



**LUND UNIVERSITY**  
School of Economics and Management

**Grey Selves:**  
**Identity work of academics caught between  
the ‘white’ traditional higher education  
values and the ‘black’ corporatization forces**

**Master’s Thesis**  
**Managing People, Knowledge and Change**  
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# Abstract

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<b>Title:</b>	<b>Grey selves: Identity work of academics caught between the ‘white’ traditional higher education values and the ‘black’ corporatization forces</b>
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<b>Keywords:</b>	identity, academic identity, identity work, higher education, corporatization of higher education
<b>Purpose:</b>	The purpose of the research is to enrich the understanding of the process of corporatization of higher education and to demonstrate the importance of studying identity work.
<b>Methodology:</b>	Our work is founded on an interpretive paradigm. We conducted an inductive case study research basing our methods and methodology on hermeneutics.
<b>Theoretical perspective:</b>	We developed our argumentation on the basis of interpretive and critical theory regarding identity, identity work, insecurity and corporatization of higher education
<b>Research question:</b>	<b>How do academics work on their identities in the context of corporatization processes in higher education?</b>
<b>Empirical foundation:</b>	The case study was focused on the specific environment of academic staff in LUSEM in the context of local and global market-oriented processes influencing academia.
<b>Conclusion:</b>	We have identified distinct clashes between different groups of identity sources. Their interaction creates different levels of identity work intensity for academic in LUSEM. They experience relatively low level of material insecurity and higher one of symbolic insecurity. The strongest identity work trigger is the instrumentalist view on higher education.

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# List of acronyms and abbreviations

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EFMD	European Foundation for Management Development
EQUIS	European Quality Improvement System
EU	European Union
HE	Higher education
HEI	Higher education institution
LUSEM	Lund University School of Economic and Management
NPM	New Public Management

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# Introduction

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*“Souls are never black or white; they are all gray in the end...”*

*Philippe Claudel, “Les âmes grises”*

The eternal human pursuit of firm distinction between black and white, good and bad, safe and unknown, agency and structure is rendering our selves ever more insecure in a time of supercomplexity and freedom from heavy anchors of moral standards, social boundaries and identity attributions.

Academia as an important institution, profession and part of society is not spared from the same dualism debate. The ‘white academic self’ is autonomous, creating independent and ‘pure’ knowledge, enlightening students and serving a greater purpose for the development of society. This is associated with the traditional state-run university. The ‘black academic self’ is caught in power webs, monitored and controlled, producing commodified students, ‘cashable’ knowledge and timesheets. All of those have been attributed to the contemporary business schools, privately owned and closely tied to business and industry. As simple as it sounds on paper, it is never easy for individuals to choose the color when working on their identities. People draw upon different resources and are affected by various forces when constructing their selves and since identities are moreover multiple and emerging we see identity work as continuously changing the shades of the grey self.

Academia has traditionally been regarded as a very special occupation, which members take pride of and identify strongly with their autonomy (or academic freedom), professionalism, discretion and role in society. Additionally, this is not simply outsiders’ perspective, but insiders’ as well. The integration of business values and models into higher education is questioning most of those traditional identity sources and we believe that in the context of those challenges



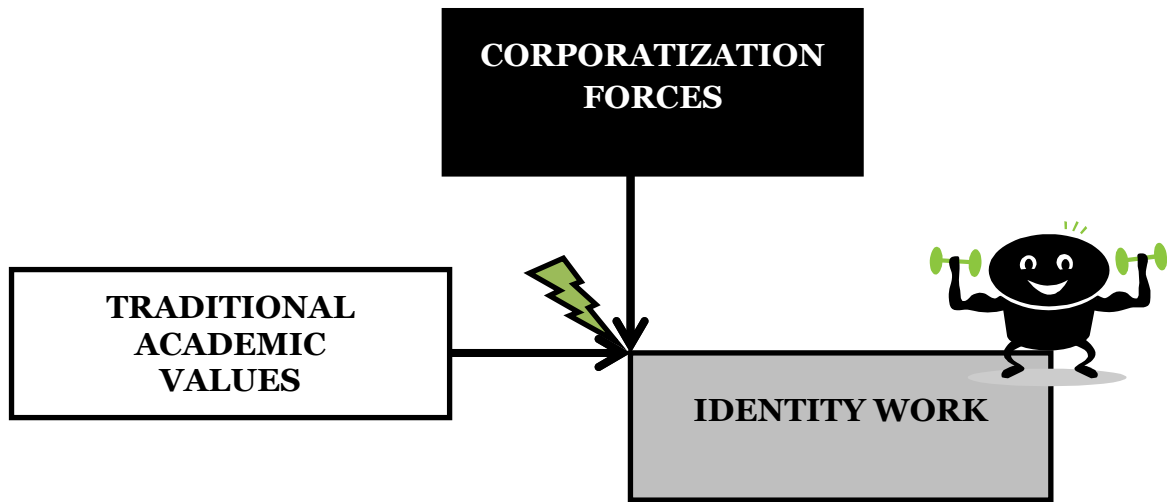
academics resort to sensemaking and their identity work is intensifying. The relationships between academia, business and state are shifting, creating a lot more complex networks and connections - increased scrutiny from the state, market competition, new forms of public research funding - all of those creating a form of “academic capitalism”, which puts academia in new power relations, negotiations and interactions, changing the nature of the academic freedom, which is one of the most important constructs of academic identity (Henkel, 2005). The changes are perplexing the way academics look upon themselves and that calls for ‘harder’ identity work.

### *Research problem*

The present study has developed gradually, ‘flowing’ naturally into its current shape. Our initial interest into the topic stemmed from conversations with our thesis supervisor, who inspired us to dig deeper into the current developments in higher education. We ourselves as part of the academic life are also curious about the environment we are in and have our own observations regarding certain changes in higher education.

We decided that the most appropriate and interesting advancement for our study would be to conduct interpretive qualitative research with the purpose of better understand academic identity work in the context of corporatization of higher education. Nowadays ‘identity’ is a popular topic in organizational studies, probably because “identities are less secure, more open and increasingly differentiated (...) and the contexts in which they are formed, have become more interesting” (Coupland and Brown, 2012, p. 1). At the same time, this increased “fluidity and fragmentation of identity” (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002, p. 624) makes one more sensitive to identity regulation from a critical perspective, which even not the focus of this work is a big influence and inspiration.

Everything that happens around us is a potential source for identity work. *Figure 1* below shows that we perceive both the traditional academic values and the corporatization forces as sources for identity work of academics and this conceptualization will lead you throughout our research.



*Figure 1: Visualization of the research problem*

We conducted the research with four questions in mind. Three of them are exploratory, leading us into richer understanding of the main one.

- 1) What resources do academics draw upon in their identity work?
- 2) What are the main processes ‘corporatizing’ Lund University School of Economics and Management (LUSEM) from an academic perspective?
- 3) How are they influencing each other?

In other words:

**How do academics work on their identities in the context of corporatization processes in higher education?**

Our initial point of attention was the intriguing development in higher education that receives a lot of attention recently, namely the so called ‘corporatization’, ‘businessification’ or ‘marketization’ of higher education. Despite the increased attention, however, it is not an easy

mission finding opinions regarding the topic or studies conducted in countries other than USA, UK, Canada, Australia or New Zealand. Our research is conducted in Sweden and this we see as our first contribution.

## Context

Research on corporatization of higher education has been mostly connected to the UK education system. A peer review system called REA is one of the trademarks of the UK academic corporatization - it measures the quality of the research output, directly influencing research funding, attracting prospective students, business collaborations and job applicants (Doyle and Arthurs 1995, p. 257). Engwall (1997) suggests that the changes observed in UK will spread and influence other European higher education systems. Increased evaluation will engender similar changes in other European countries and publishing in prominent journals will be the most important measure of success (Muller-Camen and Salzgeber, 2005). These opinions have been expressed more than 15 years ago and intuitively we can say that they have not been wrong. Later on in our work we will present the views of our study participants who also believe that the developments observed in the UK and the other big native English-speaking nations are indeed spreading and influencing other countries and higher education systems. Their opinions are most valuable regarding Sweden, of course, which is their place of work and our place of research.

Today in Sweden there are 16 institutions holding university status and only they receive state funding for research and research education (Engwall, 2007). In the years after 1977 governance has been centralized and the state has been making decisions regarding allocation of resources and standardizations of programs in the Swedish higher education system (Engwall, 2007). A reform in 1993 has brought more freedom and decentralized decision-making - the state agency for higher education, Universitets-och Högskoleämbetet, has been closed and standardization of the programs discontinued (ibid.). However, not long after due to a change in the governing party and policies the education system has been centralized again and a new central agency has been created with the purpose of evaluating performance of higher education institutions (ibid.). “This

short survey of the principles for governance of Swedish academic institutions can be summarised as a shift from hierarchy to market and back to hierarchy” (Engwall, 2007, p. 11). In 2006, universities were once again allowed to choose their board members thus acquiring more independence and decreasing the influences of political forces; but it is suggested that with this development higher education has become closely tied to business Engwall (2007, p. 6).

These general trends in higher education serve only as the context of our study. Our focus is the specific processes that *have* developed and *are* developing within the School of Economics and Management, Lund University, in connection to those general tendencies.

### *LUSEM specifics*

Our research site is particularly interesting for the described topic as it is one of the oldest and most prominent universities in Scandinavia, which makes it both shielded and visible for external influences. Founded in 1666, Lund University has around 46.000 students and 6.000 employees. Among all Swedish universities Lund University has the largest funding from the state. It is comprised of 8 faculties and numerous institutes and research centers. It belongs to the groups of research- intensive universities Universitas 21 and the League of European Research Universities (Lund University, 2014).

LUSEM is additionally intriguingly positioned between the white and the black in what we, not so creatively, call a ‘grey zone’. The School of Economics and Management is a faculty of Lund University and at the same time it gets referred to as ‘the business school’ by students, faculty members and management, and is competing with other internationally established business schools. This specific position is another contribution of our research.

The School of Economics and Management has been established as a separate faculty in 2004 and it numbers around 4.000 students and 400 staff within teaching, research and administration. It consists of six departments, five research centers and five ‘other’ units. Chair, academic staff, community, students, unions are all represented in the faculty board and there are few sub-committees that report to the board. The Dean is part of the management team and he is officially

responsible for implementation of the strategy of the school (Lund University School of Economics and Management, 2014).

The school is EQUIS accredited member of since 2001 and this fact was one of the initial ‘fuel’ sources for our study because accreditation of universities is one of the processes connected to the notion of corporatization of higher education. The main goal of EQUIS, European Quality Improvement System, is to continuously improve the quality of management education. EQUIS does not focus on particular units, departments or programs; it evaluates an institution as a whole, including all programs from first degree to PhD studies. EQUIS values good balance between academic work (research-wise) and connection with external stakeholders. It also focuses on improving the learning environment and fostering entrepreneurial and management skills of students. Having an international profile is one of the main prerequisites to become accredited member. (EFMD, 2014)

### *Contribution*

We are curious about the results of our research because, as already briefly mentioned, it contributes in several ways to the domain.

First, the literature on corporatization of higher education is focused on native English-speaking countries (and mainly UK, USA, Australia, Canada, New Zealand), which could be explained through the specifics of their higher education systems and perhaps the greater degree of corporatization. Those processes, however, could not be restricted within national borders. The abovementioned countries are very influential and powerful on the higher education market and can cause changes in the behavior of their international competitors. Moreover, some of the corporatization forces are observed in other systems as well. In that sense, there is a gap in the literature examining other countries. We believe that Sweden is a good empirical site, because it is a European country, member of the European Union, and although the higher education

systems of all EU countries are not uniform, they are influencing each other to a great extent because of the free market and easier movement of students.

Second, we are conducting research in Lund University School of Economics and Management, which is a faculty of a traditional, well-established, old, state-owned university – the ‘white university’. At the same time LUSEM is relatively independent and is competing on an international level with typical business schools – privately owned and market-oriented – the ‘black schools’. This positions LUSEM and its academic staff in the grey zone between the white traditional values and the black corporatization forces. Since more and more old, traditional universities might be going through the same processes and identity struggles we believe it is essential to study those developments as they offer richer understandings and opportunities to see identity work ‘in action’.

## Structure

The paper is organized as follows:

The present *Chapter I* serves as an introduction to the problem, the sources for our curiosity, the foundations of our research questions and our approach. We presented a brief description of the international and local context and established the general idea of the clash of the black corporatization forces and the white identity sources, which provokes intensified academic identity work. The ‘colorful’ metaphor will be used throughout the paper for richer understanding and exemplification.

In the following *Chapter II* we discuss our ontological and epistemological stances; we present the methodology of the study and the methods used in empirical work and analysis. We raise the important issues of reflexivity and validity.

*Chapter III* is a review of the literature we find relevant for the study. It is divided in two main sections, namely theoretical perspectives on identity and identity work, and scholarly

explorations of the corporatization of higher education. The latter is further divided into three sections – functionalist, interpretive and critical research.

In *Chapter IV* we present our empirical material and begin interpretation.

In *Chapter V* we build a deeper analytical and theoretical discussion around the empirical findings presented in *Chapter IV*. We offer a conceptualization model on intensity of identity work.

*Chapter VI* closes the paper with a conclusion, implications and recommendations for future research.

# Methodology

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In this chapter we present our overall approach, including our ontological and epistemological stances, we raise the question of how to be reflexive researchers and to ensure the validity of our study. Last but not least we dwell upon our own biases and preconceptions. In the second part we describe the methods that were used for empirical work and analysis; we give an overview of the research site and participants, and describe the possible limitations of the study.

## Overall approach

### Ontology and epistemology

Crotty (1998, p. 2) argues that every research study is meant to start by asking and answering the questions of what methods and methodologies are to be used and why. The justification is based not only on the usefulness of the particularly chosen methods and methodologies, but more importantly on our own understandings and assumptions about reality. So before going into the details of the methodology we are planning to apply let us elaborate further on our ontological, epistemological and theoretical stances.

Ontology is “concerned with ‘what is’, with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality as such” (Crotty, 1998, p. 10). Our ontological stance is a nominalist one - we assume that we construct and describe our social world using ‘names’, meanings and negotiations in interactions (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p. 7).

Epistemology is the belief we hold about what kind of knowledge is possible and how we can ensure its adequacy and legitimacy (Maynard, 1994, p. 10 in Crotty, 1998, p. 8). On a broader level we are positioning ourselves as anti-positivists, meaning that we believe reality “can only be understood from the point of view of the individuals who are directly involved in the activities



which are to be studied” (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p. 5), in other words, again, we believe that reality is socially constructed, which further positions us in the constructionist epistemological stance. The main points in understanding this epistemology are that there is no objective truth ‘out there’, meaning is constructed, and moreover different individuals may construct different meanings regarding the same phenomena (Crotty, 1998, p. 9).

### *Theoretical perspectives*

The theoretical perspective is the philosophical base of the chosen methodology; it is the logic behind the processes (ibid., p. 3). Our theoretical perspective is hermeneutics. Choosing hermeneutics as our theoretical stance means that 1) we believe that our personal preconceptions regarding the topic will play an important role in our research and analysis and 2) we will understand the part through understanding the whole and vice versa. We will be striving for “understanding of underlying meaning” using the hermeneutics’ spiral - going from part to whole and back again (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009). Following the line of the hermeneutical theoretical perspective, points of attention in our methodology are: we will follow our intuition when interpreting text (and not facts) in its context, we will have a dialogue with that text (and not just passively listen) and we will pay attention to the emerging sub-interpretations which we might confirm or reject later on (ibid., 2009).

This is an inductive interpretive case study. The inductive approach implies that we did not build a theoretical framework and hypothesis to test in our study; instead we are not limiting ourselves with previous theories and are only using those as guidance towards our conceptualizations (Rowlands, 2005). Case study research suggests that the researcher is interested in deeper understanding of the case in particular context (Yin, 2003). We will describe both the case and the context in the following paragraphs.

