

Insider Without: Journey across the Working-Class Academic Arc

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Abstract

Patricia Hill Collins (1986) labels herself as an ‘outsider within’ due to her intersectional standpoint as a Black woman sociology professor in the ivory tower. In contrast to the ‘outsider within’ lens, I theorize my own social location as an ‘*insider without*’ due to a complex matrix of identities within the classed academic cultural context. Using counter storytelling, I explore my insider without location through analysis of my journey across the ‘*working-class academic arc*.’ In the working-class academic arc described below, I apply intersectional theory (Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1989) by connecting my personal experiences with existing working-class studies scholarship. The arc process culminates in my development of critical intersectional class consciousness and actions of resistance. By introducing this three-phase arc, I hope to raise awareness of the invisible academic class culture which invalidates working-class ways of being and knowledge production.

Keywords

Insider without, working class academic, class consciousness, class culture, intersectionality, resistance, rejecting respectability, reclaiming identity

When I left Knoxville, Tennessee and Best Buy retail life for the last time (heading to graduate school), I thought my southern, Podunk accent was already gone. My dad made a habit of calling me a yankee or a valley girl because I did not talk like his mountain-folk family. Driving into Ohio with my fiancé, I rounded an interstate 75 curve and was knocked out by the Cincinnati skyline ahead of us. All of the possibilities of a better life hit me like a ton of bricks. This was my chance to move from economic instability to middle-class security. I believed my graduate education held these promises.

During my first week in graduate school with seventeen cohort peers, it became depressingly clear that my hillbilly accent was still ever-present. You see, context. To those growing up surrounded by non-hillbillies, my ‘refined’ (in my mind) southern accent was still thick as molasses. No doubt many of them were able to look past the southern drawl, but others associated my colorful Dixie expressions with less than stellar intelligence. While reading texts for classes, I often came across words on the written page that I had never seen before on paper. Sometimes I did not know how

to pronounce them even if I knew the meaning. Knowing the word ‘façade’ by sound (fuh-sahd) did not prevent me from pronouncing it ‘fay-cayde’ the first time I witnessed the word in print. In the last few years, my reading of works by working-class academics revealed similar experiences of pronunciation and grammar embarrassment (Garger 1995; Phillips 1995).

Although keenly aware of the impact of my biscuits and gravy accent, I somehow failed to fully recognize that middle-class culture was operating as the normative code within academia. Working-class studies scholars consistently complicate conceptualizations of class as more than income (Lee 2017). Barbara Jensen (2012) theorized class as culture and therefore more complex than a set of financial markers. In Jensen’s view, class culture serves as the medium to reproduce inequality across class divides. Given working-class studies’ appropriate refusal to define working class, Linkon and Russo (2016) urged scholars to clarify how they define class. I define social class as a way of being, relating, and thinking that culminates in a shared cultural experience often invisible to the privileged and the marginalized. As others noted, class culture influences speech and expression, food preferences, hobbies, clothing and presentation, work ethic, physical movement, values, and much more (Attfield 2016; Bettie 2014; Gardner 1993; Jensen 2012; Warnock 2016). In consideration of the impact of class oppression, I also endorse Langston’s (1993) framing of class as the range of choices available in life.

In her well-known description of experiences in the academy, Patricia Hill Collins (1986) labeled herself as an ‘outsider within’ due to her intersectional standpoint as a Black woman sociology professor in the ivory tower. Somewhat in contrast to the outsider within lens, I theorize my own social location as an ‘*insider without*’ due to a complex and interactive matrix of identities within the academic cultural context. For example, my privileged whiteness and heterosexuality afford me presumed *insider* status as a professor because academic spaces operate with white cultural standards and heterosexual norms at the center. At the same time, my working-class body and habitus betray me as an accidental insider who behaves *without* proper middle-class manners, attire, communication style, and competitive individualism. Quite simply, I exist as a professional *insider*, yet simultaneously *without* middle-class cultural performativity or habitus (Lehmann 2013).

Below, I explore my *insider without* location through personal narrative, counter storytelling, and analysis of my journey across what I call the ‘*working-class academic arc*.’ In the working-class academic arc described below, I apply intersectional theory (Cole 2009; Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1989; Dill & Zambrana 2009) by connecting my personal experiences with existing working-class studies scholarship. The arc process culminates in development of critical intersectional class consciousness characterized by reclaiming working-class identity, advocating for working-class perspectives from a strengths perspective, and both naming and resisting middle-class cultural norms in academia. By introducing this arc model, I hope to inform (warn) working-class scholars about the invisible (to the middle-class) nature of academic class culture which operates just below the surface to invalidate and eradicate our shared ways of being and knowledge production. In other words, I have attempted to write the paper I wish I had read in graduate school that would alert me to the middle-class cultural values and codes of behavior that perpetually define me as without.

