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‘Mopping up tears in the academy’ – working-class academics, belonging and the necessity for emotional labour in UK academia

Bridgette Rickett* and Anna Morris

Both of Department of Psychology, Leeds Beckett University, UK

Previous research exploring how working-class women experience UK Higher Education (HE) work has made evident recurring themes around social segregation and corresponding difficulties with feeling they belong. This paper develops this work by exploring the ways in which UK, HE based working-class women lecturers talk about their sense of belonging. It was found that, in contemporary UK HE, lecturing work is located within a marketised space where caring for students is central and the deployment of emotional labour to seen to be a necessary requirement to meet those demands. In addition, this labour is understood to be work that working-class women can readily take up, and as one of the few vehicles to enable feelings of value and belonging. However, this work is also devalued, unaccounted for and potentially harmful to those who do engage in it, therefore shoring up/ reinforcing a class and gender stratified UK academy.

Keywords: Working-Class Women Academics Belonging Emotional Labour

Introduction

Working-class women in contemporary UK HE

From the few figures made available, we can see a small rise in the percentage of academics from working-class backgrounds between 1989 – 17% (Halsey, 1988) and 2011 – 23% (Wakeling & Savage, 2015). Data also indicate that the percentage of women UK academics was 46% in 2018, a small increase of 2% from 2013 (HESA, 2019). However, despite the current focus on auditing and metricising shifting demographics in UK HE (e.g. Equality Challenge Unit: UK’s Athena Swan and the Race Charter) we have no clear, published metrics on the numbers of working-class women who work in UK HE, where they work or what roles they have. An explanation for such illiteracy, at least in the UK, is that social class continues to sit outside of the protected characteristics that are covered by the 2010 Equality Act in the UK. This is despite repeated calls from scholars, such as Pattison and Warren (2017), to make it the tenth protected characteristic (alongside age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage, civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity).

* Corresponding author’s email: B.Rickett@leedsbeckett.ac.uk

What we do know is that some working-class feminist academics, often after having experienced difficult academic journeys, have employed qualitative methods to make visible differentials in how working-class women experience themselves and their academic work life (e.g., Acker, 1992; Reay, 1998). This work has revealed that working-class women's academic lives are littered with classism and sexism (Langhout, Drake & Rosselli, 2009), while different processes of social segregation enable persistent devaluing and, sometimes, disregard (e.g. Reay, 2004), and bodies and practices are policed and regulated to fit masculinised, middle-class norms (e.g. Raisborough & Adams, 2008). Arguably, these practices of division and exclusion continue to function to help maintain and justify inequalities for working-class women. Undoubtedly, rather than the joyous and fruitful journey sold through meritocracy discourse, moving from one social class setting to another involves struggling with feelings of belonging, identity and authenticity (Lucey, Melody, & Walkerdine, 2003; Reay, 2004), leaving some severed from both themselves as working-class women and the middle-class academic body and being (see Hey, 2003; Mahony & Zmroczek, 2005).

Contemporary context, discourse and higher education

The recent dramatic shifts in the social, economic and political landscape of UK HE mean that we cannot assume any difficulties currently faced are analogous to those experienced, reported and theorised in this earlier scholarship. In fact, some characteristics of recent shifts may shape working-class women's working lives as academics in such a uniquely classed and gendered manner that they may have registered the impact more than most.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, academics were already noting that early career researchers and lecturers joining higher education in the 1990s were entering a very different system to those who joined in the 1970s and this was shifting academic identities. For instance, Henkel (2000) had argued governmental policy has forced a profound shift away from core values such as academic freedom, autonomy and purpose. While other writers have noted that this shift, at least in Europe, has been towards an inward-looking identity which concerns itself with efficiency, cost effectiveness and the importance of having a 'competitive edge' (Evans & Nixon, 2015, p. 14). At the same time, attention was directed at asking how inequalities of social class and gender might be implicated within particular processes such as quality assurance auditing and 'new' managerialism (e.g. Hey & Bradford 2004; Morley, 2003). In addition, the beginning of the 'restructuring wheel', reinforced by the seemingly innovative and forward thinking discourse of modernisation (Giroux, 1988), has been argued to have led to a re-masculinising of central leadership rhetoric and practice while professional teaching became increasingly casualised, feminised and professionalised (Saunderson, 2002). Simultaneously, we have seen an 'audit explosion' in higher education (Morley, 2017; Strathern, 2000), and the refashioning of higher education as a market-force has been instrumental in sculpting new forms of relationships, knowledge and academic labour.