Further, we are basing our research on an interpretive paradigm. Interpretive qualitative approach implies that “qualitative researchers are interested in what those interpretations are at the particular point in time and in a particular context (Merriam, 2002, p.4). We will perform an

interpretive analysis on identity work using in-depth interviews as method for empirical data collection since we believe that ‘language - with all its inherent hermeneutic limitations - is the only medium we have available to ‘account’ for it [identity]’ (Ybema et al, 2009: 315). What does that mean? It means that although the relationship between language and the one interpreting the language (i.e. the researcher) is very complex and one can never go ‘outside of humanity’ and transform into a pure observer without any assumptions, preconceptions and biases, in other words “outside their own epistemological and ontological commitments” (Johnson & Duberley, 2003, p. 1294 as cited in Ybema et al, 2009, p. 314), discourse is still the primary source one can use for analytical purposes with the increased importance of reflexivity that we will discuss later on (Ybema et al, 2009).

Following one of Alvesson and Kärreman’s (2000a) approaches, we will strive towards being ‘discursive pragmatics’ - since the social world is so vast and complex, it is almost impossible to gain a complete understanding of any issue of interest and is unreasonable to make exclusive claims, however it is exactly this same richness that is worth capturing and analyzing. Going further and because it is not our goal to conduct language analysis, we will try not to overlook the ‘level of meaning’ (the meaning in the language, in the utterances; how people make sense), which is of course not an easy undertaking, reflecting again the issue of representation and the practical ambiguity of interpretation from the point of researchers, however not impossible if one is “sensitive to the framing power of context and language” (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000, p. 152).

### *Validity, Reliability and Reflexivity*

Methods for assuring validity and reliability developed in positivistic approach cannot be used for objective knowledge because they have limitations when applied to qualitative research (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 1999, as mentioned in Sandberg, 2005). However Sandberg (2005, p. 58) suggests that communicative, pragmatic and transgressive validity can be successfully used for justifying knowledge in interpretative research: “the proposed criteria of validity can be seen

as a specification and elaboration of how each theory of truth within the proposed truth constellation corrects each other”.

Communicative validity can be achieved by “community of interpretation” (Apel, 1979 found in Sandberg, 2005, p.54) which means that participants have to understand what researchers are trying to ‘get’ from them. We assured that our participants understand our aims by explaining carefully at the beginning of each interview what the purpose of the study is and by making sure that our questions are posed in a clear manner and that the participants can ask additional questions and are free to elaborate on different topics. Second, we assured coherent interpretations by using hermeneutics (Karlsson, 1993, as mentioned in Sandberg, 2005). Another way we used to assure communicative validity was to discuss the findings with other researchers in the field.

Pragmatic validity means to be sensitive as researchers about the difference between what people say they do and what they actually do. Reasons for that might be inter alia “perpetuating a storyline”, “identity work”, “cultural script application”, “impression management”, “political action”, “construction work” or “a play of the powers of discourse.” (Alvesson, 2003, p.31).

One of the means that we applied in order to fulfill transgressive validity was that we were looking for contradictories and incoherent statements instead of looking for coherence (Lather, 1993, as found in Sandberg, 2005).

Validity and reliability are closely connected however different concepts: “although the main question of validity relates to the truthfulness of interpretations, the principal question of reliability concerns the procedure for achieving truthful interpretations” (Sandberg, 2005, p. 58). Further, the author states that researchers cannot avoid their interpretations but they can use what he calls ‘interpretative awareness’ to assure reliability, which means that we as researchers should “acknowledge and explicitly deal with our subjectivity throughout the research process instead of overlooking it” (Sandberg, 2005, p. 59). We did not partially take notes of the statements that support our views, selectively interpret what we heard or ignore what is opposing our views hence we assume that we avoided what Kvale (1996 as found in Sandberg, 2005) calls ‘biased subjectivity’.

*“In order to understand identity in depth we need to listen carefully to the stories of those we claim to understand and to study their interactions, the discourses and roles they are constituted by or resist – and to do so with sensitivity for context” (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003, p. 1190)*

Being sensitive also means being reflexive, being conscious of one’s epistemological and ontological stance, of one’s biases and assumptions that play an important role in all parts of a research endeavor - from the formulation of a research interest, through empirical work and finally to analysis and drawing conclusions. Moreover, we are using in-depth interviews as an empirical method, which means that we are interpreting language, which calls for increased reflexivity.

Not only we as researchers are not ‘outside’ the language, but language cannot be regarded as a “simple medium for the transport of meaning” (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000a, p. 138) from the ones using it in the first place. Language is a mean to interact with our world, but we should be careful not to fall victims of the desire for facts and ‘truths’. Language use and language interpretation depends on the context and situation and it always “produces a particular version of what is it supposed to represent” (ibid., 2000a, p. 142). This is the problem of representation - how reliable is language in representing specific phenomena, conveying meaning, insights and understandings - and we support the view of the scholars, that it is naive to expect a full, factual representation, nonetheless language is able to “convey something beyond itself” (ibid., 2000a, p. 148).

Moreover, ‘identities are reflexive accomplishments’ (Coupland and Brown, 2012: 1) hence identity study requires utmost attention to reflexivity from the researchers as well. In order to be reflexive one should strive to be fully aware of one’s own biases and current limitations.

## Biases

One of the validity procedures that Creswell and Miller (2009, p. 127) suggest is disclosure of researchers' "personal beliefs, values, and biases that may shape their inquiry". Further, the authors state that it is from vital importance that the researchers point out what are their biases at the very beginning of the research process in order to facilitate the readers in understanding what colors someone stance and also to be able to show the biases throughout the research.

One of our assumptions was the view we hold on academics. The image we had in mind was rather naïve and romanticized – the free academic surrounded by books and papers who is more a philosopher than a nine to five employee. Stemming from this was our expectation to find resistance and strong critical discourse expressed from the participants in our study towards any forms of professional monitoring and surveillance or commodification of knowledge. We tried to overcome this bias by trying to better understand what they perceive as important and appealing in their profession and how they look upon themselves instead of feeding the images we had into the interview process.

Second, influenced by some of our preliminary readings we anticipated some difference in the opinions of young and old academics, because the so called corporatization in higher education is not necessarily recent development and some of the younger professionals might actually lack the opportunity to compare 'now and before' which is sometimes suggested as a reason for tensions in academia. We were sensitive towards this factor, however we were striving towards 'thickness' in our identity work research and wanted to avoid 'linking identity prematurely to standard categories' – in this case age (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003, p. 1190).

Another one of our assumptions was that the EQUIS accreditation of the school would be one of corner stones of our study; hence we looked for deeper understandings regarding reporting from the academics and were expecting high degree of tension. However, by asking open-ended and broader questions we were careful not to steer the responses of the participants into a negative or positive judgment.

## *Empirical work*

### *Research site*

What is now called School of Economics and Management has been going through different organizational changes before it became the independent faculty within Lund University in 2004. Until then it has been changing its names, sizes and number of departments. Now the school is responsible to the Ministry of Education and it is mostly state funded. The school has a matrix organization, including departments on the one side and undergraduate programs, master's programs, PhD programs and Centers of Excellence on the other. (Lund University School of Economics and Management, 2014)

### *Participants*

We conducted eight interviews with staff from the Department of Business Administration within the School of Economics and Management. Our initial intention was to have a diverse group of participants from most or all departments within LUSEM. We sent invitations via e-mail to employees of LUSEM explaining briefly the purpose of our study and asking for their interest. However, since our sampling was self-selecting and the participation was voluntary, the result steered our case study even more specialized and narrower as all participants proved to be part of one department, namely the Department of Business Administration. In this count we exclude two of the participants who are part of the leadership team in LUSEM, holding primarily administrative roles at the time of the research. The other six interviewees have both teaching and research profiles, dedicating different percentage of their time to each of these roles. Some of them have also certain administrative responsibilities within the department.

We were granted access to the organization, however we were asked not to present the study as endorsed by management in order to secure absolutely voluntary participation. We have not been asked to perform any specific tasks, collect information or steer the study in any particular direction in order to gain access. The research is completely independent.

### *Empirical data collection*

We conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with open-ended questions - the rationale behind it being that open-ended and broad questioning leaves room for individuals to create meaning of the situation and does not lead the interaction/conversation into just a few narrow categories (Creswell, 2003, p. 8). Our preparation involved reading of relevant literature and methodological guidelines as well as compilation of topics/questions. Since the interviews were semi-structured we left greater room for expression to the participants and were trying to simply guide them through the process or ask for deeper insights or elaboration on some topics of interest. All of the participants enjoyed the process and were eager to share their thoughts with us. We did not sense any reluctance or hidden intentions for taking part in the study. Interviews lasted between 45 and 70 minutes and were conducted entirely in English. We were meeting the interviewees at places of convenience for them, mostly at their offices and other meeting rooms within the Department of Business Administration.

### *Data Analysis*

All interviews were digitally recorded and fully transcribed and entered into a word processing document. We did not use any research software for analyzing, because we decided it will not produce any desirable outcomes in terms of interpretation and understanding.

Following rules for interpretation stands against the core of hermeneutics (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009, p. 97). However, in line with the aforementioned main methodological

principles, we did an iterative analysis - having dialogue with the text, going from the part to the whole and back again, developing sub-interpretations, affirming some of them and others rejecting on a later stage. All of this was a continuous process intertwined with the data collection stage. We could say that our analysis began simultaneously with the empirical data gathering as we started developing sub-interpretations already during the first interview. We have noticed some explicit resources used for identity work and we were sensitive about those in the following interviews as well.

The coding process began after careful formatting and re-reading of the transcribed material. Then we started developing categories of sources and tensions in identity work. We began interpreting how the external forces of corporatization influence the identity work of the participating academics and started conceptualizing our material. At the end we tried to position our empirical findings within the broader theoretical perspectives on the topic in order to make a contribution to the field. Although with an interpretive mindset, while analyzing, we were also keeping a critical speck and we were sensitive for hidden power systems or meta-discourses.

Studying and analyzing identity work is rather ambitious and ambiguous undertaking. As already mentioned one should be very reflexive and clear about one's ontological and epistemological stances, assumptions and preconceptions and limitations of the study.

### *Limitations*

One of the most important issues concerning our research is that it was conducted in the university and department where we are enrolled as students. It has been suggested that suspicion and uncooperative behavior could even be stronger towards 'insiders' than outsiders (Humphreys and Brown, 2002, p. 426). Although we are not employed by the School of Economics and Management, our thesis' supervisor is and this could transfer some form of suspicion towards our study. We believe that this possibility has been balanced by the fact that participation in the study was on a completely voluntary basis and anonymity was guaranteed to all interviewees.



Another limitation or point of attention for us was the asymmetrical position we obtained in this research as we were in fact students interviewing professors and in that sense the roles were quite ambiguous, which could have enacted ‘roles’ indeed - for example mentoring or unwillingness to show weakness or dissatisfaction with teaching. Dramaturgy is always possible in empirical field work (Gagnon, 2008) and we were aware of it and prepared to take into account any such performative exhibit. The aforementioned plus the age difference between interviewers and respondents could have as well affected the perceived seriousness of the study from the side of the participants. Moreover, by a matter of coincidence, the study had only male participants and the researchers are female. As this is not a gender study and our sampling was by convenience, we do not put too much stress on this fact, however we bare this in mind as one of the possible influences on the study.

Last but not least, the focus of our research is the School of Economics and Management, however due to self-selective sampling the participants in our study are employees of only one of the six departments of LUSEM. We do acknowledge that as a consequence our study is limited and has more explorative nature.

In order to overcome these limitations we strived to conduct the interviews in a professional manner without subjectifying ourselves to the roles of students against professors and even though we did not overthrow our great respect towards the participants we tried to ‘own’ the interview process.

As part of our preparation for the empirical work we studied relevant literature on the topics of identity and higher education. The papers that we find most relevant for better understanding of our research problem we present and discuss in the next chapter.

# Literature Review

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There are two broad research fields that serve as theoretical background for our study. First we present scholarly opinions on identity, identity work and identity regulation. We position ourselves in the broader debate regarding agency and structure and discuss the general importance of studying identity. Second, we offer a debate around the most significant studies regarding the corporatization of higher education. This second part is further divided into three sections according to the paradigms the studies are based on. Functionalist, interpretive and critical views are presented. We believe that in order to be reflexive researchers we should be aware of all perspectives independent of where we position our study.

## Identity

### Identity is...

*'Identity is matter of claims, not character; persona, not personality; and presentation, not self' (Ybema et al, 2009, p. 306)*

Identity could in fact be regarded as the 'bridge' between the individual and society, formed in a constant interaction or more precisely - being continuously formulated and reformulated through social processes and discourses (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003), it is an on-going "negotiation between social actors and institutions, between self and others, between inside and outside, between past and present" (Ybema et al, 2009, p. 303), continuously 'worked on' by people as they author versions of their selves (Coupland and Brown, 2012, p. 1). Any "essentialist claims" regarding the true core of the self by the people constructing their self-identities could be regarded as "stabilized moments" in the fluid processes of identity formation and negotiation, because if one takes the position that identity is socially constructed, it means that this is

happening continuously as identity gets formulated, reformulated, negotiated and articulated (Ybema et al, 2009) and any image of the true self is nothing more than a momentary snapshot of all the background processes that continue to develop. It is, however, not obligatory, as suggested by Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003), to take an extreme position on the continuum of 'stable identity versus fluid identity' - one can assume an appreciation of the on-going identity work in a more or less unstable environment where there is no one dominant discourse, offering a strong enough 'identity falsework', and still be open to the possibility that people might experience different degree of stability or instability in their social world and interactions and this might lead to different degree of (in)stability of their self-identity.

Collinson (2003) suggests that a key concept for understanding identity and the construction of subjectivities is insecurity. Resulting from different changes in society, he argues that people have shifted from "ascribed" to "achieved" identities, which has resulted in increased insecurities and subjectivities along with higher degree of freedom. Exactly this freedom from "firm anchors for identity construction", argue Alvesson and Willmott (2002, p. 624) is the source of opportunities for "micro emancipation" (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996, as cited in Alvesson and Willmott, 2002, p. 624) and should not be labeled 'bad' altogether. This is referred to as "a sweeter flavor" by Knights and Clarke (2013) - the insecurity which emancipates and provokes one into more creative identity work. Yet, it is a complex process and the freedom of choice, the 'open' identity leaving one more vulnerable, might result in a voluntary subjectification as a shelter from all insecurities (Collinson, 2003). This voluntary subjectification could be a result of the individual pursuit of firm identity, of a clear-cut distinction between agency and structure, of secure position of being either an object or a subject, because being both is too ambiguous and individuals tend to try to overcome it also by holding on to "particular notions of the self" (Knights and Willmott 1989, 1990, as interpreted in Collinson, 2003, p. 532). However, having a fixed identity is simply close to impossible as one's self is a complex web of subject-object knots and ropes and looking for security which cannot be found can only render one more insecure. As Knights and Clarke (2013, p. 336) state: "insecurity tends to generate a preoccupation with stabilizing our identity yet the contingent nature of the world makes such stability unrealizable and this reinforces the very insecurity that we expect identity to dissipate".

Moreover, 'one's self' is actually 'one's selves' as one holds multiple identities and the interplay between those can foster even more insecurities (Collinson, 2003). Interpreting Collinson, Gagnon (2008, p. 378) points out that symbolic insecurities could be defined as existential, psychological and social, "encompassing status anxieties, sense of self-respect and esteem, autonomy and well-being" and in our research we will pay close attention to those as well as to material insecurity and multiple identities. "Achieving" identity, working towards a stabilized self, also means competing in different aspects - for example in our case study this could possibly be represented through aspirations for higher positions, more publishing, publishing in higher ranked journals, receiving better student evaluations, and international reputation among others. One's self is dependent on others' opinions, judgments and evaluations, which cannot be controlled and this increases our insecurity (Knights and Clarke, 2013).

