



## Exploring academics' identities in today's universities: A systematic review

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## Exploring academics' identities in today's universities: A systematic review

**Purpose** – The article aims to analyse international studies on the impact that new forms of control and performativity in higher education have on academics' identity. The aim was threefold: to provide an overview of the main published findings; to establish biases and future lines of research; and to offer a starting point to stimulate a debate on the future of universities.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The study consisted of a systematic review of the international literature published in the last ten years. A bibliographic search was conducted on the Web of Science, SCOPUS and Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC), which yielded a total of 26 articles that were subsequently subjected to thematic analysis.

**Findings** – The article provides an overview of the types of identities developed by academics as a result of the new forms of control. Among the main findings, this study reveals a clear predominance of professional identities characterised by submission to the new neoliberal demands. The professional, social and health consequences associated with these identities are also highlighted. Finally, a proposal is made for future research to better understand how these new professional identities are constructed and developed.

**Research limitations/implications** – Because of the chosen filters or databases, the study could have omitted possible articles relevant to this review. Therefore, researchers are encouraged to replicate such a study by expanding, for example, the languages used.

**Originality and value** - This work helps us to obtain a detailed description of the different identities generated as a consequence of the new governance of higher education. Furthermore, possible implications for mitigating this situation are mentioned.

**Keywords:** higher education; academic work; academics; identity; evaluation; managerialism; systematic review.

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## **Introduction**

The advent of neoliberalism as an ideology in the 1980s influenced all sectors of society, including education (Rodgers, 2018). This ideological trend is characterised by principles such as free market economy and privatisation of public services, among other aspects (Olssen and Peters, 2005). In the case of higher education, recent years have witnessed several changes aimed at boosting economic growth through the search for quality in this sector, which is understood as an increase in both the scale and scope of production (Tomicic, 2019). The aim was to facilitate the standardisation of this sector and thus better respond to the labour market demands (Holmes and Lindsay, 2018).

To this end, a series of neoliberal policy measures were implemented which have led to a radical transformation of higher education objectives and functions (Javadi and Azizzadeh, 2020). On the one hand, these changes include obvious structural changes such as the introduction of the "undergraduate+postgraduate" formula, the development of the credit-based system or the expansion of mobility programs. On the other hand, a series of less obvious structural changes can be observed, such as privatisation processes or private management of the public sector, among other aspects (Brøgger, 2019).

However, in addition to these changes, the development of new forms of governance based on principles of governmentality (Ball, 2003) and performativity (Foucault, 1991) stands out. This governance has materialized in the development and standardization of assessments based on the quantification of quality coupled with an important policy of incentives. These new forms of governance based on a mixture of assessment, quantification, standardisation, and incentives are considered by many authors (Englund and Gerdin, 2019) to be the most effective policies because of their capacity to generate changes in the behaviour of the teaching staff (ways of doing and proceeding). Brøgger

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(2019) refers to all these strategies as “incentive-based” or “soft-governance”.

Recently, a significant proliferation of these evaluation processes has been observed, focusing on different aspects of the university world, such as teaching, mobility plans, curricula, and so on. The possibility of expanding the social prestige of institutions or obtaining economic resources, among other examples, depends mostly on these evaluations (Gill and Donoghue, 2016).

However, among these evaluations, there has been a significant development and standardisation of performance evaluations for university teaching staff, which are, in turn, associated with a significant incentive policy. Academics are therefore constantly subjected to evaluation systems that measure the quality of their professional output through quantification, and promotion is linked to production. It is thus understood that the greater the quantity of production, the higher the quality of their professional activity (Dashper and Fletcher, 2019). Furthermore, the fact that research is a priority among all the duties of academics has relegated other professional activities (management or teaching) to positions of secondary importance. This is due to the fact that without a positive evaluation of research activities, it will be difficult for an academic to achieve stability or promotion within the university (San Fabián, 2020). As a consequence, academics are under continuous internal and external pressure (Dashper and Fletcher, 2019) to improve their scientific productivity, which is understood as an increase in the number of impact publications.