From 2000 onwards, scholars contended that universities had now become the next neoliberal project, giving rise to dramatic expansion and a focus on 'widening participation' initiatives, marketisation, financialisation and the 'prestige economy' (see Morley, 2018). As Deem (2014) wrote, a discourse of modernisation, buttressed by the imperative for strategic change, was deployed to change 'hearts and minds', to

pull academics into this ‘new world’, and to shape selfhood and work practices in distinct ways. The dominance of this discourse also produced a shift in knowledge work, where management of the production of knowledge was at the centre of the ‘audit explosion’. As working-class women grew up to become academics within this swiftly shifting move to a ‘modernised’ terrain, they began to feel the requirement to take up and reproduce the discourses of neoliberalism within their own constructions of themselves as academics. Research has suggested that this required a shift in the self was often marked with confusion and bewilderment for some. For example, the useful work by Archer (2008) reports that some of the working-class women academics’ interviewees in her study initially saw the world of academia as a ‘dream’ space, where colleagues work together in their pursuit of the intellectual production of knowledge. However, the contemporary, ‘modernised’ quasi-commercial academic world they went on to inhabit was therefore incomprehensible to them.

The neoliberal project produced the rise of what Cribb and Gewirtz (2012, p. 339) call ‘gloss and spin’, where marketing discourse demanded that feelings, words, bodies and practices become ‘polished’ to reflect university level aims. Following discursive psychology arguments, the concern for theorists began to focus on interrogating how, in contemporary UK HE, discourses focused on emotion, and how these often functioned to include, exclude and control selfhood into an idealised emotionally embodied self. As such, authors such as Leathwood and Hey (2009) drew on post-structuralist-influenced analysis to further demonstrate that emotions are a site for social control within UK HE.

When considering a genealogy of emotion in higher education, it is clear that working-class women’s identities were, and are, constituted in relation to emotional discourse in very particular ways. For example, recent work noted the paradox of binary opposition of rationality and emotion in intellectualised western thought that has been pervasive in organisations such as higher education (Putnam & Ashcraft, 2017). This is not coincidental, nor is it neutral, but rather positioned in a hierarchical way that values the embodiment and the performance of one over the other. This traditional power positioning of rationality over emotion, in addition to gendering of the binary through the positivist and dualist notion of knowledge production, has continued to favour masculinised bodies and practices, while a current post-binary gender movement may allow us to theorise possibilities for thinking beyond this dualism (Veijola & Jokinen, 2018).

Prior to the wider cultural turn to emotion and the self (see Woods, 2012), there had been a lack of concern and attention to the study of emotion in academia. This had mirrored the traditional construction of it ‘as an emotion-free zone’ (Leathwood & Hey, 2009, p. 429), where its ideal inhabitants reflect the masculinised notion of rationality while emotion is maligned as the property of other. However, following the turn to emotion in the social sciences, scholars have recently argued that, while emotion-free may continue to be a dominant value in HE, emotions, as part of ‘affective ecologies’, or our emotional relationships with each other and the world we work in, are also purposely evoked (e.g., shock) to ensure compliance (e.g., through self-preservation rather than collective action) to change implementations. This leads Morley (2012) to argue that affective ecologies, such as those emerging from austerity ‘threaten to reinforce social hierarchies and opportunity structures’ (p. 354).

