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Volume 9 Issue 1: Editorial

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Each time we write an editorial we comment on the state of the world and always reach for reasons to be hopeful. We must stay hopeful, because hope is what keeps us fighting for what we know is important.

Maintaining hope doesn't mean ignoring or avoiding the terrible events that are happening, but it does give us reason to keep going! There is strong relationship between hope, activism, and action of course. It is with spirit towards action, backed by the power of research, reflection and advocacy, that we continue.

People who are demanding their freedoms from oppressors (in any context) need to know that there are others out there in the world who are standing (and fighting) in solidarity. And solidarity is always the key – staying strong together and not being divided. We are always stronger together, and this is something that working-class people around the world understand very well.

So, where is the current hope? We could suggest that the trouncing of the Tories (Conservative government) in the UK general election this year, does spark some hope for the millions of people in Britain who have suffered due to the previous government's austerity measures. Hope needs action though, and the new Labour government needs to show that it is committed to undoing the damage and providing the means for working-class people in the UK to live with dignity.

More recently we saw some awful scenes coming from the UK as people reacted violently towards Muslims and immigrants in the wake of a terrible crime. It was shocking to see groups of (mostly) white men attempting to attack mosques and spouting racist slurs. This was fuelled by an intentional misinformation campaign, created to divide. But we also saw in the aftermath, the coming together of local people to clean up the damage, and the presence of thousands of anti-racism demonstrators sending a clear message to the racists that their views are not welcome.

Sarah was proud to see that the streets of her old neighbourhood of Walthamstow (in London) were filled with anti-racist locals who affirmed their pride in the multicultural neighbourhood. They refused to accept the racist rhetoric and people from all cultural backgrounds united. Walthamstow is a working-class area, and this showed that working-class people are culturally diverse and enjoy the sense of community among people who share their class interests.

Here in Australia cost of living pressures continue to rise sharply and present some of the biggest challenges many have seen in generations. As politicians scramble to point fingers the gaps between people continue to rise, with one report finding "average rents rising by more than 50 per cent since 2020". How do people so sharply worried about housing look after themselves and those around them? While it can appear too hard to even think about, again, we look to each other for solidarity and support. There are pockets of kindness everywhere, even if they are not headline worthy.

With the US election around the corner, we should also acknowledge the organisers and activists who are pushing for the representation of working-class people and who work hard in communities and workplaces to ensure that people are ready to vote. In terms of hope, we've seen it in the workers organising their workplaces and winning improved wages and conditions, but when it comes to political hope, there is a lot riding on this election, with one candidate making it clear that he has no intention of helping working-class people. The world watches on...

This issue offers up a diverse array of pieces, that includes scholarly articles, commentary, a personal essay, poems and book reviews. We start with Miranda Mosier-Puentes' article, '"I would love to have these conversations with family": A Listening Guide exploration of the relational experiences of first-generation students in helping professions' which explores the ways that many first-generation students experience changes to their relationships with family due to their education. Mosier-Puentes' data shows that for many such students, it can be difficult to share what they have learnt with their families.

This is followed by two articles focused on working-class literature – in 'Sid Chaplin: A Writer with a Cause', Ronald Paul argues for a revisiting of the work of British working-class author Sid Chaplin, whose novels about working-class life in the 1950s and 1960s have not been appreciated for their radical working-class politics. And in 'British Working-Class Literature, Higher Education and Identity Politics: Elevating Working-Class Voices in New Literary Pedagogies', John D. Attridge examines the dearth of working-class literature courses in UK higher education institutes and presents some reasons for this absence.

Magnus Gustafson is next with '"A small step forward can be as important as a big one" – Parliamentary debate about the first abortion law in Sweden in 1938'. In this article, Gustafson takes us to Sweden in the 1930s and outlines arguments made by politicians in relation to their support or opposition of abortion laws. Gustafson claims that only one politician at that time positioned the issue of abortion rights as a working-class issue.

The issue then moves to a commentary piece from our friends at the Connors Institute at Shippensburg University – Lawrence M. Eppard, Annie Linker, Madison Laughman and Katie Bonomo, present some preliminary findings of a study into the choice of study major for women students and how this may influence the gender pay gap in the US. In 'College Major Selection, Social Class, and the Gender Pay Gap in the United States' the team finds that not all of what they expected to find was supported by the collected data.

Sara Appel's personal essay follows, 'Diary of a Sub On Strike: A Week on the Picket Line with the Portland Association of Teachers', which is an account (with photographs) of her experience on a picket line as a substitute school teacher. Appel demonstrates the affirming effects of solidarity actions.

Four poems are also included in this issue. Three are from Angela Costi - 'A Ship in Distress', 'A Christmas Carol for the Carers', 'The Service of my Baba's Windows' which explore the pain of watching parents as they age. And a poem from Ian C Smith follows, 'Mistake City' which presents a story of regret.

The issue ends with eight book reviews, edited by the Journal's excellent book reviews editor, Dr. Christie Launius. The range of books is impressive and includes scholarly works on topics

such as the history of Latinas/os in the US South, the role of luck in the ability for college students to find jobs; reasons for working-class disengagement with the US Democratic party; the wilful neglect of trailer park homes. There are also reviews of creative works such as a graphic novel set in Canadian oil sands, poetry focused on the experience of a poor Indigenous community in Canada; short stories about white working-class men in a deindustrialised setting and a memoir about a childhood spent in a Chinese restaurant in Detroit. The interest in writing about working-class life continues to flourish.

We end with thanks to all of our contributors, and to readers. Working-class studies is a truly interdisciplinary field, and the works in this Journal continue to demonstrate this!

“I would *love* to have these conversations with family”: A Listening Guide exploration of the relational experiences of first-generation students in helping professions

Miranda Mosier-Puentes, Portland State University

Abstract

First-generation students are, by and large, working-class students. While many have focused on their experiences of academic and social integration into college, first-generation students are often just as concerned with remaining integrated in their home communities, reflecting their tendency to value interdependence. This qualitative study explored the relational experiences of first-generation students attempting to share their learning in family conversations. I conducted focus groups with 19 first-generation students enrolled in programs preparing them for the helping professions, particularly social work and teaching. Transcripts were analyzed using the Listening Guide (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 2015). Findings highlighted participants’ struggles to share their learning within their home communities, and varied responses, including self-silencing, being silenced by family, and an emerging sense of relational loss.

Keywords

first-generation students, social class, Listening Guide, family relationships, helping professions

Introduction

While framing working-class students on US college campuses as “first-generation” obscures class, it offers greater inclusion to students whose identities (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), service workers) sometimes exclude them from dominant constructions of the working-class (white, male, industrial workers) (Linkon, 2018). Indeed, given the prevalence of classism on college campuses in the United States (Ferguson & Lareau, 2021; Langhout et al., 2009), many students struggle with identifying as working-class (Warnock & Hurst, 2016). Because first-generation students (FGS) are more likely to be low-income and/or low-socioeconomic status (SES) (Bui, 2002; Checkoway, 2018; Chen, 2005; Engle & Tinto, 2008) their experiences are relevant to working-class studies.

The mystification of class in the first-generation label is unfortunate because completing a postsecondary education[1] often involves socialization into middle-class culture prevalent in academia (Ardoin & martinez, 2019; Hamilton & Armstrong, 2009; Hurst, 2010; Stephens et al., 2012). That FGS should adapt to college (and not the other way around) is presumed. Researchers focus on FGS' academic and social integration in college (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Lowery-Hart & Pacheco, 2011; Stuber, 2011). But the process of integrating into college has implications for FGS's family relationships and their ability to *remain* integrated within home communities.

This study explores the relational experiences of 19 FGS in focus group discussions preparing for careers in the helping professions (social work, teaching, and related professions) in a public, four-year university. Slightly more than half (11) of the participants were white, five were Hispanic or Latina/o, and there was one Black/Jamaican, one biracial Native, and one East Asian participant. All but four were women, and the majority of undergraduates (eight of 13) identified as non-traditional, or older than the traditional-aged college student (18-21years). Participants experienced relational distancing between school and home, particularly in conversations about learning. They spoke of silencing themselves, being silenced by family, and relational loss. As Jane Van Galen (2021), who created the *First in Our Families* Digital Story Project, has noted, FGS' own stories about their experiences go largely unheard in a context that celebrates the trajectories of FGS solely in terms of grit, resilience, and ultimately, gratitude for social mobility.

Literature Review

A foundational study of FGS' relational experiences underscores the assumption that college-going results in separation from family. London (1989) outlined three patterns of "breaking away," with each involving some degree of FGS being sent out as "delegates" to fulfill educational aspirations: being bound to family roles while simultaneously sent out as a delegate, being sent out as a delegate (often to meet a family member's unmet educational aspirations), and experiencing exclusion in their role as a delegate. Themes of separation from family may manifest as the pressure to separate to achieve academic success (Bradbury & Maher, 2009; Lehmann, 2014) or cope with the college transition (Rodriguez et al., 2021). Separation from family was even anticipated in a study of potential FGS, prior to enrollment (Langenkamp & Shifrer, 2018). Research highlights possible reasons: FGS report higher levels of "family achievement guilt," a sense of guilt over one's educational accomplishments in comparison to family, and Latino FGS report more than white FGS (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015). FGS feel conflicted by family expectations (McCoy, 2014) or resistance to college (Richardson & Skinner, 1992). FGS report downplaying their student identity or challenges and questions from family about college (Mosier, 2021; Bradbury & Maher, 2009; Orbe, 2004).

But research also highlights the significance of family relationships (Cunningham, 2016; Bradbury & Maher, 2009; Bui, 2002; Covarrubias et al., 2019; Gofen 2009; London, 1989; Orbe, 2004; Stieha, 2010). Family is a source of support (Mosier, 2021; McCoy, 2014; Rodriguez et al., 2021), greater than school, teachers, or mentors (Gofen, 2009). FGS report being celebrated as family stars or receiving special treatment (i.e. food, money) (Cunningham,

[1] I've also used "college" throughout, reflecting the most common way of referencing postsecondary education – that is, any education after publicly-provided primary and secondary education ends (typically at age 18) in the United States. In practice, this includes a dizzying array of public and private, and two- or four-year institutions where students may or may not live on campus, attend full or part time, and may take two, four, or many more years to complete degrees or certificates, or may never complete them.

2016; Orbe, 2004). In addition to receiving family support, many FGS pursue education *for* family, creating a path for others (Bui, 2002; Capannola & Johnson, 2022; Gofen, 2009; Jehangir et al., 2022; O'Shea, 2015) or bringing honor to families and preparing to support them financially (Bui, 2002). Family needs are central to FGS' educational decisions (Bradbury & Maher, 2009), and family relationships are critical to FGS' sense of well-being (McCarron, 2022) and academic success (Gofen, 2009).

The tendency to focus on FGS separating from family, despite literature demonstrating the centrality of family relationships, may arise from the deficit-focused framing of FGS (Gray, 2013; Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020), with some (Irlbeck et al., 2014; Pascarella et al., 2004) questioning the capacity of families to support FGS. But it also reflects the dominance of middle-class values in academia (Ardoin & martinez, 2019; Hamilton & Armstrong, 2009; Hurst, 2010), which emphasize independence and viewing college as a time for self-development (Stephens et al., 2012). In contrast, FGS are more likely to value interdependence (Chang et al., 2020; Covarrubias et al., 2019; Stephens et al., 2012), often manifested in prioritizing family relationships. Interdependence is central to the working-class value of belonging, which emphasizes relationships over a middle-class sense of "becoming," a focus on individual achievements (Metzgar, 2021).

As a result, many FGS experience what Rendon (1992) described as "trying to live simultaneously in two vastly different worlds" (p. 56), navigating between middle-class college culture and their largely working-class and/or BIPOC communities. While Hurst (2010) focused on working-class students and didn't highlight FGS status,[2] she named distinct patterns: Loyalists remained strongly identified with working-class backgrounds, while Renegades assimilated, attributing family's working-class status to dysfunction, A third group, Double Agents, blended into both working-class and middle-class settings.

A handful of studies focus on FGS and family communication. Among first-year students, there was no difference between FGS and continuing generation students in communication frequency (Palbusa & Gauvain, 2017), but FGS have fewer conversations about college (Covarrubias et al., 2018). In both studies, families offered emotional support in the absence of academic advice. Others explore indirect impacts, such as the "memorable messages" of remembering, focusing, and counting on family, not worrying, and setting an example (Wang, 2014) or "cautionary tales," that frame education not as separation from family, but an intergenerational story of social mobility where low-income FGS build college careers on the sacrifices (not failures) of previous generations (Rondini, 2018).

These studies often focus on academic outcomes, such as academic self-concepts or grades. But conversations are also a potential site for exploring family relationships. A study of first-in-family (first-generation) Australian students revealed that students became "cultural change agents within the household," encouraging family participation in higher education, leading to subtle shifts in family habitus (O'Shea, 2015, p. 152). Lee and Kramer (2018) noted that "conflicts between home and college habitus are most clearly expressed in interaction, particularly conversation" (p. 89). The low-SES FGS attending selective institutions in their study feared being revealed as "snobs" in family conversations (p. 89).

Most research on FGS in the United States has focused on the relatively small proportion of FGS who attend selective, disproportionately private institutions, while the vast majority of

[2] Although notably, all but one of the students she interviewed were first-generation.

FGS are attending community colleges (Rondini et al., 2018) or less selective institutions (Redford & Mulvaney-Hoyer, 2017). FGS in this study were attending a public, four-year "access"[3] institution, where many students transfer from community college. They were preparing for careers in the helping professions (social work, teaching, and related professions), fields with calls for increasing racial and ethnic diversity (Casstevens et al., 2012; US Dept of Education, 2016), where attention to class(ism) is limited (Liu, 2011). This exploration of FGS attempting family conversations highlights the relational work – and losses – they experience in becoming members of the helping professions (i.e., social workers, teachers, and related professions)[4].

Theoretical Framework

I followed Orbe's (2008) recommendation that one form of standpoint feminisms, Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 1990) is particularly applicable to FGS. Collins proposed a multifaceted conceptualization of power: it is both dialectical and group based, as well as subjective and responsive to individual agency and resistance. FGS experience the dialectical nature of power when they are constructed as outsiders in college (Orbe, 2008). But FGS also vary in experiences of being impacted by, resisting, or enacting domination, with students who hold more dominant identities (e.g., white, male, traditional-aged, and others) being more likely to disavow the importance of being first-generation (Orbe, 2004; Stuber, 2011). Because I anticipated students' experiences of being first-generation would differ, I wanted an approach sensitive to identity, particularly gender, race, and class, although citizenship and regional identities were also salient.

My approach was also guided by feminist post-modernism, which challenges objectivity, positioning research as inherently subjective (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). This allowed me to attend to relationships among participants, and between the researcher and the topic. My emphasis on relationships was shaped by Gergen's (2009) construction of relational being, and his argument that identities are not individual constructions, but arise from and within relationships. Gergen argued that "remaining intelligible within relationships" with others, from family to strangers on the street, was the glue that "holds civilization together" (p. 140). In other words, our appearances, behaviors, and – as these participants' experiences showed – topics of conversation and the ways we conduct conversation are shaped by people around us. We remain intelligible when those appearances, behaviors, and conversation match what might be expected of us in a given context. The concept of relational being led me to center the relational experiences of FGS preparing for the helping professions. How would students in the helping professions "remain intelligible" within family relationships?

Researcher Positionality

As a fellow first-generation student, I am familiar with relational distancing. I remind myself often that I am doing work my ancestors never dreamed possible. As a white and working-class

[3] "Access" is a term university leaders use colloquially, but also accurately, as this university is among the roughly two-thirds of degree-granting postsecondary institutions in the United States that accept three-quarters or more of applicants (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023; US News and World Report, 2024).

[4] One may question whether these occupations move students into the middle class, given their relatively low pay in the US. Here I'm influenced by Barbara and John Ehrenreich's (1977) identification of teachers and social workers as members of the professional managerial class (PMC), given their role in social reproduction and control, while also recognizing the general collapse of the PMC (Ehrenreich & Ehrenreich, 2013). Most important, though, is the sense of transformation participants expressed that suggested class mobility was a part of their educations (whether desired or not).

student whose arrival at a university was delayed until I was a 30-year-old mother of teens, the academic challenges of completing a college degree paled in comparison to the relational work of maintaining a sense of coherence in family relationships. As an instructor in one of the undergraduate programs we drew participants from, I felt complicit in participants' struggles to articulate what it meant to be first-generation or working-class, something which no doubt reflected my own insecurities as a working-class academic. These explorations of conversations arose from the frustrations and growing sense of isolation among participants. But the struggles to know and be known in conversations with family are also close to my heart.

Method

These data were drawn from a dissertation of the relational worlds of first-generation college students and the impacts on their socialization into the helping professions (i.e., social work, teaching, and related fields) (Cunningham, 2016). The research question that guided this study was how do first-generation students in a school of social work describe their relational worlds?

Study context and participants

I conducted focus groups at an urban, public university in the Pacific Northwestern United States. Participants were students in two undergraduate programs (social work (BSW) and an interdisciplinary liberal arts and professional degree (Child and Family Studies (CFS)) and one graduate (social work (MSW)) program.

Following ethical approval by our institution's review board, I used emails, flyers, and in-class announcements to recruit potential participants. In-class announcements were helpful as many students didn't realize they were first-generation. Students were eligible if they had no primary caregiver who had completed a bachelor's degree. Forty students indicated interest, and 19 participated in one of six focus groups (two participants completed individual interviews when other focus group attendees did not show). Participants selected pseudonyms and self-identified their race, ethnicity, sex, and class, as well as other salient aspects of identity. I used participant's own terms as descriptors (i.e., Hispanic, rather than defaulting to Latina/o/x/e, or Native, rather than Indigenous or First Nations). See Table 1 for participant demographic information.

Table 1
Participant demographic information

Pseudonym	Race/ethnicity	Sex	Social Class	Major
Jayne	European	female	lower-middle	BSW
Veronica	Hispanic	female	none listed	BSW
Arturo	Hispanic/Latino	male	working-class	BSW
Juli	white	female	lower-middle	BSW
Maria	Latina	female	working-class	BSW
Amber	white	female	working-class	CFS
Davis	white	male	low income	CFS
Lizette	Hispanic	female	working-class	CFS
Tara	white	female	working-class	CFS
Amy	white	female	lower-middle	CFS
Bob	Latino	male	working-class	CFS
Brandi	Black/Jamaican	female	working-class	CFS

Lauren	white	female	lower class	CFS
Clara	white	female	lower-middle	MSW
Michelle	white	female	working-class	MSW
Nancy	white	female	working-class	MSW
Dave	white	male	working-class	MSW
Jaclyn	Native/Biracial	female	working poor	MSW
Lainey	East Asian	female	lower middle	MSW

Data collection

Because little was known about the relational experiences of FGS in helping professions, I followed David Morgan's (2011, personal communication) recommendation to use a low-structured, open funnel interview format. Broad opening questions invited each participant in before narrowing the focus. Key questions included the salience of student identity with family, experiences of a cultural distance between home and school, and how family voices and aspects of students' identities (i.e., race, class, gender, and other aspects of identity) influenced relational experiences. Focus groups lasted from approximately 90 minutes to 2 hours and were audio-recorded and transcribed. This paper focuses on the topic most eagerly embraced by participants: experiences of relational distance from home communities which arose within conversations. While I did not directly pose questions about conversations, the challenges of talking with family about learning came up in each focus group or interview.

Data Analysis

I followed the Listening Guide, a voice-centered relational method of analysis (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 2015) that outlines several readings, or "listenings" of a transcript. Each listening involves reading transcripts with a specific focus while listening to the audio recording. The first attends to *who is speaking* and focuses on plot, metaphors, and inconsistencies, as well as researcher responses: closeness, discomfort, confusion, or other reactions. The second asks *in what body*, and directs attention to the voice of the self, particularly passages with first-person references. Given the tendency for FGS to exhibit interdependent values of the working-class (Stephens et al, 2011), I read transcripts with an eye for FGS to locate themselves in the collective "we" or "us." The first two listenings allowed me to establish relationships with speakers and hear how they described themselves.

In the third (*telling what stories about relationships*) and fourth (*in what cultural and societal frameworks*) listenings Brown and Gilligan (1992) asked how speakers describe relationships. The third attends to relationships that support authentic engagement, and the fourth notes how speakers locate themselves within political, cultural, and historical contexts. Brown and Gilligan (1992) invited researchers to be *resisting* listeners, attending to silence. I noted silence, pauses, or laughter. Given the significance of family relationships, and the struggles emerging in conversations about their learning, the Listening Guide allowed me to remain open to participant voices longer, highlighting contradictory and competing voices (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998).

Limitations

This study was limited by the use of single focus groups. Ideally, a repeated focus group design would have allowed for a deeper exploration of participants' experiences over time, as this

appeared to be a topic that most participants hadn't considered as part of their education. Indeed, for many participants it was the first time relating to peers on the basis of being first-generation. To address this, I held member-checking sessions in the term following data collection. I used a PowerPoint to flesh out preliminary themes and offered detailed handouts, which included participant quotes. While I was interested in their "check" on analysis, I was also invested in creating a chance for them to experience what I had: the comfort of hearing from others with shared experiences, of realizing they were not alone. This study was also limited by the small numbers of non-Latinx or Hispanic people of color, which is reflective of the larger student body.

Findings

The most critical aspect of participants' relational worlds was the degree to which they were able to remain connected to home communities, particularly family. They experienced relational distance most pointedly in conversations. A theme of "conversations we can't have" emerged in every focus group or interview. Participants struggled most in conversations with their families about social justice, privilege, and oppression, topics that arose frequently in their studies, but some experienced resistance to any conversations about their learning.

While the salience of their first-generation identities varied when they were at school—some found it meaningful, some did not—*all* participants described their student identities as impacting relationships within home communities. These impacts were most obvious in conversations – or the conversations they attempted to have – with family. Neither the topics they wanted to discuss nor the approaches they'd learned in classroom conversations seemed well-suited to conversations with family. As such, their conversational struggles were a unifying experience among FGS from very different backgrounds. These interactions between Arturo, a non-traditional aged Hispanic man, and Juli, a traditional-aged white woman, offer one example. Throughout, Arturo confidently directed conversation, sharing stories and asking Juli what she thought. Juli hesitated and dropped her words mid-sentence when Arturo spoke. Their sole shared experience seemed to be struggling in family conversations about their learning. (Transcription notes are italicized and bracketed within excerpts).

> **Arturo:** and now they [brothers] said that I talk differently. And then — 'cause my ideas are different…they tell me about family problems and I don't even relate to it or…so I can't avoid it.
> **Juli:** And going off that, I think language is different for an educated person versus somebody who doesn't have the same education. Sometimes when I'm talking to my family about social justice, or…like oppression and privilege, they're like, "I have no idea what you're talking about" – [*abrupt pause*]
> **Arturo: --** That's very true what Juli said about… this language, which is about social justice and your own community and groups and the whole social work language…. you know, I have tried to put myself on the same level as my brothers now… I can't get anymore…I – because being a member of a minority group, most of my life have been oppressed. And I was kind of unconscious of that. So, I understand when I talk with my brother or people…they don't know much about this stuff. And I'm thinking, "it was probably better, it was better not to know anything…" [*trailing off*].
> **Interviewer:** You're thinking, Arturo, maybe my family is better that way, better not knowing?

> **Arturo: [***5 second pause***]** No, I don't…I tried to tell them, I would like to not tell them. But I think it's one of my…jobs…to educate people so they can have a conscience?

Here, two undergraduate social work students with divergent experiences connected in struggles to share learning with family: social justice, privilege, and oppression formed conceptual language barriers that stymied family conversations. Arturo referred to himself as a "working-class citizen" and understood first-generation status as an added dimension of marginalization. Familiar with classism, racism, and the nativism directed towards Hispanic people (thus the need to emphasize his citizenship status), he'd found community in the campus diversity and multicultural services. But his pauses and questions suggested a moment of uncertainty. In contrast, Juli was still figuring out what it meant to be first-generation, and was unsure about her class background, initially calling herself "lower-middle class," but later making references to growing up "super, super poor." Perhaps out of awareness of her privilege as a white person, Juli yielded, creating space for Arturo's narrative. But another interpretation highlights the gendered dynamics, which allowed Arturo confidence in directing the conversation and reinforced Juli's silence. Arturo and Juli's words challenge any notion that FGS experiences are universal: age, gender, race, and class (and accordingly, ageism, sexism, racism, and classism, or perhaps more accurately, class consciousness) powerfully influenced their interpretations of their first-generation status. But both felt a growing relational distance with family emerging in conversations about their learning.

Arturo summed up their transformations:

> **Arturo:** So, we change. So, you adapt to the culture [of school] …So now that's what people acknowledge to you…like when my family say, "You look…you sound different," you know? "You write different." Or the letters I send to my mother. It's not the same writing. We change…too much, too much.

Participants varied in how they responded to these struggles: some chose to self-silence and others attempted to share their learning. Below I'll explore their responses, and the relational implications.

Self-silencing

Participants were attentive to the social mobility a degree might promise, and sensitive to the possibility of replicating unequal power relationships with family. As a result, many chose to remain silent about their learning in conversations with family, even when they were also experiencing a profound sense of personal transformation. Sometimes they pointed to geographic distance contributing to relational distance. Bob, a working-class Latino and non-traditional CFS student, was planning to pursue a graduate degree in education and become a teacher. Here, Bob was planning a trip home to the South, and talked about plans to self-edit:

> **Bob:** …a lot of the ideas I got from college…just like a general philosophy, like feminism or all those ideas, are not going to be the thing that people want to hear there.… everything that they'll take from me I'm sure will be like, criticized… All the things I bring to the table may seem…either pretentious, or like I'm talking down to them, or like I'm not going to be at the same…pace as them. I think they're anticipating that, like when I come and see them…I'll

> come in with all these ideas and be like, very liberal -- and they're like, "we don't care!" [*laughs*]…
> **Interviewer:** You said specifically, like feminist ideals and things like that, yes?
> **Bob:** Yeah, the other day I was talking to my friend on the phone and they were using words that – I wouldn't use, at all, but I just had to be like…if I were even to complain about that, they'd be like, "Oh, like who do you think you are?" I'm just going to have to accept, and not try to be that person to come in and rescue them from their Southern, like, backwards ways. It's not my position.

Bob's anticipation of this visit highlighted potential conflicts: feminist philosophy would likely be seen as pretentious, too liberal, or "talking down." In this passage we also see the salience of regional stereotypes and perceived political values: Bob was studying in a city that was gaining national recognition for its "liberal" orientation, contrasted here with stereotypes about "backwards" Southern ways.

Similarly, Amy, another non-traditional CFS student planning to become a teacher, spoke about semi-annual family visits in the Midwest and being torn between her desire to share her learning and keep peace:

> **Amy:** I actually have some interesting things to talk about — [*laughs*] — now, you know? Rather than just what I did last weekend... School is definitely — I was already sort of …liberal-leaning and sort of socialist leaning, but this program [*laughs*] has just made that so much more intense, because I'm more informed now and I feel more strongly about that. And so, my family's not — my family is very conservative…they're very conservative in their thoughts and opinions. So, when I go home to visit…sometimes I wonder, is it even worth it to bring up these things? Because I have so little time to actually spend with them. Do I really want it to be, like, you know…conflicting, conflictual-like dialogue, like arguments, like not really arguments, but just sort of intense conversations, and so I sometimes sort of avoid talking about some of the things I learn at school with my family? Even though, I mean, they're super supportive and super stoked I'm in school, but…I don't know…I'm like, "Oh, I don't even want to talk about it." [*laughs*]

Similar to Bob, Amy suspected her learning would provoke conflict. She backpedals in her descriptions of (potential) family conflict: "conflicting," "conflictual-like dialogue," "arguments," "not really arguments," finally landing on "intense conversations." As Amy noted, she already felt politically different, but her learning exacerbated this divide. Her frequent pauses and laughter indicated discomfort, or ideas difficult to articulate.

But the experience of choosing to self-silence was not limited to FGS who lived far from family and had less frequent contact. Here Lauren, a white lower-class student who lived near family, echoed Amy's desires to talk, and her own self-silencing:

> **Lauren**: …I would *love* to have the conversations we have, like in Law and Policy [a required course]. I love it, it's so interesting. I come from a very conservative family. It's like *everything* we talk about is so on the other spectrum, and I think it's fascinating, 'cause I wasn't taught all that, and it's completely eye-opening. I would love to bring it up to my dad, but I know...shit

> would hit the fan. He would like, destroy me, bring down whatever I'm trying to say, cause he's like, his way or the highway.
> **Amy**: But you have facts and figures to go with it!
> **Lauren**: Yeah, all my — no --
> **Amy**: -- just, like, sift through your notes while you're having a conversation.
> **Lauren**: I'm tempted to do that...it would be fun...but it would be dangerous as well.

Similar to other participants, Lauren was certain sharing her learning with family would be futile, and potentially "dangerous." Although she had just explained why she opted to self-silence, Amy encouraged Lauren to talk, suggesting she use class notes to support her arguments. Lauren's words highlight the gendered silencing that is often a part of family relationships in a patriarchal society: "he would destroy me, bring down whatever I had to say." The response of choosing to self-silence entirely was more common among participants in undergraduate (BSW and CFS) programs, but all participants reported some level of self-silencing when sharing their learning with family.

Being silenced by family

While all students were sensitive to the changing power dynamics in family relationships that arose in conversations, some chose to forge ahead, but faced silencing from family. Silencing appeared in a range of responses, including indirect responses (e.g., sighs), dismissal, talking over students, and less frequently, being pointedly asked not to discuss school. Many FGS were inspired by classroom conversations about social justice issues (many of which felt relevant to their lived experiences as BIPOC, working-class, and/or non-traditional students). They were eager to replicate these conversations with families, and often surprised by family resistance.

As noted above, MSW students were more likely to attempt conversations with family. Clara, a white lower-middle class MSW student, contrasted her experiences with conversations in the classroom and those with family:

> I can say a lot of things here [in school] and I can generally feel like I'm understood, or at least I'll get some clarifying questions. But I can say the same thing at home and get, like, a weird look, or a concerning look, of just some clarifying questions that are like, "Wow. We are *totally* not on the same page."

Clara shared a story that highlighted the role geographic distance might play, about a recent trip to visit family in the Midwest. She described a tense ride home from the airport, being lectured by her uncle, a retired police officer, who took offense at her support for Black Lives Matter. But the focus group conversation also highlighted how common Clara's experience was, when she said, "I've definitely made the mistake of saying something I thought was pretty neutral," and was met with laughter (suggesting she was not alone). "I have to be more intentional," she concluded. "I don't have as much time for slipping or messing up when I'm around family, 'cause it's limited time."

But once again, conversational struggles were not limited to participants with infrequent family contact. Lainey, a working-class MSW who emigrated from China as a child, was living with her parents. She described how they reacted when she interrupted their biases about other people of color or unhoused people, a tendency she attributed to their own struggles as immigrants:

> …. moving here from another country and to have to make a living for yourself, they survived a lot…they have a certain concept about who they [other people of color and unhoused people] must be. Mostly stemming from survival and fear. And so, when I tell them, …" Really?" [*raises one eyebrow, skeptical tone, laughs*] …I push back…it may not always be well received.

While participants were learning to respect a diversity of opinions, it's generally not acceptable for students in helping professions to express overt biases. FGS embraced the anti-bias values central to their emerging professional identities as part of their entire identities, including the parts they shared with family. Participants often felt the need to interrupt their family member's biases when they emerged in conversations, but struggled with this process.

FGS who shared their learning with family were sometimes silenced by dismissals of their learning. Jaclyn, a biracial Native MSW student who identified as working poor, shared her experiences:

> …some of the things I've brought home and talked about, they just don't understand…. I did a report…on [local agency serving sexually exploited minors] and was showing videos and explaining the interviews I got to conduct, and my dad was just like, "That stuff doesn't happen." …I've learned that I just can't have conversations with them, because …. they're not gonna process it…it probably [*laughs quietly*] is just a waste of my time.

Jaclyn continued to attempt conversations, particularly with her mother, but felt her parents were "pretty naïve to what's going on in the world." Perhaps the content of her conversation (the experiences of sexually exploited minors) *was* too much to process. Another MSW student, Dave, pointed to the difficulties working-class families might face in engaging with conversations about student learning, "their interests are in surviving, and paying their bills on time, and having enough food…" Dave recalled an offhand comment his father had made years before, when he was earning his bachelor's degree: "I can see *you've* been to college."

Family silencing, although often indirect, sometimes formed a pattern. Maria, a BSW and working-class Latina, frequently referred to a term her mother and sisters would use when she brought up school:

> **Maria: …**they're like, "Oh, you know – her social work stuff." …I'm learning about all these things: policies and macro-level work, and all this great stuff that I totally love! But when I go home, of course, you know, I'm very close to my family so I want to share… and I'm trying to explain or share white privilege or oppression they're like, "Okay…so what?" … maybe I throw too much at them at once so it's like, "You know, Maria…" they probably block me out and that's probably my fault. But I wanna have these conversations... like gender roles or the lobbying for immigration reform I did in Washington D.C…. So, when I bring back all these things and I tell my family about it, that's when they're like, "Oh Maria. Oh, her 'social work' stuff." [*rolls her eyes and sighs*].

Notice Maria's questioning of herself: "Maybe I throw too much at them." She repeated the familial refrain about her "social work stuff" often, each time stiffening her body or rolling her eyes, as if to invoke her mother and sister's reactions, who seemed at turns bored, exasperated,

or put off by Maria's ongoing attempts at conversation. Maria highlighted the additional complication of language, "When I go home, it's in Spanish—everything changes in the language, you know?" She persisted, translating her learning into Spanish and continuing to attempt conversations, a strong testament to the significance of these relationships.

