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Beyond the academic imposter syndrome. A Feminist Relational Discourse Analysis of accounts of (un)belonging from UK working-class women academics.

RICKETT, Bridgette and THOMPSON, Lucy

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Corresponding author:

Dr Bridgette Rickett   b.rickett@shu.ac.uk

Beyond the academic imposter syndrome. A Feminist Relational Discourse Analysis of accounts of (un)belonging from UK working class women academics.

Abstract

Previous research utilised discourse analysis to explore institutional ideal worker discourse to find that it shapes (un)belonging and shores up an unequal and stratified academy via intersecting classed and gendered discourse. This paper develops this work by utilising Feminist Relational Discourse Analysis (FRDA) on interview data from twelve, one-to-one semi-structured interviews with working-class women academics employed in UK Higher Education institutions. This analysis, first, identified a dominant discourse; *'being a fish out of water'* that drew on a contemporary iteration of the 'psy complex' construction of the 'imposter syndrome' to obscure systems of power underpinned by gendered and classed portrayals of who embodies the ideal academic. Second, the analysis produced I Poems which uncovered hidden accounts of how this dominant discourse silences via a coupling with sufficient/deficient academic discourse to individualise – and make private – shameful and painful emotional experiences of unbelonging. Conversely, simultaneously voiced accounts attempted to resist and rally against individualised deficient constructions. This study evidences the utility of FRDA to uncover the unheard and silenced voiced accounts that are intimately connected to discursive systems of gendered and classed power, while illuminating counter-narratives that challenge individualised discourse of inequalities to claim rightful citizenship in the UK Academy.

Introduction

While historically the definition of social class has been the subject of debate (see Bullock and Limbert, 2009; Phoenix and Tizard, 1996; Rubin et al, 2014), recent scholarship within psychology has sought to establish a commonly shared definition of social class as a category into which people are socialised. In addition, it is proposed to afford amounts of capital/resource including: economic - access to income and wealth; cultural - the legitimacy of our interests, preferences, and education and knowledge according to dominant groups in society; and social - the economic and cultural value of the personal ties and networks we develop or inherit (see Rickett and Sheehy-Skeffington, 2022). Disappointingly, in contrast to gender, there has been a remarkable paucity of psychology scholarship on the study of social class, despite the findings that social class measures predict a plethora of life outcomes such as our educational achievements, our health, and our work-related outcomes (Rickett et al., 2022). Class also has profoundly psychological dimensions (see Day, Rickett and Woolhouse, 2017), including ways of viewing ourselves and the social world around us (Warren, 2022). As such, the recent rise in the psychological study of social class is welcome, necessary, and timely as research reports a near-universal trend towards dramatic increases in the wealth gap between the rich and the poor over the past two decades (Chancel, et al., 2022). Given this, and the evidence that economic capital is a strong driver of social class-based outcomes, the impact of social class on people's lives is now likely to be more, not less, pronounced.

Discourse around Social Class

Discursive psychological approaches are critical if we are to understand the interrelationship between the rhetorical mechanisms that underpin how we understand ourselves, others, and the world around us within the broader, embedded, dominant, and powerful societal and institutional level discourses around social class. While discursive work within psychology is long established, this scholarship has also paid relatively little attention to social class. Nonetheless the small body of scholarship that has centred on social class has yielded a growing body of in-depth and illuminating knowledge.

Working-class as inherently inferior

As psychosocial theorists such as Ryan (2017) have argued, a less articulated enabler and sustainer of class hierarchies are socially produced notions of superiority and inferiority which are stitched into classed subjectivities**.** Phoenix and Tizard's (1996) data from interviews with young Londoners drew our attention to the means by which middle-class participants talk often drew upon figures from popular culture such as TV shows to discursively position working-class people as inferior (and them as superior). While more recent intersectional research found that positioning functions to 'other' in both a classed and gendered manner. For example, interview data revealed not only that working-class personhood was often constructed as inferior, irrational, feckless, and worthy of disgust, but also that this was particularly pronounced in the construction of working-class women, while their fellow men were more likely to be depicted as aggressive, lacking impulse control, and prone to risk-taking and criminal activities (Valentine and Harris, 2014).

Important research from applied psychology has examined how such constructions reflect socially shared values around social class and how these drive exclusion in organisational

settings. For example, Cleland and Palma (2018) examined the institutional discourse deployed by senior leadership in medical schools to find that the language used reinforced culturally located stereotypes about 'us' and 'them', assumed classed differences derived from the economic background of applicants and/or their families, and drew upon these to conclude inherent, 'fixed' characteristics that reinforce a classed ideology of difference.

As Valentine and Harris (2014) have persuasively argued, such findings illustrate that these judgements are moralising, produced from cultural ideologies, and they matter because they justify contemporary social exclusion (e.g. who should be allowed to be where and when) which is often reconfigured as an individual problem emanating from the morally and economically 'inferior' poor (Rickett, 2020).

Invisibilising Social Class hierarchies

Discursive work has also identified an opaqueness in talk around social class which leaves class identities often difficult to claim and any prevailing social class discrimination difficult to name as socially produced classism. For example, the aforementioned research by Phoenix and Tizard (1996) argued that participants appeared to have restricted access to a discourse of class as a result of powerful discourse that dissolves a society stratified along class lines. While Cleland and Palma's work (2018) found university senior leadership teams differentiated between social class groups often using subtle linguistic signalling (e.g., working-class applicants as 'WP' and middle-class students as 'our students'). Arguably this work highlights how limited or coded discourse around social class can justify class hierarchies and make classed identities fraught or difficult.

Other work has established that an important discursive mechanism driving the invisiblising of social class inequities and classed identities is the saturation of neo-liberalist notions of shared humanness, meritocracy, and individual responsibility to justify class privilege or

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indeed the lack of it. For instance, within US university institutions 'upper-class' students often discursively justified their privilege by reference to their parents' hard work, while classed divisions raised by working-class peers (e.g. stress around financial difficulties) were denied by middle-class students. Instead, a 'shared humanity' discourse was drawn upon to establish being human as the final leveller, the world as classless, and themselves as 'class-blind' (Thomas and Azmitia, 2014).

Despite this, working-class peoples are painfully conscious of their classed identities and the inequalities bestowed upon them and may see upwards social mobility as a means to escape some of these inequalities along with their stigmatised working-class identity. As a way of illustration, discursive work has found a reproduction of a meritocracy discourse in talk about future selves, where education, hard work, and drive are referred to as enabling social mobility in a fluid, unidimensional classed system (Bullock and Limbert, 2003; Schwartz, Donovan, and Guido-DeBrito, 2009). However, a fluid class system does not straightforwardly create a socially mobile self. This process is complicated, and fraught with structural and social barriers that collude to ensure that classed (and gendered) identities stick and often create a profound lack of belonging (Rickett and Morris, 2021). As such, constructions resemble less of a 'classless society' and more of an acknowledged social hierarchy that is only inclusive to those who work hard, have the aspirations to merit inclusion *and* whose social and individual characteristics 'fit.' Consequently, as Jay, Muldoon and Howarth (2018) argue, inequalities are hidden and there is a lack of positive discourse about the working-class, while the middle-class both seek claims to the 'hard worker' identity while striving to deny or silence the impact of differential economic, social and cultural resources via a reproduction of the classless society (Sanders and Mahalingam, 2012).

