

The Precarious plight of American Working-Class Faculty: Causes and Consequences

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Abstract

For working-class Americans, the path of the professor is precarious. The neo-liberalization of higher education and the hegemony of academic elitism have made working-class faculty an endangered, disadvantaged, and invisible minority within the professoriate. On one hand, financing a graduate school career from humble origins is an increasingly risky investment. On the other, working-class Americans who secure a faculty job are often under-matched to low salary, high workload positions and endure classist ostracism and micro-aggressions. This essay is intended to not only trace the tragic trajectory of American working-class faculty but, more importantly, to invite conversations and identify suggestions that lead to our colleges and universities becoming more personally supportive workplaces and professionally empowering platforms for working-class professors.

Keywords

Working-class faculty, higher education, precarity, performativity, cultural capital, imposter syndrome, neo-liberalization, hegemony

Introduction: class hegemony in academia

‘precarity’ designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support.

(Butler 2009 ii)

Judith Butler’s definition of precarity easily extends to the plight of America’s working-class faculty. For example, the term is used in the titles of two recent papers on working-class professors (Vossen 2017; Warnock 2016). In Butler’s terms, economic support has failed as working-class Americans are increasingly priced out of academic careers. Social support for working-class faculty has never been systematically provided. Therefore, those from the working-class are out of place in the academy, ‘that most upper-middle class of social institutions’ (Huxford 2006 p. 207). Indeed, invisibility and ostracism are longstanding features of professional life for working-class faculty:

- ‘... social class still permeates higher education even though matters of class are whitewashed in these institutions’ (Soria 2016 p. 128)

- ‘... academia barely acknowledges working-class existence’ (Fay & Tokarczyk 1993 p. 4)

While these declarations are remarkable considering that at least one-fourth to one-third of faculty in the U.S. may be considered working-class¹ (Arner 2016; Seifert & Umbach 2008), they are not exceptional. Indeed, laments like those above reverberate throughout the essays Fay and Tokarczyk collected for *Working-class women in the academy: laborers in the knowledge factory* (1993); echo the auto-ethnographies in Ryan and Sackrey’s 1984 volume, *Strangers in paradise: academics from the working class*; and, foretell the narratives that comprise subsequent collections (Dews & Law 1995; Muzzati & Samarco 2006; Oldfield & Johnson 2008; Van Galen & Dempsey 2009; Welsch 2005). This genre’s currency is evidenced in Hurst & Nenga’s 2016 compilation, *Working in class: recognizing how social class shapes our academic work*, special editions of *Rhizomes* (Siegel 2014) and the *Journal of Working-Class Studies* (Chapple et al. 2017), and review essays (Brook & Michell 2012; Warnock 2016).

To convey their concept of class, many contributors to this literature appropriately refer readers to Pierre Bourdieu and his 1988 book *Homo academicus* (Arner 2014; Beech 2006; Provencher 2008; Rothe 2006; Warnock 2016). While Bourdieu’s frame of reference was the 20th Century French academy, his work translates to the experience of contemporary American working-class faculty members. Of particular resonance is Bourdieu’s presentation of cultural capital. Accumulated through ‘habitus’—the ingrained routines of physical activity and subconscious thought that reproduce class relations—cultural capital includes not only status but mannerisms and sensibilities as well. For example, academic pedigrees, speech patterns, and fashion statements are all currencies of cultural capital. By locating class in culture, Bourdieu maps the terrain of class conflict in the academy.

Working-class faculty frustration stems from their cultural marginalization in the academic workplace; their persistent protests attest to the intensity of their class identity. Grimes and Morris (1997) surveyed 36 American working-class sociologists about the intersection of their gender, race, and social class with their academic careers. Not surprisingly, the working-class White men they interviewed, otherwise privileged by their race and gender, reported that class had the most career impact. White women, Hispanic women, and Hispanic men, however, also emphasized class over gender and ethnicity. Only for the African-Americans in Grimes and Morris’s report did race have a larger effect than class (1997 p. 111). By no means, however, is class epiphenomenal in the experience of working-class African-American faculty:

Black women’s experiences with race and gender are unique intersections that often place them in an interlocking matrix of domination. And acknowledging the dimension of class makes our reality almost unbearable, volatile and highly toxic.

(Gray & Chapple 2017 p. 9)

¹ Arner suggests that Ladd and Lipset’s one-fourth estimate in their 1975 report has remained generally accurate. Seifert and Umbach’s one-third estimate is based on parental educational attainment among a sample population of 4,231 faculty at research institutions taken from the National Center for Education Statistics’ 1999 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (Seifert & Umbach 2008). Because working-class faculty are more likely to teach at teaching institutions (Grimes & Morris 1997; Langston 1993), this sample of research university faculty may underestimate the proportion of working-class faculty.

