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Loneliness in the Neoliberal Age: The Use of Libraries to Alleviate Alienation

According to Robert Putnam's article *Bowling Alone*, social interaction and participation on a wide scale are declining and isolation has become a massive issue within American society. This decline has been occurring for the past few decades and will continue if left unchecked. Why this matters is that isolation is seen as a social ill within modern industrial society. It often can lead to significant negative psychological effects, which can, in turn, affect other aspects of one's health. But what exactly causes this "social capital" decline, why is it occurring at such as fast rate, and why is this a recent phenomenon (Putnam 1995, 3)? Putnam somewhat blames the rise in new technology stating that "in the language of economics, electronic technology enables individual tastes to be satisfied more fully, but at the cost of the positive social externalities associated with more primitive forms of entertainment (Putnam 1995, 13)." While this denunciation towards social media and other recent technological advancements that promote individual use isn't entirely without justification, it is perhaps too limited when looking at the full range of societal disengagement. Isolation isn't caused by individually used technology but rather by what produces that individualistic framework in society. What creates that framework, according to David Harvey in his book *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, is the rise in neoliberal attitudes in those that hold power not just politically but also economically (Harvey 2005). Neoliberalism as a concept has thus placed people into a society in which monetary gain and competition hold more weight than collective engagement, which helps to isolate them from their work, their social relationships, and society in general. Nowhere is this more evident than in modern American research universities, which have taken to neoliberal attitudes on a similar

timeline to Putnam's social disengagement observations. Furthermore, universities can be viewed as a microcosm society and through this framework these links of isolation and neoliberalism become apparent. So what is the solution to fight against this increase in isolation? Putnam says more research is necessary while other academics discuss widespread social reform. Both of these responses are either insufficient or long-range solutions that don't help those currently suffering from isolation within the neoliberal institution. A short term solution to alleviate the problem can be found within the library of these colleges and universities. Through open space, social programming, and information literacy education, libraries and librarians can fight against the encroaching social isolation caused by neoliberal practices through engaging the student community. This paper will be split into three distinct sections to discuss the issues at hand. The first section, titled Alienation and Neoliberalism: A Broader Understanding will assess the concepts of alienation through a Marxist lens and link it to the history of neoliberal practice. The second section, The Modern Research University and Alienation will address these ideas and how they affect these learning institutions and the students who exist within. Lastly, Within the Neoliberal Institution: The Purpose of the Library will assess the impact of libraries and librarians both positively and negatively with regards to alienation.

Part I: Alienation and Neoliberalism: A Broader Understanding.

Before addressing the various ideas of alienation and the social changes that neoliberalism accounts for, it is important to understand Robert Putnam's concept of "social capital" (Putnam 1995, 3). Putnam writes on this framework as one that stems heavily from differing fields of social science, all intent on understanding social phenomena. "Social capital" conceptually is likened to physical and human capital, but "refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and

cooperation for mutual benefit" (Putnam 1995, 3). What he means by this is that areas within an industrial society that facilitate social interaction such as volunteer organizations, club activities, sporting clubs, or community meetings amongst other things that promote this type of social organization. It can also relate to areas within a democratic society that engage communities such as voting or political organization. Social capital is something that someone has when they individually or through a group engage in these interactions on any scale. When that engagement diminishes or isolation occurs, either self-imposed or externally introduced, then social capital is individually lost. In essence, social capital relates heavily to one's ability to communicate with others and feel like they are engaged with a community, thus creating trust or bonds. Putnam explains this further by saying that social capital relates to the "tools and training that enhance individual productivity" in a social situation though unlike physical capital these tools are not tangible (Putnam 1995, 3). That doesn't mean that they aren't researchable, as Putnam writes within a statistical framework to display overall disengagement and a loss in this social capital over a period of a few decades. However, what this indicates is that unlike physical capital it is difficult to point to the exact causes of a decline when it happens. When millions of people are withdrawing from social activity and the "affairs of their communities" in the short time of two decades (at the time in which Putnam's text was written) despite cultural growth such as higher levels of education, one can question what exactly is leading people en masse to disengage (Putnam 1995, 4). The answer can be found by examining the Marxist concept of alienation as that idea engages with a broader social framework.

