Hostile Encounters

Fig. 4.1 'Mask'

Introduction

Dominant discourses about social mobility focus on its expected positive effects i.e. equality of opportunity; higher incomes and better health outcomes. Upward mobility is presented as a way to "free" oneself (Reay 2017: 114) from the "baggage" attached to 'being' working-class (Friedman 2016b: cited in Bentley 2020: 64). Social mobility has a "neoliberal vocabulary of aspiration, ambition and choice" (Reay 2017: 112), where the notion that talent and effort determine individuals' place in the social hierarchy still persists (Alon and Tienda 2007: 489 cited in Bentley 2020: 52). Little is presented to contradict the advantages of upward social mobility.

Not Fitting In

Ryan and Sackrey (1984) highlighted some of the difficulties faced when they referred to the sense of anxiety and unease inherent in the working-class experience when one achieves social mobility. One way that this was expressed by my respondents was in statements that alluded to imposter syndrome (IS). Deb's comment about it being *"only a matter of time before I'm found out"* being typical. Cisco (2020) explains that these feelings of IS can have tremendous consequences for the sufferers, from insomnia, and severe depression, to an inability to enjoy one's own success. I do not mean to imply that imposterism is something experienced only by working class academics, as we know that an estimated seventy percent of high achievers report these feelings at some time in their career (Buckland 2017). The best-selling author, Neil Gaiman, reflecting on his own experiences suggested "if Neil Armstrong felt like an imposter, maybe *everyone* did" (Blyth 2018). But Maddie Breeze (2019) explains it well when she describes imposter syndrome as being 'a public feeling' that is intersectional and situated with those without power. While examples of IS were noted within my cohort, when I delved deeper, commentary from respondents tended to focus on whether they 'fitted in'. And as I discuss later in this chapter, was linked with various, hostile encounters.

Almost all respondents, irrespective of personal characteristics, subject area, and to a lesser degree, institution, felt they were not 'natural' academics (Mewburn 2017). Beverley Skeggs (1997), when discussing her own experiences as a working-class woman in academia, talked about "not getting it right", adding "you are never absolutely sure what 'getting it right' would be" (ibid.: 130–131). Throughout my interviews the same theme reoccurred:

I don't 'fit in'. My accent, my clothes, I don't share the same sense of humour as my middle class colleagues. [Belinda, a lecturer in Social Policy at a red brick institution]

When respondents were asked to elaborate on why they felt they did not 'fit in', they referred to aspects of their 'presentation' such as accent, clothes, and sense of humour. As hexis is the physical embodiment of habitus the dispositions of middle-class people are coded inherently 'right', inherently 'tasteful' (Lawler 1999: 6), while the working classes carry the 'marks' of their impoverishment (Charlesworth 2000) on their body. One's social history is displayed by one "deportment, stance, gait, gestures, etc." (Jenkins 2000: 75). My respondents referred to various examples of how their bodily hexis manifested, with accent being cited most often.

The 'Wrong' Accent

One's grammar, semantics and vocabulary may vary, but an accent is something particular to the locality in which its speakers reside. Linguistic prejudice has been documented against speakers of regional dialects and various racial or ethnic groups. In a survey of attitudes towards 38 different British accents, Indian accents received low ratings (Sharma 2019). In her interview, Saira, a senior research fellow, also an Indian working-class academic said that her 'strong' Indian accent had been commented on when giving a presentation. There is a long tradition of using "brown voice" for caricature. 'Apu', a recurring character in the animated TV series The Simpsons has long been seen as a racist stereotype and Donald Trump's reported mockery of Narendra Modi's accent being yet another high-profile example (Amin 2018). When Saira highlighted this linguistic prejudice, she was greeted with accusations of being oversensitive. As we will see later in this chapter, this is a typical response faced by ethnic minorities.

My respondents also reported being stigmatised for their regional accents, particularly if they were 'northern' or 'welsh':

I presented at a UK conference, the top scientific one in my field. An audience member puts up her hand and says: "I'm finding it very hard to follow you as you are talking in a regional manner". Upset I mentioned it to my supervisor

who was at the same conference. Rather than be sympathetic he asked if I could tone it down? [Polly, a lecturer in Medical Sciences at a red brick institution]

I moved for a Lectureship, and on the first day I had two colleagues kindly 'advise' me that I may want to 'work on' my 'strong' Welsh accent if I intended to teach students. [Catrin, a lecturer in Community Health, at a red brick institution]