As bell hooks openly reported in *Where We Stand: Class Matters* (2000), she felt scared and ill-equipped writing about class for the first time. The prospect of writing about my personal experiences of class brings up similar emotions for me because my training in psychology and positivist science taught me the personal and the scientific are mutually exclusive and should be kept in distinct and separate locations (as if such a goal were possible). Even though my interdisciplinary training in feminist theory, critical race theory, and queer theory clearly challenged such traditional perspectives, writing about personally painful and marginalizing moments paint me into a particularly vulnerable corner. My previous scholarship's almost exclusive focus on systemic inequality where I carry privilege reveals my discomfort with tackling my own oppression based on sex, class, and religious identity. Regardless of my flawed disciplinary training and emotional avoidance of my marginalization, resisting the dominant narrative requires counter storytelling so well utilized by working-class academics who persevered through the emotional labor of writing about class (Fay & Tokarczyk 1993; hooks 2000; LeCourt & Napaleone 2010). Though this work feels self-indulgent and unknown, my goals are to raise awareness and create new spaces for development of critical intersectional class consciousness among both working-class and middle-class academics.

As contextual background, and sometimes foreground, of my academic life, I provide information here about three state universities where I taught over the last seventeen years. The institutions include an urban research university in the Midwest, a smaller teaching-focused university in Kentucky, and a Master's comprehensive Hispanic-Serving institution in Texas. The varied interactions and cultural miscommunications I offer as illustrations in this paper occurred within university settings as well as in academic spaces such as conferences and other professional meetings. Therefore, no assumptions should be made about where these examples took place. In addition, I excluded names, titles, and specific indicators that might reveal the identity of the guilty and the innocent. At the same time, I claim these experiences and perspectives as my own and am more than cognizant of alternative viewpoints as held by the middle-class academics who engaged in the interactions I describe.

The Working-Class Academic Arc: Phase One, Escaping Home through Education

Phase One of the Working-Class Academic Arc encompasses the educational experiences of working-class students and the clear societal message that individual academic merit earns the reward of economic, and often geographic, escape from the working class or working poor. Although no one in the memory of my extended family had ever attended college and my parents were first-generation high school graduates, my mother trained me early and often that education was my way out of facing bankruptcy, living paycheck to paycheck, and choosing between paying the electricity or the water bill. More specifically, she regularly reminded me that my education was top priority because I could never depend on a man to pay my rent. Mom made a specific point of never saying 'if you go to college.' Instead, she consistently talked about 'when' I would go to college in the future, phrasing that communicated the path was not optional. My grandmother, Betty Sue, left school after third grade and her sister left eighth grade to work. My grandparents worked in furniture staining and sewing factories Levi Strauss and Breezy Wynn. In fact, my grandmother used to joke that she put her hand down all of the University of Tennessee Volunteer football players' pants...because she expertly sewed every single lace eyelet into their athletic gear. Her naughty sense of humor aside, my grandmother and great aunt came home every day

from Levi with blue hands covered in dye. By the time I began higher education as an undergraduate, my mother's vocational Licensed Practical Nurse degree was the most education anyone had ever achieved in my family. She later earned her Registered Nurse associates degree at the age of 54. So off I went to earn a doctoral degree even though I had zero clue what that meant.

I grew up with the consistent message that education provides the only escape for working-class kids chasing the middle-class dream (Warnock 2016). As Franschelli, Evans, and Schoon (2016) noted, this framing of working-class families, communities, and culture as something to run away from and shed must be further problematized. Phase One involves eroding working-class identity through promotion of the myth of meritocracy and higher education as the magical way out. At the same time, these persistent cultural messages equated me, my generous and caring family, and my community's values of hard work and honesty with rejection and what Loveday (2015) calls 'fugivity.' The higher education enterprise trained me to reject my home and my working-class habitus (Christopher 1995; Hurst & Nenga 2016) and hide or alter my identity (LeCourt & Napaleone 2010). As hooks warns, leaving your past behind is the 'price of the ticket' (2000, p. 36) for success within higher education which requires severing 'ties to community and kin' (hooks 1993, p. 108).

'Education destroys something'

While I was learning to retrain myself to fit middle-class norms, my family struggled to comprehend my graduate education, asking me 'are you *still* in college?' This common experience echoes throughout the reflections of several working-class scholars (Charlip 1995; Christopher 1995; Langston 1993; Law 1995) feeling the pain of separation. Every visit to the local White Store grocery ended with my grandmother telling the cashier that I was in school to be a medical doctor (I was in a Ph.D. program). These encounters embarrassed me when I should have been grateful to my grandma for taking pride in my accomplishments, however inaccurate. I could not articulate this at the time, but her public displays of misunderstanding my education triggered feelings of class stigma within me. Proud to perform my middle-class educational status, I corrected my family's grammar countless times during these years. Jensen (2012) mentions correcting her parents' English as an example of rejection of working-class origins. When Law's mother declared that 'education destroys something' (1995, p. 1), she uttered the perfect description of my complicity in allowing education to destroy the respect, patience, pride, and loyalty my family and broader community deserved.