In addition, in some contexts, this discursive silencing via an 'othering' of class is gendered. For example, scholarship has found that working-class women working in 'elite' organisations presented their workplace as hostile to their class background and concealed their background to avoid pejorative judgment (Freidman, 2022; Rickett and Morris, 2021), while their male counterparts were more likely to openly embody and position their background as a social and cultural resource (Friedman, 2022).

Within this discursive and relational terrain, class also becomes a deeply personal and affective experience. In 2014 bell hooks wrote, "no one wants to talk about class. It is not sexy or cute." (hooks, 2014 [7]). Thereby, such discussion doesn't evoke pleasure nor is it desirable. Furthermore, the startling paucity of research on class within psychology has led some thinkers to conclude that the reason for such an important omission of thought on the subject is because the above-mentioned discursive terrain produces an emotional milieu where "class is an embarrassing and unsettling subject" (Sayer, 2005 [1]). For example, Crozier, Burke, and Archer (2016) found in their higher education research that, while different from the reluctance to discuss race, there was a clear and uncomfortable, squeamish unwillingness to discuss class. Here, then, speaking out is muffled by this emotional milieu, which, in turn, is often underpinned by feelings of shame that erode the confidence to discuss class. This silencing of working-class voices is relational to a particular performance of 'speaking up/out' stitched into norms around middle classness (Ryan, 2017).

The consequences of silencing voiced accounts of classed subjectivities, inequalities and divisions span the class hierarchy. For working-class subjectivities, an embarrassed silence is both underpinned by shame *and* produces shame around not being able to speak out. This process threatens social bonds and creates trouble for friendships and wider relationships, leaving shame to stick and stigmatise, forcing the shamed to engage in emotionally fraught identity management of the self and their practices (Scheff, 2003). While emotionally fraught

silence often reflects taboos surrounding the open discussion of social class, this is coupled with a dominance of middle-class norms in higher education contexts that further prevent economically privileged persons from critically reflecting on their 'superior' class identity and how it might shape social relations (Glodjo, 2017). Indeed Layton (2006) has theorised shame as thwarting alliances across social class, thereby considering it as one of the main emotions that sustains classed subjectivities and hierarchies. As such, it may be that discursive approaches require additional analytic tools to capture this affective and emotional landscape. While there is abundant value in discursive and affective research, these two domains have been constructed as largely incompatible in psychological scholarship (Thompson et al. 2018). This is problematic because in our everyday lives the discursive and affective dimensions of experience are very much intertwined and enmeshed. Because social class and classed experiences are so heavily bound by both affective (personal) and discursive (political) constraints, research combining these two domains is critical if we are to account for impacts of class hierarchies. In response, the current research employs voice-centred discursive methods to better understand the complexities of this personal-political interplay as it shapes classed subjectivities in academic settings. In the following sections, we will discuss recent advances in discursive research examining classed academic subjectivities, before making the case for a voice-centred discursive approach in this context.

Discourse and working-class women in academic contexts

Psychological research has recently found that socially mobile (or working-class origin) workers, despite benefits conferred via higher pay and occupational status, have more complex experiences navigating their work-life environments; possibly due to a combination of work/non-work norms and values mismatch, and organisationally embedded class-based bias. Consequently, their work-life interactions are more likely to be characterised with

conflict, feelings of disconnect, and low sense of belonging, leaving them unable to be their authentic self and flourish in either their work or non-work roles (Evans and Wyatt, 2022). Importantly, as previously argued, discursive work suggests these characterisations are gendered in particular ways which trouble the socially mobile ideal self where, for women, heteronormative discourses disrupt and fragment the opportunities for academic mobility in different and more profound ways than their male counterparts (Cohen et al., 2020).

However, there is little further understanding within psychology around working-class women's experiences in academic contexts - any scholarship on this is mainly derived from social science research authored by working-class feminist academics. This research makes visible differentials in how working-class women experience themselves and their academic work life (e.g. Acker, 1992; Reay, 1998) and reveals that these are littered with experiences of classism and sexism (Langhout, Drake and Rosselli, 2009), while different processes of social segregation enable persistent devaluing and sometimes disregard (e.g. Reay, 2004). And, their bodies and practices are policed and regulated to fit masculinised and middle-class norms (e.g. Raisborough and Adams, 2008) that proliferate within academia. As such, rather than the joyous and fruitful journey sold by the meritocracy discourse, socially mobile, working-class origin academic women struggle with feelings of belonging, identity and authenticity (Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine, 2003; Reay, 2004), leaving some severed and alienated from both themselves as working-class women and the ideal, middle-class and masculinised (and White) academic way of being (Hey, 2003; Mahony and Zmroczek, 2005).

Feminist Scholarship and the knowledge hierarchy

As Rickett (2020) argues, rather than an objective value-free science, the discipline of Psychology has been guilty of assuming, reproducing, and arguably, constructing standards

of personhood that serve to give value to one category of person while positioning others as insufficient. This produces disciplinary benefit for certain, standardised groups knitted high up in the knowledge hierarchies in higher education.

For example, feminists have long argued that psychology has assumed a male standard, which locates men as a reference point against which women are regarded unfavourably or simply ignored (Gilligan, 1982). Black psychologists have similarly argued that normative whiteness has historically been constructed and thereby treated as the standard and 'default' (Richards, 2012), while people of colour are silenced as the 'non-white' or derogated 'other' and in the process racialised. Unsurprisingly perhaps, given this history, 'class' has often been used as a euphemism for 'working-class,' and therefore the 'other' to the middle-class (Blackman, 1996). Thus, psychology has historically validated wider academic 'certified' ways of knowing (Kress and Kress, 2011) that have historically regulated university level education and most closely align with a White, Western, middle-class, and masculinised view of the world, which in turn is presented as an objective 'truth' (Rickett, 2020). This 'others' embodied knowledge that does not align with classed and gendered ideals to a less reliable and less valid position in academia.

For example, Rickett and Morris (2021) argue that the binary discourse of rationality and emotion in intellectualised western thought is not coincidental, nor is it neutral, but rather positioned in a hierarchical way that values the embodiment and the performance of one over the other. This power positioning of rationality over emotion, in addition to the gendering of this binary through positivist and dualist modes of knowledge production, favours middle-class, masculinised minds, bodies, and practices while constructing feminised, working-class minds as inherently inferior.