Some conversational struggles participants encountered seemed specifically related to their learning in a school of social work. Women (but not men) in each program reported being asked if they were going to "take people's children away." A social work student noted that she was afraid of "becoming a social worker" to some of her "more dysfunctional" family members, someone who would surveil and pose a threat. Another student was rebuffed by family after explaining that she would not be qualified to offer therapy to a family member struggling with addiction. Participants seemed attuned to this, and attempted conversations with topics that seemed more neutral. Maria was completing a field placement where she had learned about child development, a topic she'd anticipated was more acceptable, but met resistance. Maria reported, "when I bring up these new ideas, that's when they're like, "Oh, here she comes again. Oh, Maria and her theories — Maria and her social work stuff."

Less frequently, participants were explicitly asked not to speak about school. Nancy, a white working-class MSW student, noted the few family relationships where she could share her learning, such as with her mother. But she described considerable silencing from family, saying "my stepbrother calls me a commie…and my stepsister has told me, they don't want their kids to hear my liberalism…" To keep the peace, Nancy's mother asked her to refrain from any more conversations about her learning with her siblings.

Be(com)ing Unknown to family: Relational loss

Whether participants chose to self-silence or were silenced by family, being unable to engage in conversations about their learning had relational implications. As they grew in their identifications with the helping professions—particularly social work and teaching—participants often expressed a profound sense of transformation. Many were excited by the person they were becoming. But they also recognized the loss that arose from not being able to share themselves fully with family.

Another example comes from Lauren, whose voice was shared earlier. "I would *love* to have these conversations with family," Lauren proclaimed. She began with a sense of energy and inspiration–like others, she felt compelled by her learning. But while imagining a conversation with her father, her energy shifted:

> **Lauren:** It sucks because the stuff we're learning, I love it. It's part of me. And I feel like if I can't share part of me with my family…they kind of don't know me, and I don't like that… [*pauses...notable decrease in group banter and laughter as participants grow quiet*] ...I feel like at least at work and at school, I see people every day so they know me. I feel like they know me better than my parents and sister know me, and I don't like that...So that's — it's hard to be open, but... [*5 second pause*] is that good? [*asking group and interviewer, quietly*]
> **Bob**: Yes [*also quietly*].

The Listening Guide opened up this passage in analysis, forcing me to attend to the sudden emotional shift. Moments earlier the group had been laughing, imagining Lauren thumbing

through notes and engaging in a heated political debate. The sudden quiet in the room suggested we'd encountered a painful truth about being first-generation: sometimes, the process of learning which might make you feel more fully yourself will simultaneously distance you from people you love most. In this passage, Lauren revealed tensions between school and family: each was central to her self-definition and yet they were at odds. Lauren was being transformed by her learning: "it's part of me." But in the process, she was also encountering relational loss.

In another conversation, MSW students took turns describing what it felt like to be unable to express themselves fully to family. Clara, the Black Lives Matter protestor quoted earlier, described feeling isolated, and misunderstood by family. Another participant, Nancy, responded:

> The word that was coming up for me was disconnected…especially with my siblings. I don't feel a connection with them around a lot of things, because I do have that different perspective, from being in social work specifically. But also, I feel like they don't necessarily see me the same as they did before, before we all kind of picked our future routes and so we just don't connect about the same things we used to.

Here, each woman took turns describing what it felt like to be unable to speak freely with family. Their conversations were limited for different reasons: Clara's family was concerned about her safety while Nancy's had expressly asked her to not speak about her learning. As they listened to each other, there was relief at being able to articulate a loss that was not acknowledged.

Relational loss poses a heavy cost, even for students excited by transformation. It surprised participants, leaving many feeling adrift. In closing, I'll return to Arturo, one of several participants who located himself in the collective "we" or "us" almost as often as the first-person singular pronoun. As an older Latino, he had anticipated feeling "other" in school. But he was shocked by changes in family relationships, asking pointedly, "Where do I belong now?"

Discussion and Conclusion

These findings build upon literature on FGS familial interdependence (Chang et al., 2020; Covarrubias et al., 2019; Stephens et al., 2012) by focusing on conversations with family as a site for understanding relational experiences. Unlike the majority of research with FGS, which focuses on the small numbers of FGS in more selective institutions (Rondini et al., 2018), this study provided a glimpse into the relational lives of FGS in a less selective institution. These participants attended an urban, public four-year university with relatively large proportions of FGS. And yet their fears about family conversations were not all that different from the low-SES FGS attending an elite institution in Lee and Kramer's (2018) study, who feared that they'd be revealed as "snobs" in conversations with family (p. 89).

And perhaps it was a fear of being "revealed" that led some participants to self-silence in conversations about learning, or for participants who chose to share, an actual "revealing" that prompted family silencing. Participants expressed a sense of transformation, with many embracing their learning, suggesting socialization into helping professions. Lauren described her learning as "part of me," reflecting a common sentiment among participants. Some, like Amy, had always been a little "liberal-leaning," and studying in a school of social work

strengthened pre-existing views. Others, like Lauren, who came from a "very conservative" family, felt her views changing, and felt more fully herself as a result. Participant's identification with social justice values, which is part of upholding professional ethics, suggested their integration in school was successful.

But as Hurst (2010) noted, "education has always been a *class*ing process" (p. 23) and socialization into helping professions is no exception. The limited attention to class and classism within the helping professions (Liu, 2011), may put FGS at a disadvantage. While the majority identified as working-class or low income, few could speak to the significance of class background, and some students struggled to articulate any class position. Participant's general sense of transformation, and excitement about their learning, obscured the embedded class assumptions they were taking on in the process of becoming social workers, teachers, and other members of the helping professions. Linkon (2018) noted the tendency for the FGS label to erase class, warning this mystification could "inadvertently push students into middle-class culture" and increase pressure on FGS to excel academically and transform family situations (reflected in the common theme of creating a path for others (Bui, 2002; Capannola & Johnson, 2022; Gofen, 2009; Jehangir et al., 2022; O'Shea, 2015). These students were, largely, being pushed into middle-class culture, and many embraced aspects of the process. Because this "*class*ing" process is rarely openly discussed, the burden of integration rested largely on students, who seemed to be struggling in isolation. Even though conversational breakdowns (either self- or family-imposed) were a widely-shared experience, it seemed to be a topic missing from their education. Focus groups allowed participants to realize relational distancing was a shared experience, and not an individual failure, but participants seemed hungry for more discussion on these topics.

These findings highlight the need for greater attention to social class in education into the helping professions. It was striking that some could not locate themselves as people with classed backgrounds in a society with dramatic inequalities, and most could not speak to the significance of class. FGS demonstrated sensitivity to shifting power dynamics in family relationships, but didn't recognize these as fears of reenacting classist encounters within families. Attention to class must move beyond the interpersonal/individual to include a structural understanding of class. Given the historical and contemporary relationships between helping professions such as social work and teaching and the largely working-class communities of FGS, it's not surprising participants experienced some family resistance (for example, being asked if they were going to "take people's children away," a fear with roots in the overrepresentation of working-class families in the United States foster system). Participants knew classroom topics were relevant to their families (i.e., white privilege, immigration reform, police brutality). But participants seemed to lack models for having these conversations in a way that resonated within home communities. Most approached conversations with a need to persuade or inform. What seemed to be missing from descriptions of their conversational struggles was the possibility for conversations that explored, questioned, or expressed curiosity about how privilege, oppression, or social justice were relevant or experienced within home communities.

This study highlighted the centrality of sharing one's learning with family as a critical aspect of FGS' relational lives, and the relational struggles and losses they encountered as part of their education into helping professions. Given the values of interdependence among FGS, these relational losses are important to attend to. Rather than "breaking away" from family (London, 1989), these participants' desires for conversations signaled a need for a continued sense of belonging (Metzgar, 2021) within their largely working-class communities.

Author Bio

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Sid Chaplin: A Writer with a Cause

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to recover the radical subtext of both the life and work of Sid Chaplin by reasserting the essentially political dimensions of his writing. Chaplin devoted the whole of his career as a writer to documenting not only the decline of the coal mining industry in the north-east of Britain where he lived, but he also traced the impact this process had on the working-class communities that were dependent on the pits. In his two later novels set in the city of Newcastle, *The Day of the Sardine* (1961) and *The Watchers and the Watched* (1962*)*, Chaplin went on to dramatize similarly troubled changes in urban working-class life in the 1950s and 60s. The article not only argues that it is this nexus of class, politics and literature that translates so convincingly into his Newcastle novels, it also claims that it is the fundamental radicalism of his own literary project that explains the problematic neglect of his work by both critics and readers.

Keywords

Sid Chaplin, *The Day of the Sardine*, *The Watchers and the Watched*, Working- Class Politics and Literature

Sid Chaplin: The Critical Debate

In the two comprehensive collections of his writings, *In Blackberry Time* (1987) and *Hame: My Durham* (2016), Sid Chaplin (1916-1986) is not only seen as a unique and wide-ranging author in his own right, but also a defining source of inspiration to the group of northern working-class writers that emerged in Britain's postwar decades. Thus, in the foreword to the first anthology, *In Blackberry Time*, Stan Barstow recalled Chaplin's leading role in this resurgence of working-class literature: "Sid was already the senior figure, the veteran. We all acknowledged his example. *The Leaping Lad* had shown us all it was possible to write without meretriciousness from the inside of working-class life" (1987, p.12). A similar tribute is included in *Hame: My Durham*, paid by Chaplin's son, Michael, who reasserted the particular significance of Chaplin's two 'Newcastle novels' as portrayals of working-class youth on Tyneside caught in a turbulent urban transformation from tradition to modernity: "Sid entered a golden period as a writer of novels, including *The Day of the Sardine* and *The Watchers and the Watched*, his matchless evocations of young men trying to find themselves in the brave new world of Newcastle of the 1960s, both popular and critical successes" (2016, p. 229).

Together with novelists like Alan Sillitoe, David Storey, John Braine, Barry Hines and Keith Waterhouse, Chaplin belonged to a generation of working-class trailblazers that included the critical theorists Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart; playwrights such as Shelagh Delaney and Brendan Behan; film director Ken Loach; folk singers and musicians Ewan McColl, Peggy Seeger and A. L. Lloyd; and the sculptors and painters Henry Moore and L. S. Lowry.

However, despite the apparent appeal of Chaplin's work, his novels, stories and essays have remained sadly neglected by readers and critics alike. Thus, the subtitle of D. J. Taylor's otherwise positive retrospective of his work begs the question: "Why was Sid Chaplin not more celebrated, or his books better selling?" (2016, p. 18). In another response to Chaplin, his friend and colleague, John Mapplebeck made a similar critical observation: "[W]ith the exception of a perceptive publisher like Flambard, Sid's work is no longer common currency. He seems the chronicler of a lost world" (2016, p. 2).[1] In what remains the most rigorously theoretical discussion of Chaplin's two Newcastle novels, Michael Pickering and Kevin Robins return to this same issue in order to identify more specifically the reasons for Chaplin's inability to gain the wider recognition he deserved: "This neglect seems to have come about not only because they have not enjoyed the greater public visibility resulting from adaptation into film, but also, and more importantly, because certain aspects have made them seem incompatible with the more celebrated working-class novels of their period" (1989, p. 357).

The recurring theme of several of the so-called 'kitchen sink realist' depictions of working-class life at the time was a young man's struggle to escape the constraints of class. This was done by distancing themselves from their social roots through a love relationship with a woman from the middle classes. It is this depiction of social migration that is more than problematic, however. Novels such as Alan Sillitoe's iconic, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958), end up reproducing a stereotyped image of macho working-class heroes on the make. Ian Haywood also reacted to this reductive gender image of Sillitoe's main character: "Arthur's determination not to conform to standards of respectability manifests itself primarily in a vigorous sexual life. At one stage in the novel he is involved with three women" (Haywood, p. 100). A more personal denial of the working class can also be found among the writers themselves. Sillitoe is again typical in this respect. Once he had become a successful author he rejected the essential aspect of class in his own fiction. As Nigel Gray comments: "Sillitoe is like a man who uses a ladder to climb out of a pit and then asks 'What ladder?'" (Gray, p. 20). Moreover, novelists not only turned their backs on the traditional representation of working-class exploitation and struggle, they also abandoned "the world of working-class family and community in which the youth of these novels grew up" (Pickering & Robins, p. 358). In contrast, however, Sid Chaplin chose himself to remain true to his ties with the working class as well as the political causes associated with it. Once again, Ian Haywood notes: "Chaplin kept the vital issues of labour movement politics and class betrayal on the literary agenda" (Haywood, p. 119). This, I would argue, is a key to understanding Chaplin's underestimation as a writer, something that has been downplayed or ignored in the discussion of his work. It is this fundamental critical issue I want to address here. In doing so, I want to show that Chaplin's social engagement was not only grounded in his own working-class experience, it remained the ideological subtext of his whole writing career.

Sid Chaplin: His life and work

Sid Chaplin was a coal miner for 20 years, as well as an industrial reporter for the National Coal Board for a further 20 years. He remained from the beginning to the end a committed spokesperson for working people. As a young man, he was politically radicalized by the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, where he tried unsuccessfully to volunteer to fight on the Republican side. Working as a miner, he joined the National Union of Mineworkers and

[1] Flambard Press republished Chaplin's two 'Newcastle' novels in 2004. The publisher closed down in 2014.

was member of the Labour Party, both organizations seeming to offer Chaplin a more ambitious political career within the Labour movement. His post-war years as a Methodist preacher also left a strong didactic streak that can be discerned in his later writing:

> In the late 30's Sid became radicalised by the bitter hardship endured by his parents, their six children and the mining communities of south west Durham during the Depression. His first ambition was political – to fight in the Spanish Civil War, become a trade union official or even a Labour MP. But when these dreams were scuppered by the need to earn a wage and then the outbreak of war, Sid began to think seriously of another apparently unattainable goal – to become a published writer. (Michael Chaplin, 2019, p. 2)

Once he had established himself instead as a journalist and writer, Chaplin sought to give a voice to those who were "hidden from history", in particular the miners, their families and local communities. It is within this context of historical recovery that he produced a body of work recording their lives, from the highpoint of coal production in Britain when over one million people were employed in the pits, to the final decline of the whole industry, which he foresaw. The span of his writing also covered some of the most defining struggles of the British working class – the General Strike of 1926, the Hunger Marches of the 1930s and the Great Strike of 1984-5, which signaled the death knell of coalmining in Britain. [2] In his novels and short stories he traced the closure of the mines, a process that had such a devastating impact on towns and villages throughout the northern counties of Durham and Northumberland. While writing his two most ambitious novels set in the regional capital of Newcastle, *The Day of the Sardine* (1961) and *The Watchers and the Watched* (1962), he also depicted the demolition of large parts of the inner city and the suburban displacement of working-class families. It was the social breakup of Britain that left a trail of fragmentation that still characterizes society today.

In an interview carried out by Peter Pickering and Kevin Robins, Chaplin was asked about the political dimensions of his own writing. The reply he gave is revealing: while he didn't believe in either "agitprop" or waiting for "the ideal socialist state to come", he nevertheless saw as his prime task to create a fictional record of the world of work (Hawthorn, 1984, p. 149). As an example of this kind of writing, he suggested documenting the experience of working in a car factory. This focus on modern assembly line production clearly appealed to Chaplin as part of a literary challenge to capture the condition of workers who, like the miners, were on the receiving end of job mechanization, rationalization and long-term unsustainability:

> What I do believe in is sensible writing about things that count. And I think there are great big gaps – it appalls me that there has never been a novel about life in a motor car factory. I'd love to see it […] I've got to record as well, and I try to do that. (1984, p. 149)

Another major writing project in this context, one that was unfortunately never finished, was an epic work depicting the history of the Durham miners. It was a book perhaps only Chaplin could have written, himself a miner, trade unionist and radical local journalist. It would not only trace the rise and fall of the coal industry in the area, but also the whole way of life that supported it. The extraction of coal has moreover always been a political act in Britain. This

[2] For a comprehensive background to these historical events, see further, Huw Beynon & Ray Hudson, *The Shadow of the Mine: Coal and the End of Industrial Britain*. (2021).

was perhaps one of the foremost examples of Chaplin's avowed mission to place his writing at the service of ordinary people, both present and future:

> Somewhere in those scattered notes there is an epic story: who knows I may be the right man in the right place, and the miner in the distant north and this forgotten county may live in a book long after the last ton of coal has been drawn to the surface, when curious sightseers may find the ruins of pit-head and pulley-wheel as quaint and historical as Pele Tower and Roman Wall? (Sid Chaplin, 2016, p. 243)

The Day of the Sardine

There is a significant political presence in Chaplin's two Newcastle novels, a form of consciousness of class, race and gender that I want to explore in more detail here. From the outset in *The Day of the Sardine* (1961), the reader is struck by the influence, both private and public, the figure of Uncle George has on Arthur, the main character in the novel. As a Labour councilor, Uncle George has a patriarchal finger in many pies, usually involving some form of corporate graft. Workers are at the mercy of his small-scale nepotism in order to keep their jobs. Uncle George's network of personal ties has evolved over time through different levels of building contracting and a local council that keeps a firm political grip on a working-class city like Newcastle.[3] In Chaplin's novel, *The Day of the Sardine*, Uncle George is without doubt meant to personify two sides of the same bent coin: a Labour chairman who pulls the town planning strings while also promoting the electoral interests of a Party that is meant to stay true to the traditions of the workers' movement: "'Who was this Ernie Bevin?' [Arthur] asked. 'Ye never heard of Ernie Bevan? The Dockers' KC? The greatest Labour leader of all time – the man that did more to win the war than Churchill! It only goes to show what the modern generation is …*we've* toiled an' moiled - *they* ask us who Ernie Bevan was…'" (Sid Chaplin, 2004a, p. 46). Despite Arthur's feigned ignorance, the young man's reply nevertheless shows him to be already aware, not only of radical trade union leaders like Frank Cousins, but also some of the more threatening existential issues of the time: "'Give me Cousins every day. I chipped in, knowing his prejudices. 'There's a man that sticks to his principles on that stinkin' H-bomb and everything'" (Sid Chaplin, 2004a, p. 47).

Arthur is a working-class youth whose prospects are initially thwarted by the need to help out with the family income. When he starts work as a building labourer, a job arranged by his Uncle, this places him both physically and symbolically at the centre of urban development in Newcastle itself. A city makeover that also opens up new opportunities for backhanders, perks and payoffs in which Arthur is at first more than willing to participate:

> She knew as well as me that the old faker could put by with all the extras he got from union business, committees, sitting on this and that; and I won't go any further because everybody knows that in this country nobody ever makes

[3] It was in the 1960s that this local power relationship in Newcastle was personified by the Labour councilor, T. Dan Smith, who conflated his own interests as a politician and city developer. See further: Chris Foote Wood, *T. Dan Smith "Voice of the North" Downfall of a Visionary: The Life of the North-East's Most Charismatic Champion* (2010).

> anything on the side out of public service. Ah, Ah, Ah! 'When do I start.' (Sid Chaplin, 2004a, p. 49)

At the same time society is moving towards a consumerist lifestyle that seems to offer more social mobility, especially among young people. Chaplin's key "Teddy Boy" figure of Arthur epitomizes this new, individualistic identity. [4] Working-class "teenagers", (another subcultural label invented at the time), were at the forefront of a counterculture of rock-and-roll music, juke boxes, coffee bars, drain-pipe jeans and brylcreem, denoting a 'generation gap' that caused moral panic among many parents. Teddy Boys were also linked to gang violence and sexual promiscuity. It is a mixed-up world of material self-gratification under the Cold War shadow of atomic annihilation.

Chaplin's troubled working-class hero, Arthur, is very much a product of these shifting social and sexual tensions. On the one hand his involvement in Saturday night fights with other teenage gangs sustains his macho reputation also when it comes to the seduction of young women. At the same time, his loyalty to the gang is challenged by the very different worldview he comes into contact with on the building site. Here in the conversations he has with his older workmates, a more critical understanding of class formation and consciousness begins to emerge:

> 'Everybody knows there's different classes', I said. 'Everybody knows,' he snorted. 'And that makes it so. But it's just imagination. You and your pals could get together and make a caste and get as much satisfaction as the nobs among yourselves. Know that. Gang of Teddy Boys or whatever they call them now are no different from the nobs that keep themselves – and the cushy jobs – to themselves. (Sid Chaplin, 2004a, p. 122)

There is without doubt a level of frustrated ambition in Chaplin's image of working-class youth at this time, of young men and women who want to change their lives, but have no clear idea how or into what. The conclusion is moreover that those with privilege and power are never really threatened by unruly working-class youths like Arthur who remain rebels without a cause. The metaphor in the title of the novel's title also reflects this illusory freedom of small fry that have their day in the sea, before being caught, tinned and sold:

> I watch the sardines moving along the little conveyor; a silver stream from the sea bound for the place where they're shuffled tail to head and head to tail and slid into the boxes. There I go. Stiff and straight and swimming in the gravy, but that's no consolation when the lid's clamped down. (Sid Chaplin, 2004a, p. 291)

At one significant point Arthur gets involved with Dorothy, the idealistic daughter of a local Methodist minister, both of whom exert a strong emotional influence on him, not least because of the father's first-hand experience of class oppression. Chaplin's own conversion as a radical preacher can also be detected here, where religion is not so much an escapist "opium of the people", but an accusatory "sigh of the oppressed, the heart of a heartless world", to quote Karl Marx, (p. 41):

[4] See further: Jon Savage, "The invention of the Teddy boy". (2024).

> He'd taken a five-quid passage to Canada and had slaved for a maniac farmer for two or three years; and worked in a West Virginia coalmine where the hand of the Lord had preserved him from the company cops during a strike and stretched out into the mine when it blew up to save him and three more. He'd ended up in a Bronx Mission where the idea came to him to take the trip home and start away for himself preaching the Gospel. He'd lost his wife. His stipend wouldn't have kept a sparrow but he sang like a thrush. He'd been born kind but stayed kind. (Sid Chaplin, 2004a, p. 206-7)

In his own semi-delinquent way, Arthur helps to create the conditions for a more precarious urban environment, one without the ties that previously kept people together as a community. Chaplin sensed himself the negative cultural and psychological implications of unfettered shopping based on the 'never-never' installments of hire purchase debt. Thus, the story ends on a note of radical alienation, looking back on a previous way of life that served ordinary people well, despite the hardships. In his novels, Chaplin contrasts the social cohesion of village communities with the plate glass anonymity of the big city.[5] Thus, symbolically, the novel concludes with Arthur imagining himself sailing away on one of the oil tankers leaving the river Tyne for "Persia and sunshine". In reality, however, this temporary escape only offers another locus of petty cronyism to which he will eventually have to return:

> It's the same the whole world over, they say, and sometimes worse; I wish they'd give everybody a chance to find out for themselves. All they give you is a decko at the TV or pictures. And meantime you're supposed to be making a living on a dead-end site under a pack of phonies like Uncle George and Sam Sprogget, or other characters that think they're doing well for themselves by bearing down on the lambs and shearing the sheep. It makes you sick. It's all a dirty rotten trap. (Sid Chaplin, 2004a, p. 197)

The Watchers and the Watched

Chaplin's second novel set in Newcastle, *The Watchers and the Watched* (1962), produced conflicting responses from contemporary critics. Michael Chaplin characterized the work as "matchless" as the first (*Hame*, p. 229). Melvyn Bragg was more hesitant, suggesting in his forward to the reprint that "It may be his best novel" (2004, p. 6). Anthony Burgess described it in his review as "gloriously comic and moving" (*Blackberry*, 1987, p. 197). In contrast, dissecting the sociopolitical aspects of the novel, Pickering and Robins voiced the following reservations:

> Despite its confrontation with important social issues and the question of working-class culture, *The Watchers and the Watched* is ultimately a flawed novel because Chaplin retreats from the challenge to the comfort of an older, idealized working-class order.

[5] In his later novel, *Sam in the Morning* (1965), Chaplin ends on a note of complete urban desolation: "I have a vague impression of walking down below in streets which are valleys. I travel the city, looking for a friend whose name I do not know. The streets are long and its buildings are as high as the sky. So high that you must not look up while you ring door-bells which bring no response and knock at doors that stay shut. It is the valley of dry bones. I never look up. Up there makes you and ruins you. It is a barren land where winners lose all as well as losers. Sometimes you doubt your own identity. Something is missing and it is still missing when you reach out and touch a living woman in the dark. Something is always missing." (Sid Chaplin, 1965, p. 275)

The novel narrows into a spurious narrative resolution where a more open, questioning, and unforclosed form seems to be appropriate. (1989, p. 365)

Ostensibly, the novel revolves around the domestic tensions that the main character, Tim "Tiger" Mason, experiences during the first few months of being married to his pregnant girlfriend, Jean. However, *The Watcher and the Watched* is also without doubt Chaplin's most sustained political interrogation of the lives working-class people facing social and economic upheaval. Melvyn Bragg sums up Tiger's development as a trajectory that "follows the initiation into manhood through marriage of a man who is thwarted by circumstances" (2004, p. 2). It needs to be added however that these circumstances also include his active involvement in combatting rackrenting slum landlords and racism. In both cases, Tiger draws strength from an older man, this time his politically radical father, who helps him understand these issues in a wider context of immigration, poverty and crime. [6] The political becomes more personal when Tiger and his wife, Jean, choose not only to confront their landlord for their own sakes. They also support their neighbors who are the victims of the same criminal gangs who threaten them with eviction. Tiger's relationship with his father is at the core of this narrative, embodying as he does different ways of living against the grain, as though society were already on the cusp of radical change. Thus, their family home represents a utopian space, not least for fellow travelers who pass through, sharing different visionary ideas about a better world:

> Sometimes he wondered if he'd ever known his father. Then out of the past would come that picture of a lithe, active young feller who was always good for an argument, always ready to bring company home, especially the kind of company that gives food for thought in return for a cup of tea and something to go with it. Local councilors, union men, itinerant preachers of religion or socialism, traveling actors, extraordinary tramps. (Sid Chaplin, 2004b, p.108)

In *The Watchers and the Watched*, Chaplin returns to the theme of slum clearance and its replacement by apartment blocks made of brutalist concrete. However, in this second novel, he also projects an alternative image of resistance, where people choose to remain in their ramshackle homes that nevertheless allow them to stay close to family and friends. Tiger and Jean are also directly affected by the threats when they openly support the occupation of houses by their neighbors. Moreover, it is through their encounter with Two Step, an Asian ex-boxer turned local activist that they experience more organized grassroots struggle:

> 'Who's the little chap?' 'Ye don't know him!' said the conductor. 'That's the laddo!' 'That's ol' Two Step, the ol' flyweight He's fighten' their case for them.' 'So that's him!' said Tiger. Everybody knew of Two Step, the fly little ex-pug, who was always in the storm centre: evictions, street fights, or elections. His name was legendary along the Road. (Sid Chaplin, 2004b, p. 171)

[6] In his later novel, *Sam in the Morning*, Chaplin includes a portrayal of yet another politically radical family member, Uncle James, who is an avowed anarchist. A case could perhaps be made for Chaplin being sympathetic to anarchism. In a letter from Uncle James to Sam Rowlands, the hero of the novel, Chaplin shows just how politically informed he himself could be: "You will be glad to hear that I still get along to the Bigg Market and my gang of Old Faithfuls; you'll doubtless laugh but I feel that the Time is Always Ripe; that the bottom is dropping out of the old-style unions and the Parliamentary wangle; and that one day the people (there are no longer workers, but then none of our Founders were workers) will come to their senses and see the big sell-out for what it is worth. […] It's all right you laughing, but the evidence is all against you. One day you'll find out that it's anarchism or bust; death or glory; and that your muddled old uncle was right all the time." (Sid Chaplin, 1989, p. 113).

The shortage of cheap housing and the ensuing friction between ethnic groups also make them the object of racist attacks with the landlord playing one family against another. When tenants start to act together, racist slurs are spread to confuse and cloud the issue. It is one of the strengths of Chaplin's novel that he does not underestimate the influence of racial prejudice among working people. He makes it clear however that the ultimate function of racism is to divert tenants away from their common interests. It is against these everyday problems of racism that Chaplin sets his own more complex view of the liberated "Swinging Sixties". Chaplin also reiterates that it is only through class solidarity that such divisions can be overcome. This unequal and combined level of class and racial consciousness is expressed succinctly by Angus, one of the local residents: "We've got to have these folk. We need them. Otherwise, no buses, no trains, no caffs, no expansion. No, ye've got to fight Finch an' ye've got to fight prejudice an' ye've got to fight natural processes: and ye've about as much chance as a cat in hell 'They'll never shift me outa my place'" (Sid Chaplin, 2004b, p. 286).

One of more powerful collective symbols that are highlighted in the novel are the trade union banners that were paraded on marches, demonstrations and strikes. It is a tradition Chaplin clearly thinks needed to be upheld. These lodge banners were lovingly embroidered with portraits of famous Labour leaders and slogans going back to the beginnings of the Labour movement: "Workers of the world unite", "The future is ours through socialism", "Organise, Agitate, Educate". [7] The radical reputation of mining villages like Chopwell in County Durham, known as "Little Moscow" during the 1926 General Strike, is still remembered because of its revolutionary banner. Not as an act of mourning, but as a collective celebration of battles fought, lost and won. Moreover, these banners also contained iconic representations of the mutual cooperation on which miners depended every day working underground.

There is also a direct reference in the novel to the annual "Big Meeting" of the Miners' Gala in Durham that still attracts thousands of workers and their families in a festival of solidarity and struggle. It is another radical core memory that is passed on to Tiger by Two Step:

> 'Some day we'll have the processions again,' said Two Step. We'll march through the streets with pomp and circumstance – ordinary people will! It'll be like Blaydon Races, only better. There'll be floats with folk dancin' on them, there'll be all the unions wearin' sashes and carryin' banners, there'll be bands – everythin', with noise an' colour an' music made by people […] Give people a chance an' they'll flock together, 'said Two Step. We've lost the art of catchin' people. An' that's the only way to get them outa their houses … with a hell of a big procession, the biggest ever, and a procession with a meaning (Sid Chaplin, 2004b, p. 276)

In this second Newcastle novel, Chaplin re-engages with the function of the Labour Party as an established working-class domain that would allow Tiger to develop his talents as a community leader. At the same time, Tiger remains skeptical of its structural levels of bureaucracy that impinge on his chances of making things fundamentally better for the people of Newcastle. There is therefore an ideological clash in the novel between individual self-seeking and genuine political engagement. In the figure of Tiger, Chaplin is clearly revisiting some of the divided loyalties [8] he himself must have felt during his years as a public relations officer for the employers' National Coal Board and ordinary miners themselves:

[7] See further: John Gorman, *Banner Bright*, 1973.

[8] Chaplin's wife, Rene Chaplin, writes: "He became Coal's roving reporter, criss-crossing Britain during the early 50s in a little light aircraft piloted by his photographer Harry Smead. Many of the jobs were routine –

> ‘Ah want to help folk,’ said Tiger. ‘And that’s a dull job, said the old man. ‘Ye’ll have to go into politics. No use thinkin’ ye can go dancin’ around like old Two Step’. ‘A’ve no fancy for politics.’ ‘Ye’ll have less when ye get into them. But it’s the only way a young feller like you can do any good. It’s a painful job an’ what it lacks is heart, lad, heart.’ (Sid Chaplin, 2004b, p. 312)

However, despite Tiger’s initial reluctance, it is the emotional pull of his father and his radical legacy that allows him to regain a sense of direction of where he comes from and where he is going, questions that lie at the radical heart of the novel:

> How was he to know that in the walk up the street he had put the matter to rights? In some strange way he had become himself, and at the same time he had taken in his father. He was his father as well as himself. The wound was healed. He was complete. He had taken his father’s hope on his shoulders. (Sid Chaplin, 2004b, p. 340)

Tiger’s turn from individualism to group activism are two trajectories that remain intertwined. There is therefore no unequivocal conclusion to the novel. It is a story of its time, although not one of a lost generation. The youth revolt of the 1950s and 60s also paved the way for the welfare state, women’s liberation, decolonization and a working-class cultural revolution in Britain. Chaplin’s work formed an integral part of this radical sea change. It is also why he remained something of a political outsider, not one easily assimilated by the wave of postwar northern working-class writers that followed in his wake.

Conclusion

This article argues for a fundamental critical reassessment of the fiction of Sid Chaplin that situates his work more radically as a writer with a pronounced political direction. One that places Chaplin both at the heart of the resurgence of British working-class writing in the 1950s and 60s, while also maintaining a consciousness of class that was relatively unique at the time. Moreover, it is argued that this radical preoccupation explains why he remained more marginalised in the critical debate about the image of the working-class in the so-called “kitchen sink realism” of the then contemporary novel. This literary and political problematic is made particularly evident in Chaplin’s two “Newcastle” novels which explore the clash between individual escape and collective resistance in the narratives.

A clearer biographical connection to this commitment to class is also claimed through Chaplin’s working both as a coal miner and industrial reporter for the National Coal Board, roles that kept him in close touch with working people for more than 40 years. It was within this class context that Chaplin was able to critique the bureaucratic norms and careerism of the official Labour and Trade Union movement, a theme he returns to in the two Newcastle novels. This everyday point of social contact sustained his underlying belief in the democratic capacity of ordinary working men and women to transform and regenerate society in a more rational, equitable and humane way. It was this personal experience that provided the radical premise for Chaplin’s own literary project: to recapture and celebrate an essential working-class way of life through the art of fiction.

