The Dynamics of Control of Migrant Agency Workers: Over-Recruitment, 'The Bitchlist' and the Enterprising-Self

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Abstract
This article explores migrant workers' experiences of organisational control while undertaking temporary agency work. This study is based on a 'covert' ethnographic study set at a temporary employment agency that short-term contracts workers to the catering and hospitality industry. The findings show how control is perceived by workers to emerge from the over-recruitment, coupled with the allocation of work through an informal ranking system. Migrant workers' specific socio-economic circumstances and their race and gender identities informed their responses to these systems, resulting in the buy-in to discourses of enterprise. The result was actors who are complicit, if not active, participants in self and peer regulation. As such, this article contributes to the literature on enterprising-selves, control of temporary agency workers and the wider manufacturing consent literature.

Keywords
control, enterprising-selves, migrant workers, temporary agency work

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Introduction

Since the EU accession in 2004 and the entry of the A10 into Europe, the UK has seen an influx of around 3.6 million migrants, most of which are workers seeking jobs to make viable lives in the UK or send remittances back to their home countries (The Migrant Observatory, 2020). This arrival of migrants has been a catalyst in the growth of temporary agency work where 'the supply of transnational migrant workers, prepared to work under less favourable conditions than local workers' (McDowell et al., 2008: 754) has created a supply for temporary employment agencies. There has been much debate around why migrant workers are over-represented in temporary employment (Forde et al., 2015): some simply see the temporary status of migrants as a 'good-match' for temporary employment (Janta et al., 2011) while others suggest migrants' uncertain financial and legal status results in them becoming more susceptible to temporary work (Anderson, 2010; May et al., 2006; Shelley, 2007). Temporary agencies have long been conceptualised as an intermediary for migrant workers, which has created a segmented labour market, where migrants experience markedly worse wages and terms and conditions than their local counterparts (Piore, 1979). However, the efficiency of temporary employment agencies relies on the willing participation of workers, which raises questions around how their consent is elicited. The literature on migrants in temporary agency work provides insights into how workers are recruited (Janta et al., 2011), how agencies and contractors 'organise' these workers based on identity politics (McDowell et al., 2007, 2009) or how migrant agency workers may resist through impermanence (MacKenzie and Forde, 2009) or transnational mobility (Alberti, 2014). Despite these insights, little is known about how migrant agency workers are controlled at an organisational level and how they respond to these controls.

The case of migrant agency workers is a particularly pertinent one, not only due to the growth of temporary agency work, but also because migrants have become susceptible to some of the most exploitative labour market practices (Anderson, 2010: 301; Rogaly, 2008). The current literature on control of temporary agency work tends to treat workers as homogenous and fails to consider how complex migrant identities may affect the individual's experiences of work. The diversity of temporary agency workers may have integral impacts on their experiences of control and their ability to resist these controls (Gossett, 2002). The literature also fails to consider how the enterprising discourse has seeped into low-paid, precarious work as a way of managing triangulated employment relationships. To explore these experiences and gain deeper understandings of control of migrant agency workers, this article draws on data gathered from a 12-month 'covert' ethnographic study of migrant agency workers. Drawing on the theoretical lens of 'enterprising discourse', this article contributes to understanding how control is experienced by migrant agency workers. Through the analysis of these data, this article contributes both empirical insights and several theoretical contributions. Firstly, the concept of enterprising-selves is extended to develop insights into how 'enterprising-subjects' are relationally co-created and reproduced. Secondly, this article contributes to a more nuanced analysis of worker identities in understanding how the enterprising discourse appeals to its subjects. Finally, this article demonstrates how enterprising discourses have spread to all facets of work, even the most precarious and low paid, and how they serve to reproduce uncertain and insecure workers.

This article starts by reviewing the literature on temporary agency work. This is followed by a brief unpacking of the literature on enterprising-selves, outlining the gaps in this literature. We then provide an overview of the methodology, paying particular attention to reflexive ethics and covert research. This is followed by a presentation of the ethnographic data and the discussion and conclusions.

Controlling temporary agency workers

The separation between the temporary employment agency and the contracting organisation (Fu, 2015; Vosko, 1997) creates gaps between the supervision and discipline of workers (Kalleberg, 2000). This has raised perplexing questions on how workers are effectively controlled in this context. Contracting organisations attempt to elude responsibility of employment by limiting the extent to which they supervise workers' activities (Carnevale et al., 1998) or using temporary workers for only short durations (Smith, 1998). This means that workers are often dispersed across numerous worksites and have very short and sporadic interaction with contracting organisations, which makes direct monitoring or indirect cultural controls difficult. These idiosyncrasies mean that standard forms of control are seldom sufficient to maintain labour discipline (Gottfried, 1991).