Working-class women (un)belonging in the academy

Socially class-based inequalities can be usefully theorised by employing feminist informed discourse analysis to examine how women consolidate and assert a sense of belonging and therefore resist the imposition of the working-class 'other' (Wagner and McLaughlin, 2015). Such research has focused on contemporary forms of labour (e.g. emotional labour). For instance, recent discursive research has found that UK working-class origin academic women's talk was marked by classed and gendered discourse which presented emotional labour as both a vehicle to feelings of belonging, yet also as something that is devalued and divisive (Rickett and Morris, 2021). These contested understandings of emotional labour suggest that there are complex affective dimensions to classed subjectivities that cannot be understood with a discursive approach alone. This warrants further exploration from a perspective that can account for both the affective and discursive dimensions of voiced experience. This is especially necessary in light of prior research, which has demonstrated the power of discourse to shape voiced accounts of classed subjectivities. For instance, as previous research has established, the voicing of social class is often made difficult via the discursive invisibilising of social class-based inequalities and an ever-present dominance of the working-class 'other,' all of which is filtered through an affective and emotional milieu. In addition, as emotions are often left unnoticed in discourse, authors have recently argued for an emotion-based discourse analysis to afford a clearer view of the emotional terrain within the experience of a discourse (e.g., Koschut, 2018). What's more, the voices of individuals are often lost when focussing on the overarching discourses drawn across a series of told stories (Saukko, 2010). Some forms of discourse analysis also directly reject notions of a singular 'truth' to consider multiple/alternative understandings, which might lead to women's material experiences and disadvantages not being regarded as 'true'. Both the former and latter features are in direct opposition to the goals of feminism (Burman, 1990). Therefore, discourse analysis alone may struggle to hear those voices or the emotionality

within them and may have the unforeseen consequence of dislodging feminist goals. As a means of addressing these shortcomings, this present research will utilise a recently developed, innovative form of analysis - Feminist Relational Discourse Analysis (FRDA) - to creatively unearth both discursive systems of power *and* the voices of those that are often silenced within them. The centering of voice within FRDA allows us to understand how spoken accounts of the self, including the emotional substance of these, are intimately connected with discourse and can provide powerful, feminist-informed counter-narratives to dominant ways of understanding (Thompson, Rickett, and Day, 2018)**.** This is accomplished by recognizing that people's voiced accounts often express complexities and contradictions that provide valuable insights into the messiness of experience. In addition, analysing these voiced accounts voice in relation to discourse can assist in the generation of feminist understandings of how lived experiences are actively shaped, moderated, accepted, resisted, and negotiated within the confines of overarching discourse (Saukko, 2010). FRDA has been effectively employed across diverse research aims, for example, to understand mothers' voiced accounts of the discourse around the 'duty to protect' (Gillborn, Rickett and Woolhouse, 2022), how online women's voiced experiences of abuse were shaped via 'personal growth' discourse (Howard and Adan, 2022) and how gender non-binary people voice experience within freedom discourse (Ward and Lucas, 2023). This present research will both develop this scholarship around FRDA and further expand the discursive understanding of gendered and classed (un)belonging within academic contexts for working-class origins women via the following aims:

• To identify the gendered and classed discourses around (un)belonging within UK Higher Education *and* uncover the voices of working-class women academics within them.

- To illuminate how spoken accounts of the gendered and classed academic self are intimately connected to discourse and can provide feminist-informed counter-narratives to dominant ways of understanding.

- To examine the ways in which voiced experiences are affectively and agentically shaped, moderated, accepted, resisted, and negotiated within overarching discourse.

Methods

Details of Study

To address these main aims, we extended an earlier discourse analysis of data derived by interviews with 12 academics (Rickett and Morris, 2021) to add in the 2nd step of FRDA in order to discover voiced accounts of how discourses impact on us and structure how we experience ourselves (see steps to analysis section). The participants in the 2021 study met three criteria; they identified as a woman, as working-class, and currently worked as an academic in UK Higher Education. None of the participants knew each other, and they worked in a broad range of disciplines including Psychology, Criminology, English, Design and Technology, History, and Economics. As previously argued, social class is a complex interplay of economic, social, and cultural capital. However, people's 'subjective' sense of which social class they belong to is often at odds with more formalised, objective measures, particularly for the socially mobile where such measures of present social class and a current self-identification of social class may differ. Subjective assessments can illuminate individual level asynchrony between how class is measured, and self-identification can capture context and the intersectional nature of social class more readily (Rubin et al., 2014; Cabinet Office, 2018; Rickett and Sheehy-Skeffington, 2022). As such, it followed that we should use self-definition as a measure of class (and all other characteristics).

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In addition to self-identifying as working-class, the sample were mainly white (8), with the remaining identifying as Black, Pakistani, and 'mixed-race' and most identifying as Straight/ Heterosexual, with 4 identifying as LGBTQAI+. In addition, ages ranged from 28 to 62 years old, and all stages of the academic career were represented. Unsurprisingly, while our sample was diverse, social class dominated interview data. When prompted to talk about ethnicity or sexuality participants reported that being working-class was more central to them and others. This could potentially be a response to the unusual invitation to talk about the 'embarrassing and unsettling subject' (Sayer, 2005 [1]) of social class that drove motivations to take part, together with a salience of being working-class for these participants within the profoundly middle-class space of academia. This small sample size allowed us to conduct in-depth interviews, enabling the generation of a wealth of in-depth data consistent with discourse analysis methodology. As Sandelowski (1995) posits, a small sample size is not an issue in discourse analysis as the interest is in the variety of ways the language is used. However, while we note it is possible to use a single person's narrative within qualitative inquiry, given our aims, we followed the suggestion of between four and ten participants (see Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009) for a substantial piece of research that enabled, first, a thorough discourse analysis *and*, second, a diverse array of voiced accounts. All interviews were semi-structured, were carried out on a 'one-to-one' basis and consisted of questions constructed to extract narrative accounts of experiences. Interviews lasted an average of 90 min and were recorded with prior permission using a digital recording device. Pseudonyms were given to participants, and these will be used from this point onwards. The interviews were conducted by one of two researchers, who identified as Bisexual and Straight/ Heterosexual, White, working-class women.

Steps to analysis

The steps outlined in Thompson, Rickett, and Day (2018) were followed in detail. We were first interested in the way that gendered and classed power relations intersect and reside in discourse and what potential implications these have for aiding/hindering equal relations. More specifically, we aimed to identify overarching discourse deployed by the speakers around belonging, gender, and class. A main concern was the speaker's positioning within these discourses, the possible implications for subjectivity and practice, and what such discourses might tell us about the wider social conditions within which these working-class women academics are situated.

To this end, in step 1, text was read through several times and then 'chunked' (a section of text that centres on a particular topic/issue). All chunks were coded using NVivo themes where each chunk is labelled as a theme that reflects the words or phrases used repeatedly in them or that best represent what is being described (e.g. clothes and speech). We then identified ways in which these themes were being discussed (e.g., being unable to sound intelligent). Following this, we looked for similar ways of talking, first within each theme, then across the different themes, examining the varied and contrasting ways that femininities and class were constructed. Finally, an over-arching, dominant discourse centring on (un)belonging was identified: '*being a fish out of water.'*

In Step 2, Voiced accounts were identified to inform how lived experiences of working-class women academics in the UK are actively mediated and negotiated through the discourse identified. 'I Poems' were then generated for each participant by collating the quotes that pertained to the discourse. For example, to generate Ellie's I Poem for this overarching discourse, Ellie's interview transcript was examined to identify the coded chunks pertaining to the discourse and these were copied, in sequential order, into a separate document.