Scholars such as Ahmed (2004), Ogbonna and Harris (2004) and Gill (2018) have also viewed contemporary higher education landscapes as highly emotionally-charged, largely a result of the heightened intensification of the academic labour process and exacerbated by the multiple and sometimes conflicting demands of

various ‘stakeholders’. While other work has drawn our attention to the increased requirements for emotional labour as a response to initiatives that aim to reduce costly estate by moving academics into shared offices. For example, while emotions were made invisible in individual offices, in shared, open offices they could be revealed and therefore discovered via the shifting from private to public, therefore requiring academics to engage in considerable emotional labour in order to retain privacy and be deviant from othering discourse around emotional displays (Van Marrewijk & Van den Ende, 2018).

In sum, as Blackmore’s (1996, 2004) influential work on the management of emotion has theorised, while some emotions are to be hidden as private feeling, other emotions have been appropriated and commodified into emotion work demands. For example, since the mid-90s, the university environment has required emotional labour in order for academics to increasingly engage in pastoral care. Research aimed at mapping the experience of this increased requirement (Laws & Fiedler, 2012) has reported that academics often have unplanned experiences of students requiring emotional support, they often found the management of emotions in some face-to-face encounters stressful, and both of these experiences left them feeling underequipped and overwhelmed. Arguably, these experiences are also in conflict with the requirement for the ‘polishing’ of the academic subject and the need to produce caring bodies that put aside, manage, and mask feelings in order to labour in the pursuit of the happy student. Both the discourse of students as customers in the new marketised terrain, and the ‘student mental health crisis’ have been theorised as having produced a demand for an expansion of emotional labour (Brown, 2016; Hughes, 2005; Macaskill, 2013) from the performance of skills into the production of a worker’s total identity.

Academic scholarship on emotional labour has allowed us to reveal the hidden, often devalued labour that is a longstanding and increasingly necessary feature of multiple organisational demands generally associated with traditionally working-class workspaces. For example, historically, much work has focused on cashiers and checkout operators (e.g., Rafaeli, 1989), flight attendants (e.g., Hochschild, 1983; Taylor & Tyler, 2000), and workers at the Disney theme park (e.g., Van Maanen, 1992). In addition, much of this work has drawn on the assumption that emotions are a problem for capitalism, as such, they must be controlled, regulated, and policed (James, 1989). While Sara Ahmed (2004; 2010) refers instead to ‘affective economies’ where emotions are produced, hold value, and shape relations between people, places and things which ‘become sticky, or saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension’ (2004, p. 11).

Traditional emotional labour scholarship has also highlighted the gendered nature of labour, equating it to the invisibility of emotional work carried out by many women (James, 1989), thereby especially significant in the social reproduction of gendered power and relations. As Reay (2004) argued, emotion can be viewed as a kind of emotional capital, which women are expected to be able to draw on and ‘spend’ it on others as a kind of ‘labour of love’. While other work has made it clear that not only is emotional labour gendered, it is also classed. Historically, working-class women have had narrow options for potential employment, ranging from motherhood to being in a caring profession or services (Taylor, 2012), while, in recent history, as argued above, other types of work they carried out had an inherent demand for emotional labour. Therefore, it may be difficult for us to position ourselves as successful if our labour doesn’t include explicit caring for others and/or the need to emotionally labour. For example, research has found that within some working-class settings, such as door

supervision work (Rickett & Roman, 2013), the ability to enact the labour of suppressing and masking one's own feelings in order to care for others is constructed in an idealised manner for working-class women. Importantly, this constructed ideal also allows for a classed re-writing of normative ideology around the maternalised woman which can disrupt other gendered ideals (such as women as weak and vulnerable) to enable status and respect from fellow workers. However, such counter discourses may not translate to a traditionally middle-class academic setting where research has found that those who locate themselves in feminised discourses of caring and compassion are directly in conflict with concepts of masculinity associated with leadership and power within the academy unpack? (Atkins & Vicars, 2016).