In Jamie's interview she mentioned that a colleague *"jokingly said my keynote will need subtitles".* Donnelly et al. (2019) reported that teachers they interviewed were told, advised, or felt a need to modify their accents in order to be perceived more 'professional'. In one example, a teacher from Bristol modified his accent to avoid being perceived as a 'yokel who lives on a farm'. Coogan (2019) in an article for the Times Higher Education commented that our "ingrained linguistic habits" can mark us as being inferior. He reports feeling the need to say something clever when he meets someone for the first time to "overcome the initial impression that [his] accent creates". Coogan (2019) asks "Is my Salford accent, cultivated on a council estate, really "wrong*"?* Larcombe (2016) has a similar experience, reporting that an irritant he faces is that people often say to him: "you don't sound like a professor".

The association between accent and social class in Britain has a long history. Hiraga (2005) found speakers of urban accents like Birmingham were perceived to be the lowest in status measures such as wealth and intelligence, whereas speakers with received pronunciation (RP) were classified highest. One's language—accent, intonation, style etc.—can reveal the class-mediated relationship of different groups to their social context. Language use reflects the socially constructed relationship between people and their position in the social world. Betraying our class positioning by its very utterance (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977: 117). Bourdieu and Passeron (1977: 116–167) cite class differences: where bourgeois language is abstract and formal, working-class language, influenced by a life of material deprivation, is "common", and "vulgar" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 60). Two interviewees said that they had been 'jokingly' referred to as Vicki Pollard, a comedy character in Little Britain who is a single-mother teenage delinquent, or chav, from the West Country. Such comments revealed a class-based prejudice of working-class life.

Katie Edwards, speaking in a BBC radio programme about accentism discussed that after giving a conference presentation, an audience member told her that she really enjoyed her paper but it took a while to "get over" her accent. This seems an incredibly rude comment to make, but it spurred Edwards on to interview other academics to hear about their experiences. She spoke to 20 academics from Russell Group institutions and found accentism was rife in as every respondent had negative experiences (Edwards 2019). Binns (2019) mentions similar issues among her respondents, as interviewees reported being mocked due to the way they spoke (p. 67). Among my own respondents, those from Russell group institutions were more likely to report negative experiences, compared with interviewees from post 1992 institutions. I asked a number of interviewees who had worked both 'types' of institution about their experience. Most reported that they felt more comfortable in post 1992 institutions, for instance Sal, a lecturer in Social Studies at a traditional institution, said this was because her accent did not stand out in the same way that in had in the elite institutions, she had worked in. Deb, who also worked in different 'types' of institutions, felt those working in the elite institutions may have had more difficult experiences as she noticed that colleagues in post 1992s had known each other throughout their educational trajectory.

> *Many of my colleagues did their BA, and then postgraduate qualifications together, before becoming staff members. They live in the local area so are less likely to be snooty about someone's accent.*

A regional accent could be an advantage with some students as they may feel more comfortable with lecturers who 'sound like them'. From a teaching perspective, it is important to ensure that students 'see' diverse academics involved in teaching, research and administration. I return to this discussion in Chap. 5.

The 'Wrong Sense of Humour'

Humour, a basic part of human interaction, is a way in which people can make light of the difficult situation or establish shared experiences. Nurses who took part in a study by Ghaffari et al. (2015) reported that humour affected patient outcomes positively and promoted nurses' physical and mental health. Laughing together is a sign of belonging (Kuipers 2010),

but my respondents noted that their sense of humour was another cultural marker of class distinction:

> *My sense of humour is quite self-deprecating, and my colleagues don't seem to get it.* [David]

If a sense of humour is not shared it can be difficult to build up or maintain a relationship (Kuipers 2010). When canvassing opinion at the 2009 Edinburgh Festival Fringe, Friedman (2011) observed differences in humour. He categorised his respondents as having either 'low cultural capital' (LCC); 'mixed cultural capital' (MCC) or high cultural capital' (HCC) (p. 352). When evaluating preference in comedy HCC respondents used terms such as 'intelligent' and 'intellectual' and had a somewhat 'disinterested aesthetic' (Bourdieu 1984: 32–48 cited in Friedman 2011: 360). In comparison, for LCC respondents, pleasure and enjoyment was paramount, so the emphasis was on 'feeling good'. Both categories of respondents expressed an interest in 'clever' comedy, yet HCC respondents appreciated complexity, whereas LCC derived enjoyment from humour that related directly to their lives (p. 363). Although Friedman's sample may have been skewed towards MCC and HCC respondents as they are more likely to attend such cultural events.