Intersectionality is also the unifying theme in the autobiographical essays in *Resilience: queer professors from the working class* (Oldfield & Johnson 2008). For many of these professors, their working-class background has had at least as much of an influence on their experiences in higher education as their sexual orientation (e.g., Johnson 2008). Christopher, reflecting on the ambiguities she has faced as a queer, working-class professor, concludes that ‘Class is harder to come to terms with [than gender and sexuality]’ (2008 p. 45).

Masking class: ideology and performativity

Social class in faculty culture, then, presents a paradox: how can an essential and problematic aspect of faculty identity be invisible? Part of the answer lies in the meritocratic ideology that has long obscured the dialectic between social class and American education. Traceable to prominent exponents such as Thomas Jefferson in the eighteenth century and Horace Mann in the nineteenth, the idea that education is a class-leveling playing field is a fundamental American fiction (Bowles & Gintis 1978; Isenberg 2016). We are encouraged to believe that educational opportunity is seized by the worthy and wasted by the unfit; what we made of our time in school has charted the destiny we deserve. That is, academic credentials are produced by our personal determination and intellectual aptitude, not structured by social relations.

In reality, however, members of the upper classes demand schools that will confer class privilege to their children exclusively. The public and private sectors have, in response, sorted the supply of primary, secondary, and higher education institutions by social class to serve this purpose. At the local scale, public school quality varies widely by school district and private schools provide alternatives for a price. Regionally and nationally, colleges and universities are meticulously ranked to signal the social status they ascribe. Since the selectivity of admissions weighs heavily in college rankings and correlates closely with tuition costs, academic quality is conflated with the class background of the student body. Laundering educational privilege to make it redeemable as merit is oppressive in Friere’s sense of the term—that is, the oppressed are compelled to accept the legitimacy of their oppressors (Friere 1981). Of course, this essential practice of educational provision contradicts our democratic principles. Hence, we are regularly reminded to avert our gaze and instead envision educational attainment as meritocratic².

This ideological interpretation extends uninterruptedly to faculty careers (Arner 2014). Professors earn appointments at prestigious universities, promotion, and tenure based on their publications, grants, and awards. Indeed, the privileged uphold the ideology of achievement with examples of working-class faculty success: ‘The small number of professors from the working and underclasses is often constructed through the meritocratic lens of the American dream as being the hardest working, the most capable of manufacturing a systematic plan for achievement’ (Muzzati & Samarco 2006, p. 71). According to the myth of the meritocracy, class is irrelevant to academic performance and is naturally invisible in the academy.

² In 2019, however, the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation’s ‘Operation Varsity Blues’ made a global spectacle of America’s educational hypocrisy. The FBI charged 33 parents, some of whom are internationally known executives and entertainers, with paying bribes to gain their children’s admission to elite American universities. The bribes, which totaled more than \$25 million, were paid to misrepresent the children as athletes in order to qualify them for athletes’ lower admissions standards or to falsify their scores on admission exams (Kates 2019).

In reality, ‘performativity’ may outplay merit in setting the trajectory of one’s faculty career. Writing on the French faculty, Bourdieu offers this exposé:

The real fee for admission to the group, what is known as ‘team spirit,’ that is, the visceral form of recognition of everything which constitutes the existence of the group, and which the group must reproduce in order to reproduce itself, only appears indefinable because it is irreducible to the technical definitions of competence officially required for membership of the group.

(Bourdieu 1988 p. 56)

Lovell (2000) helps explain that Judith Butler’s discussion of performing gender further articulates Bourdieu’s cultural capital and extends his concept of habitus. By presenting gender identity as a process of becoming through performance, Butler’s emphasis on subjectivity counterbalances Bourdieu’s concern with establishing the inertia of routines rooted in class contexts.

Resting on Butler’s authority, Fedukovich (2009) and LeCourt (2006) embrace the potential for constructive agency through performing class. They caution their working-class faculty colleagues against fixed representations of social class and describe their own voluntary accretion of middle-class cultural capital to their personal working-class identities. Conflict, however, comes when working-class students and faculty realize that to get faculty jobs and promotions they are expected to perform in conformance with middle-class cultural norms (Baker 2006; Muzzati & Samarco 2006). In the next section, I trace the history of working-class access to higher education and review working-class auto-ethnography to clear away the cultural and ideological smokescreens that blur social class in the academy.

