our stories were constructed through unique places, narratives and actors, and sometimes in the 'bubble' away from the academy, all were embedded in the shared context of neoliberal academia. During our group discussions, Tara (Phase 3) described collegiality as a form of coping:

> *I think the fact that we all agreed...that collegiality is a way to counter our insecurities and anxieties of the context, which is the neoliberal academy. So the context is causing these insecurities and these anxieties, and collegiality, it seems for us is a way to cope with it, and to maybe resist it or...maybe one way forward.*

Our coping strategies were intertwined with the moments of 'our insecurities and anxieties'. Such anxieties triggered the need to search for moments when we felt seen, heard, recognised and supported. Collegiality through sharing created a 'safe space'. Tara (Phase 3) summarises this new experience of collegiality:

> *... whether that's a shared experience, like going through promotion and having a chat together about the experience is sharing, that it's sharing of a smile, just across the corridor when that connection is built. So I think for that safe space to be built, and to have that sense of a safe space, that sharing is important.*

As researchers, creating a safe space through our memory-work discussions was instrumental to our sharing and interpretation, as well as providing support during the pandemic. By creating this counter space together for unpacking 'what is happening', we facilitated subtle but meaningful processes for building a collective understanding of collegiality and creating new possibilities for navigating academia. We learned that within this competitive environment there are those willing to guide and mentor us (Macneil, 2016). Collegiality allows us to learn about ourselves and others; and learn from each other about how to work together.

> *I think for Natalie it was a learning experience for her of how she could change so she learnt to be more vulnerable, that being vulnerable was okay. I don't know, I think I got a sense with Anouk's as well that she learnt that – well I mean maybe in a lot of them [memories] there's a learning process and that's that hope, that learning that there are people out there who are going to be encouraging* (Karen, Phase 2)

Our findings underpin the transition from writing our individual memory to collective understanding during our group conversations. Although we sought to create our own rules for being a 'good' academic, it was often in reference to the neoliberal academic game:

> *A few of us don't care about playing the game. So we're actually resisting against that gameplay mechanism and using each other. And this is not using in that sense of the word but using each other as more of a support mechanism just to keep going, you know, living day to day, because day to day is very tough.* (Fleur, Phase 3)

These observations attest to complex processes of coping and survival in the neoliberal university. Together we developed shared ways to deal with disparate moments of our academic life by simultaneously drawing on or rejecting aspects of neoliberal academia. This

collective process has been effective for several groups of academic collectives in recent years who are navigating uncertainty in responding to the demands of neoliberal academia (e.g. Ahonen et al., 2020; Plotnikof, et al., 2020).

Overall, four interconnected themes emerge from our project: collegiality is collectively learnt through acts of care; it is facilitated through spatial and temporal context; it contributes to our togetherness and wellbeing at work; and helps us to learn how to survive or resist the neoliberal academy through sustaining and forging a 'counter space' to the context we inhabit. We used collective collegiality as both concept and process. As a concept, it gave our discussions focus and form. As a process, it facilitated our learning, because a collective method of memory-work allowed us to learn, enact, and experience collegiality as we researched the same. The collective was one of mutually devoted co-researchers, each member committed to the ethos of our emerging collegiality.

Discussing collective collegiality as care and counter space

We have demonstrated that collegiality runs along many lines. If we return to the three types of collegiality identified in the literature: behavioural, cultural and structural (Bess, 1992), we find that, for us, collective collegiality cuts across types. It is experienced at a behavioural level, which is shaped by the cultural and structural environment. Our relationships with our colleagues, students, supervisors and those at conferences all carried the potential for learning various forms of collegiality. Collegiality could be 'sparked' through something as simple as a smile, as pleasurable as a boat ride with colleagues, or as unexpected as interest in our research from a stranger; and then develop into something more. Indeed, this research project was 'sparked' by an open invitation from one academic to all members of our department, which developed into a counter space that each of us actively chose to enter.