In sum, we argue that exploring contemporary discourses of emotion (and caring as requiring emotional management practice) in HE will allow us to engage critically with the neoliberal projects that deploy such discourses to police and regulate. Unequal relations inherent in discourses of emotion shape the value and status assigned to the expression/lack of expression of certain emotions by regulating which ones we can feel and/or enact and who is (dis)allowed to do so. Therefore, clearly examining the role of power, and ideology in (re)created emotion discourses helps us to understand if and how minority, often discriminated against groups, such as working-class women, are differentially impacted upon.

To enable this focus, we adhere to the understanding and analysis of intersectionality that coincides with post-structuralist arguments (Butler, 1999), and follows Foucauldian understandings of power (see Knudsen, 2007). As such, gender and class articulate through the deconstruction of multi-layered meanings that are shifting and often contradictory and identities are subjected to conditions surrounding their contextualization within these (Butler, 1999). In sum, our aims are to use a post-structural and feminist-informed discourse analysis to identify classed and gendered discourses of emotion, to explore how they are reproduced, and also how they are negotiated, contested and performed within the UK HE academic work. In addition, we aim to gain an understanding of emotional labour by examining how practices are both controlled and regulated through gendered and classed constructions.

Details of study

To address these main aims, we interviewed 12 academics who met three criteria; they identified as a woman, as working-class, and who currently worked as an academic in UK HE. None of the participants knew each other, and they worked in a broad range of disciplines including Psychology, Criminology, English, Design and Technology, History, and Economics in HE institutions in the North of England. It is beyond the scope of the current paper to provide a comprehensive review of the debates and issues around how researchers may define and measure class (for fuller discussions see Bullock & Limbert, 2009; Rubin et al., 2014). In brief, we agree with Walkerdine's earlier arguments (1996) for more holistic conceptualisations of social class beyond traditional (perhaps simplistic) notions. Holt and Griffin (2005) argue that in contemporary Western societies, a person's social class cannot necessarily be read from standard measures, such as Social Economic Status, and often represents a complex interplay of a person's life experiences, family background, the social networks that they are part of, their language and speech style, lifestyle, mode of appearance and so on (Kraus & Stephens, 2012) Therefore, people's 'subjective' sense of which social class they belong to is often at odds with more formalised,

objective measures. Bearing these arguments in mind, and the post-structuralist position we took, it followed that we should use self-definition as a measure of class (and all other characteristics).

To give further context, our sample were also: mainly white (8), with the remaining identifying as Black, Pakistani and 'mixed-race' and most identifying as Straight/ Heterosexual, with 4 identifying as LGBTQAI+. In addition, ages ranged from 28 to 62 years old and all stages of the academic career were represented. Perhaps unsurprisingly, while our sample was diverse, social class dominated interview data. When prompted to talk about ethnicity or sexuality participants reported that being working-class was central to them and others (see extract 8 below for an example). This could potentially be accounted for by the desire to talk about the 'embarrassing and unsettling subject' (Sayer, 2005, p. 1) of class driving motivations to take part and a centring of being working-class for these particular participants.

This small sample size allowed us to conduct in-depth interviews, enabling the generation of a wealth of in-depth data consistent with discourse analysis methodology. As Sandelowski (1995) posits, a small sample size is not an issue in discourse analysis as the interest is in the variety of ways the language is used. However, while we note it is possible to use a single person's narrative (e.g., Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) within qualitative research, given our aims, we followed their suggestion of between four and ten participants for a substantial piece of research.

We recruited our sample from a broad range of Departments across 17 institutions in the North of the UK. All interviews were semi-structured, carried out on a 'one-to-one' basis, consisting of questions constructed in order to extract narrative accounts of experiences, and lasted an average of 90 minutes, and were recorded with prior permission using a digital recording device. Pseudonyms were selected by the women which we will use from this point onwards. The interviews were carried out by one of two researchers, who both identified as Straight/ Heterosexual, white, working-class women.