Precarious times: from the Golden Age to the New Depression

Economic, political, and demographic currents create and constrain opportunities to go from a blue-collar background to college and then to a faculty career. In the early twentieth century, college was an elite reserve (Rudolph 1962). As of 1900, only two per cent of American 18 to 24 year olds were enrolled in college and total enrollment was less than 250,000 (Snyder 1993). By 1940, population growth, industrialization, urbanization, and expanded public education had driven enrollment to almost 1.5 million. But, with only 9 per cent of traditional age students enrolled, college remained unaffordable for lower-income Americans (Hunt 2006; Kinzie et al. 2004; Snyder 1993). Prior to World War II, ‘financial aid was primarily a local matter supported through philanthropy and an occasional institutionally-generated loan program aimed at supporting student needs and later, student merit’ (Fuller 2014 p. 61). Federal intervention would prove necessary to put college within reach of the masses.

The Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944 was the first large-scale government initiative to increase the working-class presence in higher education. The ‘G.I. Bill’ paid for World War II veterans’ college tuition and living expenses. While higher-ed higher-ups like the presidents of Harvard University and the University of Chicago issued class-coded warnings that veterans were academically unqualified and would lower standards, veterans outperformed traditional students in the classroom (Olson 1973). By the mid-1950s, 2.2 million World War II veterans had used the

G.I. Bill's education benefits, half of them first-generation college students (Fuller 2014; Simmons 2014). In socioeconomic terms, 'The G.I. Bill also indicated that a substantial portion of the nation's youth had the ability but not the money to enter college' (Olson 1973 p. 607).

Motivated by egalitarian aspirations espoused in the 1947 Truman Commission on Higher Education's *Higher education for American democracy*, financial aid initiatives continued in the 1950s with the re-authorization of the G.I. Bill in 1952 and the establishment of federal student loans through the National Defense Education Act of 1958 (Fuller 2014; Simmons 2014). The goal of removing financial barriers to higher education access was best expressed, however, in the Higher Education Act of 1965, which expanded federal loans and grants and funded student work-study jobs (Simmons 2014).

In step with Cold War defense spending, the postwar economic boom and the coming of age of the baby boomers, these government financial aid programs contributed to absolute and relative enrollment growth (Labaree 2017). Enrollment grew from 2.44 to 3.64 million in the 1950s, then more than doubled to 8 million during the 1960s. At the same time, enrollment as a percentage of the age 18 to 24 population grew from 9 per cent in 1939-40 to 24 per cent in 1959-60 to 35 per cent by 1969-70. The G.I. Bill-induced gender imbalance lessened in the 1950s and 1960s: by 1970, women were 40 per cent of the student body just as they had been before World War II (Snyder 1993).

To meet the unprecedented demand for higher education, colleges and universities scrambled to hire faculty. The 270,000 teaching positions added during the 1960s nearly doubled the professoriate and job openings for junior faculty exceeded earned doctorates every year between 1962 and 1968 (Cartter 1976; Snyder 1993). Indeed, at the peak of the professor shortage during the mid-1960s, there were twice as many openings as new Ph.D.s. (Cartter 1976). This mismatch between supply and demand resulted in an unprecedented and un-replicated seller's market for professors. Working-class kids of the Depression Era 'Lucky Few' generation who made it to college and liked the look of faculty life could ride their run of good fortune straight into the 1960s 'Golden Age' for working-class faculty (Carlson 2008; Ryan & Sackrey 1984). As Ryan and Sackrey put it, '...the system of higher education got big enough to let *us* inside' (1984 p. 42, emphasis in original).

Available data demonstrate increased hiring of working-class faculty during this period. As the Golden Age was peaking in the late 1960s, younger faculty members were significantly more likely to come from blue-collar families than were senior faculty. At that time, the Lucky Few generation faculty were in their 30s. One-fourth of them were working-class, while only 18 per cent of their colleagues in their 60s came from blue-collar families (Ladd & Lipset 1975 p. 173).

The 1960s bubble, however, burst in the 1970s. Bullish graduate departments had expanded their programs and produced an oversupply of would-be professors. In 1969-70, almost 30,000 doctoral degrees were conferred, more than three times as many as just 10 years earlier (Snyder 1993). For faculty hopefuls, the 1970s were not a Golden Age but, instead, a 'New Depression' (Hogan et al. 1978). Newspaper reporters attending the American Historical Association (AHA) meetings of the mid-1970s estimated that there were four to eight unemployed Ph.D. historians for every available job (Wood 2016). Supporting this anecdotal evidence, AHA data show that the 1973-74 cohort of

nearly 1,200 new History Ph.D.s had to compete with each other and with senior colleagues for about 750 open faculty positions (Townsend & Swafford 2017).