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Second, each statement made in the first person was then underlined, including every "I" statement and accompanying verbs. In addition, we revised guidance on producing I Poems (Gilligan et al., 2003) to not only use statements beginning with 'I' but also to include statements beginning with "you" or "we" where a participant was discussing their own experiences using a collective pronoun. This revision reflected recent psychology scholarship which provides an understanding of how the way we see ourselves and our aspirations are a classed phenomenon and the classed cultures we inhabit and our exposure to networks shape certain practices and expectations, which in turn reinforce classed psychologies (Kraus and Stephens, 2012; Stephens, Markus and Fryberg., 2012; Manstead, 2018). In the case of working-class communities, a collective, interdependent model of the self in relation to others is more common, therefore collective pronouns are more commonly used to mean 'I' (Ross, 2004).

Third, underlined first-person statements were kept, and the rest of the data deleted to create an I Poem for each participant. Finally, the resultant I Poems allowed the researcher to hear and find each participants' first-person voice concerning the discourse at play, allowing us to listen to how the participant narrates their own self and experiences more clearly. This stage involves listening for the multiple (or contrapuntal) voices within each poem, which could be contradictory or complementary, to identify the layers of the person's experience, including emotional experience. This step captured the personal in relation to the discursive and considers the self as mediated by both discourse and experience by emphasizing first-person voice as the central site of meaning (Thompson et al., 2018). Through this approach, multi-layered voices and experiences were heard whilst acknowledging the discursive realms within which they are situated, and a theoretical account was constructed to address the research aims.

Findings

Step 1: Discourse Analysis

Being a fish out of water

Talk around unbelonging dominated the data, and in many cases, this talk was either explicitly or implicitly presented as manifesting from a 'complex' that produced an unworthy and inadequate self. This subjectivity was commonly presented as fixed 'inside' them, while stories were told of the externally conspicuous marking of working-class women as not embodying the social and cultural capital required to fit in and belong.

> Extract 1: Ellie 'I mean I do feel still a bit like a fish out of water because I would say that I'm still a rarity in a way so, but certainly I don't think I would say any of my immediate colleagues have had or have the same background … I find it easier to get on with the support staff and have a chat about random things more than sometimes I do with the academic staff.'

In extract 1, Ellie presents herself as alone, where the lack of other working-class academics leaves her and her 'background' 'othered'. This positioning is contrasted with relations with other non-academic contracted colleagues ("support staff") who were constructed as welcoming, relations with them more effortless, and conversation easier and lighter ("random"). It is noteworthy that while relationships between working-class women (and assumed middle-class) academics were mainly used as examples of unbelonging, there was other talk which presented some of those relationships as friendships.

> Extract 2: Eliza, 'There are 4 of us and we are very close and we are very lucky, I consider myself very lucky that I have those colleagues, those friends erm and I know

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that I can go and share with them if I need to and they can do the same with me and so I think we offer each other emotional support'

Extract 3: Martha, 'I veer between those sorts of cultures of middle-class and you know we go around to (work) friends and occasionally have a bottle of wine and stuff like that but at the same time I'm just as happy eating a spread cheese sandwich with some Seabrook crisps'

In extract 2, Eliza repeatedly describes herself "lucky" to have four "close" relationships that offer emotional support and friendship. This positioning of friendships with (assumed middle-class) colleagues as fortuitous is in direct contradiction to the meritocracy discourse where this "luck" would be re-understood as the gains of a socially mobile self who works hard and is skilful at making and sustaining supportive friendships. It also presents such friendships as exceptional. While Martha (extract 3) situates such unusual transcending of class boundaries (expressed via references to classed food practices) as means to avoid a potentially fractured self.

Extract 4: Ellie 'I'm different so I feel like I don't belong to this social group shall we say, so I hate dinner parties'.

However, the above extract demonstrates that such fluid assimilation is not just presented as exceptional or as a mean to a healthy self - it is presented as near impossible for some participants. Here profound unbelonging is constructed as extending to an abject lack of desirability to engage in social events often associated with being and maintaining middle-classness (such as "dinner parties") and often utilised to ensure social network connectivity with other middle-class people. As sociologists Pachucki and Malo (2014) found, despite the undeniable requirement for both economic capital and cultural capital to enjoy a dinner party, it is social capital (the people we know) that is drawn upon in the construction of the

preferences in food and how it served and consumed. For Ellie, attending these events are both necessary to enable access to the economic and cultural value of such personal ties and networks yet a highly undesirable and possibly unsuccessful means to make friends and fit in.

Furthermore, there was an emphasis on how a visible, embodied lack of cultural capital marks 'otherness' and signifies a lower position in the knowledge hierarchy:

> Extract 5: Therese 'What I'm saying might sound intelligent but the way I say it might not be the most eloquent way … and maybe that's just a perception thing or maybe I perceive I've got to do that, or whether it's like that sort of idea of imposter syndrome.'

> Extract 6: Natalie 'But imposter syndrome is this thing that makes you feel like you're not good enough sort of thing and I think working-class sort of ties into that massively because I wasn't brought up speaking in an academic manner.'

> Extract 7: Eliza 'Even just the sound of my voice is different from theirs and maybe they don't notice but I do and everyone else just sounds more intelligent"

> Extract 8: Maddie 'I think I feel intimidated at times, I don't feel as clever, I don't feel as knowledgeable, and I don't feel as capable in comparison to some of my colleagues.'

The way a person speaks is presented as firmly denoting the cultural capital required to be an ideal academic. Moreover, ways of speaking are drawn as a measure of cultural capital and the lack of ability to perform this marks not just an illegitimate form of education and knowledge but an intelligence deficiency, positioning them as being unable to acceptably perform cleverness. Interestingly, Knights and Clarke (2014) have theorised that there is a necessity for academics to work hard to present a 'clever' self despite what Ford, Harding, and Learmonth (2010) argue to be the "sheer impossibility of being as skilful and wise as is

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required" [76]. However, while research has found that, for the middle-classes, the knack of performing cleverness defers potential as well as entitlement (Lucey and Reay, 2002), cleverness collides with classed neoliberal discourses of meritocracy to produce the deserving and undeserving citizen, determined by the (in)ability to adequately embody the hierarchical positioned form of knowledge. For example, Maddie (extract 8) presents herself as not being able to demonstrate that she is "knowledgeable" enough, or capable enough, and being intimidated into not feeling as clever. While Eliza argues that "even the sound of my voice" (extract 7) marks her as lacking intelligence in comparison to her middle-class colleagues' voices who do perform the legitimate cultural capital to defer the embodied intelligence and entitlement to be an academic. Therefore, the detection and exposure of a lack of the necessary cultural capital is unavoidable and the simple act of speaking denotes inferiority.