Alienation as an idea takes on a variety of forms according to Tom Moody in his essay *The Alienation of Women Under Capitalism.* It can be cultural, ideological, political, psychological, or religious and the concept of individual isolation applies to each of these forms (Schmitt and

Moody 1994, 58). Personal estrangement does not exist solely within a singular state which is why determining the cause is a difficult task. Marxist theorists work around this difficulty by looking at alienation as not a constant state but rather as a "historically created phenomenon," with the origin and continuation being linked to the particular alienation in labor as the primary aspect which integrates itself into the other forms mentioned above (Novak and Mandel 1970, 7). George Novak writes in the introduction to his book *The Marxist Theory of Alienation* that "alienation expresses the fact that the creations of men's hands and minds turn against their creators and come to dominate their lives. Thus, instead of enlarging freedom, these uncontrollable powers increase human servitude and strip men of the capacities for self-determination and self-direction which have raised them above animals" (Novak and Mandel 1970, 7). This trajectory from alienated laborer into an alienated individual is further discussed by Ernest Mandel in his essay *The Causes of Alienation* to which he cites three historical forms of alienation that make up this route. The first two forms are the introduction of wage labor and the refusal of access to the means of subsistence, but the third and final form concludes this by separating the worker from their work (Novak and Mandel 1970, 20–23). This final form is where alienation permeates the psychological and social forms mentioned by Moody. Mandel writes that:

> "The alienation of the worker and his labor means that something basic has changed in the life of the worker…Work is no longer a means of self-expression for anybody who sells his labor time. Work is just a means to attain a goal. And that goal is to get money, some income to be able to buy the consumer goods necessary to satisfy your needs. In this way, a basic aspect of human nature, the capacity to perform creative work, becomes thwarted and distorted. Work becomes something which is not creative and productive for human beings but something which is harmful and destructive… At this point the notion of alienation is extended from a purely economic to a broader social phenomenon" (Novak and Mandel 1970, 23).

By linking this historical phenomenon about labor to the concept of alienation, Marxist theorists provide insight into the causes behind the social and psychological forms of isolation

that can be seen within civilized society. The benefit of this discourse is that it gives us an understanding of how this can fit into a neoliberal context and also how it can fit into the framework of a university.

Neoliberalism as a concept is defined in a similar way to Marxist alienation in that it is viewed through a historical lens as a multifaceted notion, effecting a larger scope beyond the political identity it is often ascribed to. David Harvey writes that neoliberalism is "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (Harvey 2005, 2). The role of the state within this environment is to preserve a framework appropriate for these practices while also minimally (or selectively) interfering with the markets. This focus on money over all else, according to Marx, is the exact environment in which alienation is destined to occur. The worker in the neoliberal institution isn't working for the sake of productivity or creativity, but rather as a means to attain the goal of gaining money. Through this, they are estranged from the work they do and that self-estrangement leads into other areas of their life according to Marxist theory. But beyond this theoretical connection to Putnam's ideas of disengagement one can find an interesting timeline connection.

Harvey explains that neoliberalism saw its main starting point in the 1970s, with the emphasis on deregulation, privatization, and withdrawal from the state (Harvey 2005, 3). The 1970s timeline is referenced within Putnam's article on the loss of social capital as the beginning of the major social decline within the United States. It is of note that this disengagement continues to become a problem as neoliberal ideas increase in their influence. However, it would be incorrect to assume that neoliberalism, social isolation, and their connection is an entirely

recent idea. All of these are historically created phenomena that have been bolstered to high degrees through the extremities of neoliberal practice, but social isolation can be linked to the practices of classical liberalism which presents the historical understanding of how these concepts becomes intertwined.

Liberalism as a political ideology has a major focus on the autonomous individual and human rights. The problem with this concept in liberalism and by extension neoliberalism is that this framework does not have the capabilities to deal with alienation when Marxist theory is applied. Liberalism, by itself, fails to account for it by confusing alienation for a conflict of rights rather than a conflict of systems and behaviors. Richard Schmitt discusses this in his essay *Why Is the Concept of Alienation Important?* by stating that liberalism in fact "conceals alienation," by insisting that "we are separate individuals who can transcend social pressures and influences with effort" (Schmitt and Moody 1994, 15). Neoliberalism has this conflict of rights issue embedded within it, but it pushes further into potential alienation by focusing on the primacy of the individual and faux freedom. The freedoms that neoliberalism "embodies reflect the interests of private property owners, businesses, multinational corporations, and financial capital" rather than that of the community, and individualism is pushed to make sure that these interests are kept up (Harvey 2005, 7). When this disjointed freedom is applied to all of the other aspects mentioned before, the connection between neoliberalism and alienation is more than just a timeline coincidence. It is correlation equaling causation as the neoliberal institution creates an environment prime for this social disengagement.