In keeping with a feminist and post-structurally informed focus (e.g., Rickett & Roman, 2013), we were interested in the way that gendered and classed power relations intersect and reside in discourse and what potential implications these have for aiding/hindering equal relations. More specifically, we aimed to identify overarching discourses deployed by the speakers around emotional labour, gender, and class. A main concern was the speaker's positioning within these discourses, the possible implications for subjectivity and practice, and what such discourses might tell us about the wider social conditions within which these (and other) working-class women are situated. To this end, text was read through several times and then 'chunked' (a section of text that centres on a particular topic/issue). All chunks were coded using Nvivo themes where each chunk is labelled as a theme that reflects the words or phrases used repeatedly in them or that best represent what is being described (e.g., 'students as children'). We then identified ways in which these themes were being discussed (e.g., academics needed to be like a mother). Finally, we looked for similar ways of talking, first within each theme, then across the different themes, examining different ways that femininities and class were constructed. Finally, two main, over-arching identified discourses were identified: 'being a fish out of water', and 'labouring to mop up the tears'.

Being a fish out of water

We found that discourses around (un)belonging dominated the data, profound feelings of not belonging were often talked about and often presented as manifesting from a 'complex' that determined feelings of unworthiness. Feelings of exclusion were presented as unsurmountable, and stories were told of the conspicuous marking of working-class women as not embodying the cultural capital required, leaving 'fitting in' as a strategy to reduce profound feelings of unbelonging, difficult or even impossible.

Extract 1: Ellie

'I mean I do feel still a bit like a fish out of water because I would say that I'm still a rarity in a way so, but certainly I don't think I would say any of my immediate colleagues have had or have the same background ... I find it easier to get on with the support staff and have a chat about random things more than sometimes I do with the academic staff.'

Extract 2: Maddie

'I think I feel intimidated at times, I don't feel as clever, I don't feel as knowledgeable, and I don't feel as capable in comparison to some of my colleagues.'

Extract 3: Therese

'What I'm saying might sound intelligent but the way I say it might not be the most eloquent way ... and maybe that's just a perception thing or maybe I perceive I've got to do that, or whether it's like that sort of idea of imposter syndrome.'

Extract 4: Natalie

'But imposter syndrome is this thing that makes you feel like you're not good enough sort of thing and I think working-class sort of ties into that massively because I wasn't brought up speaking in an academic manner.'

In Extract 1, Ellie presents her workplace as socially segregated, where the lack of other working-class academics leaves her and her 'background' othered and while 'support staff', also marked by their apartness, provide more welcoming, effortless, relationships. It is noteworthy that, for the most part, relationships between working-class women (and assumed middle-class) academics were only explicitly talked about in regard to examples of othering experiences. The profound sense of classed alienation was often seen to be caused by a noticeable lack of cultural capital, leaving them unable to acceptably perform 'cleverness'. Interestingly, Knights and Clarke (2014) have recently theorised that there is a necessity for academics to work hard to present a knowledgeable self despite what Ford, Harding and Learmonth (2010) argue to be the 'sheer impossibility of being as skillful and wise as is required' (p. 76). However, while research has found that, for the middle-classes, the knack of performing cleverness defers potential as well as entitlement (Lucey & Reay, 2002), cleverness collides with classed neoliberal discourses of meritocracy to produce the deserving and undeserving citizen, determined by the (in)ability to adequately embody 'cleverness'.

For example, Maddie (Extract 2) presents herself as not being able to demonstrate she is 'knowledgeable' enough, or capable enough, and being intimated into not feeling as clever. While, Therese (Extract 3) questions her feelings of feeling othered ('or whether it's like that sort of idea of imposter syndrome').