These processes of scholars' evaluation have spread worldwide (Browing *et al.* 2017), e.g., *Research Excellence Framework* (UK); *Excellence in Research* (Australia); *Teacher Evaluation Programme* (Spain); *Research Assessment Exercise* (Hong kong); *Excellenzinitiative* (Germany); and so on.

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3 This new scenario is having a major impact on universities' knowledge creation processes,  
4 educational objectives and social functions (Javadi and Azizzadeh, 2020). Moreover, it is  
5 also been affected not only the professional activity of academics, but also their ethics,  
6 their social and professional relationships, and even their health (Dugas *et al.*, 2018;  
7 Cannizzo, 2017; McCune, 2019), which is significantly transforming their professional  
8 identities (Jiménez, 2019; Huang and Guo, 2019; Shams, 2019).  
9

10 Professional identity (henceforth PI) is a concept that has conquered the world of social  
11 science research. When the singularity of the subject was denied, the understanding of  
12 reality was achieved through the analysis of social structures. However, since the  
13 historical recovery of the subject (the driving force of structures), its analysis allows for  
14 a better understanding of social reality by attending to the singularity of each subject  
15 (Bolívar, 2014). This makes the subject an essential ingredient for the understanding of  
16 reality. Therefore, without understanding the subject, it is difficult to understand the  
17 implication and impact that structures have on social reality.  
18

19 In this sense, identity is understood as the consequence of a process in which life and  
20 professional experiences interact with the political and economic context and with  
21 professional beliefs, values and motivations (Bolívar, 2014). Despite all this, studies on  
22 academics' identity highlight the enormous influence that the broader social context has  
23 on their development (Lankveld *et al.*, 2017; Clarke *et al.*, 2013), which is currently  
24 characterised by the new forms of governance described above. In this context, it is  
25 essential to study the PI of its main characters in order to understand the real impact it  
26 has on them and, therefore, on society.  
27

28 All this has led to a considerable increase in the number of empirical research studies  
29 focused on exploring the impact that these new governance practices have on academics'  
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identities (Arvaja, 2018; Cannizzo, 2017; McCune, 2019). However, there are very few systematic reviews on the study of academics' professional identities.

On the one hand, we have the reviews by Alonso *et al.* (2015) and Lankveld *et al.* (2017) which only focus on the factors that contribute to or hinder the development of academics' teaching identity. On the other hand, we find research by Trede *et al.* (2012), which delves into the theoretical concept of academics' PI. Moreover, this latter review only focuses on studies published in higher education journals and only up to 2008. Thus, there are no recent reviews that provide a general overview of the new types of professional identities that are being developed by teaching staff in today's university. Therefore, the main objective of the present work is to gather relevant information to respond to the following research questions:

- According to the scientific literature, what are the main professional identities developed as a result of the influence of new forms of governance on academics?
- What are the main characteristics of the studies carried out in this field of research (e.g., methodological approaches, instruments, contexts, and participants)?

To this end, we have analysed the studies in the literature of the last decade that examine the influence of new forms of governance on the PI of university teaching staff. The aim of this study is to contribute towards increasing knowledge of research on the PI of teaching staff in various ways by:

(1) establishing a general overview of existing knowledge by highlighting points of interest;

(2) identifying research needs in this field of study, i.e., establishing future lines of research; and

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(3)promoting reflections on both the university system that is currently in place and the system that we wish to have.

## Methodology

This systematic literature review uses the ReSiste-CHS framework (Codina, 2018), which is based on the work of Booth *et al.* (2016). This framework consists of various well-differentiated phases that aim to provide the review with the highest degree of systematisation.

