

---

This is the **accepted version** of the book part:

Caravaca Hernández, Alejandro; Agud Morell, Ingrid; Moschetti, Mauro Carlos.  
«In search of the cracks in the system : Feminist and queer scholarship in  
education and the marketized university in Spain». A: Queer Sharing in the  
Marketized University. Núm. 1 (2022), p. 15-28. 14 pàg. London: Routledge.  
DOI 10.4324/9781003203254-3

---

This version is available at <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/321454>

under the terms of the  <sup>IN</sup>  
COPYRIGHT license

## X. In search of the cracks in the system: feminist and queer scholarship in education and the marketized university in Spain

Alejandro Caravaca, Ingrid Agud-Morell, & Mauro C. Moschetti

### **Abstract**

It has been well documented that the logics underpinning how the marketized university functions legitimize certain hegemonic perspectives and topics, while relegating to the margins emergent, critical, and innovative approaches that challenge the dominant knowledge paradigms. This chapter uses queer scholarship as both a frame and case study for analysing the effects of neoliberal dynamics on knowledge production in the field of education. It explores how academics navigate the marketized university and how, and to what extent, they struggle to generate individual and collective strategies and spaces of resistance and contestation. Drawing on in-depth interviews with 14 researchers from 11 Spanish universities, we identify both spaces of resistance and strategies undertaken to navigate neoliberal academia in the hope to ultimately subvert—or queer—‘the dominant notion of the natural’ (Case, 1991, p. 3).

### **Introduction**

Following global trends, Spanish universities are undergoing a process of marketization as a consequence of the advance of neoliberal logics within academia. As in many European countries, the so-called Bologna process introduced a series of transformations in higher education based on New Public Management principles, such as the creation of independent external quality assurance agencies, the introduction of quantitative indicators for assessing the quality and quantity of academic production, and the establishment of certification processes for accessing the academic profession based on such indicators (see Štech, 2011). In Spain, this process prompted the creation of the

National Agency for the Assessment of Quality and Accreditation (ANECA, for its full form in Spanish), plus other regional agencies at the autonomous community level (i.e., Spain's political and administrative territorial units); the generalization of the use of impact factor indices and journal league tables to assess knowledge production quality; and the setting up of 'objective criteria' to access both tenured and non-tenured positions, such as a threshold of publications in highly-ranked journals, number of research projects coordinated and international research stays. Arguably, all these changes relate to the global rise of the 'measurement culture' embedded in 'governance by numbers', which has naturalized as common sense the use of a series of reward (and punishment) mechanisms aimed at increasing the productivity of academic labour. As Ball (2015) puts it, researchers now 'come to make decisions about the value of activities and the investment of [their] time and effort in relation to measures and indexes and the symbolic and real rewards that might be generated from them' (p. 299-300).

Yet, as higher education institutions worldwide become market players in an increasingly transnational—and inescapably stratified—marketplace, they are forced to go through deep transformations affecting their underlying assumptions, goals and logics. Interestingly, Spanish universities are experiencing tensions between the global trends of becoming 'performative' and 'entrepreneurial' institutions—increasingly struggling in a constant competition for resources of various kinds and at multiple scales (Pereira, 2015; Taylor, 2014)—, and their bureaucratic, vertical tradition. Furthermore, since the beginning of the economic crisis in 2008, in the context of austerity policies and the resulting financial restrictions affecting most Southern European countries (and Spain in particular), these transformations have been undertaken alongside massive government expenditure cuts, the establishment or raising of tuition fees for students and a significant increase in the use of temporary job contracts for hiring lecturers and researchers in public

universities (see Castillo & Moré, 2016). In fact, while academic positions may have quite a high social prestige in Spain, economically they are far from privileged. In public universities during the academic year 2017-2018, 44.5% of scholars did not hold a tenure position and around 75% of these were part-time academics, with salaries normally below €10,000 gross/year. Only 15.1% of the academic personnel was 39 or younger, while 53.7% were 50 or older. The average age for research and teaching staff in Spanish public universities was 49, which has risen in recent years (Ministerio de Universidades, 2021). These data, together with the fact that power positions are most frequently occupied by (white male) scholars over 60 years old, determine that early-stage scholars find it increasingly difficult to reach stable or non-precarious positions and to transgress the established operational dynamics<sup>1</sup>.

