

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

## Women's Studies International Forum

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/wsif](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/wsif)

# “I’m complicit and I’m ambivalent and that’s crazy”: Care-less spaces for women in the academy

Chrissie Rogers

Aston University, Sociology and Policy, Languages and Social Sciences, Aston University, Aston Triangle, Birmingham, B4 7ET, UK

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 30 October 2015

Received in revised form 26 May 2016

Accepted 21 July 2016

Available online xxx

## ABSTRACT

This paper is about three working class women academics in their 40s, who are at different phases in their career. I take a reflexive, feminist, (Reay 2000, 2004, Ribbens and Edwards, 1998) life story approach (Plummer, 2001) in order to understand their particular narratives about identity, complicity, relationships and discomfort within the academy, and then how they inhabit care-less spaces. However unique their narratives, I am able to explore an aspect of higher education – women and their working relationships – through a lens of care-less spaces, and argue that care-less-ness in the academy, can create and reproduce animosity and collusion. Notably, this is damaging for intellectual pursuits, knowledge production and markedly, the identity of woman academics. In introducing this work, I first contextualise women in the academy and define the term care-less spaces, then move onto discuss feminist methods. I then explore and critique in some detail, the substantive findings under the headings of ‘complicity and faking it’ and ‘publishing and collaboration’. The final section concludes the paper by drawing on Herring’s (2013) legal premise, in the context of care ethics, as a way to interrogate particular care-less spaces within higher education.

Crown Copyright © 2016 Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## Introduction

This paper is about three working class women academics in their 40s, who are at different phases in their career. I take a reflexive, feminist, (Reay, 2000, 2004, Ribbens & Edwards, 1998) life story approach (Plummer, 2001) in order to understand their particular narratives about identity, complicity, relationships and discomfort within the academy, and then how they inhabit care-less spaces. However unique their narratives, I am able to explore an aspect of higher education – women and their working relationships – through a lens of care-less spaces, and argue that care-less-ness in the academy, can create and reproduce animosity and collusion. Notably, I want to argue that this is damaging for intellectual pursuits, knowledge production and markedly, the identity of woman academics. In introducing this work, I first contextualise women in the academy and define the term care-less spaces then move onto discuss feminist methods. I then explore and critique in some detail, the substantive findings under the headings of ‘complicity and faking it’ and ‘publishing and collaboration’. The final section concludes the paper by drawing on Herring’s (2013) legal premise, in the context of care ethics, as a way to interrogate particular care-less spaces within higher education.

## Contextualising the subject: silencing women

The intersections between gender, class, race, and so on are evident within the academy, but for this paper I intend to focus closely on gender, and particularly working class women. As it is women, in comparison to men, populate lower grades in higher education, are less likely to be a principal investigator (PI) in research, and their promotion has not kept a pace with the recruitment of women students (Aiston, 2014; Hoskins, 2010; Morley, 2014). Moreover, silences about women ‘pulling up the ladder’ behind them, lacking care and ‘feminist elbows’ arguably needs discussing, (Skelton, 2005: 327–328). Furthermore, the guilt, particularly working class women feel, if they complain too much, can be silencing, if not paralysing (Gill, 2010; Gill & Donaghue, 2016). Yet, there are too many women who are silenced, and silencing is a tool of oppression. For ‘when you are silenced, whether by explicit force or by persuasion, it is not simply that you do not speak, but that you are barred from participation in a conversation which nevertheless involves you’ (Ahmed, 2010: xvi). Not only are there silencing practices that permeate academia, ‘toxic shame’ is apparent, where one might embody a sense of illegitimacy in the work place due to cruel reviews of work, promotion failure, lack of funding and classed identity (Gill, 2010: 238; see also Back, 2016). Also, if women cannot trust powerful others to perform and embody care, generosity and respect, can they ever really speak out about their position, feelings and identity construction?

E-mail address: [c.rogers3@aston.ac.uk](mailto:c.rogers3@aston.ac.uk)

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2016.07.002>

0277-5395/Crown Copyright © 2016 Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Please cite this article as: Rogers, C., “I’m complicit and I’m ambivalent and that’s crazy”: Care-less spaces for women in the academy, *Women's Studies International Forum* (2016), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2016.07.002>

Care-less-ness within institutions; in this case the university, and a 'lack of trust can be a reason not to speak' (Ahmed, 2010: xvi). Thus, as Sumi Madhok and her colleagues suggest in discussing gender, coercion and agency,

We live our lives in a period marked by economic, political, and cultural inequalities; are ever more intimately touched by these; and are implicated, willingly or not, in a range of coercive practices. Yet at this very moment, we are told that we enjoy unprecedented levels of freedom, are offered a disorientating array of choices and assured protection by a list of individual rights that is longer than ever before (Madhok, Phillips & Wilson, 2013: 5).

Critically, the legitimacy of bemoaning the position women academics inhabit, can seem questionable due to the 'privilege' that comes with it (Madhok et al., 2013, Hoskins, 2010). However, I want to argue that women academics in particular, are often complicit within their working life, colluding with those in more 'powerful' positions, and on occasion 'fake' good relationships with colleagues, managers, research partners and students, so as to project a legitimate and valid academic identity. Moreover, even if there is recognition that there are institutional and relationship problems that result in dangerous practices for staff, a flood of sessions on wellbeing, mindfulness, equality, time-management and leadership, are offered to help (Gill & Donaghue, 2016), implying care-full practices are adhered to.