The unique characteristics of temporary agency work have resulted in a literature that explores control in this context, with research that sheds light on how the triangulated relationship has created unique methods of regulation. The research largely agrees on the limits of bureaucratic techniques of control for temporary agencies. Given the limited contact between temps and the temporary employment agency (Gottfried, 1991), there is little way for rules to be exercised and enforced while workers are on assignments (Gossett, 2006). However, bureaucratic controls are often exercised by contracting organisations, through rationalising jobs and delimiting work to sets of tasks and responsibility, as a way of regulating temp worker conduct (Gottfried, 1991).

Other scholars have recognised the complexity of control as interlocking systems emergent from both the contracting organisation and the temporary employment agency (Garsten, 1999; Gossett, 2006), yet there is some disagreement as to the impact this has on workers. On one hand, the complex melange of direct and indirect controls from temporary agency and contracting organisations intensifies controls experienced by workers (Gottfried, 1991), where the uncertainty of being temporary is seen to result in enhanced reflexive self-monitoring (Garsten, 1999; Gottfried, 1992). On the other hand, the space between the social structures of the contracting organisation and the temporary employment agency is seen as an empowering space where workers can avoid commitment to organisations (Garsten, 1999) and exploit the gaps between management systems (Gossett, 2006).

The fragmentation and isolation of temporary agency workers has also been considered a powerful way through which control is elicited. Isolation means that agency workers put in more 'real time' as they do not engage in non-productive activities (Gottfried, 1991, 1992; Parker, 1994). Temp workers' inability to compare their wages and terms and conditions with their peers limits their capacity to take collective action and makes them more susceptible to being marginalised (Henson, 1996; Rogers, 1995). This, coupled with the substitutability of temp workers, intensifies self-regulation in the absence

of direct monitoring (Garsten, 1999). Contracting organisations have been seen as instrumental in the fragmentation of workers where they actively craft a dis-identified workforce as a way through which they can protect themselves against collective action (Gossett, 2002: 400). Although temporary workers may be seen to enjoy freedom from commitment to the organisation, this limits the opportunity for workers to pursue any meaningful change of organisational conditions (Jordan, 2003).

The limitations that temporary agency work poses to the application of bureaucratic and direct controls has urged scholars to consider how alternative forms of control may operate. Degiuli and Kollmeyer (2007) consider the extent to which management draws on ideological controls to get temporary workers to voluntarily adhere to the rules. Drawing on Gramsci's concepts of ideological hegemony, the authors show how temporary employment agencies normalise insecurity through the discourse of neoliberalism. These ideas demonstrate that indirect forms of control may be applicable to those working in precarious forms of employment, despite their individualisation and fragmentation. The following section reviews the literature on enterprising-selves, considering its application to the debate on the control of temporary agency work.

Enterprising discourses and enterprising-selves

The literature on enterprising-selves has emerged from the fall back of the bureaucratic organisation and the rise of flexible autonomous working practices (Vallas and Cummings, 2015), a phenomenon synonymous with the proliferation of temporary agency work (Moisander et al., 2018). The neoliberal discourse has been seen to shape humans in accordance with the principles of 'homo-economicus' in the absence of direct or repressive government controls (Foucault, 1991[1978]; Vallas and Cummings, 2015). This places particular focus on how a 'set of ideas, practices and discourses have come to shape identities as self-disciplinary and enterprising' (Sturdy and Wright, 2008: 428). Subjectivity becomes the target of control, where the intent is to 'reconstitute workers as adaptable, flexible and willing to move between activities and assignments and take responsibility for their own actions' (Storey et al., 2005: 1036). The enterprising-self explains how self-motivating and regulating individuals are produced through discourse, creating ideal self-fulfilling subjects (du Gay, 1996). Du Gay suggests that 'organisations cultivate their employees to become enterprising subjects or actors driven by the desire to optimise his or her own existence' (1996: 181). The characteristics of enterprise are distinguished from the qualities of being a 'good employee' where individuals are seen to be a 'microcosmic business' (Storey et al., 2005) developing themselves as a product or brand, and creating strategies and insights into the market in pursuit of economic gain (Sturdy and Wright, 2008; Vallas and Cummings, 2015).