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profiling managers, writing features on new machinery and old pitmen. But he also came to expect the call in the middle of the night: the times when he had to hurriedly pack and take himself off to a far corner of Britain. And steel himself for what was to come. They’d been another disaster” (*Blackberry*, 2016, p. 157).

Author Bio

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British Working-Class Literature, Higher Education and Identity Politics: Elevating Working-Class Voices in New Literary Pedagogies

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Abstract

This article interrogates the absence of working-class literature modules at the UK undergraduate level before evaluating various attempts at incorporating working-class voices and working-class literature within new and emerging literary pedagogies. It begins by outlining the current state of (predominantly British) working-class literary studies, and questions why working-class voices and working-class texts haven't been granted similar or equal footing for undergraduate academic study within the UK higher education sector. It then goes on to consider how the rise of identity politics has impacted attempts at defining, representing and accounting for working-class experiences. While acknowledging that other disciplines which have emerged from recent shifts toward identity politics (including gender studies, postcolonial studies, and queer theory) all seek, in varying degrees, to decentre the white patriarchal experience and disrupt and decolonise the status quo, this article determines that the inclusion of working-class perspectives at the same level remains confused, vague, and sometimes taboo – putting genuine working-class voices at risk of assimilation, marginalisation, and/or ostracization. The article goes on to qualitatively evaluate a number of recent pedagogical attempts at rectifying this issue, resisting demands to position class-consciousness in diametric opposition to popular models of identity politics, and making the case instead for valuable, insightful, and intersectional literary pedagogies which identify and showcase working-classness as a formative aspect of identity-making on par with other important aspects of self-identity. Consequently, it promotes the need for continued research into how British working-class literature might be defined, taught, and disseminated to a new generation of students in UK higher education, primarily to prevent working-class voices becoming (or remaining) a peripheral concern in new literary pedagogies.

Keywords

Class, identity politics, literary pedagogies, teaching, universities, working-class literature

Introduction

How do we define and teach working-class literature in higher education settings alongside models of identity politics which seemingly offer limited space or opportunity for the self-definition of the working-classes? This is a question which strikes at the heart of the ongoing pedagogical change which has been taking place in universities and across higher education institutions worldwide since the rise of the identity politics movements of the 1980-1990s, particularly in the arts and humanities sector. As modules on gender studies, postcolonialism and queer theory (working in conjunction with various equality, diversity and inclusion schemes) continue to disseminate literature which consolidates notions of identity and self-

identity as formative to the way we read, interpret and understand key texts (Sumara 1998; Bordin 2022; Altun 2023), new and emerging pedagogies and other epistemological frameworks tied to these developments are often accused of sidelining, ignoring, or confusing the importance and relevance of class (particularly the working-class) within the very same disciplines (Rizzo 2003; Binfield and Christmas, 2018; Faue 2018; McNicol and McMillan 2018; Das 2020). This marginalisation risks the subsumption of authentic working-class voices, materials and texts into alternative pedagogical, epistemological and/or research narratives that fail to comprehensively account for the working-class experiences that lie at the root of these creative endeavours. At the very least, this erasure (unintentional or otherwise, whole or in part) poses a problem for working-class students and academics, who already experience feelings of loneliness, dislocation, and inadequacy due to a number of other social, cultural, and material barriers (Reay 2001; LeCourt 2006; Reay et al., 2010; Warnock 2016; Crew 2021) – feelings which might be compounded by the absence of recognisable working-class voices in the subjects they have chosen to study or teach. More broadly, such erasure additionally risks reducing and limiting the scope, depth and nuance of the field of working-class studies itself; if authentic working-class voices are not always or truly reflected in the literature designated as representing the working-class experience (Linkon 2010; de Waal 2018), our ability to critically consider class from a variety of reflective, interpretive and even unorthodox angles becomes at least partially compromised.

Ongoing sociological, anthropological and pedagogical research in this area nevertheless suggests that this erasure and/or marginalisation of genuine working-class voices is by no means inevitable. Since the turn of the millennium the field of working-class literary studies in Britain (and abroad) has grown substantially (Linkon 2010; Lennon and Nilsson 2020; Fazio, Launius and Strangleman 2021), and attempts at addressing class-based inequalities in the classroom have been spearheaded by several teachers and academics in both the UK and the US (Mayberry 1996; Reay 2001; Rizzo 2003; Beech 2004; Beswick 2020). To overcome the risks associated with ignoring issues around class, accepting the status quo, and perceiving working-class studies as already on par with other disciplines, it is clear from many of these studies that working-class voices must be prioritised, listened to, and taken just as seriously as the voices of those who exist on similar or overlapping axis of oppression, ostracisation, and marginalisation (Finn 1999; Lindquist 2004; Reay et al., 2010). Only in the wake of such discussions might we see epistemological models of identity politics begin to seriously and comprehensively consider the inclusion of class as a formative marker of self-identity – and only following these discussions might new modules of working-class literature begin to take shape as part of the encouraging and ongoing pedagogical changes we see in universities today.

In this article, I thus consider some of the key reasons behind the continued marginalisation, contortion and/or absence of authentic working-class voices (perspectives as recognised by self-identified working-class readers) and working-class literature (i.e., any text or work of literature designated as working-class within the current field of working-class literary studies) within current UK higher education settings. I then go on to evaluate some of the more recent pedagogical attempts at overcoming this issue.

In the first section, I begin by pointing out the disparity between the extensive and bourgeoning field of British working-class literary studies, and the relative absence of working-class voices and working-class literature on UK university module reading lists at the undergraduate level. I then question whether or not such a disparity is tied to ongoing issues surrounding the definition, representation and accountability of working-class experiences in light of the rise of identity politics. While I predominantly focus on attempts at defining and discussing British

working-classness (rooted as it is in my own expertise and experience in the field), this is not to oversimply, marginalise or ignore the important similarities, differences and/or points of convergence between working-class communities from different countries and different continents, particularly between those in Britain and other western, Commonwealth, and/or colonised nations – which are, of course, worthy of considerable further research that goes beyond the scope of this paper. Questioning these definitions nevertheless aims at diagnosing some of the specific hesitancies around incorporating class within the increasingly prevalent epistemological models of identity politics utilised in British universities and across the western world today – models which frequently underpin various other teaching modules based on other formative aspects of self-identity at both an undergraduate and master's level (Mayberry 1996; Bernard 2023).

In the article's second section, I interrogate and evaluate a number of pedagogical attempts at resolving the specific issues I have identified – attempts which are currently being explored and experimented with in both the secondary and higher education sector, both in Britain and abroad. In particular, I assess the extent to which the authors and academics behind these attempts have successfully incorporated authentic working-class voices (as defined above) within their alternative pedagogical approaches to literary education, and determine whether or not this might result in a partial move toward the formulation of new modules and reading lists centred around British working-class literature at the undergraduate level.

In my concluding remarks, I go on to question the use-value of some (often frustrated) attempts at defining the British working-class and working-class literature in light of the creative, dynamic, and person-centred teaching methods being experimented with in education settings today. In particular, I resist calls from certain quarters to position working-classness in diametric opposition to models of identity politics, particularly when so many of these new and emerging literary pedagogies identify and spotlight the value of a class-inclusive intersectional approach. I consequently recognise that continued pedagogical research in this area might not only widen the scope of British working-class literary studies (in terms of materials taught and studied), but may additionally incorporate authentic experiences from the working-class student body into the field itself. Finally, I submit that such changes will undoubtedly help position working-classness as a valid academic, epistemological, and formative aspect of identity-making on par with many of the other important aspects of self-identity which we so often deliberate in the higher-education classroom today – which, in turn, will ultimately affect exactly how we categorise, read, interpret and understand both working-class and non-working-class literary texts in higher-education environments.

British Working-Class Literature, Higher Education and Identity Politics

Since the rise of identity politics movements in the late 1980s to early 1990s, the field of working-class literary studies in Britain has made significant inroads; indeed, few today would suggest that the discipline is in anything other than robust health. Building upon seminal works such as Jonathan Rose's *The Intellectual Life of the British Working-Classes* (1992), Pamela Fox's *Class Fictions: Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel, 1890-1945* (1994), Ian Haywood's *Working-Class Fiction, from Chartism to Trainspotting* (1997), and several publications on working-class and socialist writings written and edited by H. Gustav Klaus,[1] texts such as Peter Keating's *The Working-Classes in Victorian Fiction* (2016), *A*

[1] See *The Socialist Novel in Britain* (1982), *The Literature of Labour: 200 Years of Working-Class Writing* (1985), and *The Rise of Socialist Fiction* (1987).

History of British Working-Class Literature (2017; eds., John Goodridge and Bridget Keegan), Roberto del Valla Alcalá's *British Working-Class Fiction: Narratives of Refusal and the Struggle Against Work* (2017), Phil O'Brien's *The Working-Class and Twenty-First Century British Fiction: Deindustrialisation, Demonisation, Resistance* (2019), and Sandie Byrne's *Poetry and Class* (2020) all seek to consolidate and collate patterns, trajectories and trends in British working-class fiction and publishing from various points in recent history, and across a variety of literary forms and formats. John Fordham's chapter 'Working Class Fiction Across the Century' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Twentieth-Century English Novel* (2009; ed., Robert L. Casiero) attempts something similar within a more limited collection rooted in genre and national identity, while work by academics such as Keegan (*British Labouring Class Nature Poetry, 1730-1837*, 2008), Kirstie Blair and Mina Gorji (*Class and the Canon*, 2012), and Tim Fulford (editor of Robert Southey's republished *Lives of Labouring Class Poets,* [1831] 2023) aim to recover and recentre the tradition of Britain's pre-industrial labouring-class poets, and position them as valid and useful precursors to more recent examples of British working-class literature. Self-identified British working-class authors such as Kit de Waal (2018) have also spoken out on the urgent need for increased representation in the field, while others have focused on expanding the scope of the discipline by identifying and exploring specific and often niche subgenres, coteries and recurring themes within British working-class literature more generally. Prominent examples include Cassandra Falke's *Literature by the Working Class: English Autobiographies,1820-1848* (2013), Nicola Wilson's *Home in British Working-Class Fiction* (2016), Kirstie Blair's *Working Verse in Victorian Scotland: Poetry, Press, Community* (2019), Matthew Crowley's *Representations of Working-Class Masculinities in Post-War British Culture: The Left Behind* (2020), and Robin Harriott's *The Birmingham Group: Reading the Second City in the 1930s* (2022).

Throughout these volumes, certain writers and authors crop up time and again with notable regularity, gesturing toward a tentative tradition or collection of British working-class writing that appears to exist within our collective academic consciousness. Such writers include Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell (Haywood 1997; Keating 2016), whose Victorian social novels (or social-problem/-protest novels) deal in detail with aspects of poverty and inequality in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, and whose works are frequently paired with understandings of class and class-consciousness in nineteenth-century Britain;[2] the naturalist poet John Clare (Keegan 2008; Blair and Gorji 2012; Harrison 2017); D. H. Lawrence – with particular reference to his semi-autobiographical debut novel, *Sons and Lovers* (1915) (Haywood 1997; Wilson 2016; de Waal 2018); and the "Angry Young Men" of the 1950s-1960s, such as John Osborne, or Alan Sillitoe (Williams 1979; Hitchcock 1989; Haywood 1997; Fordham 2009; Wilson 2016; del Valla Alcalá 2017; de Waal 2018; Crowley 2020). Other cited examples of British working-class literature are a mix of disparate titles which – to one degree or another – engage with facets of trade-unionism, socialism, and/or poverty and destitution: texts like *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists* (1914) by Robert Tressell (actually an Irish writer often situated within the British tradition) (Fox 1994; Haywood 1997; Fordham 2009; Wilson 2016; Harriott 2022); Ellen Wilkinson's General Strike novel *Clash* (1929) (Fox 1994; Haywood 1997); Walter Greenwood's interwar tale of unemployment, *Love on the Dole* (1933) (Wilson 2016; Harriott 2022); or Irvine Welsh's Scottish addiction drama *Trainspotting* (1993) (Haywood 1997; del Valla Alcalá 2017). For many of these researchers, working-class literature in Britain is clearly shaped by narratives of survival, resistance,

[2] Consider recent publications such as *Charles Dickens and the Street Children of London* (2011) by Andrea Warren, *Dickens's Class Consciousness* (2016) by Pam Morris, and *Servants and Paternalism in the Works of Maria Edgeworth and Elizabeth Gaskell* (2017) by Julie Nash.

endurance, and suffering, often against a backdrop of pre-industrial, industrial, or post-industrial employment opportunities.

These traditions, narratives and research trajectories, however, prove somewhat absent (or at the very least, misaligned) when it comes to the availability of working-class literary education for undergraduate students at top UK universities. In 2003, American historian Mary Rizzo acknowledged how the "social movements of the 1960s and 70s" which foreshadowed the rise of identity politics saw academic institutions across the west "increasingly" turn to the idea that "individuals lives are structured by gender, race, class, ethnicity and sexuality" – but while she identifies various "newly created departments, programs, and area[s] of study focused on" most of these categories, she concedes that "class remains surprisingly left behind" (p. 127). Twenty years later, there is little indication that the situation has substantially improved, particularly for new students in Britain: in a quantitative assessment of the undergraduate modules available (i.e., listed online) on BA English degrees at the top 25 ranked universities for the subject in 2023, only two (at Edinburgh and Liverpool John Moores) mention class or working-classness explicitly – despite a number of other available modules being directly concerned with issues around race, post/colonialism, gender, and sexuality.[3] Texts by some of the writers listed above *are* taught at undergraduate level, but they are usually categorised according to literary period, gender, nationhood, or identity more broadly – rather than in direct relation to the author's class or class-background.[4] At the same time, class-based modules which appear on other university courses (such as Northumbria's "Workers and 'Chavs': The British Working-Class", which is listed as a module option on their Sociology BSc) are rarely visible in English departments within the same institutions,[5] and universities with strong research records on class and/or research centres dedicated to the study of working-class lives fail to offer modules dedicated to the study of British working-class literature (the University of Sussex proving a notable exception).[6] While this doesn't qualify as an entirely comprehensive assessment of the state of working-class literary education on offer in the UK today, it does provide a snapshot (albeit limited and relative) into how a number of universities – including those most highly rated in the subject of English – consider class alongside other important markers of identity-formation. At best, the provision for studying British working-class literature appears inadequate, poorly

[3] See Appendix A, detailing information on universities as ranked by *The Guardian* (2023).
[4] See, as cursory examples, Dickens listed on Durham's 'The Victorian Period (ENGL0017), at https://www.ucl.ac.uk/module-catalogue/modules/the-victorian-period-ENGL0017; Gaskell on Surrey's 'Mobilities of Nation and Empire: Victorian Literature 1850-1890 (ELI3006), at https://readinglists.surrey.ac.uk/leganto/nui/lists/9091386480002346; and Sillitoe on Hertfordshire's 'Images of Contemporary Society: British Literature and the Politics of Identity', at https://www.herts.ac.uk/courses/undergraduate/ba-hons-english-literature2.
[5] See 'Module SO6007 – Workers and 'Chavs': The British Working Class' at https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/study-at-northumbria/courses/sociology-bsc-ft-uusscg1?moduleslug=so6007-workers-and-chavs-the-british-working-class&alttemplate=df847541-4f68-426a-8940-4c60ff4c5262&y=2025; and details of modules for their English Literature BA (Hons) at https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/study-at-northumbria/courses/english-literature-ba-hons-uusegl1/#modules. Or see 'Module SOCI20045 – Class and Social Divisions' in the University of Bristol's School of Sociology, Politics, and International Studies at https://www.bristol.ac.uk/unit-programme-catalogue/UnitDetails.jsa?ayrCode=23%2F24&unitCode=SOCI20045, but no explicitly class-based module on its course BA English (see https://www.bris.ac.uk/unit-programme-catalogue/RouteStructureCohort.jsa?byCohort=25%2F26&byCohort=Y&selectedCatalogue=PROGRAMME&orgCode=ENGL&programmeCode=1ENGL001U).
[6] The University of Bristol again proves a useful example here, as its research centres include the Centre for the Study of Poverty and Social Justice (see https://www.bristol.ac.uk/sps/research/centres/poverty/). The University of Sussex, meanwhile, houses the Mass Observation Archive (see https://massobs.org.uk/), and includes a third-year module on its English BA (Hons) course entitled 'Q3319 – Class, Culture and Contemporary Writing' (see https://www.sussex.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/courses/english-ba).

developed, disorganised, and somewhat ill-defined, with working-class texts often subsumed into alternative areas of study; at worst, it seems working-classness and, by extension, working-class literature, is being deliberately ignored or sidelined by higher education institutions which are otherwise embracing epistemological models of identity politics in other key areas.

In light of the changing understandings of class as a sociological and anthropological label (particularly as a label indicative of someone's unique identity) that have occurred over the past thirty to forty years (in conjunction with the rise of identity politics), I propose three primary reasons for this disparity. Firstly, I suggest that identity politics has increased and compounded the difficulties in providing a *stable and/or hermetic* definition of class and working-classness that sits neatly alongside definitions of other markers of identity or self-identity formation, despite the proliferation of research and multiplicity of definitions on offer around the term; this prevents working-class literature from being widely or seamlessly adopted into the undergraduate academic curriculum under a single, homogenous banner, such as in the way other identity-based modules are categorised (e.g., women's writing, or postcolonial literature). Secondly, I submit that concerns, debates and arguments around representation and "authentic lived experience" – which are often crucial to dominant readings and understandings of feminist, queer and postcolonial literary texts (Ryan 2008; Cover and Prosser 2024) – are not as easily and readily applicable to literary texts otherwise designated as working-class. This is related to questions of definition, but also takes into account the apparent permeability and porousness of class-based identity in the twenty-first century, as individuals appear increasingly able to both move between the classes, or redefine their class position within the system at various points in their lives (Roberts 2001; Savage 2015). Similarly, others claim to be impacted by working-class origins long after they might be labelled by others as financially secure or successful (or indeed, as middle-class) (LeCourt and Napoleone 2011; Crew 2020). Finally, I contend that students who have grown-up and been raised and educated in a society dominated by arguments and debates around identity politics are often concerned with the notion of accountability – a natural corollary to prior concerns around identity and authentic representation. In the academic classroom, this translates as questioning which individuals have the right to tell which stories (Mahala and Swilky 1996; Mayberry 1996), which not only puts seemingly established or self-proclaimed working-class authors under the spotlight, but also the very teachers and educators who impart and disseminate ideas borne out of these working-class texts (Mayberry 1996). Naturally, such debates might engender degrees of discomfort, despair or even disillusion among lecturers and/or seminar tutors who might not perceive identity and self-identity in exactly the same way (or with the same import) as their students – thus preventing the inclusion and/or proliferation of British working-class literature into the curriculum by hesitant educators who cannot authentically claim a working-class background or genuine working-class upbringing. Additionally, this conclusion suggests a dearth of working-class academics more generally within schools of literature in higher-education environments, who might otherwise take up the mantle of spearheading working-class programmes of literary study.

To frame these arguments within the appropriate social, cultural and historical contexts, it is worth pointing out the significant impact identity politics has had on late-twentieth and twenty-first century systems of higher education. Eric Hobsbawm notes how the term and its wider usage came about as a "consequence of the extraordinarily rapid and profound upheavals and transformations of human society in the third quarter of [the twentieth] century" in the western hemisphere, including (but not limited to) the Civil Rights movement, the Stonewall Riots and second-wave feminism (1996, p. 40). As a result, the rising interest in identity politics saw a concurrent reshaping of epistemological frameworks in education which created the space and

opportunity for the establishment of new, interdisciplinary academic fields and movements associated with its corresponding upheavals (Rizzo 2003). These include women's studies programmes, first developed in the 1960s-70s and pioneered by academics such as Juliet Mitchell and Simone de Beauvoir (and led more recently by researchers such as Elaine Showalter and Patricia Hill Collins), which often critiqued pervasive cultural perspectives on gender, feminism and the patriarchy; postcolonial criticism, which has been heavily influenced and informed by the ideas of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha; gender studies and queer theory, spearheaded by academics such as Judith Butler, Alan Sinfield, and Michael Warner in the 1980s-90s; and the more recent, often student-led movements of the twenty-first century which prioritise non-white and non-western artists, writers, and thinkers as part of efforts to "decolonise the curriculum" across colleges and university campuses worldwide (Afekafe et al., 2018; McConlogue 2020). But while these disciplines (particularly the first three) have been neatly incorporated into undergraduate teaching structures, opportunities for interrogating class and working-class literature remain awkwardly left behind.

Since the early 2000s, it is the overarching and ongoing difficulty of defining class – and defining the working-class, in particular – which has been repeatedly identified by academics and researchers (in both the UK and across the Atlantic) as a major barrier to meaningful pedagogical change. For Julie Lindquist, for example, the omission of working-class culture in the classroom can be attributed to the collectively accepted social assumption that class is "marked neither as an identifiable category, like gender, nor as a unified set of historical practices" (2004, pp. 89-92). In a 2000 article on reclaiming lower-middle class shame, Rita Felski poses the issue as a visual problem: "What, [she asks], is the ontological status of class as a marker of personhood? How stable or indeterminate is it? As a signifier, class seems to differ from race and gender, which often mark identity inescapably" (p. 38). In the same article, she insists that "most writers agree that the traditional Marxist view of class as a polarised struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat is of little use in the contemporary Western context" (p. 34). English and film studies professor Peter Hitchcock concurs with these arguments, suggesting that "the difficulty of working-class representation begins with the fundamental abstractedness of class. There is [now] no way to understand critically the extraction of value from the working class under the sign of capital" (2000, p. 23).

More recently, other scholars continue to detail how class and working-classness remain contested and nebulous terms, both within and outside of academia. Geoffrey Evans and James Tilley, for example, describe "social class" as "one of the most widely discussed, and disputed, concepts in social science", and consider the debate "fundamentally unresolvable" (2017, p. 2). They nevertheless go on to centre "occupation, and to a lesser extent, education, as key measures of where people are positioned in the class structure" (p. 3), and insist that "Britain remains a class-divided society" (p. 8). For US scholar Colby King, however, "no single way of defining the working class captures the range of circumstances that are meant to be communicated in the various observations and experiences in which the category is referred to", and he acknowledges how, as late as 2019, "the working class is increasingly acknowledged as a demographically and circumstantially diverse group" (2019, p. 116). Jess Pilgrim-Brown agrees, believing that "conceptualising what it means to have a working-class identity in the UK today is complicated, complex, and consistently under debate", partly as a result of the "blurring of the lines between socio-economic status and class identity" in early twenty-first century society (2023, pp. 51-2).

For educators such as Lindquist, Felski and Hitchcock, the rise of identity politics clearly occasioned new opportunities for defining self-identity and identity-formation, especially in

relation to race, gender and sexuality. But because the working-class cannot define itself in the same way, and aren't recognised as a single, homogenous group with a shared and mutually accepted notion of class-specific oppression, these authors imply that the working-classes have ultimately failed to capitalise on the opportunities afforded by the rising interest in identity politics compared to other marginalised groups – consequently pushing working-classness toward the borders of legitimate academic study. Almost twenty years later, Evans and Tilley, King and Pilgrim-Brown recognise a similar lack of stability around conceptions of class, as well as the confusion and frustration which might arise from the multiplicity of definitions available to both academics and the reading public. Again, this indicates that working-classness lacks a definitive marker or essentialist definition that might help to establish firmer and more easily recognisable pedagogical parameters for its study at undergraduate level.

Efforts at defining British working-class literature by leading literary scholars also betray the vacillating, precarious and sometimes obfuscating foundations upon which the discipline is based, and might also go some way to explaining its continued absence in the undergraduate classroom. Raymond Williams first attempted the task by relying on a Marxist interpretation of class in his influential essay "British Working-Class Literature after 1945" (1979), principally by drawing out the specific "distinctions between working life and working-class life" (p. 128). According to Williams, "the majority of working-class novels and plays in Britian [had at the time] been written by people who were born and grew up in working-class families, and who at one stage or another, often relatively early, were moved on to an educational system which took them away […] from working-class jobs but not working-class life and family connections" (p. 133). This inevitably resulted in a proliferation of working-class novels and plays in which the focus is "working-class family life" but not "the central experience of the class which is work" (p. 133). For Williams, working-class texts are thus frequently framed as "regional" stories which exclude both real work and inter-class conflict, and which instead focus on the enjoyable exploits of quasi-heroic protagonists – "the young working-class who were very easy to celebrate" (p. 140), but who don't really encapsulate the ongoing hardships faced by real-life working-class communities in Britain.

More recent attempts to define the genre nevertheless reach a range of alternative conclusions that build on, work within, and conflict with Williams' observations. Matthew Crowley, for instance, draws upon Williams' own "structures of feeling" and Foucault's "discursive formations" to define class in the context of "overarching historical narratives", each of which "treats history as a series of interlocking and interrelated flows' (2020, p. 4). Here, Crowley emphasises the reliance of ideological structures such as class on aspects of cultural and material history to both underpin and inform their present existence. He then goes on to cite Bourdieu's work on habitus and Butler's ideas on performativity to define class as a "formation that actively produce[s] the objects and practices that [it] describe[s]" (2020, p. 5). He thus departs from Williams' assertion that "the *central* experience of class […] is work" (emphasis added), while nevertheless simultaneously granting that acts of work and labour might very well exist *somewhere* within this self-producing ideological structure. In contrast, Nicola Wilson builds upon Joanna Bourke's understanding of class – which consciously resists centring experiences of labour, work, and the workplace in relation to working-class lives – to buttress her own close-readings of work and the home, and goes on to define working-classness as a "subjective, embodied awareness and feeling, rather than a strictly political or economic identity" (2016, p. 2). Unlike Williams and, to a lesser extent, Crowley, Wilson thus posits emotion and interiority as a fundamental (rather than incidental) tenet of working-class writing, and rejects the centrality of more easily identifiable, physical acts of work and manual labour that Williams sees as characterising genuine *working* fiction.

Other researchers rely on historical contexts and period-specific details to establish clear-cut boundaries for working-class literary study. In *The Literature of Labour: 200 Years of Working Class Writing* (1985), H. Gustav Klaus echoes some of Williams' arguments when he foregrounds the essential connection between labour, politics and the historical developments of the British working-classes, but he also advocates for a focus on what he labels "proletarian" culture, art and literature – even if writers and artists contributing to this culture were "not necessarily born into the working-class" (p. 12). Mike Sanders also deliberately conflates nineteenth-century Chartism with "the working-class movement" of the period in his study of Chartist poetry (2009, p. 1), while Pamela Fox saw the era of 1890-1945 as fostering "the development of an identifiable class outlook" based on the actions of both workers and more privileged members of the establishment, including "the rise of the Labour Party, trade union activism […] and the implementation of the welfare state" (1994, p. 2). Phil O'Brien, meanwhile, considers the "drastic changes to class formation in Britain brought about by the ideologies of neoliberalism" in his study of twenty-first century British fiction, including the "contradictions upon and through which neoliberal capital operates" (2020, pp. 1-2). He goes on to acknowledge "class as a discursive experience" which "shapes social, political and historical change" (p. 2), reiterating Crowley's conclusion that working-classness – and consequently, working-class literature – is simultaneously dependent upon and always interacting with previous historical conceptions and ideas about its own formation and development.

US scholar Sherry Lee Linkon determines that this variety of definitions and interpretations over what constitutes and determines modes of working-class literature is partly due to the discipline's emerging status as a recognisable field of study. While pointing to Paul Lauter's 1982 article "Working-Class Women's Literature: An Introduction to Study" as an essential springboard for working-class literary studies, she wrote in 2010 that "scholars of working-class literature are [continually] uncovering new and forgotten books and exploring the common qualities that define working-class literature as a genre" (Linkon 2010). In a later article (co-authored with John Russo), she also confesses that "in part, what we mean by class changes depending on the situation in which we are using it, but our varied answers to this question also reflect the varied interests and assumptions of members of our scholarly community" (2016, p. 5). As Phil O'Brien clearly states in his own introduction, "what is needed" in the discipline "is a variety of approaches to writing about and engaging with class as social and historical relation" (2020, p. 3). For researchers such as Linkon and O'Brien, then, the working-class literary canon remains (at least, for now) entrenched in the process of its own self-creation; its content, its interests, and its goals lack solid or widely-agreed upon boundaries, are constantly evolving, and remain open to ongoing (sometimes embattled) interpretation. Consequently, such a canon cannot yet be contained within its own unique discipline. This might partly explain the marginalisation of British working-class literature at the UK undergraduate level, where the formulation of modules for literary study is heavily reliant on traditional and recognisable modes of literary periodisation, genre, and thematic categorisation.

Alongside these recent attempts at defining class and working-class literature, the current trend for spotlighting the value of authorial lived experience – both within the field of literary studies and the publishing industry more widely – might also account for the sidelining of working-class fiction on undergraduate reading lists. Since the turn of the millennium and the rise of identity politics, multiple critics, readers and audiences have engaged in discussions and interrogations over the extent to which authorial or "authentic lived experience" determines the

social, cultural and artistic value of a given text within various public and/or academic arenas, with specific attention often paid to evidencing and/or corroborating identity-based encounters (Ryan 2008). As recent, hotly contested debates in the media over "trans-authentic casting" (Bakare 2021) and "blackfishing" (Karimi 2021) indicate, identity has been thrust to the forefront of debates on everything from artistic integrity to cultural appropriation, and artists and works of art (both new and historical) are now lent additional weight and credibility with a twenty-first century audience if the artist can claim first-hand, autobiographical experiences of the modes of marginalisation and/or oppression they claim to be representing and communicating within their work. For younger audiences in particular, identity politics has played an important role in shaping their social, personal, and even romantic interactions (Sloam and Henn 2018; Pickard 2019), and so assuming or adopting the manners or characteristics of a socially marginalised group with which one has little life experience has become increasingly frowned upon as strained, inauthentic, and offensive. Novelists such as Kathryn Stockett (*The Help,* 2009), Delia Owens (*Where the Crawdads Sing,* 2020), and Jeanine Cummins (*American Dirt*, 2018), for example, have all been recently targeted for diluting or misrepresenting minority cultures and for viewing the lives of others through a reductive touristic gaze (see Jones 2014; Miller 2019; and Olivas 2020 and Chávez 2021, pp. 90-91, respectively). While some authors have come out in defence of writing "without first-hand experience" (Kunzru et al., 2016), and while other novels – such as Rebecca F. Kuang's *Yellowface* (2023) – are already satirising the trend, this increasing propensity to value authorial experience in storytelling has also led to critical reassessments of otherwise canonical texts, such as in the deconstruction of the white-saviour narrative of *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Seekford, 2016-17).

As early as 1996, Daniel Mahala and Jody Swilky explored this increasing tendency of both authors and readers to reconsider the value of personal lived experience in composition. They suggested that this "turn towards "story," "testimony," and the "personal" in professional discourse" was "a complex and many-sided phenomenon", but ostensibly viewed it as moving "towards a practice of storytelling […] which deliberately challenges the boundaries of [the] reserved space of Western culture", and which might "revive dispossessed cultures and experiences, and make possible a newly critical relationship with the dominant culture" (p. 363). As working-class writers such as Natasha Carthew or Kit de Waal contend, fictional experiences are of little literary or emotional or social value if they remain inherently inauthentic, strained, or false; plus, Carthew explains, "without these [authentic] voices, real experiences – and even dialects – will start to be lost" (Carthew 2022). Propelled by these socially admirable and culturally imperative objectives, it is easy to see how authors falling foul of such goals have faced accusations of both cultural appropriation and/or inauthenticity. Interrogating authorial experiences of class in a similar fashion, however, proves less straightforward, partly because the lack of a singular definition over what constitutes British working-classness destabilises attempts to question the legitimacy or authenticity of particular literary representations. This can be evidenced in multiple ways.

Firstly, if class is related directly and most importantly to acts of work (as claimed by Williams), then it follows that individuals will move between the classes depending on the work, occupation or employment they undertake. Once an author moves between the classes, however, surely it becomes less clear (according to the logic of identity politics) about the extent to which they might write of their experiences previously living under an alternative class structure? Despite being considered by many to be "*the* working-class novel of the early 1930s", Ben Harker points out how Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole* (1933) has been criticised by leftist commentators "for leaving out sustained and explicit coverage of

oppositional working-class collective agency, be it the General Strike of 1926, political advances for the Labour Party in the 1929 General Election, or the activities of the Communist Party and its front organisations such as the National Unemployed Workers' Movement (NUWM)" (2009, p. 56). This is despite Greenwood himself jumping between a number of temporary and insecure jobs during early adulthood before spending time on the dole himself (Hopkins 2018, pp. 196-98) – which, within new epistemological models of identity politics, more than qualifies him for writing about working-class experiences. Yet others also comment upon the author's complicated and sometimes fraught relationship with his working-class background; he was, according to fellow Labour politician Stafford Cripps, frequently "in danger of having his head turned by success" (quoted in Hopkins, p. 212). This clearly complicates the usual approach of exposing the inauthenticity of authors who represent marginalised communities they otherwise have no history, experiences or affiliation with. Within working-class studies scholarship today, Greenwood's novel thus sits somewhere awkwardly between an authentic, first-hand account of working-class life, and a somewhat condescending and detached retelling of material hardships from a later position of financial and literary success.

If, on the other hand, class is a self-perpetuating and performative series of ideological practices connected to historical trajectories (as outlined by Crowley and expanded upon by O'Brien), then class is almost exclusively subconsciously performed – acted out by individuals relying on social and historical understandings of what class means to them which are, in turn, shaped by their own material and geographical circumstances. But how do we determine the in/authenticity of subconscious thought? Again, this particular conception of class makes it difficult for proponents of identity politics to deconstruct working-class experiences in the same way they might other important aspects of identity-formation, where it is easier to recognise and point out inauthenticity based on widely available and clearly discernible autobiographical data.