Humour was seen as central to the working-class experience, with both genders suggesting that they could relax immediately with people with similar class origins as

> *We take the piss out of each other.* [Eleanor, a researcher in Gender Studies at a traditional institution]

Working-class humour, particularly men's typically is portrayed in a negative light. The suggestion being that it consists mainly of derogatory remarks and sexual comments (Collinson 1988: 185–186). Yet my respondents saw humour as a way of displaying friendship or solidarity:

> *If I joke it's because I see you as a friend.* [Tim, a post-doctoral researcher in Computer Science at various institutions]

Humour is a characteristic of the "most effective teachers" (James 2004: 94). For instance, Ted, a lecturer in Media Studies from a post 1992

institution talked of using humour to help his students relax in their first classes:

> *It's interesting that you mentioned a sense of humor because I do use my sense of humor a lot with students, If they're a working-class student and I talk to them about working-class things, that's more likely to resonate with them than someone who you know, the kind of trendy middle-class teacher who comes in and talks about going to a rave at the weekend, it's not really gonna work.*

As most of the interviews were free flowing and relaxed, I noticed interviewees (and I) using the occasional profanity. In later interviews, I asked respondents about this.

> *I do think the swearing quite an interesting thing for the study because swearing is unrestrained speech and academia by default is inhibited speech, so I think it's funny that we started like "You OK with swearing?", "I'm OK with swearing" kind of feeling each other out a little bit.* [Seb]

A slightly smaller number of female respondents compared with men would 'joke around' in the interviews and use the odd profanity (approx. four females compared to 7 males). There were no other obvious differences e.g. identity characteristics, or type of institution employed at, or primary subject of expertise. But the general consensus among interviewees was profanities were linked with the self—deprecating humour of the working classes. As Jay and Janschewitz (2012) notes "a cleverly placed swear word in a funny situation can be very amusing".

> *I couldn't imagine telling an anecdote without popping in a swear word.* [Nicole, a Business Studies lecturer in a post 1992 institution]

Others, such as Helen, who worked at a Russell Group institution as a History lecturer saw swearing as a facet of the freedom of a working-class identity.

> *Working-class people in general are just freer, you know. The last thing I want to be worried about is whether a swear word comes out of my mouth.*

My respondents would also use profanities as an adjective or an adverb, in situations where the speaker wanted to emphasize what he or she is

saying. The use of the profanity has more impact on the listener than just saying "oh that was good".

The Wrong 'Look'

Clothing performs a major role in the social construction of identity, being a visible marker of social status. In the early twentieth century, Richmond (2013) talks of how 'the poor' wore second-hand, often home-made garments, or utilitarian clothes provided by charities. This often made them the targets of pity and/or ridicule, which in turn often led to mental distress. As the middle classes had the financial resources for a greater variety of fashion, they were able to buy new, ready to wear garments.

A visible sign of working-class respectability is a smart suit or dress. Respondents referred to such clothes at work events.

> *We organised this conference, I think a conference is formal, so I've got a skirt and a little blazer on—you know smart outfit. My friend turns up in just leggings and a baggy t-shirt. I felt like I should dress in an appropriate like smart way to suit the spaces whereas the middle class just walk in feel like they own it and can turn up in their slippers if they wanted to.* [Isabelle, a PhD researcher at a red brick institution]

This should not be problematic but unpicking the extract it highlights another example of a working class academic not knowing 'the rules of the game'. In this instance it's knowing the types of clothes they should wear at such events.

> *I seem to get it wrong as I come dressed in my best outfit, whereas everyone else [read middle class the respondent suggests] seems to be dressed, in my opinion, either very scruffy, or very expensively. I fit into neither category.* [Sal]

Clothes convey meanings in society that go far beyond the clothes themselves. A police uniform, for instance, tells us immediately what the wearer's occupation is. Most respondents mentioned the traditional image of an academic being a tweed jacket with patches on the elbows, an image that excludes women as there is no stereotypical female version of the tweed jacket. Many respondents said they had learnt what academics should wear by attending conferences. For male sociologists, the academic conference attire was "*flowery shirts and jeans*" [Neil, a Lecturer in

Sociology at a traditional university] or "*dark denim and a polo shirt*" [Jeremy]. Whereas, female academics at conferences, proposed by a number of respondents, tended to either wear clothes from Boden or Jaeger, retailers known to be favourites among the middle classes, or what was described as "*the newsreader dress, a figure-hugging, knee-length dress in a bright colour*" [Amy].