In addition to transformations in the labour structure, the process of marketization of universities contributes to the centralization—and, consequently, marginalization—of certain epistemologies, approaches, fields and even methodologies (see Jones & Calafell, 2012). In other words, the marketized university is designed to legitimize and normalize certain epistemologies, perspectives and fields, while silencing and relegating to the margins emergent, critical, or innovative approaches that may challenge its neoliberal logics. Re-embedded within and reactivated by this are assumptions governing and regulating knowledge production, such as colonialism, ethnocentrism, and androcentrism (e.g., Grosfoguel, 2013). For this reason, epistemic normalization and marginalization can be seen as the result of complex processes of interaction between various limiting mechanisms.

Against this background, in this chapter we use feminist and queer scholarship as both a frame and case study for analysing the effects of neoliberal dynamics on

---

<sup>1</sup> Some commentators even describe Spanish academia as a ‘gerontocracy’ (Yagüe, 2015)

knowledge production in the context of the Spanish marketized university. As a frame, queer approaches apply post-structuralist perspectives to problematize the paradoxical relationality of ‘the norm’ (Jones, 2019) and the devices of normalization and legitimation. These approaches become a relevant lens to critically examine the ‘production of [neoliberal] common sense’ (Chun, 2017) in academia (and elsewhere). As a case study, feminist and queer scholarship’s marginalized position within neoliberal academia deserves a closer look to try to identify and describe both the mechanisms of marginalization to which it is subject to, and the transformative responses deployed by scholars in this field. We argue that although women and feminist studies have been (peripherally) present in Spanish academia since the 1980s (Ballarín, 2001), its ‘epistemic value’, is still very low. Epistemic value is understood as ‘the degree to which, and conditions in which, a knowledge claim is recognised as fulfilling the requisite criteria to be considered credible and relevant academic knowledge’ (Pereira, 2015, p. 2). Despite the growing visibility of feminist and queer scholarship in recent years following global patterns, the epistemic value of the queer case in, of and from Spain is questionable. These aspects, together with a not-so-distant conservative-fascist past and—as has recently been the case in many countries in Europe—the growing rise of extreme-right parties, make the Spanish context an interesting case study for analysing the impact of higher education marketization on feminist and queer scholarship and scholarly labour. Moreover, Spain constitutes a novel case study in this regard. The fact that most research of this sort has been conducted in the centre of the global economy of higher education, *i.e.*, the UK, the US and Australia, does not reflect a lack of relevance of other contexts but, rather, the existence of central and peripheral areas in the production and dissemination of knowledge.

Drawing on in-depth interviews with 14 researchers from 11 Spanish universities, we consider the case of feminist and queer scholarship in the field of education. We analyse and share the ways in which academics located at that intersection navigate the marketized university and how, and to what extent, they struggle to generate individual and collective strategies and spaces of resistance and contestation. The selection of the interviewees followed three criteria: (a) engagement in feminist and queer scholarship (some interviewees identified themselves with the term ‘feminist’, others with ‘queer’, and others with a combination of both); (b) research focus on the field of education; (c) currently employed at a Spanish university, regardless of the kind of contract (i.e., casualized, stable, tenured, etc.). The interviews were conducted between May and July 2021, following three thematic blocks: the first included questions regarding their personal and academic trajectory; the second revolved around how they experienced and navigated marketization dynamics in the Spanish higher education system; the third addressed the limits and the possibilities of resistance and contestation to those dynamics in the field of feminist and queer scholarship.

In the next section, we present a framework on queer scholarship in education. Then, our analysis is structured in two sections. First, we analyse the strategies undertaken—and shared—by scholars to navigate the dynamics of neoliberal academia. Second, we explore the ways in which scholars create spaces of resistance to contest those dynamics. Finally, in the conclusions section, we address the tensions that emerge between gaming the rules of marketization and challenging, from a queer perspective, knowledge production and the production of (educated) subjects in neoliberal academia.

### **Queer perspective in educational scholarship**

Before anything else, it is worth noting that using a queer perspective, as understood in this chapter, does not necessarily refer to the identity or sexuality of

scholars (for studies about LGBTQ+ scholars, see, e.g., Aguilar & Johnson, 2017; Davies & Neustifter, 2021; Dolan, 1998; and LaSala et al., 2008, among others). Rather, we conceive of such a perspective as one intrinsically related to feminist analytical frameworks in that it is a ‘critical intervention in the academy’ that seeks ‘not just to generate more knowledge but also (...) to question and transform existing modes, frameworks, and institutions of knowledge production’ (Pereira, 2012, p. 283). Although feminist and queer scholarship might be seen as separate fields by some, as evidenced by the interviewees’ complex identifications with the terms (see Breeze and Taylor, 2018, for a further discussion on the different approaches to queer feminist, queer, and feminist scholarship), there are strong connections amongst them—or, as expressed by this book’s conceptual framing, there are many aspects they both share. Focusing on these overlapping and shared aspects with feminist approaches, we understand such a queer perspective as a lens that forces us to redefine what is important in shaping educational communities, and how structures of denial or rejection produce difference as an alteration or disturbance, and as something out of the ordinary.