In the first phase, databases were selected on the basis of quality criteria (SCOPUS, WoS and ERIC). The fundamental quality criteria consist in the use of databases with international recognition for their efficient analysis tools, which allow high impact research journals to be found. In addition, keywords were chosen, and the following search equations were established:

- (“academic identity”OR“professional identity”) AND (“higher education”OR“university\*”) AND neoliberalism
- (“academic identity” OR “professional identity”) AND (“higher education”OR“universit\*”) AND (metric OR measure)
- (“academic identity” OR “professional identity”) AND (“higher education”OR“universit\*”) AND (“research evaluation”)
- (“academic identity” OR “professional identity”) AND (“higher education”OR“universit\*”) AND managerialism

In the second phase, the inclusion/exclusion criteria were established (Figure 1), following the ideas of Booth *et al.* (2016). In the third phase, the results were evaluated (Figure 1). This phase was conducted by two researchers in order to provide the investigation with the highest possible degree of consistency. After applying the



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inclusion/exclusion criteria, the searches of the various databases yielded a total of 317 documents. After eliminating the duplicates (n=12), the title and summary of the remaining 305 studies were read. On this occasion, 258 documents were eliminated since they were not considered to be directly related to the objective of the study. Subsequently, a complete reading of the rest of the documents (n=47) was carried out. All those studies considered irrelevant to our objectives and research questions were excluded (n=21). Some examples of eliminated studies are: Barker, 2017; McLachlan, 2017; Sheridan, 2013. Finally, 26 records were chosen for our bank of documents.

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Insert Figure I here  
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Finally, in the fourth phase, the results were analysed and synthesised. For this purpose, two different processes were carried out. On the one hand, an analysis of the main characteristics of the studies was carried out. To this end, an information collection table was drawn up in order to systematise the collection of relevant information: authors, date of publication, research objective, context, methodology, instruments and sample characteristics. On the other hand, a thematic analysis was employed (Braun and Clarke, 2006) using the *Nvivo qualitative 12 analysis software*. As in the previous phase, the thematic categories were decided by three researchers in order to obtain the highest level of consistency in the research.

For this thematic analysis, four different phases were carried out. First, two researchers conducted an independent reading of each paper to familiarize themselves with the data in the studies. After the reading, in a general way, each researcher generated their own emerging themes. These themes were then put in common and after a process of reflection and discussion, the final emerging themes were selected. Finally, the text



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was coded according to the agreed themes. For this purpose, Nvivo 12 was used using nodes. This process was also carried out independently by both researchers so as to saturate the information of the studies. In parallel, a double-checking process (Creswell, 1998) was carried out in which the third researcher supervised the whole process.

#### *Limitation of the study*

The main limitation of this study could be the possible bias resulting from the filters or databases used. It is therefore possible that articles relevant to this review may have been overlooked, either because they are located in different databases or because they do not meet the established criteria. In this sense, for example, the use of English and Spanish may lead to a certain bias of relevant studies. Thus, these aspects should be considered for future research. Nevertheless, these decisions were taken with the aim of obtaining the highest level of scientific rigour. Finally, the main difficulty observed in the development of the research was finding the full texts for its analysis.

### **Results**

In this section the 26 studies included in our systematic review will be analysed. To this end, we will first provide an overview of the objectives, contexts and research designs, after which we will analyse the emerging topics resulting from our thematic analysis.

#### *General description of the studies*

##### *Main research objectives*

The objectives of the studies included in our review can be summarised into two main groups. First, the general objective of most of the studies is to analyse the influence of new management demands (evaluations and metrics) on the processes of constructing and developing professional academic identities (Gaus and Hall, 2015; Guzmán-Valenzuela

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and Barnett, 2013; Guzmán-Valenzuela and Martínez, 2016; Huang and Guo, 2019; Huang, Pang, Yu, 2016; Jiménez, 2019; McCune, 2019; Saura and Bolívar, 2019; Shams, 2019; Tülübas and Göktürk, 2020; Ylijoki and Ursin, 2013). However, although the main element examined is the influence of metrics and evaluations on the performance of academics, some studies also aimed to analyse other political technologies such as the rapid digitalisation of higher education (Collins *et al.*, 2020; Saura and Bolívar, 2019).

Within this first group, we can observe a growing number of studies aimed at analysing the influence of the mentioned aspects on the PI of young teachers (Djerasimovic and Villani, 2019; Chipindi and Vavrus, 2018; Smith, 2017; Ursin *et al.*, 2020; Ylijoki and Henriksson, 2017). Additionally, authors such as Findlow (2012) and Dashper and Fletcher (2019) focus on disciplines with little tradition in the academic community (e.g., nursing or event management).