The early writings on enterprising-selves have received considerable critiques. Fournier and Grey (1999) posit that du Gay's (1996) account tends to overstate the totalising nature of the discourse and Sennett (1998) suggests rather than succumbing to these discourses, subjects might interpret, adapt and contest them. Sturdy and Wright (2008) challenge the idea of individuals as docile recipients of the enterprise discourse, showing how they are active agents in perpetuating by example and practice. While Courpasson (2000) has challenged the strength of the enterprising discourse and the 'binary'

conception of enterprise and bureaucracy, arguing that despite employee purchase on enterprising discourse, bureaucratic techniques are still relevant to organisational control. Even with the growth of empirical work that evaluates the strength of the enterprise discourse and how workers may engage, contest, co-opt or perpetuate it, the research is limited to considering the effects that this has on the relationship with oneself or one's work but not the impact that this may have at a group level. In this study, we are interested in not only how the enterprising discourse is produced through organisational practice but also how it may gain purchase over individuals and be relationally reproduced between workers.

The literature has also acknowledged that individuals may engage in 'identity work' to contest, resist or adapt the enterprise discourse for their own ends (e.g. Doolin, 2002; Essers and Benschop, 2007; McCabe, 2009; Mangan, 2009). Individuals may use alternative axes of their identity (Doolin, 2002) or alternative discourses (McCabe, 2009) to subvert the enterprising discourse. For example, Essers and Benschop (2007) consider how Turkish and Moroccan migrant women engage in boundary work to negotiate an acceptable identity between culture, religion, gender and enterprise. The literature has been preoccupied with considering how individuals contest, subvert or adapt discourse; however, very little attention has been placed on how facets of individual identities may serve to galvanise enterprising ideals. Our concern with migrant workers is particularly relevant as they have been discussed in the literature as typified 'homo-economicus' (McGovern, 2007). We consider the extent to which this depiction of migrant workers serves to intensify enterprising discourses.

Finally, much of the empirical literature explores how the enterprising culture imposes its effects over professionals (Doolin, 2002; McCabe, 2009; Mangan, 2009; Sturdy and Wright, 2008), job seekers (Vallas and Cummings, 2015) or over the self-employed (Essers and Benschop, 2007). Critics have highlighted how it fails to connect with the contemporary workplace where precarity and non-standard work practice is increasingly becoming the norm (Kalleberg, 2009). This is seen as a failure of the literature to connect concepts of enterprise with the advent of precarious employment (Hatton, 2011; Kalleberg, 2011) in a context where workers increasingly need to demonstrate their employability (Smith, 1998). This need to demonstrate employability is particularly relevant to temporary agency workers where their recruitment to the agency places them into a 'microcosmic job market'. Despite insights garnered from Moisander et al. (2018) around how bio-power and the enterprising-self elicit consent from workers and sustain precarious work relationships, there is much to learn about how enterprise discourses regulate and sustain precarity in the context of low-wage temporary agency work.

Methodology

In addressing the research questions, this article draws on interviews that were collected as a part of a year-long 'covert' ethnographic study of a UK temporary employment agency, 'Staff Solutions'. Staff Solutions was selected as it is one of the leading national agencies in hospitality and catering in the UK and is typical of an organisation of this type. Along with interview data, the article presents some of the first author's observations of

the mundane cultural practices in the agency. The data selected for this article aimed to unpack the 'nuances of social stratification in informal work' (Alberti, 2014: 870) in order to gain deeper understandings of workers' experiences of control within their socio-cultural context.

This article primarily draws on interview data gathered during the research, given that they provided more focused material directly addressing workers' interpretations of control within Staff Solutions. The observations were collected during shifts, as the first author worked at the agency. The intention to research agency workers was not revealed to management as it was envisaged that this would not be welcomed as is typical for organisations that may be held up to scrutiny for the use of exploitative management practices (Luigiosi, 2006). However, after around two months in the field the researcher disclosed her research to agency workers.