In the context of our analysis, a queer perspective helps us call into question the stability of the categories that are central to the ways in which education organizes knowledge of bodies and bodies of knowledge (Britzman, 1995). Queer theory signifies improper subjects and improper theories, questioning the very grounds of identity (subjects) and theory (knowledge). Therefore, a queer perspective serves two different yet complementary purposes in our study: understanding ‘knowledge production’ and problematizing ‘subject production’. A queer approach helps us question what kind of knowledge production is authorized and which is excluded (or relegated to the margins), both in neoliberal academia in general and in the institutional context of the marketized university in particular. Specifically in the field of education, a queer perspective may

also contribute to a critical assessment of the ways in which neoliberalism and neoliberal pedagogies conceive of the ‘educated subject’. The way in which the subject of education is understood has enormous implications for knowledge production on education, which ultimately shapes theories, methodologies, policies and, educational goals.

Quoting Moira Pérez and Gracia Trujillo-Barbadillo (2020), who bring together queer approaches in the Luso-Hispanic context in a recent edited book (*Queer epistemologies in education: Luso-Hispanic dialogues and shared horizons*), such a queer lens can ‘bring forth unique views on how knowledge is produced, transmitted, hierarchized and legitimized (or not)’, ‘examine power relations and their interweaving with normalization through the administration of knowledge and epistemic agency’, ‘work to unpack the manifold assumptions and “common sense” givens that are smuggled with our beliefs’, and ‘stress the various forms of individual and collective resistance ‘from below’ and alternative circuits involved in knowledge production’ (p. 5). Interestingly, the authors use in their book the binomial ‘Queer/Cuir’, in which the latter is an alternative way of writing the former following Spanish pronunciation—this can be understood as a reappropriation of a foreign term which challenges itself the universality of knowledge—and experience—by paying attention to the structuring contextual features and culturally embedded connotations of ‘cuir-ness’ in Spain.

Relatedly, as Jones (2019) points out, at the core of a queer perspective lies an opposition to hegemonic narratives and structures which uphold a supposed normalcy and naturalness of being, relating and encountering with others. Furthermore, queer thought also serves us to question not only how the *signified* is being signified, but also who the *signifier* is and how she/he/they is/are allowed to signify. As presented in the following sections, queer scholars working in the field of education, as challenging signifiers



themselves, need to unfold a multiplicity of strategies if they want to achieve their academic goals.

In order to problematize the production of the educated subject, we consider queer scholarship's alternative strategy to conceive of universal categories (Beasley, 2005). Along with other critical perspectives, queer thought contributed to the deconstruction of the idea of the modern universal subject which has guided educational theories and knowledge production throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Queer thought calls into question the stability and fundamentalism of binary categories that are central to the way education is organized. This perspective does not simply aim to legitimize those sexualities that are far from the norm, but to question the underlying dichotomous logic that builds them and the power structure that is established between the different opposing poles according to which we understand the categories class, ethnicity, age, gender, religion or ability. Queer scholarship aims to add complexity to the notion of the educated subject, advocating category permeability. As Beasley (2005), drawing on Sedgwick (1985), describes it, the basis of queer thinking is 'criss-crossing the lines of identification (self-identity) and desire (sexuality) among genders, sexualities, and other social categories such that traditional demarcations are disrupted' (p. 10).

In what follows, we focus on the case of Spain and explore the shared ways in which education scholars researching from feminist and queer perspectives interact with the norms and constraints imposed by the marketized university.

### **Building strategies: navigating neoliberal academia**

The marketized university puts certain epistemologies and approaches at the centre, while placing some others at the margins—particularly those that may question or challenge the logics of neoliberal academia. We have argued that feminist and queer scholarship occupies a marginalized position in Spain, both in academia in general and in

the educational field in particular. Within this context, education scholars researching from a feminist and queer perspective are forced to develop diverse, more or less overlapping strategies to navigate the dynamics and demands of Spanish neoliberal academia regarding knowledge production. In this section, we will share five of these strategies undertaken by scholars, as identified through the interviews, namely, (1) re-defining their research agenda; (2) developing parallel research strands; (3) publishing in high-impact journals and in other, more accessible, spaces; (4) writing collaboratively; and (5) strategically being attentive to language. As will be further discussed, while some of these strategies are unique and specific to feminist and queer scholarship, others might be common to other critical or non-hegemonic approaches.