Finally, if class is the emotional or holistic embodiment of subjective feeling (a perception described by Bourke and utilised by Wilson), then class is individualistic and person-centred, and not necessarily reliant on external factors such as work acts, income, or material comfort. If someone *feels* working-class, they might suitably lay claim to that feeling within certain boundaries. While staking such a claim does not inhibit potential challenges from others about the appropriateness or authenticity of such feelings, this definition too muddles the usual approach in epistemological models of identity politics to directly and emphatically call out representations that appropriate or falsify marginalised experiences – for how can we rigorously (and righteously) assess the extent to which such feelings intersect with previous material conditions, community relations, family connections, and/or acts of work and labour which fall outside of conventional understandings of what constitutes working-classness? Jack Carroll nevertheless attempts such a task when he contests that "Orwell's bourgeoisie upbringing and unfamiliarity with the working class hindered his ability to portray his subjects, their living conditions, and their community in a manner that was not influenced by his own bias" (2020) – particularly in relation to *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), a text famous for its depiction of the northern working-classes. Yet others, such as Ben Clarke, insist that Orwell's "emphasis upon […] identities" was in fact "founded upon the idea that the narratives that determine such communities are, to use Althusser's phrase, identical with the "lived" experience of human existence" (2007, p. 8). Clarke goes on to credit how "Orwell's own understanding of […] class difference increased with his broader political consciousness" that had come a long way since the earlier publication of *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) (p. 17). For Clarke, Orwell's improving ability to *feel* the reality of working-class lives justifies

further writings on the British working-class experience – despite the author's otherwise middle-class background.

Within all of these parameters and definitions, it is consequently clear that assessing the authenticity of working-class lives is not as straightforward as simply recognising a physical, superficial, or apparently autobiographical disconnect between author and published work, even if the legitimacy of other supposedly working-class texts (including those by Dickens, Gaskell, and several other authors listed above with questionable working-class origins and/or suspect relationships with working-class lives) are now being brought under greater scrutiny.[7] With what makes for an authentic working-class text so up in the air, it is easy to see how educators in the undergraduate classroom have so far avoided coordinating and consolidating modules based solely and exclusively on working-class lives.

For other social historians and observers, this intrinsic or authentic value borne out of genuine life experience is often absent from discussions on class partly due to the newfound suspicions toward class structures and class practices that have increased since the rise of neoliberalism (which itself occurred alongside, and is intertwined with, the rise of identity politics). As Verity Burgmann explains, "during the 1980s the intellectual and political climate [primarily of the political left] became increasingly hostile toward the notion of class and contemptuous of the working class, with decline of class-consciousness persistently paraded as proof of the death of class itself" (2005, p. 1). By the early-1990s, such hostility in Britain emerged at the fringe of the "Kinnock agenda" of pre-New Labour, which sought to recognise that "the economy had changed out of all recognition, and with it the working-class" as well (Cronin 2004, p. 306). Instead, the Labour Party aimed to become a broad ''rainbow coalition" of the excluded and marginalised who, together with what remained of the traditional working-class, could be "mobilised around a fundamentally left-wing programme' (Cronin 2004, p. 306). For Terry Irving, this "damage caused by identity politics" resulted in a fractured and limited acknowledgement of class solidarity among the self-professed left: "Instead of exploitation in common, liberal thinkers looked for multiple oppressions. […] Instead of practising solidarity as activist intellectuals, informed by an understanding of the history of the class struggle, they retired to academia and built abstract models of intersectionality" (Irving 2017, p. 106).

As, according to Irving, "liberal thinkers" ignored or suppressed historical or materialist understandings of class in their efforts to incorporate models of authenticity and identity politics into their worldviews, it is subsequently not illogical to presume that similar notions of class or working-classness might have been equally sidelined and/or subconsciously ignored in the corresponding study of literature during the same years of the early twenty-first century. Indeed, in addition to Rizzo's earlier observations, Rita Felski has affirmed how there was "a noticeable silence about class in much contemporary cultural theory" at the turn of the new millennium (2000, p. 34), a point echoed by Evans and Tilley in their own study on the more recent political exclusion(s) of the working-classes in Britain: "By the turn of the millennium, British sociologists appeared to have turned their backs on the very idea of class" (2017, p. 2). Ben Clarke and Nick Hubble strike an even more cynical tone when they claim that although there has been an "increased prominence of the working-classes in political discourse since the Great Recession began in 2008", such discourse engages "not with the working-classes [proper], but with fantasies that simplify the people they purport to describe" (2017, pp. 2-3).

[7] For further details about Dickens and Gaskell's backgrounds and upbringings in particular, see Claire Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life* (2012), and Helena Kelley, *The Life and Lies of Charles Dickens* (2023); and Deidre D'Albertis, 'The Life and Letters of E. C. Gaskell' in *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell* ed. Jill Matus (2007).

While O'Brien's work on the impact of neoliberalism on British working-class fiction somewhat resists this interpretation, these authors clearly see working-classness in the twenty-first century as being either wilfully subsumed or tactfully ignored by both academics and politicians alike, partly in a cynical effort to recentre a model of identity politics disconnected from class dynamics as the *cause célèbre* of university approaches to inclusion, access, education and participation.

Identity politics thus not only complicated ideas around the authentic literary representation of the British working-classes, but reshaped or reformed historical notions of class and working-classness in a manner that had a profound impact on party politics in Britain, and whose effects rippled outwards into other realms of society – including within the education sector. As Michael Zweig contends, "the emerging field of working-class studies is" more recently "settling on definitions of class that are rooted in the power relations established in production, extending outward into politics and culture" – partly because "income and education are poor proxies for class" in the identity-obsessed twenty-first century (2017, pp. 29-30).

Zweig's reference to "power relations" leads directly onto my final (but related) consideration for why British working-class literature remains relatively absent from the undergraduate English literature classroom: that of authorial accountability. As Julie Lindquist boldly asserts, since the rise of identity politics "there is something about the act of claiming working-class experience that pisses people off" (2004, p. 187), and several writers, educators and academics situated in these new fields of study have been grappling with the urgent question of who gets to tell (and teach) what stories. In her introduction to *Teaching What You're Not: Identity Politics in Higher Education* (1996), Katharine J. Mayberry asserts how the increasing proliferation of identity-based modules appearing on academic syllabi in the 1990s put more privileged teachers under the spotlight: "In a setting where little was safe from interrogation […] it was only a matter of time before white faculty – guardians of the now thoroughly problematised trinity of knowledge, authority, and tradition – were challenged. The most provocative of these challenges revolved around the issue of identity […and] identity-based credibility […] as an entirely new precondition of professional authority" (p. 3). For students from minority, oppressed, or marginalised backgrounds, it became increasingly important that academics had some kind of first-hand experience which would qualify them to teach subjects related to these identity-based struggles. While Mayberry deliberately exposes the historical exclusion of class from these particular discussions in the 1990s, it is not unreasonable to assume that some academics would nevertheless go on to perceive their class identity in a manner not dissimilar to their gender, sexuality and racial background. Considering that recent studies put the number of self-identified working-class academics in the UK higher-education sector as low as 14% (Friedman and Laurison 2019, p. 244) or even 10% (Wakeling 2023), we can thus fairly conclude that there is a distinct *lack* of first-hand working-class experience among higher-education faculty in the UK today. Combine this with the demand to pair subject teaching with first-hand experience that Mayberry recognises as being brought about by the rise of identity politics, and it suddenly seems unsurprising that so few lecturers in English are currently pioneering, organising or even teaching modules centred around British working-class literature; ultimately, they lack the authentic working-class upbringing and/or background that students have come to expect from academics teaching on identity-based modules.

For some, this partial erasure or suppression of working-class modules in the curriculum has the unintended consequence of suppressing working-class voices in literature altogether – even if such voices are often framed by middle and upper-middle class perspectives. The self-described middle-class Irish author Roddy Doyle, for instance, resists calls to speak only from

his own experiences, and insists that not only is the subject of class "fun to deal with as a writer", but that investigating concerns beyond the scope of your own class is part of "people's urge to somehow […] redefine themselves" in this current age of identity politics (O'Malley 2013). While Mayberry concedes the risk that "identity is replacing expertise" within higher education settings (1996, p. 4), she too looks at opportunities for personal reflection and redefinition, proposing that academics and faculty members take advantage of the current cultural moment to examine "his or her own motives, qualifications, and goals as teachers and as scholars" (p. 5). Such instances of self-reflection have undoubtedly proliferated in the near thirty years since Mayberry's observations were first published, and they take the form of several of the new and innovative literary pedagogies that I now go on to evaluate. Having established how ongoing debates around identity politics have impacted definitions, conceptions and representations of literary working-classness and, to some extent, prevented their assimilation into newly accepted forms of undergraduate teaching in the UK, I now turn to some of the recent pedagogical attempts at overcoming this issue, and consider the extent to which class and working-classness might begin to be thought of as equally important and valid aspects of identity-formation in the future of twenty-first century literary education.

Elevating Working-Class Voices

So how might these myriad, often contradictory arguments around defining, authentically representing, and responsibly accounting for representations of the British working-class be resolved to recentre working-class experiences, and encourage the foundation of a more concrete pedagogical understanding of working-class literary studies in the undergraduate English literature classroom today? To assess this question with sufficient insight and precision, I will now interrogate and evaluate a number of more recent pedagogical attempts at responding to issues and concerns around working-class representation in the classroom. While these various attempts are drawn from both the UK and US, and from both secondary and higher education settings, I nevertheless consider exactly how they might each contribute to the formation of core modules for the study of British working-class literature within UK university settings. In doing so, I respond directly to both the notable absence of working-class modules for literary study, and the urgent need to consider class as a formative aspect of identity-formation alongside other aspects of identity – particularly within the increasingly utilised epistemological and pedagogical models of identity politics available to academics and educators today.

To overcome the complications around neatly or singularly defining class or working-classness, some literary researchers emphasise the importance of accurately delineating and applying the correct term, label, moniker and/or sub-definition of class which is always historically dependent on a variety of economic, material and social conditions. In *Teaching Labouring-Class British Literature of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (2018), Kevin Binfield and William J. Christmas concede that while "contemporary students […] tend to see the existence of a labouring class and an author's membership in it as […] a social problem that must be corrected", they determine that it is the responsibility of educators "to foster in students a disposition to replace [this] nostalgia with an active, critical reflection on the realities of [the intersections between] labour and life" (pp. 2-3). To achieve this, they invite teachers and students to "view authorship and literary creation in an earlier historical context of labour", and to "consider how labouring-class authorship diverged from leisure-class theories" that are historically specific (p. 4). In particular, they stress that even the eponymous label chosen for their collected volume – "labouring-class" – "should not be understood as a singular term that reduces a manifold to a cleanly circumscribed entity; rather, it stands as an adjectival form of

labouring classes, suggestive of plurality and diversity […] and more inclusive of women and authors of African descent than is suggested by other terminology" (pp. 7-8; original emphasis). Binfield and Christmas consequently opt for an intersectional approach that nevertheless underlines the significance of historical specificity; by choosing the most precise available definition to describe the working-class author being taught, historically inaccurate pitfalls are not only avoided, but additional avenues of research that intersect with other marginalised identities are broadly welcomed into the field. Considering the extent to which identity politics values recovering and recentring marginalised experiences, this might prove a useful method for introducing working-class modules and texts at the undergraduate level in universities.

In the introduction to their edited collection *New Working-Class Studies* (2018), John Russo and Sherry Lee Linkon also advocate for an "emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches", but otherwise spotlight "cultural representations [of class] as sources for understanding working-class experience" (p. 1). This "cultural approach" – which alleviates the need for the acutely specific labels advocated by Binfield and Christmas – ultimately foregrounds "important models for linking the academic study of working-class history and culture with activism and education" (p. 2). As the pair go on to insist, "No discussion of working-class life and culture would be possible without the formative ideas from three social sciences: sociology, anthropology and economics" (p. 8). For Russo and Linkon, then, definitions of class and working-classness become more malleable (and more meaningful) when considered from a variety of social, cultural and academic angles, and they propose a pedagogy for study which prioritises connections between disciplines *and* between educational institutions and other class-informed structures (such as unions, or the home). To adapt and expand opportunities for learning about and understanding working-class literature at the undergraduate level, English departments across UK universities might therefore consider how working-class literary studies might be taught in conjunction with programs from other schools and departments. Tutors and academics from interdisciplinary research centres might, for example, put together modules on working-class literatures and working-class cultures and make them available on a number of different degree programs; this widens the scope, nuance and opportunities for collaboration in the teaching of (and research within) British working-class studies, while at the same time practically prioritising adequate student numbers to make the module viable. It would also align with Russo and Linkon's assertion that "New working-class studies brings together scholars, activists, and workers from a variety of perspectives, disciplines, and theoretical schools" (p. 10) to help move the discipline beyond historically constrained or otherwise culturally limiting definitions of class.

While these scholars are making concerted efforts at diversifying the field, lingering questions over "authentic lived experience" and accountability still confuse and frustrate other attempts at neatly delineating a space for British working-class literary studies at the undergraduate level. Many education researchers agree, however, that one of the most effective ways to engage with and respond to these debates around authenticity, around who gets to tell what stories, is by empowering students – particularly working-class students – to admit their own authentic experiences into the classroom and challenge existing hierarchies of learning. This includes challenging what constitutes "literature" – and by extension, British working-class literature – worthy of academic study.

Romy Clark's and Roz Invanič's *The Politics of Writing* (first published in 1997) accounts for the historical systemic exclusion of student working-class experiences in the classroom in some detail. Drawing upon David Bartholomae's earlier 1986 essay on "academic discourses", Clark and Invanič acknowledge that certain types or styles of writing – and therefore, reading –

depend "on the access people have had to literary practices and discourse types"; if students are unfamiliar with the particulars of a vocabulary or it differs from their way of talking or communicating at home, it is doubly challenging to grasp such a language in the classroom (2006, pp. 135, 15). They also concede that "inequalities in education" are "primarily class-based", and that working-class students often "hold different values and beliefs from those encoded in the discourses and genres that they encounter and are encouraged to reproduce in school" (pp. 43, 126). This is supported by researchers such as Wilkins and Burke, who found that working-class students unfamiliar with such norms have been "summoned to adjust their behaviour and [are] learning to fit with culturally implicit norms and pedagogic demands" as recently as 2015 (p. 435). Clark and Invanič's research thus displays an acute awareness of the perceived inauthenticity of the working-class experience that persists within the educational environments and limited curriculums currently on offer, and might go some way to explaining why working-class students (or even working-class academics) are more hesitant than other marginalised groups to advocate for the inclusion of British working-class literature at undergraduate level; having been taught from a young age to disregard their authentic class-based experiences in the classroom, such individuals are unlikely to confidently consider the very same experiences as worthy of academic study.

Clark and Invanič nevertheless advocate for the active involvement of educational institutions in "exposing the partiality of accounts of the world", and for lending a "sense of personal power or authoritativeness" to marginalised, working-class students (pp. 227, 232). Generally, this has been a popular approach to formulating new literary pedagogies since the early-2000s. Julie Lindquist, for example, emphasises how important it is to "enable students to locate their own affectively structured experiences of class within more integrated understandings of social structures and identity formations", particularly for those from a working-class background who may have to negotiate loyalties between two different and competing developmental environments (2004, p. 188). In her 2006 paper on performing working-class identity, Donna LeCourt also voices concerns about educational approaches that have posited "working-class and academic discourses existence in a dichotomous relationship where one discourse is depicted as in almost complete opposition to the other" (p. 30) – just as Clark and Invanič described. Instead, she extols the need for a more collaborative relationship between the two – championing the right of students to challenge institutionally imposed "hierarchies" around class and identity politics (p. 44) and suggesting that "seeing class as both economically structured and culturally fluid" will help create "the potential for infinite meanings" in new classroom pedagogies (pp. 45-6). In "Redneck and Hillbilly Discourse in the Writing Classroom", American teacher Jennifer Beech additionally warns of the "capacity for seemingly well-meaning educators to perpetuate mainstream classist and racist ideologies". To resist this, she advocates for "a pedagogy that allows students from a variety of class backgrounds to make use of knowledge brought from their home communities while still making their way into academic discourse" (2004, pp. 173, 183). While some researchers, such as Diane Reay, see fundamental shifts in government policy or the national curriculum as the only method for achieving this kind of transformational change in classroom on a wider scale (2001, p. 343), these studies and attempts to reevaluate and remodel the teaching of class are nevertheless predicated on what Patrick Finn summarises as the idea of "connecting knowledge with the reality of working-class students' lives" (1999, p. xi).

To deconstruct such "hierarchies" and achieve "infinite meanings" for working-class students within higher-education settings, many universities have turned toward ostensibly pedagogical widening participation programmes to help potential and first-year applicants decode the "academic discourses" identified by theorists such as Bartholomae, Clark and Invanič. Mary

Lea and Brian Street, for example, posit that by applying an "academic literacies" perspective to extra-curricular routes into higher-education and encouraging working-class students to recognise and decode unfamiliar language, universities might increase applications from students from lower-income backgrounds. Unlike "study skills" and "academic socialization" models, they argue that an "academic literacies" model pays greater attention to structural power relationships, authority, and meaning-making "that are implicit in the use of literary practices within specific institutional settings" (2006, p. 370). Ultimately, Lea and Street found that when university leaders do incorporate different literacies into their widening participation schemes, they are more likely to elicit positive and varied responses from students about what it means to be at a literacy-based disadvantage. At the same time, researchers such as Wilkins and Burke highlight how such schemes are most effective only when they operate from a point of "*working-class empathy*" rather than "*middle-class sympathy*" (2015, p. 445; original emphasis). Teresa McConlogue's *Assessment and Feedback in Higher Education* (2020), which includes a chapter on "Developing Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment Practices", also details how adopting an empathetic approach to multiple disadvantaged backgrounds – including social background – in the grading of final submissions engenders more useful and practical feedback for working-class students (pp. 140-141).

These pedagogies consequently provide useful templates for incorporating working-class literature into the undergraduate curriculum. In the first instance, academics might begin to work alongside and in conjunction with groups of working-class students to formulate truly authentic working-class literature modules and reading lists. This collaborative approach would immediately prioritise and underscore the importance of working-class student voices within academic settings (as advocated by multiple researchers above), while simultaneously "connecting knowledge with the reality of working-class students' lives" and enabling them to deconstruct epistemological and literary hierarchies and other "academic discourses".

To achieve this kind of change, Borsheim-Black et al. advocate for reading *against* existing canonical texts to help marginalised students comprehend and critically analyse existing structures of power and control. For these researchers, "canonical texts perpetuate ideologies that are also dominant – about Whiteness, masculinity, heterosexuality, Christianity, and physical and mental ability" (2014, p. 123), and are therefore especially suited to being critiqued in an age of identity politics which imbues inherent value in alternative or marginalised identities. While, once again, the concept of *class* as a dominant social ideology is absent from this analysis (more specifically, the middle-class attitudes and customs found in multiple canonical texts that often prove the "norm" against which other class-based behaviours are measured against), Borsheim-Black et al. nevertheless subscribe to Paulo Freire's belief that canonical texts (inadvertently or otherwise) "support the dominant ideology" and consequently enact behaviours that reinforce existing social and economic inequalities (1985, p. 17). Borsheim-Black et al., thus recommend that students should learn how "language and texts are not neutral and always ideological", and that only by 'questioning representation and normativity' will individuals and institutions begin to "work toward [effecting some kind of] social transformation" (2014, pp. 123-4). Like Freire, they "recognise the power canonical novels hold to reaffirm cultural capital" (p. 132). Encouraging groups of undergraduate working-class students to read against canonical examples of working-class literature and collectively determine the authenticity of such texts might therefore be doubly useful: such a process guards against accusations of inauthenticity behind a literature module's creation, while simultaneously affirming and validating a variety of personal, working-class experiences that have been traditionally or historically ignored and sidelined within academic settings.

While reading against canonical texts can prove useful for elevating working-class perspectives, other researchers propose redefining or upending the canon altogether. In an article on the "use value" of working-class writing, Sonia Perera, for instance, examines what makes this kind of writing valuable, and how it connects with "traditions of literary internationalism" (2012, p. 932). She deconstructs ideas about the "English canon" and "world literature" – marking them as elitist categories, a product of privilege and colonialism – and calls for the introduction of new working-class literatures (including "unglamorous" diary entries, letters and autobiography, and work in multiple languages) to be included in higher education environments. Deconstructing "use values" of popular or canonical texts might therefore be equally helpful for improving the academic outlook of disadvantaged or marginalised students and bringing working-class perspectives into the undergraduate literature classroom. To achieve this, students might be encouraged to bring a literary text of personal value to introductory seminars, which can range from anything to a paperback bestseller to a diary-entry of their own. In subsequent discussions, they might then be able to redefine what constitutes "literature" or "value" and begin to deconstruct the terms as critical concepts. This will enable all students to incorporate their own "value systems" into their studies, no matter their class-background – and ensure that texts with alternative viewpoints or which exist outside of the middle-class canon are treated with equal critical diligence. Such an approach fits neatly with Katie Beswick's more recent research on taking seriously "*felt* class identity" (as advocated by Bourke and Wilson), whereby she positions "*class feeling* as an important dimension of understanding how barriers to access and participation operate" (Beswick 2020, p. 267; original emphasis). While Beswick's research is centred around affective class identification in the theatre industry, its focus on the "multitude of reasons why individuals feel themselves, legitimately or otherwise, to be members of the working-class, regardless of where they are positioned by instrumental measurements" (p. 268) might clearly be applied to similar literary contexts – including within the undergraduate English classroom.

At the same time, pedagogical models of widening participation which value "empathy" rather than "sympathy" can provide similarly illuminating methods for encouraging working-class undergraduate students to value their own subjective (if sometimes uncritical) interpretations of working-class literature. Within an undergraduate literature seminar, for example, lead tutors might model acts of disclosure, before encouraging the sharing between peers of institutional, social or literary challenges faced by students from all social backgrounds. Tutors might then encourage students to identify points of similarity and convergence between their own experiences and those found in selected working-class texts. Where working-class students' own authentic lived experiences mirror or parallel with their literary counterparts consequently provides opportunities for them to not only contribute (or potentially even lead) classroom discussions, but feed directly into pedagogical models of literary interpretation facilitated by the academic tutor. This would constitute an empathetic approach which overcomes suggestions that determining the authenticity of class-based experiences is too unwieldly, indeterminate and/or complex for undergraduate students to accommodate.

Michalinos Zembylas, however, anticipates that some students might struggle to speak about personal identity and overcome this kind of "pedagogy of discomfort" – a term he coined to describe a pedagogy which might invoke feelings of shame, awkwardness, embarrassment of even pain felt by students when engaging in "social justice education" which "unsettle[s] cherished beliefs about the world" (2015, p. 164). Yet he also confirms how "in recent years" such discussions are increasingly framed as being "pedagogically valuable" (p. 163). Zembylas sees such pedagogies as being "grounded in the assumption that discomforting feelings are

important in challenging dominant beliefs, social habits and normative practices that sustain social inequities", and he affirms how they create "openings for individual and social transformation" (p. 163). While potential in/sensitivities between students may arise and need to be delicately navigated, subsequent discussions can broaden students' understandings of identity-based labelling while simultaneously encouraging them to reflect upon their own methods of valuing or de-valuing literary texts. Undergraduate seminar tutors can therefore "embrace crisis as a medium to transform students' identities and worldviews" (Zembylas, p. 165), and continue to model processes of discomfort and disclosure as useful pedagogical tools for formulating alternative reading lists centred around British working-class literature and authentic working-class experiences.

Yet Zembylas also insists that "experiencing discomfort should not be confused with the absence of safety" (p. 165), and that "minimizing ethical violence toward any student is important" (p. 173). Additional safeguards for working-class students are thus required to ensure that such pedagogies are primarily "challenging students to critically analyse their ideological values and beliefs that subordinate on the basis of [class]" – and not on forcing "marginalized students" to be "representative[s] of a homogenized group" or on forcing "privileged students […] to make their transformation "evident" in public" (Zembylas 2015, pp. 166, 171). Within the undergraduate English literature classroom, such safeguards might include advertising relevant content in advance of the seminar (via content warnings); laying out terms for respectful discussion in opening lectures and seminars; and introducing and discussing connected notions of intersectionality and allyship in an attempt to ensure discussions of class do not become focused on devaluing the authentic lived experiences of students with similarly marginalised or oppressed, but other, identities. By working in conjunction with the new and emerging literary pedagogies evaluated here (including those on establishing historically specific definitions of class, connecting working-class literature with working-class culture and activism, instituting empathetic models of widening participation, and integrating the authentic experiences of working-class students into classroom debates), such safeguards can function as equally positive conduits for rethinking traditional parameters of academic literary study.

Conclusion

As definitions and representations of class and working-classness continue to evolve and be debated by scholars, politicians and sociologists within both public and academic arenas, it is clear that opportunities for studying British working-class literature remain limited for new undergraduate students across the UK. While the rise of identity politics and the subsequent implementation of new modes of learning centred around self-identity and identity-formation have fundamentally reshaped how academics, researchers, tutors, and students all think about themselves, the positive and encouraging changes to the study of gender, sexuality, race and nationhood, and post/colonialism (particularly within literary contexts) are either ill-conceived, indeterminate, or altogether absent in the study of class and working-classness. As outlined above, this discrepancy seems to have emerged (in part) due to the increasingly awkward relationship between class and identity politics, which numerous researchers and social historians identify as being rooted in ongoing social conflicts centred around un/acceptable notions of individualism, neoliberalism, and in/authenticity in twenty-first century society.

Yet this article also evidences a number of new and emerging pedagogies that are currently making concerted efforts at widening access to the field of working-class studies. These

alternative models of education create openings for the more detailed, specific and in some cases expansive study of working-class literary history; advocate for interdisciplinary connections that embrace lived experiences of working-classness outside of traditional academic and institutional spaces; and promote empathy between a range of different identity-based communities to encourage increased understanding, collaboration, and research in the discipline. Most pertinently, they all stress the importance of adopting an intersectional approach for both challenging existing dominant structures within education systems and establishing new and innovative approaches to the study of working-class lives. As Katie Beswick asserts, "class inequality is inherently intersectional", as it frequently becomes "entangled with injustices related to race, gender, sexuality and disability, [especially] to the extent that it is difficult to understand the lived experiences and stigmas produced by distinct identity positions" as existing separately from class (2020, p. 266). Discussions of working-class literature, working-class writing, and subjective experiences of class should therefore not preclude an engagement with other aspects of identity that – within the context of literary studies – academics and students regularly explore in pedagogical approaches to gender, sexuality, and postcolonialism.

As early as 1995, Constance Coiner attested how "working-class writing often coincides with other literary categories" (p. 250), despite its relative absence in higher-education settings and/or the undergraduate literature classroom. Considering how markers of identity shape "literary categories" today, such a claim clearly invites researchers and academics to consider class through a multitude of exacting socialised prisms which are rooted in the continued proliferation of identity politics. While Beswick herself also points to how "class discourse" so often becomes "conflated with conceptions of the white working-class and dismissed on the basis of this" (p. 267), this is a distinction and over-simplification that must be resisted; as texts by George Lamming, Samuel Selvon, and more recently Alex Wheattle, Kit de Waal, and Lemn Sissay indicate, there is no such thing as a total nor homogenous "white working-class" in a country as multicultural as Britain. While it is equally important not to amalgamate (and consequently simplify) class-based prejudice and discrimination with experiences of racism (or class-based prejudice with any other kind of identity-based discrimination), an intersectional approach to working-class literary studies nevertheless permits us to consider questions of class (and what it means to be working-class) from a variety of nuanced, alternative, and authentic perspectives – perspectives which are ultimately grounded in what so many of the pedagogies evaluated above essentially advocate for: the idea of "connecting knowledge with the reality of working-class students' lives" (Finn 1999, p. xi).

As Borsheim-Black et al., insist, teachers and academics must not only recentre authentic working-class student experiences, but do more to "locate counterstories […] written by [marginalised] writers, musicians, activists, artists, or politicians who were active" not just in the major arenas of history, but in the margins and shadows of the past as well (2014, p. 128). Going forwards, it therefore falls to academics, teachers, educators and tutors to adopt, practice and/or experiment with the new literary pedagogies being established and promoted by so many of the researchers mentioned above, particularly in an effort to procure working-class "counterstories" and "revise established histories" about what constitutes working-class literature. As even Terry Irving concedes, "class is part of the zeitgeist again" (2017, p. 105), and, in light of this cultural moment, academics should take advantage of the "renewal of intellectual energy in class studies" that is evident in wider research in the field (pp. 110-111). By adapting, contorting, and evolving our understanding of class so that we begin to see working-classness as a more formative aspect of identity in line with other marginalised facets of identity, we might thus begin to see new working-class texts, authors and methodologies

infiltrate their way into our popular academic consciousness – and only then might we begin to see the consistent and dedicated formulation, consolidation, and proliferation of undergraduate modules dedicated to the study of British working-class literatures within UK universities.

Author Bio

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Appendix A: Teaching Class in UK Universities: Undergraduate English Literature Modules Assessment

The following table provides links to BA English course pages (for Autumn 2024/25 entry) for *The Guardian's* Top 25 UK Universities of 2023 for studying English.

Modules relating to lower- and/or working-class experiences that can be found online are mostly absent, but exceptions (highlighted bold) have been identified in the table below.

A complete list of *The Guardian's* Top UK Universities for English is available at: https://www.theguardian.com/education/ng-interactive/2022/sep/24/best-uk-universities-for-english-league-table.

All information accurate as of July 2024.

Rank	University	Class (Y/N)	BA English Literature Undergraduate Modules (Links)
1	St. Andrews	No	https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/subjects/english/english-ba/
2	Oxford	No	https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/courses/course-listing/english-language-and-literature
3	Durham	No	https://www.durham.ac.uk/study/courses/q300/
4	Cambridge	No	https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/courses/english
5	Warwick	No	https://warwick.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/courses/englishlit/
6	UCL	No	https://www.ucl.ac.uk/prospective-students/undergraduate/degrees/english-ba
7	Lancaster	No	https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/courses/english-literature-ba-hons-q300/
8	Loughborough	No	https://www.lboro.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/courses/english/
9	Surrey	No	https://www.surrey.ac.uk/undergraduate/english-literature
10	Edge Hill	No	https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/course/english/
11	Exeter	No	https://www.exeter.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/courses/english/english/
12	**Liverpool John Moores**	**Yes**	**https://www.ljmu.ac.uk/study/courses/undergraduates/2024/36045-english-literature-ba-hons** **Module: Working-Class Writing**
13	Hertfordshire	No	https://www.herts.ac.uk/courses/undergraduate/ba-hons-english-literature2
14	Glasgow	No	https://www.gla.ac.uk/undergraduate/degrees/englishliterature/#coursedetails
15	Aberdeen	No	https://www.abdn.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/degree-programmes/577/Q300/english/
16	Hull	No	https://www.hull.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/english-ba-hons
17	Strathclyde	No	https://www.strath.ac.uk/courses/undergraduate/english/
18	York	No	https://www.york.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/courses/ba-english/
19	Gloucestershire	No	https://www.glos.ac.uk/courses/course/elt-ba-english-literature/
20	Swansea	No	https://www.swansea.ac.uk/undergraduate/courses/culture-communication/english-literature-creative-writing/ba-english-literature/
21	Birmingham	No	https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/undergraduate/courses/english/english

22	Sheffield	No	https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/undergraduate/courses/2025/english-literature-ba
23	Edinburgh Napier	No	https://www.napier.ac.uk/courses/ba-hons-english-undergraduate-fulltime
24	**Edinburgh**	**Yes**	**https://www.ed.ac.uk/literatures-languages-cultures/english-literature/undergraduate** **Module: Working-Class Representations**
25	Keele	No	https://www.keele.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/undergraduatecourses/englishliterature/

“A small step forward can be as important as a big one” – Parliamentary debate about the first abortion law in Sweden in 1938

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Abstract

“A small step forward can be as important as a big one”. So says the social democrat Agda Östlund in the Second Chamber of the Swedish Parliament on Wednesday May 18, 1938, when she justifies her support for a new abortion law.[1] The law gives the right to abortion for women with faltering health and many children, but not for those who suffer financial hardship or social disgrace after becoming pregnant out of wedlock. The debate, and the bill, is characterized by a spirit of cooperation and willingness to compromise. An exception is the conflict between the female members. Voting takes place by standing up and only a few votes against the bill. Previous research has not considered class as central to this debate. However, as we shall see, the debate is about the working-class woman.

Keywords

Agda Östlund, abortion law in Sweden, Swedish politics 1930s, working-class women, rhetorical situation

This article takes a rhetorical perspective on the abortion debate in the Second Chamber in May 1938. Specifically, I contextualize the parliamentary debate and conduct a textual analysis how the statements in the debate, relate to a rhetorical situation. I analyze the utterances in accordance with the theoretical perspective established by rhetoric scholar Lloyd F. Bitzer, the key concepts are rhetorical situation, problem, restrictions and audience (Bitzer, 1968). The aim is to clarify which rhetorical strategies will be used in the debate, with particular focus on Agda Östlund.

The Social Democratic Women’s Association had been pushing in the fight to change the abortion legislation for years. A couple of years prior to the debate, 1,500 organizations with a total of a quarter of a million members united around a call demanding the right to abortion for those who suffer from financial need and social disgrace. The Social Democratic Minister of Justice at the time, Karl Schlyter, who was of the same opinion, took the initiative for an investigation (Lennerhed, 2002, pp. 93).