By the 1980s and 1990s, Golden Age faculty were reaching their golden years. They promised their protégés that the job market would rebound with their retirements. Instead, colleges and universities responded by filling many vacancies with part-time faculty (Youn 2005). Under-represented groups—women, minorities, and the working class—were those most likely to be passed over for full-time jobs and left with part-time positions (Kerlin 1995). Writing in the early 1980s, Ryan and Sackrey foresaw ‘...shrinking possibilities for any hillbillies and meanstreeters who are, this moment, growing up with fantasies about being college teachers’ (1984 p. 34).

Dwindling support for public higher education also undercut the aspirations of working-class students for academic careers. In the early 1970s, Carnegie Commission reports favored a ‘market model’ for public universities which would lead to sharp tuition increases (Bowles & Gintis 1976). In the 1980s and 1990s, taxpayer revolts and the dissolution of the USSR further eroded financial support for the ‘Cold War university’ (Labaree 2017 Ch. 7).

Transferring the cost of higher education to students increased their dependence on borrowing. Growing debt loads discouraged working- and lower-middle-class students to pursue and complete graduate degrees and modest faculty salaries made repayment arduous (Finkelstein et al. 1998; Kerlin 1995). By the 1990s, the costs of graduate education had shifted to students such that faculty work was, once again, becoming a ‘genteel profession’ reserved for the affluent with family financial support (Fay & Tokarczyk 1993). From a working-class perspective, an academic career became an ever-more irrational choice: the tight job market reduced rewards and the inevitability of indebtedness increased risk. Kerlin predicted that:

To a large extent, it is likely that class backgrounds will play an increasingly substantial role in the years ahead in determining who will be able to attend and complete doctoral studies and, ultimately, who will enter the academic labor market for the college and university faculty of the 21st century.

(1995 p. 13)

The precarity of the 1990s persisted into the twenty-first century and worsened as the financial crisis of 2007-08 rationalized deeper cuts into public higher education spending. Reviewing working-class faculty auto-ethnography since Ryan and Sackrey’s 1984 volume, Warnock reports that debt is an ‘overwhelmingly more present’ topic among those who entered the job market in the last decade (Warnock 2016 p. 30). Indebtedness will undoubtedly plague the next generation of faculty as well: median debt among new bachelor’s degree recipients exceeds \$30,000 (AAUP 2016).

As financial exposure has increased, returns have become more uncertain. From 1975 to 2011, tenure liners’ proportion of the professoriate fell from 56 per cent to 29 per cent while the percentage of contingent faculty increased from 44 per cent to 71 per cent. Part-timers grew from 31 per cent to 51 per cent of all faculty and non-tenure track full-timers from 13 per cent to 20 per cent (Curtis 2014 p. 2).

Much of this increased risk is borne by minority and female faculty. To the considerable extent that class conflates with race and ethnicity in the U.S., comparisons between White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian faculty are telling. Table 1 shows that Blacks and Hispanics are badly under-represented among the professoriate. Gendered discrepancies are also indicated in Table 1 and elaborated upon in Table 2. In particular, women are the majority of the contingent faculty workforce.

This sweep of higher education history shows that working-class faculty have become part of the ‘...reserve army of underemployed skilled white-collar workers whose jobs by no means exhausts the limits of their skills or abilities...’ cultivated by the post-World War II expansion of higher education and exposed by the post-industrial decline of America’s global economic supremacy (Bowles & Gintis 1976 p. 204). They are the last to be hired, the first to be fired, and over-represented in the part-time faculty ranks. In other words, their abilities are often under-matched to their positions and postings (Grimes & Morris 1997; Lang 1987; Vander Putten 2015).