Although the mainstream literature cautions against covert research practice (Homan, 1980; Warwick, 1982), the choice to use deceptive practice was driven by a consequential ethical argument, the outcome of which was to make migrant agency workers visible. As Calvey (2008) suggests, social research rarely has ethical absolutes; rather, it falls on a continuum, and therefore covert research does not necessarily constitute unethical research. The research proposal had been approved by the host-institution, yet as the literature notes, the ethics committee is abstract from what happens on the field (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004) and gives the 'illusion that moral concerns, power issues, justice and protection of other human beings has been addressed with no other need for concern' (Cannella and Lincoln, 2007: 316). The linchpin of ethically conducting the fieldwork relied on the first author's engagement in reflexive practice in and out of the field through 'an intensification of the relations to oneself as the subject of one's acts' (Foucault, 1986: 41). Pseudonyms were given to all actors in the field as well as the organisations and location to preserve anonymity; however, ethical practice was embedded in an intense reflection on all interactions in the field to gain insight into how the researcher's own power and privilege imprints the data. These ethical considerations were rooted in the decision to disclose the research intentions to migrant agency workers and subsequently in the analysis of the data. Initially, the first author had collected data based on her own observations; these were documented after each shift and reflected upon. However, as time passed, it became clear that the observations reflected the researcher's own identity and privileges, and it became difficult to give voice to the workers' while interpreting experiences on their behalf. The nature and aims of the research were revealed to fellow workers after developing a relationship with them. Revealing the research intentions to workers helped foster closer relations between the researcher and participants; the researcher was transformed from being a privileged other to a sympathetic active member within their social domain (Adler and Adler, 1987). In many ways the identity as a researcher was a less threatening one than the identity as a fellow worker; as the findings sections will show, the work environment stimulated intense competition between workers.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 41 agency workers; these were recorded, and workers provided full consent and were given the right to withdraw. Interviews were often conducted in the form of conversations while on shifts and where information was complex or difficult to remember the researcher would ask, 'Is it ok if I

jot this down?' During the fieldwork, the researcher had to develop an awareness of 'where to turn the tape off' (Calvey, 2008: 913). Participants were offered the opportunity to read the interview transcripts, which no one took up, although one worker asked to read a conference paper based on some of the early findings. This was sent via email.

The analysis of the data required a deep and reflexive acclimation into the world of agency workers. Initially, control did not arise as a theme; this was because the researcher did not experience the constraints of control in the same way that agency workers did. She was not dependent on the work for money, she had settled status in the UK, and she enjoyed many facets of socio-economic privilege that the agency workers did not. When interviewing temporary agency workers, it became clear that control, although not always labelled control, was a central issue. From the overarching theme of control, the sub-themes of insecurity, uncertainty and enterprise emerged from the data, where the researcher looked for patterns of behaviour in the field, or 'themes that elicited emotion and attention' from agency workers (Reed and Thomas, 2021: 224). Quotes, anecdotes and narratives from the data were coded with these themes; however, careful attention was given not to reduce the data to simple themes but to ensure the complexity and inter-relatedness of these themes was preserved (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). After these themes were developed from the data, a process of data complication was used, where the data were linked to concepts in the literature. For example, it was clear that insecurity was a product of the temporary employment agencies' bureaucratic management, but an antecedent of the internalisation of the discourse of enterprise. This then allowed the researchers to make connections, parallels and paradoxes between theory and data. The following section introduces the case study organisation.

Case study organisation: Staff Solutions

Staff Solutions is a nation-wide temporary employment agency that supplies workers on a temporary basis for catering and hospitality roles. The research was conducted in one UK city-based branch. Staff Solutions supplied unskilled and semi-skilled workers to several organisations, including hotels, contract catering units, restaurants and catering venues. The kinds of tasks on offer included: waiting tables, kitchen portering, kitchen assistant work, housekeeping and bar service. Around 80% of the workers signed up to Staff Solutions were migrant workers, from over 20 countries, working on different types of visas. When interviewing the workers, it was clear that most relied on agency work as their sole source of income.

Staff Solutions charged a premium to organisations by offering a flexible, reliable, contingent workforce. With no payments unless assigned to shifts and no need for office space, workers were held on the books like a costless inventory. Workers are then assigned to various catering and hospitality venues on a pre-agreed temporary basis. There is no choice in the type of work assigned and the length of temporary positions varies. Mostly, organisations use workers on a shift-by-shift basis, although on some rare occasions workers are contracted for longer periods.

Staff Solutions provides a middle-link liaison service between workers 'on the books' and organisations requiring temporary workers. In Staff Solutions, Adrian, a recruitment agent, was responsible for finding shifts from under-staffed organisations and distributing shifts to

the agency workers. For workers on Staff Solutions' books, obtaining work is by no means a given; rather, it is the outcome of an informal system of patronage and regulation that dictates the ways in which work is allocated. In the following section this process is outlined in detail.