In contrast to my habits of correcting grammar, I also visited home with a sense that I should downplay my education and avoid being perceived as uppity or too smart. To that end, I engaged in some level of code-switching by leaving academic terms and concepts at the door when returning home. Despite my efforts, I once faced blank stares among friends after using the word 'tangential.' I had become accustomed to its use in academia and mistakenly generalized that to people outside the ivory tower. In professional settings, I switched back to middle-class codes, answering, 'I'm well' (not 'I'm good') when colleagues asked me how I am doing. Among faculty, I made sure not to use southern grammar such as 'ain't' or 'y'all' or 'fixin' to.' Much of this code-switching occurred without my awareness until I began to unpack my own internalized classism.

To avoid the stigma associated with my class roots, I developed the internalized classism necessary to fully participate in higher education's demand to change myself, and its demand that I not challenge the system that requires this habitus transformation (Loveday 2015). I learned not to tell middle-class academics that I grew up in a trailer, or mobile home for people not well-versed in Southern speak. I learned to keep silent about my relatives who served time in prison, as middle-class peers often reacted in ways that hinted at perceiving me as guilty by association. In addition, I caught on quick that spray cheese on Ritz crackers and screw-top wine result in twisted middle-class faces and ridiculing laughter at social gatherings.

Voluntarily Losing My Voice

My opening anecdote about working hard to rid myself of stigma via accent erasure reflects my efforts to conform to middle-class habitus of standard English, 'the language of power and mobility' (Jensen 2012, p. 81). Habitus transformation requires not only a new vocabulary and new accent (Clancy 1997), but also constant vigilance to keep the back woods (i.e., backwards) accent at bay, for it will betray the hidden working-class academic unexpectedly (LeCourt & Napaleone 2010).

Here I was 22 years young, beginning graduate work, and terribly ashamed anew of my voice and how my people pronounced words. At that point, I made it my mission to become the most non-descript middle-American speaker of all time. Newscasters, actresses, people from the Midwest were my 'talk right' exemplars. A year later, I no longer had people asking me where I am from based on my othered voice. My students in Kentucky would ask me to slow down because I 'talk too fast' and 'sound like a northerner.' This response was music to my ears as I urged my students to 'listen faster.' They would even express surprise when I would reveal my mountain origins. Looking back on it, I am sad to say this became a point of pride for me in my own mind. This feedback reinforced that I had accomplished transformation and denial of my people and of myself. I desperately wanted to disassociate myself from those people in Appalachia (pronounced 'App-uh-latch-uh,' not 'App-uh-lāshe-uh').

For years, I tried to suppress my voice of origin, my heritage, my family, my people as a result of my internalized classism. Why does the U.S. classed educational system require us to become like 'Them' and disavow our stories in order to gain acceptance? At the time, I knew I was working for acceptance in higher education, but I did not view that work or that goal as a negative or as oppression. I viewed it as practical and necessary to get my degree. Perhaps I even viewed this neutral accent 'achievement' as a positive piece of the puzzle of earning advanced degrees. At the time, my understanding of feminist theory, women's studies coursework, critical race theory, and educational foundations, and even sociology did not cause me to take a reflective stance on how I was erasing part of myself for 'Them'. In Phase One, it never even occurred to me, not once, that I should embrace my own voice and just speak like me. That came much later.

Overall, graduate school was less about my course work, and more about striving for respectability (Attfield 2016) under the institutional gaze of middle-class academia. This process of transformation required conscious effort to adjust self-presentation to minimize perceptions of my unacceptable former self and thus avoid the stigma of working-class membership (Lehmann, 2013). In essence, graduate culture provided the site for my personal battle to change my habitus

(Hurst & Nenga 2016). Although I consciously sought additional training in women's studies, critical race theory, sociology, and intersectional theory within courses with Patricia Hill Collins, I did not recognize leaving my past behind as oppression, or as an imposed demand of academia, because I perpetuated deficit-model critiques of the working class without attention to systemic analyses or awareness that middle-class cultural norms defined me as without. These higher education rules, schemas, and unwritten norms rest on assumed codes shared by the middle-class and often upper class (Stephens et al. 2012; Jury et al. 2017; Warnock & Appell 2012). It took me another 13 years to acknowledge the additional burden of cultural taxation, draining emotional labor, and loss of time involved in the working-class academic journey to respectability (LeCourt & Napaleone 2010; Lee 2017; Warnock & Appell 2012). My motivation stemmed from a strong desire for a sense of belonging (Ostrove & Long 2007), as well as avoidance of stigma and alienation which working-class students experience at higher levels (Lee 2017). Honestly, I did what I knew I must to survive, graduate, and obtain an academic position.

Phase Two: Insider Without...A Decoder Ring

Phase Two of the Working-Class Academic Arc was characterized by the belief that I had made it, coupled with continued efforts to maintain respectability and acquire more skills to build my middle-class habitus toolkit. Unaware of my 'mark of difference' (LeCourt & Napaleone 2010), my entrance into faculty positions paralleled my naïve assumption that my middle-class performativity equated being perceived as middle-class. At the same time, many of my most salient identities granted me *insider* access as a member of the privileged and normative groups within higher education. My insider white, heterosexual, able-bodied, non-transgender/cisgender, and U.S. citizen privileges automatically offered me a certain level of respect, belonging, and cultural capital in academic spaces that masked the impact my working-class status. My insider degree, profession, income, and tenure-track position left me without awareness of my egregious violations of middle-class norms. In contrast to Patricia Hill Collins' (1986) outsider within location in academia as a woman of color, my position could be summarized as the *insider without* (e.g., without middle-class habitus).