Table 1. Proportion of faculty by demographic category compared with proportion of U.S. population, 2011

Demographic category	A. % of faculty-age population ¹	B. % of tenure- line faculty ²	C. % of tenure-line faculty in proportion to % of faculty-age US population = B / A	D. % of contingent faculty ³	E. % of contingent faculty in proportion to % of faculty-age US population = D / A
Hispanic women	7.1 %	2.3 %	0.33	2.7 %	0.39
Hispanic men	7.6 %	2.7 %	0.36	2.5 %	0.33
Black women	6.7 %	2.6 %	0.39	4.8 %	0.71
Black men	5.6 %	2.6 %	0.46	2.9 %	0.52
White women ⁴	33.5 %	29.6 %	0.88	37.7 %	1.13
Asian women	2.7 %	2.9 %	1.09	2.3 %	0.86
White men ⁴	33.1 %	45.6 %	1.38	35.4 %	1.07
Asian men	2.4 %	5.8 %	2.43	2.4 %	1.00
Other ⁵	1.3 %	5.9 %	3.54	10.3 %	6.92
Total	100.0 %	100.0 %	1.00	100.0 %	1.00

Sources: US Census 2011; Curtis 2014

Notes:

1. Faculty-age population includes non-institutionalized US citizens between the ages of 25 and 64 on the basis that most faculty do not earn the graduate degree(s) required to teach undergraduate classes until at least age 25.
2. Tenure-line faculty includes tenured and tenure-track faculty.
3. Contingent faculty includes full-time non-tenure track faculty and part-time faculty.
4. Figures for Column A are for non-Hispanic Whites.
5. Other includes non-resident aliens, those belonging to unlisted races and ethnicities, and those with unidentified races and ethnicities.

Table 2: Faculty appointment by race, ethnicity, and gender, 2011

Appt. category	Black women	White women	Hispanic women	Black men	Hispanic men	Asian women	White men	Asian men	Total
Tenured	11%	17%	18%	18%	23%	19%	27%	35%	21%
Tenure-track	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	16%	8%	16%	9%
Tenure line sub-total ¹	18%	25%	26%	26%	31%	34%	35%	50%	29%
Non-tenure-track	18%	21%	18%	17%	16%	26%	18%	23%	20%
Part-time	64%	55%	56%	57%	53%	39%	47%	27%	51%
Contingent sub-total ¹	82%	76%	74%	74%	69%	66%	65%	50%	71%
Total ¹	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Curtis 2014

Notes:

1. Percentages, including sub-totals and totals, are rounded.

Under-matching career to class

A key contributor to working-class faculty precarity, under-matching in higher education merits examination at a systemic scale and at the level of lived experience. The provision of public higher education underwent a systemic shift in the 1960s and 1970s that accommodated class segregation. Namely, community colleges grew spectacularly to absorb the inflow of working-class students. Enrollment in public two-year schools nearly quadrupled between 1963 and 1973 from 739,811 to 2,889,621 (National Center for Education Statistics 1991). The two million additional community college students represented half the enrollment growth in public higher education over that 10-year span. From 1973 to 1983, the trend towards community colleges became more pronounced as two-year schools claimed two-thirds of enrollment growth and nearly half of total public post-secondary enrollment (National Center for Education Statistics 1991).

At the time, Bowles and Gintis claimed that ‘the booming community college movement has created a class stratification within higher education’ (1976 p. 208). Correlation of student SES with institutional categories supports their assertion. Under-represented at elite institutions, working-class students helped fuel the explosion of community colleges. Table 3 displays the composition of a representative 25-student class by institutional category and SES quartile from 1972 to 2004. In our hypothetically average classroom at the nations’ elite universities, a token poor student from the lowest SES quartile would be joined by a colleague or two from the lower middle quartile in a learning environment dominated by affluent students. Analysis of subsequently available federal education data leads to the conclusion that low-income students’ representation at selective schools remains low (Giancola & Kahlenberg 2016). Conversely, SES categories have been much more evenly represented at public community colleges. Beginning in the 1990s, students from the lower half of the SES scale have comprised the majority at these institutions.

Table 3. Composition of a representative 25-student class by institutional category and SES quartile, 1972-2004

Institutional category	Year	SES quartiles				Total
		Lowest	Lower middle	Upper middle	Highest	
‘Most competitive’	1972	1	2	3	19	25 students

colleges and universities	1982	1	3	4	17	25
	1992	1	1	6	17	25
	2004	1	2	5	17	25
Public community colleges	1972	5	6	7	7	25 students
	1982	5	7	7	6	25
	1992	6	8	7	4	25
	2004	6	7	7	5	25

Source: Pell Institute 2018.