In the second group, the general aim of the studies was to examine the consequences of these identities for academics (Cannizzo, 2017; Dugas *et al.*, 2018, 2020; Harris *et al.*, 2019; Knights and Clarke, 2014; Ylijoki, 2013).

### *Methodological designs*

Of the 26 studies selected, 22 were qualitative studies; three used a mixed design, and only one employed a quantitative approach. Within the qualitative studies, there was a predominant use of interviews (18) of different types, including semi-structured (14), in-depth (1), and a biographical-narrative approach (3). However, other designs are also used, including reflective diaries, observations, and discussion groups.

### *Sample characteristics*

Most of the study samples gathered in this systematic review are composed of faculty members of varying academic ranks; however, there are some (5) that focus only on

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3 young academics. In terms of the academic disciplines addressed, considerable  
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5 homogeneity can be observed according to Biglan's (1973) classification.  
6

7  
8 In relation to the geographical distribution of the studies, Europe accounts for  
9  
10 most of the research studies (13), with the UK (6) and Finland (5) standing out among the  
11  
12 countries. Studies from other areas are also noted such as Chile (2), China (2), USA (2),  
13  
14 Indonesia (1), and so on.  
15

### 16 ***Thematic analysis***

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18 After applying the thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), the following four topics  
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20 emerged (Table 1): *professional identities of rejection/resistance, of*  
21  
22 *acceptance/submission, flexibles, and young academics' professional identities.*  
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29 Insert Table 1 here  
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### 33 ***Resistance/rejection Professional Identities***

34  
35 The group of *Professional identities of resistance/rejection* includes all the information  
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37 concerning professional identities which are developed as a consequence of strategies  
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39 based on opposition or rejection to the new demands of the wider social context. In this  
40  
41 regard, we observed two types of resistance/rejection professional identities in scientific  
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43 articles published in the last ten years.  
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49 First, we observed a PI characterised by the tendency to ignore every aspect of the  
50  
51 broader social context. This type of PI is linked to veteran academics who, due to their  
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53 professional position, do not need to accept any changes in order to survive in the  
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55 university. This kind of identity is usually associated with academics who are about to  
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57 retire. Therefore, this type of PI is noted for placing the traditional values of academia  
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before new performative demands. This PI is given multiple names, such as *Resilient or Spectator PI* (Ylijoki and Ursin, 2013; Ylijoki, 2014), *PI Mode I* (Leisyte, 2015), *Careless Outsider PI* (Huang *et al.*, 2016), *franchise PI* (Jiménez, 2019) or *Ethical and Aesthetic Project PI* (Tülübass and Göktürk, 2020).

The resistance/rejection PI is characterized by the establishment of a balance between teaching and research (Guzmán-Valenzuela and Martínez, 2016; Leisyte, 2015). In fact, authors such as Dugas *et al.* (2020) highlight that, in this PI, teaching and research are usually complementary activities. Moreover, this identity is related to high levels of job and personal satisfaction (Dugas *et al.*, 2018).

There is another type of PI that involves attitudes of rejection towards managerialism. This rejection occurs in people who either feel incapable of responding to the high production demands (Huang *et al.*, 2016), or consider that they do not have enough skills or experience to deal with such demands (Dashper and Fletcher, 2019). This PI usually searches for career options outside of academia, and is often linked to disciplines with little tradition in the academic community (Dashper and Fletcher, 2019; Findlow, 2012).

This PI is termed the *job insecurity PI* (Ylijoki and Ursin, 2013), and usually involves high levels of anxiety and distress as a result of not being able to respond to management demands along with the fear of an uncertain future. In addition, it is associated not only with low levels of job satisfaction (Dugas *et al.*, 2018), but also the development of negative emotions that result from the feeling of having failed as a researcher (Ursin *et al.*, 2020). These emotions include guilt, anxiety, fear and even burnout.

Finally, two key aspects regarding this first theme are worth noting. The first is the decrease of these types of identities in scientific articles with the passage of time, and

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the second is the notable absence — at least among the articles included in our review — of academics who fight against the new performative demands.