First, most researchers state that they have either strategically or unconsciously re-defined, re-shaped or modified their research agenda to get around the obstacles and limitations for addressing certain research topics from a feminist and/or queer perspective in education. As a clear reflection of feminist and queer perspective's peripheral position within academia, the Institute for Women—which is dependent on the Spanish Ministry of Equality—published a press release<sup>2</sup> only in May 2020 stating the organization's commitment to 'fully recognize' feminist and gender studies as an 'area of knowledge' by the Spanish research agencies. Relatedly, for most university departments, gender and sexuality has not been a priority or even a recognized field, which has made it difficult for researchers to build a research community or develop research projects. Some interviewees consider the situation to be partially reversing, arguably due to the combination of the growing influence of global social movements in recent years (i.e., feminism and LGBTIQ+ activism) in Spanish academia and beyond, and the work of

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.inmujeres.gob.es/actualidad/noticias/2020/Mayo/EstuGeneroFeministaUniEspa.htm>

some scholars researching in the field. However, as we have argued, the ‘epistemic value’ of such scholarship in Spain is still low.

Yet limitations still exist and have made some researchers re-think and question their interests. As one of our interviewees puts it, ‘I first thought that it would be impossible to work on these topics... I even had the temptation to change my agenda in order to survive’ (Scholar 10, tenured, full-time contract). Similarly, to increase the chances of getting published, other participants claim to have slightly adjusted their interests to meet the agendas of other scholars and develop joint research projects: ‘Have I changed my research interests? Indeed. Strategically. But I also think I have brought some of my interests to the research projects I have strategically decided to engage in’ (Scholar 11, non-tenured, part time). This negotiation stated by some scholars demonstrates the tension between their own agenda—which is frequently unlikely to receive funding or be published—and the need to meet the demands of neoliberal academia. This can be illustrated in more depth in the following quotes:

The key is to do something that fits [in what is accepted by quality assurance agencies] but at the same time that lets me do what I want. And it’s been mostly like this with the projects I’ve participated in, and that’s what has allowed me to actually do things. (Scholar 8, tenured, full time).

You get ambivalent messages about what is valid and what is not... that’s why I think you should have a plural profile, between those things which are valid in academia and those that you feel like doing [i.e., feminist and queer studies], and the opportunities that come up. (Scholar 4, non-tenured, full-time).

Second, another strategy followed by some scholars lies in developing or incorporating a different research topic with better prospects for publication, even if it is disconnected to

feminist and queer studies (in education), while continuing to work in parallel on their ‘genuine’ interests on a ‘B-side’ basis. In the words of an interviewee:

We sometimes have parallel work streams, one that is aligned with your interests [i.e., feminist and queer studies] and another one that might work for you in terms of publications. I don’t know if it’s the ideal thing, but I’ve seen many colleagues doing the same when they have an interest for which they can’t find any specific space to publish or feel comfortable in conferences and so... So, they have those interests, but they also have others that are more... general or open. (Scholar 7, non-tenured, full-time).

Somewhat paradoxically, while this strategy can be useful for adapting their CVs to the demands of external quality assurance agencies, it implies double work for researchers and has negative impacts on (the apparently neutral terms of) consistency and professional specialization, which both serve guiding principles in neoliberal academia and are especially valued by quality assurance agencies in Spain. One of the interviewees speaks to this and bluntly states, ‘academia constantly reminds me that my publications are disparate and of little importance’ (Scholar 4, non-tenured, full-time).

The third strategy we identified consists of trying to publish in top-ranked journals to stay in line with the ‘measurement culture’ and the ‘tyranny of numbers’ embodied in quality assurance agencies—because promotion to different academic positions is conditioned on a positive evaluation of criteria such as publication record by ANECA and/or the regional agencies—but without neglecting other spaces or formats for publication. With these alternative circuits of knowledge dissemination, which may include informational books, community talks and less well-ranked and open-access journals, scholars intend to make their research accessible to a broader audience, following personal political principles:

The important thing is giving what I know to whoever asks for it. It's my commitment with the world. I can either give a lecture at a university, for a women's association in a 300-person village, or in the context of a school's family association...It's not about money; it's about commitment and activism. (Scholar 9, tenured, full-time).