Recruitment practices

The agency operated a practice of over-recruitment, which led to scarcity of work, competition among workers and a restricted choice of shifts. Consequently, workers often struggled to make up their weekly cumulative hours. Given that recruitment was relatively simple, and barriers to entry into the industry low, it was easy to see how Staff Solutions managed to achieve a constant influx of new recruits. Indeed, my own experience of being recruited was a straightforward one. I emailed a CV in response to an advert posted online and was called in for an interview. The interview was little more than a box ticking exercise where I filled out a work contract, provided my 'eligibility to work' documents and bank details and was asked to fill out a multiple-choice questionnaire on catering (which I failed, but Adrian overlooked this). From there I received minimal training, which consisted of being shown a mock table setting so that I could see correct placement of glassware, cutlery, napkins and side plates.

Agency workers thought that Staff Solutions 'over-recruited', effectively signing up anyone onto their books, to create a reserve workforce that was constantly in competition for shifts. As Zalia, a Portuguese migrant commented:

> Most weeks they can't give me enough shifts, like 30 hours max. Really, I need 40 for covering my bills and to send money to my children. So, I'm asking Adrian for more always but he's saying, 'I have a lot of people who want work, not just you'. But I think if everyone is asking for more and more work, why he's always bringing new people in?

Other workers had expressed similar concerns. Gloria, a Zambian migrant, had noticed 'patterns in recruitment' that had negative implications for the workforce:

> I noticed what happens here, they always taking people on, you know, they will take anyone . . . but before a peak season, so Christmas, weddings, concerts or sports events, they do a huge recruitment drive and then we never have as much work as we expected.

The consequence of over-recruitment was the creation of a tight internal labour market, and in response to this workers felt unable to turn down any offers of work. This was both due to the need to make up cumulative hours but also because of the consequences of being seen as an inflexible worker. Zalia, for example, commented that the scarcity of work had removed her choice around what shifts she could work:

> I'm really just saying 'yes' to everything, even if it's so far away or just only a short shift, not worth my time, I will say yes. If there was lots of work, I can have some choices but because it's not I just always say 'yes'.

Similarly, Maria, a Brazilian migrant, commented:

> You know it's a crap shift and you don't want it, or you can't do it for some reason, maybe you have plans, but you have to because probably you won't get another chance to work. There is no choice in this place.

The limited number of available shifts meant that Staff Solutions was able to schedule workers on shifts that were often viewed as undesirable and would otherwise have been hard to fill. However, this was only possible with the willing participation of workers who constituted themselves 'as adaptable, flexible and willing to move between activities' (Storey et al., 2005: 1036).

The internalisation of this insecurity produced by the tight labour market was even more intensely experienced by migrant workers. As Maria comments:

> My situation is not similar to the British people who can go to the government and ask for free house and free money. If I don't work, I don't pay a rent and I don't eat and I don't allowed to stay here – it's that simple!

Both Maria and Zalia, not having settled status in the UK, expressed concerns over not being able to access state assistance; a shortfall in work would be experienced as a serious hardship. Migrant workers' precarious legal and economic status in the UK served to exacerbate the internalisation of self-regulation.

Allocation of work and Adrian's 'bitchlist'

In the context of scarce and highly insecure work, the allocation of shifts became a point of contention among workers. Work was not seen to be allocated on an equitable basis, but in ways that rewarded those who were compliant with Staff Solutions' ideals of an enterprising worker. Although not explicit, there were informal, normatively understood rules that determined suitability of workers for specific jobs based on characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, race and nationality. Non-white men would be positioned back-of-house, away from the gaze of the customer. This was the same for non-white women, who were designated to housekeeping. Back-of-house roles were considered among the worst of the jobs to do in the agency because they often involved physically dirty tasks, had connotations of servitude and presented little opportunity to develop social capital. These observations were similar to McDowell et al. (2007, 2009) where race, gender and ethnicity were relevant to the organisation of labour. What differs in this case is the ability for workers to override these systems of allocation. Agency workers were able to influence the sorts of work they did and the amount of work they were offered through compliance with what was labelled by the workers as 'the bitchlist'.[1]

Adrian's 'bitchlist' – whether apocryphal or real – was a normatively understood ranking system. The criteria that determined a worker's ranked position was speculative but to be ranked high up on the 'bitchlist' was of critical importance as it had implications for the amount and quality of work received. The aim of the workers was to always be located near the top of Adrian's informal list. This required being submissive to Adrian's demands. Those at the top of the 'bitchlist' were offered greater quantities of more coveted work.