### *Acceptance/Submission Professional Identities*

The second emerging theme, *professional identities of acceptance/submission*, includes the professional identities which are developed as a consequence of strategies based on acceptance or submission to the new demands of the wider social context. They represent the opposite side of the identities previously described. Moreover, these are the most frequent type of academic identity included in the literature of the last ten years. In order to facilitate analysis of the many professional identities that comprise this theme, these were organised into three groups:

- professional identities related to a positive vision of change.
- professional identities linked to a negative vision of change.
- professional identities associated with a neutral vision or unconscious submission to change.

Within the group of professional identities related to a positive vision, some are characterised by a proactive and uncritical adaptation to change. This is primarily because changes are seen as positive and are legitimised and used for the benefit of the individual. This kind of PI is typical of academics who either belong to scientific disciplines that are highly valued in the world of publication, who are part of governing bodies, or who have been directly involved in the processes of contextual change (Huang *et al.*, 2016). In the scientific literature, a variety of terms are used to describe this type of PI, including *PI of success* (Ylijoki and Ursin, 2013); *Mode IV or Hybrid PI* (Leisyte, 2015); *Catch-up PI* (Huang and Guo; 2019) or *PI of Calculating Entrepreneur* (Tülübas and Göktürk, 2020).

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In this group, there is also another type of PI that is characterized by a great capacity to adapt to any requirement or situation, with the simple aim of obtaining benefits. This IP is known as the *Chameleon PI* (Huang *et al.*, 2016) or the *academic track PI* (Jiménez, 2019).

This first group of professional identities based on acceptance is usually associated with high levels of motivation, both intrinsic (seeking career advancement) and extrinsic (meeting management demands). Furthermore, these are related to the development of positive emotions such as enthusiasm or enjoyment (Ursin *et al.*, 2020), as well as high levels of confidence and job satisfaction when they are able to respond to the new demands of the context (Dugas *et al.*, 2018).

With regard to those professional identities that are characterized by a negative and critical vision, there are those that are typically associated with adaptation to the new demands of the context with the sole aim of surviving in the academic world. Within this group, three types of PI can be distinguished: *PI of loss* (Ylijoki, 2013) or *Mode III PI* (Leisyte; 2015); *stressed faculty PI* (Huang *et al.*, 2016), *thrown out PI* (Huang and Guo, 2019), and *managing faculty PI* (Jiménez, 2019).

The first type, that is, *loss PI or Mode III PI*, is typified by silent subjugation caused by the fear of not being able to survive. In this PI there is predominance of performative principles, negative feelings caused by the increase in demands, and the loss of traditional values.

The second type of PI, *stressed faculty PI*, is linked to those academics who adapt to the new demands of the context, despite showing a significant sense of difficulty in coping with them. This inability usually generates high levels of insecurity (Knights and Clarke, 2014), which are associated with negative emotions such as anxiety, fear or exhaustion (Ursin *et al.*, 2020).

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The third type, *PI thrown out*, is similar to the previous type to the extent that it is associated with academics who critically adapt to contextual changes. In the face of their inability to cope, however, they develop a whole range of unconventional practices such as using predatory journals or paying in order to publish. In this sense, although it is true that they show negative emotions, these are not as strong as those shown in the previous type. The most common emotions are inferiority and frustration.

The last type, *managing faculty PI*, involves acceptance of the new demands, but with a high level of awareness of performative control. Whilst this PI is not characterized by feelings of inferiority, high levels of stress are often present.

In general, this group of professional identities, typified by acceptance related to a negative view, usually shows low levels of job satisfaction (Dugas *et al.*, 2018). This is true of those academics who have always been attracted to research and whose feelings about it have changed in the light of new pressures and demands (Collins *et al.*, 2020; Jiménez, 2019), and also of those who have never found research to be appealing but are now forced to do it (Dugas *et al.*, 2018).

Finally, within the PI of acceptance and submission, there is a group with a neutral vision of the changes or, in other words, with tendency towards unconscious submission. In this regard, the study conducted by Saura and Bolívar (2019) focuses on the development and construction of new academic subjectivities.