Interestingly, there is also a contrasting construction of inherent intelligence that draws on social capital bestowed in childhood via a reference to books and family "talk" in the home, in addition to evidence from hierarchically ranked achievement levels across children in school:

> Extract 9 : Julie, 'I had always known I was clever, I had always been in the top 3 at school, I kind of knew, I guess I kind of knew, even though I was from a working-class background my parents talked and my dad had books around they weren't remotely academic books but he did read and have books around, so it was a different sort of environment.'

However, this confidence of being embodied with intellectual capabilities is highly unusual in the data where feelings of 'othering' are often explicitly located within a 'psy complex' (e.g., extracts 5 and 6). The 'psy complex' refers a set of professions who examine the 'psyche,' and which serve to regulate and control groups and individuals (Foucault, 1972,

1981). The 'imposter syndrome' originates from early 'psy complex' explanations that emphasise the intrapsychic obstacles that explain women's fear of success (e.g. Clance and Imes, 1978; Horner, 1970), individualising alienation and producing a self-regulating subject who is responsible for 'improving themselves' to avoid the failure that the syndrome may provoke (Young, 2011). Here, constructions draw on a deficient self and this is sewn tightly into the genealogy of the discourse of 'imposter syndrome' (Rickett and Roman, 2021). However, what may be construed as an individual's private emotions, which one can 'self-regulate' (such as anguish associated with an 'imposter syndrome'), may be inseparable from the structural and power relations that produce them and should, as such, be viewed as both individually and organisationally situated (Martin, Knopoff, and Beckman, 1998). For example, Robinson (2018) found that Black women academic faculty attributed feelings of imposterism to structural relations that projected feelings of imposterism onto them because of their dual identities as Black women. These women understood themselves as being 'imposterised' by normative relations that positioned them as inferior, revealing limitations with individualized accounts of 'imposter syndrome.' Drawing on this evidence as part of a feminist psychological reconceptualisation of 'imposter syndrome,' Thompson (2023) argues that imposter syndrome can be better understood through the examination of 'imposterising practices', which reveal a politics of institutional belonging and unbelonging. Such practices function to establish ideal 'legitimate' institutional citizens while casting 'others' as illegitimate in comparison. Here, Thompson (2023) draws on Ahmed's figure of the institutional 'stranger' (2017) to describe those who do not inhabit institutional norms, arguing that imposterism is embodied by these estranged citizens who are called into question by the institution and must therefore work harder to inhabit it.

Therefore, an interesting further reading of the use of the term 'imposter syndrome' is that it aids sense-making around unbelonging, while enabling the production of a collective of other

'affect aliens' (Ahmed, 2010), such as fellow working-class 'sufferers'. Breeze (2018) argues that feelings of being an imposter can be a shared resource where 'othered' workers can connect and be critical of standards, therefore creating space to resist the discourse of the deficient self. While no such solidarity was explicitly shared by our participants, individualised responsibilisation of unbelonging was countered, via stories that held culturally embedded, classist and sexist 'othering' to account.

> Extract 10: Therese 'I did meet colleagues at a restaurant when I first got the job and they thought I was the waitress. They walked in and I'm sat at a table and they asked me 'oh you know we've got a table booked and you know the names this? And I was kind of like I think I'm supposed to be on that table with you (both laugh) it was a bit awkward but we laugh about it now.'

> Extract 11: Gina 'There is very much like a mansplaining like what working-class is, and you're like yes I know, their just like no, no, you don't know what it's like and you're just like well and then when you tell them … they have a very stereotypical idea of, you know you can't be a decent normal human being.'

In extract 10, Therese further reiterates that her class and gender mark her apart, as less than, in this case, a waitress who ought to be 'serving' her colleagues. While humour ("we laugh about it now") is often seen as a signifier of good relations (Rickett and Roman, 2013), here it is also used to make light of such sexist and classist assumptions. Arguably, Therese is left with little space to permit expressions of resistance without stripping her of the identity of someone who is liked and accepted. Many of our participants also reported the difficulty of getting classism acknowledged and their classed experiences heard. For example, in extract 11, Gina deftly re-constructs the contemporary, feminist-led term for the patronising and dismissive practice of 'mansplaining', reconceiving it as 'classplaining'. This is a discourse

around the embodiment of class determining a lack of belonging, while avenues to break

silence on class and classism are limited and colleagues continue to reproduce de-humanising

and segregating constructions of the working-class ("you know you can't be a decent normal

human being").

Stage 2: I Poems

For the purposes of this article, extracts from I Poems will be selected to enable an

examination of how voiced experiences are affectively and agentically shaped, moderated,

accepted, resisted, and negotiated within overarching discourse. Accordingly, these I Poems

refer to voiced accounts of the *being a fish out of water* discourse to demonstrate affective

and agentic negotiations of this discursive terrain, and the impacts of this. Specifically, this

selection aims to illuminate a diversity of voiced experiences surrounding this discourse to

demonstrate the multiple and complex negotiations of classed subjectivities and belonging in

this discursive realm. Each I Poem will now be presented, analysed, and theorised to

complete the FRDA analytic process, starting with Ellie's I Poem.

Ellie:

> I do feel still a bit like a fish out of water.
>
> I would say that I'm still a rarity in a way so, we're quite a small department here.
>
> I don't think I would say any of my immediate colleagues have had or have the same
> background.
>
> I don't know if it's me that I have this perception that I'm different and that I'm not
> trying hard enough to find common ground with people or if it's a two-way thing,

I have had a very different upbringing in life to a lot of people here, and who you

know have families and live in a big house, up in the countryside and their problems

are you know ooh I have to take my child to whatever lessons [laughs].

I don't know how to talk to you about that but you know.

I find professionally no, because I think I'm respected.

I think I am respected but personally yes, and that's a big issue actually.

I still find this, it could just be me.

I still have this barrier.

I'm different.

I feel like I don't belong to this social group.

I hate dinner parties.

I think there are some of us that do have similar backgrounds, but it's not explicitly

discussed.

Ellie voices an experience of profound unbelonging, in which on one hand she is the creator

of her alienated self. However, on the other hand, she names a lack of other working-class

colleagues, or a working-class collective, that makes her feel alone and the 'other.' These

contrapuntal voices limit her ability to actively resist classed and gendered deficient

subjectivities, and her ability to place the responsibility for a lack of diversity in social class

background on university staff at an institutional level.

Here, there is also a schism in her sense of herself: she feels her academic self is accepted and

'respected,' but herself ("personally") isn't, and this is partly because of a faulty self that

produces barriers to being included. For instance, she argues that she is "not trying hard enough" to belong. The consequence of Ellie's engagement in this discourse is that her experience of social segregation is voiced as being both inherently 'her' fault, while the silencing of these feelings ("not explicitly discussed ") are hers to face alone. Derrida's early work (see Caputo, 1997) on a discourse of silence and Rickett's (2020) work on the submerged identity helps us to theorise that discourse in relation to social class is often limited, unavailable, or avoided. Here, a working-class self is stigmatised, and an emotional terrain of shame production interacts with feelings of alienation and unbelonging emanating from one's own deficient working-class selfhood. As such, opportunities for collective action, solidarity and social support are rendered unthinkable and elusive in any case since she is profoundly "different" and does not "belong to this social group." This unbelonging is epitomised by her visceral dislike for "dinner parties" and a perceived economic, social, and cultural capital chasm between her and her colleagues ("who you know have families and live in a big house, up in the countryside").