All previous views point to where we position ourselves in regard with the 'agency' discussion in the field, namely whether we believe that identities are fully, partially or not at all regulated or put differently: "actors constitute themselves *through* discourse or are choreographed *by* discourse" (Ybema et al, 2009, p. 308, italics in original). That is a very important issue of analytical distinction and we believe that "the identities which individuals manifest are effects both of structure and agency, though the dynamics and nuances of these relationships are, and will continue to be, contested: identities are aspired to as much as they are ascribed, both regulated and resisted, negotiated, accepted and disdained" (Coupland and Brown, 2012, p. 1). People do participate in the construction of their 'reality', however within the available discourses (Humphreys and Brown, 2002). The degree to which those social discourses shape and influence the individual identity work is though unclear. However, the significance is always to consider both the agency and the structure - yes, we are subjects to power and, yes, there are dominant discourses which shape our understandings and meaning-making, *but* we are also active participants in those same discourses, shaping and constructing our selves and our environment.

We do acknowledge that 'identities are caught in webs of power and political interest' (Coupland and Brown, 2012, p. 1) and 'meta-narratives' are present in all settings and are a very strong influence on individual sensemaking and identity construction (Ybema et al, 2009). Nonetheless,

identity regulation is only one side of the complex process of identity construction and combined with identity work form a “mixture of conscious and unconscious elements, an interpretive and reflexive grid” which is self-identity as “the narratives of self” (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002, p. 626).

The focus of our study is identity work - the active participation, the personal labor of the individuals sweating over the project of achieving a particular identity – based on a particular notion of the self or a socially available persona. Let us discuss these ideas more comprehensively in the following section.

### *Identity work*

*“Identity work involves the mutually constitutive processes whereby people strive to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of personal self-identity and strive to shape the various social identities that emerge in relationship to others in the various milieux in which they live their lives.” (Watson, 2009, p. 257)*

Identity work is the constant struggle for securing a coherent sense of the self or self-identity and in times of changes or transitions it becomes more apparent and more ‘conscious’ and concentrated (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). We believe that higher education is in such a transitional stage, observed to greater or lesser extent in the settings of our study. Watson (2008) also supports the opinion that work environment undergoing change is a fruitful research site because during transformations people tend to focus more on their identity work.

People use different discourses when creating sense of self and some of them could be opposing and contrasting and nonetheless used in the quest for coherent narrative self-identity (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Clarke, Brown and Hailey, 2009).

An important identity construction for example is the work towards being a “professional” (Clarke, Brown and Hailey, 2009), or “academic”, “a good employee”, “teacher”, “researcher”.

Watson (2008, p.127) calls those “discursive notions of publicly available personas or social identities” and states that those are the connections between the discourses people draw upon in identity work and the ‘self’ part of identity. In other words, social identities are the main parts of discourses that people are referring to in their identity work with the personas as influencing factor on the self-identity.

Building upon Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003), Watson (2008, 2009b) suggests that individuals are also defining their selves through the eyes of the others and are actively trying to influence how they look upon them - this is to add the work on the external identity.

Individuals use different tools and resources for identity formation of the self, but as well of the others, thus it is of utmost importance for the researcher to pay attention not only to the self-definitions but to those of ‘others’ as well, because “identity may be a matter of being ‘subject’ to, or taking positions within discourse, but also an active process of discursive ‘work’ in relation to other speakers” (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 18 as cited in Ybema et al, 2009, p. 302). In other words, identity work involves positioning of the self among ‘others’ in regard to what one is and what one is not - recognizing the similarities and the differences, and this also applies to social and organizational identity where it is what ‘we are’ and what ‘we are not’ (Ybema et al, 2009). Moreover, through the self-other discourse one usually tries to ‘present’ for oneself and for the others a positive and coherent self-identity (ibid.). Going further, the ‘self-other’ identity discourse is an important element of analysis, because it shows the ‘meta-narrative’ or the ‘dominant discourse’ in the magnified distinction between sameness and otherness and it “can be seen to refract the agency-structure dialectic *in action*, for it shows in plain words how selves and sociality are mutually implicated and mutually co-constructed” (ibid., p. 307, italics in original).

Before involving the special context of higher education to the discussion we would like to consider the critical notion of identity regulation, which is directly related to identity work and we always keep in mind and get inspired from. Although we are not conducting a critical study, the critical discourse on identity is a possible resource which the participants in the study can use, thus it is important to be well aware of its implications. We expect the interviewees to draw

on critical discourses because they are established and experienced academics and we accept that since they themselves research, teach and write about similar issues they “ought to be *even better* equipped than most to articulate a critique and possibly resist the disciplinary regimes” (Knights and Clarke, 2013, p. 339, italics in original) or acknowledge the presence or lack of such regimes.

### *Identity Regulation*

It is not easy to distance ourselves as researchers from the critical position on identity regulation that will be developed below, because it is in fact suggested that “organizational control is accomplished through the self-positioning of employees within managerially inspired discourses about work and organization with which they may become more or less identified and committed” (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002, p. 620). Those discourses are used by individuals when as resources for identity work and thus they subjectify themselves to identity regulation. It is difficult to distinguish as the ‘observers’ what is actually a managerial discourse and what is not and how the ‘observed’ position themselves in it since the boundaries are rather ambiguous and there is no clear-cut between identity regulation (on the side of dominant groups) and identity work (on the side of dominated groups), and the latter is an active contributor or contestator of the former (ibid., p. 621). We need to be insightful about “the hegemony of discursive practices” (Humphreys and Brown, 2002, p. 423) but at the same time we do acknowledge agency and see ‘dominated groups’ as an active contributor in their identity work not just in the part of resistance.

Power and workplace subjectification have also traditionally been tied to management control (Collinson, 2003). Within academia as already discussed increased reporting and surveillance is one of the major recent developments. Monitoring and reporting typically ascribed to quality assurance and better practices could provoke the developing of different subjectivities. Collinson (2003) characterize three usual types of selves that emerge in a context of increased monitoring and surveillance - conformist, dramaturgical and resistant selves. The first type implies that

people subjectify themselves (and their selves!) to identity regulation exercised through discipline and control mechanisms by conforming to the dominant constructions (discourses); the dramaturgical individuals manipulate their selves as an answer to the increased visibility and self-consciousness and are in a way a mixture between conformist and resistant selves, which in turn are those who, as suggested by the given name, oppose identity regulation by constructing alternative, better selves than those available within the dominant discourse (ibid.). All these selves emerge in the search for security (material or symbolic) but the result could be, ironically, higher degree of insecurity. Whether one can find conformism, dramaturgy, and resistance in academia and what else is intriguing will be discussed in the following chapter.

To briefly summarize, people as active agents constantly work on their identities and do so by drawing upon different resources. Those could be *inter alia* socially available personas, particular notions of the self, managerially inspired discourses, definitions of others. In transition and change individuals experience greater struggles and insecurities and this provokes a search for more coherent self-identity. Thus identity work is intensified.

Since higher education is in such period of transformation we believe that academics will resort to identity work. Academic identity has traditionally been regarded as based on relatively stable ground, comprised of shared values such as autonomy, professionalism, contribution to society. Those are, however, questioned by the introduction of market forces and business models into academia and we believe that these developments create identity tensions. There is certain number of studies on the topic and we will present those in the following chapter.



## **Corporatization of higher education**

As suggested already in the context and historical description, there are some substantial political, economic and institutional changes in higher education systems in number of countries globally - most obvious and analyzed in the UK, USA, Australia and Canada; but increasingly visible in other countries, including Sweden, which is our research site. Those changes described as also ‘marketizing’ (Aspara et al, 2014) and ‘customisation’ (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006) consist of different processes and have impact on perhaps even more. It has been argued that the recent developments in higher education have provoked a more serious, ontological crisis among academics, questioning and threatening their values, purpose of work and meaning in the creation of knowledge (Knights and Clarke, 2013). There are different ways to look at the corporatization processes - from functionalist, interpretive and critical perspectives; or with a marketing, organizational and public administration focus to mention just a few. For the purposes of this study we are most interested in seeing how all or some specific changes (identified further in the review) are understood to influence academic identities from an interpretive and/or critical perspective. We are also trying to distinguish specific discourses that have emerged around the changes that are perceived more as global phenomena.

Before introducing theoretical work that is in line with our analytical stance, let us briefly introduce some functionalist viewpoints on the developments in higher education. In order to reflect and interpret our empirical material it is important to consider all perspectives on the topic and not limit ourselves as researchers with just the one that is supporting our assumptions.

## *Functionalist perspective*

Functionalist research on education starts from two questions:

1. How does education serve the society as a whole?
2. What is the relationship between education and society?

The functionalist research is focused on the contribution of education to the society as a whole and the main sociologist who supports this notion is Émile Durkheim (Sociology at Twynham, 2008). Further, the functionalist research on marketization of higher education also tries to show how these changes positively influence society (for example in connection to economy). It is important to shortly point out what exists in the functionalist domain, because it contributes towards the proliferation of these ideas.

The drivers behind the corporatization of higher education are neoliberal ideas. Neoliberalism logic supports the idea that institutions should be privatized because they would operate more efficiently and also the government economic and market influence will be reduced. Neoliberalism ideas promote decrease in the public funding for public services and particularly in education "to weaken public control over education while simultaneously encouraging privatization of the educational service and greater reliance on market forces" (Berman, 2003, p. 253 as cited in Kandiko, 2010).

Slaughter and Leslie (1997, found in Park, 2011) explain on the example of four countries (United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada) how globalization is influencing higher education. The authors point out that less governmental spending for education turns universities towards the market. They introduce the term "academic capitalism" which they explain as "institutional and professorial market or market-like efforts to secure external moneys" and in their opinion this is not just a way to acquire financing but also to increase the esteem of the institution through good connections with successful corporations (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997, p. 8 as cited in Park, 2011, p. 87). They argue that the value of being market-

oriented will not simply secure the same budgets as before but also “maximization of prestige” (ibid., p. 87).

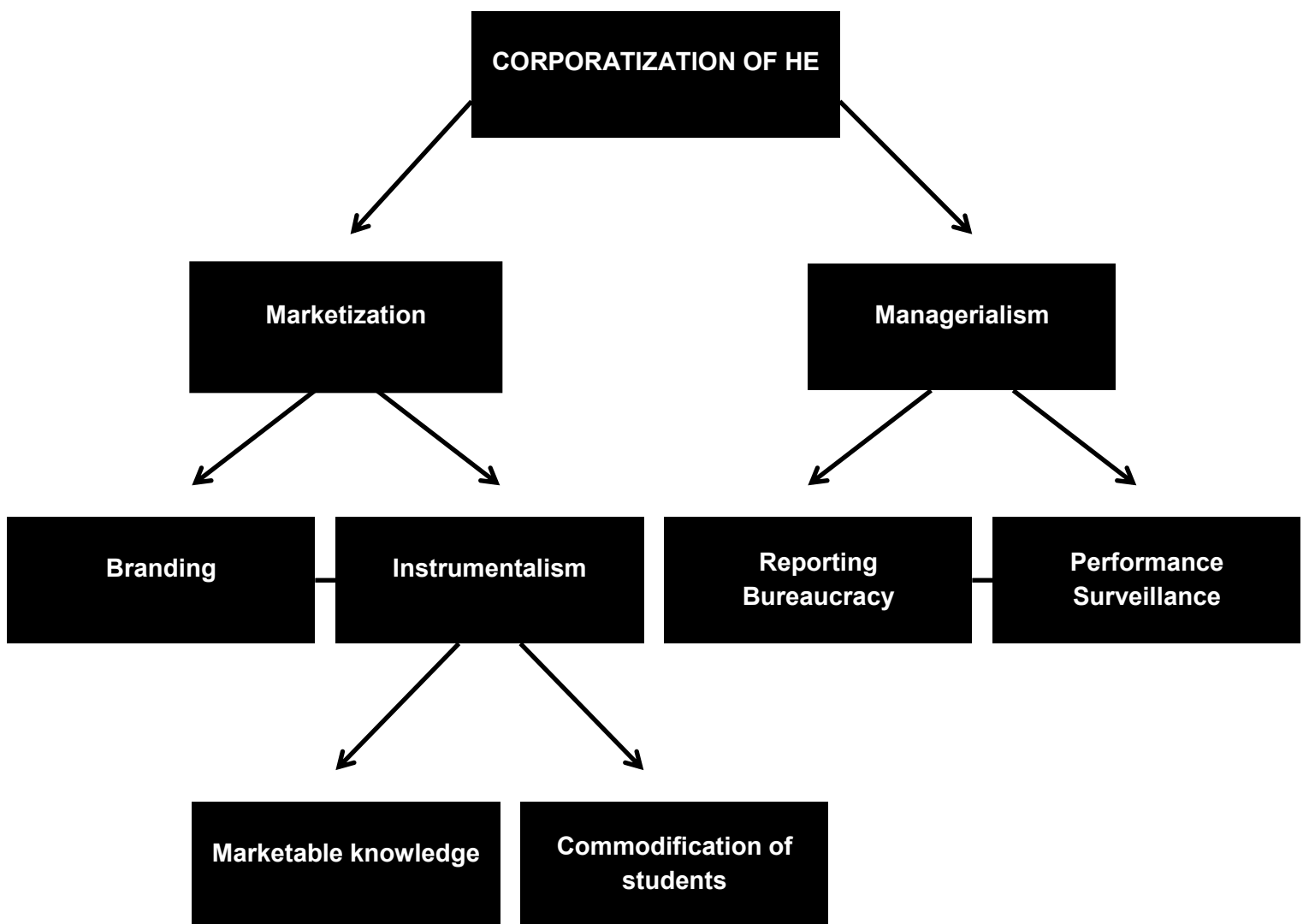
A concept connected to neoliberalism is New Public Management (NPM) - a widely used term developed by Hood in the late 1980s. It embraces the idea that private sector policies and practices can be mixed with government sector practices and used to improve the performance of public institutions (Hood, 2001). In support of NPM Walker et al. (2011) suggest that government organization’s performance is better when it behaves like a private organization and compete with its competitors on the market. They claim that in terms of performance they could not prove a connection but in terms of consumer satisfaction NPM is achieving great results.

In regard to corporatization of higher education Molesworth et al. (2009) argue for example that students make rational educational choices and having opportunity to decide influences positively their empowerment and control. Hence the authors are arguing for the increased rights of students in their role as customers.

Those studies suggesting introduction of market forces into the public sector as a whole and the higher education systems in particular have their effects. Promoting corporate values into academia, however, is not an invisible action and it meets its opponents. Critical thinking is after all one of the sources of academic identity. However, before presenting the critical views on the topic let us first look at the ‘middle zone’ – the interpretive perspective. Most of the scholars conducting research within this paradigm however are also incorporating quite critical notions into their works. Therefore in the next section we will present the main interpretive and critical issues identified as relevant in the literature and as a follow up and ‘answer’ to the functionalist perspective, we will briefly present some critique which is more on an ontological and even political level.