The assumptions around a deficient self are sewed tightly into the genealogy of the discourse of 'imposter syndrome' which originates from early psychoanalytic explanations that emphasize the intrapsychic obstacles that explain women's fear of

success (e.g., Clance & Imes, 1978; Horner, 1970). However, what may be construed as an individual's private emotion (such as anguish associated with an 'imposter syndrome') may be inseparable from the structural and power relations that produce them and should, as such, be viewed as both individually and organisationally situated (Martin, Knopoff, & Beckman, 1998). Indeed, the uncritical reproduction of a discourse that individualises and pathologises such pain avoids uncomfortable questions about both the extent to which institutional academic cultures work to constrain and disrupt such feelings of 'belonging' (Read, Archer, & Leathwood, 2003), and the consequent injuries sustained. In addition, given the increase in the numbers of minority academics, such as working-class women, evidence suggests these feelings are increasing and more widely shared (e.g. Peteet et al., 2014). In sum, it serves neoliberalism well to neatly blame the increasing numbers of academics feeling unwelcomed rather than asking about the cultures and practices which make a growing number of us feel unwelcome (Thompson, 2015). A reading of both Therese's and Natalie's use of the term 'imposter syndrome' is that it aids sense-making around why they feel so out of place, while enabling the production of a collective of other 'affect aliens' (Ahmed, 2010), such as fellow working-class 'sufferers'. Indeed Breeze (2018) argues that feelings of being an imposter can be a shared resource where 'othered' workers can connect and be critical of standards, therefore creating space to resist the discourse of the deficient self.

As such, counter to individualised responsibilisation of unbelonging, we were also told many stories that held culturally-embedded, classist and sexist othering to account.

Extract 5: Therese

'I did meet colleagues at a restaurant when I first got the job and they thought I was the waitress. They walked in and I'm sat at a table and they asked me 'oh you know we've got a table booked and you know the names this??? Review this sentence?' and I was kind of like I think I'm supposed to be on that table with you (both laugh) it was a bit awkward but we laugh about it now.'

Extract 6: Gina

'There is very much like a mansplaining like what working-class is, and you're like yes I know, their just like no, no, you don't know what it's like and you're just like well and then when you tell them ... they have a very stereotypical idea of, you know you can't be a decent normal human being.'

In extract 5, Therese further reiterates that her class and gender mark her apart, as less than, in this case, a waitress who ought to be 'serving' her colleagues. While humour ('we laugh about it now'), often seen as a signifier of good relations (Rickett & Roman, 2013), here it is used to minimise and disrupt the discomfort of being the recipient of such sexist and classist assumptions. Arguably, Therese is left with little space to permit expressions of resistance without stripping her of the identity of someone who is liked and accepted.

Many of our participants also reported the difficulty of getting classism acknowledged and their classed experiences heard. For example, in extract 6, Gina deftly re-constructs the contemporary, feminist-led term for the patronising and dismissive practice of 'mansplaining', reconceiving it as 'class-plaining'. This is a discourse around the embodiment of class determining a lack of belonging, while avenues to break silence on class and classism are limited and colleagues continue to

reproduce de-humanising and segregating constructions of the working-class ('you know you can't be a decent normal human being').

Labouring to mop up the tears

In contrast, while the first discourse plays with responsibilisation narratives to question the reason and cause of feelings of belonging, this second discourse repositions contemporary academic work as care-taking work where the women we interviewed could consider themselves as worthy, authentic and valuable citizens in the a new work-intensified and stratified HE terrain.

First, for Louise, the provision of emotional support to students is presented as a central part of the role of an academic and that that has been made 'explicit' to her. While in Extract 8, Ellie locates the requirement as 'modern', drawing on modernising discourses that see these kinds of intensifications in labour demands as both progressive and able to erode the traditional 'elitist' segregation between students and academics. Therefore, on first reading, this discourse is one of emancipation from middle-class, masculinised practices of social segregation in HE.

Extract 7: Louise

'Erm, yeah its part and parcel of the job, right, ... providing emotional support for your students whether that's sort of explicit ... or sort of implicit.'