In fact, most interviewees identify the journal ranking system as flawed and are politically against it. However, they accept gaming the rules of academia to a certain extent as a means to continue researching their topics of interest while keeping their jobs. In the words of an interviewee, 'We need to be strategic if we don't want to be kicked out. What do we need [for the certification processes]? X number of articles? Then let's go for it so that we can carry on with our work' (Scholar 1, tenured, full-time). Nevertheless, following this strategy of having multiple and often incompatible streams for disseminating research involves more work, time and dedication from scholars: 'You need to know that you're going to be slower, the road will be longer and you have to do double the work of publishing in journals where knowledge is accessible as well as in other [top-ranked] journals' (Scholar 2, non-tenured, full-time). This might, however, have negative consequences for most scholars, since not many can afford to 'go slow'.

Fourth, most scholars develop another strategy that works as an attempt to both contest the overarching mandate of individuality and other traits of the entrepreneurial university (Taylor, 2014) and, at the same time, meet its demands of intensive publishing. This strategy involves scholars investing time and effort in building alliances with other academics to try to research and write collaboratively and, therefore, get more pieces published. These collaboration networks, which often include scholars working in different universities and countries, offer scholars the personal and professional support needed to stay active in an often hostile environment. As two of the interviewees state:

I have had two periods of maternity leave... and you then have a blank period without conferences, research or teaching. So, having colleagues that understand that you are at a different point and include you [as an author], even if it's in the third or the fourth position... I think these caring networks help, don't you think? (Scholar 2, non-tenured, full-time).

[My colleagues] are giving me a place, a family, a monthly meeting where we speak about where I am, the state of my article, the state of someone else's article... And my name will appear maybe in two or three papers, depending on my involvement in them. (Scholar 11, non-tenured, part-time).

Thus, despite neoliberal academia somehow penalizing collaborative work (e.g., in the Spanish accreditation system, scholars are scored unequally depending on author order), interviewees find it useful to work collaboratively: 'You look for a support network not to get exhausted; one fights for this article, someone else fights for the next one' (Scholar 2, non-tenured, full-time).

While the previous strategy might not be unique to feminist and queer scholarship, there are certain dynamics that affect scholars working in education from a feminist and/or queer perspective in particular. Besides the elements presented above and, in spite of the advancement in recent years, one must also consider the direct obstacles for producing research in education from a clear feminist and/or queer perspective. Interviewees state, for instance, that they have received explicit rejections in the case of manuscripts and research proposals for addressing certain topics or using certain conceptual categories, which illustrates queer exclusion from neoliberal academia. In this regard, a fifth strategy consists of being attentive to—and often 'softening'—the language used when applying for funding or submitting papers to conferences in the field of education. For example, a more neutral 'social justice' framing is usually preferred to a more precise intersectionality lens. According to one of the interviewees, 'if you submit

a research proposal about feminist pedagogies, you probably won't get [the funding]. You need to be very careful about how you name it, how you're going to frame it' (Scholar 2, non-tenured, full-time). However, this does not mean that scholars need to change their language entirely. Sometimes, they intentionally use language to enter specific spaces and, once in, shift to their preferred focus; others simply accept the consequences of using certain words or perspectives as a political statement, even though the chances of being rejected increase substantially. In this vein and, once again, the strategies to navigate the marketized university meet those related to resistance and contestation.

### **Weaving spaces of resistance: contesting neoliberal academia**

Along with the five strategies shared in the previous section, the scholars interviewed for this study undertake, to a lesser or greater extent, an 'intransigence strategy' that consists not of trying to tactically get around the obstacles, but rather, pushing the limits of what 'can be done' or 'is expected to be done', following their personal political principles and thus trying not to yield to the demands and dynamics of the marketized university:

I've always done what I wanted. Sometimes I've been told 'no way' and some others I've been told 'yes'. And I think it's a way to push the margins of what can be done in academia: if we don't continue to fight to be able to work on these topics now, we will never be able to. (Scholar 12, non-tenured, full-time).

Therefore, for these scholars, navigating neoliberal academia lies not only in making concessions or trying to game the system but also in actively contesting and resisting. Nevertheless, this course of action may have negative impacts on the researchers' academic trajectories. In fact, beyond the aforementioned quandary about whether or not to change research focus and succumb to legitimized language and approaches, some scholars have even had to leave (or at least considered leaving) the university:

I felt like leaving academia. I said: ‘What is this scam, these lies they have here? I don’t want to participate!’. But, at the same time, we can’t be kicked out from every place! ... So, I also told myself: look, I don’t care, I’m doing what I want, whatever I do, I do it right, and nobody can tell me off. (Scholar 13, non-tenured, part-time).