The current law primarily affected women from the working class. Despite the ban, well-to-do women could obtain relatively safe abortions with the help of money and contacts. They could also choose to travel away to hide the pregnancy, give birth and give it away. Working-class women, on the other hand, were forced to turn to the uneducated or try on their own. Thousands of women became sterile and around fifty died due to infections and other complications from improperly performed abortion procedures. Even abortion procedures under medical

[1] Andra kammaren 1938:35, Ang. förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, p. 27.

supervision had certain risks, as sulfa and penicillin had not yet come into general use (Hatje, 1974, p. 119).

During this mobilization for a change in the law opinion was turning. The discourse, or problem formulation around the abortion issue, was changing. Namely, the problem surrounding the population issue was getting a bigger place in the formulation of the problem. It had to do with reformism. The Social Democrats could move forward by using this discourse and creating cooperation and agreements with the conservatives.

At the beginning of the 20th century, abortion was illegal throughout Europe. In 1920, Russia, which two years would change its name to the Soviet Union, became the first country to legalize abortion. Legalization was intended to be temporary, designed to recognize women's equal status and protect their health. It was believed that as social conditions improved and the state assumed the burden of child rearing, abortions would become less necessary, and the problem of unwanted pregnancies would cease to exist. For population policy reasons, restrictions were reintroduced for women seeking abortions in 1936.

In 1926, during the Weimar Republic, laws were introduced that eased the penalties for abortion. After Hitler came to power, the existing legislation was applied more strictly, except for abortion on eugenic grounds. In 1936, the number of prosecutions doubled from previous years and harsher sentences were imposed. After the start of World War II in 1939, abortion was banned in Germany and death penalty was introduced in 1943.

Even in France, the abortion law became more restrictive just before the Second World War. Doctors involved in abortions were automatically suspended from medical practice for at least five years. Within months of the Pétain government signing an armistice with Hitler, the Pétain government made abortion laws even stricter.

Abortion on medical and humanitarian grounds became legal in Poland in 1932. The following year, in 1933, Latvia introduced abortion rights on medical, humanitarian and social grounds. In the Nordic countries, Sweden and Iceland introduced the right to abortion on medical-social grounds and Denmark on medical grounds during the second half of the thirties (David, 1992, pp. 3). In Norway, however, the discussion never led to any law. Some believe that the women in the Social Democratic Party were let down by their male party colleagues. Others believe that the Minister of Justice Trygve Lie rejected the bill, which resembled in Sweden and Iceland, because he feared it would lead to a stricter practice. Despite the ban, the possibilities of obtaining an abortion legally were still greater in Norway than in the rest of the Nordic countries (Elvbakken, 2021, pp. 121). In Sweden, many continued to have illegal abortions even after the new law (Lennerhed, 2008, p. 39).

In the United States, where the influence of the Catholic Church was strong, abortion and contraception were considered one and the same issue. The same arguments used against abortion – for example, the value of human life – were used against contraception. Even in Sweden, the contraceptive issue and the abortion issue were linked together (Williams, 2016, pp. 13). In fact, the Parliament decides on the legalization of abortion and the right to inform about contraceptives on the same day.

In 1933 the Social Democrats and the Agrarian Party reached a settlement on unemployment and agricultural issues. The background of the settlement was the agricultural crisis and mass unemployment affecting Sweden at the time. Up to 200,000 people were out of work. The

Social Democrats got their demand for funding to fight unemployment through, while the Agrarian Party got a higher price for butter and expanded regulation of agriculture. Inspiration for the cross-block cooperation was drawn from the neighboring country of Denmark, where the social democratic Prime Minister Thorvald Stauning formed a government with the liberals. The crisis was not only economic and social but also political. In Germany, Adolf Hitler and the Nazis had come to power in the wake of the crisis.

A few years later, the Social Democrats and the Agrarian Party formalized their cooperation in a proper coalition. The Social Democrats' interest in the Agrarian Party also had long-term and strategic reasons. Namely, the party wanted to broaden its voter base and the hard-working small farmers were considered to offer such an opportunity. At the time, farmers and industrial workers were occupational groups of equal size, and the combination "farmers and workers" had become a political term (Ohlsson, 2014, pp. 255). The Agrarian Party, for its part, preferred cooperation with the rising Social Democrats over a bourgeois collaboration, which included the Liberal Party, a party they perceived as unreliable in trade and agricultural matters, according to political scientist Leif Lewin (2017, p. 201).

When Alva and Gunnar Myrdal, two researchers who have been called the architects of the People's Home [Folkhemmet], published the book *Crisis in the Population Question* [Kris i befolkningsfrågan] in November 1934, a population policy debate broke out in Sweden. The book had a huge impact (Hirdman et al., 2012, p. 213). As the right has long stressed, Sweden had a depopulation crisis, and the Myrdals took over the argument and reformulated the population issue to be about left-wing politics. Birth rates fell because children cost money, they argued. Humans are rational and choose not to have children because of economic insecurity, lack of housing, poor conditions for women in the labor market and other social circumstances. The Myrdals' solution involved a solidarity-oriented social policy with child benefits, housing subsidies for families with children, free health care for all children, free school meals and free kindergartens and afternoon care. Their solution aimed to enable to combine motherhood with gainful employment, at least until the children reached the school age.

Minister of Social Affairs Gustav Möller took advantage of the inflamed population debate to get the right-wing parties on board with carrying out social policy reforms. For Möller, who did not seem to be convinced of the threat of depopulation per se, population policy arguments become primarily a tactic to get the right-wing parties on board with the reforms that were important to him:

> Jag får säga att jag inte ett ögonblick tvekar att skrämma hur många bondeförbundare och folkpartister som helst med hotet om att vårt folk eljest kommer att dö ut, ifall jag med det hotet kan förmå dem att rösta för sociala förslag som jag här framlägger. Det är min enkla syn på befolkningsfrågan, och den räcker för mig (Hirdman et al., 2012, p. 219).
>
> I must say that I do not hesitate for a moment to frighten any number of members of the Agrarian Party and Liberals with the threat that our people will otherwise die out, if by that threat I can induce them to vote for the social proposals that I put forward. That's my simple view of the population issue, and it's enough for me.

As early as May 1935, Möller appointed a population commission, a large parliamentary inquiry commission that consisted of a group of experts and politicians from different parties

who were given the task of proposing measures to increase marriage formation and childbearing (Hatje, 1974, p. 27).

Historian Yvonne Hirdman tests the idea that Gunnar and Alva Myrdal exploited women and their difficult situation for their ideas about the transformation of society. An example is their argumentation on the abortion issue (Hirdman, 1992, p. 127). Abortion for purely economic reasons is socially and individually an emergency measure, not a satisfactory social policy solution. The very fact that women are forced to have an abortion for economic reasons constitutes "an indictment of our society" and proof of the need for redistributive politics, they reasoned. This argumentation could thus be seen as a tactical use of the female situation to push for social reforms. Nevertheless, the Myrdals' conclusion on the abortion issue was that abortion must be allowed for economic reasons because the interventions would then be performed by experts (Myrdal, 1935, p. 62).

The Myrdals' tactics failed, reasoned Hirdman. While they proposed reforms that would free women and make it easier for them to combine motherhood with paid work, the population commission's proposal aimed at giving women the opportunity to realize their nature by becoming mothers under the best conditions: "The population policy became very much a support for the homes with the wife well preserved inside". According to Hirdman, the Myrdals failed with their tactics because they underestimated their opponent.

Among others, the right-wing Magnusson of Skövde was on the population commission. The population commission had two main objectives: to increase the birth rate and to abolish poverty and need through social policy. A conflict arose between these two objectives when the commission had to take a position on the abortion issue (Hatje, 1974, p. 133). Even the commission seems to be using women's situation to push for social reforms: it used the Myrdal's argument tactic albeit with a different choice of words. For the commission, the need for abortion for economic and social reasons does not constitute "an indictment of our society" but is instead a "declaration of incompetence" by society.[2]

The population commission proposed a series of reforms to make it easier for women to give birth. These include, for example, increased maternity allowance, improved maternity care and help with housing loans.[3] Regarding social disgrace, meaning unmarried women who fell pregnant, which drove many women to have an abortion, the commission proposed to educate and put pressure on employers to not fire unwed mothers.[4] However, the commission drew a different conclusion than the Myrdals: Since the proposed measures had to be implementable immediately, an abortion law that allows abortion for economic and social reasons was unnecessary. According to the commission, the only group that should have the right to abortion for social reasons was the mothers with faltering health and many children. This group

[2] Statens offentliga utredningar 1937:6, Yttrande i abortfrågan. Avgivet av Befolkningskommissionen, Stockholm 1937, p. 20.
[3] Statens offentliga utredningar 1937:6, Yttrande i abortfrågan. Avgivet av Befolkningskommissionen, Stockholm 1937, pp. 23.
[4] Statens offentliga utredningar 1937:6, Yttrande i abortfrågan. Avgivet av Befolkningskommissionen, Stockholm 1937, pp. 26. "In particular, with regard to women's risk of being fired in certain occupations, if they marry or become pregnant, the commission assumes that through strong pressure from enlightened public opinion or, if this is not sufficient, through legislation, the employer in question here is forced to act in a socially more insightful and responsible way", it says on p. 28.

was part of what the commission called the medical-social category. For both financial and medical reasons, these women were considered incapable of carrying another pregnancy.[5]

Thus, the Myrdals' tactic to use the women's vulnerable position to push through a social transformation failed in the reforms subsequently proposed by the population commission were not aimed at liberating the women and giving them the opportunity to combine family life and gainful work; rather, they were aimed at making women realizing their nature as mothers under the best conditions.

In the spring of 1938, the red-green coalition presented a bill on a new abortion law. Responsible for the bill was K.G. Westman, the minister of justice and a member of the Agricultural Party. The bill followed the population commission's proposal and did not grant the right to abortion for social and economic reasons, only for humanitarian, medical and eugenic reasons. In line with the commission's proposal, the medical category in the bill gives room for "mixed medical-social indication".[6]

The law committee, which carried out a revision of the bill, considered that the demarcation for medical-social indication was well balanced. At the same time, it emphasized the importance of continuing the reform work so that women in the future do not have to have an abortion due to financial need and social disgrace.[7] However, a group of right-wing parties contended in a motion that the definition of medical-social indication is unclear and too "elastic" and advocated that it be narrowed down to only apply to medical reasons.[8] The Communists, for their part, highlighted in their motion the social and economic vulnerability of women and advocated the right to abortion for social and economic reasons.[9]

A rhetorical situation is a language situation in which a speaker can influence the beliefs and actions of participants. According to rhetorical researcher Lloyd F. Bitzer (1968), for a situation to be considered rhetorical, it must contain a problem or some other factor that motivates an utterance and an audience that can influence the problem. In addition, the rhetorical situation

[5] Statens offentliga utredningar 1937:6, Yttrande i abortfrågan. Avgivet av Befolkningskommissionen, Stockholm 1937, p. 20. "The Population Commission has already emphasized its view that the committee's proposal on the permissibility of abortion on certain social indications cannot be rejected except under the condition that at the same time reforms are carried out, strong enough to abolish the underlying social ills. In the long run, of course, one cannot allow the abortions to be carried out quite innocently to an enormous extent and at the same time, according to the letter of the law, keep them indiscriminately criminalized. To maintain a criminal law prohibition, which only prevents the experts in abortion operations, namely the doctors, from performing them, to allow a section to remain in the criminal law, which was only used to exceptionally set an example, it is a condition, which is not a right - and cultural state worthy. The essential question therefore becomes, in the opinion of the commission, whether the positive reforms concerned by the committee cannot be implemented to the extent and with the speed that pregnancy for women no longer had to entail a risk of distress or misfortune. If this were possible, a new basis in legal consciousness would of course have been created for the enforcement of the law. Before considering this crucial issue, the Commission would like to state as its opinion that a legally accepted permissibility of abortion on social indications would mean a declaration of incompetence on the part of society explicitly written into our legislation itself has factual validity, although fairness requires that it also be stated ; the current state of affairs is, as the commission has developed, unsustainable, as it means danger both to the spiritual and physical health of the people as well as to the sanctity of the legal order. But the Commission believes that, before this condition has been thoroughly tested, this conclusion should not be drawn".

[6] Kungl. Maj:ts proposition nr 136. Förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, p. 35.

[7] Lagutskottet 1938 nr 42, p. 17.

[8] Motioner i andra kammaren 1938, nr 378, p. 3.

[9] Motioner i andra kammaren 1938, nr 381, p. 3."It is cruelty to lower-class women to deny them the right to terminate a pregnancy due to social reasons," the motion states.

includes all the restrictions that the speakers must consider if they are to be able to convince the audience to take on the problem in the way they wish.

Thus, rhetorical acts are always anchored in a historical context and constitute a response to a specific situation in this context: "Rhetorical works belong to the class of things which obtain their character from the circumstances of the historical context in which they occur. […] Similarly, a work is rhetorical because it is a response to a situation of a certain kind." (Bitzer, 1968, p. 3).

The problem is an imperfection that has an urgent character: it is a defect, an obstacle, something that is in a way that it should not be. A problem that cannot be influenced with rhetoric is not a rhetorical problem, according to Bitzer (p. 6). On the other hand, critics have pointed out that the very identification and description of the problem is part of the rhetorical act. They believe, with good reason, that Bitzer, in his definition of the problem and the rhetorical situation, does not pay enough attention to the fact that the actor sets the agenda by selecting facts and events, interpreting them, and giving them a specific meaning by portraying them linguistically and symbolically. In other words, rhetoric is about linguistically and symbolically creating attention for a specific situation and giving it a specific meaning. According to rhetoric researcher Richard E. Vatz, "It is only when the meaning is seen as the result of a creative act and not a discovery, that rhetoric will be perceived as the supreme discipline it deserves to be" (1973, p. 161).

Political scientist Kari Palonen argues that the difference of opinion, the pro et contra, or for and against debate, defines parliament as an institution (2019, p. 1). In the case of the abortion law debate in 1938 the battle concerns the law committee's proposal about the medical-social indication which the Communists wanted to expand to a social indication and which a group of right-wing parties instead wanted to replace with a strictly medical indication.

The framework for the discussion of abortion rights changed when it became part of the population issue. This affected not only the abortion issue but also the Social Democrats' reform project. There was a consensus in the Swedish Parliament that the population issue was important. This was an issue all parties had to deal with. Consequently, the abortion debate culminated in a compromise within the framework of the population issue. Several speakers emphasized the importance of cooperation and compromise to find a solution.

Right-winger Magnusson of Skövde describes how, during his work in the population commission, he reconsidered his stance and stood behind abortion rights for women with faltered health and many children.[10] Liberal Party member Nilson of Eskilstuna speaks of a "good middle way" and party colleague Thorwald Bergquist of a "happy middle way" and a "cautious" and "well-balanced" bill. K.G. Westman, the minister of justice and a member of the Agricultural Party K.G. Westman calls the bill a "conscientiously considered attempt" to find a solution to difficult legislative problems and points out that the law should be seen as a step on the way to make it easier for women's motherhood.[11]

An exception is the communist Hagberg of Luleå, who believes that the abortion issue was "sacrificed on the altar of cooperation" and that the Social Democratic members who are part of the coalition government must have committed violence against their own conscience.[12]

[10] Andra kammaren 1938:35, Ang. förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, p. 21.
[11] Andra kammaren 1938:35, Ang. förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, p. 25; p. 19; p. 20; p. 28.
[12] Andra kammaren 1938:35, Ang. förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, p. 35.

Another exception is the right-wing Olsson of Staxäng, who maintains that it is not possible to compromise on an issue concerning "Christianity's faith in God and reverence for the majesty of the Creator."[13]

Furthermore, there seems to be a consensus regarding eugenics. Although the bill broadens the definition of abortion for eugenic reasons, it is not subject to debate. One of the few who raises the subject is the liberal Mosesson of Lidingö who, after standing behind the law committee's proposal, emphasizes his wish for abortion would to take place if the parents have a genetic predisposition to mental illness, mental retardation or physical illness.[14] Historian Annika Berg points out that eugenics was adopted by representatives of different political parties at the time and adapted to different ideologies (2009, p. 165). According to the historian of ideas Gunnar Broberg and the historian Mattias Tydén, during the 1930s, a special "welfare state eugenics" developed in Sweden where systematic sterilizations can be seen to limit the costs of various types of social care. The followers of this eugenics distanced themselves from Nazism and preferred to speak of hereditary hygiene rather than racially charged racial hygiene (1996, pp. 95).

There also seems to be a consensus that the fetus should be considered a human life. The Social Democrat Vilhelm Lundstedt, who chose to support the Communists' motion, is the only one who has a dissenting opinion. He advocates free abortion until the fetus is 20 weeks old: the fetus should be considered a woman's body part. If a woman eats so that she gets gastritis, if she drinks alcohol and destroys her organs, or if she mutilates or kills herself, she is not punished by criminal law. On the other hand, if she has an abortion to save herself and a future human being from an unhappy life, she is punished, this does not add up, argues Lundstedt.[15]

Men, and their role when it comes to unwanted pregnancies, were conspicuously absent in the debate. When they do it is as officials. Several members of Parliament emphasize the importance of doctors when it comes to making the abortion law work. For instance, the liberal Sandberg of Luleå remark that if the law is applied by responsible doctors, it would provide a reasonably satisfactory guarantee against abuse and against moral degradation.[16]

This debate on abortion law has previously been discussed by historian Elisabeth Elgan. However, her discussion lacks a class perspective, which is necessary when looking at this debate (Elgan, 1994, pp. 176). In fact, class is a central issue. It is the working-class woman that the legislation strikes against. Within the capitalist system, the working-class sells its labor and working-class women are correspondingly reduced to reproduction and bodily labor. Class affiliation is determined by the individual's relationship to the means of production. The working-class woman has a special position, either she is a housewife or works in a factory with a lower wage than the men and is then even more exploited. During the 1930s, working-class women were forced to either try to have an abortion on their own or get help from quacks and thereby risk their life and health, states Vilhelm Lundstedt.[17] No one talks about the middle-class women as the problem the debate is about. What the members disagree about, what the problem is about, concerned how the working-class woman should function in modern society: Which limitations of the working-class woman's right to decide should be maintained within

[13] Andra kammaren 1938:35, Ang. förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, p. 13.
[14] Andra kammaren 1938:35, Ang. förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, p. 30.
[15] Andra kammaren 1938:35, Ang. förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, p. 1; p. 11.
[16] Andra kammaren 1938:35, Ang. förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, p. 29.
[17] Andra kammaren 1938:35, Ang. förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, p. 10.

the framework of an acute population crisis? What new freedoms are possible to give the working-class woman within the framework of an acute population crisis?

The image of the good womanhood as synonymous with reproduction is prominent in the debate. For example, K.G. Westman claim that a good mother makes sacrifices and takes responsibility for the survival of society. It is necessary to support the maternal instinct for the survival of society. However, giving birth is always associated with sacrifice and personal risk. There are times, Westman admits, when society's interests in more citizens conflicts with the woman's individual interest. Nonetheless, he adds, providing more rights than suggested in the commission's report means theoretically advocating genocide.[18] Magnusson of Skövde is in agreement that a good woman takes social responsibility in the population issue: When society tries to improve the conditions of mothers and families in every possible way, society also has the right to demand that they take on the social responsibility of giving birth to children. Otherwise, the social assistance is useless.[19]

As a guarantee that an extended abortion right is not abused, Vilhelm Lundstedt highlights the women's maternal instinct. According to Lundstedt, a good woman longs for children and aborts only in case of emergency: thus, the mother's instinct ensures that the decision to terminate the pregnancy was preceded by the deepest despair, he believes.[20]

Against the image of the good woman and the good mother stands the image of the bad woman and the bad mother. The bad mother gives birth to children out of wedlock. However, Magnusson of Skövde argues that at the same time as we must strive to eliminate the social dishonor in connection with motherhood, we must realize that not every motherhood is entirely free from social dishonor in connection with motherhood. But above all, it is motherhood within the family that must primarily be promoted.[21] The bad woman shows no interest in the home and family and has deficient knowledge in terms of care and nursing. Even the lower classes place ever higher demands on comfort in their new modern homes and consider themselves to have no place for children. Therefore, it is dangerous to talk about social reasons when it comes to abortion, maintains Nilson of Eskilstuna.

> Jag hörde för inte länge sedan en kvinna någonstädes i vårt land säga på tal om hennes för några år sedan gifta dotter: 'Hur skulle det se ut med barn i det hemmet, sådana möbler som de har!' När man har den inställningen, då är det fara å färde.[22]
>
> Not long ago I heard a woman somewhere in our country say about her daughter who was married a few years ago: 'How would it look with children in that home, such furniture as they have!' When you have that attitude, then something dangerous is about to happen.

The bad woman commits violence against her own nature and maternal instinct by having an abortion out of convenience. She imagines the responsibility for the expected child is so great that she wants to free herself from it, declared Magnusson of Skövde: "One convinces oneself

[18] Andra kammaren 1938:35, Ang. förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, p. 27.
[19] Andra kammaren 1938:35, Ang. förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, p. 23.
[20] Andra kammaren 1938:35, Ang. förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, p. 12.
[21] Andra kammaren 1938:35, Ang. förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, p. 25.
[22] Andra kammaren 1938:35, Ang. förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, pp. 25.

that they can face poverty and misery of all kinds, that it is therefore better for their own sake and for the sake of the expected child to avoid the burden of childbearing."[23]

The bad woman also exploits and manipulates the system, deceives the doctors and performs an abortion for reasons of convenience, claimed Olsson of Staxäng. He refers to statistics which he believes show that a large percentage of women used their tuberculosis diagnosis as a pretext to terminate the pregnancy. Furthermore, he refers to a doctor who states that medical reasons can be abused. Accordingly, he argues, "This shows how necessary it is that even purely medical indications are surrounded by clear and sharply demarcated regulations".[24]

In the debate between the female members, which could be described as the debate within the debate, the overall problem remains, but is developed with the question of whether reformism as a political strategy can be seen as valid in a situation where women are suffering and the question of how they can represent the interests of working-class women. The female speakers in the debate were Agda Östlund, Ruth Gustafson and Solveig-Rönn-Christiansson. Agda Östlund and Ruth Gustafson have worked side by side in the Social Democratic women's movement since they first met in the Social Democratic women's club in Stockholm at the beginning of the century. While Östlund became one of the first five female parliamentarians, Gustafson became a member of Stockholm's city council. Only in 1932 was Gustafson elected to the Parliament. Solveig Rönn-Christiansson belongs to another party, the Communists, and a younger generation. Rönn-Christiansson has been a member of Parliament for two years, since 1936.

Here a somewhat different picture of the men emerges. The men involved in pregnancies are described by Rönn-Christiansson and Gustafson as irresponsible. In many cases, women are forced to have an abortion because the men shirk their responsibility, argues Gustafson.[25] Because these men waste money that should have been spent on providing for mothers-to-be, the maternity aid committee is forced to pay out contributions in kind, explains Rönn-Christiansson.[26] Rönn-Christiansson describes the men in the Labor government who presented the bill on the abortion issue as hard-hearted.[27]

For Rönn-Christiansson, the good woman is synonymous with motherhood and reproduction. However, she describes motherhood with concrete and starkly realistic images. She talks about mothers who take care of large groups of children in poor conditions. According to Rönn-Christiansson, half a million are provided for through the poor relief system, just as many live in substandard housing. A third of the children are malnourished, and 4,000 die annually of malnutrition before the age of one.[28] Parallel to this concrete and starkly realistic image of motherhood, Rönn-Christiansson also conveys the image of motherhood as a utopia and as an image of a societal ideal, following the Soviet communist model.[29]

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[23] Andra kammaren 1938:35, Ang. förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, p. 23.
[24] Andra kammaren 1938:35, Ang. förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, p. 14.
[25] Andra kammaren 1938:35, Ang. förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, p. 32.
[26] Andra kammaren 1938:35, Ang. förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, p. 16.
[27] Andra kammaren 1938:35, Ang. förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, p. 15.
[28] Andra kammaren 1938:35, Ang. förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, p. 16.
[29] Andra kammaren 1938:35, Ang. förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, p. 24. During the difficult years, abortion was free in the Soviet Union. It meant a relief and a way out for the women. In addition to this, the country had a broad information campaign on sexual issues. Now the law has changed, there is no longer free abortion. The reason is that conditions in the Soviet Union have changed. Now the women of the Soviet Union can become mothers with joy. Here in Sweden, we have not yet achieved these conditions. Therefore, an expanded right to abortion is needed, Rönn-Christiansson believes.

Agda Östlund is the only speaker who gives an image of the woman that goes beyond reproduction. An image of the woman as an independent individual who has the right to decide emerges when Östlund reserves herself against a section in the bill that states that underage women who have often been self-sufficient for many years should not be allowed to express themselves in decisions about abortion.[30]

Rönn-Christiansson regards cross-class collaboration as part of the problem. Hopes for a solution to an acute social problem have been dashed and perhaps the disappointment feels stronger because the bill comes from a Labor government, she says.[31] On the other hand, Gustafson believes the spirit of cooperation and willingness to compromise is a prerequisite for moving forward. Although she is not completely satisfied, she sees it as a success that women with faltering health and many children are given the right to abortion under the bill.[32] Even Östlund is on the same page that the bill is a step in the right direction. If it proves necessary, the right to abortion can be further expanded in the future, she states.[33]

When Östlund discuss the abortion issue, she also talks about her entire political career. On several occasions she had tried to get the abortion issue at the agenda. In 1921, after a high-profile abortion case, the Social Democratic Women's Association wrote a letter to the Minister of Justice demanding a change in the law (Flood, 1939, p. 147). In 1928, a delegation from Sweden attended the Socialist Women's International in Brussels and made a statement in favor of abortion rights (Vessman, 1928, pp. 6). The year after, in 1929, as a member of Parliament, Östlund had submitted a motion for a comprehensive change to the abortion law. The proposal was rejected in all instances (Elgan 1994, chapter six).

At the same time as she stands up for how she believes politics should be conducted, and what she has learned as a member of the Parliament for almost two decades, she also expresses disappointment that progress has not gone at the pace she had hoped:

> Det är inte i dag, som denna fråga för första gången är föremål för behandling. Under de år, jag deltagit i riksdagens arbete, har den varit före många gånger om, men vi ha aldrig slutgiltigt kunnat lösa densamma. Jag har således för min del kunnat bli besviken många gånger. […]
> Även om det föreliggande förslaget icke går så långt som jag skulle önska, behöver det inte hindra, att man även kan bestämma sig för att ta det som är möjligt och vara nöjd därmed utan att därför i varje enskild punkt behöva deklarera sin ståndpunkt. […]
> Det föreliggande förslaget är av djupt allvarlig natur och ingriper i hela vårt liv och hela vår framtid. Jag tycker det vore väl värt att bifalla, och att ett mindre steg framåt kan vara av lika stor betydelse som ett stort.[34]
>
> It is not today that this issue is being considered for the first time. In the years that I have participated in the work of the Parliament, it has come up many times, but we have never been able to finally resolve it. For my part, I have thus been able to be disappointed many times. […]

[30] Andra kammaren 1938:35, Ang. förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, p. 26.
[31] Andra kammaren 1938:35, Ang. förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, p. 15.
[32] Andra kammaren 1938:35, Ang. förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, p. 32.
[33] Andra kammaren 1938:35, Ang. förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, p. 26.
[34] Andra kammaren 1938:35, Ang. förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, pp. 26.

> Even if the present proposal does not go so far as I would like, it does not have to prevent that one can also decide to take what is possible and be satisfied with it without therefore having to declare one's position in every single point. […]
> The present proposal is of a deeply serious nature and interferes with our whole life and our whole future. I think it would be well worth approving, and that a small step forward can be just as important as a big one.

As a symbol of reformism, Östlund herself becomes the subject of debate. Rönn-Christiansson believes that Östlund as a member of the law committee has failed her mission: As a representative of working-class women, she should have had something more to say on the abortion issue.[35] Gustafson opposes Rönn-Christiansson making herself the working-class women's representative and defending party colleague Östlund. For many years, and long before Rönn-Christiansson became active, Östlund has fought for the interests of working-class women.[36] It is unnecessary for Gustafson to defend Östlund, Rönn-Christiansson answer:

> (T)y fru Östlund är säkerligen en av de vackraste kvinnogestalterna i svensk arbetarrörelse. Men det är just detta, att det goda initiativet och det man tidigare planerat i denna sak fått en egendomlig utlösning i fru Östlunds uttalande, som jag tagit mig friheten att idag kritisera.[37]
>
> Mrs. Östlund is certainly one of the most beautiful female figures in the Swedish labor movement. But it is precisely this, that the good initiative and what was previously planned in this matter had a peculiar outcome in Mrs. Östlund's statement, that I took the liberty of criticizing today.

Conclusion

In the debate between the women, the social democrat Agda Östlund, who is at the end of her career, is thus in the center. She receives criticism but is also elevated to a monument and becomes a symbol of reformism. Through the abortion issue, she signs her political testament. The new law should be seen as a small step on the way, she says.

The purpose of this article has been to clarify which rhetorical strategies are used in the parliamentary debate on the 1938 abortion law in Sweden. The main point of view is the rational argument of population policy, which means that society cannot afford an overly extended abortion right. The Social Democrat Vilhelm Lundstedt's argument for free abortion up to week twenty because the fetus is then considered a part of the woman's body and the right-wing Olsson of Staxäng's argument about obedience to God are examples of ethical and ethical-religious arguments.

A rhetorical strategy among male members is to contrast the good woman who is synonymous with reproduction and who makes sacrifices and takes responsibility for the survival of society,

[35] Andra kammaren 1938:35, Ang. förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, p. 18.
[36] Andra kammaren 1938:35, Ang. förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, pp. 31.
[37] Andra kammaren 1938:35, Ang. förslag till lag om avbrytande av havandeskap, pp. 33.

against the bad woman who shows disinterest in the home and family and does violence to her own maternal instinct. Another rhetorical strategy among male members is to make invisible the men's own role when it comes to unwanted pregnancies. Another rhetorical strategy is to talk around the class issue in different ways, for example by describing women as too comfortable in modern life.

The conflict between the women could be described as a debate within the debate. While addressing the overall problem, it is further developed by questioning whether reformism as a political strategy is valid in a situation when women are suffering and how they can represent the interests of working-class women. Here the very problem around class becomes explicit. Men's role in unwanted pregnancies also emerges here. The men are described as irresponsible. Agda Östlund tries to build trust with the audience by highlighting her long experience as a politician. When she describes the necessity to compromise to move forward, she mixes factual, emotional and ethical arguments: "The present proposal is of a deeply serious nature and interferes with our whole life and our whole future", Östlund says.

When the communist Solveig Rönn-Christiansson describes the men in the Labor government as hard-hearted, there is both an ethical and an emotional dimension to the argument. Class cooperation is regarded by communists as unethical. In her description of how working-class women and their children live in poverty, she mixes factual and emotional argumentation. When she speaks of the real class position and makes herself the authentic working-class representative, she uses a strategy that is apt to inspire confidence. She accuses Agda Östlund of having failed the working-class women. The debate that follows will then be about Agda Östlund's trust capital. When Social Democrat Ruth Gustafson defends her party mate Östlund, Rönn-Christiansson replies that it is unnecessary because "Östlund is certainly one of the most beautiful female figures in the Swedish labor movement". But Rönn-Christiansson adds with a factual argument that it is precisely when it comes to the position regarding the abortion law that she has failed.

Just like for many male debaters, the good woman is synonymous with reproduction for the communist Rönn-Christiansson. The only one who gives an image of the woman that goes beyond reproduction is the social democrat Östlund. Here the image of the woman appears as an independent individual who has the right to self-determination.

Author Bio

Magnus Gustafson is a doctoral student in history and history didactics at Malmö University in Sweden and has a focus on rhetorical strategies in the Swedish Social Democratic movement. In his PhD he writes about the female pioneer Agda Östlund (1870–1942) and her rhetorical strategies in the voting struggle and as a member in parliament. Gustafson is a member of The Nordic Network for Research on Working-Class Literature which organizes researchers interested in working-class literatures from the Nordic countries.

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College Major Selection, Social Class, and the Gender Pay Gap in the United States

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Abstract

Although researchers have made plausible arguments about the contributions of several factors, occupational segregation and the "motherhood penalty" are widely considered to be two of the most important causes of the gender pay gap in the United States today. In this article we discuss some of the most important findings in the gender pay gap research in the U.S. We then summarize an exploratory study we conducted in spring 2024 into one particular stage in the process of occupational segregation: the choice of college major. We hypothesized that (a) female students would be overrepresented in lower-paying majors and (b) working-class females, while still overrepresented in these majors, would be more likely to choose higher-paying majors, given their backgrounds and the greater salience of economic security for them compared with their non-working-class female peers. Using enrollment data from a university in the Mid-Atlantic region of the U.S., our first hypothesis was supported: females were overrepresented, to a significant degree, in majors with the lowest starting salaries. Our second hypothesis was not supported: the distribution of working-class females in lower-paying majors was virtually identical to that of non-working-class females. We discuss these results as well as survey responses from a convenience sample of 38 students at that university, responses which further illuminate our quantitative findings. We plan to develop this study into a full empirical investigation in fall 2024.

