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## Writing Yourself In? The Price of Playing the (Feminist) Game in the Neoliberal University

This chapter examines the centrality of writing in how feminist women academics engage with the neoliberal university. In this, I focus on the experiences of U.K. sociologists and question the extent to which feminist positions are able to ‘become’, ‘arrive’, or assert themselves as legitimate within the academy. Orienting itself around specific accounts of how sociologists negotiate the demands of the Research Excellence Framework (REF)<sup>1</sup>, the chapter looks at narratives of affect in writing practices and how these relate to the production of knowledge understood as legitimate within the discipline. In doing so, the chapter raises the provocative question of how far it is really possible to ‘write oneself in’ to academia? The discussions here build on scholarship examining the often precarious place of the ‘early career’ feminist researcher in global higher education spaces (Thwaites and Pressland 2017), as well as that which considers the classed experiences of creating and narrating ‘value’ in research (Addison 2012). Within this context, this chapter engages with the experiences of feminists in the academy, to ask to what extent is it feasible for a feminist position to be a legitimate(d) position?

The research in this chapter is based on an ethnographic study of the relationship between the craft of writing and the production of legitimate knowledge and positions in sociology. Here, I focus on the accounts of three participants - Kate, Naomi, and Johanna. Their stories indicate that women in academia take a number of steps in order to pragmatically navigate the requirements of the neoliberal university and the concomitant personal and political positions of feminism. I explore the way in which these women recognize and dual game of mainstream academic and feminist practice, and the modes through which they engage with these. The chapter shows how these women use writing both to demonstrate fidelity to mainstream sociological legitimacy whilst also satisfying their feminist political aims. Participants identified feminist practice as including activities such as citation practice, and publishing and promoting the work of women – especially women of colour. One participant, Maria, termed this ‘the politics of production’, and argued that it is a key way of establishing feminists as academics. On an everyday level, this feminist praxis was found in the organisation of reading and writing groups, sustained support for colleagues, and pedagogical decisions about how and who to teach. What unites these actions is a sense of organisation, commitment, and solidarity. Whilst men in the ethnography shared practical elements of this, they lacked a shared notion that this was done as part of cohesive political action, or that they were beholden to it. By contrast, feminists in the ethnography spoke of experiencing guilt and shame in situations where they couldn’t or didn’t offer this form of organised political support.

Analyzing this dynamic use of writing reveals the fragile grip of feminist positions in the academy. Crucially, the chapter demonstrates this fragility exists both in terms of intellectual framing as well as professional positions. Kate, Naomi, and Johanna’s accounts show how feminist positions work in paradoxical and contradictory ways - as supportive, generative and

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<sup>1</sup> The Research Excellence Framework assesses research done in U.K. higher education institutions. It is framed around a benchmark of ‘excellence’, and ranks written outputs of researchers from ‘Unclassified’ to 4 Star. The exercise is conducted across ‘units of assessment’ which broadly map on to disciplines. These are judged by a panel of senior academics in the discipline who read and score the submissions. Full time academics are required to submit four ‘outputs’ to the Research Excellence Framework exercise. In preparation for this, many departments run a ‘mini-REF’ in which colleagues grade one another’s outputs.

creative, but also demanding of onerous and time-consuming emotional labour, thus arguably disadvantaging the feminist academic. Through examination of how affective working practices enable or interrupt a sociologist's ability to understand themselves as legitimate this chapter argues that the price feminist academics pay for a seat at the table is a costly one of exhaustion, self-doubt, and unwilling co-option into hegemonic practices. I begin by discussing conceptions of legitimacy in academia, and subsequently build on this to show how these concerns emerge in participants' writing strategies. Through this I show how feminist academics consider both their political commitments and the neoliberal conditions in which they write. However, I attempt to end on a note of hope: though feminist positions are undoubtedly shown here as tenuous and vulnerable, what chinks of light exist in the agentive and powerful ways the women in this chapter assert in their steps to survive – and thrive – in the neoliberal university? In what ways might attentiveness to the narratives of this difficult and precarious work show small beginnings of change in the academy?