Awareness of 'Without' Status

Of course, male privilege in the academy made it abundantly clear that my presence violated androcentric spaces as I was without the right to speak from expertise or debate a man's argument. Due to imposter syndrome as a woman in academia and subconscious knowledge of lacking class respectability, I typically worked seven days a week during my six years pre-tenure. Warnock (2016) connected working-class origins to feeling like a fraud and inferior to middle-class colleagues, as well as feeling the continuous need to prove legitimacy. I witnessed male faculty belittle sexual harassment laws as setting men up to be falsely accused and was directly asked whether 'women's studies is only about male bashing.' In fact, a white male faculty member clarified that his offer to treat me to lunch required 'the full monty' (i.e., no clothing) during the exact hour he was skipping the department's required sexual harassment training. As a female professor, experiences of being interrupted and talked over by men, expected to smile and nod as men pontificate on the merits of a policy, and yelled at in meetings when men feel threatened are all unfortunately common for women faculty, especially women of color. My training in women's studies and connections with feminist academic mentors provided the tools for critical analysis of

gender in these moments. When a white male faculty member suggested that the secretaries (all white women) wash dishes for faculty, I perceived this as sexism alone. However, classism was also at play in the assumption that staff should serve the elite professors with no time for the menial task of soaping up a coffee mug. Although my intersectional gendered lens included analyses of race, sexuality, and gender identity, my lens failed to analyze social class as a possible influence on my experiences of microaggressions.

During Phase Two, my class awareness of being *without*, centered on obvious financial gaps between me and my colleagues such as my student loan debt vs. their lavish vacations, inheritances, vacation homes, savings accounts, and spouses making six-figure salaries. Student debt alone lingers as a hidden injury (Warnock 2016) that working-class academics face for decades into their faculty careers. For example, my undergraduate student loans somehow resulted in monthly payments until age 50 which adds up to 29 years of payments! These obvious financial burdens, absent for my middle-class peers, defined my semi-class conscious existence while the impact of class on my academic cultural experiences remained invisible to me. Although I did not yet recognize dislocation from my family as class-related, being without my family caused deep pain and distress. Middle-class habitus within education demands what Schwalbe (1995) called awayward mobility. This geographical separation from working-class families results in decreased communication separation and eventually losing touch (Lang 1995). The aptly titled, *This Place so Far From Home* (Dews & Law 1995), spoke to not only the cultural gap for working-class academics, but also the geographic displacement and isolation from family. In contrast, middle-class families expect moving away for education and career opportunities and possess the funds and vacation benefits for regular travel to visit family (Lang 1995). Upon leaving Tennessee for graduate school in 1998, I was clueless that it would be 16 years before I spent another holiday season with my mom or my family. Without extra cash for travel, I also had a spouse working in retail, which required him to work on 100% of the days around Thanksgiving and December 25. This retail rule prevented travel to see family unless we made the full 430 mile round trip all on Thanksgiving or Christmas day. Middle-class colleagues rarely had employment connections to retail service that demand the job be prioritized over time with family.

Involuntarily Losing My Middle-Class Voice

For the working-class academic, Phase Two includes devoting more energy to practicing middle-class habitus acquired in Phase One and defending the self against being perceived as working class. Despite all that effort to acquire my new respectability accent, moving to Texas for the prized tenure-track job certainly harmed my attempts to avoid sounding southern. Within just a few months of teaching in Houston, my southern accent was creeping back without my awareness. Soaking in a tub of southern, my hillbilly brain jumped at the chance to absorb what it knows as home. Of course none of this was apparent to me until I started going to conferences across the nation and being asked about my southern accent. The first few times this happened, I was shocked, terrified, and embarrassed. I was even apologetic explaining that Texas messed me up after all I had done to conceal my identity. In Phase Two, I held on to the shame I felt for my own voice and the poetic Dolly Parton accents of my mountain origins. In fact, I grew up in Dolly's hometown clogging (dancing) at Dollywood, so her voice provides the perfect exemplar for the sounds of my people.

Insider Without: Working-Class Violations of Middle-Class Codes

My perception of my social location among the professoriate was that of an insider without the same financial freedom and family connection of my colleagues. Working-class studies narratives refer to the dual nature (Gardner 1993) of working-class academic identity, feeling nowhere at home (Overall 1995), and a borderline state as neither here nor there (Cappello 1995). In my borderline class existence, I unwittingly violated hidden middle-class culture while simultaneously believing I achieved an *insider* position. Early in my career, I received unsolicited feedback from a senior female faculty member that perfectly illustrated the use of middle-class respectability as a tool for controlling working-class bodies (Attfield 2016). After directly vocalizing my support for more degree flexibility for students, she advised me to keep my mouth shut because people are not ready to hear from a strong, opinionated woman. Although she referenced only sexism as the issue at hand, the intersection of my working-class habitus and my marginalized location as a woman informed this advice to silence myself for acceptance in academia. In contrast to how I am read by (upper) middle-class academics as too direct (i.e., difficult, unprofessional), I consistently witness middle-class women speaking in soft, measured, apologetic voices responded to with deference and respect as they perform idealized constructions of classed femininity. The gender and class intersections define me as violating middle-class gender roles that expect women to behave like a proper little lady.