#### *Care-less spaces in the academy*

I have spent some time thinking about care-less spaces in the context of intellectual disability and feminist ethics of care. Indeed, my latest work (Rogers, 2016) develops a care ethics model of disability where I found many care-less spaces, in schools, the home, local authorities, friendships (intimate or not), communities, the health service and so on (see also Rogers, 2007). Care-less spaces are also found in a number of other areas such as the criminal justice system, commercial and private businesses and not least of all universities. My argument here is that my care ethics model can map onto higher education, because the premise of the model is not about disability per se, but fundamentally about social and political relations where care-less-ness is abuse - emotionally, practically and socio-politically. As it stands my care ethics model proposes three spheres of caring work, but these are currently populated with care-less spaces. The caring spheres are: *The Emotional Caring Sphere* - where love and care are psycho-socially questioned; *The Practical Caring Sphere* - where day to day care is carried out relationally and *The Socio-political Caring Sphere* - where social intolerance and aversion to difficult differences are played out. These three spheres all interact in complex ways and are grounded in social and political relations that seek caring legal and cultural processes.

Grounding care-less spaces within a care ethics model, I turn to early key thinkers in feminist ethics of care, including Nel Noddings (2003 [1984]), Sara Ruddick (1989) and Joan Tronto (1993). These feminists composed accounts of the particular relationship between women and ethics of care. This often involved a consideration of the mother-child relationship as a specific and significant example of the intertwining of ethics and everyday life. Whilst the embodied aspects of motherhood are fully recognised, it is the gendering of the social roles of women, and indeed of morality, which are emphasised, producing accounts of moral reasoning which are grounded in, but not limited to, women's experiences of care. For my study here, this translates into women and their role within the academy, as I focus on aspects of the everyday relational life of women academics. From this perspective, care is understood and presented as a practice and as a way of thinking. Yet, often, within these areas of 'caring' I discover care-less spaces that damage, thwart, and contest caring work. Indeed, within these spaces women are in danger because they are inhabiting the care-less space that is all encompassing as it permeates the emotional, practical and socio-political spheres every day.

The development of a feminist ethics of care sought to define care in more grounded terms, but also, at a philosophical level, it has aimed to reposition and argue for the value of care as a basis for moral and political theory as well as for social policy. Importantly too, in thinking beyond the emotional and practical spheres and into the socio-political sphere where we recognise social justice and care, mass systemic violence is recognised. Significantly, in mapping care-less spaces Noddings (2003 [1984]) work is important in the conceptualisation of care and caring as an alternative moral theory, and offers a detailed definition of care as a central, crucial and human practice. She presents, as do others (for example, Ruddick, 1989), care as a practice and therefore as learnt and, importantly, as improvable, but also argues that experiences of being cared for are definitively human, or 'universally accessible' (Noddings, 2003 [1984]: 5). This point illustrates a significant theme in feminist ethics, which is to highlight the commonality of human vulnerability, not just at the beginning and end of life, but as a constant and fundamental condition.

Broadly, I suggest that care and caring are not necessarily about individual rights and freedom per se, as this detracts from the politics of care and assumes a paternalistic state of doing and being. In the framing of this paper, because an 'ethics of care that is political and critical must be grounded in the concrete activities of real people in the context of social relations' (Mahon and Robinson, 2011: 2), I seek to explore the concrete activities and social relations of three women academics as a way to understand the experiences of inhabiting care-less spaces. This is because all of these areas, once introduced within academic life, are influenced by the macro and micro politics of higher education. Moreover, it has not gone unnoticed that higher education, is arguably increasingly restrictive, bounded and less creative (Back, 2016, Evans, 2004). Yet, 'creativity, motivation and resistance are all necessary for intellectual endeavour' (Mauthner and Bell, 2007: 96).

Discussing care-less-ness in academia therefore is palpable, due to the enormity of gendered caring activity, both formal and informal, and the continued inequality within the academy for women (Evans, 2011; Lynch, 2010; Morley, 2014). This is largely as a result of the expectation of women to adhere to, and perform caring and care-full practices. By highlighting care-less spaces, via three women's narratives, I explore mistrust, complicity and discomfort within particular academic roles and relationships. Crucially I question if these spaces and relationships are sustainable, safe, care-full and just. Because as Jonathan Herring (2013: 45) suggests, care 'is not a strange activity which is undertaken by a few brave souls, but it is ingrained into the existence of every person'.

It is evident that philosophically, moral reasoning based on justice which 'asserts that morality is about the objective application of universalizable principles among mutually disinterested, disembodied individuals' (Robinson, 2011: 5) is wholly inappropriate in the academy and social life more broadly. As none of us live in a world of abstraction; we live in a world of relationships, *in the real world*. Therefore, in developing feminist ethics and within my care ethics model, human safety, trust, responsibility, respect and care-full practices and relationships are key. Furthermore, there is and ought to be an alternative to Kantian rights based ethics (Rogers, 2016). Fiona Robinson (2011) in her work looks at human security (or safety) via a feminist ethics of care, and in my analysis, I begin to see how the emotional, practical and socio-political spheres leak into and out of private and public life for women academics, particularly working class women. Furthermore, women have been considered less than able and irrational, and certainly populate fewer authoritative and leadership positions (Aiston, 2014; Madhok et al., 2013; Morley, 2014). They are therefore in danger of abuse - emotional or otherwise, and are largely unsafe.

People are interdependent and economies are reliant on caring practices, and that includes how higher education produces knowledge and nurtures women academics. I agree with Robinson, in her approach to an ethics of care as she makes an ontological shift; 'one that allows us to see moral subjects as relational and to recognise ethics as fulfilling

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4941943>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4941943>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)