### **Legitimacy in Academia**

A key driver of the production and designation of legitimacy in academia is a strong relationship between disciplinarity, canonicity, and privileged structural positions. Underpinning the stories of the research participants in this chapter is a particular value paradigm which privileges the work, ideas, and voices of those who are male, white, and middle-class. This paradigm shapes the field of sociology (and academia more broadly), including the type of knowledge claims which can be legitimately made within sociology. This structural and intellectual inequality has been noted as significant in the origin story of sociology (Connell 2007), the bifurcation of Black Studies from a 'mainstream' tradition of sociology (Bhambra 2014), the Eurocentrism of sociology's conception of modernity (Bhambra 2007a, 2007b), and the centrality of 'founding fathers' in the social theory canon (Marshall and Witz 2004). The presence of this value paradigm forms specific modes of structural social inequality and exclusion within sociology. Both Kate Hoskins (2010) and Diane Reay (2000) discuss the way in which academic spaces form hostile environments for working class scholars, especially those who are also women and people of colour. Similarly, Kate Sang's (2016) research elucidates the way in which black feminist women academics experience an intersectional exclusion (Crenshaw 1989, 1991) on the grounds of 'race' and gender but also report feeling excluded from supposedly progressive feminist spaces within the academy, thus pointing to the way narratives of intersectionality may be strongly employed as rhetoric but do not always result in more equal access or practices of diversity and inclusion.

These exclusions also filter conceptual and philosophical frameworks of knowledge. Kathryn Maude (2015) and Sara Ahmed (2013) note how citation practice is used to uphold the dominance of white male thinkers across disciplinary canons; relatedly, I have argued elsewhere that the conception of the 'universal' in social theory favours the promotion of white men - owing to the ability of this group to subtly and quietly present themselves as neutral and representing universal positions (Burton 2015). Patricia Hill Collins writes of the way in which,

elite White men control Western structures of knowledge validation, their interests pervade the themes, paradigms, and epistemologies of traditional scholarship. As a result, US Black women's experiences as well as those of women of African descent transnationally have been routinely distorted within or excluded from what counts as knowledge (Hill Collins 1990 [2000]: 407).

Analysis from feminist, queer, and race studies demonstrates a relationship between legitimacy and how sociologists practice the discipline – particularly in terms of epistemological and

ontological positions (Ahmed 2010, 2014; Bhambra 2007a; Felski 2015; hooks 1989). It is important to make the link between the gendered and racialized production of canonical disciplinary value systems and the extension of this hegemonic white male power to organising the value system of the neoliberal university. Clare Hemmings notes a similar machination in the repeated closing down of feminist, women's studies, and queer studies degree programmes and departments. She writes that, that 'In institutional terms the broader discursive positioning of feminism as misguided, limited, or anachronistic...makes academic feminism extremely vulnerable' (Hemmings 2011: 10). Not only are the intellectual positions and institutional spaces inhabited by feminism unequally authorised within the value system of sociology as a discipline, this lack of value is preyed upon by the neoliberal university.

Ana Cristina Santos identifies that the main criteria for judging the 'worth' of an academic - citation metrics, the winning of grant money - are related to successful practicing of positivist ontology (Santos 2014: 9) and notes further how '[i]n mainstream academia, gender and LGBT/queer - as fields of studies - are confronted with the need for constant validation and re-legitimisation' (2014: 17). These marginal fields - which extends to disability, race, and ethnicity studies - are continually demanded to prove they deserve their seat at the table. Within the context of undergoing audits, both in research and teaching, being understood as producing or engaging with scholarship in a central and valued space of the discipline is vital to showing oneself as intellectually legitimate. The accounts of the women in this chapter point to the ongoing quality of these contests for (potential) legitimacy as sociological knowledge makers. They most particularly demonstrate feminist sociologists as needing to embed themselves in the central spaces of the discipline in order to make the case for the value of a feminist sociology. Academia always already arrives as a space which is classed, gendered, and racialized; it exists as a terrain which is deeply hostile to particular bodies and social identifications whilst putting others at a distinct advantage. The conditions of the neoliberal university exploit and deepen this inequality. The narratives in the following section, however, show feminist practice in academia as both fragile and agentic. The chapter demonstrates audit cultures as part of wider structures of sexism within academia, but it also points to ways in which feminists resist, challenge, and upturn this dominant power.