Putnam's question on what causes alienation is thus answered through the lens of the encroachment of neoliberal policy both through the Marxist theories presented previously but also through the timeline connection. The best step forward is to discuss how this affects real-

world institutions and how a neoliberal focus on monetary gain and privatization has changed the purpose of a modern research university.

Part II: The Modern Research University and Alienation

The discussion of neoliberal alienation within the framework of the institutional university requires a specific focus as to who is being alienated. While much discourse can be had for faculty and staff members within the academic institution, this paper will be specifically about students. Within the framework of the university as a societal microcosm, the comparison between students in an academic setting and the alienated worker represented through Marxist theory are noticeable. The student, much like the alienated worker, works within their environment to attain a goal rather than for their own sake or self-exploration, this goal in both situations is to make money. The difference is that within the university the goal is attained over a longer period of time (a degree) than within a workplace environment. Furthermore, the university student often times must supply their own funding (consequently going into high levels of debt) to attend the institution for the hope of receiving a higher monetary standing than if they never attended, with no guarantee that this will work out in their favor. This wasn't the initial goal of the research university, but through neoliberal policy, these institutions have begun to look at their students not as those who are there to benefit from knowledge transfer, but as revenue providers and capital investments. Regardless of these differences, the alienation of the student body within a university comes both from their separation to the institution itself (money makers rather than members of a community) but also from their lack of ability to self-direct and create their own agenda. A student in most cases does not have much influence over the trajectory of a university in the same manner that the alienated worker has no influence on the industry they sell their labor to. From this comparison the university thus becomes a microcosm

of society where alienation can settle in much faster with the population. So why was the university setting prone to this shift when the original ideas of the institution were non-neoliberal?

According to the book *Organizing Enlightenment* by Chad Wellmon, the modern research university was heavily inspired by the German model which itself was "a response to a pervasive Enlightenment anxiety about information overload" (Wellmon 2015, 4). While this instance of anxiety occurred in the 1800s, its continuation through disruptive innovations in knowledge allowed for modern research universities to apply similar standards of organizing these various forms of knowledge, reinventing itself for the sake of new media. "By the late nineteenth century, the research university had become the consummate technology for organizing knowledge. It had also come to stand in for a whole way of configuring, managing, and cultivating the impulse to know" (Wellmon 2015, 3). The ability to organize knowledge according to Wellmon, allowed the research university to become "the central institution of knowledge in the West," presenting society with new forms of knowledge research, capture, and storage (Wellmon 2015, 6). This method maintained by the research university accomplished a variety of feats including establishing the "ideals of academic freedom and the unity of teaching and research" (Wellmon 2015, 8). It also gave rise to "the logic of intellectual specialization that continues to form the contemporary university" (Wellmon 2015, 8). The ethos of the university was thus focused on individuals with specialized knowledge as a way to combat the encroaching excess of information during times of media transition. This is important to mention because of the fact that neoliberalism has a heavy focus in "liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework," but this liberation through specialization continues the money over all else mentality (Harvey 2005, 2). The focus of specialization in the university

through this monetary framework according to Mandel is problematic and prone to alienating people. In an industrial setting "commodity production and a social division of labor (is) pushed to the limits of overspecialization. As a result, people in a particular job or doing a certain activity for a living will incline to have an extremely narrow horizon. They will be prisoners of their trade, seeing only the problems and preoccupations of their specialty" (Novak and Mandel 1970, 25). Overspecialization, while having value in knowledge organization also has the potential to alienate those by stripping them of their ability to communicate with others (Novak and Mandel 1970, 25). Universities through the focus in overspecialization for knowledge creation unintentionally play into industry and neoliberal thought, making the transition of the university into a neoliberal institution smooth from a social perspective. But this just shows the theoretical similarities in the ethos between the historical research university and neoliberal thought. The actual practice and introduction of neoliberalism in higher education perhaps used this similarity to a starting point, but the main contributing factors were economically based.