At the individual scale, auto-ethnography corroborates that the entire academic careers of working-class faculty are a series of under-matches. Under-matched as undergraduates, blue-collar students transfer seamlessly into under-matched graduate programs. Beech describes how she gravitated to a nearby regional state university as an undergraduate (then Livingston University, now the University of West Alabama). Based on minimal and anecdotal information, she moved on to Southern Illinois University and the University of Southern Mississippi for her M.A. and Ph.D., respectively. In retrospective reference to her final graduate school destination, she answers her rhetorical question, ‘This time around did I research programs to match up my interests with their scholars and reputations or at least to make sure a program offered a decent stipend and health insurance?’ with an emphatic ‘Nope’ (Beech 2006 p. 17). Similarly, Kauzlarich went from Sangamon State University (now the University of Illinois at Springfield) to Western Michigan University for graduate school ‘because one of my undergraduate professors knew a guy there once.’ He explains his selections by stating that, to him and his family, ‘a degree was a degree, no matter where you got it.’ Only towards the end of his studies did he realize that his academic pedigree made him ‘an untouchable as far as being an employee’ at ‘fancy’ colleges and universities (Kauzlarich 2006 p. 42).

Recent statistical analysis confirms and extends Kauzlarich’s claim. Using *U.S. News & World Report* rankings, Colander and Zhou divided universities granting Ph.D.s in English into four tiers. They found that for graduates of programs in the lowest tier, which included 67 of the 130 departments, the chances of landing a tenure track job at a national research university or national liberal arts college are ‘essentially nil’ (Colander & Zhou 2015 p. 142). Clauset and colleagues documented the dominant influence that doctoral program prestige holds over faculty hiring in history, computer science, and business. They were left with the rhetorical question, ‘How many meritorious research careers are derailed by the faculty job market’s preference for prestigious doctorates?’ (Clauset et al. 2015 p. 5).

Launching careers from off-brand graduate schools, uninitiated academics are buffeted by the job market. While those with rare right stuff become living legends by landing the tenure track job at an R1, many end up under-matched, considering themselves fortunate to escape the fate of the adjunct instructor by catching on full-time at a community college, an under-endowed obscure liberal arts college, or a state teachers’ college (Grimes & Morris 1997; Langston 1993; Soria 2016; Vander Putten 2015). Jobs at these working-class higher education institutions come with lower salaries. These positions also have higher teaching workloads that preclude time for research and writing. Indirectly but effectively, therefore, class-based matching of faculty to institutional category squelches scholarship from the working-class.

Precarious workplaces: class unmasked

Additional issues face working-class faculty at the super-structural scale of shared experience. Professors continue to fill edited volumes with their colleagues' first-person vignettes as successive generations, pressured to perform the part of the upper middle-class professor and keep their identity offstage, seek venues for their working-class voices. Their soliloquies, while intensely personal, form a chorus calling out the sharp contrasts in class-based values and behavior that make their academic workplaces socially and psychologically precarious.

The social psychology dyad of belonging and achievement underlies contrasting class-based faculty values and behaviors. That is, the working-class emphasis on belonging to family and community is at odds with the self-centered careerism normative in the academy. For working-class women and minorities, this conflict is particularly pronounced. Fay and Tocarczyk point out that some successful female faculty are stigmatized as 'male-identified' if their personal career goals are perceived to outweigh their responsibility to colleagues and students (1993). Similarly, African-American faculty stress that white America's capitalistic worldview is opposed to the working-class African-American spirit of collectivity (hooks 1993; Thompson & Louque 2005).

These conflicting values find expression in equally polarized behavior patterns. Achievement-oriented upper middle-class faculty are socialized to self-promote (Warnock 2016). Belonging-based working-class faculty are taught to be self-effacing (Wilson 2006). Upon arrival in graduate school, working-class students learn that the rules of humility and reciprocity they were raised to respect do not apply in the academic arena of individualized achievement and competition (Rothe 2006; Twale & DeLuca 2008). In academia, as a Dean once admonished the author, 'if you don't blow your own horn, people will think you don't have one.'

As researchers, demonstrating one's personal reputation is required for tenure. Consequently, some scholars covet recognition to a dysfunctional degree. Faculty lore is replete with cautionary tales of credit stealers and authorship appropriators. As teachers, uninhibited expressions of high self-esteem also serve a purpose. Two common measures of faculty performance, student evaluations and student enrollment, reflect the choices of impressionable undergraduates. Because bold-faced faculty bragging has a remarkable influence on students' opinions, bourgeois boastfulness may reinforce the gender and cultural biases documented in student evaluations (Fan et al. 2019; Mitchell & Martin 2018). In other words, a sure way to build the sought-after student following is through unquiet self-confidence. Observing the naturalness of these behaviors to their affluent peers, working-class faculty view self-promotion as reflecting the entitlement and arrogance of class privilege (Muzzati & Samarco 2006).