### **Being Feminist in the Academy: Dual Dances of Legitimacy**

The concomitant power and fragility of feminist practice and women academics in the neoliberal university is shown forcefully in accounts of everyday lived experiences. Les Back comments that attentiveness to the everyday, to the small and the mundane, allows us to see 'what is at stake in our daily encounters' (2015: 821), and it is from this perspective that I offer the following personal narratives. In this section, I focus on the ways in which women in sociology use writing to negotiate the demands of the Research Excellence Framework and other internal institutional audits. In doing so, I show how they experience the conditions of the neoliberal university as gendered. Further to this, I indicate the disparity between the value system of academic feminism and 'mainstream' sociology, highlighting the way that participants in my doctoral research understood themselves as seeking professional and intellectual legitimacy through multiple - often contradictory - value paradigms. Through this, I draw attention to the way that mainstream sociological legitimation sits within the dominant white, male tradition but also the way in which these are the qualities and practices privileged and rewarded within audit culture

Kate's experience shows why it is necessary to be attentive to key issues of time and emotional labour when considering the opportunity for feminist positions to be legitimate academic positions. Her story pushes to the fore the deeply gendered and (hetero)normative experience of being a parent in academia; it suggests that parenting itself is not especially problematic - rather,

the role of the 'good mother' and the conventionally gendered expectations of this (in academia but also society more broadly), conflict with the value paradigm underpinning the concept of scholarship in itself. At the beginning of my ethnography Kate had just returned from maternity leave and her daughter had recently had her first birthday. About five months into my research I met with Kate in her office. As I knocked on the door, Kate waved me in but stayed glued to her email - she was sorting out a particularly delicate negotiation of her own research. Waiting for her to finish I noticed that she looked particularly chic - a hair cut and sharp outfit had given her a glow. Despite this she looked pained. As she turned to me, I asked her how she was - a general friendly inquiry rather than a pointed research question. Even before she spoke, I could see the anxiety in her face - I thought she might simply burst into tears. There was a bit of a pause and she replied, straight off, no lead in: 'I'm really struggling with managing an academic career with parenting. There's so little time, especially with starting a new research project. And it's just the constant upheaval of having a small child'. Kate had taken it on herself to attempt to create a positive space for writing by ensconcing herself on a regular basis in a university library for several days a week. However, Kate identified that things come up and need to be dealt with then and there: this disrupts both her work and her parenting schedule and then she is 'on the back foot with both'. This experience emphasises the way in which the practice of writing shapes the gendered quality of the academy: highlighting the necessity of isolation, time, focus, and concentration required to produce written work is vital in understanding how the value system, and practical effects of this, work to exclude women academics in various ways. Kate brought up her calendar on her computer and showed me. Almost every day was filled with meetings at her institution or field site visits away from home - 'and of course you can't write in between', she said. Kate needs clear days to write - she requires calm space in which to orient herself entirely towards writing. Though Kate has goals of writing days in the library, field work whilst her daughter is in nursery, and adhering to the agreement of 'home by 5pm', these are 'all in negotiation' with her partner. Within this context, Kate's opportunity to write work of the quantity and quality deemed necessary to protect oneself within audit culture is severely diminished. Kate's confession marked a key moment in the ethnography; until this point she presented as highly successful and incredibly competent - and she undoubtedly is - but the revelation of the toll taken to perform this position was significant in drawing attention to the crucial role of feeling legitimate within academia, and the way in which performing competency and sophistication is central to this.

Rachel Hile Bassett notes that the culture of academia, exemplified in 'the work that never ends, the rigidly prescribed hierarchical career structure, the emphasis on competition and individual achievement' (Hile Bassett 2005: 1), rather than the actual work itself, ultimately prevents holding a visible caregiving role and performing as a legitimate and credentialised academic. Caregiving, in this case motherhood - but we could also think of caring for family, partners, friends (Roseneil and Budgeon 2004; ) - is not legitimated in this value paradigm. This culture must be recognised as particularly masculine and patriarchal. The focus on competition and individual achievement that Bassett identifies, as well as the time and space to complete the work that never ends assumes an academic subject who is able to devote his time to these endeavours.