Despite my training and scholarship analyzing complex systems of oppression within the matrix of domination (Collins 1990) and awareness of class inequalities, I had a long way to go on the class-consciousness continuum. Believing in the promise of education as the path to the middle-class, I lacked awareness of the institutional gaze of class (LeCourt & Napaleone 2010) that constructed me as *without*. Higher education typically involves an assumption that all faculty originate from the middle (or upper) class (Gardner 1993; Lee 2017), all the while denying that faculty are classed beings (Lee 2017). The widespread assumption that a doctoral degree erases the prior self renders working-class faculty like me invisible (Gardner 1993; Phillips 1995). This psychology of invisibility (Fryberg & Townsend 2008; Rios & Stewart 2013) perpetuates microaggressions that both deny the impact of class inequality and normalize the experiences and culture of the elite (Lee 2017).

Having no middle-class culture decoder ring bestowed on me at my doctoral hooding ceremony, my mark of difference (LeCourt & Napaleone 2010) as a working-class body in an elite profession for the middle and upper middle-class remained invisible to me. Social class operates at complex levels continually reproduced and maintained in academic social spaces, ever present in our communication styles, emotions, and body language (LeCourt & Napaleone 2010). Education falsely promises middle-class acceptance and passing for those who distance themselves from working-class origins, but later find themselves unable to shed the marginalized membership as classed outsiders (Lehmann 2013). The false promise lies in the assumption and myth that income equals class status, an extreme over-simplification of social class. Overall (1995) acknowledges she toned down her working-class culture expressiveness to avoid colleagues labeling her as unprofessional, but I find that no amount of shifting the self or assimilating to middle-class mythical norms (Lorde 1984) will ever earn full acceptance for working-class academics. And at what cost would this acceptance be awarded?

My severe lack of awareness of middle-class cultural capital (Warnock 2016) resulted from being *without* access to working-class academics' narratives or mentors. No decoder ring in sight, I remained *without* the couth to avoid talking about the financial impact of cutting faculty travel funds and years without merit raises. Even worse, I openly talked about who faced the greatest negative impact due to these institutional factors, first-generation faculty from working-class families. When I stressed about zero or low raises, middle-class colleagues viewed me as greedy and trying to get more than others. They did not recognize that raises mean more to a working-class colleague with no safety net. For my middle-class peers, no raise might be a disappointment, but it will never mean they cannot get the car fixed, go on a vacation, pay a medical bill, or pay down a credit card currently racking up interest. For me, years without raises or suddenly cutting summer pay for teaching immediately calls my financial security into question. Despite these classed contexts, verbalizing my concerns caused middle-class discomfort and signaled that my direct and open discussions of income are viewed as hostile violations of the hidden code.

The financial and cultural disparities faced by working-class faculty and students remain invisible to middle-class faculty. More specifically, this lack of awareness of the challenges and realities faced by working-class students perpetuates an environment that advantages students from middle- and upper-middle-class backgrounds. For example, working-class students rarely receive the hidden curriculum (Case et al. 2014; Warnock & Appel 2012) that passes from faculty to students during informal interactions (e.g., office hours, chatting after class). As a student, I always assumed I should not approach professors, ask for extensions when sick, or 'bother' them in their offices. Privileged students understand they are welcome to approach faculty and have access to their mentoring, while many working-class students leave class and go directly to low-paying jobs that prevent them from engaging with professors outside of scheduled class time. Middle-class faculty may not consider the extreme financial burden of textbooks that cost over \$100 each or assigning projects that require students to purchase \$50 worth of poster boards and craft supplies. As a working-class faculty member *insider*, I often bring up how faculty might work collectively to address these group disparities and social injustice, thus invoking values of community and interdependence. My calls for working-class perspective-taking, violate higher education's middle-class cultural norms that center independence and individualism, thus marginalizing interdependence and communal values (Stephens et al. 2012). Of course, I recognized academic individualist norms as white, male, and Western cultural values, but somehow neglected to identify them as intricately tied to social class.

Even within feminist academic circles, where I assumed critical analyses of systems of oppression were encouraged, my behaviors met unstated disapproval by middle-class academics 'who never said what they actually meant or felt' (LaPaglia 1995, p. 177). Thinking of myself as an insider in feminist spaces openly proclaimed as 'safe' by white middle-class academic women, I operated *without* middle-class habitus to fully achieve the acceptance and respect required to effectively participate in decision-making processes. For example, when I attempted to advocate for faculty without affordable childcare during the holidays, suggesting we not require meetings during those semester breaks, an upper-middle-class faculty member scoffed, rolled her eyes, and emphatically declared the claim of no childcare was inaccurate. In this moment, all faculty financial situations and childcare support were framed as equal and adequate, denying class diversity among the faculty and refusing to acknowledge how institutional practices might negatively impact working-class faculty.