Importantly, our collegial experiences were embedded in a wide variety of academic contexts. At conferences, in the office, or alone behind a device, collegiality was learnt collectively through the spaces and times of those interactions; often within a 'bubble' of collegiality outside of the neoliberal norms. The spatial and temporal elements were particularly relevant to our experience of collegiality in the neoliberal university: we found collegiality is not organisation-based, rather it is relational and borderless. Collective collegiality resists co-optation by the neoliberal university because it creates possibilities for togetherness and solidarity, extending what other scholars have identified as forms of resistance such as care (Ivancheva et al., 2019) or eros (Lund and Tienari, 2019). It may be that we learn collegiality at conferences and by the side of the road while fixing a car because these are the places and times (see Nordbäck et al., 2022) we can create counter spaces within the neoliberal environment. Nevertheless, we are heeding Lipton's (2019) warning that collegiality may inadvertently advance the neoliberal agenda if wellbeing initiatives are institutionally organised.

Managerial collegiality promotes a form of collegiality that valorises productive and efficient collaborative behaviours, both at individual and cultural levels, often to benefit managerial and university goals. The university promotes programs to 'connect' early career academics, to form communities of practice around teaching or research, to progress academic careers by networking. We had all felt the pressure to make time for these spaces. The career-focused flavour of these structured spaces, in which collegiality was learnt as instrumental, never quite felt like what we were seeking. Collective collegiality, however, is an altogether different approach, premised upon caring, communality, and learnt through unselfish behaviours as well as the preservation of academia's enduring culture of mentoring.

Our sense of collective collegiality helped us to survive or navigate increased workloads and resist exclusion from decision-making processes. The time and space we carved out for collective collegiality was seen by some of us as a counter act – creating collegiality that was grounded in communality and offered support beyond (or directly opposing) instrumental ends. While some in our group did not understand these efforts in terms of resistance or 'survival' (Nordbäck et al., 2021), they perceived the difference between the two forms of collegiality and the possibilities that collective collegiality held to take us in unexpected, communal directions.

Our findings show that collective collegiality is learnt through a culture of care. Collective collegiality is particularly important in academia because colleagues are a key source of learning with senior colleagues traditionally guiding newcomers through the academic 'guild system' (Macneil, 2016). This includes the obvious learning of the job – how to research and teach – but also how to navigate our way safely through the neoliberal university. This key learning gained through collective collegiality allows us to embrace (rather than patch over) the problems, tensions, and vulnerabilities that emerge. Managerial collegiality promotes supposedly conflict free, dissenter free, harmonious collegiality, as if good research or good teaching is always non-confrontational and without rough edges. In contrast, we found collective collegiality helped us to find ways forward in an otherwise fraught and fractured neoliberal context; it helped us articulate some of the 'terror and targets' of the neoliberal university (McCann et al., 2020; Ratle et al., 2020; Zawadzki and Jensen, 2020), identify its mechanisms of our vulnerability (Ryan et al., 2021), and to build upon 'counter space' discourse (Bowes-Catton et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2020; Smith and Ulus, 2020) from a place of solidarity and mutual care. We suggest a collective approach as 'one way forward', emphasising the experience of togetherness and the sense of communality which can emerge

from collective practice. Other experimentations with collective practices can build on our foundations to show other ways forward, in other contexts, with other forms of collegiality.

The place (Nordbäck et al., 2021) and time (Weatherall and Ahuja, 2021) of this research project, enabled us to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic together whilst at the same time exploring the phenomenon of collegiality through our memories. Virtual working arrangements and the use of tools such as Zoom enabled us to communicate, collaborate, develop and maintain our professional and personal relationships and interactions. The project, as an emergent example of collective collegiality, helped us to remain connected through the changing working conditions of the pandemic, enhance our wellbeing and learn from each other. A key aim at the outset of the project was to organise organically and collectively; to invite and create spaces for open discussion to emerge among colleagues. Our method of memory-work offered us that inroad into working together; the phases offered the collective distribution of work, the sharing of stories, and the shared interpretation of our ideas (Crawford, 1992; Onyx and Small, 2001). Most important, however, was the way in which a deep interconnection between our method and our understanding of collegiality developed. For us, memory work was not just a method for exploring past experiences of collegiality, but also a way of actually *practising* collegiality together as a group. We found that memory-work offered a way of studying collegiality in the neoliberal university that helped us enact the values of communality, collectivity, and togetherness, as others have likewise found (Hurd and Singh, 2021; Ryan et al., 2021). As we progressed in our project, our evolving understanding of collegiality informed how we undertook our method, while our collective written and spoken words facilitated a learning process similar to the experience of Jandrić and colleagues (2017: 92) whereby: "Small pieces of collaborative writing fragments

are knitted together by a common history and shared membership of a learned society that joins together disparate thought and common intentions".