Extract 8: Ellie

'I think that that's (her class) probably more important actually (than being a woman or LGB)... weirdly because I think that coming from that sort of background makes me more down to earth and approachable and I speak, you know the one thing in academia that's been a real problem I think for many years is this perception of elitism that has persevered ... that has created a barrier between the students ... so the fact that were are in a more modern kind of world.'

Extract 9: Maddie

'Yeah, because I think I'm much more down to earth, you know I'm not so bound up in erm, I mean it doesn't always work but yeah, I am much more pragmatic, much more down to earth, more approachable maybe.'

Indeed, in the discourse, countering the marking of them as deficient, embodied cultural capital was identified as the reason they can deliver student support so well, thereby creating some space for empowerment, a sense of belonging and, arguably, producing discursive resistance to the authority of the masculine emotion regime (Lewis, 2008). Ellie centres her class as 'more important (than being a woman or LGB) weirdly' in determining whether she can be a worthy, highly valued citizen in this 'modern' HE context (Extract 7). Here then class associated 'skills' are presented as valuable for the demands of the time and symbolising modernity and progress. While Maddie agrees that this social and emotional capital ensures students see her as more 'approachable' more 'down to earth' than her middle-class colleagues (presented as the unnamed other). In turn, middle-class colleagues were explicitly drawn as old-fashioned, unworldly and lacking the emotional resilience to deliver student support. Gina (Extract 10) vividly caricatures this well, where she tells a story of a colleague getting visibly emotional ('nearly crying and getting really upset')

presenting this to be both unwarranted and caused by emotional fragility seen to be typical of her unworldly, middle-class background.

Extract 10: Gina

‘My colleague ... started getting really upset about something she was talking about and ...erm but she started nearly crying and getting really upset and I said why are you crying and getting upset about this ... she has a very different background to me so she would of come up through the whole sort of Oxbridge kind of route.’

However, despite the emancipatory potential this discourse enables, most of the women we interviewed also lamented both the emotional and professional impact the requirement to deliver emotional labour had on them and the unfair gendered distribution of the under-valued workload associated with it.

Extract 11: Jo

‘The bit that most impacts negatively on my wellbeing is the, what’s the word, the lack of respect to some extent for things that I think are very valuable, crucial, important but they’re not in an academic...I find that they’re very undervalued.’

While the necessity and importance of providing emotional care-taking is largely unquestioned in this discourse, Jo does seek to highlight the emotional injuries sustained (“impact” on “well-being”) as being as a result of “lack of respect” afforded to both the work and the people who carry it out, producing the unworthy subject. Contemporary universities, re-positioned as service providers, expect academics to perform emotional labour in order to achieve both student satisfaction (which is metricised and deployed to attract students), and profit (through successful student recruitment; Koster, 2011). However, as others have found (e.g. Leathwood, 2004) women lecturers felt emotional labour, and any pain and anguish associated with it is also invisible, therefore unacknowledged and unrewarded,

Extract 12: Louise

‘Well it’s detrimental to my personal research agenda, (both laugh) yeah, emotional wellbeing no but to my professional wellbeing sometimes.’

Extract 13: Therese

‘But I do know a lot of female colleagues who are very much expected to provide a lot of additional emotional support to students and do that and it’s not captured within the time sheets ... and it’s not rewarded’

Further, this “uncaptured” necessity to deliver emotional labour through student support, is positioned as “very much expected” from women, leaving women feeling “lumbered”.

Extract 14: Maddie

‘Student a will tell student b and c that they were really good so students b and students c will go and see them because they kind of get a positive, it’s a bit like Tripadvisor oh they’re really good at that, so that means that they get lumbered, not lumbered that’s the wrong word because I think we all want to make sure our students are looked after.’