The structural differences as regards feminist practice within the academy versus the way men support one another highlight the disparity of gender and the inequalities faced. Kate elaborated on this, noting that women 'always have more ground to make up [than men]'. She cited 'feminist collective practice' and noted how laborious this is: 'when people instrumental to your career ask you to do a conference, I want to support them, but when I have to pull out, go home early, or I end up writing on the morning, I then feel flakey, I feel bad'. Kate indicates a reluctance to 'let people down', because it would act contrary to her principles of feminist support. She paralleled this with how she sees men behave at conferences: 'boys running in

crowds, they bolster one another. Their sense of obligation to one another is different – they say no and don't apologize. Even the early career boys are in a position of relative power'. Kate brought this back to the gendered experience of being a parent in academia, noting that 'we [women] can't play the game like men'. Her description of being a mother in academia is in stark contrast to her experiences of seeing how men who are fathers are treated. Kate asserted that,

having children in academia is detrimental to women's careers and positive to men's. [Men's] kids are revered, they're considered special and prized for taking care of their children, whereas if you leave a conference or a meeting early as a woman, you're judged. There's a real double-standard – children become buy-outs for men. Their children actually give them more time.

Kate further expressed disbelief at the notion that 'all men saying they're leaving early for the children actually do any hands on care when they get home...it's an excuse, a way of leaving early to buy more time for work'. Her analysis mirrors that of Hunter and Leahy, writing about parenting and academia in the physical sciences, who assert that 'science is a "greedy institution" that makes total claims on scientists' membership and attempts to encompass the whole personality' (Hunter and Leahy 2010: 435; citing Grant et al 2000). This leaves little space for any caregiving role and further evidences the assertion that academic practice is oriented to the goals of the individual; thus to be legitimate within this framework, one must be viewed as dedicated and productive. Hunter and Leahy further note that 'children are likely to have an adverse effect on both productivity and visibility' (Hunter and Leahy 2010: 434). Having children arguably prevents attainment of the ideal worker in that it circumvents productivity and being visibly devoted whilst simultaneously showing priorities outside of academia. What is vital to recognise is the gender difference – that motherhood and fatherhood are enacted, perceived and policed differently and unequally.

The affect of the neoliberal university on considerations of legitimacy is also found within the ontological space of research practice. Naomi described how she felt compelled by the strictures and value system of the REF to significantly alter her work so that it would be accepted as legitimate. Naomi conveyed how she feels that her work as an ethnographer is not readily understood by the parameters for 'research outputs' that her department requires she adhere to for the REF. As such her plan is to produce four 'outputs' which can be submitted for the REF, and then return to her 'own' writing. This perception and tactical approach alters the way Naomi writes, and how she thinks about her own writing. Naomi talked about how the REF "forces writing and the amount that you write". Already Naomi is thinking of REF 2020...She looked quite pained, frustrated, and resigned as she explained that she doesn't want to work to the REF but "has to be ready for it". Naomi expressed concern that the pace of academic life and time constraints of academia make it hard to get "REF-ready and maintain your real work". She feels the pressing nature of "pace and time" – that one must work with a sense of urgency. The perceived constraints of the REF did not just influence the sort of work Naomi produced – the privileging of the 'more boring' REF-appropriate work in an already busy timetable, it also affected how Naomi felt within the space of academia. She noted that 'women of colour academics are always under more scrutiny', and the REF escalates and intensifies this. Moreover, the values enshrined by the REF shaped where Naomi chose to publish – which in turn altered how she wrote the article in question. Describing one particular publishing decision, Naomi told me that she felt under pressure to put a particular article into a mainstream sociology journal because "doing well in the REF is about where you publish as well as what you publish". However, this is not only a decision of publication site, but also of how Naomi then had to write the piece. Changing the publication to a mainstream journal meant changing the way Naomi

approached the piece. Thus, in her actions, there is evidence that sociologists – particularly women/women of colour – understand mainstream disciplinary spaces as dominated by white, male concerns. Attempting to become part of these spaces means altering how feminist research practice is presented within writing.

Having been systematically excluded from academic knowledge formation, at levels of ontology and structure, women – especially women of colour – are positioned at a greater distance from the (imagined) centre than white male colleagues. This situation is exacerbated by a contradictory condition in which the very presence of women of colour in academic spaces is often viewed as the end-point in equality and diversity achievement: their very existence silences the racialised structures of the institutional or intellectual space. Sara Ahmed identifies this in relation to institutional whiteness and the debilitating affect of reading the appearance of black and brown bodies in education as a sign of successful diversity: ‘Any success is read as a sign of an overcoming of institutional whiteness: “Look, you’re here!”, “Look, look!”’ (Ahmed 2012: 203). Because of this, subsequently pointing out the piercing scrutiny of black and brown academics, and the racialised structures of the academy is read as ingratitude: ‘Our talk about racism is read as a form of stubbornness, paranoia or even melancholia, as if we are holding on to something (whiteness) that our arrival shows has already gone’ (Ahmed 2012: 203). And so the voices of people of colour are silenced and a (white) equilibrium is reasserted. These are the conditions under which Naomi attempts to write herself into spaces of sociology. To story herself in this manner is both to externalize a perception of herself as obeying the rules of the (racialised, gendered) game but also to draw attention to herself as storied. Here, she shows the gap between her preferred writing practice and what is compelled of her professionally. Her multiple narratives of self and writing show that this is as a way of dealing with racism and sexism in spaces of sociology.