Keywords

Americans, Blau, child penalty, Child Penalty Atlas, children, college major, discrimination, economic insecurity, fathers, female, first-generation students, gender, gender inequality, gender pay gap, gender pay ratio, gender roles, glass ceiling, Goldin, inequality, Klevin, low wage work, male, motherhood penalty, mothers, occupational segregation, sex, sex differences, social class, United States, university, work/family balance, working-class

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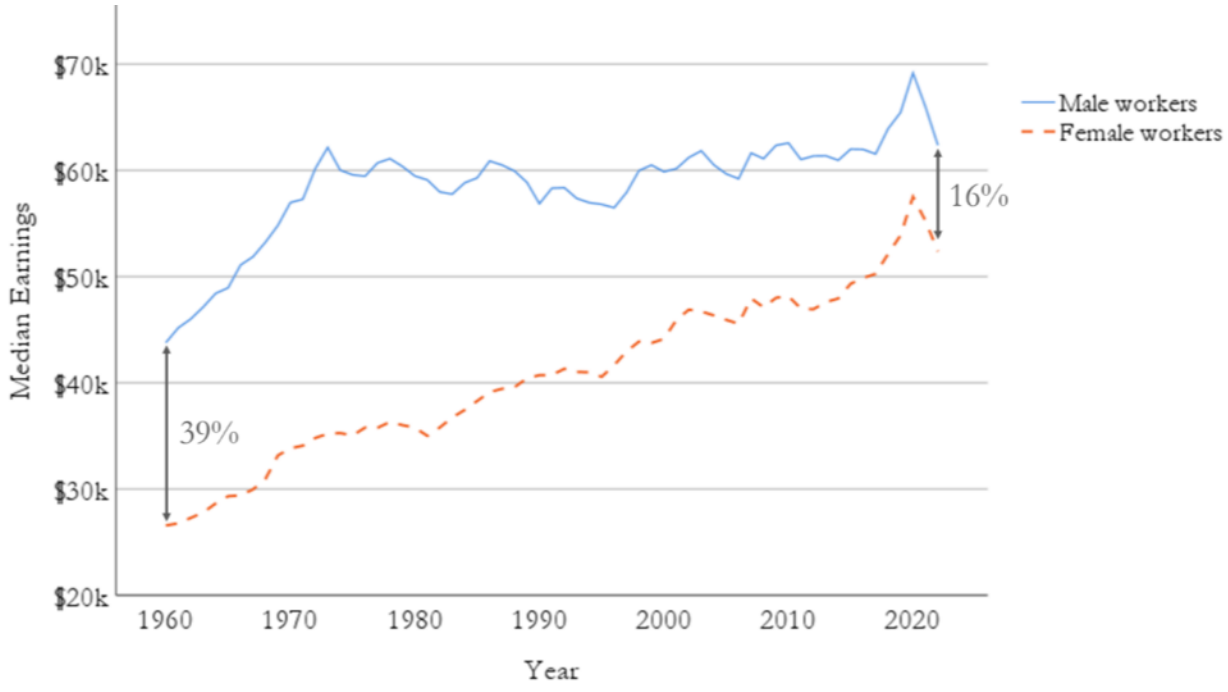
FIGURE 1. Decline in the Gender Pay Gap Over Time in the United States.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2024).

Introduction

The most recent data published by the U.S. Census Bureau (Guzman & Kollar, 2023, p. 8) show that the median earnings of American men who worked full-time, year-round was $62,350 in 2022, while it was $52,360 for their female counterparts. This translates into a gender pay ratio of 84% and gender pay gap of 16%.

In Figure 1 (above) and Table 1 (below) you can see how this gap has changed over time. In the first year that the Census Bureau provides data (1960), for instance, the gender pay ratio was 61% and the gender pay gap was 39%. These numbers have improved significantly over time as American women entered the paid labor force in much larger numbers (see Figure 2 below).

It is important to note that traditional measures of the gender pay gap reflect the ratio of female to male earnings for a specific group of people: full-time workers across all U.S. industries without regard for myriad differences between these workers. Thus, these measures "do not reflect a direct comparison of women and men doing identical work" (Bleiweis, 2020).

This may be confusing for many Americans, as the public and political discourse around this issue can often obscure[5] what is actually being measured.

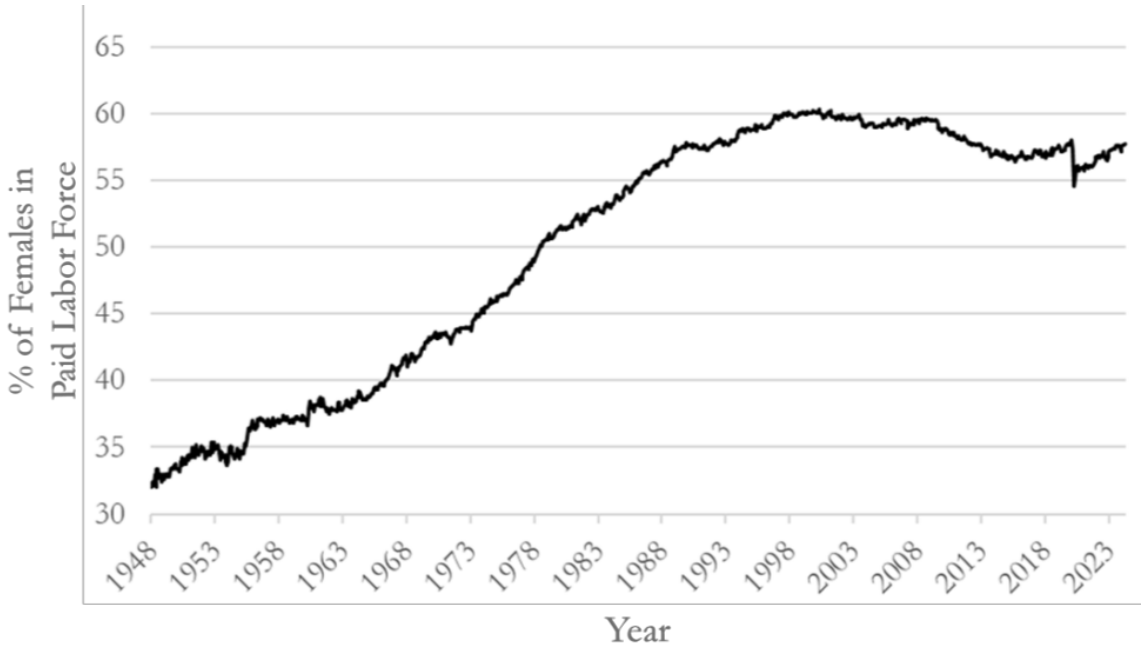
[5] As it does with so many important and complicated societal issues.

TABLE 1. Gender Pay Ratio Over Time in the United States.

Year	Median male earnings	Median female earnings	Gender pay ratio	Gender pay gap
2022	$62,350	$52,360	84%	16%
2010	$62,570	$48,140	77%	23%
2000	$59,860	$44,130	74%	26%
1990	$56,850	$40,710	72%	28%
1980	$59,460	$35,770	60%	40%
1970	$56,960	$33,820	59%	41%
1960	$43,770	$26,560	61%	39%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2024).

FIGURE 2. Female Labor Force Participation in the United States, 1948-2024.



Source: Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis (2024).

During former President Barack Obama's re-election campaign in 2012, for instance, his team made this claim in an advertisement: "The son of a single mom, proud father of two daughters, President Obama knows that women being paid 77 cents on the dollar for doing the same work as men isn't just unfair, it hurts families" (Jacobson, 2012). As PolitiFact's Louis Jacobson explained at the time:

> "The Obama campaign took a legitimate statistic and described it in a way that makes it sound much more dramatic than it actually is. The 77-cent figure is real, but it does not factor in occupations held, hours worked or length of tenure. Describing that statistic as referring to the pay for women 'doing the same work as men' earns it a rating of Mostly False" (2012).

As one example of how these groups of workers may differ, women made up slightly less than half (47%) of the *overall* labor force in one 2018 analysis—but were a strong majority (78%) of workers in *low-paying* occupations (AAUW, 2024). This can be starkly illustrated by the percentage of females in low-paying jobs like childcare (93% female), housekeeping (88%), and cashiering (73%) in this analysis, versus the proportion in high-paying work like certain jobs in engineering (11-12% female) and computer-related work (19-26%) (AAUW, 2024).

As economist Astrid Kunze notes in her review of the gender pay gap literature in developed countries, "Women are systematically working in relatively low-paid occupations and men in more highly-paid occupations; this may reflect genuine job barriers or differences in preferences by gender for different kinds of jobs" (2017, p. 24).

Explaining the Gap

Some of the most influential work that attempts to help us better understand the complexities of the gender pay gap in the U.S. and the reasons behind it comes from the field of economics, particularly scholars like Harvard University's Claudia Goldin, Princeton University's Henrik Klevin, and Cornell University's Francine Blau and Lawrence Kahn.

Their analyses and those of other leading scholars point to two factors in particular as the most important drivers of the gender pay gap in the U.S. today: sex differences in childcare responsibilities (often referred to as the "motherhood penalty" or "child penalty") as well as sex differences in occupation[6] (often referred to as "occupational segregation").

The Motherhood/Child Penalty

Economist Claudia Goldin, who won the Nobel Prize in 2023[7] for her work on the gender pay gap, argues that sex differences in childcare responsibilities are the primary driver of the gap:

> "Historically, much of the gender gap in earnings could be explained by differences in education and occupational choices. However, Goldin has shown that the bulk of this earnings difference is now between men and women in the same occupation, and that it largely arises with the birth of the first child" (Nobel, 2023).

In one notable study that Goldin and her colleagues conducted, they compared male and female MBA students who had graduated from the same elite program. Despite nearly identical earnings when they first graduated and entered the labor force, a pay gap emerged over time after the birth of children:

> "Differential changes by sex in labor market activity in the period surrounding a first birth play a key role in this process. The presence of children is associated with less accumulated job experience, more career interruptions, shorter work

[6] "So-called women's jobs, which are jobs that have historically had majority-female workforces, such as home health aides and child care workers, tend to offer lower pay and fewer benefits than so-called men's jobs, which are jobs that have had predominantly male workforces, including jobs in trades such as building and construction" (Bleiweis, 2020).
[7] More precisely she won the "2023 Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel."

> hours, and substantial earnings declines for female but not for male MBAs" (Bertrand et. al., 2010, p. 252).

As Goldin recently explained: "It is really the child, the family responsibilities, that lead to these large differences [in wages]" (LaBlanc, 2023).

Henrik Klevin and his colleagues have documented the motherhood penalty across countries (see Figure 3 below) (Klevin et. al., 2023). Their work is incredibly valuable—it not only shows how children impact female wages virtually anywhere you look around the world, but that this impact varies significantly from country to country. There is much we can learn from these differences when attempting to achieve greater pay parity. Klevin and his colleagues have even made these data available to the public online—you can check it out yourself via their Child Penalty Atlas.

A recent analysis from Payscale (2024), a compensation software and data company based in Seattle, WA, comes to similar conclusions to those of Goldin and Klevin:

> "Most interestingly, when we control gender pay gap analysis for job characteristics, we observe pay parity. Earnings of women without children keep pace with earnings of men without children. This supports research that suggests that having a child or being able to have a child is the primary or true cause of gender pay disparities. . . Research shows women's income decreases because they reduce their working hours to balance childcaring responsibilities more than men" (Payscale, 2024).

The Payscale study's authors claim to explain even more of the pay gap than many previous studies. In their 2024 report they asserted that, when they controlled for a variety of variables to ensure a comparison of similar workers (people with equivalent jobs and qualifications), the gender pay ratio all but disappeared—from 83% when uncontrolled to 99% when controlled. This would leave only 1% of the gap unexplained by measurable factors. For comparison, one of the most well-cited analyses of the gender pay gap (Blau & Kahn, 2017) left 38% unexplained.

The Payscale report does not lay out their research methods in a traditional manner, making it very difficult to discern the full list of controls that they used. Based on our reading of their report it seems that, at minimum, the following variables were likely included as controls: occupation, industry, job tenure, hours worked, experience, education, age, race, parent status, remote work status, and location (Payscale, 2024).

FIGURE 3. Motherhood/Child Penalties Around the World.

Source: CPA (2024).

According to the authors of the Payscale report, the most powerful factor in their analysis was sex differences in childcare: "The 'motherhood penalty' explains the gender pay gap" (Payscale, 2024).

Given the difficulty in assessing Payscale's methodology based on the limited information they provide online, their findings cannot be given nearly the same weight as those from leading peer-reviewed studies.

Occupational Segregation

The presence of a child is clearly impactful on women's wages in the U.S. Another crucial factor to consider is occupational segregation.

In their well-cited 2017 analysis, economists Francine Blau and Lawrence Kahn found three variables that stood out as particularly influential, explaining most of the pay gap in their study: occupational segregation, sex differences in industry, and sex differences in labor force

experience, with occupational segregation playing the largest role (Blau & Kahn, 2017, p. 799).[8] Blau explains their findings:

> "[W]e have considerable occupational segregation by gender. . . Men and women also tend to work in different industries. . . [T]ogether, occupation and industry explain about half of the gender wage gap. Among professional workers, women are more likely to be in relatively lower-paying jobs, such as elementary school teachers, whereas men would be more likely to be in higher-paying jobs, like lawyers or doctors. Women also tend to be more concentrated in lower-paying service occupations, like childcare workers. Gender differences in college major are really important and are related to the occupational differences. We've had equalization in terms of gender opportunities in education to the point that women are now exceeding men. But despite some convergence there are still sizable differences in college major and these are very closely tied to labor market outcomes. In STEM [science, technology, engineering, and mathematics] fields, for instance, women are particularly underrepresented" (Eppard & Blau, 2020, p. 32).

Andrew Chamberlain and Jyotsna Jayaraman (2017) came to a similar conclusion in their research, focusing specifically on the different types of majors that male and female college students end up choosing:

> "[T]he biggest cause of today's gender pay gap is that men and women sort into different jobs—men into higher-paying positions and women into traditionally lower-paying jobs. . . During college, men and women gravitate toward different majors. . . This puts men and women on different career tracks—with different pay—after college. . . Many college majors that lead to high-paying roles in tech and engineering are male dominated, while majors that lead to lower-paying roles in social sciences and liberal arts tend to be female-dominated, placing men in higher-paying career pathways, on average. . . Nine of the 10 highest paying majors we examined are male-dominated. . . Choice of college major can have a dramatic impact on jobs and pay later on. Our results suggest that gender imbalances among college majors are an important and often overlooked driver of the gender pay gap" (p. 2).

Why Such Inequalities?

Taken together, the weight of the evidence suggests that the two biggest reasons for unequal pay between male and female workers in the U.S. are the motherhood penalty[9] and occupational segregation. So why do these sex differences in childcare responsibilities and occupations exist? There have been a variety of reasons put forth.

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[8] "[G]ender differences in occupations and industries are quantitatively the most important measurable factors explaining the gender wage gap (in an accounting sense). . . [G]ender differences in location in the labor market, a factor long highlighted in research on the gender wage gap, remain exceedingly relevant" (Blau & Kahn, 2017, p. 854).

[9] Astrid Kunze explains that, "Traditionally, most men work full time and continuously throughout their lives. For women, the employment picture is much more varied" (2017, p. 13). And the authors of the Payscale report find that, "The most likely explanation for the widening gender pay gap by age is some women becoming mothers and leaving the workforce, incurring the aforementioned motherhood penalty" (2024).

Some of the reasons for occupational segregation may stem from differences in the characteristics of men and women themselves. On average, for instance, men and women tend to prefer different professions—this shows up quite starkly in college, where there are large differences in the types of majors that women and men tend to choose (Chamberlain & Jayaraman, 2017). These preferences could be the result of innate differences between men and women, differential societal pressures and expectations by sex, or some combination.

There are observed group differences in psychological traits between the sexes which may play a role here, such as differences in competitiveness, risk aversion, importance placed on family, agreeableness, and importance placed on work/money, among others (Blau & Kahn, 2017, p. 838). These differences may influence the types of occupations that women and men end up choosing, the promotions they seek, the number of hours they end up working, the work/family balance they desire, their perceived job performance, etc.[10]

We cannot rule out the presence of discrimination. A recent meta-analysis (Schaerer et. al., 2023) of 85 experimental employment audit studies conducted from 1976 to 2020 involving over 360,000 job applications found that, over the last decade at least, women do not seem to be discriminated against when it comes to job callbacks:

> "The present meta-analysis finds that discrimination against female applicants for jobs historically held by men has declined significantly and is no longer observable in the last decade. In contrast, bias against male applicants for female-typed jobs has remained robust and stable over the years. These results thus demonstrate both welcome declines in and the stubborn persistence of different forms of gender discrimination. Contrary to the beliefs of laypeople and academics revealed in our forecasting survey, after years of widespread gender bias in so many aspects of professional life, at least some societies have clearly moved closer to equal treatment when it comes to applying for many jobs" (Schaerer et. al., 2023).

This is of course a sign of great progress toward gender equality. But these results are for callbacks alone and do not mean that there might not be unequal treatment *after* the callback—such as in the actual decision to hire, as well as later decisions about pay, workplace treatment, promotions, firing, etc.

Take the Payscale study discussed earlier as an example. Even though the controlled gender pay gap in their analysis was only 1%, there were specific occupations where it was much more pronounced, including drivers (17%) and some jobs in religious organizations (13%). And while the overall controlled gender pay gap was 1% for the lowest job levels, it grew to 6% at the highest job levels for women of all races and 11% for Hispanic women (Payscale, 2024). So while it is plausible that discrimination is not the primary factor driving the overall gender pay gap in the U.S. today, gender norms still may be strong enough in some industries and workplaces so that they continue to contribute to gender inequality.

[10] It should be noted that all the independent variables we discuss—from occupational segregation to industry differences to psychological traits and beyond—may impact the gender pay gap directly and/or each other as well. Competitiveness may impact occupational segregation in several ways, for instance—which industries you consider pursuing/avoiding, which promotions you seek/earn, your job tenure, your work/family balance, etc.

Why do we have such differences in childcare by sex? As we have discussed, mothers are more likely to either drop out of the labor force for a period of time when they have a child, scale back their hours, and/or deprioritize their careers in some other manner much more than working fathers:

> "Parenthood leads some women to put their careers on hold, whether by choice or necessity. . . Fathers, however, are more likely to hold a job or be looking for one than men who don't have children at home. . . Among those who do have a job, fathers also work a bit more each week, on average, than men who do not have children at home" (Kochhar, 2023).

Astrid Kunze similarly notes that, unlike many fathers, when mothers have a child, "they decide whether and when to return to work, and, if they return to work, whether to work full-time or part-time" (2017, p. 13).

This has a substantial impact on the money women are able to earn as well as their career advancement. It also may impact not only how much a mother works but the types of jobs she is willing/able to take on.

As is likely the case for occupational segregation, it is plausible that some combination of both individual preferences on the part of women themselves as well as societal pressures and expectations contribute to sex differences in childcare responsibilities.

Our Exploratory Study

In the spring of 2024, we undertook an exploratory study into the gender pay gap in the U.S., hoping to learn more about the processes responsible for occupational segregation. We were particularly interested in sex differences in college major selection and whether they are moderated by social class.

Our two hypotheses were that (a) female students would be overrepresented in lower-paying majors and (b) working-class females, while still overrepresented in these majors, would be more likely to choose higher-paying majors compared with non-working-class females, given their backgrounds and the greater salience of economic security for them.

The first hypothesis follows from previous research which suggests the presence of such differential decision-making by sex.

The second hypothesis assumes that, while working-class women will be influenced in their college major choice by their sex, they will also be influenced by their social class in ways that non-working-class women are not. We posit that economic security will be a more salient concern for them when compared with non-working-class women, thus moderating the impact of sex and leading to less unequal representation in higher-paying majors.

In order to explore these hypotheses, we first secured detailed enrollment data from a regional university in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States (henceforth referred to by the pseudonym "Mid-Atlantic University" or "MAU").[11] These data allowed us not only to

[11] No citation or bibliography entry included for MAU enrollment data in order to protect anonymity. This is an ethical consideration and IRB requirement.

calculate the percentage of women and men in each major at this university, but to examine whether these percentages were different for first-generation (our proxy for working-class) female students compared with non-first-generation ones.

After completing this analysis, we then distributed a Qualtrics survey to a convenience sample of students at the university, receiving 38 responses. This survey asked a number of open-ended questions about how these students arrived at their college major decision. We then analyzed their responses for any patterns that might help further illuminate our quantitative findings.

The scatterplot in Figure 4 (below) displays the association between sex and college major selection in our analysis of enrollment data. The x-axis (horizontal axis) is the percentage of men in each major, while the y-axis (vertical axis) displays the median starting salaries in the first five years that these majors are in the labor force. As you can see, there is a strong correlation ($r = 0.78$, $p < .001$) between sex and starting salary. As you move left-to-right on the horizontal axis, the percentage of men in each major increases, corresponding with a significant increase in starting salaries on the vertical axis by the time you get to the most male-dominated majors.

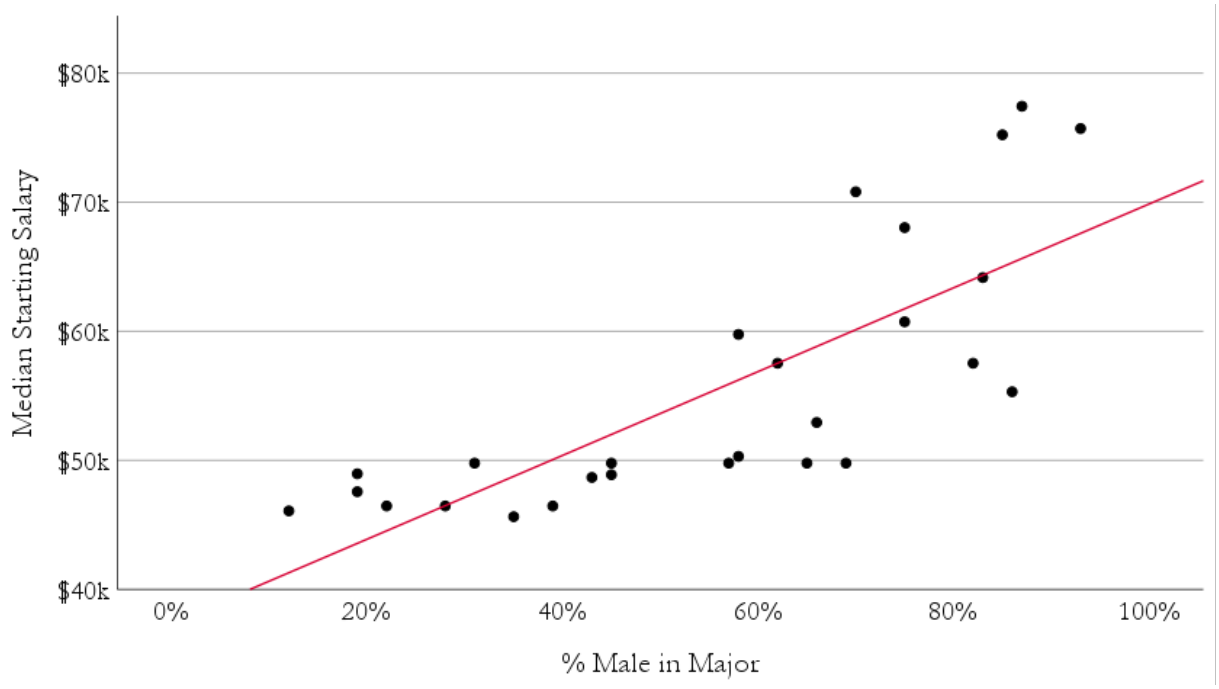
Table 2 (below) displays our analysis of the possible moderation by social class of the relationship between sex and college major selection. We calculated a cross-tabulation of the average starting salaries for the highest-paying, middle-paying, and lowest-paying college major tiers. There was more than a $20k difference between the highest-paying ($67,709) and lowest-paying ($47,242) tiers, with middle-paying majors yielding a $51,664 average starting salary.

In this same table we analyzed the percentages of first-generation and non-first-generation women who chose majors in these three tiers. We found that there was little difference between the two groups. Nearly identical percentages of both first-generation (10.6%) and non-first-generation (10.2%) women choose the highest-paying majors, while similarly high percentages of first-generation (65.7%) and non-first-generation (63.4%) women chose the lowest-paying majors.

To deepen our analysis and further illuminate these quantitative findings, we surveyed a convenience sample of undergraduate students from MAU to better understand their choice of college major, receiving 38 responses.

There were three overwhelmingly dominant themes (see Table 3 below) in the female MAU undergraduates' survey responses explaining why they chose their college majors:

FIGURE 4. Association Between College Major Sex Distribution and Starting Salary.



Note: r = 0.78, $p < .001$. Converted to 2024 U.S. dollars (using BLS 2024).
Source: Authors' calculations using Glassdoor (Chamberlain & Jayaraman, 2017) and 2024 Mid-Atlantic University data.[12]

TABLE 2. Sex Segregation by College Major Starting Salary Tier, Mid-Atlantic University.

Starting salary tier	Avg. starting salary	% of all first-generation women	% of all non-first-generation women
Highest paying majors	$67,709	10.6	10.2
Middle paying majors	$51,664	23.7	26.4
Lowest paying majors	$47,242	65.7	63.4

Source: Authors' calculations using Glassdoor (Chamberlain & Jayaraman, 2017) data (2024 adjusted) and 2024 Mid-Atlantic University data (see footnote #12 below).

[12] No citation or bibliography entry included for MAU enrollment data in order to protect anonymity. This is an ethical consideration and IRB requirement.

TABLE 3. Survey Themes and Responses.

Theme	Example survey response
Personal interest/job I like	*"I started out a chemistry major, but it was a lot of work and I was forcing myself to do it but I wasn't happy."* *"I honestly just like kids."* *"I was drawn to criminal justice because I'm pretty interested in how the law works."* *"I went with a major I know I'm good at and I know I enjoy."*
Major matches abilities	*"I honestly don't do well with numbers and math is just not interesting to me."* *"I don't like math, don't care about computers/coding, and I like helping people."* *"I would rather choose a major that I believe I can succeed in."* *"I am not good with STEM."*
Improving society/helping people	*"I want to bring a change to the world and help little kids in need."* *"As a minority, I feel that there is a lot of corruption and injustice within law enforcement, so I want to be able to create a small yet significant change for all minorities."* *"I enjoy working with people and helping people."* *"I like working with kids and being able to watch them learn and grow."*

- Having a personal interest in a particular area of study.
- Desiring to pick a major that will lead to a job that she knows she will like.
- Desiring a major that matches her abilities and that she knows she will succeed in.

Another slightly less frequent but still popular theme was the desire to improve society and/or help people (see Table 3 above).

Summary

Although researchers have made plausible arguments about the contributions of several factors, the motherhood penalty and occupational segregation are widely cited as two of the most important causes of the gender pay gap in the U.S. today.

In this article we discussed an exploratory study we conducted in spring 2024 into one particular stage in the process of occupational segregation: the choice of college major.

We hypothesized that (a) female students would be overrepresented in lower-paying majors, and (b) working-class females, while still overrepresented in these majors, would be more likely to choose higher-paying majors, given their backgrounds and the greater salience of economic security for them compared with non-working-class females.

Using enrollment data from a university in the Mid-Atlantic region of the U.S., our first hypothesis was supported: females were overrepresented, to a significant degree, in majors with the lowest starting salaries. The strong correlation between sex and college major selection aligned with previous research in this area.

Our second hypothesis was not supported: the distribution of working-class females across salary tiers was virtually identical to that of non-working-class females.

In the fall of 2024 we plan to begin expanding our study into a full empirical investigation, surveying far more students, conducting focus groups, adding questions about students' future plans regarding work/family balance, adding statistical complexity to our analysis of enrollment data, possibly including more college campuses, and more.

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Diary of a Sub On Strike: A Week on the Picket Line with the Portland Association of Teachers

Sara Appel

Greetings, fellow gig workers and allies of relative employment stability!

Below I am sharing the photo-diary I kept while striking with the Portland Association of Teachers (PAT) union from November 1-13, 2023.

For more than three weeks in November, public school teachers in Portland, Oregon held their first-ever strike, bringing classes to halt throughout the Portland Public Schools (PPS) district. In near-daily bargaining sessions, the union pressed the PPS administration for a contract that would guarantee smaller class sizes, more funding for Special Education, facilities improvements, and a Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) raise to keep pace with inflation, among other demands. By the time the strike was called, PPS had been refusing to good-faith bargain with PAT for the better part of a year.

Though I have been self-employed as an academic editor for five years now, I have also worked as a substitute teacher in the PPS system for more than two years—a job I took to supplement my editing income during the 'thin' times, of which there are many. Historically, substitute teachers working in Oregon public schools have been required to hold a state-issued teaching license, just like regular teachers. But I was hired on the Emergency Restricted Substitute Teaching License line, a program implemented in late 2021 to deal with a COVID-related substitute teacher shortage.

Substitute teachers are eligible to join the PAT union, and I am a dues-paying member. However, since subs negotiate a separate labor contract with PPS, our role during this strike was primarily one of support—though we also received the daily $120 strike stipend granted to any PAT member willing to join the picket line for three hours each morning. All the more reason to show up for my union, ready to stand strong.

I also kept this diary as a window into how a freelance or 'gig' worker like me goes on strike. You'll notice that I took a couple mornings off, for instance, and that I wasn't able to attend most of the union's afternoon rallies; I had to get home for my 'second shift' as an editor, often followed by an evening 'third shift' in my current role as Communications Coordinator for the Working-Class Studies Association. Still, I did the best I could to make time for the strike (read on to find out why I wasn't able to continue striking past November 13—my diary's dramatic conclusion).

My experience on the PAT picket line was, moreover, my first time striking as a member of a labor union. So even though I've been a longtime scholar of working-class studies, I welcomed the chance to become as much a participant in the struggle for worker power as an observer and documenter of it.

Finally, a citational note: Throughout my diary, I refer to the PAT Bargaining Brief, a daily update on the state of negotiations from union President Angela Bonilla and the rest of the Bargaining Team. Though the Brief was e-mailed to all union members each day of the strike, it is also available as a public document on the PAT website. The Brief is organized into click-through web pages, each of which contains a running, chronological list of several weeks' worth of updates. Therefore, to keep things simple, I'll identify separate daily Briefs in parentheses with the abbreviation 'BB' followed by the date (e.g., BB 11/2).

***

Day 1: Wed. 11/1

Today I got up around 7am, made coffee, threw on leggings and my waterproof jacket (this is Oregon), and headed to Roosevelt High School. Though salaried PPS teachers were instructed by the Portland Association of Teachers (PAT) union to report to and strike in front of their own schools, substitutes could strike at any school, since we work at various K-12 schools in the district and therefore don't have a 'home base.' Being a quick few minutes' drive from my north Portland apartment, Roosevelt was my clear choice.

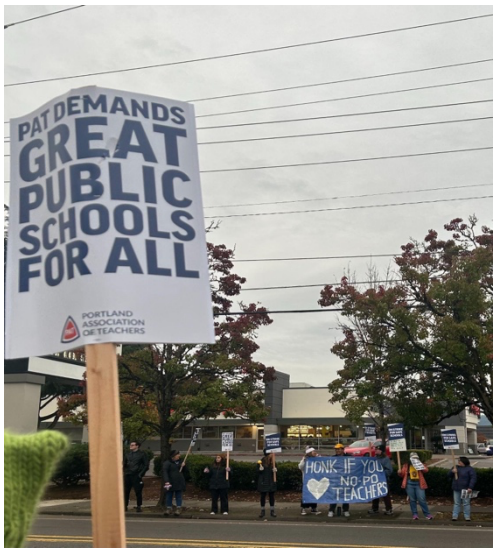
I was shy when approaching the hub of canopy tents under which donuts, mini muffins, and a QR-code sign-in station awaited us. I'd subbed at Roosevelt many times, but didn't really know any of the teachers. You don't usually meet the teachers you're subbing for, is the thing, and when you bounce around between several schools, filling in for classes as different as Media Studies and PE, you're not around enough to make friends during prep periods. I did, however, exchange smiles with several students—who, quite valiantly, hauled their sleepy adolescent selves out of bed on a day when they could have easily stayed home, just to support their teachers.

I was put further at ease when a wide-awake young woman—Abby Pasion, an Ethnic Studies teacher and one of Roosevelt's strike captains— pointed me toward a stack of cardboard signs on sticks. I held one up and gave it a twirl: "On Strike for Our Students" on one side, "PAT Demands Great Public Schools for All" on the other. "Are you ready to fight for a fair contract?" bellowed Abby through a megaphone. Taking this as our cue, we moved toward the school entrance, signs and coffee cups in hand. Abby then explained the basic flow of each day to come: 7:45-10:30am spent striking at your school, followed by a larger PAT-wide noon rally at a predetermined location. Today's rally, as it turned out, would be at Roosevelt.

Logistics settled, our growing group began circling the sidewalk in front of the four Greek-style columns holding up the schoolfront. "We're all going to get our 10,000 steps today!" someone joked, and it's a fact: striking is good for your health. Abby, though, felt we needed a cheerleader: "Hey Shawn Swanson, where you at? Come and lead us in a chant!", she phoned through the crowd, and sure enough, Shawn—an enthusiastic young English teacher in New Balance sneakers—was happy to oblige.

The first of Shawn's chants captured a sentiment shared widely among the district's more than 4500 striking teachers: "Hot, cold, rats, mold! This is getting really old!" Though I had yet to encounter any of the rodents seen scurrying through PPS schools over the years (spotted, among other places, at Koyoma-Lane Elementary and Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary), I thought of my time subbing at north Portland's Jefferson High. Taking attendance in Ceramics, I had to yell over the relentless clanging and banging of an ancient heating system—and that classroom never did get above 60 degrees in February, despite all the noise.