Feminist academic spaces promote critiques of gender, and to some extent race, sexuality, and gender identity, but react to the taboo of discussing class/classism with guilt and defensiveness (Mahony & Zmroczek 1997). In contrast, socialist feminist scholars such as Angela Davis, Michelle Fine, Lois Weis, Heidi Hartmann, and Valerie Walkerdine challenge this taboo, but the neglect of social class remains. hooks (2000) shared her story of being misread as rude for asking middle-class colleagues the cost of material possessions. This classed cultural norm against sharing financial information protects those who have more from revealing their economic realities (hooks 2000). Lee (2017) argued that liberal middle-class faculty participate in reproduction of class stigma, a description applicable to my interactions with many, though not all, faculty claiming feminist identity.

These moments of cross-class *communication slippage* occur each time my working-class cultural ways of being crash into middle-class academic expectations that I behave according to their standards and values. LeCourt and Napaleone (2010) wrote about their own encounters with cross-class miscommunication that resulted in being labeled as emotional, defensive, or aggressive. I personally witnessed working-class women academics being described by middle-class faculty as ‘bossy’ for providing solicited advice and as ‘difficult to work with’ for expressing views divergent from their supervisor’s views on an issue. Haney (2016) identified cultural differences among working-class faculty such as frustration with following stuffy parliamentary procedures created by the upper class. When I expressed my impatience with over-baked discussions with no plan of action and endless layers of unnecessary bureaucracy, middle-class academics misread my intentions, my emotions, and my thinking. Class dynamics shape faculty daily encounters (Lee 2017) and inevitably create miscommunications that harm only working-class academics, judged negatively for being *without* the proper behaviors and values that middle-class culture endorses.

Phase Three: Critical Intersectional Class Consciousness

For the small group of working-class academics that make it to Phase Three, this stage is characterized by development of critical intersectional class consciousness, (re)claiming working-class identity, recognizing strengths of working-class culture, as well as resisting oppression and rejecting respectability. In my view, this phase provides healing through eye-opening realizations and pathways for embracing the previously tenuous position of feeling alienated from both home and profession. After I shared the writing of several working-class scholars with a colleague from a similar background, she replied that reading these personal narratives was ‘like having a veil lifted,’ making her ‘brain hurt, but in a good way.’ In Phase Three, I sought out working-class studies scholarship, which allowed me to finally turn critical attention to my previously invisible marginalization.

Intersectional Theory and Class Consciousness

As I mentioned earlier, my whiteness, along with many privileged identities, often masks my working-class roots, rendering my classed injuries invisible to me and my academic colleagues (Haney 2016; LeCourt & Napaleone 2010; Smith et al. 2016). Reynolds (1997) identified the tendency to conflate African American identity with working-class status and whiteness with middle-class. Despite my own research on privilege and systemic oppression, I failed to reflect on

my classed interactions and negative consequences of being the *insider without*. Over the last few years, my scholarship became more focused on intersectional theory and application within psychology and intersectional approaches to teaching. While completing my book on intersectional pedagogy (Case 2017), I attended the 2016 working-class studies conference at Collin College in Texas and attended Sherry Linkon's keynote talk. The proximity in timing of these events followed by reading the first issue of the *Journal of Working-Class Studies* (Attfield & Giuffre 2016) inspired further reading that expanded my critical intersectional class consciousness.

Scholars of working-class studies repeatedly called for infusing intersectional theory to complicate critical class analyses (Linkon & Russo 2016; Roediger 2005; Russo & Linkon 2005). These recommendations typically pointed out that working-class subjectivities are inherently intersectional (LeCourt & Napaleone 2010) and must critically analyze the impact of race, gender, sexuality, and more. In contrast to these calls for my (non-existent) class analysis to incorporate intersectionality, my intersectionality needed to incorporate class analysis. The main theoretical tenets that I applied to my intersectional pedagogy model (Case 2017) advanced my own critical class consciousness: promoting power analysis, analyzing systemic privilege and oppression, centering the voices of the marginalized (e.g., counter storytelling), and taking action for social justice.

(Re)Claiming Working-Class Identity

Despite the fact that my critical intersectional class consciousness developed after I became full professor, I reclaimed my working-class identity while acknowledging my partial middle-class privilege. My first step in this reclamation required unlearning internalized classism and refusing to support stigma aimed at poor and working-class folks. Still feeling a pull to my Tennessee past as an Appalachian clogger, I joined an exhibition dance team called the Collective Sound Cloggers, and we perform all over Texas and at national conventions. The two-hour practice sessions each week take me fully out of my academic perspective and shut down all scholarly analyses. The women on my team remind me of my family and give me the chance to stay connected to people outside of the ivory tower. This outlet provides an avenue to embrace my roots and return to my working-class habitus. Internalizing the middle-class gaze, I used to feel uncomfortable and judgmental when family members wore blue jeans to weddings and funerals. In Phase Three, I recognized jeans as perhaps the best and cleanest clothing option that a coal miner or construction worker owns, not signs of disrespect or bad manners.