These subjectivities are characterised by an uncritical submission to the new demands of the context resulting from their normalisation (Cannizzo, 2017). In this sense, Saura and Bolívar (2019) refer to a new neoliberal academic marked by a significant degree of internalization of neoliberalism in the self. This leads the individual to unconsciously abide by the system. This PI, much more common in young people, generates high levels of stress, anxiety and health-related problems in general. Further,



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according to Acker and Webber (2016), this type of PI can be associated with good levels of job satisfaction due to unconscious subordination. This means that the achievement of work objectives takes precedence over working conditions.

Finally, it is important to note that all the professional identities described in this section share in common a gradual loss of autonomy, an increase in individualisation processes, a sense of servitude to the demands of market competition and productivity logics, prioritization of research over teaching, and a sense of the traditional academic being, among others (Djerasimovic and Villani, 2019; Dugas *et al.*, 2020; Gaus and Hall, 2015; Jiménez, 2019; Saura and Bolívar, 2019; Ylijoki, 2014).

#### *Flexible professional identities*

The third emerging theme consists of *flexible professional identities*. This theme groups together all the information related to professional identities that are in an intermediate position between the two previous themes. These types of PI are characterized by a feeling of continuous tension between the new performative demands and the traditional models of academia. Within this theme, three different types of professional identities have been revealed: *balanced PI*, *interest-based PI*, and *PI in progress*.

The first type of PI is linked to the continuous search for a balance between traditional and performative values, and therefore between the duties of teaching and research. As a consequence, this identity is often associated with significant workloads, high levels of stress and both cognitive and emotional burnout (McCune, 2019). This PI has been given multiple names in scientific articles, including *PI agency of change* (Ylijoki and Ursin; 2013), *own path PI* (Huang and Guo, 2019) *unfinished PI* (Jimenez, 2019) or *PI of Ethical Dilemma* (Tülübas and Göktürk, 2020).

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The second type of PI also seeks a balance between performative and traditional demands but, in this case, the balance is not total, but instead depends on the needs of the individual at each given moment (Shams, 2019). This type of identity is known as *mobility PI* (Ylijoki and Ursin, 2013), *PI of the resolute pilgrim* (Huang *et al.*, 2016) or *itinerant academic PI* (Whitchurch, 2019).

Finally, the last type of PI is characterised by a complete loss of traditional values, although these have not yet been replaced yet by performative values. In this sense, this is an unfinished PI that is continuously searching and under construction. This type is known as *PI Mode II* (Leisyte, 2015).

All the professional identities described in this section tend to show high levels of insecurity, more specifically the so-called *existentialist insecurity* (Knights and Clarke, 2014). This insecurity is a consequence of the continuous struggle and tension produced by the search for a balance between traditional and performative academic values. Moreover, and in relation to feelings, these identities are associated with ambivalent emotions (Ursin *et al.*, 2020), since these individuals can also perceive positive feelings of satisfaction, appreciation or enjoyment; or, at other times, they experience negative feelings of stress, anxiety or confusion. These negative feelings are mainly due to the inability to simultaneously follow the principles of both traditional and performative academia (Dugas *et al.*, 2020).

#### *Professional identities of young academics*

The last emerging theme is concerned with the *professional identities of young academics*, which groups together all the information related to the construction and development of the identities of young university teaching staff faced with the new demands of the broader social context.

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Taken together, the studies included in this review emphasise the clear superiority of identities centred on research, as opposed to those linked to teaching (Leisyte, 2015; McCune, 2019). The main reason for the prevalence of research over teaching is the fact that a research profile is necessary for academics to secure promotion, along with the low social status associated with teaching (Laiho *et al.*, 2020).

Further, the studies highlight the predominance of professional identities of acceptance versus those of rejection/resistance or flexibility (Dugas *et al.*, 2020; Smith, 2017). In particular, Ylijoki and Henriksson (2017) report that the most commonly observed PI among novice academics is the *Managerialist PI*, which is typified by the continuous quest to meet the productivity demands of the new performative reality. This is due to the great vulnerability that young academics feel due to the intense competition for future job security (Saura and Bolívar, 2019).

Finally, other authors such as Djerasimovic and Villani (2019) point out the presence of a notable spirit of action and entrepreneurship that leads to individualised academic activity.