While not one of the examples given above, the following extract from Bentley's (2020) thesis demonstrates the difficulties that a working class woman trying to dress for a middle class profession has: "Initially, without much thought, I muted representations and signifiers of my working-class culture in the research setting … because I knew that signifiers of my working-class culture (my gold hoop earrings in particular) were not only 'valueless' outside of the working-class community (McKenzie 2015a cited in ibid.: 92), but subconsciously I viewed them as having a detrimental impact on how I would be perceived in the interview setting. So, at first, I dressed conservatively, with little makeup and no jewellery". Goffman (1959) believed that when an individual comes in contact with others, that individual will attempt to control the impression that others might make by changing or fixing his or her setting, appearance and manner. To be 'feminine' is to fit into an idealised, higher-class position (Hatherley 2018), but due to their superior financial resources, this 'hegemonic, 'acceptable' femininity is a resource more readily accessible to middle-class women (Skeggs 1997).

Unhealthy Food and Weight

Interlinked factors of income inequalities and food literacy have traditionally pushed people from disadvantaged communities towards unhealthy eating (Templin et al. 2019). Income inequalities makes planning, budgeting, storing and preparing healthy meals difficult, while one's food literacy exacerbates the capability to make healthy food choices. These factors are often passed on from generation to generation. A small number of respondents talked of being overweight, linking this back to the food they ate when growing up. Everyday eating practices are bound by distinctions of taste, according to one's social position. This becomes problematic for academics in elite institutions where attending formal dinners. Wills et al. (2011) drew on two qualitative studies which looked at diet, weight and health from a social class perspective. They found economic

structures may limit agency, leading to classed food and eating practices. As Daisy mentions:

> *We have formals three times a week throughout term time. We dress up in gowns and enjoy a lovely three-course meal. I enjoy them, but I'm not used to this fancy food. I grew up eating chips and pies.*

Elite institutions are not an easy experience for students (see Reay et al. 2009; Bathmaker et al. 2016; Coulson et al. 2018; Reay 2017) and for my respondents working in elite institutions, felt it was particularly difficult as they had few people that they could discuss issues such as formals.

A number of female respondents reported being self-conscious of their weight. A slender body can be more of a class signifier than dress itself. Bordo (2003) refers to the relationship between fatness and social mobility. Previously the wealthy ate in excess, and 'fatness' was associated with wealth and beauty. But in the last few decades, the slender body has become the signifier of aristocratic status, while being overweight is associated with working class populations. The emerging middle class chose to embrace the svelte aristocratic body as opposed to the irresponsible working-class population. Some of the women I interviewed referred to feeling uncomfortable about their weight as they felt that they were 'larger', in comparison to the middle-class women they worked with. For instance, Caroline, a researcher in Psychology at a traditional institution:

> *I worry I am reinforcing stereotypes of stupid fat working class.*

The concern is understandable as gendered stereotypes tend to associate beauty with smallness, unobtrusiveness and passivity (Hatherley 2018: 29), all aesthetic qualities associated with middle class as opposed to working class femininity.

Some female respondents mentioned they could identify working class women at academic conferences:

> *Our dress sense stand out [in a good way I mean], but we are more likely, in comparison to middle class women to have softer, perhaps overweight [but more beautifully feminine bodies].* [Amy]

But as obesity is often equated to moral and intellectual laziness, being overweight in the academy can lead to anxiety. Rudolph et al. (2008)

found the probability of being offered an academic position was reduced if an applicant presents as being overweight. An article by Christina Fisanick (2019) speaks of the challenges of being a faculty member who struggles with their weight. For instance, when teaching she has struggled to manoeuvre around the classroom when desks are close together. She talks of wearing dark clothes so that her credentials are noticed as opposed to her body shape and size. Her comments were reiterated by two of my own female respondents who talked about experiencing anxiety that being defined as being overweight had perhaps negatively affected colleagues' perception of them, and their work. Issues like this only added to the social isolation that they felt.

Tattoos

While it's estimated that about one in five of the UK population is tattooed, there is still a stigma associated with tattoos. Martin and Dula (2010) found negative attitudes towards people with tattoos, with some believing those who have such adornments are academically unsuccessful. Seven of my respondents reported having tattoos, four of whom (three women) cited them as being a problematic image for an academic:

> *I've got full sleeve tattoos. I don't look like I am supposed to be here* [Katherine, a senior lecturer in Psychology at a post 1992 institution]

> *I was standing smoking outside one of our buildings and because it's summer, I had a lot of my tattoos on display. There was an open day going on and I got so many filthy looks from these parents who were coming in and I thought "How dare you! I'm here, I'm doing a PhD here. I've earned my place here" but that look that I saw reflected in so many people's faces was like "this isn't your space, this is my space for me and my children".* [Mary]

While the reaction this respondent faced could have also been related to the stigmatised social status those who smoke now experience, Elaine, who has five tattoos said she felt she should cover up her tattoos when in day-to-day settings such as work. Despite the prevalence of tattoos in modern culture, the consensus amongst my small number of 'inked' respondents was that tattoos are still viewed pejoratively.