"You have left us no good choice, now we use our teacher voice!" we shouted together, our group of marchers having increased to about 30 teachers and students. I must admit, however, that a sidewalk set blocks from the nearest main road wasn't the best location for our "teacher voices" to resonate. Someone wisely suggested that we take the strike to Lombard St., across from the large Fred Meyer grocery store.



Picketing on Lombard Street. Honk, honk!

Walking that direction, I got the chance to ask Science teacher Joe Hanawalt, 45, why he was out here striking. "A lot of the statements that have come from our central administration have been disrespectful [to teachers]," he said, mentioning, in particular "disingenuous statements made to the public at large" regarding the 'hard cap' on class sizes that teachers have asked for in their demands. "The district is claiming they need to hire 500 teachers" to meet the cap—but this hiring would take place "over three years, not *one* year" as insinuated in the media. Joe's biggest problem with the administration's statements, he said, is "the gaslighting. 'We've been reasonable,' is the tone of the district. '[So], if you strike, it's really on *you*.'"

I didn't get these cool kids' names, but they were eager to be pictured supporting their teachers.

As expected, picketing on Lombard, the busiest street in north Portland, generated more attention. For sure, the PAT strike has the overwhelming support of the Portland community; according to one national poll, between 86 and 91 percent of Portlanders support *all* of the strikers' demands, including hiring more teachers and reducing class sizes to ensure that the 'hard cap' can be met. It was heartening, therefore, to know that the vast majority of the honking we heard on Lombard was coming from community members who had our backs.

With my own lower back beginning to smart from so much standing, and feeling eager to move forward with the rest of my work day as a freelance editor (subbing being my primary side hustle), I decided to skip the noon rally and head home after our 10:30 dismissal. The rent won't pay itself, after all.

Day 2: Thurs. 11/2

To change things up a bit, today I decided to picket at Cleveland High in southeast Portland—which I think of as my family school, since my youngest sister, Maggie, and brother-in-law, Matthew, have

both worked there. I looked forward to having Matthew nearby for some company and also, hopefully, getting the scoop on how my fellow strikers were feeling on Day 2.

As of this morning, the PPS District Bargaining Team still has not submitted an updated proposal for further bargaining with PAT, beyond the "lowlight"-filled proposal submitted hours later than the agreed-upon 11am deadline on Oct. 31, the day before the strike began (BB 10/31). Standing in line for the morning QR code check-in (very important, otherwise you'll miss out on your $120!), I also overheard some consternation about the lack of elected School Board members on the District Bargaining Team. It's time for the School Board to do their job and "come to the table," is the sentiment brewing.

Popping an Earl Grey-flavored donut hole in my mouth (in Portland, even the donated pastries are gourmet), I caught sight of Matthew—an English teacher and debate team coach known for his droll humor and height (he's 6'5")—waving at me from the other side of the crosswalk. In addition to its fine facilities (that's sarcasm: Cleveland is among the schools that have not yet received the building renovations earmarked by the 2012 and 2020 PPS School Improvement bonds), Cleveland has the distinction of being set on Powell Blvd., often the most gridlocked street in Portland. Though rush hour was over by now, the chorus of honks and horn blares as we rounded the corner toward Powell, strike signage held high, made fine musical accompaniment.

And the music didn't stop there. As Matthew and I assumed our strike-duty posture marching up and down the sidewalk, a group of students, armed with a drumkit and stereo system, gathered under a nearby cedar tree. They launched into a doctored karaoke version of Taylor Swift's "Shake it Off." I couldn't make out all the words, but the natural substitution of "teachers gonna strike, strike, strike, strike, strike!" in the chorus did catch my ear.

Cleveland High students lead us in a strike-friendly rendition of Taylor Swift's "Shake it Off."

In a lull between the music, I found a moment to ask these students what motivated them to show up that morning. A sampler of their answers:

- "Our teachers are the best… they have to teach a bunch of high-schoolers, you know what I mean? Whatever we can do, to support them!"—Mae, 16
- "I like classrooms that are more than 60 degrees– or less than 80, honestly!"—Ariah, 17
- "My mom is [a] teacher, and this year has been exceedingly hard for her… she has too many students. I have to see everything that goes on behind the scenes, and that's been very impactful."—Frances, 17
- "We all deserve education, and we can't have education without teachers. They deserve all they need."—Allesandra, 17
- "From what I've heard, teachers aren't getting paid enough, and that sucks!"—Otto, 16

- "Because not only do I want to support my teachers, but I want to become a teacher myself!"—Emmett, 17

33-year-old Matthew, himself a one-time PPS student and a district teacher for more than six years, wanted to weigh in, too: "I'm [striking today] for better conditions for my students, so they receive the individualized support they need."

Among the better conditions that the union is asking for, in addition to the 'hard cap' on class sizes necessary for all students to thrive, is a reduction in caseloads for Special Education teachers and those who support them, including psychologists, paraeducators, speech-language pathologists, and occupational therapists. In a recent *NEA Today* article about the PAT strike, one Special Ed teacher reported that the occupational therapist in her classroom "quit because she couldn't manage and support the students she had. Another district offered her a lower caseload, higher pay, more planning time—all the things we need to do our job." As a PPS substitute, I can report firsthand that untrained subs are often brought in as classroom support to make up for a lack of Special Education staff. I myself have taken such jobs; you take what's available, and in my experience the Special Ed students are some of the most enjoyable to work with. But they deserve better than a parade of temporary faces.

Though Matthew and a couple of his teacher friends invited me to grab sandwiches before the day's noon rally at the PPS District offices, I've been working toward a Manuscript Assessment deadline, so decided to head home again for my second shift. But I promise I'll make time for a rally soon—assuming the strike doesn't end by tonight!

Day 3: Friday 11/3
Well, the strike did not in fact end last night—and as yesterday's Bargaining Brief (11/2) from the PAT negotiators makes clear, the union has "lost any confidence that the current PPS negotiating team will bargain in good faith." The "gaslighting" that Joe Hanawalt mentioned on Wednesday is evident here; instead of hearing the union's demands, Superintendent Guadalupe Guerrero chose to pen a letter insinuating that PAT would be to blame for the "detrimental effect" of school closures. Moreover, with the District continuing to give an "unequivocal 'no'" response to the union's reasonable ask that School Board members be brought to the bargaining table (BB 11/2), the stonewalling by PPS continues.

I decided not to strike today, too, since the editing deadline is still looming large. I've also just added to my job-juggling act by throwing another ball in the mix, a part-time gig as Communications Coordinator for the Working-Class Studies Association. So goes the hustle. Today's noon rally and march through downtown Portland, I'm hearing, starts at Lincoln High School.

On the work-from-home grind with Louie!

Day 4: Mon. 11/6
"Rain or shine, we hold the line!" was the opening chant this morning at Roosevelt, where another large group gathered at the school front, rain ponchos flapping in the wind. As Shawn choreographed our marching into inner and outer circles rotating opposite directions, I sensed a more confrontational vibe taking hold.

The weekend's mediation session with the District was apparently a disaster. "They actually brought a *worse* deal to the table!" scoffed a woman marching behind me. The union's 11/5 Bargaining Brief sheds further light. Warily hopeful to hear that the "district team had a proposal for planning time"—an increase of which remains a major PAT demand—the union was therefore "enraged" that the District's proposal would, instead of offering the teachers more planning days within the regular calendar year, both increase the length of the workday *and* add an additional "District-directed" planning day to the school year. "Then they had the *audacity* to ask us to pause the strike." As if!

Moreover, despite being *spotted in the hallway* at the District office during the weekend's mediations (BB 11/5), School Board members are still not actively participating in the bargaining. Our chants therefore became direct call-ins. "Andrew Scott, come to the table! Patte Sullivan, come to the table!", we hollered, with Julia Brim-Edwards, Eddie Wang, Herman Greene, and eventually, the full slate of School Board members being summoned to do their job, and show up at the negotiating table! The music this morning was also notably *lit.* "It's like a Mardi Gras parade!" one striker remarked as New Orleans jazz blared from a large speaker. Twisted Sister's "We're Not Gonna Take It" and The Talking Heads' "Burning Down the House" ratcheted up the energy another notch.

After about an hour of dance-marching, we walked few blocks to the Charles Jordan Community Center, a recreation center named after Portland's first Black City Commissioner. By the time we arrived, the crowd had grown to more than 200, with strikers from other north Portland schools, including Cesar Chavez K-8, George Middle School, and James John Elementary, joining us.

As we mulled around before starting our street march, I found a moment to chat with Abby Pasion, 27, our enthusiastic strike captain and a 2014 Roosevelt-grad-turned Ethnic Studies teacher. Abby's big hope for the PPS strike is that it could "really set a precedent for a transformation of higher ed in the US," riding the tailwind of the 2018 #RedforEd movement of "red state" walk-outs and the 2022 wave of early-fall teacher strikes in large cities like Columbus, Ohio and Seattle, Washington. "The entire country is going to look to us to see what's going to happen with this contract." We also talked about issues with school facilities. "We can't even control the thermostat in our own buildings!" Abby exclaimed, a nod to how the District keeps the heat throughout PPS schools set at 68 degrees, even though ancient school buildings—38 date back to the Hoover Administration—can produce classroom temperatures radically higher or lower than this. Most schools also still lack central air conditioning, making the recent climate-change related heat waves that much harder to bear.

Abby Pasion, Ethnic Studies teacher and Roosevelt High grad.

PPS's warped budget priorities were a theme of today's march chants, my favorite being the simple yet elegant

"Beep beep, toot toot! Get up off of that loot!" The march dispersed right at 10:30, and I headed home for my editing shift. Today's noon rally will be broken up into seven different regional sites, to keep spreading the strike momentum throughout the city.

Shining a light on the District office.

Day 5: Tues. 11/7

I took the morning off from striking again today—but I did manage to make the 5pm union-wide rally in front of the School District office, a location chosen to keep the community pressure on before the School Board meeting at 6. As a downpour rolled in, I scanned the packed crowd Where's Waldo-style, finally spotting my sister Chelsea's red Carhart beanie and the stroller containing my 1-year-old niece and future PPS student, Fiona. The whole family came out tonight, to give Matthew and rest of the PAT crew our support.

Future PPS student Fiona and her mom, Chelsea Appel.

Weaving my way toward them, I stopped in the middle of the crowd to take in Desmond Spann, aka DLux the Light, a Franklin High English teacher who is also an acclaimed local poet and hip-hop artist. Standing on a flatbed truck stage, he began his performance with "The Gift," a spoken-word poem addressed to the Fionas among us: "Children—you are not the future. You're not the hope nor the promise of a better tomorrow." As I listened to his poem—a call-out, as I took it, of how turning children into a symbol of future potential does violence to the "now" that childhood should rightfully be—one line struck me: "If I must live in your tomorrows, you will surely suffer, today."

In the context of the teacher's strike, the "you" being addressed here could be the District and their lack of willingness to prioritize *now* for PPS children. The union is fighting to provide children with the education that they need to thrive, right now, so they won't be punished later for being ill-prepared to succeed on the playing field of a grossly unequal, hyper-individualistic society that will likely still blame them for failing to "make good" on their futures. If that is the result of public education in the US—a continual deferral of resources and care to the sentimentality of "tomorrow's" children as an empty symbol of future promise—the "you" who "will surely suffer, today," will be all of us.

I also cannot help but zoom out further, at this especially bleak moment in history, and think of Palestine. More than 4,000 precious Gazan children, over the past month, have sacrificed all of their todays and tomorrows at the altar of "your tomorrows," or the continuing conquest of more land, resources, and ultimately, *futures* by the world's elite. We must begin to see our struggles as connected.

Locating my family at last, I bent down to kiss my niece, who was by this time staging a protest of her own against the confines of her stroller. Tomorrow's child, today, would rather be crawling. As twilight gave way to darkness, softened by the moon-like light of an emblem projected on the side of the District office—"Public schools, the heart of the community," it read—we decided to pack it up and head home. It's getting close to bedtime, after all.

Day 6: Wed. 11/8

I arrive at Cleveland this morning, and what do I hear? Members of the high-school band leading a wind-section heavy rendition of "Solidarity Forever," with saxophones, flutes, percussion, and an amped electric guitar! I'm definitely here for the "now" that these children are serving.

"Solidarity Forever" at Cleveland High.

And maybe it's the solidarity going to my head, but it feels like PAT is getting a *bit* closer to a resolution with the District. Matthew agrees, and last night's School Board meeting seems to bear out some of our optimism. For one thing, Oregon Governor Tina Kotek, who was discouraging teachers from striking just last week, has now called on School Board members to come to the bargaining table, and has also brought in a state financial officer to make sure PAT and the District "are working from the same set of numbers," according to a Governor's office statement. Moreover, School Board Chair Gary Hollands told the feisty Board meeting crowd that both he and Superintendent Guerrero, along with other Board members, were, in fact, part of yesterday's bargaining sessions—so that is certainly progress!

Self-explanatory.

But, as Matthew explained and media coverage of last night's meeting backs up, there's a shady 'scab' situation underway right now that paraeducators— those who, as I mentioned above, staff Special Education classrooms—are not happy about. Since paraeducators are represented not by PAT, but by the Portland Federation of School Professionals (PSFP) union (which, by the way, has its own separate contract negotiations underway with PPS), apparently the District thinks it's ok to require these crucial staff members to serve as online "reading coaches" during the strike, after being given only *one day* of training—a training, Matthew adds, that paraeducators have been asking for "for years," and have suddenly been given during the strike. Indeed, PPS appears to be treating the strike "like an inclement weather day or an emergency closure," said Amaru Moon, paraeducator in the Intensive Skills Center at Grant High School, at last night's Board meeting. "Why are our staff expected to work during a school closure? Are you afraid of us unifying with teachers on the picket line?" Hmm. She may be onto something.

Still fired up after last night's poetic inspiration, today I also made it to the noon rally on the Blumenauer Bridge— a northeast Portland pedestrian crossing named after our longtime-serving, bowtie-wearing US Representative, Earl Blumenauer. The objective of today's rally is specific: to troll School Board member Andrew Scott on our way to the bridge by stopping at the Oregon Convention Center, where he's attending some kind of retreat with mucky-mucks as Deputy Chief Operating Officer with Metro (a regional government agency that oversees public works projects). And troll we did, shouting "Andrew Scott, you're no good, listen to teachers like you should!", among other incendiary rhymes, at the Convention Center's green glass façade. Hopefully, he hears us.

Trolling at the Oregon Convention Center.

Day 7: Thurs. 11/9

Now I know we're still weeks away from the official start of the holiday season, but something magical happened this morning at Roosevelt: the first appearance of Mariah Carey on a PAT protest sign, declaring, "All I Want for Christmas Is a Fair Contract." When I asked the bearer of such tidings, Roosevelt English teacher Courtney Palmer, 45, why she thought the Queen of Christmas chose today to bless us, she said, "Well, we're in it for the long haul. And we're not afraid of the long haul."

Roosevelt English teacher Courtney Palmer, with the Queen of Christmas!

And continue to haul we will. As Abby shouted through her megaphone, not only have "our District leaders still [refused] to reallocate the money" that even the Oregon legislature has made clear needs to be moved from administrative to classroom-centered spending, but, as yesterday's Bargaining Brief (11/8) documents, the District is still giving a hard "no" on reducing class sizes, which remains one of PAT's "top priorities." The union feels that "genuine progress" won't be possible until the District agrees to bargain over class sizes—so until then, at least, we carry on. We don't want a lot for Christmas, PPS. Don't be a Scrooge.

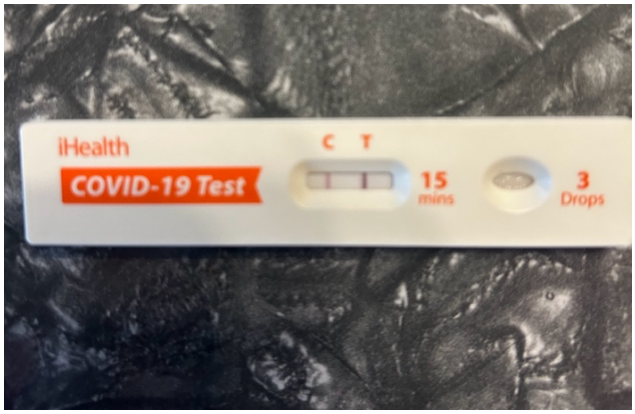
At the moment, however, PPS could use a visit by a chastising ghost. As I'm hearing an earful about during our walk to the corner of Lombard St., the District is on the verge of deploying an especially petty, underhanded move to attempt to break the strike: canceling teachers' health insurance. If the strike isn't over by Nov. 16, the District will start mailing teachers packets with instructions on how to enroll in COBRA plans—which, as anyone who has ever been sent information about this insulting excuse for health insurance knows, is just a middle finger to the union. Well played, Ebenezer.

Future teacher Landon Downes.

Standing on the corner next to Fred Meyer, I smiled at Landon Downes, 16, a Roosevelt student who has, impressively, not missed a single day of striking so far. "At a basic level, it's my teachers out here, I should be out here with them," he said when I asked him about his devotion to the cause. "And on a secondary level," he continued, "my goal is to become a teacher. So I should be out here fighting for my future. Teachers are always getting sh** on… so we need to see that there is a positive future for this." I'll have to make sure that Fiona behaves in his classroom if she's lucky enough to have Landon as a teacher someday.

Day 8: Monday 11/13
(Friday was Veteran's Day)

Well folks, it's finally happened. Until this morning I've liked to think I remained a vax card-carrying member of the Never COVID Club. But I woke up with my throat on fire, took a home COVID test, and it came up bearing the darkest-of-dark-pink positive lines—which my best friend assures me means I "really, really have it."



Ugh.

So sadly, unless the long haul continues to roll straight into the holidays, this ends my time on the PAT picket line. I'll miss the cool $120 I was pulling in for marching around in the rain with a sign for three hours each morning. But more than that, I'll miss being part of the "now" that this teacher's union, by understanding our collective value and power as workers, has been creating.

As Landon reminded me last week, and the irony in Desmond Spann's poem captures as well, there's nothing inherently wrong with children being the 'future.' More are born every day, and these children will (knock on wood) continue to inherit tomorrows well beyond our lifetimes. But this future must be a collective one, envisioned and cultivated together. The gravest mistake we can make for our children—the way we will fail them—is if all we can offer them is a fantasy grounded in the personal 'potential' of each life as an island unto itself. We cannot keep placing the burden for society's survival on individual children, regardless of

how few resources, and how little care, we have put into their thriving. We owe them, instead, a generous and loving social contract. And one way to do that is to ensure that their teachers—among those most responsible for stewarding them into adulthood—have the robust labor contract that they deserve.

Epilogue: A Tentative Win

After 11 weekdays of teachers striking and more than three weeks of bargaining sessions, PAT and PPS reached a tentative contract agreement on Sunday, Nov. 26, 2023, with 94.7% of voting PAT union members choosing to ratify the contract. Kids were already back in classrooms that Monday, after a two-hour late start.

Though PAT was overwhelmingly positive in their assessment of the new contract, calling it a "historical agreement" that "secured improvements on all our key issues," the teachers did have to make some hard compromises with the District. They wound up receiving a cost of living (COLA) increase of 14.4% over three years, far down form their original ask of 23%. But, this was higher than the District's best offer of 10.5%, which the teachers argued was so low it would "effectively lock in an 8% loss of buying power in educator salaries relative to the high rates of inflation experienced in the last few years" (from Article 12 of PAT/PPS Side-by-Side, see the 11/12 Bargaining Brief). Especially since the District had been refusing to budge on the COLA issue until a few days before the settlement was reached, we'll call this a win.

The union also received meaningful concessions from the District on planning time and Special Education—the addition of a first-ever contract article focused on protecting Special Education staff from case overload, for one—as well as $20 million to update heating and cooling systems throughout PPS schools. Teachers also, thankfully, didn't have to bear the threatened 'pause' in their health insurance. Still, the union's biggest loss came in the area of class sizes. They didn't get their 'hard cap' on number of students per class, instead agreeing to a pay increase for teachers who wind up with jumbo-sized classes. Though extra pay is better than a pizza party, it does nothing to address the unsustainable workloads that PPS teachers, at least for now, will continue to face. Overworked teachers simply can't give students the individualized attention that they need—and a loss of learning follows from there.

But regardless of how we might tally up 'wins' and 'losses' for this teacher's strike, in a bigger-picture sense, every strike is a win. In *Slaying Goliath* (2020), Diane Ravitch writes that the greatest achievement of 2018's Education Spring wave of "teacher revolt" throughout West Virginia, Arizona, and other states of notable hostility to public education, was the long-overdue respect teachers received by banding together to fight for themselves and their students. As Ravitch put it, #RedforEd won the "national discourse" battle over the value of public schools as a social good worth the people's support and funding (266).

The PAT union could hardly have received greater public support for their cause—one buoyed, also, by a 2023 labor resurgence that saw everyone from autoworkers and Hollywood writers to nurses and Amazon drivers striking and forming new unions. Give the teachers everything they need to do their job for our kids, was the message from Portland to PPS. And whether or not the District was listening, that message remains.

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Author Bio

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All photos taken by the author.

Three Poems: ‘A Ship in Distress’, ‘A Christmas Carol for the Carers’, ‘The Service of my Baba’s Windows’

Angela Costi

‘A Ship in Distress’
after artwork no. 37 folio 20 of Shipwreck (1) Sketchbook 1803-10 by J M W Turner

study (a)
I wish it was a ship I saw instead of Mamma
on her side with her massive naked thigh afloat

the rest of her in deep trouble gurgling up the storm
of a day filleting then frying then serving fish

she rolled the bucket brimming and splashing
slapped the mop and churned the grit to be good

the floor greasy from deep-fried oil
slipped her into the swell of grime

worked her arms like a captain’s command
when the mast breaks and the sails tear

study (b)
when she fell
it was slow

as if pulled down by a long sweeping line across a page
she lay there

willing herself to rest
with clenched teeth

knowing her daughter’s scream
would save her from drowning

artwork 37 folio 20 of Turner’s Shipwreck (1) sketchbook c.1803-10 accessed: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/jmw-turner/joseph-mallord-william-turner-a-ship-in-distress-r1139189

A Christmas Carol for the Carers

and for Eleni Costi who has advanced Alzheimer's

after A Christmas Carol, *films 1938, 1984, 2009*

Pitch
the miserly multi million man is on rerun
year after year after repenting his ways
not before humiliating the poor,
this year we watch another movie
starring an unknown with casual work on a usual day
two hours before she is scheduled to stop
and go home to plastic green branches
trying to hold red baubles, falling
on her children's second hand gifts

Trailer
Androulla Dimitriadis is driving too fast
for a quiet street, receives a call from her manager
puts him on speaker without slowing down
Schedule change
Now?
Head out to Mrs Costi, needs showering
the car slides to a stop
grinds its gears as it circles back

Premiere
the camera pans out from steering wheel to freeway
brimming with fuel's adrenalin
with carers navigating past semi trailers on roundabouts
dark tunnels across bridges to reach
a door in time to open a flashback
The young woman is softly stepping into the dimly lit room
commanding calm as she calls *Eleni Eleni*
On her knees, picking the crumbs from the carpet
Eleni looks up
and the light on her face shows joy

The Service of my Baba's Windows

i.m. Kostantinos Costi, born in Kyrenia, Cyprus 1936. Before his home became Turkish occupied, he left in the mid-1950s. As Cyprus was a British colony during his youth, he spoke three languages: Cypriot dialect, English and Greek. He died in Melbourne 2023.

My last view μόνο αυτό το δέντρο I love

from his wheelchair, his eyes do all the climbing

when
the grand Melaleuca taps the glass with a branch

this is not the tree of his young fear, spying on soldiers
chasing his sister
it is the tree that visits him each and every day

there are so many others in the large building
he calls *Prison*
they too are sustained by a window's care

he tells the story of the giant cat who pounces
leaves
This γάτα sees the ghosts looking out

his blind is up for the moon to shed light
on a scream he heard
It could be a possum or the γάτα, or a woman

Ήμουν χαρούμενος happy to sit on my καρέκλα
getting my pension growing my κήπο

he hogs a room of the brick veneer house
with a window that takes most of one wall

the curtain is tied back, constrained at frame-side
like an old friend who pops in uninvited with sad news

there is no vista of plump grapes entwining passionfruit
no boundless boat spreading a net for swordfish

these are views for his father who was swamped by regrets
this window mediates his mood with fragments of shade

shows him how the toil of dirt in that patch is one potato
for him to fatten wash peel mash then lavish with gravy

My souvla ετοίμασα
the way ο πατέρας μου taught me
our οικογένεια was young and alive

the frame is awash with his cousins competing
to air their Cypriot laments while his wife threads

her torso through pockets of relatives with tray after
tray of fetta drizzling, haloumi sizzling, pita swaddling

the lamb, oregano wafts with the smoke of charcoal

as whiskey is gulped, wine is sipped and water is left

lonely he becomes a tall man at his window, turning
his arms into flags, waving at them to go to his table

laden with memories from his Yiayia and Pappou
Sit Eat Drink Talk
only of what θυμόμαστε

That work broke my back

she ignores his sigh as she unties the curtain
instantly his *κήπο* vanishes into crimson

in the early morning, he lifts the layers, peaks and
dares the clouds to hail inclement as his legs ache

when baby-blue gazes back he grunts, searching for the keys
to drive him from his garden bed of garlic tomatoes and basil

at the bench waits the hardboiled egg, and a smirk of grey
parts spring's weather into laying bricks or laying down

he barracks for the wind as it rallies branches to fight
gulps coffee then phones his boss *I'm not coming in*

My first time in the νοσοκομείο the nurses were καλοί

he was possessed by a zest to dance
away
his grieving wounds

before the stones pulped his kidney, he
drank
the zivania and smoke of rebetika

the electric bed allows him to goggle
the *Fancy*
Fitzroy Gardens made for polite curtsy and bow

his stitches itch with tubes hitched to make him piss
still his days
are filled with grand-dame elms fanning his brow

he totters to the sill creaking out a whistle for
Parrot
red orange blue swoops past, while he holds his breath

My first job was εντάξει I could make them smile
I was a baby sixteen years old

window smears a lash at DAGOS
TAKING OUR JOBS as he learns
to fry eggs and bacon for officers
who grunt their orders at him

the sky is dark as they
make him catch their pence
after he says *Thank you sir*
without a trace of accent

when the last customer leaves
he sneaks a smoke or a candy
looks at the *Sexy* rows of cars
chooses the one for dreaming

In Kyrenia the θάλασσα
was outside
looking in

he folds the curtain around
his hiding body
pressing face
on glass
his
Mama
calls his name as he smiles
at the *ζουλατζιά*
with its thousands of red berries
he won't pick any
they are meant for looking
in a home
where a window
is valued
more
than a painting

Author Bio

Angela Costi is the author of five poetry collections. Her most recent, *An Embroidery of Old Maps and New* (Spinifex Press, 2021) won the Book Prize for Poetry in English, Greek Australian Cultural League 2022. Her sixth manuscript, *The Heart of the Advocate* is scheduled for publication with Liquid Amber Press, 2025. She is known as Αγγελικη Κωστη among the Cypriot Greek diaspora, which is her ancestry. She is based in Naarm.

Mistake City

Ian C Smith

At last he lands a real job, regular, not stop-gap: reasonable wages with overtime, albeit monotonous graft reached by driving in peak hour traffic, the idea of the car as freedom thwarted. He hasn't been told he shall be clocked by a time and motion study manager. The search for fulfilment a narrow curved tunnel, he seeks the metaphorical light at its end after surviving an upbringing looked back on in anger. Just days before his debut in new overalls he accidentally sets fire to his home. Breathing smoke stink, arm slung in plaster, hope for legitimacy appears, yet again, to have led to a handful of dust.

Still kids, they danced to the tribal throb of pop music at their reception. This was where his bride introduced him to her friend, a beauty with wide eyes and full lips, her body a pageant squeezed into a tight black dress. After dancing with his new wife he beelined for this friend who had stared hard back at him, eyes glittering. Absurdly, he wanted to kiss her right there but managed not to. What the hell's going on? he thought in a delirium of confusion.

An avid movie fan, he escaped the marauding flames by crashing through a window like a stuntman, shielding his face with his forearms, almost losing the use of one hand permanently due to his deeply sliced arm that bled everywhere requiring numerous internal sutures. Instead of exiting via the narrowest window he could have opened the outside door but, believing he was unlocking it, trapped himself by locking it.

Envious friends competed with ribald remarks, he and that sexy girl gyrating, his breath ragged with exercise and desire. His bride claimed him for the next dance joking about the danger of introducing him to her friends. Though he knew his behaviour sparked this jealousy his eyes met that girl's again as she danced with another hopeful. His marriage only hours old, too unsure of himself to have been a skirt chaser, this craziness maddened him.

His colony's clamour like living in the painter Brueghel's bathos, he strives for acceptance but errors honeycomb his history. Knowing he needs this new job with its requirement of his two good hands, he reasons that, rather than phone the factory, he should present in person to plead for time. Hair cut, managing his vehicle's gear shift with cast-free fingers, a lips moving, anus-clenching drive, he practises his accident/recovery synopsis, rearranging and deleting certain negative details in the way writers construct braided narratives.

The prospective new boss listens in an office with imposing diplomas on the walls, intrigued by this age-old winter's tale of lighting a fire: the freezing house, damp firewood, a sudden cataclysmic chimney downdraft the sympathetic insurance assessor had suggested. Edited out with the insurance guy are the mower fuel, the trembling hands, panic at the door. Included, generous with clichés, is a sturdy picture of the virtues of family life. What once was a recurring fantasy of unzipping the tight black dress of an ardent girl he never saw again remains his secret.

He doubted the nuptials would have gone ahead if he met the sexy girl a month earlier but shied from that scenario. Because he attracted trouble, its sometimes sidekick, anxiety, rode with it. Their wedding night more conforming than aroused, they began marital co-operation nagged

by something intangible. Being sensible, but cynicism creeping in, they saved for stuff as the shadow of time's passage came swiftly to meet them. The job that was held open for him, and the heft of persistent memories glimpsed like lighted windows of a train passing in the night, became fading domains of his beating heart.

Author Bio

Ian C Smith writes in the Gippsland Lakes region of Victoria, and on Flinders Island. His work has appeared in Antipodes, cordite, Griffith Review, Journal of Working Class Studies, Meniscus, So Fi Zine,Text: A Journal of Writing and Writing Courses, & Westerly. His seventh book is wonder sadness madness joy, Ginninderra Press.

Márquez, C. (2023) *Making the Latino South: A History of Racial Formation.* University of North Carolina Press.

Review by Emiliano Aguilar

While most people today are accustomed to hearing "south of the border" regarding the international divide between the United States and Mexico, few might think of it as referring to the Carolinas. Yet, in Cecilia Márquez's wonderfully engaging book, *Making the Latino South*, we are brought to the dynamic roadside attraction South of the Border along Interstate 95, which opened in 1949. What was once a beer depot became a sprawling campus, including a motel, amusement park, several restaurants, souvenir shops, and the cartoonish mascot, Pedro. And when Alan Schafer, the founder, opened Confederateland on the property, he effectively merged the stereotypical fetishization of Mexico with a "Lost Cause" ideology during the civil rights movement.

While this ironic historical happenstance occurs in a community that recorded less than two dozen Mexican-born residents for decades, the book at large documents the dynamic racial landscape of the US South from the 1940s to the early 2000s. *Making the Latino South* not only joins an exciting field of scholarship about Latinas/os outside of the Southwest, New York, and Florida but offers readers a provocative goal: to interrogate how non-Black Latinos navigated whiteness and the logic of white supremacy. Márquez argues that in the South, Latinas/os were incorporated not as white people "but as Black and non-Black Latino people who were marked as racially distinct while at the same time being integrated into whiteness and Blackness" (7).

For decades, the US South represented a land of hope for Latin American migrants, akin to how U.S. historians framed northern urban communities for African American migrants, leaving the South for cities like Chicago, Detroit, Gary, and Milwaukee. This parallel serves as the opening anecdote, as the Soto family leaves Texas in the late 1950s for the Mississippi Delta, where they made nearly triple their weekly income, and their daughter did not face the same educational discrimination from white peers as she had in Texas. The Soto family, and many like them, discovered that for non-Black Latinos, race worked differently in the South than it had in the Southwest. Non-Black Latinos found the region and its infamous system of Jim Crow as both simultaneously capacious and rigid in managing Blackness and non-Blackness.

This did not remain the case for the increasing number of migrants in the region. Márquez traverses the region in the second half of the twentieth century to understand the trajectory of non-Black Latinos from "professionally white" to "hardworking immigrants" to "illegal aliens." The book emphasizes three fundamental temporal shifts: the pre-civil rights movement, the post-civil rights movement, and the post-9/11 United States. At each of these moments, non-Black Latinos find themselves gradually removed from the benefits and privileges of whiteness, increasingly becoming the fuel to white backlash to demographic change, economic woes, and heightened nativist sentiments.

Making the Latino South encompasses five chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion that promise quite different perspectives to this narrative of change and continuity concerning non-

Black Latino racialization in the South. While the chapters proceed chronologically, they are meant to detail how Latina/o migrants uncovered new truths pertaining to race in the South. Márquez describes the first three as a frame to understand how provisional whiteness impacted Latina/o migrants.

Márquez shows both the rigidity and flexibility of Jim Crow for Latinas/os in the South. The first chapter is framed around Karla Rosel Galarza, the stepdaughter of the farmworker organizer, intellectual, and activist Ernesto Galarza. When the Galarzas relocated from California to Washington D.C. in 1936, they were able to benefit from their non-Blackness by living in a segregated white community in northern Virginia. However, when Karla decided to enroll into the segregated Black Margaret Murray Washington Vocational School, questions concerning their racial status positioned a moment of confusion for Jim Crow that, as Márquez argues, established a Black and non-Black categorization. Karla Galarza was ordered to transfer to a white school and ultimately, the segregation case was not taken to court.