Students should be exposed to the real me and the open identity of their professors. If we want students to feel they belong, working-class faculty must stop pretending and passing. By reclaiming my voice and fried okra accent, I hope I can serve as an example of a southern girl who breaks stereotypes. My accent does not need to change, academia and the systems that perpetuate classism need to change. By hiding and altering myself in hopes of passing as middle-class, I lost a piece of my working-class habitus. Overall (1995) and hooks (2000) discussed their own conscious efforts to stay connected to the places of their roots and maintain working-class habitus such as writing for accessibility rather than promoting the classed culture of academic jargon. Piper (1995) argued that education convinces working-class students something is wrong with us and

our families, but we must confidently engage with working-class culture from a strengths perspective.

Working-Class Culture as Strength

Due to my newfound critical intersectional class consciousness, Phase Three includes overdue critique of the deficit model judgment of working-class people as inferior, backwards, ignorant, and lacking the idealized middle-class cultural habitus. Attfield (2016) rejected the standard viewpoint from higher education that being born into the working class is something to overcome. Jensen (2012) and Warnock (2016) urged moving away from the deficit model to reframe working-class culture and values as strengths that contribute positively to the academic environment. This approach requires turning the critical eye away from working-class people as problematic and toward critique of the culture of academia and institutional systems that perpetuate these negative ideas. This approach does not endorse working-class individuals or shared cultural norms as perfect, but calls for critique of the dominant and privileged middle-class cultural norms that continue to stigmatize and oppress others. Within this new critical analysis, my working-class *without*s described in Phase Two become strengths when recognized, claimed, valued, and wielded to contribute diverse insights and challenge power structures.

Class conscious working-class faculty who openly share their identity also provide models and create less hostile campuses for working-class students (Stricker 2011). We also offer unique insights into the lives of working-class and first-generation students facing more interference in their educational paths than middle- and upper-class students (Stricker 2011). In terms of my approach to faculty duties, Phase Three made me aware of working-class influence on my internal drive to do applied research, teaching, and service. During my doctoral program interview, I expressed my need to engage in applied scholarship to solve social problems instead of conducting studies that collect dust in a journal on a library shelf. I need to produce something relevant and practical for reducing prejudice, raising privilege awareness, or facilitating learning. Haney (2016) identified working class roots as the reason he found non-applied research problematic. For me, my family valued creating and doing, not just talking about an issue, and encouraged an incredible work ethic that pushes me to do more than what is expected. Stricker (2011) also argued working-class faculty ask different questions than middle-class faculty, a strength that contributes to broader perspectives in the pursuit of quality scholarship.

My class culture taught me to help out anyone in need, give even when I have nothing to give, cheer for the underdog, and relieve suffering above all else. These working-class values of selfless sharing and caring directly influenced my anti-racism advocacy and my ally work with sexual minorities and transgender communities. This working-class strength ingrained social justice morals that prevent me from remaining silent when I witness social inequalities being perpetuated within academic spaces. I find myself *without* the ability to prioritize middle-class comfort above exposure of injustice. Including more working-class faculty who bring these cultural values into higher education will result in more complex considerations of social justice. If the academy includes more diversity, default assumptions are more likely to get questioned versus automatically accepted. Daukas (2006) pointed out people from diverse social backgrounds ask different questions and notice previously hidden patterns. During a research talk that involved offering Saturday workshops for community members, I noticed the speaker describing the research team's

confusion as to why the targeted attendees did not show. She declared that given the workshops were held on Saturday morning, the community members were not at work, so they were unclear about the cause of the low attendance. As a working-class woman, I immediately thought of all of the people in this low income, underserved area spending Saturday at their service jobs and blue-collar jobs, or sleeping after working the night shift. Many of these individuals undoubtedly have two to three jobs trying to make ends meet. Jobs such as cleaning offices, cooking food, serving food, selling clothing, painting homes, mowing lawns occur on all days of the week and continue throughout the weekend. Drawing from the strengths of working-class perspectives, this question of workshop absence would be quickly answered.

Resistance and Rejecting Respectability

With critical intersectional class consciousness in Phase Three, working-class faculty begin to reclaim roots as our most powerful resource (hooks 1993) in challenging middle-class norms and exposing invisible cultural values. In Phase Three, working-class faculty act as advocates for making hidden class mobility injuries known and resisting cultural reproduction of these injuries (Franceschelli et al. 2016; Overall 1995). As ‘active agents rather than passive subjects’ (Sowinska 1993, p. 149), working-class academics insist on working-class inclusion while interrupting and making visible the middle-class performances that create injustice. LeCourt and Napaleone (2010) argued that through deliberate acts of class transgression, faculty might achieve performance of working-class subjectivities, but face perceptions of violating academic norms. Attfield (2016) described scholar Lisa McKenzie as unapologetically working class, a clear rejection of respectability politics. However, when working-class transgressions reject respectability and critique middle-class culture performance, the system will work to undermine the credibility of those seeking to expose the invisible (Attfield 2016). The academy needs more openly working-class faculty, even though this openness may present risk (LeCourt & Napaleone 2010).