Yet tattoos can also enable the academic to feel like an individual in a system that lacks individuality. As Professor Leonard argued in his article,

"The Inked Academic Body", tattoos challenge the academic stereotype of tweed jackets with patches on the elbows, and bookworm glasses (Leonard 2015). Tattoos also provide a way for students and teachers to connect on a more personal level. As Nick, a senior lecturer in Film Studies at a red brick institution, says:

> *Students ask me about the inspiration behind my tattoos. Others will tell me about their tattoos. The conversation is more relaxed that it normally would be between lecturer and student.*

Resisting Middle-Class Femininity

Returning to Professor Gannon, the 'Inked Professor', he acknowledged that it may be easier for him to have tattoos in comparison to female academics. For instance, in my interview with Liam he mentioned: "*standing there [in the lecture theatre] with an arm full of tattoos and a comedy t-shirt on*". Tattoos are growing in popularity, but for women they are still linked with notions of promiscuity, heavy drinking and unattractiveness (Swami and Furnham 2007). From a young age, women are encouraged to think about the image they convey through their clothes and other forms of presentation. When Aaronovitch (2000) talks about white working-class women having tattooed shoulders (cited in Lawler 2005) this is not meant as a positive statement. The 'place' of tattoos is key to value for women. 'Tramp stamps' are lower-back tattoos which were popular in the late 1990s and early 2000s. They are most often found on women and would prove to be a "class-based risk" for middle-class women (Dann et al. 2016: 45). The social response is often a degrading one, women who have these are often seen as hyper-(hetero)sexual (as Skeggs 1997 would see it) or crass and vulgar. Women are expected to practice body supervision and portray a conservative aesthetic A respectable, middle class, femininity being a form of capital (Skeggs 1997) women are encouraged to seek.

However, Yosso (2005) reminds us that "resistance is the legacy of the minoritized" (p. 80), and this was true in my conversations with some female participants when discussing aspects of their presentation. They talked with pride about resisting the respectable femininity through their personal style which included piercings (n.3 respondents), tattoos (n. 6 respondents), buzz cut hair styles (n.2 respondents), and clothes that were "*not very academic*" [Clara]. A woman's dress is a "permanent revelation of her most secret thoughts, a language, and a symbol." (Balzac 1839

cited in Crane 1999: 241). Academics with their tattoos, piercings and shaved head, are at odds with a 'nice' middle-class femininity, (Kosut 2000).

Microagressions

But the 'problem' was more than just aspects of their presentation such as accent and the clothes they wore. Analysing the data, it was apparent that the academy is a hostile place for those from underprivileged backgrounds who become academics. Respondents referred to overt cues that made them feel unwelcome in academia. Behaviour otherwise known as micro-aggressions, a term coined by Chester Pierce (1970), is typically described as a subtle form of structural oppression that manifest as verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities, (whether intentional or unintentional), that communicate derogatory, or negative slights (Sue et al. 2007: 271) toward minorities and other historically stigmatized groups (Lilienfeld 2017: 139). "Subtle" is perhaps an inappropriate descriptor here as some examples I outline are far from that. Bourdieu (1990) would describe this as symbolic violence, a "soft" violence that includes actions that have discriminatory or injurious meaning such as racism, sexism or classism. Lilienfeld (2017) argues that microaggressions may be callous as opposed to malicious, yet as Deb says, "*its like a dripping tap".*

Microaggressions appear to be a common ingredient of professional life both for women and for people of colour, but they are also found to be present in the experiences of professionals from disadvantaged social backgrounds. Warnock (2016) analysed the autoethnographic narratives of working-class academics and found academia was "unconsciously classist" (p. 150). For instance, as the communication patterns of the dominant group [middle class academics] are the norm, classed microaggressions may manifest when the dominant style is not adhered to. Evette, mentioned a time when some colleagues were talking about putting together an edited collection on a subject that she had written about

> *I suggest a chapter I could write. I get an email a few days later, it says I'm better "sitting out this one out as the book will have formal, scientific language, not my 'style'". This felt class based as ok yes, I do mispronounce the odd word, there is no difference in my writing ability.* [Lecturer in Biological Sciences at a Russell Group institution]

Some interviewees talked about feeling more confident with their written communication, in comparison to their oral skills.