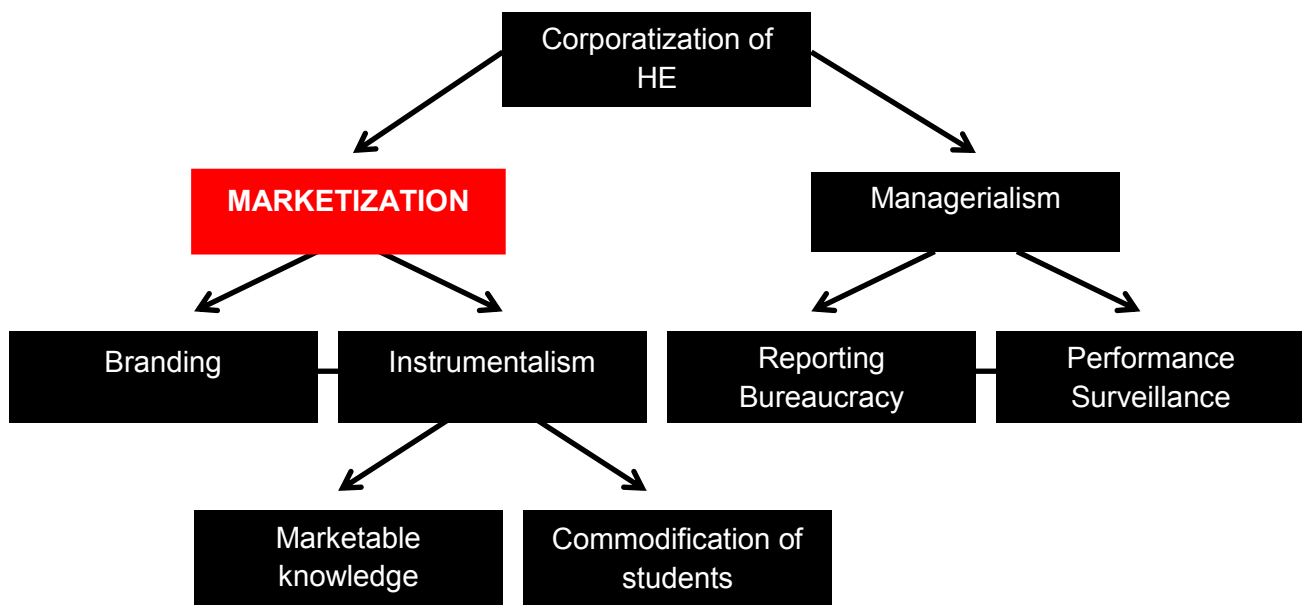
## Interpretive perspective

There is an increasing interpretive interest in the corporatization of higher education. Scholars focus on different components of this development and they are intertwined and reinforcing each other but we will try to divide them accordingly for a better theoretical representation and analytical possibilities. We will present some of the distinctive processes according to the graphic below:



*Figure 2: Interpretative literature on HE*

## Marketization



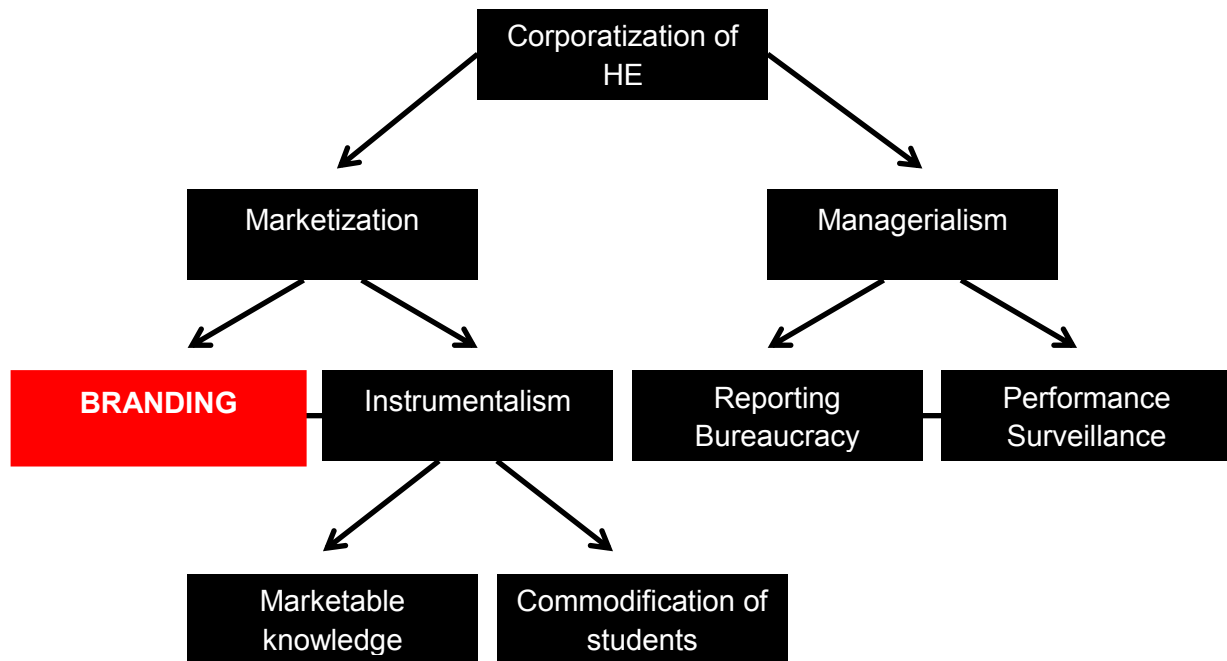
*Figure 2a: Marketization*

One of the main debates regarding the corporatization of higher education is **who actually the customer is and what is the product of higher education**. There are two main views which can be positioned on the extreme ends of a continuum: “students can be either considered as customers (with courses as the higher education products) or as products with the employers being the customers” (Conway et al., 1994, p.31 as cited in Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006, p. 319). This debate although receiving more attention from marketing scholars may have very important implications for academic identity as it is an indication about the purpose of the academic work, its demands, goals and meaning or generally speaking - *raison d'être* of a university - and it is one of the main discourses we have identified and we will follow in our study. In line with the abovementioned the market-orientation of higher education could be logically split into two sub-categories.

The first one we call ‘branding’ and this is a representation of the view that students are the customers of a university and their demands should be respected as ‘the customer is always right’. The market-orientation in this case leads to increased marketing and branding efforts and we will examine the latter as it possibly has implications for academic identity work.

The second category we named ‘instrumentalism’ and it represents the market-orientation towards business and industry demands. Business as the customer of academia could be further divided into demands for ‘useful’ knowledge and demands for ‘useful’ employees – the sub-categories which we called ‘marketable knowledge’ and ‘commodification of students’ respectfully.

- Branding



*Figure 2b: Branding*

The first type of marketization is based on the view of **students as customers** and programs and courses as products. The market development here means increased competition for students and boost in marketing and branding efforts in order to attract customers. The establishment of HE as an international market and the consequent increased competition has led to more efforts paid by the HE institutions for marketing and branding (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006). This could be perceived as a natural effect following the high degree of deregulation in a lot of countries, the easier movement of people (and students) or the globalization processes generally speaking.

It is hardly a surprise that higher education institutions try to make use of market instruments when finding themselves on a market, what is more: a global, highly competitive market. Branding is in a sense the logical choice for HE institutions competing on a market as their products or services<sup>1</sup> are intangible and quality assessment is very complex and difficult; however it is still a very ambiguous process on a various levels: most importantly - what is the purpose of the brand, who identifies<sup>2</sup> with it and how is quality measured (Jevons, 2006). As Chapleo (2010) suggests HEIs branding is emergent and a lot is being borrowed from other business areas without actually adapting it to the specifics of HE market which might be the reason for the vague and unclear route.

To make matters even more complex, we have to acknowledge that branding is not anymore understood as a passive one-way communication from institutions to customers, instead it is regarded as an active process where the brand is being formed in interaction between different stakeholders and could moreover trigger opposing interpretations about their roles and identities (Aspara et al, 2014) as it is also “a meaning-making device in organizations” (Kärreman and Rylander, 2009, as mentioned in Aspara et al, 2014). An institution does not *have* a brand, there is no fixed message of ““what” and “who” it is, and what it “stands for” in terms of values and characteristics” (Wæraas and Solbakk, 2009). Instead the brand gets created and negotiated in interaction between all stakeholders (in our case - university and school management, academics, students, business, state, society). And this process influence or even triggers intensified identity work of academics.

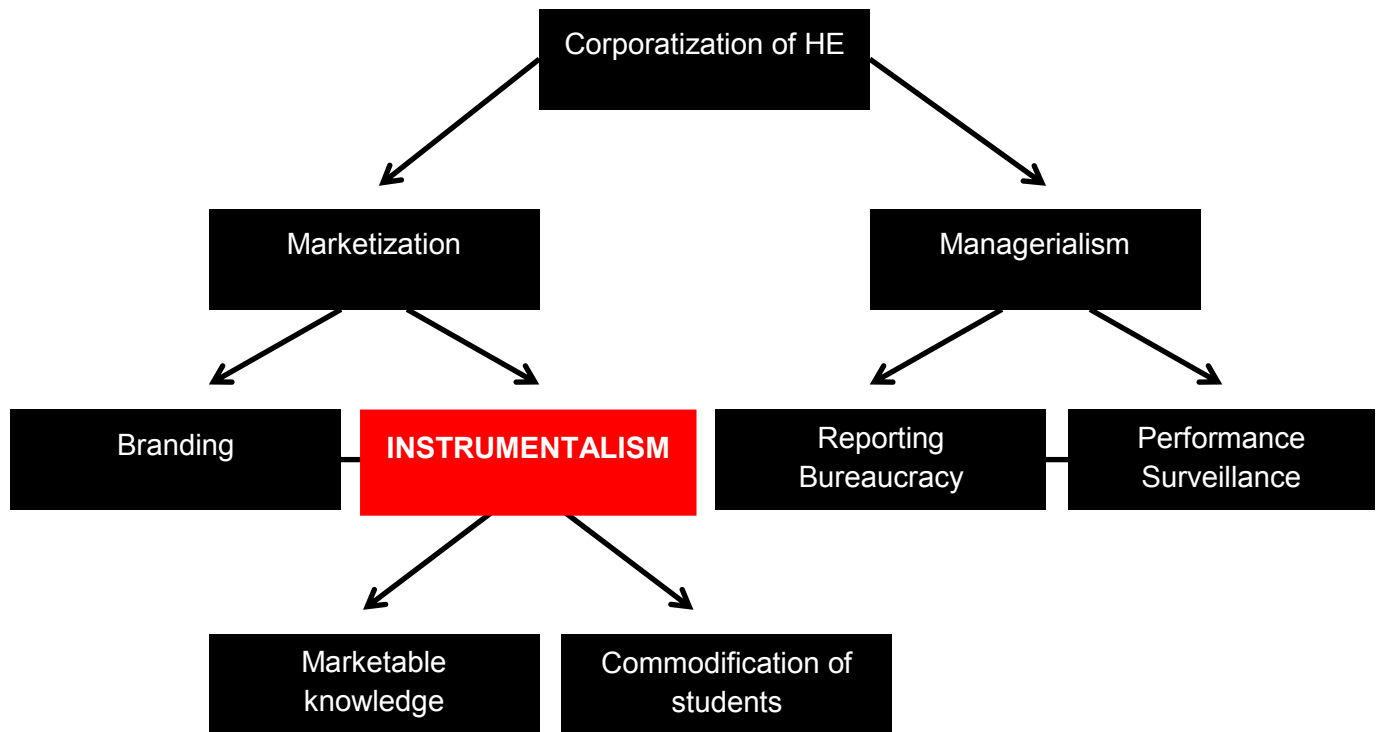
The institution which we are studying is not undergoing an explicit branding or rebranding initiative, however there are processes such as accreditation, international cooperation, marketing which are connected to the brand discourse and thus we expect branding to be one of the resources academics use for identity work.

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<sup>1</sup> There are differing opinions on the work outcome of a higher education institution - it could be seen as products or services; furthermore the vies on what exactly is the product or the service are also diverse; we refer to ‘products’ throughout the work for analytical simplification

<sup>2</sup> It is not unusual, especially in large institutions, that staff identifies with a unit/department/faculty/school rather than the university/institution

- Instrumentalism



*Figure 2c: Instrumentalism*

Yet there is another market logic in HE in addition to the one described above (in terms of competing for students), namely the demand for ‘marketable knowledge’ from industry and business (Aspara et al, 2014). If one perceives business and industry as the customer of HEIs, it is the need to satisfy the customer’s desire for ‘marketable knowledge’ that ‘marketizes’ the HEIs. The latter is also referred to as **instrumentalism** - the external pressure on universities to produce knowledge and information as defined useful from other stakeholders and not HEIs themselves (Aspara et al, 2014). Those pressures meet of course their opponents who sometimes “believe that the business world morally contradicts the values of education” (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006, p. 319). This creates identity struggles with a greater or lesser intensity, depending on the degree to which the academic has internalized the business values. Values are central for one’s identity and more so in academia where values such as institutional autonomy,



academic freedom, academic professionalism, and intellectual curiosity traditionally are the core resources for identity work and their clash with the modern corporate values creates identity schisms (Winter, 2009).

The instrumentalism in turn can be divided into production of useful, quick, marketable knowledge (research) and production of useful, quick, marketable employees (students). Additionally, students sometimes self-commodify themselves by expecting and demanding exactly the same - to be positioned as commodities and put on the production line.

“Commodification occurs when economic value becomes assigned to something that traditionally would not be considered in economic terms, for example an idea” (Jones, 2007, p. 219) and by self-commodification of students we mean that students are externally in the position of the customers that have the demanding power, however their demands come from the same corporate-related values imposed by business and industry. They prescribe economic value on education and economic value on themselves. This ‘value for money’ attitude, resistance towards critical thinking and educationally unsound expectations from the increasingly demanding students is challenging the identity of academics not least because they start questioning what is good teaching and what is the purpose of teaching (ibid.). Jones (2007) argues that the uncertainty of what it means to be a (good) teacher creates not only vocational insecurity, but an ontological one since the changes challenge the role of the academic as well as his/her identity.

Tightly connected to the concept of instrumentalism is managerialism, however we decided to divide the two and for the purposes of this paper instrumentalism represents values and ideologies while managerialism exemplifies the ‘technical’ side - the ways and practices at work.