## **Discussion**

In the last ten years, a significant number of international studies have focused on academics (Englund and Gerdin, 2019). This is mainly due to the interest in understanding the impact that the new governance of higher education is having. In this context, the study of identity becomes a fundamental part of understanding this reality. Despite the numerous empirical studies on the subject, there are hardly any review studies focused on the analysis, collection and understanding of the different identities currently developed in higher education. Therefore, the aim of this review was to gather and organize the most recent and relevant studies exploring academics' professional identities in today's university.

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To this end, we conducted a systematic review of the literature using three different databases (WoS, SCOPUS and ERIC). This search yielded 26 articles that were subsequently subjected to a double analysis process. Firstly, an analysis of the main characteristics of the studies was carried out. Secondly, a thematic analysis of the papers was developed which allowed us to detect the main emerging themes. In the following, we aim to discuss the main findings of this review, as well as to offer some professional implications and future lines of research.

In the first section of the results, we find some very relevant findings. Firstly, we observe a wide geographical distribution of the studies. On the one hand, this is evidence of the great scientific concern about the impact that these new governance systems may have on academics (Trede *et al.*, 2012). On the other hand, it also shows that the new governance of higher education is widespread worldwide (Browning *et al.*, 2017). According to Allais (2014), the expansion of such practices has been the consequence of continuous pressure from supranational bodies and neoliberal governments of other countries. However, other authors argue voluntary adoption of such practices. Tomicic (2019) explains that such voluntary adoption stems from the interest of different countries around the world to develop a higher education system capable of competing globally.

Despite this expansion, there is a clear predominance of studies developed in Europe over other areas in the last decade, coinciding with the launch of the European Higher Education Area in 2010. This entailed the development of the new forms of governance (Brøgger, 2019). Therefore, this predominance of studies can be justified by the scientific interest in analysing the impact that this new system generates on European academics.

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In terms of the thematic analysis, this review contributes to the body of research that highlights the enormous influence that the broader social context of higher education has on academic's identity development (Lankveld *et al.*, 2017; Clarke *et al.*, 2013; Alonso *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, the construction of academics' identities cannot be alien to the time and context in which they are immersed (Zabalza, 2011). As a result of this context, our study uncovers a wide variety of different Identities that we have organised into three main groups.

However, one of the chief findings of this review is the predominance of professional identities related to the acceptance of or submission to the new performative demands (Clarke and Knights, 2015), unlike the other identities described in the scientific literature. According to a number of authors, the predominance of these identities is a consequence of the need to avoid the social and professional rejection that failure to meet these new demands would imply (Cannizzo, 2017; Djerasimovic and Villani, 2019). However, San Fabián (2020) states that these identities are a result of the attempt to achieve a certain stability within the university.

In a context where research has acquired an essential role, the pressures to increase scientific productivity (Dashper and Fletcher, 2019) has generated a radically change in academics' ways of acting and proceeding (Winter and O'Donohue, 2012). In this respect, the most prominent aspect is the prioritization of research over teaching and the development of unethical research practices.

Concerning the former, and in spite of the significant body of literature highlighting the value of teaching as the core of the academic profession and the means to disseminate knowledge to society (Tight, 2019), universities appear to continue taking strides towards undermining its importance.

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Regarding the latter, the growing pressure to publish is leading academics to resort to deviant research practices that are negatively affecting research (Overac, 2019). So, as a result of these new identities not only teaching but also research are being affected.

This study has also revealed how the aforementioned professional identities are most common among novel academics. This observation is in accord with the work of Smith (2017), who suggests that this is due to the normalization of the new university reality as a consequence of ignoring other alternatives. However, Englund and Gerdin (2019) establish that the reason lies in the capacity of new governance to generate behavioural changes. In general, this identity is characterised by a loss of the sense of traditional academic being. For Tülübas and Göktürk (2020), this is due to the stress generated as a result of the collision between the opposing values of the new and the traditional university.

Finally, this identity is also determined by a loss of autonomy, the individualisation of work and by high levels of stress and anxiety. Regarding the latter, levels change depending on variables such as gender, years of experience or professional category (Bedoya *et al.*, 2017; Teles *et al.*, 2020).