There is time to craft sentences, I can edit my writing, I can do multiple drafts until it is perfect. [Amy]

Although Ben commented that when speaking face to face, his lower levels of embodied cultural capital meant he was not always able to draw upon academic language as quickly as his middle-class peers. The difference in communication styles is also illustrated in this interview extract by Kate

The way I communicate with my family, friends, school is much more emotional, more direct. But in a middle-class sphere, like academia, those modes of expression are not acceptable.

Sue (2010) describes three types of microaggressions that occur in everyday interactions: Microassaults, Microinsults and Microinvalidations.

Microassaults

The most visible form, microassaults are deliberate, conscious, and explicit verbal and/or nonverbal racist, sexist, or classist etc. acts, carried out with the intention to hurt, oppress, or discriminate. Due to the Equality Act 2010, they are the least common form of microaggression (Dovidio 2001), although hate crime statistics and the many stories from #Metoo indicate otherwise. Classism has been the hardest bias to reverse as it requires the redistribution of wealth, and opportunity and 'class' is not a protected characteristic under the equalities legislation. One could argue that argue that by virtue of having a PhD or being employed as a lecturer or researcher in the academy, this redistribution has been successful. Yet this chapter continues the argument that this is a simplistic view. While fewer respondents discussed overt microaggressions, there were examples that stood out. Jack talked of being at a formal dinner in an Oxbridge institution. Just as he felt comfortable a fellow diner said:

I bet this is the first time someone like you has been here. I had little choice but to laugh, and then I said, straight-faced, "no we are normally here to rob the place". I didn't hear from her again!

While an obvious microaggression, it is to be expected as the salary and cost of living in the locality mean that only the wealthy have the financial resources to work at Oxbridge (Academics Anonymous, 2015). For those running these elite institutions who talk of boosting campus diversity, there is to be a while to go before they understand how to do this amongst the staff cohort. Luke, a Professor in Social History at a traditional institution, recounts the time he interviewed at Oxford.

> *One of the questions they asked me was, given the background you've come from, you know, how do you think you'd would fit in in Oxford?*

Not the most welcoming of questions! And it reflects an oppressive worldview that foster marginalization and devalues people on the basis of their social class (Smith and Redington 2010).

But microaggressions did not focus on class identity alone, racial and gendered microaggressions were commonplace, as where those based intersections of one's identity. Ant, an academic with Romani heritage, spoke of a number of racist microaggressions. Sue et al. (2007) described microaggressions as the new face of racism, explaining that the nature of racism has shifted over time from overt expressions of racial hatred, towards more subtle forms that may be seen as ambiguous, and often unintentional. Gypsy Travellers are still amongst some of the most marginalised communities in Britain today, with negative and racist attitudes towards them being commonplace. Indeed, Coxhead (2007) asks if racism against the Traveller community is the last acceptable form of racism? Research by The Traveller Movement (2017) may provide some evidence towards this as it found that 77 percent of respondents were victims of hate speech/hate crime, while 91 percent reported experiencing discrimination because of their ethnicity—all of which is in clear breach of the Equality Act 2010. Ant said he could cope with the probing questions and the stereotyping about his Traveller lifestyle but was unable to hide his anger when slur words were used describe his community. The most recent time it happened was when a colleague introduced him to a new member of staff:

> *My colleague said oh don't worry he's not like the rest of the p****s. It was said so casually, like we were all having a laugh. I shouted at him saying that's fucking offensive. He apologised immediately and I explained it's like using the*

'n word'. I'm angry about explaining something I shouldn't have to in this day and age.

Afua Hirsch, author of Brit(ish), expands on this, in an article for the Guardian. She talks of the collective wound people of colour in Britain are nursing when they are expected to exert the emotional labour needed to explain the injustice of racism.

Microinsults

Microinsults are more difficult to 'prove', consisting of negative or demeaning behaviours. Rude comments were commonplace amongst my respondents. For instance, April said:

A pompous professor asked how was I 'allowed' to teach if I couldn't pronounce Foucault properly. Without thinking I told him I've been doing this for twenty years so email me if he needs some tips.

The respondent laughed when she said this, and for a moment I laughed with her. But then I considered the emotional labour this must take to deal with these issues, time and time again. And I considered that I only heard her response to one comment. I laughed only outwardly at her retort.