Still, scholars stay in academia despite the personal and professional consequences, with the will to make room for change as a way of living up to their political commitment. The following quote illustrates this:

If I had dedicated myself to other research topics, if I had managed some things differently and if I hadn’t been so rebellious and unmanageable, maybe I would be Full Professor now. But nobody can take away the good times I’ve had! I might go forward slower, but I do go forward, and I go forward with that feeling of freedom. (Scholar 1, tenured, full-time).

Interviewees highlight the importance of creating spaces for resistance and challenge to the demands of neoliberal academia, both in their research and teaching activities. One of the ways they do this is to advocate for the participation of feminist- and queer-sensitive critical scholars in decision-making committees, university departments, editorial boards, etc., as a way of building spaces of resistance, for it is expected that those scholars may introduce a different way of doing things that might contest the hegemonic thought. As stated by an interviewee reflecting on her work as a reviewer, ‘I always try to make an effort in accepting topics that are on the margins and are not usually published’, where making an effort is understood as ‘trying to help the authors improve the paper and accompanying them in the process’ (Scholar 12, non-tenured, full-time).

However, the most frequent form of resistance to the marketized university connected to research consists of creating alternative types of interpersonal relationships within academia and subverting the dynamics of knowledge production: ‘Everything



leads us to individualism, to competition, to trampling on others... we must face these dynamics and collaborate and find synergies and solidarities: we're very atomized and that reduces our strength' (Scholar 1, tenured, full-time). As many interviewees suggest, in order to contest the trends towards individuality and rivalry characteristic of a neoliberalized ecosystem, they intend to bring in sorority and a caring culture to the 'careless' university. They seek to build community with other scholars instead of instrumentalizing them for individual profit, to produce knowledge differently, questioning the principles that govern the current dynamics of knowledge production (see Breeze & Taylor (2020) for a reflection and critique on feminist and queer feminist cares in academia). In words of an interviewee:

Academia doesn't take life or experience into account, it does not place life at the centre, but performance and productivity. And when you are a feminist, you criticize it and you generate mechanisms of negotiation, re-signification and resistance ..., which frictions the structures and the culture of such old institutions as universities. (Scholar 3, tenured, full-time).

Importantly, however, the job insecurity facing most early-stage scholars, as well as the dominant institutional culture, might be relevant obstacles to this alternative way of relating to others. To put it differently, in line with that explored in the previous section, while neoliberal academia tends to reward competition and individuality, the consequences of not playing by the rules are more harmful for early-career scholars or for those who are without a permanent position; such circumstances related to job insecurity act as mediating factors in the sense that not everyone can afford to 'be slow' or 'do double work'.

Teaching emerges as another major space for resistance, to the point that for some scholars, it becomes what gives meaning to their work:

What does attach me to academia? It's not money, nor the benefits I get or my job stability, for sure. What attaches me to academia are these spaces of resistance, which are beautiful and generate knowledge, debate and reflection: you're helping the future generations of teachers and educators to introduce this [queer] perspective and, at least, you're making them question themselves. If not, what are we doing here? (Scholar 2, non-tenured, full-time).

Therefore, for most academics, introducing critical feminist and queer perspectives to their teaching in multiple ways means a clear contestation to the hegemonic thought. As the interviewees argue, these many ways include highlighting the historical role of feminist and queer thinkers or activists in the field of education, choosing critical perspectives as part of the course reading, including women authors in the course syllabus, encouraging doctoral students to publish their work in open-access formats, being attentive to and changing their own and students' language, developing varied and inclusive methodologies, creating safe spaces for student participation, and blurring the apparently exclusive line between academia and 'the real world' by inviting activists to give lectures and/or engage in empirical fieldwork. All these practices aim at expanding the limits of academia and of what is accepted in teaching spaces, as well as subverting the dominant discourses. All of this can be illustrated by the following quote: 'I think margins are built and opened when one tries to get dissident practices off the ground in a classroom which is highly normalized by curriculum and a series of assumptions' (Scholar 7, non-tenured, full-time).