This negotiation of space is complex because of the intersection of identities and ‘acceptable’ modes of practicing these social locations. Katherine Sang’s research shows that ‘ethnic minority women academics feel marginalised as women in the Academy, and further marginalised as black academics within academic feminism’. The ‘structural racism of the feminist movement’ is further elaborated by Alison Phipps (2016: 3). Phipps details how privileged feminists assert authority over experiential stories of oppression and in doing so silence women in more marginal positions, such as women of colour, trans women, and sex workers. Phipps focuses on how political action has coalesced around telling stories of the self, but notes that these stories – and their emotional affect - are often co-opted as capital in political movements antithetical to their original telling. Indeed, Phipps explains that, ‘Experience is deployed by privileged feminists (frequently in association with conservative agendas), who wield particular narratives to generate emotion and make political gains’ (Phipps 2016: 6). As Phipps says, ‘These dynamics also flatten out lived realities so they cannot be appropriated by the other side...Those with differing experiences of the same phenomenon are unable to co-exist, and there is also little space within the individual for mixed or ambivalent feelings to endure’ (Phipps 2016: 11). Though Smith and Hill Collins both point to the creation of other sites of practice – women’s studies, feminism, black women’s studies – more attuned and welcoming to white women and women of colour, it is necessary to recognise that intersecting oppressions also operate in this putatively progressive spaces. Furthermore, the different ways that different women are able to enter and use these spaces draws attention to the mobility of spaces – darting in and out of accessibility. It also shows the dynamism of the hegemonic, in that what is commonly understood as located with and of white men, is also present and active in spaces of women/feminism. It is this complex patterning of sociology spaces, born from the influence of social structures, which further leads me to conceptualise feminist positions within the neoliberal university as both vulnerable and assertive. Kate’s narrative demonstrates ways in which the emotion work/labour of feminist



practice can leave feminists at a disadvantage in a space which does not value care-giving by women, because it is viewed too often as a taken-for-granted fact of 'femininity' and so does not take on the same symbolic capital as when done by men; however, as feminist academics we must also be aware of how particular feminist narratives and rhetoric have been co-opted as part of neoliberalism and the way in which feminists may also act in accordance with neoliberal value systems.

There is, however, another way in which feminist academics might hold power in the neoliberal university, and this is demonstrated by Johanna. During the ethnography Johanna spoke at length about her sense of place as a working-class woman in academia and the way in which the stigma, inequality, censure, and unfairness she experienced was exacerbated by the enforcement of epistemological and ontological boundaries in sociology. Johanna's path has been, in some senses, consistently 'non-traditional'. She was – in her own words – a teenage 'wild child' and subsequently achieved 'shit A levels' which severely limited her choices post-18. Having chosen the local polytechnic institute over an apprenticeship with a mechanic, Johanna ended up among a class of largely mature students. Her educational 'epiphany' came when she sold her motorbike and bought a computer. The computer had a spellchecker and could cut, copy, add paste text – which made the spatial aspects of writing much clearer. It was in using this tool that Johanna realised she wasn't a 'poor student' but instead was likely to be dyslexic. This opened up writing to Johanna in a way which hadn't previously been accessible. From this Johanna completed her undergraduate and Master's study and applied for a Ph.D. She returned to her hometown part way through to take up a permanent academic position involving heavy administration and teaching. She called this a 'Faustian pact': the caveat of the job being that she would not complete her Ph.D. research and would instead attain her Ph.D. by portfolio, through her published work. This is significant to Johanna's approach to writing and her ability to understand herself as legitimate in intellectual sociology spaces which she sees as dominated by conventional forms of research and book-length writing.