Seemingly innocuous, verbal/nonverbal communications convey insensitive messages about a person's identity. Gaining promotions seemed to trigger envy amongst their colleagues

A colleague was very interested in my promotion but was unable to go as far as to say congratulations. Instead she probed my credentials and expressed views on meritocratic hiring practices—the implication being that my promotion was due to unmeritocratic means, as if promotions were only being handed out to black guys. [Theo]

I overheard them say: "Athena Swan must be for working class women this year". I was heartbroken as I work bloody hard. My natural instinct was to confront her but decided not too as I would shout at her, rather than speak about it in a nice middle-class way. [Pat]

Again it felt sad to listen to this as here are people confined by a middle-class civility that meant she must train her emotions to not react, even when insulted. The interviews would often be spent talking about how they would handle the situation if they were 'at home'. The need to regulate emotion was something that these working-class scholars struggle to acclimate (Warnock 2016: 31). But what was particularly disheartening about listening to interviewees describe these incidents is that in the literature they would be typically described as being unintentional slights, whereas for my respondents they were upsetting examples of outright bigotry.

Microinsults are problematic as they reduce the individual to a stereotype. Over half of respondents discussed hearing the word chav in relation to students "*from the exact background I am from*" [Coleen]. This is perhaps no surprise as we know that the working-classes are spoken of in many different discriminatory ways: referred to as the underclass, as irresponsible and as passive, lacking in agency (Skeggs 2004: 94). But the term 'chav' has been criticised as being particularly offensive, an exemplar of class prejudice. Bennett (2011) refers to an article in a tabloid newspaper that defines the term: "Chavs are young louts who wear cheap gold jewellery and Burberry baseball caps … [chav] refers to someone who wears "prison white" trainers and heavily branded sportswear and appears on ITV1's Trisha, like the loutish lottery winner Michael Carroll" (The Mirror) (p. 96). Words like *chav* contain a message about the way these academics were perceived by their peers. As Amy said:

> *A colleague consistently described his research respondents as chavs—nice I know! Anyway, he could see that I looked shocked, but it seemed to trigger a 'memory' in him, and he said, oh I'm sorry, you come from that area too? I was shocked how easily he related me to the word chav.*

While microinsults demean a person's race, heritage, or identity, it is felt that perpetrators of microinsults are frequently unaware of the insulting implications of their behaviour. Amy wanted to be clear that her colleague wasn't aware that 'chav' was a term of abuse for the white working class. But what was noticeable was the when she tried talking to him afterwards, he seemed unwilling to discuss the implications of his language e.g. the unconscious message that both she and his research respondents are 'chavs'.

Microinvalidations

These are comments and behaviours that exclude, negate or nullify the experiences of marginalized group members. These may potentially represent the most damaging form of microaggressions because these actions undermine and invalidate individuals' thoughts and feelings (Sue et al. 2007). A common example was where numerous respondents mentioned that when they tried to discuss the micro and macro differences in relation to class, people would quote the words of John Prescott, the ex-Labour Deputy Leader, "We are all middle class now". Respondents talked of being told that they were being too "sensitive," and/or had taken offense when none was intended, or that they had "read too much into it" [Sophie] (what a strange comment to say to an academic!). It was difficult to speak to perpetrators about issues they experienced as:

> *I'm describing some uneasy feelings I've had as opposed to something concrete.* [Leah, a sociologist who has worked in various institutions]

When respondents took the issue further, on a more formal basis, they reported that their Heads of School, line managers, co-workers and friends found ways of 'explaining' the microaggressions. Theo reported his colleagues' comments about his promotion and was told, "oh you know she was joking", "you know what she is like". Leah, noted

> *I speak to friends and they tell me I am paranoid. That's a way of silencing me what I think is quite real and I'm not the only one. We forget this happens but we can usually find someone else who has had the same experience.*

The frequency and persistence of these experiences accumulate to create harmful messages and a hostile and unwelcoming environment (Fine et al. 2018).

The presence of classed microaggressions are no surprise as the university is an institution where the working class (alongside ethnic minorities and women) are a distant 'other' (Law 1995). Brandon an academic in Health Studies says:

> *I'm proud of my heritage, but it's hard to be at times as we are portrayed as stupid, obese, scroungers, who don't visit the doctors enough. I can't remember the last time I heard anything good about being working class, can you?*

Racial microaggressions were particularly common to all but a small number of BME interviewees. Gabriel and Tate (2017) note that racial microaggressions are an invisible feature of the black scholar's experience in academia. This was also a finding in a report by Rollock (2019) who interviewed 20 of the 25 Black female Professors in the UK. She found a culture of explicit and passive bullying persists across higher education along with racial stereotyping and racial microaggressions. My own respondents related a number of racialised microaggressions. From being asked to show staff identity cards when entering university buildings with a white member of staff (who was not asked to show their identification), to experiencing sexualized comments in academic feedback from both students.

