



Queer encounters of sexuality and class: Navigating emotional landscapes of academia



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ABSTRACT

In this piece I consider processes of being (or becoming) on the academic map and the emotional disjunctures across time and place felt in occupying academia, in conducting research and in moving through intersecting spaces of teaching-research. The promise of entering and achieving in Higher Education is at once seductive (CVs produced, academic stars circulated internationally) and disturbing, felt and encountered across the university environment, via administrative, teaching and research concerns. These points of arriving, departing and travelling through institutional space intersect with what I *feel* about occupying academia. The emotional 'stickiness' of these contexts contrasts with the vision of the engaged, inclusive institution that now welcomes all through its door, with this rhetoric of arrival and belonging effacing starting points, varied journeys, different labours and divided recognitions. These are emotional matters manifest in teaching and research encounters, where a 'critical pedagogy' may be read as a failure, mobilised by the angry, emotional feminist academic, rather than her 'neutral' 'objective' 'rational' un-emotional counterpart. In arguing for an emotional presence constituted in and through teaching and research, I consider the emotional landscape of class and sexuality in particular, asking what is taken with us as we travel through academia, where feminist research in particular has been critical of the travelling subject (or 'self'), who tells only their own story.

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1. Introduction: Emotionally (dis)engaged in university

In this piece I consider processes of being (or becoming) on the academic map, and the emotional disjunctures across time and place felt in occupying academia, and moving in and out of the UK-based classroom. I highlight intersecting spaces of teaching-research, where certain subjects are made to stand-in for university – and city – commitment to equality, to signal a 'diversity' and regenerative capacity. The neo-liberal university is increasingly a site that demands a mobility of practice and an entrepreneurial orientation to local–global markets (Ong, 2006); the academic is encouraged to extend her reach, to reach out to 'diverse communities', and to do so as a responsive–responsible 'engaged' subject. These processes efface the material and affective labour and

vulnerability in 'coming up against' blockages (or 'coming out'¹), which means the queer researcher–teacher gets 'stuck' (Ahmed, 2004). The emotional 'stickiness' of these contexts contrasts with the vision of the engaged, inclusive institution that now welcomes all through its door, with this rhetoric of arrival and belonging effacing starting points, varied journeys, different labours and divided recognitions. I am not seeking to pursue a vision of the authentic teacher–researcher to be liberated in taking-up more space with her identity now recognised and validated; rather, as with queer anti-racist and feminist intersectional scholars in particular, I aim to highlight that class and sexuality get stuck on particular research-teaching subjects (Ahmed, 2011; Douglas et al., 2011; Haritaworn, 2011; Kuntsman and Miyake, 2008). In re-engaging the senses (and a sense of higher education)

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¹ Contestations over the meanings of 'coming out' exist; it is variously seen as an empowering act of recognition, a normative ideal or an option not available to everyone (Stella, 2010; Tauqir et al., 2011; Taylor, 2007). Notably, literature has queried the centrality of visibility and 'coming out' in the lived experiences of many queers, particularly work seeking to advance an intersectional perspective: research has shown that visibility may be privilege not readily available to, for example, working-class lesbian women (Taylor, 2007, 2011c) or Russian lesbians (Stella, 2010). 'Coming out' is not always an empowering or liberating act; this paradigm can create distance between 'out' and 'closeted' LGBT subjects, where the latter are represented as repressed individuals who have internalised the homophobia, often located geographically, foregrounding a 'West and the rest' linear model of coming out from repression to liberation. Many have queried if 'articulation equals liberation', asking questions about voice and silence where white, middle-class and Western LGBT activist have pursued rights-based citizenship claims, sometimes on behalf of their 'queer racialised' 'others' (Decena, 2011; Stella, 2010; Tauqir et al., 2011).

researchers and teachers have a responsibility to re-think who they talk to and travel with.

Class and sexuality weigh heavily in the classroom and in the spaces, which the engaged university/researcher must increasingly take-up, travel through and 'impact on' if they are to prove their diverse and distinctive capacity. But class and sexuality constitute blockages where some more than others bear the weight of this labour, in coming up against normative institutional structures and in endlessly 'coming out' as queer (Ahmed, 2009, 2012; Tauqir et al., 2011; Taylor, 2012b). There is work to be done in the queering of these processes, beyond the individual uptake of space, self-telling or self-recognition (which 'coming out' implies even as it is often blocked). Academic freedom has been understood as liberation, an ability to articulate and to know, but these different blockages, as a heightened part of the neo-liberal university, necessitate a different way of speaking back. This article constitutes an attempt to do exactly that; to articulate and navigate the emotional landscapes of academia, combining autoethnographic stories of professional and personal passions and pains. As emotions and 'being emotional' sticks to particular bodies – and in contrast constitutes movement for the reflexive, aligned properly affecting researcher – I hope to start, rather than end, with these stories and to ask if these are also recognised as yours.