The criteria that workers saw to be crucial to their positioning on the 'bitchlist' included their own constant availability, flexibility and willingness to learn and adapt to new venues, as well as their compliance with the rules around appearance and prescribed behaviours on shifts. Adrian had made explicit that those who decline shifts would be unlikely to be on '*the top of his list*' to call to offer further work.

The 'bitchlist' had a strong controlling effect over workers, who often expressed their fear over declining work. At the end of an eight-hour shift that had started at 5 a.m., Zalia had received a call from Adrian asking whether she was available to work from 5 p.m. until midnight on a plate-waiting shift in a hotel. She accepted the work, despite her exhaustion, exclaiming: 'I don't want that shift, I'm so tired, but if I say no, probably I'm going down the bitchlist and not going to work for the rest of the week'. This desire for availability affected lives beyond work, where flexibility for Staff Solutions resulted in inflexibility in workers' personal lives. Gloria suggests:

> Even on my days off I am waiting for the phone to ring. Yesterday, I went to meet my friends in the city for a drink, but I had an orange juice because I was thinking, 'Ok, Adrian might call and I wouldn't want to turn up to a shift drunk'. I carry this sports bag everywhere with black trousers, black shoes, black shirt and a white shirt just in case I get the call. It's not that I'm worried that turning down four hours here or there will kill me – it's about being worried about what turning down shifts will lead to, sending me right down to the bottom of the bitchlist.

However, some workers saw the 'bitchlist' as a way of overcoming some of the constraints presented by their race, gender and ethnicity. Fiona, a Zimbabwean woman, describes her experiences of moving from back to front-of-house:

> Well, I'd say for my five months working with Staff Solutions I was changing dirty bed sheets and washing dishes. I would ask them to give me some other shifts in front-of-house, but it took me that long to prove I am reliable. It's incredible really. I speak English very well, I am educated more than most and he still rather give that work to some Polish who didn't even graduate high school.

Agency workers commonly acknowledged the potential of the 'bitchlist' to overcome racial, ethnic and national barriers, but also saw this as a tool of oppression more onerously exercised on non-white workers. Michael from Benin commented:

> I've earned my place as Adrian's top bitch (laughs). I started with doing everything and anything, the worst jobs and in horrible times. Now after four years I get a lot of work offered; Adrian knows I'm good, and he understands that I put [in] a lot of effort.

However, Michael also acknowledged that, 'those white guys only need to put in half the effort I do and are still at the top'.

Snitching, bitching and the enterprising-self

The 'bitchlist' served to create a highly competitive environment even when on shift and away from Adrian's gaze. In an effort to gain more shifts, 'snitching'[2] was endemic, used

as a clever ploy to demote others down the 'bitchlist'. Christina, from Romania, discussed her feelings towards other agency workers:

> Before I was telling people before I'll go out for a fag break or when I'm texting and then somehow Adrian finds out. How come? Because they are going straight back to tell him.

Christina went on to describe an occasion where another agency worker had reported her misbehaviour. She suggested that this had been part of the reason she had lost consistent day-time work in a college cafe, an outcome of her relegation from the higher positions on the 'bitchlist':

> I had that college job . . . I really loved that job. I think I was pregnant, maybe three months at the time, and I don't know why but one week my feet became so swollen so I couldn't wear my work shoes. I was wearing my trainers until I could go to town to buy new shoes that was going to be more comfortable for me. Before I even had the chance, Cecilia, who was working there with me, told Adrian about my trainers. I know that because he rung me and told me that I needed to sort out appropriate footwear.

Like Christina, Yianoulla, from Greece, reflected on an incident where she had felt that agency workers had been instrumental in ensuring that her regular work in a venue was terminated:

> I think that lots of backstabbing goes on here. I had a regular thing going in the Sunnyview Inn. I was working with two girls from Staff Solutions, and then I find one of them or maybe both of them, I don't know, told Adrian I'm late always and not so hard working, so he told me it's better to put me somewhere else.

The 'bitchlist' was divisive in many respects. It not only created compliance with the expectations of the agency but also fragmented agency workers, providing Adrian with an army of localised surveillance.