## Managerialism

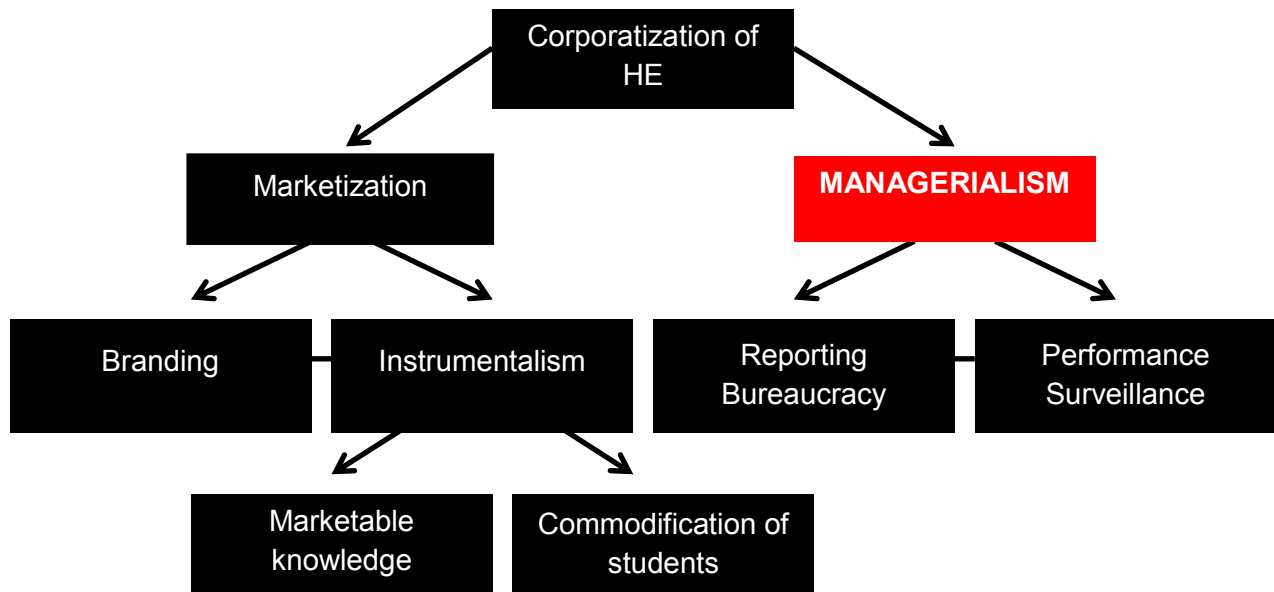


Figure 2d: Managerialism

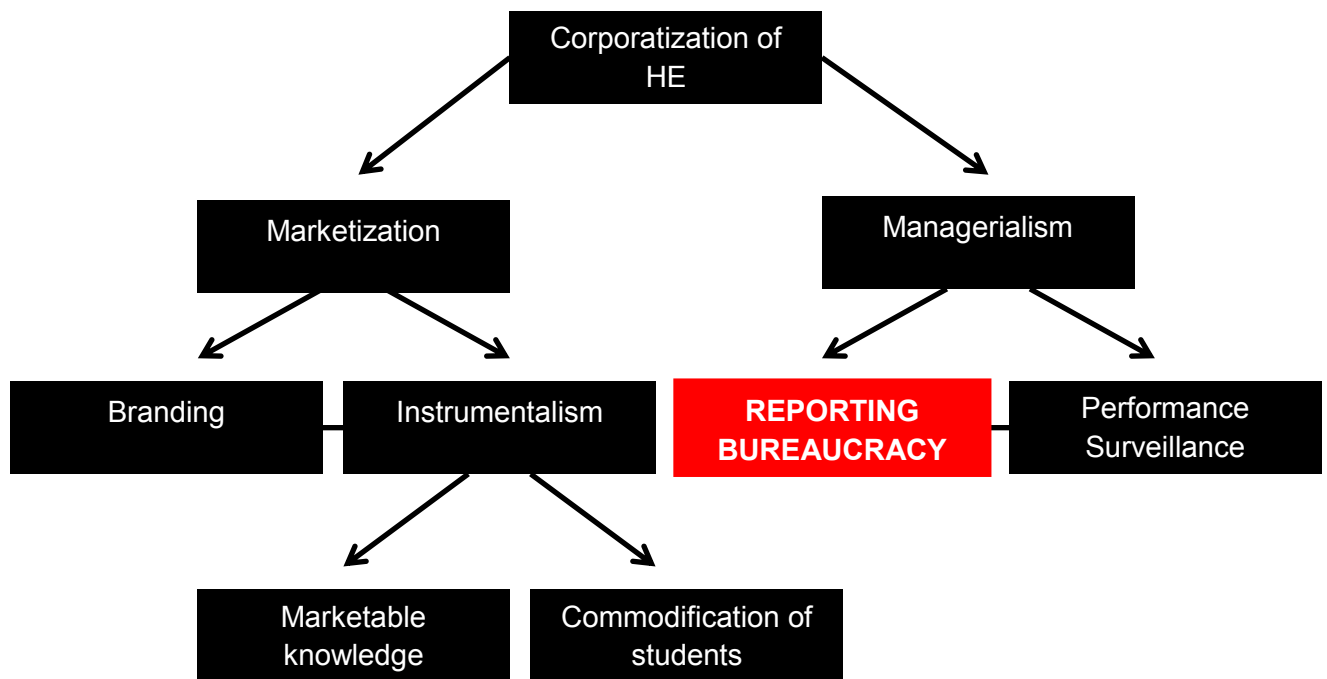
The change of HEIs modus operandi is not only powered by market forces. Significant impetuses for what is ‘going on’ today in the higher education are *inter alia* government (de)regulations, quality assessments and assurance, and funding requirements. New practices to which universities need to adapt are for example performance management, new funding models and managerialism (Wæraas and Solbakk, 2009).

*“I doubt that there are many professions whose members are so relentlessly subjected to measurement, criticism and rejection as academics, exposing them to deep insecurities regarding their worth, their identity and their standing”* (Gabriel, 2010, p. 769)

Managerialism is infusing the notions of efficiency and strong managerial culture in the forms of budgetary control, profit-making, performance management, and hierarchy into academia and that causes schisms in academics’ identity (Winter, 2009). We have ‘stripped’ down the ideological content of managerialism and have left it only to represent procedural and technical aspects.

There are two sides to these new procedures - heavier administrative burden and bureaucratization on one hand and increased surveillance and performance pressures, on the other. Let us discuss them consecutively.

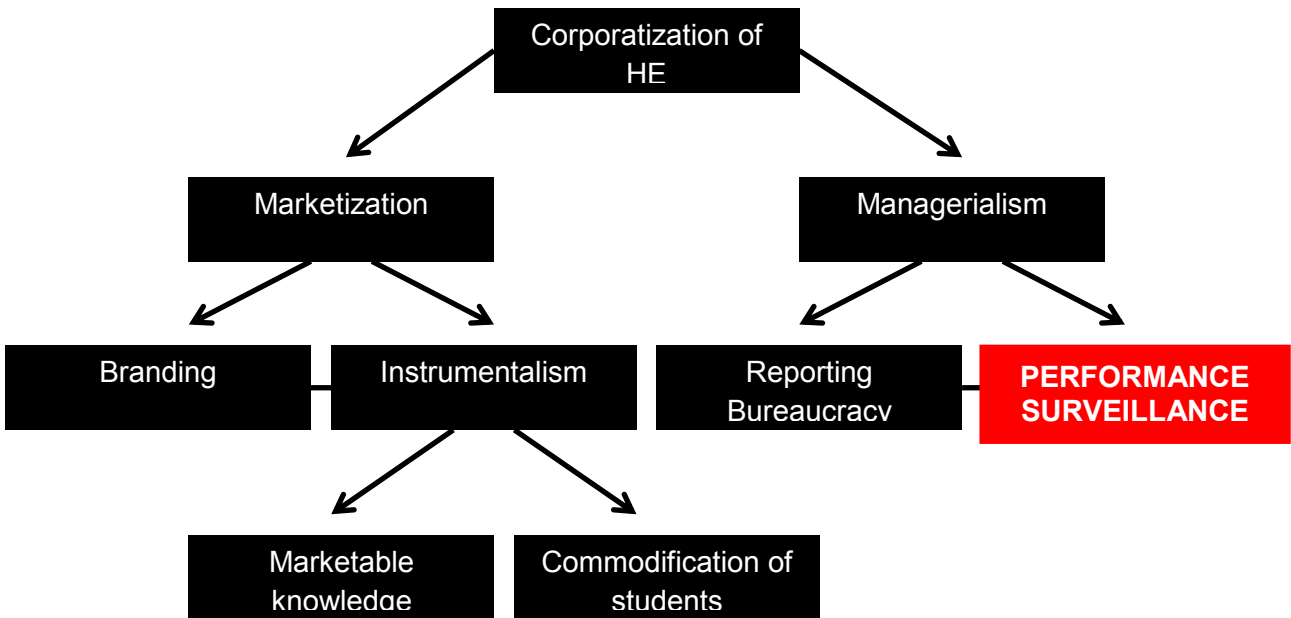
- Reporting and bureaucracy



*Figure 2e: Reporting and Bureaucracy*

The increased bureaucratization and reporting prompts identity work, because it produces fear and anxiety, reduces flexibility and threatens academic autonomy - one of the main identity resources for academics (Jones, 2007). “Outcomes, teaching scores, rankings, measurement of research output and league tables can never capture complexity, promote creative daring nor engender radical critique” (ibid., p. 219) and when put in a position of inability to reflect the complexity and quality of their work in those scores and measurements, academics become insecure and resort to identity work. Critique is regarded as old-fashioned and conservative, because monitoring is attributed to improved quality (ibid.).

- Performance and Surveillance



*Figure 2f: Performance and Surveillance*

*“Everything one does must be measured and counted and only the measurable matters.”  
(Lynch, 2006, p. 9)*

Knights and Clarke (2013) suggest that there is an idealized image of the ‘true’ academic and that ideal identity inspires one’s desire of how others should perceive one. These perfect identities and expectations are reinforced by higher pressure to perform in the recent turn towards market orientation in higher education, which anyway is an occupation, characterized by “competitiveness, intellectualism, achievement-orientation, hierarchy, and evaluativeness” (Hearn, 2008, p. 190 as cited by Knights and Clarke, 2013, p. 338). Dividing the effects of the increased impulse towards quality improvement and performance pressures in HE into sweet and bitter Knights and Clarke (2013) pose the question of whether the ‘net’ increase in quality and boosted creativity can out-measure the bitterness of the development of multiple insecurities.

The pressure to perform have made academic identities even more fragile than before argue Clarke, Knights and Jarvis (2012), because some of the performance expectations are not even

possible - the example the authors give us is with publication and the law of numbers - there are simply not enough top journals for all academics to publish in. Thus the increased pressure for performance in research would probably result in competition, rivalry and status anxiety, and subsequently insecurity and identity struggles. Performance pressures as discussed above could be regarded from two perspectives: one is 'informal' (the pressure to teach better, publish more, attend more conferences, for example) and emerging from peer pressure, personal aspirations or meta-discourses.

The second possibility is more 'formal' and official coming directly as a professional requirement or a procedural obligation. In the latter case increased performance requirements are usually tied to increased surveillance and control. This has many possible consequences. Jones (2007) for once suggests that increased scrutiny renders academics reluctant to critique. Critical thinking is, however, one of the central constructs of academic identity, universities' organizational identity and purpose of work and thus the inaccessibility of this resource could create identity tensions.

Suggesting that the surveillance policies that are produced in the pursuit of accountability are creating a 'culture of distrust', Codd (2005) also states that increased surveillance questions the foundations of professionalism, which is another important academic identity source.

Compared with other professions, academia is still relatively autonomous claim Clarke, Knights and Jarvis (2012). However, one should not passively accept claims of autonomy and analyze its increase/decrease and importance for identity construction, without keeping in mind the possibility of the doublethink (Willmott, 1993, as inspired by Orwell's '1984') - something that is rejected and at the same time claimed, a meta-narrative, dominant discourse. Drawing on George Orwell's influential work as well, Lynch (2006) suggests that the everyday institutional surveillance and the 'reflexive surveillance of the self' create alienation which leads to compliance

These critical notions regarding autonomy serve as a liaison to the closing section of our literature review where we will present briefly some more critical perspectives on the corporatization of higher education.

## Critical

A lot of what we have disputed under the interpretive literature part has more than a pinch of critical saltiness, therefore in this section we would like to go on a macro level and discuss briefly the critique towards the neoliberalism and the New Public Management.

Probably the most famous critical work on higher education in the last two decades is Ron Barnett's *Higher Education: A Critical Business*. In the book the author suggests that universities are becoming more and more dependent on alliances with companies and government and this process is not beneficial for anyone. The 'educated' individual is moving away from what he (Barnett, 1997) calls a critical-being: a combination of thinking, self-reflection and action. People who are educated at university should strive to be critical -beings. He discusses how we look upon higher education and its primarily emancipatory role: "Critical persons are more than just critical thinkers. They are able critically to engage with the world and with themselves as well as with knowledge" (Barnett, 1997, p. 1).

Today, instrumentalism in education and the focus on gaining practical skills make people forget what education is (or should be) 'all about'. Barnett (1997) suggests that individuals should be reflexive and understand which type of knowledge is valuable for them and to develop what he calls "personal epistemology".

Lynch (2006) states that it has become normal to mention education in terms of economic benefit to the country in public policy and rhetoric. Further she explains that neoliberalism suppose that education should be provided as any other product on the market to the customers who can afford it and that the rationale behind it is that consumers now have the freedom of choice between the education they like. In neoliberalism the one to be educated – 'homo economicus' is "a labour market actor whose life and purposes are determined by their economic status" (2006, p. 3). The clash between the values of the 'homo economicus' and the 'critical-being' is again the clash between the black and white academic identity resources.

It is time to have a look of how 'big is the bang' in Lund University School of Economics and Management. In the next chapter we present our findings. Put your crash helmets on!

# Empirical findings

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Academics use different sources for identity work and those are affected to a greater or lesser extent by the processes of corporatization influencing LUSEM as interpreted by the participants in the study. Some of the traditional identity resources are threatened; others are used as a catalyzer of the ‘black’ ones to reduce the identity tensions and to actually avoid identity work. The so called black and white identity sources (corporatization forces and traditional academic values) are sometimes intertwined or reinforcing each other, however we will try to divide them for analytical distinction.

We have identified three groups of forces – values associations and their clashes create certain identity tensions and trigger identity work. We will present them accordingly.

## **Monitored Employee** vs **Autonomous Professional**

The resources for identity work in this part we have divided in two groups. The black corporatization forces encompass reporting, monitoring, surveillance, control, performance pressure and bureaucracy. The white traditional academic values of autonomy, professionalism and discretion are their counterpart. How those interact, collide or reinforce each other we will interpret below.

There were some tensions and irritation demonstrated by the academics, however we did not interpreted those as strong identity struggles and we did not recognize any significant level of identity work, triggered by the reporting force. We divided the empirical findings in two parts: external and internal reporting, because the participants in the study made clear distinction between them.

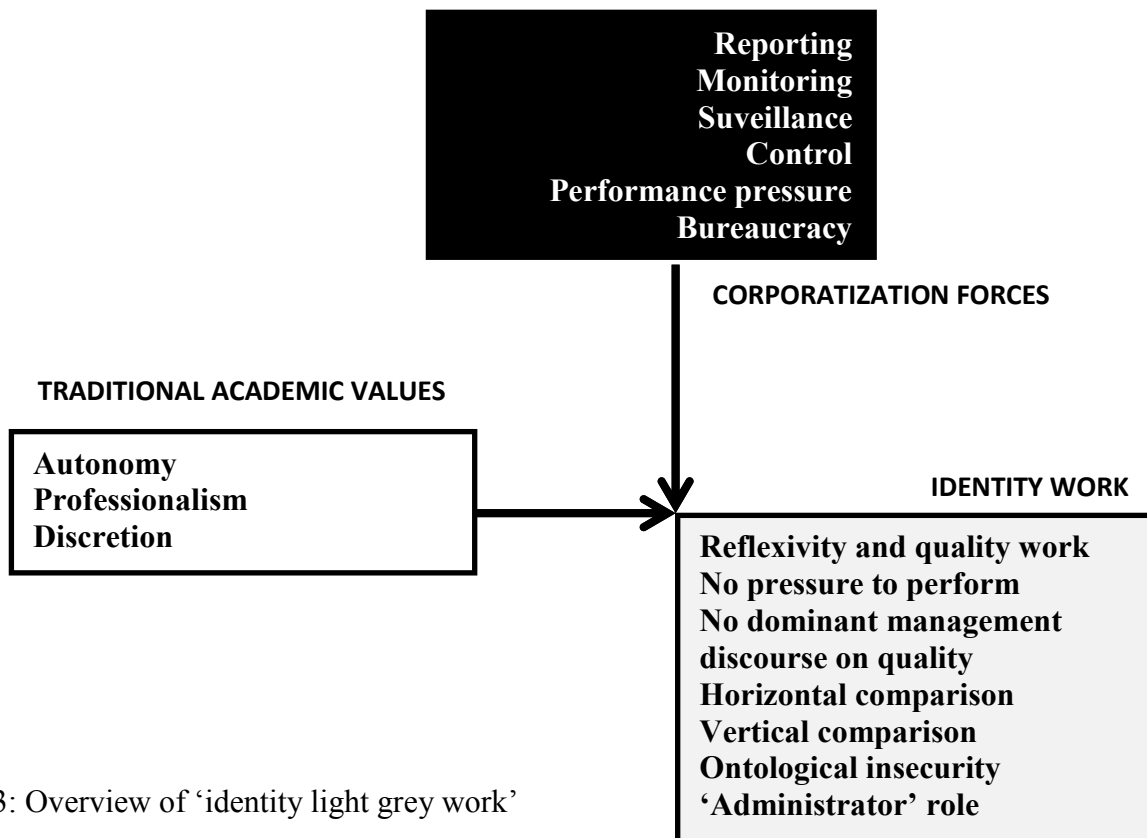


Figure 3: Overview of 'identity light grey work'



One of the main identity resources for academics is what we call the ‘autonomous professional’ - this construct includes values such as academic freedom, professionalism and discretion.

*I think that the advantage of being an academic is not any kind of material rewards...but it's more I think about autonomy. (Mr. G)*

*(...) but to me to be an academic still, being largely free to sort of design your own, you know, your own agenda for what you're going to do professionally... I mean, there's this cliché about academic freedom but still... (Mr. F)*

*I can decide for myself that this is an area that I would like to know more about, that I would like to study and I mean being able to do that for yourself, define what you are actually going to do with your time - it's one important thing. (Mr. D)*

There are two distinct views on reporting from an academic perspective. The participants clearly distinguished between reporting externally - to funding and accreditation bodies, and internally - to the school and university. We did not recognize specific notions of increased surveillance and control expressed from the academics - on the contrary, participants communicated sometimes dissatisfaction from the lack of feedback from management. This provokes a feeling of meaninglessness of reporting and just ‘time lost’. In that sense it frustrates them, because it is intrusive and drains their time for ‘real’ work.