Author Gaile S. Cannella and Professor Mirka Koro-Ljungberg start their essay *Neoliberalism in Higher Education: Can We Understand? Can We Resist and Survive? Can We Become Without Neoliberalism?* With the statement that "for the past 20 years, those who have paid attention to changing demands and particular types of expectations associated with higher education have become well aware of the "corporate university industrial complex" (Cannella and Koro-Ljungberg 2017, 155). This corporate industrial complex is a "neoliberal incursion" on higher education which has changed the focus of colleges and universities from knowledge makers into profit makers (Cannella and Koro-Ljungberg 2017, 155). This has "resulted in a focus on money over all else" within the institution and that has far-reaching effects for the future of education as well as the role of students within (Cannella and Koro-Ljungberg 2017,

159). Institutionally, this affects how the school is run. Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhodes refer to the structure of a neoliberal institution as one that follows "academic capitalism," or when universities act like capitalist enterprises through investments and money-making operations as a major defining point (Slaughter and Rhoades 2000, 73). While the institutional changes related to neoliberalism affect many portions of the university, the changes to the way in which the university sees the students are perhaps the most germane under the framework of alienation.

An area that affects students is the neoliberal change in education policy allowing universities to focus on "high-stakes standardized testing, increasing privatization and commercialization of the education system and assaults on subject areas and teaching methods that are seen as superfluous or radical" rather than serving their original purpose of knowledge organization societal service (Slaughter and Rhoades 2000, 76). This on a systemic level pigeonholes students by refusing them education in topics of interest and engagement beyond capital creation (such as in the humanities) without their input. It forces them to engage not in critical thinking or other socially beneficial ways of learning, but with means to make capital. On an individual level, it turns the role of the student from someone who learns about civic engagement to a capital product. In the neoliberal institution, "individuals are judged as smart, competent, and valuable to the institution if they generate (and do not critique) money" (Cannella and Koro-Ljungberg 2017, 159). Students are reduced to capital instead of being seen as members of a community. Furthermore, the individual aspect of the institution is constructed in neoliberal policy and pushed through things like artificial competition between students meaning that neoliberalism "co-opt all forms of knowledge" for the sake of a capitalist competitive atmosphere (Cannella and Koro-Ljungberg 2017, 156). By atomizing the population through the focus on the individual, universities convert larger institutional issues into personal

failures to disguise the systemic failings mentioned above (Ghamandi 2018, 6). A student that cannot generate money for the institution is, in the eyes of the neoliberal, effectively useless and this is framed as a problem for the student, not for the university. On the opposite side, students that can accomplish this are separated from their work and achievements and are known only as capital revenue. Students, therefore, are "fragmented" from themselves by the view of the university, objectified into potential value (Bartky 1994, 72). This separation or estrangement from the realization of potential beyond monetary value that students face is, as expressed, before no different from the alienation discussed in Marxist literature (Schmitt and Moody 1994, 58). As Richard Schmitt puts it: "Marx observed that the alienated find themselves in a world not of their making, a world in which they are not active participants but the victims of impersonal force. Hence the alienated do not feel themselves to be at the center of their lives" (Schmitt and Moody 1994, 7). Since students are reduced into the money framework within the university, falling victim to alienation is almost guaranteed, even more so when other aspects of individualism such as overspecialization are a part of the academic culture. All of these varying aspects of a neoliberal university push individualism to high levels, and as Ernest Mandel puts it "individualism pushed to the extreme also means loneliness pushed to the extreme" (Novak and Mandel 1970, 28). Stripping students of their agency through non-participatory university systems, of their community through competition, and of their ability to communicate with others through overspecialization are all examples of how neoliberalism allows for alienation to become a common feature within an institution.

The picture that this essay creates is fairly bleak, however, alienation is "not an inescapable and irremediable curse of mankind" according to Novak and this is true for alienation caused by a university (Novak and Mandel 1970, 6). While the neoliberal institution as

a whole may not fulfill its social responsibility to its students regarding social transformation, areas within the university might be able to accomplish that (Ghamandi 2018, 7). The proposal of this essay is that the library effectively represents the embodiment of social capital generation that Putnam asked for through not only its ability to engage students in ways that the university cannot, but also in its ability to present a space to students where the neoliberal estrangement is alleviated (Putnam 1995, 13).