However, despite the impact of the 'fish out of water' discourse on her experience of herself and others, Ellie can moderate this via humour and parody to wrestle back some power and agency ("ooh I have to take my child to whatever lessons [laughs]") to legitimise her own struggles against ridiculed middle-class 'struggles.' Furthermore, Ellie expresses some reluctance to invest wholesale in individualized discourses of a deficient self, meaning that she does not simply take up and reproduce this discourse uncritically. For example, she speaks of her own role in being excluded with great degree of uncertainty ("I don't know if it's me"). In contrast, she takes up structural arguments with a greater degree of certainty ("I have had a very different upbringing"; "I still have this barrier"). This tension between individualized and structurally located understandings of unbelonging shows how difficult it can be to resist or abandon individualized discourses of personal deficiency. Indeed, Ellie

must engage in a great deal of effort to avoid simply reproducing the idea that her sense of unbelonging is her fault alone. In sum, while Ellie grapples with the discomfort of the imposition of a deficient self, she is not able to straightforwardly take up feelings of belonging since she sees a fundamentally classed incompatibility between herself, and the institutionally legitimised forms of capital afforded to her colleagues.

We now move on to Therese's I Poem

Therese:

> I feel like you've got to fight that little bit harder to be seen as intelligent.
>
> I think I don't necessarily sound intelligent.
>
> What I'm saying might sound intelligent but the way I say it might not be the most eloquent way
>
> I perceive I've got to do that it's like that sort of idea of imposter syndrome.
>
> I would never hide although I did when I was younger I used to not tell people.
>
> I used to lie about what my mam and dad did when I was younger because I used to feel a bit embarrassed but erm that was just a bit silly.
>
> I tried to hide myself and then I've tried to sort of be myself and you know clothes that you wear and how you present yourself.
>
> I used to wear like lots of little dresses and things, not short dresses, or anything, inappropriate.
>
> I have had a colleague once tell me that perhaps I shouldn't dress like that if I wanted to be perceived as more serious.

I don't know because I think these sorts of things tend to be subtle, i.e. you might not necessarily pick up on them.

I've never been aware if some of the ways I've been treated, you know being mistaken as a waitress and people thinking I was a note taker are because of errr who I am or what.

I do also have a reputation as being a bit sassy so I think maybe sometimes colleagues might not necessarily want to undermine me.

 I see it as I'm a little bit too much working-class to bite my tongue, you know.

I think sometimes masking constantly how you feel and trying to play to the social situation, so people don't really know where you stand with them.

I'd far rather have the working-class honest then that, you know and I do think those things should be valued a bit more and when I say sassy maybe it's just honesty.

Therese dedicates much of her talk to first person accounts of the discourse at hand. Within these accounts she finds the ("subtle") silencing of class and gendered based 'othering' difficult to name, to the point where she doubts her own understanding of explicit examples of sexism and classism ("because of errr who I am or what"). She also feels that her embodied self is perhaps too bold, then goes on to deftly revisit this by reconstructing "sassy" as "honesty." While 'speaking up/out' is stitched into norms around middle classness (Ryan, 2017), straight talking is considered a virtue in working-class communities and is a socially located value that stands in opposition to more implicit and "vague" speaking associated with middle-class cultural values and capital (Wacquant, 2006 [31]). And it is this straight talking that Therese points to as a shield from undermining practices. Therese is also painfully aware of how the identity assimilation work ("masking constantly") – that she is forced to perform to fit in – is effortful, fraught, and inauthentic.

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For Therese to be successfully herself, she must contest the constitution of the idealised, embodied academic that must be "eloquent" in speech. For Therese, this act of rebellion and resistance is to be herself and expose her working-class embodied markers ("the clothes you wear") rather than hiding them.

The message from Therese is that revealing oneself as working-class is a kind of a 'disclosure' and something to "hide" that is shameful. Here, her personal, voiced experience illustrates how the politics of belonging draw on classed and gendered sufficient/deficient academic discourses and create personal experiences of unbelonging. This discourse is experienced as shameful: Her classed self is to be hidden, but also not to be hidden, as the shame of the deficient self-imposed on her is continually contested, and her early experience of hiding her family background is constructed as regretful. As such, Therese sees herself as on a journey towards a resistance of such 'othering' discourse, where a legitimate sense of belonging *and* an authentic embodied self ("be myself") will be achieved.

We will now move on to Gina's I Poem.

Gina

> I think because I was different from because there's certain values and things that come from a working-class background.
>
> I think it would be good if we could speak out for the students that feel that way, that they don't belong.
>
> You're like yes I know, they're just like no no you don't know what it's like and you're just like well and then when you tell them.
>
> I don't know, I think that they don't think you can be a decent normal human being.

I've heard from more than one colleague and it sort of makes you think, am I out of touch with what council estates are like now because I don't live in one now?

I will disclose but only really with people I feel comfortable with and I don't know why that is.

Gina generally avoided first-person voiced accounts of the 'fish out of water' discourse as such her I Poem is shorter; however, this brevity does not limit the depth of her I Poem. Like Therese, Gina feels the weight of the discourse of the deficient working-class self, and this produces fear and caution around disclosing her class background. As such, she only reveals this to colleagues she feels at ease with and the reason for that evades her ("I don't know why that is"). As this discourse has her on guard for prevailing 'othering,' it also creates discomfort, as such silence prevents a lack of solidarity and support for her working-class students. Therefore, she is thrust into a moral dilemma where she does not experience herself as a good person ("it would be good if we could speak out for the students that feel that way"). However, in the first line, Gina is also able to counter derogating narratives about herself by presenting difference and social distance as residing in divergent values between the social classes rather than classed and gendered superior and inferior selfhoods ("there's certain values and things that come from a working-class background"). This discourse of values disrupts the prevailing "value free" power positioning of knowledge production which favours middle-class, masculinised minds, bodies, and practices (Rickett and Morris, 2021). As with Ellie's I Poem, Gina works here to develop a counter-narrative against the individualized notion of the deficient working-class self, showing again the power of this discourse and how difficult it can be to resist.

Furthermore, Gina's I Poem illustrates that a university workplace does not provide a sanctuary from the experiences of derogatory, classed stereotypes that shore up a classed deficient self. Indeed, any attempt to dislodge such stereotypes via challenging or alternative fact-telling is disarmed via explicit disbelief in her own knowing which, in turn, disputes her lived experience. Indeed, her experience is so adrift from the emphatically communicated classed stereotypes produced by her colleagues that she questions herself ("am I out of touch"?), forcing her to question the validity of her experiences and powers of reasoning. These feelings of confusion and suspicion are socially induced and justify harassment within the workplace. As other authors have found, a discourse of feminised deficiency in reference to middle-class men justifies a moral pestering, such as mansplaining (Vaz, Gallon and Fraga, 2023). And, as Gina persuasively argues (in extract 11, Stage 1), this is coupled with 'classplaining' to produce damaging consequences on her ability to see herself as a worthy and knowledgeable academic. The social process has classed and gendered discourse stitched tightly in, and it has consequences for voiced experience as it buttresses a reading of harassment as caused by working-class women themselves, thereby creating emotional pain and shame which problematises direct action against such discrimination. Here, Gina exemplifies the consequences of classed and gendered discourses of belonging for those they cast as 'other'. While drawing on powerful individualized notions of a deficient self, she does so in such a way as to lay out the relational dynamics of this positionality and how it is lodged within institutional relations. Subsequently, we can see how notions of unbelonging become tied to notions of worth and institutional legitimacy.