Finally, in a similar vein, the last way of resisting the marketized university is related to the creation and opening of new spaces for teaching queer and feminist studies on the margins of—yet increasingly within—academia. The experiences here include the creation of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) about gender and sexuality in

education, open specialization programmes about LGBTIQ+ studies and feminist and queer pedagogies, and the recent launch of both a Master's and a Bachelor's programme on gender and LGBTIQ+ studies in two universities. Scholars point to the need to explore the breaches of the system and leverage the latest social changes, which might become an opportunity for opening more spaces for queer studies and gain a certain centrality. As Scholars 2 and 4 explain:

My colleagues with greater experience in academia told me: 'Ten years ago I would have never considered being able to coordinate an official programme about this topic within the university'. The truth is that there is some scope for action, and we need to identify it and use it; we must continue in search of the cracks in the system. (Scholar 2, non-tenured, full-time).

There are all these spaces of a threshold, these spaces in between, these cracks in the system... there are people that take action and when they see it clearly, they go for it. And this mostly happens with people that have both a lot of energy and a deep understanding of how the system works, how the norms work. The more you know the norms and the organizational culture, the easier it is for you to know who to talk to and who to avoid... and some things become possible. (Scholar 4, non-tenured, full-time).

## **Conclusion**

Using a queer perspective as a lens has helped us 'bring forth unique views on how knowledge is produced, transmitted, hierarchized and legitimized (or not)' (Pérez & Trujillo-Barbadillo, 2020, p. 5). Through the constitution of a '[neoliberal] common sense' (Chun, 2017), the marketized university excludes those perspectives that are—as stated by an interviewee—less 'general or open' (read 'neutral'), i.e., those which might challenge the logics of neoliberal academia and its allegedly neutral approach to knowledge production.

Notably, queer scholarship in education (understood as work that aims to critique the normative and the hegemonic, rather than restricted to studies that focus on identity politics or on the LGBTBIQ+ community) is itself subject to mechanisms of marginalization within academia. As it is perceived as not ‘general or open’ (i.e., not ‘neutral’), its ‘validity’ is usually called into question and it is thus relegated to the margins of what academia should be. In the context of the Spanish higher education system, this has materialized in specific obstacles, such as the non-existence of funding opportunities for projects about gender and sexuality studies, together with other obstacles responding to more active reluctance from academic governing structures and agents. These dynamics and obstacles directly affect scholars working from a feminist and queer perspective in education; however, rather than considering them as ‘pure victims of the system’, far from a deterministic perspective, we focused on exploring the strategies they develop to cope with and resist the dynamics of the marketized university, sharing their efforts in search of the cracks in the system.

The strategies undertaken by these scholars are a response to the overarching mandate of neoliberal academia of both producing allegedly neutral knowledge and sticking to the idea of the modern universal educated subject, for the ‘[neoliberal] common sense’ is not only about knowledge production, but also about (education) subject production. However, beyond the greater or lesser degrees of success and the possible individual and collective consequences of these strategies—which are mediated by factors such as the type of contract or the career stage—, the interesting point here is how scholars navigate the tension between gaming the rules of marketization and performativity while rejecting and resisting such dynamics. In other words, the key is understanding how scholars that research from a feminist and queer perspective in the educational field strategically participate in the marketized logics while struggling against

institutionalization and assimilationism, in the hope to ultimately subvert ‘the dominant notion of the natural’ (Case, 1991, p. 3).

Resisting against—or queering—neoliberal logics is precisely one of the main driving forces for scholars to stay in the marketized university. They hope to continue transforming academia by bringing sorority and a caring culture to research<sup>3</sup>, by pushing the limits of the disciplines, by questioning the principles that govern the current dynamics of knowledge production, by subversively intersectioning the fixed and fixing notion of the educated subject and by opening new spaces for teaching from queer perspectives in education. Interestingly, this shows that, despite the recent changes regarding the introduction of feminist and queer scholarship in the form of new educational programmes, a growing number of research projects and more research groups, the position of feminist and queer scholarship in Spanish neoliberal academia is still not one of centrality. In the context of the marketized university, searching for the cracks in the system does not come without tensions, which are worth considering: ‘the ongoing histories of making space for feminist and queer scholarship underscore (...) awkward positions and uncomfortable implications’ (Breeze’s and Taylor, 2018, p. 5).

We argue, to conclude, that this chapter is, for several reasons, itself an act of (queering) sharing: first, it has been collaboratively written by three authors with different backgrounds and speaking from different (career) positions; second, it is focused on the context of the Spanish academia and its shared, yet very own institutional legacies and lived experiences of neoliberalization ; and, finally, it describes different strategies shared (and shared to all of us) by several researchers working in the field of queer and feminist studies in education. All three elements can be ultimately understood as forms of contestation and resistance against the logics of the neoliberal academia.

---

<sup>3</sup> For a deeper discussion about the tensions of introducing such ‘care’ to the academia, see Breeze & Taylor (2020).