Part III: Within the Neoliberal Institution: The Purpose of the Library

So what exactly is the role of the library within an institution beyond a place for research facilitation and how can that help ease student alienation? Ian Beilin discusses this question in his article *Student Success and the Neoliberal Academic Library* by addressing the notion of success and how libraries can differ from the universities in which they preside. Success in a neoliberal institution is to gain money and so to separate students from this pressure, librarians need to "encourage alternative definitions of success" based around other ideas (Beilin 2016, 18). This doesn't necessarily mean that librarians need to work against the systems they exist in, as Beilin offers a two-level approach to success. One level uses the neoliberal definitions of success to help students survive in a professional setting, and the other level is based in alternative methods that allow students to define success in their own terms (Beilin 2016, 18). These alternative methods are linked to the instruction of information literacy to students which would allow them to question the structures they live within along with presenting them with the ability to create their own agenda. Allowing this pursuit of alternate modes of success shifts the focus of the library to the students rather than viewing them through the same neoliberal lens that the broader institution has. However, this is a single role for librarians and libraries and there are many other ways in which the space and programs can help fight against institutional alienation.

One of the most important features of a library that is often overlooked is the physical space, how it is utilized, and the perceived openness to the community outside the library doors. Marcela Cabello and Stuart Butler refer to libraries as a third place or a place that is not the home or location of work within their article *How Public Libraries Help Build Healthy Communities* (Cabello and Butler 2017). University libraries sit within a strange area because they find themselves connected closely to the "first" and "second" places (home and work respectively) when the discussion is about those living within student housing. Students live within the dorms and use the university as their pseudo-vocational position, so physically the library is not much different from any other building on a campus and the proximity between these spaces doesn't help this case either. Cabello and Butler add on to this by stating that "location and accessibility are important, of course. But so are trust and a sense of neutrality" (Cabello and Butler 2017). Trust is paramount in how one is to view a third place, and institutional libraries must create a sense of trust within the community as a step towards getting students to come in and use the space. Trust inherently indicates a connection between students and the library/librarians. On the other side of this, neutrality as used within the quote warrants some criticism. Neutrality shouldn't mean that a library or librarian remain neutral in a political or activist stance because that has the ability to reflect as not caring about the users of the library, causing further alienation within this space. "Neutrality" needs to be defined differently to where it is more seen as neutrality towards static ideas such as the defined method of success in a neoliberal context. Not critiquing dominant modes is a form of neutrality but not abiding by them is also a form of institutional neutrality, therefore the "neutrality" must be towards the institution rather than the users. This "neutrality" to dominant modes of teaching allows librarians to work in alternative ways to put those who use the library, mainly students and researchers, first. When these two

ideas are established within the library, it becomes more than just another university location, it becomes a free space for students to define themselves and their own agenda.

The idea of free space is one that philosopher Harry C. Boyte praises in his essay *Public Freedom*. He writes that free space is one "where people develop the capacity to define their own agenda in a world surfeited by professional language" (Boyte 1994, 237). A library at any location offers this, but a library within an institution can use this free space mentality as a means to fight against the metaphorical reduction of students through neoliberal policy, and therefore fight alienation. Boyte furthers this anti-objectification idea by stating that a space for public (or community in this case) freedom "suggests the process through which people become creators of the world, and no longer objects" by actively engaging with the community as more than just a source of revenue (Boyte 1994, 244). This active engagement is facilitated through the openness of the library and this is particularly how trust and neutrality become key factors in differentiating this space from the broader institution or how the university library becomes the third place for students. But openness is one thing, utilizing it through programming is another way in which a library can go against alienation.

Richard Lankes writes on participatory programs and the ways in which they are effective in bringing together a community in his book *The New Librarianship Field Guide*. A libraries job within a university may be to facilitate knowledge for the sake of research, but to accomplish things beyond that, "librarians must build systems that allow for learning" through community participation (Lankes et al. 2016, 53). This involves not only bringing people into the space through programming but also focusing on systems of engagement to promote communication between students which would help to create a sense of trust within the library. But what is suggested to accomplish this feat? Lankes writes that a library must create the