Finally, we end our selection of I Poems with Juliet's.

Juliet:

I don't think academic knowledge at the top of the pile, I actually don't.

I think there are a lot of other ways people gain knowledge and a lot of other places

we gain experiences, we become wise from things.

I was so mad with him, it was like why does that belong to you and not me?

I've just said about not liking the word (hegemony) at the same time if I want to use

it, you know, whether the fact that I'm a working-class woman.

I can use it but then there is that other thing isn't there, of there's something about

loyalty to your roots as well isn't there.

I am now an academic.

I can't call myself a working-class woman really, but in my heart I'm a working-class

woman because that's where I started.

I'm not saying I'm not proud of being an academic I am, it just doesn't fit

comfortably with my identity.

Juliet's I Poem is dedicated to directly challenging the classed and gendered knowledge

hierarchy. First, she voices accounts of wisdom as a more valuable form of academic

knowledge ("I don't think academic knowledge at the top of the pile"). This account mirrors

a recent impact of feminist practice which places wisdom as hierarchically superior to

scientific knowledge since it utilises experience and centres social, cultural, and moral

aspects in professional practice (Jakubik, 2020). Second, Juliet voices rage at being told by a

man that, as a working-class woman, she should not use an academically technical word

(hegemony). This anger is fuelled by indignation ("why does that belong to you and not me")

at the notion that normative academic language should not be used by her if she is to be

authentically working-class. Here she voices an experience of being caught between being a

rightful occupant in academia and being policed as too uppity or a 'tall poppy.' As other

feminist scholars have argued working-class women are susceptible to being stigmatised as either a 'tall poppy' or having an 'imposter syndrome' (Goode, 2019). Juliet feels anger at the imposition of the 'tall poppy,' but directly rejects notions of deficient working-class selfhood which may be characterised via the 'psy complex.' By expressing anger, she conveys that she does not believe she deserves this positioning and any question around the legitimacy of her status commonly asked of working-class women in middle class, masculinised spaces (Power, Cole, and Fredrickson, 2011). As such, Juliet's I Poem illustrates and crystallizes the multiplicity of experiences and impacts of the *'being a fish out of water'* discourse. Across this selection of I Poems, all of which illustrate this discourse, we see a range of engagement, from reluctance, to avoidance, to resistance, to outright rejection. In addition, we can see the total enmeshment of affective and discursive negotiations of classed subjectivities, such as with shameful accounts of discourses of the working-class deficient self, whereby the affective and discursive become mutually constitutive, and the personal and political become integrated.

Discussion

This research aimed to take an intersectional approach to the psychology of the cross-cutting means by which both class and gendered discourse shapes institutional (un)belonging within UK Higher Education. FRDA identified an inferior, deficient self, underpinned by an explicit and implicit discourse of the 'psy complex' imposter, which drew on embodied 'markers' of the (un)ideal academic along classed and gendered lines. Spoken accounts of the experience of a gendered and classed academic self were intimately connected to discourse where complex voices enabled an understanding of the self as mediated by both discourse and experience (Thompson, Rickett, and Day, 2018). Voices that are often silenced were revealed to illustrate that what may be construed as individual or 'private' emotion is inseparable from

socially located dynamics, relations, and forces. Finally, complex voiced accounts veered between reproducing sexist and classist discourse, moderating derogating discourse, and an outward rejection of the deficient gender and classed academic self in attempts to reconfigure the knowledge hierarchy and pierce the silencing of class-based injustice and classed psychologies in UK academia.

Rickett and Morris (2021), Taylor and Breeze (2020) and Thompson (2023) have previously challenged 'psy complex' discourse embedded in understandings of the 'imposter syndrome'. In response to these challenges and calls for an emotion-based discourse analysis (e.g., Koschut, 2018), this research developed an explicitly social class *and* feminist theorist articulation of discourse analysis to visibilise often silenced voices of working-class women within discourse. In doing so, it illuminates how contemporary, institutionally dominant 'psy complex' constructions coerce, persuade, and shape the affective landscape of experience (Ahmed, 2010). Within this landscape socially and institutionally located discourses make plausible the positioning of an 'imposter syndrome' as residing 'inside' individuals who, in turn, are made responsible for the profound feelings of unbelonging associated with the 'syndrome.' In addition, socially induced feelings of suspicion, confusion, and shame stitch themselves into this affective realm to justify unbelonging, obscure the social and institutional landscape that reproduces and sustains it and invoke neoliberal notions of 'classlessness' previously identified in earlier research (e.g., Sanders and Mahalingam, 2012; Thomas and Azmitia, 2014).

In detail, this research revealed how the discourse of the idealised, standard of the middle-class and masculinised academic self within a knowledge hierarchy (Rickett and Morris, 2021) that marks academics as ideal or not via the performance of capital. This functions to both 'other' working-class women academics as inferior and makes their voiced, resultant pain from processes of unbelonging a 'syndrome' theirs to solve via neoliberal notions of

self-regulation and 'self-improvement' (Foucault, 1972, 1981; Parker, 1998) which have been argued to be acutely feminised (Gill, 2006; Scharff, 2016). Yet it also made evident various attempts to agentically resist individualised responsibilisation knitted into this iteration of the 'imposter syndrome.' For example, we see a defiant refusal to 'improve' the self by changing speech patterns and clothing to embody organisationally prescribed cultural capital, and a spurning of socially prescribed normative practices, such as dinner parties, which operate as a quiet resistance against the imposition of the masculinised, middle-class standard. In addition, counter-narratives challenge the commodification of 'intellect' by the middle classes that problematises an authentic ownership of 'cleverness' for women working-class academics.

Crucially, this research also reveals the complex manner by which resistant voices are often paired with an expressed powerlessness to resist the classed and gendered hierarchy and a reproduction of the neo liberal conviction that the blame lies within themselves and is theirs to try to 'fix.' In addition, colleague relations are named as functioning to further thwart attempts to resist via counter attacks, questions of authenticity and refusals to believe working-class lived experience as 'truer' than dominant discourse. As such, as Day et al (2012) argued, conformity or resistance are not mutually exclusive, and rather than straight forward conformity through 'fitting in', or resistance via challenges to middle class subjectivities and practices, we see a fraught and painful tension between the two. This tension is characterised by the coercive and persuasive power of the individualised and deficient imposter that underscores this construction of the 'imposter syndrome.' This figuring of the imposter was at once conjured but also avoided in favour of structural and relational explanations for experiences of alienation and otherness. Indeed, participants expressed greater certainty about naming the relational sources of unbelonging than they did when attempting to engage with the individualized figure of the imposter. Nevertheless, while

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working-class academic women clearly pointed to the broader origins of their experiences of unbelonging, the spectre of the deficient self loomed in their accounts.