However, this competitive effort was often constructed in positive terms where workers saw the undermining of their co-workers as an enterprising exercise. Agency work was referred to by many in overtly economic Darwinistic terms. Khaled, a Moroccan agency worker, described the work environment as '*dog eat dog*' and Mario as '*each man for himself*'. In an interview, Khaled went on to describe his experiences of the competition for shifts in Staff Solutions:

> It's more or less obvious where people are on the (bitch)list, you can just ask people, 'where have you been this week' and then you know if they been to the Radley or Hotel Amici[3] you know they're at the top of the bitchlist. So, those are the ones who I'm seeing as my main competition. I'm watching them more because if they fuck up, then I'm going to take the spot (laughs).

Despite creating deep divisions between workers, competition was seen as a necessary means to an end of achieving more consistent work. Although she had expressed her frustrations, Yianoulla acknowledged that competition was a crucial and inventive way of gaining more work:

I can't blame them, I do it myself. I mean, we are all here to work, so you have to do what you have to do. You have to think of clever ways to make yourself the best and others not.

The scarcity of work coupled with the competition for the preferred work encouraged workers to self and peer-regulate. However, the ideals of competition and individualisation were often strongly linked with workers' narration of the self as an economic migrant. Alina, a Romanian woman, commented, 'I'm not here to make friends, I've come here to work and make money', thus legitimising competitive actions as a rational economic pursuit. This sentiment was echoed by many of the workers who saw such competition as a necessary means to an economic end. As Mario suggests:

I didn't come to this country with this shit weather to be more poor than I am in my own country . . . you have to compete for the work, you just have to.

Being a migrant worker therefore fed into the ideals of flexible forms of employment and Staff Solutions' desire for a hyper-competitive, flexible yet compliant worker. Migrant workers were regulated to a greater extent by these implicit controls, which intersected with their self-understandings as economic migrants and enterprising subjects. Migrant workers were tightly regulated by organisational-level controls, which augmented the appeal of the enterprising identity and in turn intensified self and peer regulation.

Discussion and conclusions

This study shows migrant agency workers are a tightly self- and peer-regulated workforce who are compliant and competitive yet offered uncertain and insecure terms and conditions in return for their labour. The enterprising discourse is a strong facet of the regulatory bricolage experienced by workers. This enterprising discourse emerged as a result of the insecurity and uncertainty instilled by Staff Solutions through over-recruitment of workers and the 'bitchlist'. Through these techniques, Staff Solutions successfully crafts a context where workers become fragmented, individualised and insecure. To this end, control is both centralised and decentralised, an argument made by Courpasson, where 'to some extent soft governance is fused with and itself governed by legitimate authority' (2000: 141). Control in this case is emergent from the temporary employment agency but only operationalised through the willing 'buy-in' from the workers who operated an informal system of peer regulation. This system explains how control is achieved in the context of complex triangulated employment relationships but also casts some doubt over the suggestion that temporary agency work offers workers some agential space to craft their own subjectivities (Garsten, 1999; Gossett, 2002). The findings suggest that there is very little room for resistance, agency or recalcitrance, even in the absence of direct organisational supervision, and this was down to migrant agency workers' wholesale purchase into enterprising discourses. From these findings, this article makes contributions to the concept of enterprising-selves, as well as empirical contributions to the work on the control of temporary agency workers.