Telling me that 'disciplines and disciplining', Johanna made repeated reference to sociology as a space hostile to the modes of expression she deemed necessary and appropriate as part of her class-conscious feminist practice. Johanna often narrated her writing practice and engagement with academia in terms of shame and stigma – this included constant checks on aspects such as spelling and grammar, Johanna feeling that slipping on these parts of writing showed her as lacking the cultural or educational capital of her peers. To not use correct grammar or spelling would mark her out as unsophisticated, crude, and not grounded in a high quality prestigious education. However, in a discussion of her recent promotion to Chair, Johanna raised the question of 'what type of professor I want to be', and confided that this promotion has had a major effect on how she sees herself, confiding that, 'it has helped with internal self-stigmatisation'. When Johanna was promoted she was able to choose the title of her Chair; she debated one which made reference to feminism, gender, or class before finally deciding on 'Professor of Sociology'. For Johanna, this was a powerful moment in which she was able to 'assume the centre-ground'. The action of doing so is, as Johanna says, 'a fuck you'. For Johanna, the naming of herself as 'sociology' is pertinent – an open and pointed assertion that feminism *is* sociology, rather than something which sits externally or tangentially to the discipline.

### **Feminist Fragility and the Neoliberal University**

The accounts above demonstrate ways in which feminist practice often sits in contradiction to the values of the neoliberal university. It also demonstrates strategies women in academia have taken in order to attempt to guard against censure by the neoliberal university; often this has meant finding ways to claim mainstream space as their own. To end, I want to draw attention to

the ambiguity and ambivalence of these feminist positions – that these women’s experiences and strategies show them both as agentive and exposed to the precarity of a patriarchal and exclusionary audit culture. This is neatly shown by adding some texture to Kate’s narrative. Though Kate articulated a very clear inequality between men and women in the academy, and drew attention to how this is underscored in the position of women who are mothers, she was also keenly aware of her privilege and the power of her status as a senior academic. Kate expressed this particularly in relation to her own consciousness regarding the REF. She discussed her relative security within this system, noting that, ‘70% of my REF activities are probably things I’d do anyway’. The journals she wants to publish in – her desired audience – are already the mainstream department-approved journals. Kate recognised her advantage here – that she is able to work within the parameters of the REF without it strongly affecting her writing practice, publication decisions, or sense of self. Crucially, Kate located this advantage in her career stage and institutional location – that she is ‘lucky’ that there is accord between her aims and those of her institution. Further to this, having published in highly-rated journals and won several large grants, Kate asserted her ability to refuse some of the parameters of audit culture: ‘I’m in a position to tell them to fuck off, to say “fuck you”. Early career people who are precarious are not’. Here, Kate pointedly notes that her institutional privilege – again, drawn on grounds of hegemonic (male, white) power is what protects much of her own feminist practice. Despite Kate’s strong feelings of precarity as a mother, she does possess some safe institutional ground. Kate’s ability to draw on elements of hegemonic power whilst concomitantly being disadvantaged within a system geared to a male-oriented value system shows the complexity of feminist positions within the academy – particularly the uneasy cooperation with dominant power that a number of feminist/women participants spoke of undertaking.

The fragility of feminist positions in the academy is emphatically shown in those instances where the neoliberal university openly appropriates and uses those feminist positions for its own purposes. Naomi spoke powerfully about this, citing numerous instances in which she is ‘dragged’ onto various institutional diversity and administrative panels in order to represent the ‘brown woman’ position. This highlights how Naomi is already monitored within the system *because* of her position as a woman of colour. It also augments Naomi’s earlier argument that her very cautious and thorough preparation for the REF is necessary because women of colour academics are ‘always under more scrutiny’ and because of this it’s necessary to obtain the standard levels of achievement, but also show how you go ‘above and beyond’ these. Naomi feels the need not just to prove that her work was valuable to the institution but that she herself is of value also – and often this means being compelled to replicate dominant forms of legitimacy in published work whilst simultaneously standing as a marker of ‘diversity’ for the institution. Naomi’s account shows how women of colour are reified and pushed to do significant symbolic work for the neoliberal university. Naomi’s attainment of ‘elite’ status in sociology – as a Professor - is built upon serious physical labour. It is not simply that Naomi thinks a certain style of creative or artistic sociology will be judged harshly by her more policy or scientific method oriented peers, it is that she recognizes her *visibility* as a woman of colour. The bolstering of her ‘real’ work with her REF work is done as self-protection. The labour involved is not only physical but emotional as well, and it emerges from the need to shorten the perceived distance between herself and the centre-ground of sociology through sheer hard graft.