Warnock's review of working-class faculty narratives led her to categorize additional contrasts in class-based behavior including 'cultural capital' and 'dress and comportment' (2016 pp. 31-32). Class-based consumption is conspicuous in our society as a whole and academia is no exception. Upper middle-class tastes in clothes, food, entertainment, and travel are normative to the point of being oppressive in academic circles. While some working-class faculty adopt and embrace the accoutrements that happen to be in fashion among their well-heeled colleagues, others refuse to conform. For example, Muzzati and Samarco avoid flaunting their faculty status in college bars and prefer the 'anonymous working-class environments of establishments outside of town' (2006 p. 79).

Another of Warnock's behavioral conflicts involves 'language and communication' and 'stereotypes and micro-aggressions' (2016 pp. 31-32). Language and communication refers to the sociolinguistics of the academy. Standard academic English is based on middle-class vocabulary, syntax, cadence, and pronunciation. Communication is emotionally restrained, reserved, and 'politically correct'. Conversely, working-class speech is emotionally direct, and occasionally irreverent and profane (Kauzlarich 2006; Rothe 2006; Wilson 2006). The working-class faculty member who is unversed in the idiom of academe or unwilling to code-switch is marked as an inferior, unwelcome outsider and subject to stereotyping and micro-aggressions. For example, a particularly pernicious classist stereotype faced by working-class faculty is the insinuation that they are racist and homophobic (Warnock 2016 p. 32).

Micro-aggressions towards faculty who threaten the status quo include bullying, mobbing, and ostracism (Twale & DeLuca 2008). For example, working-class faculty report that they are routinely talked down to and victimized by competitive 'game-playing' (Langston 1993; Soria 2016). Another disturbing aspect of the 'academic bully culture' is that it inculcates and rewards incivility (Twale & DeLuca 2008). Langston recounts that the classism of middle-class male 'pricks' in graduate school reinforced their reputations as 'brilliant' students (1993 p. 70). Like other hostile work environments, the academic milieu encourages working-class interlopers to consider changing jobs and careers (Vander Putten 2015).

These accounts suggest that academia's classism confronts working-class faculty with a Faustian bargain: they can keep their identity or have their career. There is, however, diversity of opinion regarding class intolerance in the academy. Lasane, a gay, African-American professor who grew up in poverty, writes that 'At the academy, I do not have to suppress any of my identity' (2008 p. 208). In general terms, Fedukovich (2009) and LeCourt (2006) warn that 'conflict-based' 'alienation narratives' cast the working-class – middle-class divide in mutually exclusive, oppositional terms that have problematic consequences. Their constructive perspective informs subsequent discussion of empowering working-class faculty. It does not, however, diminish the validity of their colleagues' feelings or the potential consequences of faculty class conflict. For example, flaunting working-class values and behavior and openly rejecting the hegemony of academia's ruling class has helped faculty get fired. Masking their blue-collar backgrounds to perform the part of the privileged professor will get them accepted and even ahead (Arner 2016; Fay and Tokarczyk 1993). First-person confessions are admirable for their authenticity:

- '... part of my education [at elite universities] included learning contempt for my family and the culture I came from, eradicating the dialect I grew up speaking, and learning values of hierarchy, ambition, individualism, and intellectual snobbery...' (Christopher 2003 p. 38).
- 'In some ways the social class origin of faculty is less important than their ability to conform to the expectations. If you can learn to play the game, you can stay. I suspect that most working-class academics do exactly what I did—try to learn to play the part.' (Huxford 2006 p. 215).
- '...transformative micro-identity management work is necessary to successfully continue in my upper-middle-class job.' (Baker 2006 p. 198).

Acculturation has a high cost, however. Socially, relationships with old friends and family members are compromised and often broken. Narrative after narrative includes professors' painful explorations of the gulfs opened between them and their working-class parents (Welsch 2005). Psychologically, many working-class faculty suffer from the 'imposter syndrome' (Begert 2005; Warnock 2016). The feeling of faking it leads not only to cognitive dissonance but also to the fear that one's true identity will be disastrously unmasked (Atkinson 2005 p. 91).

Inoculation from an identity crisis is available, however, at teachers colleges and branch campuses. While these workplaces are not homogenous working-class enclaves, those who came from Muzzati and Samarco's 'wrong side of the tracks' (2006) can easily find colleagues who share their sensibilities. That is, these obscure destinations offer belonging to erstwhile outsiders (Kauzlarich 2006). For example, the author felt at home upon arriving at a regional state college because his senior colleagues humorously yet vigorously discouraged anyone from taking themselves too seriously.