Other authors (e.g., Ryan, 2017) have argued that to better understand experience, there is now a requirement for a theoretical focus on how social and organisationally located discourses impact on us and shape how we experience ourselves. This research demonstrates that the use of FRDA goes beyond traditional discourse analysis to enable an understanding that the 'personal' and 'political' are inextricable and thereby making a compelling case for putting the 'personal' into broader discursive frameworks of understanding to capture this interplay. By prioritizing voice and inviting feminist readings of power, agency, and resistance around feelings of belonging, the voices of participants have been centred in the discursive account of gendered and working-class subjectivities presented herein. This is important, because it taps into the enmeshment of affective and discursive productions of classed and gendered selves. This present application of FRDA has also illuminated how discourse functions intimately in constructions of identity, and discourse profoundly shapes and constrains understandings of experiences. As such we see how discursive processes police and regulate the self and reveal the extent to which individualising processes within discourse entangled in the affective realm makes the deficient classed and gendered self difficult to resist. This difficulty prevails despite a frequently and vividly voiced reluctance to fully occupy a contemporary manifestation of the 'psy complex' and an explicit pointing to the relational dynamics and values shaping their experiences of otherness. As other feminist research has argued, these findings evidence the need to relocate individualising explanations of the 'imposter' to socially and organisationally located 'imposterising practices' (Thompson, 2023) which serve to construct the figure of the imposter against institutional and organisational ideals.

Implications for future research

First, this present research argues for a timely and crucial theoretical shift within Psychology to position psychologies within in a socially and institutionally located framework. Moreover, we would alert scholars to mindfully attend to the historical bedrock within the 'psy' disciplines social sciences that has served to established working-class as the 'other' against a middle-class standard (Rickett, 2020). This would require avoiding uncritical reproduction of contemporary individualising and responsiblising discourse (such as the construction of the 'imposter syndrome') to reveal uncomfortable questions about the extent to which institutional academic cultures work to construct, constrain, and disrupt feelings of 'belonging' (Read, Archer, and Leathwood, 2003) and the consequent injuries sustained from unbelonging. This research evidences a need for a critical, institutionally located approach that enables questions about the cultures and practices which 'other' academics, such as working-class women, and make them feel unwelcome (Thompson, 2016; 2023) instead of blaming the increasing numbers of academics that feel unwelcomed (e.g. Peteet et al., 2014)

In addition, it is clear from findings from this present research that future scholarship on selfhood would also benefit from centering voice by using FRDA to enable us to grasp both agency and the emotional landscape it both resides in and provokes. This research has also identified a profitable, minor methodological revision to such future research. While many of our participants' I Poems were configured via the standard pronoun 'I,' some were aided by the useful extension of the I Poem methodology to include 'we' and 'you' as proxy personal pronouns. In FRDA I Poems are co-constructed between the participants talk and researcher led I Poem production. As such, subsequent research may want to utilise direct participatory methods by working with the participants to identify exactly which words indicate a personal pronoun to guard against an imposition of culturally embedded research values and bias within the analytic process.

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Our analysis also indicates that dynamics and values could be indicative of 'imposterising practices' (Thompson, 2023) – this warrants further attention. For example, participants referred to mismatches between their own values and those espoused within professional spaces, and a fundamental incompatibility of the self with professional norms and practices (e.g. dinner parties). These values and practices should be central to future research if we are to fully understand how institutional othering is (re)produced on an everyday level. This could be accomplished by applying the previously outlined participatory form of FRDA to conventional qualitative interviews and/or focus group data to capture the personal-political dimensions of these practices and their consequences. Additionally, institutional ethnography (Smith, 2015; 2022) may also be a useful method of data collection by which localized knowledge(s) about institutional values, norms and practices could be generated and compared more broadly. Using this method, future research could explore the imposterising practices in place, and the institutional (re)production of these practices.

Finally, our analysis shows glaring silences around class, and this requires urgent further attention within organisational research and practice. Self-silencing and a reluctance to disclose or discuss class ran through participant accounts. Concerningly, this echoes previous findings from Glodjo (2017) and Layton (2006) who argue that silences surrounding class in dominant middle-class academic spaces are both symptomatic and constitutive of taboos which; prevent meaningful reflections on class privilege and dominance, perpetuate shame, thwart alliances across social classes, and sustain classed hierarchies. Arguably, tackling the silencing of class is needed more than any other time in the past two decades given the near-universal trend towards dramatic increases in the wealth gap between the rich and the poor (Chancel, et al., 2022). Therefore, the impact of social class on the academy is now likely to become more, not less, pronounced. As such, effective institutional change will require explicit attention to class, especially on the part of those who make decisions and hold the

power to make change. Future research could respond to this by placing class on organizational research agendas. Our analysis has also shown how easily individualised discourses can be taken up to obscure systems of power underpinned by classed constructions of who embodies the ideal academic. This makes it easy to avoid the 'discomfort' of discussing class as an intersectional and complex and relational experience, which, in turn, upholds notions of 'classlessness.' Consequently, future research would be wise to take a 'bifocal approach' (aimed at cultural and individual change) to build insight into the ways that class (intersecting with other social categories such as gender and race) shapes our psychologies, relations, and practices, and re-position organisational 'participants' in a project of class-inclusive change. The development of such change agents, as conceived within a bifocal approach, can create the capacity to disrupt classed practices, norms, and relations (Nentwich et al., 2015), thereby integrating individual and organisational change.

Conclusion

In our everyday lives, there is no experience that resides outside of the discourses and relations of power that serve to construct such experience. In turn, we account for these experiences through the discursive resources available to us. To treat the realms of experience and discourse as separate ignores this complex, messy reality. FRDA employs a voice-centered discursive method that taps into the enmeshment of intimate personal experience and discourse. This research has demonstrated how gendered working-class subjectivities, and affective experiences of these subjectivities, are bound up an organisationally situated iteration of the 'psy complex' discourse which knits masculinised and middle-class academic norms into the highly feminised, neoliberal scripts that seek to account for individual anguish in isolation from these ideals. This research paints a picture wherein this discourse colludes to alienate working-class women, who simultaneously took up *and* worked hard – in varying

degrees – to avoid these discourses. However, while participants ostensibly invested in these discourses, they also ultimately pointed to the relational and ideological origins of their experiences of (un)belonging as imposterism, which functioned as attempts to resist middle-class and masculinised ideals and notions of individual inferiority. The analysis shows how, when given analytical attention, the enmeshment of the personal and political can be understood as central to identity construction. In this case, the reluctance on the part of participants revealed both the coercive power of discourse, the possibilities for discursive counter-narratives that named class oppression and have the potential to produces collective action instead of painful isolation.

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