## References

- Aguilar, D., & Johnson, J. M. (2017). Queer Faculty and Staff of Color: Experiences and Expectations. In J. M. Johnson & G. Javier (Eds.), *Queer People of Color in Higher Education* (pp. 57-71). Information Age Publishing.
- Ball, S. (2015). Education, governance and the tyranny of numbers. *Journal of Education Policy*, 30(3), 299-301.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2015.1013271>
- Ballarín, P. (2001). *La educación de las mujeres en la España contemporánea (siglos XIX-XX)*. Síntesis.
- Beasley, C. (2005). *Gender & Sexuality. Critical theories, critical thinkers*. SAGE.
- Breeze, M. & Taylor, Y. (2018). Futures and fractures in feminist and queer higher education. *Journal of Applied Social Theory*, 1(2), 1-11.
- Breeze, M., & Taylor, Y. (2020). *Feminist Repetitions in Higher Education. Interrupting Career Categories*. Palgrave Studies in Gender and Education.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-53661-9>
- Britzman, D. P. (1995). Is there a queer pedagogy? Or, stop reading straight. *Educational Theory*, 45(2), 151–165. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.1995.00151.x>
- Case, S. (1991). Tracking the vampire. *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 3(2), 2-20.
- Castillo, J. J., & Moré, P. (2016). Por una sociología del trabajo académico. La precarización del trabajo de enseñar e investigar en la Universidad. *Sociología del Trabajo*, 88, 7-26.

- Chun, C. W. (2017). *The discourses of capitalism: Everyday economists and the production of common sense*. Taylor & Francis.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315751290>
- [Davies, A. W. J., & Neustifter, R. \(2021\). Heteroprofessionalism in the Academy: The Surveillance and Regulation of Queer Faculty in Higher Education. \*Journal of Homosexuality\*, 1-25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2021.2013036>](#)
- Dolan, J. (1998). Gay and lesbian professors: Out on campus. *Academe*, 84(5), 40–45.
- Grosfoguel, R. (2013). The structure of knowledge in westernised universities: Epistemic racism/sexism and the four genocides/epistemicides. *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, 11(1), 73-90.
- Jones, T. (2019). Queer Theory in Education Research. In V. Reyes, J. Charteris, A. Nye & S. Mavropoulou (Eds.), *Educational Research in the Age of Anthropocene* (pp. 36-53). IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-5317-5.ch003>
- Jones Jr., R. G., & Calafell, B. M. (2012). Contesting Neoliberalism Through Critical Pedagogy, Intersectional Reflexivity, and Personal Narrative: Queer Tales of Academia. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 59(7), 957-981.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2012.699835>
- [LaSala, M. C., Jenkins, D. A., Wheeler, D. P. & Fredriksen-Goldsen, K. I. \(2008\). LGBT Faculty, Research, and Researchers: Risks and Rewards. \*Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services\*, 20\(3\), 253-267. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538720802235351>](#)
- Ministerio de Universidades (2021). *Datos y cifras del Sistema Universitario Español. Publicación 2020-2021*. Gobierno de España.

Pereira, M. do M. (2012). 'Feminist theory is proper knowledge, but ...': The status of feminist scholarship in the academy. *Feminist Theory*, 13(3), 283–303.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700112456005>

Pereira, M. do M. (2015). Struggling within and beyond the Performative University: Articulating activism and work in an “academia without walls”. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 54, 100-110.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2015.06.008>

Pérez, M. & Trujillo-Barbadillo, G. (2020). Introduction. In M. Pérez & G. Trujillo-Barbadillo (Eds.), *Queer Epistemologies in Education: Luso-Hispanic Dialogues and Shared Horizons* (pp. 1-22). Palgrave Macmillan.

[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-50305-5\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-50305-5_1)

Štech, S. (2011). The Bologna process as a new public management tool in higher education. *JoP*, 2(2), 123-142. <https://doi.org/10.2478/v10159-011-0013-1>

Taylor, Y. (2014). *The entrepreneurial university: Engaging publics, intersecting impacts*. Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137275875\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137275875_1)

Yagüe, A. M. (10 October 2015). La gerontocracia gobierna la universidad Española. *Crónica Global*. [https://cronicaglobal.lespanol.com/vida/la-gerontocracia-gobierna-la-universidad-espanola\\_26441\\_102.html](https://cronicaglobal.lespanol.com/vida/la-gerontocracia-gobierna-la-universidad-espanola_26441_102.html) [accessed 28 February 2022].