> *My teaching doesn't get commented on … but my physicality does.* [Nicole]

BME respondents such as Theo and Nicole were often told they were articulate: "w*hat they meant was I am very articulate for a black guy*" [Theo]. These comments should be no surprise as a survey for the Guardian, of 240 BME staff and students found racism in universities is widespread and widely tolerated. As one respondent in the survey said: "the message is clear: assimilate and shut up—you're lucky to be here (Weale et al. 2019). My own respondents had similar examples:

> *I was in a meeting and the topic of racial bias in academia arose. Remember I'm the only person from a BME background there. The head of school brushes the comment aside, saying now was not the time or place to discuss this, but we should be certain that there are no issues with race in our school. And if anyone thinks there is, then they need to take better advantage of the resources on at the university. I sat there flabbergasted, knowing I should speak out, but I was one person. What a way of shutting down any discussion!* [Joy, a Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences at a Russell Group institution]

BME academics also reported that their 'working-classness' was not always acknowledged

> *If I'm 'here' I must be middle class because black people live in the hood.* [Ann]

However, a study by Morales (2014) found that black students were perceived as being low-income regardless of their actual class status.

Dealing with Microaggressions

Disarming and Dismantling Microaggressions

Given the harm inflicted on those experiencing microaggressions it becomes imperative to attempt to disarm, disrupt, and dismantle these slights (Sue et al. 2019: 131). They outline four separate coping strategies. 'Making the invisible visible', was a key strategy used by Amy when she challenged her colleague over the use of the word chav.

A further method of dealing with microaggressions, Sue et al. (2019) suggests, is to disarm the microaggression, for instance, indicating what has been said is offensive to you or others. Ant took this approach when he told his colleague that using a particular word to describe Travellers was offensive to him. He noted in the interview that this was hard to do but he felt he was representing not only himself but his community too.

A third method is to educate the perpetrator by encouraging the perpetrator to explore the origins of their beliefs and attitudes (ibid.). This was not a popular method of dealing with the issue because it meant spending more time engaging with the person [Lynn]. However, Theo, who was familiar with the theoretical tools of Bourdieu, felt able to do this.

> *I told this guy that one reason for the ignorant comments he made was that his upbringing [white, middle-class] was the dominant culture, the standard, and therefore all other forms and expressions of "culture" are judged negatively in comparison to this "norm." I'm not sure he listened but it was understood from an academic perspective.*

Sue et al. (2019) then states that those on the receiving end of microaggressions should seek external reinforcement or support. In short, dealing with microaggressions should go as follows: ask the perpetrator to clarify what they just said; express disagreement; point out the commonality between the two people then report the act.

Familial/Social Capital

Since the literature on Yosso's capital often shows an overlap between examples of social capital and familial capital, these two types of capital are often analysed together. Yosso (2005) depicts disadvantaged

communities as possessing "an array of knowledge, skills, peers and other social contacts" (p. 77) to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression. Hall and King (1982) highlight the kin-structured networks that helps in day-to-day living as well as in crises (p. 541). Respondents with familial capital cited their spouses and parents as providing support during difficult times, with mothers played an especially central role. Mothers used various strategies in which to help respondents cope with the microagressions they were experiencing. For instance, Coleen talked about how her mum would be on hand with motivational quotes, and little reminders of how far she had come. Zoe, who worked in professional services in the Sociology department of a red brick institution mentioned that her mum was always there at the end of the phone with "*lots of lovely comments about my work*". This familial capital meant there was less chance of respondents being isolated, and it gave them find comfort in knowing they are not alone.

Interviewees commented that university administrators were a vital support system. Ashley discussed how:

> *Admin are normally from my background, so are on hand to give a kind word.*

Respondents also accumulated familial/social capital through validation and advice from societies and clubs within their institution, for instance Afro-African society, and various sporting clubs, as well as nationwide organisations such as Disability Rights UK. Female respondents relied heavily on feminist associations although Amy commented that the group she was part of was not considerate of the impact of social class. As will be discussed in the next chapter, these atypical academics gained strength from the desire to give back to those in their communities.

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