### External reporting/EQUIS

The participants perceive EQUIS and the accreditation process as a positive development, quality assurance and a reflexive instrument. Moreover, they acknowledge it as something useful and necessary for improving the status and the brand of the school.

*Getting accreditation is a good way of forcing yourself to think through what your strengths are, what your weaknesses are, what you may need to change and sort of get an overall grip on what you're actually doing, because it's easy to fall asleep. (Mr. F)*

*And EQUIS of course is a monitoring device, very important device here. But there is no requirement put on us as researchers by the school to show any kind of productivity. (Mr. C)*

*So that's important to do and we need to know and reflect upon how we do things. I think that was kind of processes that EQUIS have....to some extent it's good for the school to do that because there used to be much less in control of what was going on. (Mr. D)*

However, although perceived as somewhat useful at this stage, EQUIS and the accreditation is bringing the school 'one step closer' to the instrumentalist view on higher education. Ranking of schools is commodifying knowledge as it prescribes economic value to it. This provokes ontological insecurities as it challenges the mission of the university.

*I guess to be about looking good and about being able to seeing that yes we are doing our jobs as we should do, it's about transparency, it's about being seen to tick the boxes, so it's about image, it's about image, and it's about keeping of the brand, keeping the brand credible. (Mr. G)*

*So whether we like it or not I think it's a fact that you can't ignore these rankings and I think you need to be involved more and more in those things. (Mr. D)*

*So therefore it's a very tough world out there, so you have to be ranked in order to be respected. (...) And that to me is of course a very sad story because the qualities that we have around here, I don't think they're related very much to ranking. (...) We do change according to accreditation offices, in case they have a good point and they often have. And we often learn quite a lot from that. But the step from accreditation to the hit lists, that's where the problem is. (Mr. H)*

But this insecurity is still 'out there', it is not in LUSEM. The school is not putting any pressure on academics to perform in certain way or to succumb to those ideas. It does participate in different organizations, it fosters corporate relations, but the extent of the market activities of the school is perceived by the academics as a reasonable one and they look upon the increased external reporting for the purposes of accreditation as something rather appropriate. The

reporting is not threatening their autonomy or discretion. It does not have the purpose of changing their ‘professional’ ways; it does not question their mission. Even if there is a slight tension of what ‘might come’, because of the developments of reporting and control in other higher education systems, exactly the comparison with those balance the eagerness. The academics use the ‘we – they’ distinction not only with other higher education systems and countries, but also with other professions.

*I think even though we are subject to certain sort of control regimes here, I think relatively to other professions we do have a fair amount of autonomy in terms of what we do, in terms of how we arrange our time, and so on. And so that I think is quite important. But also I think it's, it is having a degree of freedom to explore new ideas, develop new ideas, do new things. I don't think I would get that in any other profession. (...) And so in a sense it's a reasonably free and uncontrolled environment working here compared with say the UK. (Mr. G)*

*But I think in general terms you have a rather...a lot of degrees of freedom if you work here. (...) I mean I think the degrees of freedom you have here to define what you want to do are a lot larger than if you work in industry. (Mr. D)*

*I think there are few kinds of jobs in the world where you have such a large freedom to define what you want to do and what is important to society and where you want to spend your time. So I feel that I'm extremely privileged. (Mr. H)*

### Internal reporting/bureaucracy

Some participants were using terms like ‘window-dressing’ when describing the internal reporting procedures and saying that efforts do not matter if one cannot put them on paper. This, we believe, do not cause strong identity struggles for the participants as they see it as annoying and meaningless but since it is not actually affecting their work more than just taking portion of their time and there is no performance pressure from management, it is just some sort of

dissatisfaction with administration. There is the new role of ‘administrator’ which is created for them, but it does not create strong tensions with the traditional roles of teacher and researcher, since it does not change the core of their work to a significant extent and it does not require any specific skills that they need to acquire and are not available for them. There is a slight attribution towards the market-orientation of the school, but not to extend of triggering identity tensions.

*Well, it's not so much fun. When I say that sort of showing that we do things is more important than actually improving quality - that of course feels like wasting time basically. So I would rather sort of work with improving the quality of the course then instead of filling out some report card that we can show to another evaluator showing what we have done. But, of course, I understand that it's important. (Mr. E)*

*And it takes you a few hours to get it done, you know, it's not a big deal, it can be a little annoying at a time but I don't think it's that big a deal. (...) Maybe I can curse over it when I have to do it, or you know, when I didn't meet the deadline, when I have other stuff to do and I have to do this thing, you know, but no, seriously, I don't think it's that big a deal. And what is done with the data once it's gathered I'm not sure of (laughter). So, so in that sense it could be a little...I suppose you're not all that motivated always to do all this reporting. But because it doesn't have any consequences it doesn't seem to be anybody actually doing anything with this. I'm not sure. Yeah. Well. (laughter) (Mr. F)*

Frustration is provoked in the sense of no communication from the management, no feedback, no incentives. Academics feel that they are put in the position of reporting and evaluating their work but at the same time there is no meaning ascribed to those procedures and they are left to their own sensemaking.

The identity work here is mostly, again comparison, but in this case it is vertical – the ‘now and before’; the performance pressures (or lack of it) from management; and a light challenge of the academic role – the academics are professionals, who create knowledge and spread knowledge, they are teachers and researchers, they are not administrators.

*I mean the management of the department used to have the responsibility of being some kind of buffer, you know, trying to keep bureaucratic rules and madness away from the professional part. Now I think they're just passing it on and we get more and more work and there's a lower degree of understanding for the professional side of the organization. (...) I think a lot of people feel frustrated by this and I think it influences their...I mean the commitment they feel to their work. I know for some people it's like that. (Mr. D)*

*I dislike very much that we have developed over time here an administration that is living very much a life of its own. (...) So I am actually rather much against this development, that I cannot get any help from an administrative person anymore. I can only get demands from them, on what they want to do. And we do more and more and more of the administrative work. I'm pretty good at that too so I can do it. It's more a matter of where should I spend my time. (...) And you can also see it in our organization here physically. Where do you find the administration of the business administration - they sit, all of them, up on top of the economic library. Only administrative people. That was never the case before, we sat next to and helping each other. Now it's them and us. (Mr. H)*

*It's quite noticeable I think that if you look at the faculty office - far more administrative staff there at the faculty office, administering and all this, all this accreditation staff, than there were 10 years ago. Far, far more, actually. Being seen to tick the boxes of what a business school should be, that's quite obvious. And I think it's that level where the changes are most visible. (Mr. G)*

Although there are some attributions to reporting being in a way a control mechanism for management, these are not backed by strong opinions and any signs of greater identity tensions.

*So everybody knows that it might be completely meaningless to be filling in this form but the administration wants it because they want to have some kind of feeling that they're in control. (Mr. D)*

*I mean considering the way we are in control of what we do here and a lot of us really appreciate being in control of what we do - of course whenever someone steps in and says that, well, you have to provide this and this and that, well it's never fun. (Mr. C)*

*No, no, I don't feel pressured. I'm a little sad sometimes because all my young colleagues, they take them seriously. (Mr. H)*

We did not recognize any strong discourses and meta-narratives regarding reporting, quality or performance. The leadership team seems to have a very clear idea about those developments as they expressed an opinion quite similar to our findings, namely that reporting is increasing and there are some tensions, people that are not happy, but it is generally accepted as a necessary thing to do. Younger employees make more sense of it, explaining it through accountability, older employees have more difficulties accepting reporting as they regard it as intrusive and controlling, constraining their academic freedom, because they have the possibility of vertical comparison. A negative issue, according to management, is that the increased administrative burden creates tension between academics and administrators as the reporting gives the latter more privileges. Also, action is not always aligned with strategy and could seem as pointless bureaucracy (as it does).

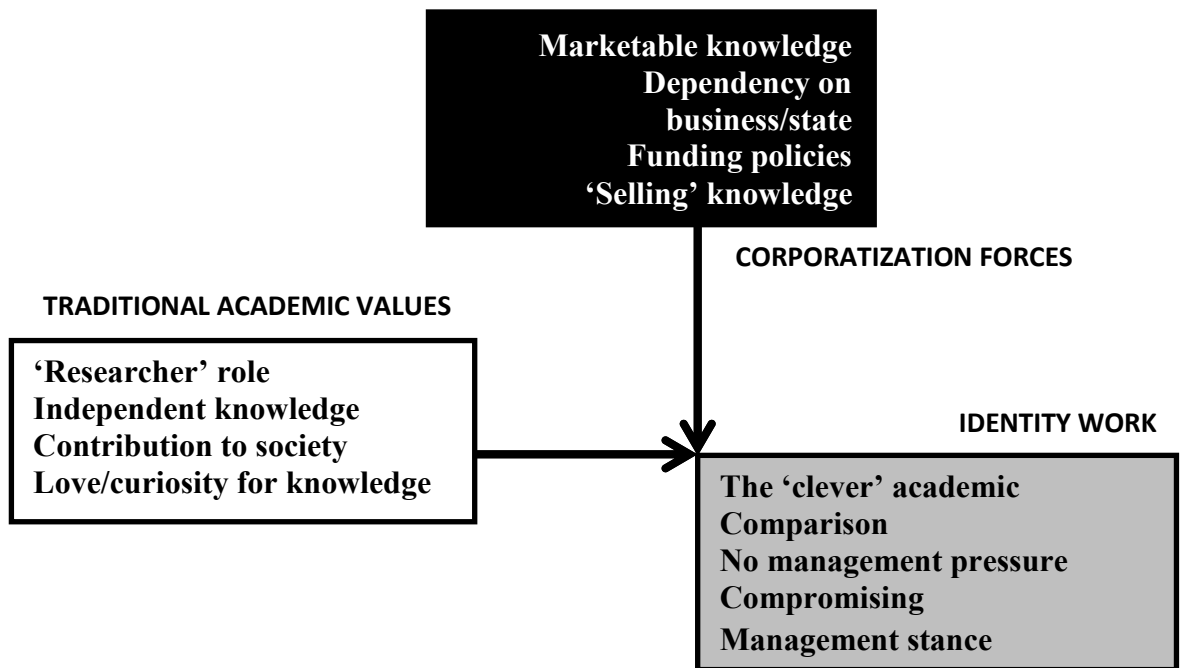
*So, yes, I think there is, well, I think there are various tensions here, it's not unproblematic, but I would say that there is a general acceptance of this notion. (Mr. A)*

They do not fear any more serious forms of resistance or development of 'dramaturgical' selves as the level of reporting is not that high.

*Of course, whenever there is reporting, there is some manipulative twisting or distortion of reality when it's codified as reports, but that's...well, I mean I see the point that there's such a risk, but I don't perceive it as a big one, because I do not think that the level of reporting and the level of surveillance is such that it really...that it brings forth faults in reporting. (Mr. A)*

## **Marketable knowledge vs Real knowledge**

This section is devoted to the identity work of academics based on another set of black and white resources and their mutual constitution. The dark side, what we named ‘marketable knowledge’, encompasses forces such as increased demand for useful knowledge, dependency on business and state, restricting research funding policies and coercion to ‘sell’ knowledge and ideas. On the white side of the real knowledge we find identity resources such as ‘researcher’ role, independent knowledge producing, contribution to society and love and curiosity for knowledge.



*Figure 4: Overview of ‘identity medium grey work’*

Academics believe that in order to fulfill their mission of contributing to society they should be somewhat distant and keep independency as knowledge producers. The forces that we observe in society, politics, business and industry, trying to draw academia closer to them, are creating tensions for academics’ identity and they resort to identity work. Following is a rather long

citation, which represents in depth the majority of opinions regarding purpose of research and the questions academics ask themselves.

*Yeah, I mean, then we come to the question of what does it mean to do research in a business school. Here we have a similar dualization between on the one hand quite a few...the thing that the main role of a business school is to provide useful knowledge - knowledge that companies in particular, but perhaps also states can exploit to enhance their competitiveness or capacity of foreseeing market changes or changes of human recruitment processes, or what have you. (...) If you sit in the lap of the CEOs or the HR directors - it's not necessarily the best position to do the research. I think you should do it with a little distance - you should study markets, you should study companies but you shouldn't sort of be the prolonged arm of them, you should have a critical distance. (...) But then you should do something that is relevant but not something that in a way directly ties in with what the women and men of the real world wants. You should do something that **surprises** them. That's why you do research. You don't do research to **confirm** what people already know. You do it to **surprise**! In that sense I think it is also...when you talk about this corporatization of higher education it is important that you in a way relate to the subjects in which you operate, let's say business, or macroeconomics or what have you, but you should never mirror them one to one - there should always be some kind of distance, intellectual distance. And there should be a moment of surprise, a little element of surprise - something that is eye-opening to it. (Mr. B)*

As briefly mentioned, one of the main identity sources for academics is their research and they see it as knowledge creation for the benefit of society.

*I love what I do, I can... I've thought about doing something else but I can't imagine myself doing something else - this is what I do, this is me. So to me it's a question of identity. I more or less knew from day one when I began studying Business Administration that I wanted to do research in Business Administration. (Mr. C)*

*To me that means [being an academic] that I have an obligation to try to use my knowledge to contribute to society, that's my prime obligation.(...) I found many*



*interesting problems that I have been able to take home and find research, find funding for and get work for PhD students. And when they work on those things, they match the needs that are out in the society. (Mr. H)*

*I actually also like the actual, the process in itself, just thinking of new ideas, what are we going to do, thinking of new projects, working on those projects, you know, reading up on a subject, and coming up with new ideas and so on. (Mr. F)*

The corporatization forces create tensions by imposing funding regimes which puts constraints on academic freedom in terms of knowledge interests and new ideas development – those have to be sold, but they have to be commercially interesting in order to be sold.

*Well, I would like to think that people should be free to produce the knowledge that they want to do without it being controlled and steered by the government funding regimes (...) Well, () I think that people should be able and free to develop ideas and teach ideas, ideas in their own right rather than, well “I could teach ideas or produce ideas only if they are commercially viable”, there are plenty of things which perhaps aren't commercially viable that we need to know about. If...I mean it becomes difficult to see how one can do critical work if one is...if knowledge becomes produced and consumed in a market. (...) I am critical, I am critical of neo-liberalism more generally, in a sense that's a political position, you know. I do believe that...I don't believe that it's in the best interests of either teaching or education that it turns over to be a market. I think that the market has its place in society but I don't think education, higher education, or other forms of education actually, is a place where the market should...the market principles should go actually, don't believe that. (Mr. G)*

*It's, whatever you do and however close you are with the rest of the society, I mean you must keep your role as a...that's the role of the university - we provide free thinkers and to take an independent position and not be the spokesman of a political party or something like that.(Mr. H)*

Some of the participants do believe that the university as an institution and LUSEM in particular should have closer ties with business and industry, but only with regard to shortening the physical distance and not the intellectual one.

*Because the university has a long tradition of keeping the university closed and we actually have to work pretty hard to open the university and to interact better with the rest of the society. And when I talk to people in local communities and small companies they are often rather scared of the university and they don't know how to interact with us. (Mr. H)*

Building on this argument the same interviewee states that the role of the university is to be a “positive force in developing society” and in that sense the school needs to be open to all – not just to the big companies that come with special demands. Being open and seeking diverse collaboration prevents subjectivity and interdependence and subsequently enhances independent knowledge creation, which is one of the ‘white’ identity sources.

However, trying to build close connections while at the same time keeping intellectual and critical distance is not easy. Academics today are forced into the role of salesmen and need to maneuver strategically in order to keep their independence and at the same time manage to secure funds for conducting research. This forces them into negotiation of what is acceptable to compromise and what not. Academics believe that they can ‘beat the system’ by being clever and strategic.