Conclusion

In this paper, we have made a theoretical contribution to the conceptualisation of collegiality in the neoliberal university. We identified the need to expand our understanding of collegiality beyond existing definitions to how it is learnt and experienced. We proposed the concept of 'collective collegiality' sitting alongside structural, cultural and behavioural collegiality. We argued that collective collegiality is learnt through collegial work experiences which occur as displays of care. Moreover, we demonstrated the importance of collective collegiality in creating counter spaces to survive and navigate neoliberal practices. Managerial collegiality, which promotes collaboration towards individual careerist ends, was simultaneously learnt through everyday life in the neoliberal university. As Macneil (2016: 168) comments, "whether we find the norms of collegiality acceptable or not depends on who creates and enforces them". The top-down imposition of collegiality, especially in its structural sense (through representation on committees or joint decision-making, for example) is very different from the bottom-up emergence of relationships of trust and support. We similarly found that collegiality is a paradoxical concept that can either contribute to or counteract the functions of the neoliberal academy. If those at the 'top', such as managers, wish to promote collective collegiality at work, they must recognise the importance of collegiality as a relational and fluid concept. They must also accept that they can only facilitate the conditions for collegiality, not prescribe or direct it. Favourable conditions include space for collegiality to be learnt freely and time to do so. Further research on how collective collegiality can emerge, both organically between colleagues and maybe

even institutionally, is needed. This can be extended to learnings beyond the academy to other workplaces and industries.

Through collective research methods, there is the possibility of nurturing communality between academics, in addition to offering unique possibilities to understand inter-relational phenomena. Our project helped us prepare the ground and sow the seeds to find 'maybe one way forward' in the neoliberal university. Learning collective collegiality helped us create possibilities within the neoliberal university to manifest non-managerial forms of collegiality that encapsulated our ideals as academics. Our collectively-developed insights both reflect our unique position on collegiality and the history of discussions of collegiality that have come before us (e.g. Ahonen et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2020; Oldfield et al., 2021; Plotnikof et al., 2020). We have contributed to a growing body of work in which academics write collectively for resistance (Ahonen et al., 2020), micro-politics (Plotnikof et al., 2020), change (Abdellatif et al., 2021) and now, collegiality. Through our collective research and writing process we demonstrated how collective collegiality can emerge and be maintained through writing, as well as through a communal time and space of care. Our experiences of the world and the university shaped how we understood collegiality across behavioural, cultural, and structural levels in the form of collective collegiality. In the neoliberal context where collegiality is mobilised by the university, managers or colleagues for productive, career-focused individual ends, these moments of togetherness were all the more important. Although these moments might be small sparks, it is from the small sparks that our search for alternatives may grow.

Epilogue

The most powerful part of our project was the many ways in which we learnt collective collegiality; as a way of understanding what was lost and what could be reclaimed in the neoliberal academy. Collegiality can be a way of collectively making sense of and surviving the neoliberal academy, if it is understood as care and grounded in values of togetherness and communality. The pandemic, which necessitated a dramatic shift to working virtually and remotely, has compelled us to search out and enact counter spaces to managerial collegiality. Our workplace had changed so much during this project. We lost colleagues, we lost students, some gained time and others struggled to find it; yet we all discovered new ways of working. This context required us to assert not only our personal, but our collective care and generosity for the vulnerable and marginalised and for those who have been threatened by neoliberal 'targets and terrors' (Jones et al., 2020). Like us, other academics will likely have their own stories of terror and of care, stories of survival, and memories of collegiality. In fact, changes to personnel and ways of working have been common across many workplaces and industries, not just higher education, and therefore, a larger proportion of employees have been made vulnerable. These stories can be powerful when shared, even between colleagues, as we shared ours through memory-work. We invite others to take that spirit of care and ask how collegiality can flourish and how it can be grounded in a sense of communality.

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