We are encouraged to self-recognise in academia, to enact career mobility via our CVs, bound to academic identities, rather than to social justice actions (Tauqir et al., 2011). Academic entrance, career mobility and institutional rewards often imply a recognition, even arrival, within higher education, where objective success may be measured through increased publications, grant income and institutional visits, producing the 'international' academic able to take up her space. This is something we are encouraged to celebrate as a successful example of meritocratic promise and rational paths followed and sustained. Yet even our 'successes' are emotionally fraught, negotiated through educational environments which shape the boundaries of being (or becoming) on the academic map (Askins, 2009; Haritaworn, 2011; Taylor and Allen, 2011). There are emotional disjunctures across time and place felt in occupying academia, in conducting research and in moving through intersecting spaces of the university and the city. The 'engaged university' is increasingly positioned as a regenerator of city capital, publics and participation, requiring the researcher to step-out into place: I outline the ways that an emotional mis-fit to place occurs in teaching and in research, where the latter is sometimes positioned as remedy to and/or freedom from the neo-liberal university (Back, 2007; Taylor, 2010a; Taylor and Addison, 2011). The engaged researcher cannot just 'come out' and be herself.

But, to repeat, these disjunctures amount to more than personalised underscoring of the gap between 'academia' and 'me', as more than simply an extension of space/self-hood. Here I consider the classed and sexual (dis)connects in academic occupations, wrestling with becoming and being stuck in affecting different research and teaching presences. I want to consider this wrestling in relation to research and teaching experience of higher education; my work on queer and class; and in relation to a recent project *Fitting Into Place: Class and Gender Geographies and Temporalities*² (Taylor, 2012a): using these examples, I question the place of a queer presence inside and beyond academia (Binnie, 2011; Taylor, 2011a). Ahmed (2004) asks 'what do emotions do?', rather than

what emotions *are*, exploring how these circulate between bodies as affective forms of re-orientation, allowing structures and spaces to be reified and naturalised as subjects 'feel their way'. Feminist attachments, queer feelings, and feelings of pain, anger, disgust and shame circulate between bodies, amidst intuitions, negotiated too by students–teachers–researchers. Here I consider the role of emotions in and across the spaces of my life as an academic with academic occupations (teaching and researching) positioned as affective encounters which re-produce certain presences and publics and block others as absent, off the map, or as stuck in their own un-reflexive (angry) identity (Ahmed, 2004; Tolia-Kelly, 2010).

Although the academic may find herself in-between (in)visibility and (mis)recognition, it is important to situate personal-profession 'travels' in research and teaching contexts, rather than apart from these and dislocated from their (and my own) production. I consider the role of emotions in and across the spaces I inhabit as an academic: these intersecting presences/absences across different parts of my life produce feelings about being in and out of place (see Kuntsman and Miyake, 2008).³

My concern is in making visible varied stories as well as the absence of (legitimate) tales, where the feelings and places of privilege can also be made evident in such articulations and silences (Taylor, 2009), rather than solely through a tale of personalised advantage/disadvantage. Although identifying as working-class and 'queer'⁴ in academia is a fraught, emotive and challenging process (Binnie, 2011) such challenges can never fully be achieved or completed as (only) 'mine' if the potential to situate claims beyond the personal (and beyond identity) is taken seriously. In a new context of higher education, institutions are now producing guidelines on 'dealing with' diversity, promising to be inclusive, welcoming places, where a 'happy diversity' sits alongside a capitalisation upon this, as an institutional return reliant on certain bodies being present. This is heightened in the current UK educational climate⁵ where elite institutions may now be in the curious position of marketing their own 'elitism' and 'diversity', while post-1992 institutions are positioned as 'failing' to deliver on what is now a strange brand of 'diverse' elitism (Taylor, 2011b, 2012b). There are various institutional confidences and concerns here, which mobilise sentiments and subjects 'out-of-place', to convey how various 'others' have arrived and are supposedly happily included (Ahmed, 2012): 'Diversity becomes a technology of happiness: through diversity, the organisation is represented "happily" as "getting along", as committed to equality, as anti-racist. Your arrival is thus a happy occasion for the organisation. But you must smile – you must express gratitude for having been received. If your arrival is

³ In pointing to this book – and the laboured efforts as well as emotional affect in and beyond its now censored pages (see Douglas et al., 2011) – I hope to signal the importance of anti-racist queer critiques and the ongoing efforts in enacting more caring presences and coalitions (Tauqir et al., 2011). Many have pointed to the worth of interrogating normative identities and positioning (such as whiteness, able-bodiedness, heterosexuality) and I hope to join this conversation on a level which is empirically plausible and which questions class and sexuality in academia.

⁴ Queer has been used as an umbrella terms for 'LGBT' identities but it is also used as a rejection of identity categories and, instead, as a queer *practice*. I hope to hold onto the ways that blockages stick to particular material bodies, often with social and economic consequences, where class in particular is often absent from debates on Queer (Skeggs, 1997; Taylor, 2007).

⁵ This research was conducted in an established red-brick university which is a member of the elite UK Russell group. Widening participation issues are different in 'new' post-1992 universities, but in this new educational climate of Conservative–Liberal fees, it is these post-1992 institutions which have long-standing commitments to 'widening participation' as a tangible everyday reality, that are now rendered more vulnerable. In contrast, elite universities may be in a position to offer limited student bursaries through the National Scholarship Programme, without altering their overall white, middle-class composition (see Taylor and Allen, 2011).

² This is based on ESRC funded research 'From the Coal Face to the Car Park? Intersections of Class and Gender in the North East' (RES-000-22-2150) and I thank the ESRC for funding this project. Michelle Addison was employed as a Research Assistant on the project for 12 months.

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