First, the article extends the literature on enterprising-selves through an insight into how enterprising subjects are relationally produced and re-produced. This contributes to a deeper understanding of how enterprise culture is crafted, dispersed and bears regulatory effects on the individual. The current literature draws insights into how enterprising discourses are produced by the organisation (du Gay, 1996), emergent from the wider socio-cultural context (Vallas and Cummings, 2015) and promoted by the individual (Sturdy and Wright, 2008), yet fails to show how enterprise discourses are reproduced and relationally sustained. The findings in this article show how migrant temporary workers internalise insecurity and uncertainty as a norm and respond to this with an intensified self and peer-regulation. The data show how workers would accept shifts despite personal obligations, placing work at the forefront of their priorities. However, the potency of the enterprising discourse really lay in the systems of peer regulation that developed as a result of, and a precursor to, the extreme examples of competitive individualism. The workers produced direct forms of localised surveillance packaged as legitimate ways of accumulating more work. In this way, these workers demonstrate all the symptoms of being a 'microcosmic business' where they develop a competitive strategy through crafting an understanding of the market or what exactly the temporary agency and contracting organisation wants, as well as an understanding of their competitors, establishing a reputation or brand as a compliant and available worker (Sturdy and Wright, 2008). Peer regulation was the competitive strategy adopted by workers, feeding information on worker misbehaviour back to the temporary employment agency. Peer surveillance is by no means a new concept, these ideas were developed nearly three decades ago to discuss how lateral control happens in team-based, high-commitment organisations (e.g. Barker, 1993; Sewell, 1998; Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992). Yet, there has been a decline of these ideas in the context of fragmented, individualised work. This study presents challenges to the assumption that peer regulation necessarily results from a highly identified workforce. Despite the fleeting and limited interactions workers had with the agency, their identification with the enterprising discourse was the glue that held together the system of regulation. Regulating one's peers was not only an effective control but one that spread like a contagion, where workers would respond by internalising regulation and watching peers in return. Through internalisation of the enterprising discourse, temporary agency workers were competitively engaged in work and monitored their peers – essentially, they became their own captors. It is argued that Sturdy and Wright's analysis that 'individuals are not the victims but active in the promotion of enterprise through visibility and imitability of one's actions' (2008: 441), is only partially true; in fact, through the promotion of the discourse, individuals become both victims and perpetrators. Therefore, the current research on enterprising-selves provides an incomplete view on how the enterprising discourse is produced and reproduced in practice and through this study we suggest that the enterprising discourse can be relationally produced and have peer-regulatory effects.

The second contribution made is to develop greater understandings of how workers' identities may serve as a catalyst to identification with the discourse of enterprise. The literature has extensively discussed the ways in which individuals may resist (McCabe, 2009), contest (Doolin, 2002), negotiate or adapt (Essers and Benschop, 2007) enterprising discourses; however, there has been little written about how facets of individual

identities may serve to augment these discourses. This article has shown how migrant agency workers readily identify with enterprising discourses, drawing on migrant identities to legitimise their competitive behaviours. Migrant workers typified themselves as 'homo-economicus' (McDowell et al., 2009; McGovern, 2007) by expressing that they were 'only here for the money' or 'weren't here to make friends'. In many ways, this finding is unsurprising as McGovern suggests economic migrants are conceptualised as 'rational, self-seeking, amoral agents . . . motivated primarily by money and, as they are separated from their original social environments, care little about the status of their jobs, or the concerns of native-born workers' (2007: 218). This depiction of economic migrants is one that was reflected in the migrant agency workers' own discourses and one that mirrors the enterprising-self.[4] The discourse around economic migration was a strong catalyst that intensified workers' experiences of controls but also that the gendered and raced allocation of work magnified the experience of controls even further. This finding highlights the value of a more nuanced view of temporary agency workers as gendered, raced and ethnic subjects. While most of the research on control of temporary agency workers treats them as a homogeneous group (e.g. Garsten, 1999; Gossett, 2006; Gottfried, 1991), the findings of this article contribute to understanding how race, nationality and ethnicity have implications for their experiences of control.

Finally, this article contributes to crafting links between the literature on temporary agency work and enterprising-selves. Many commentators have noted the increasing chasm between the theory of enterprise and the current state of the job market (e.g. Moisander et al., 2018; Sturdy and Wright, 2008; Vallas and Cummings, 2015). The ideas of enterprising-selves have seldom been applied to precarious work (with Moisander et al., 2018 being the exception), with no application to our knowledge to temporary agency work. Through considering how low-wage, migrant, temporary agency workers are equally susceptible to the enterprising discourse, we learn that the logic of the market shows no discrimination and penetrates all facets of the labour market, yet its effects weigh more heavily on migrant workers.

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Notes

1. The 'bitchlist' was a term frequently referred to by the agency workers. The meaning of bitch here relates to the slang for someone who gets 'screwed over for money' or a 'prison bitch'

(DeBraux, 2006) who is forced into submission to curry favour with a dominant prisoner. It is worth noting the frequency of the word bitch in many of the workers' first languages, from the Polish 'kurva', Spanish 'puta', Italian 'puttana', Romanian 'curva', and so on.

2. Informing on somebody.
3. These were considered more desirable venues as they were accessibly located.
4. Although we would like to examine the idea that 'migrants are amoral agents who care little about the nature of their work' more critically, it would go beyond the scope of this article.

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