### **Implications**

Organisational changes are needed now more than ever to help academics develop balanced and fulfilling personal and professional lives. Along these lines, the development of policies aimed at creating fairer evaluation systems or the development of initiatives aimed at supporting researchers in their full and balanced development would be helpful. Institutional initiatives such as guidance and support structures or the creation of working and/or mentoring groups to help

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mitigate the strong effects on teaching staff are also necessary. These measures would not only improve the situation of academics, but would also contribute to the development of a university capable of influencing progress and social transformation.

### **Future lines of research**

Despite the extensive literature on the topic, many questions remain unanswered. Therefore, two important future lines of research could be highlighted: the influence of the family context (children), and the role played by gender in the processes of constructing the PI of today's academics.

With regard to the former, it was not possible to find studies focused on analysing how being a parent in modern academia can influence the processes of construction and development of the academics' PI. As far as gender is concerned, no in-depth analysis has been found with regard to the influence of this variable on the processes of PI construction. Therefore, and in view of the available scientific evidence indicating the existing inequalities in the academic community (Li and Shen, 2020; Polenghi and Fitzgerald, 2020), more research is needed to study this issue in depth.

Finally, it might also be worth increasing the use of the biographical-narrative approach when conducting this type of research, since this is considered to be the most effective and complete way of studying PI (Bolívar, 2014). This focus would allow for obtaining a complete understanding of PI by respecting and considering its dynamic, processual, and interactive nature.

### **Conclusions**



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All of the findings reported here serve to reinforce the fact that the pillars that once sustained the liberal universities (critical thought, reflection, service to the community) are now being threatened by the interests of market forces, competitiveness, and a performative society (Brunner *et al.*, 2019). In this sense, universities are acting as private entities that focus their activities towards economic goals (Harland, 2009), where knowledge becomes a product (Ball, 2012) and research becomes political (Harris, 2005). In short, there is "a shift from a public to a private knowledge regime" (Saura and Bolívar, 2019, p. 17), which is what Slaughter and Leslie (2001) coined as Academic Capitalism.

As a consequence, we are increasingly moving away from a university based on the Humboldt ideal, that is, an autonomous, reflexive, free and universalist institution at the service of society, whose purpose is to create scientific knowledge and nurture critical citizens and competent professionals. These are all essential principles for creating a university capable of influencing progress and social transformation. It is therefore vitally important to continue analysing this topic not only to respond to the biases and future lines of research mentioned above but also to stimulate a debate that allows us to reflect and consider possible alternatives to the current state of university.

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Table 1. Explanatory table of academic identities

From Prevalence of New values						To Prevalence of Traditional Values	
Acceptance Professional Identities						Resistance/Rejection Professional Identities	
Neutral vision	Positive vision		Negative vision				
Proactive	Proactive and uncritical		Proactive and Critical				
<i>New Neoliberal Academic</i>	<i>Of success; Hybrid; Catch-up; Calculating Entrepreneur.</i>	<i>Chameleon; academic track</i>	<i>Loss; stressed faculty</i>	<i>Thrown out</i>	<i>Managing faculty</i>	<i>Resilient; Spectator; Careless Outsider; franchise; Ethical and Aesthetic Project.</i>	<i>Job insecurity</i>
Academics unconsciously subjugated	Academics favored by these changes.	Academics adapted just for benefits.	Academics adapted by fear	Academics adapted but with unethical practices.	Academics with a high level of awareness of contextual influence	Academics that do not need to accept any changes in order to survive in the university	Academics incapable of responding to the high production demands
Flexible attitude							
<i>PI Mode II</i>			<i>Mobility; resolute pilgrim; itinerant academic.</i>			<i>Agency of change; Own path; Unfinished; Ethical Dilemma.</i>	
Complete loss of traditional values not yet been replaced yet by performative values			No total Balance, but instead depends on the needs of the individual at each given moment			Total balance: continuous search for a balance between traditional and performative values	

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Figure 1. Flow chart of the stages followed in the bibliographic search.