Two-year colleges and public baccalaureates are also the places to make a difference for typical working-class students. Driven by this purpose, some working-class faculty limit their job search to these schools (e.g., Begert 2005). Others, whom the academic hiring process (under-) matched to the blue-collar campus, discover that they not only fit in but also make a difference. As discussed above, however, these psychosocial comforts come at the expense of salary and scholarship. Ironically, working-class culture may help obscure a class-based perspective on scholarship. To be sure, for some faculty on the '4-4,'³ their personal passion for teaching makes this imbalance not only palatable but preferable. For others, their working-class identification with the collective interest exerts a powerful pull. At the campus level, many faculty, perhaps especially those at historical teachers' colleges, are quick to identify with the mission of their 'teaching institution.' Interpersonally, working-class faculty who place high value on belonging to a group of like-minded colleagues are inclined to sacrifice personal goals for the good of the order (e.g., McDaniel 2008). Peer pressure may also be a less laudable, more coercive influence. For example, a leading faculty figure at one of the author's former campuses derided dabblers in research as 'university wannabes'. These motivations combine to cause professors to not only shoulder the 4-4 but also teach extra classes on 'overload' to serve programmatic needs. At schools that pay part-time rates for overloads, these players are truly taking one for the team. Finally, for those who have lost time for research and touch with the cutting edge, scholarship's value tends to diminish in inverse proportion to the amount of effort required to reawaken a dormant research agenda.

Consequences and conversations

As we have seen, the precarity of working-class faculty has three consequences. In the first place, their prospects of even becoming faculty members are precarious. All aspirants to academic careers have faced a notoriously tight job market since the 'Golden Age' ended almost 50 years ago. Of particularly pernicious relevance to working-class job seekers, however, hiring is mightily influenced by the prestige of candidates' institutional and interpersonal associations, an unwritten rule understood to their privileged counterparts but unbeknownst to them. Consequently, most take

³ '4-4' refers to a teaching load of 4 classes per semester. Most U.S. universities divide the academic year between a fall semester and a spring semester. Coupled with standard service expectations, a 4-4 teaching load leaves little time for scholarship.

part-time teaching jobs. Many of those that do catch on full-time do so as non-tenure track faculty. Finally, the few whose swim upstream finds a tenure line typically under-match to community colleges and baccalaureate teaching institutions.

Secondly, as described above, these jobs come with low wages and little time for scholarship. In other words, higher education also perpetuates class-based stratification in terms of faculty salaries and workloads. While the discrepancy in dollars and cents is painfully enumerable, the restrictions on research are equally significant and unfair. On an individual level, it is an insidious form of discrimination that robs human beings of the power to participate in the disciplinary discourses in which they invested years of education. Moreover, by successfully completing their grad school apprenticeships, they proved that they have something to say. On a societal scale, classism in the academy stifles the working-class voice in the scholarly conversations that shape our understandings of who we are and our decisions about who we will be.

Third, the psychosocial precarity of working-class faculty life is very real and widely felt. Working-class professors suffer in the classist academic milieu. Whether unwittingly or intentionally, colleagues make them well aware that they don't belong. Some internalize this ostracism and are haunted by the imposter syndrome.

Thus endangered, the further disappearance of working-class faculty will compromise American higher education. The robustness and the relevance of our teaching, research, and service depends on the working-class perspective. Working-class faculty are role models who relate to the experience of working-class students while broadening the viewpoints of affluent students (Vander Putten 2015). Similarly, working-class faculty expand curriculum and scholarship into areas that escape the attention and, often the approval, of elites. For example, the establishment of popular culture as a field of study required a movement led by working-class faculty (Browne 1989). Turning to service, the working-class experience with authority is an important basis for democratic traditions in faculty governance. As Muzzati and Samarco put it, the working-class worldview brings a 'healthy mistrust of those in positions of power' (2006 79). Identification with family and neighborhood contribute to working-class faculty members' commitment to meaningful community service. Lastly, institutional leadership from the working-class provides insight as higher education struggles to expand access and demonstrate impact.

We are challenged to make our colleges and universities more personally supportive workplaces and professionally empowering platforms for working-class professors. This essay is intended to invite conversations about how we may work to serve these purposes. For example, this agenda may include reversing the neo-liberalization of higher education; increasing faculty access to collective bargaining; redefining faculty work; and, mentoring and dialoguing. Hopefully, exploration of these initiatives will expand opportunity for all who aspire to make meaningful contributions as higher education faculty.

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