*We sell research also, because by tradition we used to have from the state research money going into the faculty. They say, ‘do research for this and be happy’. Yes we did. And then the state said ‘no, we think that you are too lazy and fat and slow so we cut down this’. So we send much less money to the faculty and we instead ask you to compete for research money from national funds or from the EU funds or whatever. So that has also been a commercialization of our work. So I, as a professor, I have to spend quite a lot of time on selling our research capabilities to various external funds and I’m pretty good at it. So it works for me. But it doesn't work for everybody. (...) So if you’re a clever researcher you look for the challenges and you do research in those areas. And of course*

*in a sense that's sensible, because that's what society has decided - this is important, this is what we should do. So we run for that, and we do that. But we, you can't change the way you run, how much...too much, you must have a core knowledge of what you're actually doing. So therefore if you're sensible, they're some areas where you don't participate. And there are others where you do participate. (Mr. H)*

Still, academics find that these pressures are not reducing their autonomy in a great degree. Interestingly, the external research funding was expressed both as contributor and restrictor to academic autonomy. The participants informed us about the pressure academics experience regarding finding external financing and the necessity to think “strategically” about the topics for research, but at the same time the external funding allows them to attribute higher percentage of their time to research where they state they mostly find their freedom.

*(...) but sort of the external financing that sort of forces you a little bit to do the kind of research that you can get a grant for and so you can't do... Maybe I would do research on a little bit different topics unless I have to think strategically all the time - sort of can I get external funding for the work that I'm doing. (Mr. E)*

Some of our participants gave preference to the research role over the teacher one; however they state that there is no obvious collision between the roles. They resort to horizontal comparison with other professions and with teaching where they experience more struggles.

*Research is probably something I would do - say if I were independently rich and I could stay at home, I don't think I could stop doing research anyway, coz' I really like it. But I could stop teaching. (...) that's important to me - to be able to do mainly research. Sort of, so maybe my identity I would say is to... as a researcher and then I also, well something negative, but I also have to teach - but it's sort of the research that I like doing the most. (Mr. E)*

*For me it's been very much driven by getting research funding because if you don't get research funding, you get to teach a lot and then it's kind of, well, for me at least it would not be as rewarding. (...) No, I don't think there's a conflict between the roles, not for me.*

*I don't think so, I'm in this very good connection between the master program I'm involved in and the research I do so that's fine. (Mr. D)*

The internalization of the different available roles is active identity work therefore it is important for our study to pay close attention to how academics cope with the different roles. We believe that the stronger identification with the researcher role for the cited participants is due to the higher intensity of identity struggle observed in relation to their teaching role; hence they resort to identity work and internalize the role of the researcher to a greater extent in order to reduce the tension. They 'switch' to the role that is more in line with their values and identify strongly with it.

*(...) you are constrained in your teaching and so on, right? But you still have a lot of leeway to sort of set your own agenda for how you do things and in research you are obviously free to do whatever you want almost, right?(Mr. F)*

The second comparison is to other systems. Although subjects to external pressure from government funding regimes and business and industry, the academics consider LUSEM a considerably safe place in regard to management control, especially so in comparison to other higher education institutions/systems.

*Management cannot control what I do research on. In some universities that happen - there are universities that have prioritized research areas and you have to do research here and here and here; if you're not doing research on that - well, either you have to leave or you have to do research on what we tell you to do. That does not happen here. There's no one influencing you here. If I want to do...write an article on something - I do it. And there is no one telling me how much time I should allocate on it - if it takes 2 years to write that article, well it takes 2 years. (Mr. C)*

Management recognizes that external stakeholders - business and society are important and considers that working closely with them is part of the mission of the school, however it also sees the tensions that these close ties provoke because of the increased demands from the

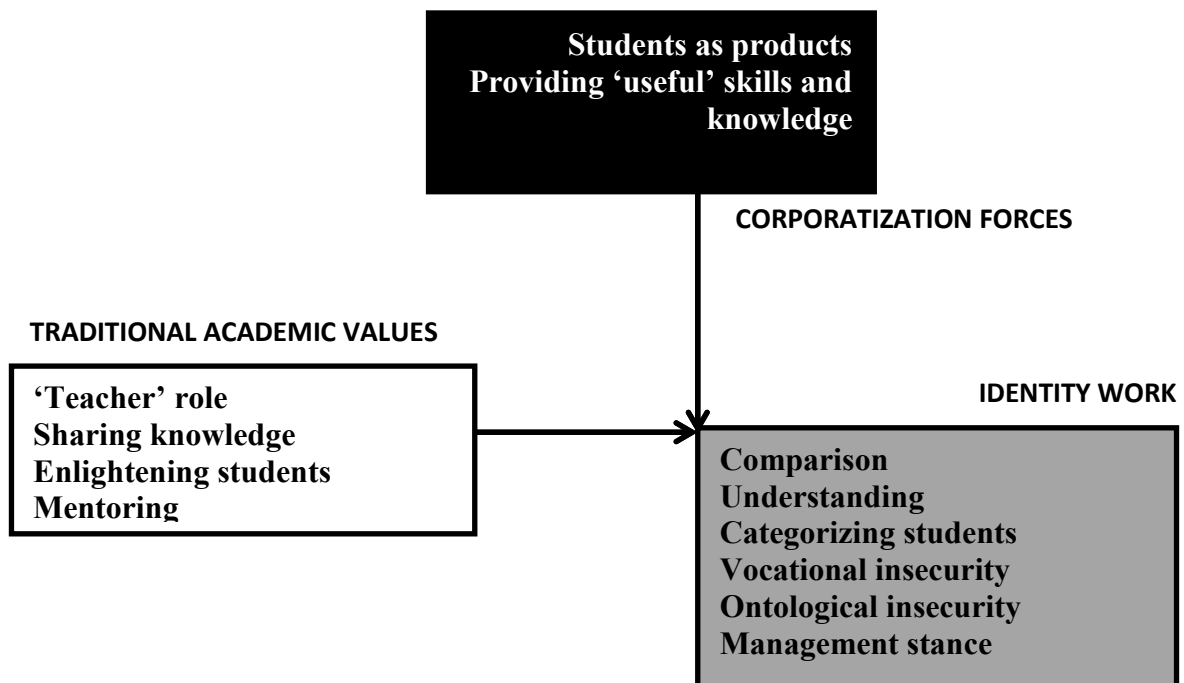
'consumers' side and the reluctance of some academics to give greater say to the business. They are sensitive regarding academic autonomy and are trying not to be too intrusive.

*No, no, I think in some way I would see it as a difference between, I mean within the mission that we talked about - educating students productively and conducting research which I think is expressed and generally very widely shared, the tension is between those who say that we, the teachers, the researcher, should define what we are going to do, what we are going to teach, what we are going to do research about, whereas the other side of it is that the students are always right. If there is an increasing demand of this program or this course compared to this course, the students should be allowed to move freely and similarly, research funders should have a greater say in what we do research on and so I think that is a useful way which captures that tension between sort of the suppliers being defining both in teaching and research and the students and the funders and so on, the demand defining what should be done. (Mr. A)*

## **Commodified Students vs Enlightened Students**

A strong tension in academic identity work showed in our empirical material is stemming from the changing role, power and demands of students. Academics' understanding of what it means to be a teacher is challenged by the new demands of students, imposed by business or themselves, and this is affecting professors' identity. They start questioning what their role is as teachers, should they oppose the new developments or succumb to them, what is white and what is black.

In our interpretation black is: "students as products" notion and the demand for "useful" skills and knowledge. The white traditional academic values are: "teacher" role, sharing knowledge, enlightening students and mentoring. We investigate the clash between these resources and the tensions that may trigger identity work.



*Figure 5: Overview of 'identity dark grey work'*

One of the main identity constructs for academics is their connection to students - the interaction, the teaching, and the 'enlightenment'. The feeling that you provoke someone's intellectual development, open new perspectives or are a mentor to a student - those are ideas of the academic mission, resources on which academics build their identity.

*I mean, that's the primary thing we do here. I mean - we're teachers. We're primarily teachers. It's incredibly fun to teach most of the time, if students appreciate you it's incredibly fun to teach. If you're teaching on things you really like it's incredibly fun. (Mr. C)*

*I like...about the teaching what I like is the interaction with students. (...) I like thesis supervision - things that sort of, you know, there's interaction you get to help them, you get to sort of throw ideas at each other - you could do this, you could do that and blah blah and so on, so that's fun. (Mr. F)*

*Well, I actually enjoy teaching and I think that you...talk to most people here; I think they would say they quite enjoy teaching but they don't like marking. (...) So in a sense I'm quite happy with my teaching. (Mr. G)*

Now more and more students are perceived to be instrumentalists - entering university to 'get the degree for the CV', focusing on gaining 'provable' skills which will later on help them to get a job. Thus they are depriving academics of the possibility to internalize the core characteristics of the 'teacher' role. When students are commodified, academics are turned into factory production line workers and their professional identity and mission is threatened. Students are not interested in being enlightened and that creates vocational and ontological insecurity.

*And so basically the students are products from the system so it's a factory producing students as products in order to make them as I guess employable and compliant employees for the purposes of employers. (...)And I think that the school basically has a role of producing employable, employable students, as products. And, yeah, and I think that there are certain, I think, pressures for...on us to produce for example business graduates with, who are sort of capable of going in... and producing.... business skills.*

*Here in this group we tend, I think, to have an ambition of not necessarily producing skilled accountants or skilled marketing professionals but at least critical human...critical human being, critical human beings. But even that we sometimes actually sell in quite an instrumental way. (Mr. G)*

*(...) students, now I talk about students, but also to some extent teachers, have some sort of alignment with the labor market. They think in terms of what they want to do - profession, salary, and so forth. (...) They don't want any waste. (Mr. B)*

*But many of the students are, like I said and other people, maybe want a closer tie to sort of what the companies want - like producing employees for companies. And that's something that's changing and I find that maybe a lot more frustrating than this administrative work. (Mr. E)*

Apart from the frustration in some of the most critical participants who express deep dissatisfaction with the commodification of students, there are some who are still critical but have a greater tolerance for the business values of the students. Their understanding is that these values are imposed externally on the students by market forces. However, they might experience even greater identity struggles, because they feel that they are 'fooling' the customer and cannot provide what is asked from them and at the same time they do not agree with those demands. This again, challenges their 'teacher self', the credibility of their 'professional self' and the critical thinking of their 'autonomous academic self'.

*I don't like teaching so much, like, the lecturing, well if people are interested to pass and not interested to learn - doesn't feel so useful what you do, right? (...) they don't need to learn things, but they need the degree so they want to pass the exam, but if they learn things - no, that's not so important. And that affects teaching a lot, because if you have students that are not genuinely interested in the subject and just want to sort of pass and get the degree - that's much more sort of, that is a much bigger factor that affects my work. (...) And the students know that, but you need the degree to get the job, right? But you don't actually need what we teach - it becomes hard to please the customer in that sense. It's almost like the customer is being fooled in some sense, right? (Mr. E)*



*So I think that the tendency of focusing on students as products to some extent comes from the students themselves. (...) They have no alternatives. They have a weak connection to the labor market (...) they can't do all the things that my generation took more or less for granted. So in that sense one should never moralize and say that "Ha-ha, you single-minded, simple-minded students, you only think about your future", because it's a natural response I would say to the very insecure labor markets in contemporary Europe. (Mr. B)*

There is obvious distinction of good and bad students, and those are less or more instrumental respectively and provide greater or lesser opportunity of 'enlightenment'. Academics refer to instruction in the advanced levels – master and PhD – as teaching, where they find those possibilities for interaction, exchange of ideas, mentoring. When referring to teaching at the lower level they sometimes actually do not even use the term teaching, but instead – lecturing.

*It's a good balance on teaching at the levels which I find rewarding which is the master's level and the PhD level. (...) But the important thing for my teaching is that now I can...it's the satisfaction of working with intelligent students and getting them doing good work. (Mr. G)*

*If you don't have good students it's very difficult to maintain quality in teaching, because you sort of have to adapt the material to the body of students that you have. (Mr. F)*

Unlike the research topic where there was no expression of material insecurity and academics felt protected by the lack of management involvement and control of the production of knowledge, in regard with student commodification they feel that the school is succumbing to the trends and is aligning its purpose with the external demands. This creates greater tensions.

*In that sense I saw my main beneficiaries as of course the students, but also the students in more general terms, in terms of benefits: in terms of having a world view and having a critical mindset, then having analytical and so forth. And I can see here, at this school that it is slightly more focused on preparing students for some kind of more well defined*

*occupational or entrepreneurial future.. So in that sense I have been negotiating with myself what does it mean to be a teacher in a business school... (Mr. B)*

And indeed the management discourse is slightly more business oriented when commenting upon students' rights and demands compared to research:

*And I think there is another trend that is part of the increasing competition of sort of more market, the market logic being more... I think that the accountability toward students has been increased also over the last 25 years and I think that's overall a good development. And maybe, all those similar things could be said that...it mainly makes some teachers feel insecure sometimes, but overall it's a good development. (Mr. A)*

Similar to the topic of autonomy, academics are trying to reduce the tension by comparison.

*I'm in a very much appreciated school, a very much appreciated university in Sweden. So, and I have yet the very best students so it doesn't affect me at all. But I have some colleagues who work in smaller cities in Sweden where they have very much more difficulties to get good people. (Mr. H)*

*Maybe less for Lund than for many places, because we are lucky and we can choose the best students generally. (Mr. E)*

On the other hand, there are also examples of those who accept the higher degree of instrumentalism and alignment with the market - by students and the school. One participant for instance does not show any signs of struggle with those notions, on the contrary - he embraces the market orientation and that enhances his teacher identity. He looks upon the students as his customers and main beneficiaries of his work; he is their mentor, however providing different skills. The alignment of demand and supply brings identity stability and does not trigger any tensions.

*Sure you could talk about some kind of outer society benefiting from the students coming out of the school but I primarily see my role relative to students - there are sort of my customers, those are the ones I try to assist. (...) But I mean I have a fairly strong opinion*

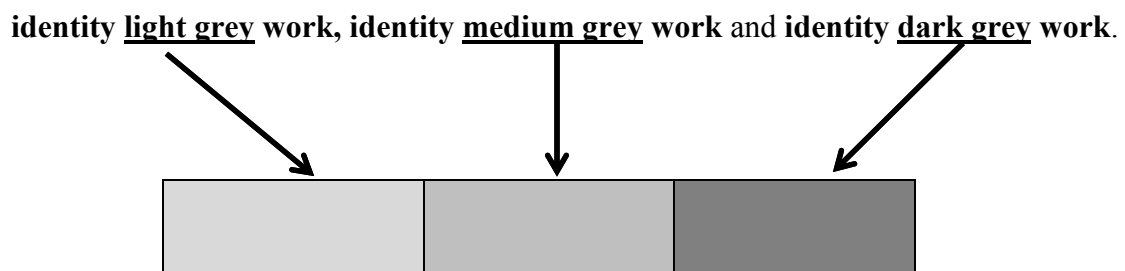
*on what I want students to learn because I think that is important for employers in the end. And I think in terms of measuring quality of the program to me the most important measure is the kind of positions that students get after the program, the kind of employers that hire them. (Mr. C)*

# Analysis

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In our empirical material we identified the traditional academic identity constructs. Subsequently we presented how academics make sense of the different corporatization trends and how the two types of resources for identity work interact with each other. In the following chapter we discuss our findings in depth in an effort to reveal deeper analytical discoveries and trends. We conceptualize our findings in an effort to make a contribution to the domain.

We present our findings based on the intensity of identity work according to our interpretation. The results are offered in progressive order, starting from the forces – values interaction which appeared to create the slightest tensions in the identity of the academics taking part in our study. There are three levels of identity work intensity that we have distinguished:



*Figure 6: Different 'shades' of identity work*

## Identity light grey work

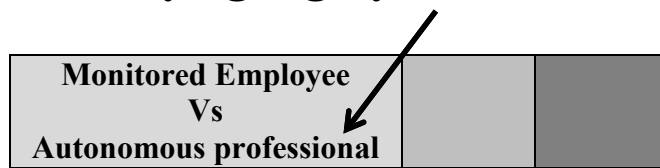


Figure 7: 'Identity light grey work'

Increased reporting, monitoring, surveillance and control threatens academic autonomy in the sense of questioning and decreasing academic professionalism and discretion – staff should be monitored, they are not trusted to decide for themselves and rely on their opinions. Also, management discourse on reporting, quality and performance, if present, might as well intensify the identity tensions and trigger identity work. Influenced by a lot of interpretive and critical literature on the topic and the fact that the School of Economics and Management is undergoing accreditation procedures and there is in fact increase of the reporting and monitoring, we expected to see our interviewees struggling to a great extent with those issues and as a result 'working hard' on their identities. However, we were proved wrong.