pressure to participate through their programming as that would bring people into the space. This pressure is split into five aspects, but the most important of these are the pressures "to converse" and the pressure "for social interaction" (Lankes et al. 2016, 54). The former pressure elicits a desire for students to be heard by the institution because unless the students "can converse, many participants will refuse to use the tools you provide" (Lankes et al. 2016, 54). The latter is more based around the connection of individuals to the broader community as "human beings are (always) social creatures" (Lankes et al. 2016, 57). This means that in order to fulfill these two roles, libraries must create systems that allow for users to be heard (either through the creation of the system or through the ability to customize it) as well as create systems that "take into account members' connections to their communities" (Lankes et al. 2016, 58). Building a system or programs that specifically meet the needs of students within the academic community allows for libraries to fix socially what the broader university is failing at. If done correctly, students will be allowed to communicate freely with others, use the space for their own needs rather than for the purpose of attaining a goal, and engage with participation programs which would therefore help in self-determination. All of these elements grant students clemency to the alienation caused by neoliberalism and presents them the ability to raise their social capital in a specific space. That being said, the library is still a part of the institution and therefore isn't entirely separate from the neoliberal policies that affect the other areas. A library can very easily become a neoliberal institution itself and to avoid these pitfalls the problems involved with existing in a neoliberal environment should be constantly critiqued by the library.

A neoliberal library according to Beilin is "simply one whose policies are guided by the imperative of the market in the strictly economic sense" (Beilin 2016, 14). Beilin determines fours key aspects that make up a library neoliberal. First is the need to constantly justify the

library's existence. Second is the removal of "protections from those parts of the library that serve no widely used purpose" (Beilin 2016, 14). Third is the idea that information literacy should "serve the need of industry and government for skilled and competitive individuals" (Beilin 2016, 14). Lastly, the neoliberal library will urgently "call for management strategies that improve performance, value and return on investment" (Beilin 2016, 15). These all fall under neoliberalism in that they all explicitly serve to gain capital or remove things that do not serve that singular endpoint. On the broadest level, it is easy to see how this type of policy can undermine the "goal of providing library services in the open and democratic manner" that many libraries strive for (Beilin 2016, 15). One could argue that if you remove these aspects or value programs in the library that go against the "capital as end goal" process that one can make the library a non-neoliberal entity. Because of this perceived simplicity, critiques of neoliberalism in libraries ignore how these policies "help shape the ways in which academic libraries conceive of and approach information itself, and how this warps the democratic mission of the library" (Beilin 2016, 15). Therefore, a method in critiquing and moving away from neoliberalism in the library would be in how the library deals with the outer institution. Beilin suggests:

> "Librarians should question the eagerness with which they are rushing to prove their indispensability to administrators and faculty. In order to allow for some critical distance in their pedagogy, they need to put some space between themselves and those other groups, even though working with teaching faculty is considered one of librarians' first responsibilities" (Beilin 2016, 16).

This separation can be attained through the free space student-oriented programming discussed in the previous paragraphs. As expressed before Beilin argues that a library could do both, on one hand existing within the neoliberal framework of working with external institutions to survive and on the other going against it through their own work with students, thus making a slight barrier or connection depending on how it is framed, between the student body and the

larger institution. However, even if the library manages to fully separate themselves from a neoliberal framework within a university, the library must be made aware of how their own participation programs might lead to more alienation as students themselves aren't as separate from the larger institution. Mandel writes on this specifically stating that "alienation can be overcome through a "sense of participation" or a "work ethic" however this has the potential to insidiously remove awareness of one's condition which will only further alienation" (Novak and Mandel 1970, 49–50). A librarian must be constantly critiquing how their programs function within a neoliberal space and make sure that those who working and living within these spaces are not made to ignore the systems they fit into outside of the library. Participation is great, but participation without awareness can only lead to alienation in the words of Mandel, which is the exact opposite of what the library should attempt to accomplish.

Conclusion

Robert Putnam's discussion on the loss of social capital and the rise of alienation can be closely linked to the rise in neoliberalism when one looks at both the time periods of decline/rise and the external discussions on what causes alienation. Marx's notion of alienation being a historical phenomenon of workers being separated from their work by those who own the means of production can be applied directly to neoliberalism's monetary end goal framework. The university as an institution has recently come into itself as one that follows neoliberal goals which are distinctly different from the knowledge organization that universities were originally created for. Because of this, students that live and work within this institutional framework are prone to alienation as their existence from the perspective of the university is to provide money. Despite the reduction of students, areas within the institution such as libraries can help to alleviate potential alienation while also working within the neoliberal framework through having

students use their free space, social programming, and information literacy education. Libraries must, however, constantly critique the structures they work within as a way to not fully become neoliberal entities themselves as allowing that to occur would only hurt students and their ability to generate social capital, thus causing alienation. Through self-critique and programming, the library can become a place of engagement and a physical embodiment of social capital generation rather than another addition to the alienation inducing institution.

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