This chapter has highlighted the way in which taking a feminist position in the neoliberal academy often results in paradoxical mobilisations of power and privilege. Each of the participants I have discussed continues to hold a secure, senior position within sociology and all have shown an ability to embed themselves within academia, produce the work they deem worthwhile, and engage with academia from a feminist perspective. Johanna makes serious claims to the value of feminist practice and gender-oriented scholarship to sociology through her

choice of title. Kate underscores the value of communitarian, collective feminist practice through continuing her commitment to this despite feeling its inconsistency with the neoliberalisation of sociology. However, all three examples show in this chapter also demonstrate that part of securing oneself in academia whilst holding a feminist position is ultimately often come by through increased workload. Ros Gill comments that, 'A punishing intensification of work has become an endemic feature of academic life' (Gill 2009: 231), and I think this is even more so for women, and for women who attempt to live academia through feminist research methods, thought, and practice. Naomi's strategy of writing double the amount of work necessary, so that she can fulfil both her political goals and professional requirements is both laborious and emotionally draining. This is succinctly demonstrated through another example, which focuses on the role of epistemology and the canon. Sharon M. Meagher recounts a situation in which feminist philosopher Barbara Freeman was asked by a man, after a conference presentation, 'what about Hegel?' – a question which showed little engagement with the work Freeman had actually presented:

Freeman got up from her chair, walked around the table to the very edge of the stage and leaning hard toward the questioner, screamed "WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH HEGEL? WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH HEGEL? FUCKING NOTHING!" Freeman then calmly returned to her seat, took the microphone, and answered the man's question in tremendous detail, proving that she could pass his test while at the same time exposing the absurdity of having to engage in such a translation project (Meagher 2012: 206).

The above quotation is used by Meagher to evidence her assertion that Freeman has succinctly and successfully challenged the modes of dominant knowledge production in philosophy whereby feminist philosophers are unfairly and unequally compelled not only to have expertise in feminist philosophy but also a full command of the mainstream canon. Meagher writes of the 'extraordinary and unfair expectations that were being placed on us' and the 'utter lack of reciprocity' from mainstream, usually white male philosophers, who feel no responsibility to have any knowledge of feminist theories (Meagher 2012: 205-206). Freeman's fierce, calculated, and scholarly response to the 'Hegel boy' in the audience is praised by Meagher, but is it such a victory? Meagher's description of the event indicates that Freeman's response – whilst certainly effective – is also built on returns to the dominant symbolic of knowledge production and fraught with emotional and intellectual labour, and furthermore, demonstrates that in order to make these claims to legitimacy, many of us simply end up working harder. Feminist fragility in the neoliberal academy stems from the way that the value system of the neoliberal academy and the audit cultures it allows to thrive is driven by a patriarchal conception of legitimate knowledge production.

### **The Price We Pay**

The above discussion of feminist positions in the neoliberal academy demonstrates opportunities for assertiveness within the vulnerability of difficult and potentially hostile institutional conditions. I want, especially, to end this chapter on a note of hope, and to pull together how the strategic machinations of participants here provide firm ground on which we might claim validity for feminist positions within an increasingly destructive and narrow conception of 'knowledge' in academia. Ros Gill perceptively notes that,

The “kitchen” of academia is, it would seem, too hot for almost everyone, but this has not resulted in collective action to turn down the heat, but instead to an overheated competitive atmosphere in which acts of kindness, generosity and solidarity often seem to continue only in spite of, rather than because of, the governance of universities (Gill 2009: 232).

My question, related to this, is twofold: firstly, whether the inclusion of feminist academics in the governance of universities (for instance even in the ways Naomi is used) might result in the egalitarian, communitarian, and supportive politics of feminist practice becoming part of institutional governance; secondly, whether it matters – and is perhaps preferable – that feminist positions sit outside of institutional power? Is there a way of countering the neoliberal university through the continued creation of institutional spaces oriented to feminist practice (such as this collection, for example)? Michael Billig asserts that audit culture is ‘a culture of boasting’ (2013: 24). Might we not take this on ourselves and ‘boast’ of the significant contributions feminism has already made to the academy – to openly and assertively own these in teaching, research, and writing. Arguably, under these conditions of inspection and audit, it is important to follow Johanna’s example and claim feminist positions as always already present within the academy.

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