Resistance and deliberate acts of transgression help expose middle-class norms and make working-class faculty visible in academia. Resistance called me to write this paper despite strong middle-class messages that I should hide, keep my mouth shut, and internalize the class marginalization I experienced as something I deserve. Resistance requires me to write even though I feel vulnerable and open to retaliation. If I am to reclaim my roots, I must stand up and speak out because backing down from bullies and oppressors is unacceptable in my community. Resistance means delegitimizing the deficit model that blames working-class people for their economic situation (Cappello 1995). Lee’s (2017) working-class academic participants described their acts of resistance to middle-class culture such as cursing, bringing wonder bread and velveeta cheese to a potluck, and introducing oneself as a redneck. Phase Three resistance includes refusal to internalize classist judgments of my accent or language. In Phase Two, I felt embarrassed when my accent marked me as *without*. Now, I prefer to use these moments to educate my middle-class peers on working-class language and challenge the assumed superiority of middle- and upper-class pronunciation. I still frequently encounter middle-class folk who hear me saying ‘pin’ when I am looking for a writing utensil ‘pen.’ These two words are actually homonyms in my hometown, and I refuse to pronounce them with distinction.

Conclusions and Call to Action: Working-Class Inclusion in Diversity

Despite higher education diversity initiatives devoted to race and gender, which deserve continued attention and expansion, social class is very rarely acknowledged as relevant in university settings (Fay & Tokarczyk 1993; Lee 2017; Stricker 2011). The neglect of social class coupled with the assumed normativity of the middle-class leaves working-class faculty invisible in academia. To address this exclusion and strengthen diversity programs, initiatives, and policies, social class must become an equally valued aspect of these efforts (Smith et al. 2016; Vitale & Hurst 2016; Warnock 2016). Let me be clear, initiatives incorporating social class must not be implemented to the detriment of diversity initiatives addressing race and ethnicity, but should all function in support of the same goals. The strengths working-class academics bring to the professoriate offer great benefits to students, faculty, staff, and the teaching and research missions of the institutions. Therefore, attention to hiring and retaining a greater number of working-class faculty, especially those with critical class consciousness, should be fundamental to diversity goals (Lee 2017; Stricker 2011). Recruiting more working-class faculty into the academy (ivory tower) across all types of institutions may increase class awareness and strengthen higher education.

Calling for Working-Class Faculty Visibility

Arner (2016) advised junior faculty to keep working-class backgrounds hidden from the middle-class gaze of both students in the classroom and faculty colleagues. I emphatically disagree with this advice, though I understand it comes from a place of protection given the risky nature of being marked as working class. Now is the time for working-class faculty to proudly identify with the roots we were taught to deny and advocate for more visibility of social class issues on campus. Stricker (2011) called for faculty to come out as working class and use our *insider* positions to help students navigate the mystery of academic culture, and more important, that they all have a right to belong and take up space in academic environments. The current silencing of working-class perspectives begs for an influx of working-class faculty speaking out to move academic discussions away from silencing our perspectives (Stricker 2011). As Lehmann (2013) argued, openly working-class faculty serve as a resource to working-class students as mentors and role models that illustrate belonging for those feeling excluded. Recently, several universities launched campaigns to highlight first-generation faculty on campus, such as University of California, Irvine (Lee 2017) and UC, Santa Cruz. Warnock (2016) called for more of these programs, and I suggest expanding them to explicitly promote 'working-class' identity, along with first-generation, although these groups overlap.

Promoting Awareness and Structural Analyses of Class

Intersectional theory demands going beyond the individual level to critical analysis of power operating at systemic, structural, institutional, and societal levels to maintain inequality (Dill & Zambrana 2009). Discussions of class experiences typically concentrated on individuals must shift to deconstruct systemic classism (Fine & Burns 2003). Within my home discipline of psychology, we need much more research by and with working-class communities. Psychology undergraduate curriculum and graduate training programs severely neglect social class at all levels. Of course, psychology also needs to move away from the notion that class is merely a demographic variable to be 'controlled' and set aside. Unfortunately, most disciplines could make improvements to the inclusion of social class personal experiences and structural analyses within undergraduate and graduate courses and across the curriculum. Previous campaigns to include writing across the

curriculum acknowledge the importance of this skill and planned for infusion into a greater proportion of courses. To their credit, some universities and colleges have implemented initiatives promoting ‘diversity’ across the curriculum, but even these progressive initiatives tend to neglect social class. Faculty also need programs and workshops that support their professional development in understanding the impact of social class in the academy. Such opportunities speak to inclusion for working-class faculty and provide training for middle-class faculty to work as effective allies.

Author Bio

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