In extract 14, Maddie keenly uses a disruptive and parodying narrative of the service review (Vásquez, 2014) where ‘customer’ experience is central and weaponised through hierarchical metrics for profit, ‘customers’ are ‘put first’ and ‘services’ rated highly gain more ‘customers’ and thereby more profit. Here she is the service/product, the students the product reviewers, and a space for resistance is created. However, this does require some hefty hedge work to avoid positioning herself as someone who doesn’t want to enact such “valuable” and “part of the job” work, or as someone who doesn’t care about students “being looked after”. In sum, the policing and regulatory function of overarching discourse of ‘labouring to mop up the tears’ for working-class women such as Maddie, squeezes out the space to other themselves from it while retaining commitment to it, even to the acknowledged detriment of themselves.

Concluding remarks

This research used discourse analysis to explore how the reproduction of traditional power hierarchies in UK Higher Education worked hand-in-hand with the contemporary marketised terrain to produce both an exclusion from and access to the sense of belongingness for working-class, female academics. Throughout and between the two discourses identified, an overarching story of (un)belonging is fashioned. Here, overarching discourse constructs feelings of alienation as emanating from individuals rather than organisations, while both shared feelings of exclusion and the deployment of emotional labour are seen as opportunities for belonging in an otherwise exclusive terrain. In addition, within these discourses, classed and gendered identities are constructed as being key determinants of why some people are both excluded and required to deploy emotional work more than others. This politics of belonging comprises specific political projects which construct (un) belonging to particular collective selfhood that also meet specific institutional level aims in a modern university. What is revealed here is the extent to which working-class women academics both conform to and resist othering discourse. It is over simplistic for us to view reproduction/conformity and resistance as polarized and discrete. As it has been pointed out by Day, Johnson, Milnes & Rickett (2010), it is difficult to define some expressions of agency as either ‘reproduction’ (e.g. of oppressive norms) or ‘resistance’ and that the two often work simultaneously. What is betrayed here is the extent to which institutional academic cultures work to constrain and disrupt feelings of ‘belonging’ in classed and gendered ways, in addition to the complex and fraught manner in which those same discourses can be challenged and co-opted to distance the self from feelings of isolation and marginalisation.

To conclude, this paper aims to bring new insights into the uneven distribution of the impact of contemporary UK HE lecturing work increasingly located within both a marketised and a work-intensified work-space. Within these spaces, working-class women in our study continue to feel unwelcome. They draw on potentially individualising accounts, such as an ‘imposter syndrome’, for these feelings while simultaneously seeking to centre collective identities that can resist othering expectations by drawing attention to classism within UK HE as central to the process of being made to feel unwelcome. In addition, the ‘modern’ requirement to provide student support through deployment of emotional labour is both understood as a vehicle to enable feelings of belonging and value for working-class women, yet also

as something that is (de)valued and divisive according to intersecting classed and gendered power differentials.

Moving forward, first, it is now crucial that feminists seek to be critical about the constraining power of ‘modernising’ discourse that steers the necessity to engage in emotional labour and the unequal impact this has on how certain minority academics are valued and understood. Second, this research must work to make visible the silencing and disappearing of such labour which allows social segregation to continue. Third, we need now to attend to the lived and experienced feelings of both unbelonging and the emotional injuries sustained through the enactment of this labour carried out to claim rightful belonging.

As feminist discourse analysts influenced by poststructuralist theory, we acknowledge the limitations of our ability to meet this aim using current methods. We agree with recent feminist concerns over power, agency, and resistance that have drawn attention to the absence of participants’ first-hand accounts in discursive work (McKenzie-Mohr & Lafrance, 2014). Finally, we feel that the ‘personal’ and ‘political’ are inextricable, and, in pursuit of this final aim, are making a case for putting the ‘personal’ into broader discursive frameworks of understanding to capture this interplay by prioritizing voice, and inviting new and politicized feminist readings of power, agency, and resistance around feelings of belonging, where the voices of participants remain central to the discursive accounts of researchers (Thompson, Rickett & Day, 2018).

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