Academics in LUSEM are frustrated of all the procedures they need to follow and the excel sheets they have to fill in, mostly because there is no feedback to that and no sensegiving. There are explicit tensions between academics and administration, recognized by management as well. However, we do not perceive the level of frustration very high and we believe that the identity work triggered by increased reporting is based on ontological insecurities coming from the 'outside' and considerations of what might be. Clarke, Knights and Jarvis (2012) for example suggest that "academics have been complicit in the historical institutionalization" of the evaluation systems in the UK and that its effects were simply not anticipated and therefore not resisted. Since academics are aware of all those developments and constantly make comparison, they fear that the same might happen in their environment.

The comparison, however, is also serving as a 'white color' in their identity work since Sweden and LUSEM are regarded as a safe place. The reporting requirements mostly provoke irritation and 'steal' from academics' time for core work. They are not perceived intrusive in the way of work; there is no indication from the participants of management's attempt for control, creation

of subjectivity or identity regulation. Management on the other hand expresses sensitivity towards academic autonomy and claims that it shares the view that it is an important academic value and identity construct.

The increased reporting is perceived not as a control tool, but it creates a new role of an ‘administrator’ for the academics, which could be in conflict with the other two – the ‘teacher’ and the ‘researcher’ and might not be in line with the academic mission. Hence they need to negotiate what this new role means for them. Deem (1998, p.51 based on Jary and Parker, 1994) points out that attempt of university management to decrease “the power of an established professional group, and in introducing new bureaucratic techniques as a means of reforming the allegedly already over-bureaucratized university” is somehow ironical. Irony, cynicism, irritation and somewhat bitterness are expressed from our participants as well. The bureaucratization diminishes the ‘extravagance’ and ‘particularity’ of academia as it normalizes it and brings it closer to any other office job. In that sense the ‘autonomous professional’ is becoming a mere fantasy – “an idea or belief that is not significantly affected by actual behavior” (Sveningsson and Larsson, 2006, p. 207). Individuals resort to fantasy self-identities connected to a certain role when they face a force they wish not or cannot resist (Carr, 1998 as mentioned in Sveningsson and Larsson, 2006). We used the word ‘becoming’ above, because the academics expressed quite reflexive and critical opinions and are still resisting the new role of ‘administrator’ as opposed to the ‘autonomous professional’.

We have also followed the case of the ‘monitored employee’ with a very critical mindset. Drawing upon the literature presented on reporting, bureaucracy, performance and surveillance we expected to uncover hidden power mechanisms, surveillance tools, control regimes and what not. Contrary to our expectations, however, we did not spot any power webs or interests in knitting them. There are of course certain powerful discourses and meta-narratives, but those we believe are not organizational ones, but national or even international/global. Stronger effects in LUSEM have the meso-discourses, but we will discuss those later on.

Deem (1998) suggests that universities are using some of the practices for measuring the performance of academics for the purpose of maintaining a good public image, or in other words – branding.

Branding was connected slightly critically by some academics with regard to reporting and in the sense of unavailability to represent the qualities of their work in an evaluation form, suggesting that the core purpose of ‘ticking the boxes’ is simply building a brand. Waeraas and Solbakk (2009, p. 453) propose that some of those ‘branding’ practices could lead “to a search for a limited set of values and a very precisely defined identity”. As suggested before, however, the search for a fixed and stable identity could trigger even more insecurities as it is a ‘wild hunt’ (Knights and Clarke, 2013; Collinson, 2003).

Nevertheless, in our empirical material we did not recognize strong struggles and insecurities in that direction. The topic was touched upon now and then in connection to the accreditation and ranking procedures; however those topics were developed in terms of students’ market-orientation rather than explicit branding efforts from the institution. Some ideas expressed by academics in connection to university ranking systems point to ontological insecurity, however those were more explicitly articulated as pointing to student and knowledge commodification and we will not pay separate attention to those here as they are almost fully overlapping.

The influences of the corporatization forces described above on the academic identity are not particularly strong. In this case ‘battle’ the white traditional academic values prevail. We call the interaction between the two sets of sources “light grey identity work”.

## Identity medium grey work

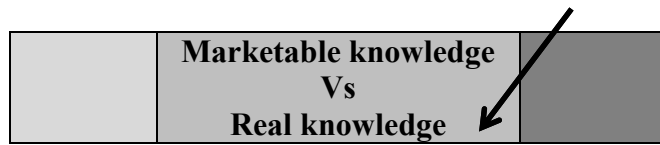


Figure 8: 'Identity medium grey work'

Research is one of the main academic identity resources. The curiosity, the eagerness to think, to develop new ideas, to create knowledge and by this be a positive force in society, are concepts central to the academic identity. The 'researcher' role is moreover a very well established 'socially available identity' with traditional values prescribed to it. Academics are drawing upon both the former 'internal' resources and the latter external role - what Watson (2008, p. 127) calls "social identities or publicly available personas". However, forces such as the demand for marketable knowledge and increased dependence on external funding for research are now threatening those identity sources. Ashforth and Humphrey (1993, p. 99) suggest that a clash between values can burst when academic work is entangled in profit-making activities and is following corporate ideologies and practices, because that is in conflict with a "central, valued and salient [professional] self". Being forced to "sell" knowledge and complying one's work with the interests of business and industry are activities that obviously do not match the traditional values of independent knowledge creation for the benefit of society. The academics taking part in our study expressed somewhat critical opinion that this form of corporatization is restricting their autonomy in the sense that they have to make strategic decisions and slightly compromise with the ideas they want to pursue, however, the paradox is that they accept more readily the increased scrutiny in regard to research activities (in comparison to teaching). Clarke, Knights and Jarvis (2012) also observe that academics are sometimes rather acceptive to the audit procedures in regard to research and publications and this they explain with "tradition that valorizes the creation and communication of knowledge" (Keenoy, 2003 as mentioned in Clarke, Knights and Jarvis, 2012).

Furthermore, some of the academics are adapting what it means to be an academic to what is actually achievable today in that sense. We recognized that they sometimes internalize or



'excuse' certain market values incorporated in academia and this is what Winter (2009) suggests as a strategy to overcome identity tensions of academics at corporatized universities. They talk about 'being strategic' and 'smart' in ways to get research funding. Henkel (2005) suggests that defining research as strategic is the commodification of knowledge – proving that it would contribute to the solution of a problem posed by external stakeholders in order to get funding. Now, moving from 'strategic research' to 'strategic researcher' we attribute to a certain type of survival strategy, namely the 'dramaturgical selves', which are 'characterized by an ambiguous and shifting amalgam compliance and opposition' (Collinson, 2003, p. 539). There are examples of resistance with claims that academia should protect its autonomy and not blindly follow the demands of the business world but rather keep critical distance. However, there is also compliance to the funding regimes.

The main types of identity work that we have identified are comparison to other institutions/systems, negotiation with the 'force' (adapting/soft idealism/dramaturgy), alternation between academic roles, and reflection upon management stance regarding the issues in question.

Ybema et al (2009) suggest that the 'we - they' discourse - differentiating what we are and what others are, is one of the means academic staff use in identity work in order to preserve their identities. The participants in our study also resort to comparison - with other professions, institutions and even between themselves, in order to put more 'white' and reduce the tensions of their threatened identity resources.

Another way of reducing the identity struggles observed in our empirical material is the alternation between different roles. One participant states that he is unsuccessful researcher, meaning that he is not doing research and not getting external financing, and then he identifies fully with the role of the teacher. In this 'switch' he keeps his academic identity relatively stable and avoids greater struggles.

The medium shade of the grey is also due to the fact that there is no material insecurity, no management pressures on performance and no powerful discourses regarding this side of the instrumentalism trends in higher education.

## Identity dark grey work



Figure 9: 'Identity dark grey work'

*“Through their command of discrete expertise, academics can still largely influence the processes of both their research and teaching, but the raw material (students or problems to be investigated) is increasingly determined by the combined influences of the state, institutional managers and the market” (Miller, 1995, p. 56 as cited in Nixon et al, 2001, p. 233).*

The third distinguished notion in our research is the influence of the instrumentalist view of ‘students as products’ on the white teaching values of academic identity. We found that the highest tension for academics is the clash between their identity as teachers in the ‘core’ sense of what we called ‘enlightener’ and the commodification of students. More so the self-commodification of students who are today perceived by academics as more market-oriented, prescribing economic value on themselves and their education and entering higher education in order to gain marketable skills instead of personal development and enlightenment.

Since the demands of the students do not meet the opinion of what should be supplied, academics are reconsidering what it means to be a teacher and that creates identity struggles. Moreover, they are deprived of their identity resource as ‘professional’ who knows best what is needed, as mentors, as thought-provoking and enlightening people. Jones (2007) argues that uncertainties of what the right thing to do is and forces questioning the autonomy and the professional expertise of the teacher create not only vocational insecurity, but since those issues affect both the academic role and the academic identity, they create deeper moral struggles and ontological insecurity.

Barnett (2000, p. 415) also argues that in a supercomplex world where “no longer are the boundaries, or the forms of right knowing clear” individuals experience increased conceptual insecurity. What is for Barnett (2000) ‘conceptual’ and for Jones (2007) ‘ontological’ we equate to Collinson’s (2003) ‘symbolic’ insecurity with the purpose of simplification of analysis. All of those refer to emotional insecurity and are triggering identity work. In line with the claim of Barnett (2000) that Knowledge is being transformed into knowledgies, the majority of the participants in our study are also recognizing those multiple knowledge forms which are challenging and confusing to their academic self. Some reject the multiplicity; others are trying to negotiate their perceptions and to ‘decapitalize’ Knowledge. However, both ways are identity labor-intensive.

Again, as with the previous topic, the main portion of identity work is done by comparison (in this case both vertical and horizontal), negotiation with the ‘force’ (adapting/understanding), alternation between academic roles, and reflection upon management stance regarding the issues in question. A new source for identity work here is a critical meso-discourse, fueled by the work of the critical management theorists within the department.

The vertical comparison encompass the ‘now and before’ discourse. Perhaps because one of their own identity constructs is learning, the desire for gaining new knowledge and perspectives, and because they too have been students and have an interpretation of ‘what a true student is’ – those issues create ontological insecurity and identity struggles.

However, the horizontal comparison is in white - LUSEM is still a relatively secure place compared to other higher education institutions, because it gets the ‘good’ students. Categorizing students as good and bad and comparing their different approaches to education also serves academics in their identity work. ‘Good’ students still provide the opportunity for academics to identify with the teacher role in its core meaning.

Another way of reducing the identity tensions is to withdraw from the teacher role and identify strongly with the researcher one. The alternation between the available social roles was explained in the previous section.

An important resource for identity work is management discourse and management's stance regarding the issues in question. Management representatives have stronger market-oriented view on the role of the students and in their opinion they represent the customer - increased accountability toward students is overall a positive phenomenon. The idea that the students should have the right of demands and those demands should be met by academic staff is creating insecurity – both vocational and ontological for academics. As suggested by Winter (2009), managerial actions and practices contradicting the values and ideals of academics do trigger identity work.

“The capacity for critical thought is central for academic identity...” claims Jones (2007) and this is very much supported in our research. Academic value and mission, critical thinking is also identity work trigger. We found a hint of a critical meso-discourse on the topic of commodification of students in particular. When expressing critical opinions in relation to the issues in question some of the participants of the study were bringing up the work of the organizational studies scholars within the Department of Business Administration. Whether this was a reference, inspiration or a dominant discourse is beyond our interpretation and we would like to leave the question open for and consideration.

Below is a summary of our discussion and what we consider our main conceptual contribution. In our empirical material we found implications of different levels of intensity of personal identity work. Analyzing the clashes of different identity sources as developed by the participants in the study we distinguished three level of intensity of identity work. Our conceptualization initially advanced around the fight between the traditional academic values which we called white and the corporatization forces, referred to as black accordingly. Thus depending on the relative ‘power’ of the different forces that are in direct interaction we distinguished three grey shades of identity work – light, medium and dark.

Shades Criteria	Light grey	Medium grey	Dark grey
Corporatization forces	Reporting Monitoring Surveillance Control Performance pressure Bureaucracy	Marketable knowledge  Dependency on business  Funding policies ‘Selling’ knowledge	Commodification of students  Providing ‘useful’ skills and knowledge
Influence on identity work	Low	Moderate	High
Traditional academic values	Autonomy Professionalism Discretion Traditional roles (professional)	‘Researcher’ role  Pure (independent) knowledge  Contribution to society  Love/curiosity for knowledge	‘Teacher’ role  Sharing knowledge  Enlightening students  Mentoring
Influence on identity work	High	High	Moderate
Intensity of identity work	Low	Medium	High

*Table 1: Overview of ‘three shades of identity work’*

# Conclusion

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We started this project with a rather critical mindset. One of the first works that we examined for background preparation was Willmott's (1993) article on corporate culturism. We did so with a comparison in mind between the corporate world 20 years ago and the higher education world today. Although there are significant differences in the starting point - there has been no Fordism period in higher education as far as we know; on the contrary - it is claimed that academia has enjoyed greater freedom with no control mechanisms at all, we have identified some common ground characteristics of the two and maybe starting from opposite points and travelling in opposite directions, they are about to meet.

Corporatization is not a new development in higher education. It has been a rather hot topic in the last two decades or so. This is due to the fact that the changes in higher education are not a singular phenomenon, they are stemming from a whole new ideological and political movement.

Intrigued by the corporatization forces and inspired by the academic values we decided to call them idealistically black and white respectively and to see how dark the shade of grey is when they meet. Thus we arrived to the conclusion that in order to understand how those processes affect academia one should 'have a peek' into identity work processes, because when people find themselves in a challenging and transforming environment they tend to focus on their selves. This is mostly due to the fact that today our identities are more open and flexible and one is constantly working upon one's identity in a quest for a secure self. We are 'liberated' from prescribed or inherited identity anchors, however increasingly insecure.

The red thread in our work was the black and white battle and the resulting grey work. We identified three intensity levels which were presented in the previous chapter as our theoretical contribution in the domain of identity work. We believe that we also contributed for a better understanding of the notion of corporatization in higher education by conducting research in Sweden where there is comparatively scant empirical research on the topic and by analyzing identity work of academics employed in traditional state-run university and at the same time part of the international higher education market.

According to our findings Lund University School of Economics and Management is a relatively 'safe haven' and academics do not experience high levels of control, performance pressure or material insecurity. However, the level of symbolic insecurity, although not perceived to be extremely high, should not be underestimated. Academics do experience identity struggles because of the shifting values of students and society and the subsequent instrumentalist pressures on higher education. When those external pressures are supported by management actions or discourse the identity tensions are higher. As 'survival mechanisms' academics resort to vertical and horizontal comparison, alternation between socially available roles for them, dramaturgy, and negotiation or internalization of market values.

### *Implications and recommendations*

Our research is far from exhaustive, however we do believe that we have presented somewhat interesting findings of how academics work on their identities in the specific context of corporatization forces in higher education.

We see identity work as a very useful concept for better understanding of processes in all areas of the social sciences and in this sense the practical implications of the conceptualization we built around the levels of intensity of identity work could be used in research outside academic boundaries. The model could be further refined by in depth studies of identity work in changing environment. What we defined as 'black versus white' identity resources might as well be transformed into 'new versus old' or 'external versus internal'. In our case study we perceived it as appropriate to fuel more 'dramatism' in the battle of the identity sources based on our assumptions, preliminary observations and preparations which suggested this negative - positive dualism. However, we do not see it as an obligatory condition to position the 'clashing' identity resources on an extreme continuum.

We also suggest that a more attention paid to the role of social discourses - on a micro, meso and macro level, in the same context would prove fruitful for deeper understanding of identity work.

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