Turning to the Deep South, another chapter restructures narratives of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to include the often-untold stories of Latina and Latino activists and organizers in the region. These men and women navigated their professional whiteness to the benefit of their activism but also had contested outcomes as the movement came to emphasize Blackness, leaving non-Black Latinos and white members expelled from SNCC overnight. Latina/o SNCC activists, while granted a degree of flexibility as white in their activism in Jim Crow South, were still ultimately viewed as non-Black by SNCC's Black members.

The final chapters turn from professional whiteness to the instrumentalization of Latina/o immigrants into the South. Increasingly, Latina/o migrants found themselves instrumentalized or increasingly associated with their potential or essential role as laborers despite their existence being defined by much more than their work. Turning to Dalton, Georgia, the fourth chapter notes that with the construction of 'Hispanic' and the increasing dependency on Latinas/os as laborers, the construction of these immigrants as "hardworking" became a cornerstone of their racialization. Industriousness and its association with Latinos instrumentalized the immigrants as laborers. In the fifth and final chapter, anti-immigrant sentiments drew "Latino" and "illegal" into a synonymous relationship as the Great Recession fueled draconian legislation. In documenting the proliferation of anti-immigrant legislation of the early 2000s, Márquez notes how Latinos became a hardened racial category, firmly entrenching these essential immigrants as minorities.

Making the Latino South is thought-provoking and raises questions and potential new research threads for future scholars. However, I would have liked more engagement with class and white supremacy. For instance, I thoroughly enjoyed Márquez's reinsertion of Latinas and Latinos into the story of SNCC and its lessons for multiracial unity and coalition work. That said, other Latinas/os served as the counter to these activists. Leander Perez, Louisiana's famed segregationist and district judge, comes to mind. In grappling with how some Latinos, like the Galarza family, benefitted from white supremacy with housing and education, for instance, Márquez's work offers an opportunity to engage with the individuals that more willingly embraced white supremacist ideology in navigating these racial landscapes. Simply, not all Latinas/os opposed Jim Crow and the ambiguous racial order it erected for them.

Overall, *Making the Latino South* is a must-read for those interested in the US South and its history of race, civil rights, and immigration. The book is a welcome addition to the histories

of the modern US and begins to grapple with the wave of anti-immigration legislation at the turn of the century. Márquez' work will surely be a cornerstone of future studies concerning the Latina and Latino South as scholars continue to grapple with the complex racial landscapes of the region. More importantly, the work -- much as a generation of scholars of the Latina and Latino Midwest has done -- reminds its reader that the South is not a new destination for Latinas and Latinos. Instead, the South is significantly defined by its Latino presence.

Reviewer Bio

Emiliano Aguilar is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Notre Dame. He is currently writing a book, *Building a Latino Machine: Caught Between Corrupt Political Machines and Good Government Reform,* about how ethnic Mexicans and Puerto Ricans navigated and utilized corruption to further their inclusion in a midwestern Rust Belt community.

Streib, J. (2023) *The Accidental Equalizer: How Luck Determines Pay after College.* University of Chicago Press.

Review by Allison L. Hurst

This is Jessi Streib's third book, all published in the last eight years. As with *The Power of the Past* and *Privilege Lost*, it is a snappily written, crisply presented monograph based on interviews with a select group of persons experiencing some interesting aspect of class dynamics in contemporary America. In this case, the group of persons are college seniors looking for jobs and mostly finding them. Streib employs this group to tell a story of the role of luck *rather than class* in finding well-paying work after college. *The Accidental Equalizer* thus operates as a counter-narrative to that which is mostly related by researchers publishing in this journal. Instead of a story of class mobility blocked by preexisting class advantages, Streib describes a field that is so random and undetermined that class advantages (e.g., what and who one knows, how much money and education parents have) are largely powerless to make a difference in outcomes. In her account, working-class students are equally as likely to find a well-paying job after college as their middle-class peers.

To say this finding flies in the face of a lot of pre-existing research would be an understatement. Is Streib convincing? To some extent, yes. A finding that, in certain circumstances, class background matters less than luck is actually quite a consequential and even, perhaps, revolutionary finding. But those "in certain circumstances" are important to keep in mind.

Let's begin with where Streib shines. She is a facile storyteller and is able to convey difficult information succinctly. There is a lot of "economics" discourse throughout the book, but a casual reader would hardly notice as it is wrapped up well in colorful description and compelling examples. As always, her title attracts and surprises, and throughout she writes passages that could easily stand as "soundbites" on a podcast or in the pages of the *New York Times*. Actually, I expect to find it there soon!. Unlike many academics who get tripped up on their own discourse, Streib always seems to know how to reach her audience. This is a fun book to read. It is compelling and persuasive, and full of stories of actual people struggling to make sense of their circumstances.

Throughout she uses a simple analogy of *Let's Make a Deal* as a running theme in support of her theory. You may recall the famous game show in which contestants were shown three doors and asked to randomly select one in the hope of acquiring a valuable prize. Actually, the game was a bit more complicated than this, but let's keep it simple, as Streib does. Class doesn't help any contestant in this game. It is wholly random, and the contestants have no idea where the prize is located or even what the prize is. As Streib explains, they can't call their parents for help as their parents don't have any useful information either. Streib argues that the employment market for some college graduates works similarly. It doesn't matter if your parents were college professors, corporate CEOs, or pinsetters at the local bowling alley. How much money graduates earn out of college is subject to luck.

Now the caveats. Streib uses a particular sample of college seniors and graduates here – those majoring in business at a mid-tier public university who are on the market for mid-tier business jobs open to recent college graduates. Students, all with college degrees from the same institution, compete blindly for entry-level "business" jobs advertised in such places as Monster.com. These jobs can be anything from cold-calling customers to "marketing" jobs that entail rote data entry to project management. The advertisements are often comically ambiguous and almost never state a salary figure, unless it is to call it "competitive." A student can pursue a job through multiple interviews thinking that this is a well-paying position at a major company doing important business-related work only to find out at the very end that they will make no more than $35,000 doing largely grunt work like making copies. Or that they will be earning twice that and be on a fast track to promotion into management. The point is, *who knows?* The conditions of employment, including salary, are largely hidden away, like those valuable prizes in *Let's Make a Deal*. Most of the students/graduates Streib interviews also appear to "settle" for the first job they actually land, largely because there is so much uncertainty and anxiety about employment. Thus, wealthier students who have their parent's support if they need to keep looking are also taking the low-paying option when offered.

I am concerned with the book's generalizability. On the one hand, Streib is careful to clearly state the circumstances under which class does not matter. First, information has to be lacking. Job seekers simply don't know enough about this market to pull strings or take shortcuts. Salaries are hidden, job descriptions are vague, job titles are uninformative, and promotional structures are not disclosed. Secondly, employers use "class-neutral criteria." It appears (almost) random what criteria are used by hiring committees. Streib talked to people making these decisions, and they are all over the map. Some might like the fact that a candidate went to a private high school and others might be turned off by it. Some might give more weight to prior unpaid internships while others think this is an unfair advantage and prefer candidates who've worked real jobs. Many hirers tell Streib they don't like entitled candidates, seemingly *dis-advantaging* middle- and upper-class job seekers.

On the other hand, Streib suggests that these circumstances (poor information plus class-neutral hiring criteria) are fairly widespread. I think she has raised a really interesting question here – where and when do we find these circumstances? But I am much less optimistic than she is about the answer to that question. One of the reasons class-neutral criteria operate in the mid-tier business hiring market she studied was that the bar was set relatively low for candidates. There are a lot of these jobs and anyone with a college degree who majored in business and who knows how to present themselves during an interview (something the college program teaches them, as Streib shows) is desirable. In that case, it really is luck who ends up with what employer. Everyone who wants a job gets one. It's only after the hiring that pay differences are noted. But how many markets are really like that? We know from Laurison and Friedman's *The Class Ceiling* that some professions pay a lot more attention than others to class criteria. Furthermore, having a college degree is itself a non-class-neutral criterion, as Streib herself knows. Despite what many highly educated people think, the great majority of young adults are still not earning college degrees. The fact that working-class graduates were not further disadvantaged once they earned a degree from a mid-level public university is something, but certainly not the whole or even main story about American mobility that her title suggests.

Streib's final chapter suggests we have a choice between class-based meritocracies and luckocracies, her coined phrase for the random hiring practices she uncovered. She spends some time discussing the pros and cons of each. I think this is something of a wasted opportunity for a book that is welcomely succinct. I would much rather have seen her be more

thoughtful about those specific circumstances and what we can really learn about the ways class affects opportunities for all. I fear the upcoming *New York Times* piece that tells everyone class doesn't matter anymore. It's just luck.

Reviewer Bio

Allison L. Hurst is a Professor of Sociology at Oregon State University. She is the author of *The Burden of Academic Success: Loyalists, Renegades, and Double Agents* (2010), *College and the Working Class* (2012), *Amplified Advantage: Going to a "Good" School in an Era of Inequality* (2019), and the co-editor of *Working in Class: Recognizing How Social Class Shapes Our Academic Work* (2016).

Newman, L. and T. Skocpol (2023) *Rust Belt Union Blues: Why Working-Class Voters Are Turning Away from the Democratic Party*. Columbia University Press.

Review by Jack Metzgar

When I was in my teens in the late 1950s, I played baseball for a team sponsored by Franklin Local 2635 of the United Steelworkers of America. We played teams sponsored by the Steelworkers' Lower Cambria Local, the Italian Sons and Daughters of America, and the like. Now the best two teams in what is a comparable league in my home town of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, are both sponsored by local pharmacies, and there are no teams representing union locals or ethnic lodges anymore.

This look back to a younger time is occasioned by reading *Rust Belt Union Blues: Why Working-Class Voters Are Turning Away from the Democratic Party* by sociologists Lainey Newman and Theda Skocpol. Based on interviews with retirees, an early chapter evokes the dense social networks in steel towns back in the day (the 1940s into the 1970s) built around the Steelworkers and other unions as well as churches and ethnic clubs. I can't guess how meaningful that chapter would be for people not from that old world, but it grabbed me by the heartstrings, and I had to try and resist the temptation to wallow in reminisces of "when life was slow and oh so mellow" (which I really like doing!).

But this is a book of serious political analysis, and Newman and Skocpol use that chapter not to evoke nostalgia in old-timers, but to try and convey how strong unions once were and the differences they made in all aspects of community life beyond workplaces, but especially in politics. Their argument is that politics is social, and that voting, as well as other forms of political activity, is rarely a relationship between an individual and a candidate, party, or program. Rather, our political views are shaped by our social worlds and the institutions that help create those worlds – institutions like churches, ethnic clubs, and, most importantly for their political analysis of Western Pennsylvania, unions.

Newman and Skocpol sometimes exaggerate how Democratic union members and union households were at mid-century. Union households rarely voted more than 60% Dem in Presidential elections nationally. And those unions who by the 1970s had slipped away from year-round political economic education and just announced their endorsed candidates at election time had waning political influence well before the full-blown crisis of unionism in the early 1980s. But Newman and Skocpol are not looking at only that direct relation between what union leadership does and how members vote. As sociologists, they tease out the impacts a local union has when, for example, its hall is a gathering place for other groups' meetings, for wedding receptions, Christmas parties, and such. A union's impact back in the day included its positive presence in the larger community, whether with money like sponsoring baseball teams or the civic participation of its members in every area that mattered. Unions' impact on politics was not restricted to union members and households, but also reached into the broader

community – not primarily in endorsing candidates, but in the consistent hearings unions got on any issue of local, regional, or national importance.

It is no surprise that the decline of unions from representing a third to only a tenth of workers has greatly harmed the Democratic Party nationally and especially in former union strongholds like Pittsburgh and its surrounding area. But Newman and Skocpol go beyond the quantitative relationships in showing the full scope of union power when it was strong. This helps us not only better understand what has been lost, but also what aspects of unionism might be valuable to restore beyond the mighty numbers the labor movement once enjoyed.

Rust Belt Union Blues is a regional study with limited generalizability, especially outside the Rust Belt. Pennsylvania is a key battleground state, however, and Dems desperately need to do better there than in the recent past. Western Pennsylvania used to be strongly Dem in many areas; now only Allegheny (Pittsburgh) and Erie counties were blue in 2020, and they are by no means a lock for Dems in 2024. But this regional study is especially valuable in revealing the complex texture of political thoughts and feelings among groups of workers who were once a progressive force, but are no longer.

In their interviews, the authors found not a singular political psychology, as so many analysts who don't do interviews so often conjure – either a social psychology where resentment, racism, and xenophobia are key or one of wholesome, good-hearted folks who are lost and confused. Rather, they found people, like the rest of us, trying to make sense of their experience and of the wider world in which that experience occurred. They found people crippled by resentment, sure enough, and some confused wholesome folk. But mostly they found a powerfully shared sense of betrayal across many different political leanings, a sense of betrayal rooted in having been betrayed.

Steelworkers and other manufacturing workers were betrayed and left behind in the decades around the turn of the century. Specific federal government actions sought to beat back the inflation of the 1970s with free trade policies based on meager wages and degraded conditions in other countries – and then just doubled down on those policies even after inflation disappeared. Workers were not the only ones who suffered. So did the myriad towns for whom union wages were their primary engine of economic activity. The economic disasters visited upon various cities and towns, especially in the Rust Belt, are well known. Newman and Skocpol, however, explore the social and political vacuum created by the demise of manufacturing and its unions. A vacuum that over time got filled by gun clubs, megachurches, Tea Party outfits, and MAGA mania.

Restoration, making things "great again," and retribution resonate with folks who have been betrayed and left behind. Newman and Skocpol give a sympathetic rendering to a variety of voices, not all of them wholesome, but almost all more complex than survey data could ever capture. They highlight one man's explanation for why he voted again for Trump in 2020 even though the former president had done nothing to bring steelmaking and coal mining back to Western PA, as he had promised while campaigning in 2016: "A lie is better than nothing." (p. 224) This makes little sense unless you realize that Trump's "paying attention," even if just blowing smoke, occurred while the national conversation, whether from Democrats or Republicans, had for decades been acting like this man and his ilk do not exist.

Reading this book can cause some despair, as the authors exaggerate how good things were in the past, when tens of thousands of union steelworkers voted for Eisenhower, Nixon, and

Reagan, and how bleak they seem today. The authors miss the more dynamic parts of the US labor movement by focusing exclusively on industrial and building trades workers (predominately white men) while not contextualizing with some attention to today's unionists, who are more likely to be in service and public sector jobs and are much more diverse.

I also wish the authors had paid more attention to those hardy souls in MAGA country who remain Democrats (about a third of voters in the 20 counties around Pittsburgh) or who are genuine Independents. There are many voters for whom Trump's phony rhetoric resonates, but not enough to vote for him. And, likewise, there are those who voted for Trump in 2016 but not 2020 – and even those who voted for him twice but without conviction. Combined, this is a large group of voters, and moving even a relatively small percentage of them toward Biden in 2024 will ensure Pennsylvania stays blue, which is a necessary condition for keeping our one-day dictator out of the White House.

American politics would be better with more and stronger local unions to agitate for Dems, but voters who live in union households are still about 20% of all voters, and a bit more than that in Pennsylvania. The recent upsurge of strike activity and highly publicized victories – in auto and at Starbucks, at both ends of today's labor movement – may give unions a more credible voice, both among their members and all the people those members might influence. And President Biden has made a big bet by identifying himself as "union Joe," both symbolically and in substantive policy. With some luck and a little help from their friends, unions could once again be decisive in places that have long been left for dead.

Reviewer Bio

Jack Metzgar, a retired adult educator at Roosevelt University, is a founder and past president of the Working-Class Studies Association. He is the author of *Striking Steel: Solidarity Remembered* and *Bridging the Divide: Working-Class Culture in a Middle-Class Society*.

Hormel, L. (2023). *Trailer Park America: Reimagining Working-Class Communities.* Rutgers University Press.

Review by Lora A. Phillips

Over the course of several decades, an absentee landlord fails to perform minimally sufficient maintenance on their rental property, compounding design flaws associated with its original construction. Residents are subsequently exposed to a years-long water crisis, as raw sewage and its associated bacteria enter their drinking water. Despite this, most of the property's working-class residents not only remain in place, but also advocate to keep their community intact. Unfortunately, the landlord refuses to make the costly repairs necessary to resolve the water crisis. The state subsequently condemns the property, thus forcing its residents to relocate.

In *Trailer Park America: Reimagining Working-Class Communities*, Leontina Hormel uses a sociological lens to understand the above scenario which, at first glance, could easily be misconstrued as individual failures leading to appropriate state intervention to protect an at-risk group of residents who should have "seen the writing on the wall" and moved out long ago. Indeed, this precise narrative was pervasive in local public opinion and media reporting on the Syringa Mobile Home Park in the Palouse region of Idaho, the site of Hormel's scholar-activism. Drawing on over five years of meticulous research—including ethnographic work, interviews, needs surveys, and public sociology—Hormel poses a compelling argument for why the decline and closure of Syringa Mobile Home Park more accurately reflects structural forces that not only directly harmed residents of the park, but also have dire implications for working-class communities across America. In doing so, Hormel movingly reframes popular perceptions of mobile home parks and the humans who live in them.

Specifically, Hormel elucidates how the ecological crisis and ultimate displacement faced by Syringa's residents can be traced back to the political economic forces of settler colonialism and capitalism. The existence of Syringa was exclusively viable due to settler colonialism, which displaced the site's Native Nimíipuu (Nez Perce) peoples and transformed its natural resources into property that would become privately owned, managed, and developed at its owner's discretion. Guided by the ethos of capitalism, which purports that land is best suited to its most profitable use, the original owner constructed Syringa Mobile Home Park on the site of a seasonal wetland that was unviable for commercial farming. Given the unique tenure arrangement of most mobile home parks, wherein residents own their home but pay monthly rent on the lot that it sits on, the owner could therefore draw monthly income from the land.

Hormel further illuminates how the decline and closure of Syringa Mobile Home Park must be understood to represent the confluence of settler colonialism and capitalism in the context of an additional structural force: neoliberal politics. Syringa's poorly constructed water and sewerage system, combined with the reality that it was built on a seasonal wetland, led to the water crisis that would be attributed to the park's closure. This combination of factors was, in part, made possible due to the rural location of the park, which subjected the landowner to less government oversight and fewer construction regulations.

As conditions in Syringa deteriorated, decades of privatization and deregulation culminated in a scenario whereby government agencies were powerless to compel the park's owner to repair the dangerous water and sewerage system. In the absence of the owner's voluntary compliance, the state turned to what was ostensibly the only tool at its disposal: condemning individual mobile homes and, ultimately, formally closing Syringa Mobile Home Park. The consequences of neoliberal politics for park residents were, perhaps, most on display during their involuntary displacement, wherein a dearth of government programs and assistance found residents falling through the cracks of the housing system, with already overburdened community and faith-based organizations stepping in to fill the gaps.

Thus, rather than improving living conditions for the long-suffering residents of Syringa, government (in)action had the perverse effect of harming residents in a variety of ways, including, but not limited to: a loss in the assessed value of their mobile home; for those mobile homes that were functionally immobile, a loss of the home itself; and fostering local social stigmatization that resulted in difficulty securing new housing.

Moreover, the closure of Syringa Mobile Home Park led to the destruction of a working-class community—not just in its physical form, but also in terms of the mutually beneficial, reciprocal, and profoundly meaningful social relationships that tightly bound residents together and contributed positively to their health and well-being. The importance of this deep sense of community cannot be overstated; beyond partially motivating residents to advocate for Syringa to remain open, their shared sense of community directly facilitated a variety of impactful collective action activities—activities that are notoriously difficult to successfully coordinate within any group, let alone within a group of people who are often construed as socially disorganized and lacking in agency. Ironically, successful collective action among the residents, situated within the broader political economic context, contributed significantly to the mobile home park's closure. Syringa residents scattered as they were forced to individually secure new housing. Over time and distance, relationships were lost.

Hormel's overarching narrative regarding how relational class inequalities acted to expose Syringa residents to ecological hazards and housing precarity is a moving case study of how external forces slowly destroyed a vibrant working-class community. In fact, I find Hormel's valid assertion that mobile home parks are working-class communities to be a key contribution of *Trailer Park America.* Nonetheless, the labeling of mobile home parks as working-class communities is simultaneously one of my few critiques of this book. Throughout the chapters, Hormel impressively weaves an intersectional analysis into what is already a rich and complex narrative. Her demonstration that mobile home parks are not only home to a particular social class, but are also feminized spaces that sometimes house differently abled individuals, leads me to wonder whether mobile home parks are *just* working-class communities. Future scholarship might seek to answer the derivative questions: Mobile home parks are working-class communities *for whom,* and, how does this compare to other working-class identities and communities?

Although Hormel does reference contemporary concerns in the housing market, including rapidly rising housing costs and the growth of investor-owned properties, her policy recommendations focus more narrowly on reducing precarity for the residents of mobile home parks. While this makes good sense in the context of a book about mobile home parks, I was particularly struck by the reality faced by Syringa residents upon their forced displacement; namely, that there was a shortage of comparable working-class communities across *any* housing type for them to relocate to. Beyond implying the need for broader, market-level policy

changes, the reality faced by Dawn Tachell, Shannon Musick, Jim Ware, and other Syringa residents whom I had come to know, provoked me to wonder about the current state and future prospects of working-class communities in America and the social relations that emerge from them.

In sum, Hormel presents a compelling case study that makes vividly clear how political economic structures in the contemporary United States operated to destroy the working-class community of Syringa Mobile Home Park. Past scholarship concurs that these structural forces—namely, settler colonialism, capitalism, and neoliberal politics—affect working-class Americans regardless of the type of housing they reside in. I believe that *Trailer Park America* is a must-read for current and aspiring community engaged working-class scholars, as Hormel skillfully centers the experiences and voices of park residents while also demonstrating how their lived experience is relevant for sociological theory. Overall, this book will leave you pondering what working-class communities should look like in the future, and it will inspire you to act upon that conclusion.

Reviewer Bio

Lora A. Phillips is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Western Ontario. Her research seeks to answer three broad questions: Who has access to a stable life, and who does not? Why do observed social class, age, and racial-ethnic differences in exposure to precarious circumstances exist, particularly as it relates to the role of spatial and temporal context? And what are the consequences of exposure to material precarity, and inequalities therein, for individual and community health and well-being?

Chin, C. (2023). *Everything I Learned, I Learned in a Chinese Restaurant*. Little Brown and Company.

Review by Tracy Floreani

Curtis Chin's memoir lands at an opportune moment, when both food writing and memoir are experiencing a boom in the publishing world and among the foodie reading public. Chin's personal story seems likely to be put in conversation with other popular Asian American food writing, such as Momofuku Noodle Bar founder David Chang's *Eat a Peach* and the Anthony Bourdain-produced/composite-authored *L.A. Son*, about Korean taco truck celeb Roy Choi. Unlike these titles, though, which focus on the making of celebrity chefs, Chin's memoir flips the script and details the making of an ordinary person from the second home of a Chinese kitchen in Detroit in the 1970s and '80s. The story is deeply place-based, moving away from the predictable settings of New York, California, or culinary training abroad, and brings to life both the physical space of the restaurant where he spent most of his non-school hours and Detroit's multi-ethnic community during a time of great change.

To be clear, this is not a book of food writing. Brief descriptions of homemade snacks, restaurant specialties, and special off-menu family entrées pepper the story, but food is not the focus of the narrative nor the author's *raison d'être*. Simple descriptors like "tasty" and "delicious" appear a bit too frequently as stand-ins for more nuanced, sensory-filled descriptions, but the book's use of food is more symbolic, anyway. Here, food functions as part of the setting, part of the family culture, and even as a love-language during times of conflict. In her study *Eating Identities: Reading Food in Asian American Literature*, Wenying Xu asserts that "table narrative" in Asian American texts serves as a "site of economic, cultural, and political struggle, not as a site to produce self-exoticism or food pornography" (p. 14). Indeed, Chin's book serves up plenty of economic, political, and cultural struggle. By structuring the book in chapters that mimic the sections and numbered dishes of a Chinese menu, he hints at the ways in which the family restaurant structured his sense of self and possibilities. The memoir is full of pathos, including both a self-deprecating humor, as he recounts his experiences as a naive child who didn't always fit in with his family or community, and a palpable sense of fear that increasingly pervaded everyday life in the neighborhood surrounding Chung's Restaurant. This fear grew out of the increasingly violent crime accompanying the crack epidemic in tandem with a spate of reactionary, anti-Asian hate crimes when the Japanese auto industry's new success in the U.S. weakened the labor market in the Motor City. As he describes his pitch of the book in interviews, "come for the egg rolls, stay for the talk on racism."

The story moves chronologically from his family migration to Detroit a century ago, to his earliest childhood memories in the back kitchen, through his high school and college days, to his long-awaited launch into coming out and coming into adulthood. The narrative voice and tone evolves over the course of the book, too, from goofy and childishly joking toward more sober contemplations of place, race, and identity as Chin reaches his teen years. While there is plenty of family story, the book is rich with the contexts of this period and subtly develops into both a deeply personal memoir and a frank, unromanticized love letter to the struggling city of

Detroit. He poignantly notes at one point, "It must be sad to grow up in a city that has always been poor. It was even sadder to grow up in one that was formerly rich" (p.122). Woven into the story are many brief explorations that bring the period back to life: the multiple forces pushing the city into decline; rallying moments of Detroit sports triumphs; lighthearted escapism into popular culture and the worlds of Bruce Lee and John Hughes movies; the political climate of the Reagan era; and the new horizons glimpsed with the fall of the Berlin Wall. His representation of his own maturing outlook comes through especially in how the narrative voice becomes more controlled and insightful in his teen years as he details his growing awareness of the vulnerabilities presented by his intersectional identities. He deftly illustrates the complexities of his own thinking as he came to understand his sexuality but also felt the need to remain closeted both within his traditional family culture and in the life-or-death context of the AIDS epidemic at its height. Simultaneously, the violent, public murder of Vincent Chin (a family friend) made all of Detroit's Asian American population afraid to leave their homes, but also spurred their outrage and moved them to join in public demonstrations for civil rights. It is during this period that the author pinpoints his move toward politically-inflected writing: "Organizing my thoughts into sentences and then paragraphs renewed my faith in the American political process. I went from being a passive victim to an active participant" (p. 106). The narrative also feels very honest throughout, as Chin openly shares anecdotes of behaviors he is not particularly proud of, works to understand his own flirtations with being a young Randian conservative, and examines his willingness to remain deeply closeted for longer than felt comfortable.

Social class isn't the centerpiece of the story, but Chin's intersectional identity certainly includes "working-class." Class-consciousness and the family's moves toward upward mobility are throughlines of the story. While his parents joined an established, multi-partner family business, they clearly struggled throughout Chin's childhood, working long hours 364 days of the year and maintaining one beat-up van used to haul both restaurant supplies and deliveries as well as their six children and a set of grandparents in the rolling, seatless cargo space. As he describes his childhood, "most of my clothes were hand-me-downs and all of my toys were time-shares" (p. 82); "everyday was Take Your Kid to Work day" (p. 32). The family outings to a movie or a mall could likely be counted on one hand. As sirens became "the new Motown sound" (p. 122), more and more families moved out of the small Chinatown, and Chin's parents saved enough to join the exodus. He describes the extended family's move to a house in a small town about twenty minutes away from the restaurant, only to face a *Raisin in the Sun*-style attempt by neighbors to push them out of the majority-white community. And while the ten of them moved into a middle-class, split-level house, the resulting lifestyle was definitely not that of his schoolmates: "Our house resembled a northern outpost of the restaurant. Usually, it was a big mess, with unopened bills littering the kitchen counter, dirty aprons and napkins in the laundry room, boxes of paper supplies cluttering the halls" (p. 45). While their father, a fourth-generation American and college dropout, was content with his lifestyle and the choices his kids wanted to make for their futures, their mother had other ideas. Newly married and arriving in Detroit from Hong Kong at seventeen, her choices had been limited. She was determined that her children move up in social class through education.

The "everything I learned" of the title really comes to bear once Chin reluctantly agrees to go to college. In his childhood, the lessons were more overt: learning lessons from his own misbehavior, learning the art of strategy and "building momentum" from observing his mother play mahjong (p.90), learning how to prepare food (which, oddly enough, his parents didn't teach him, so he finagled lessons from one of their hired wok cooks on whom he had a crush). As the chapters set in college unfold, he seems to recognize all the implicit learning of his past

as he adapts to new surroundings. Readers look back with him on the lessons gleaned through constant observation in a restaurant that served a cross section of all of Detroit's population, from the local political elite, to the random tourist, to the prostitutes who worked the nearby red light Corridor. Wenying Xu notes that the power of food lies in its role as "the most significant medium of the traffic between the inside and outside of our bodies, [it] organizes, signifies, and legitimates our sense of self in distinction from others who practice different foodways" (p. 2). We witness this embodied knowledge coming to bear in Chin's life as he learns, through food-based interactions, how to connect with people from different cultures (even if they resist connection), how to work with powerful people and be civically engaged, how best to respond to racist behaviors, and, ultimately, how to develop his voice as a writer.

Reviewer Bio

Tracy Floreani is professor of English at Oklahoma City University where she teaches American literature and academic writing. She also serves as Director of the Jeanne Hoffman Smith Center for Film and Literature, OCU's public humanities initiative, and as president of MELUS. She is the author of *Fifties Ethnicities: The Ethnic Novel and Mass Culture at Midcentury* (2013), editor of the MLA *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Ralph Ellison* (2024), and is currently working on a biography of Fanny McConnell Ellison.

Beaton, K. (2022). *Ducks: Two Years in the Oil Sands.* Montreal. Drawn and Quarterly.

Review by Katherine Arnoldi

If the definition of plot is a character who wants something with obstacles in the way, then the graphic novel, *Ducks: Two Years in the Oil Sands,* by Kate Beaton is brimming with it. After college, Kate Beaton is back home in "have not" Cape Breton in the "have not" Canadian province of Nova Scotia with big school loans and no prospects of a job. Cape Breton has one export, people, so off Beaton goes to lucrative employment in the oil sands of northern Alberta.

Her father, a butcher, and her mother, who works at the credit union, are horrified. Why did she go to college, with all that expense, to just work in the western oil sands like everybody else in Nova Scotia? Her mother tells her nursing is a good field, one that, we assume, may have allowed her to stay close to home, but Kate has studied history and anthropology and wants to be an artist. "All I want to do is pay off my student loans," (p. 25), she says, so she can have a chance at a job she might love. The plot is in motion.

At the airport, her mother sprinkles her with holy water, blames herself and laments how she had to work and never had time to be with young Kate and then breaks down sobbing, as though she has a premonition of the dangers to come.

In Fort McMurray, Alberta (motto: We Have Energy), Kate sees casinos and bars named Newfoundlanders and makes her way to Syncrude, the base mine where she will work the split shift, twelve-hour days, six on, six off. Right off the bat, she is told of work hazards, fingers cut off by saw blades, trucks with people inside squashed by heavy hauler machinery and fingers lost to frostbite. During her two years, she will hear of many such tragedies. There is a poster of a safety pyramid: 300,000 risk behaviors on the bottom, 300 near miss incidents on the next tier, 30 minor incidents almost at the top and the pinnacle is one word: fatality.

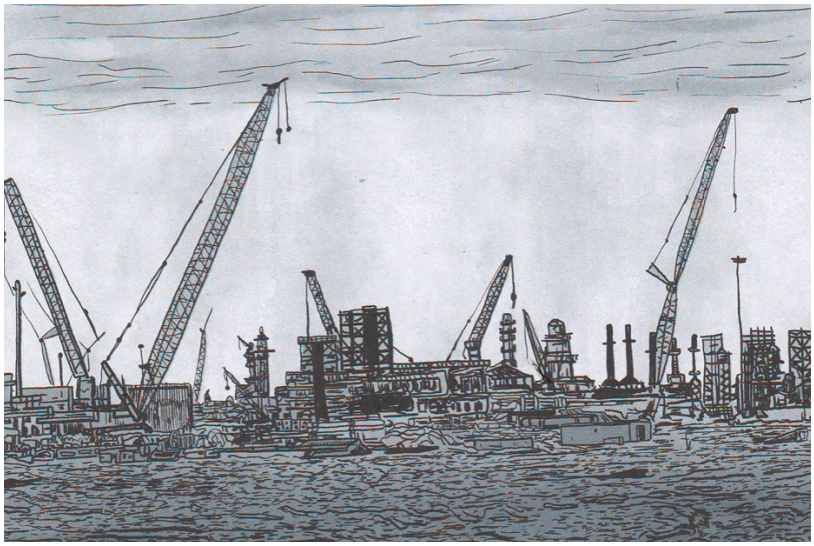
Equipped with a hard hat and steel-toed boots, Kate secures a job in the tool crib, relatively safer, except that there are fifty men for every one woman in this workplace depicted by Beaton as a flat, cold, barren moonscape of nothing. The men ask her the color of her underwear, trap her in hallways, try to open her locked door at night and eventually the worst happens, but who can report it and hope to keep their job? She befriends other women, one a welder out in the cold and scary fields and others inside with her and Kate survives her two years, noting that the man who raped her never gave it another thought, while it is a trauma that she will live with for an eternity.

The black and white line drawings enhanced by grey washes show lighthouses and Kate riding a ferry, her hair flying in the wind, in Cape Breton, and cars trapped in snowbanks, along with dirty, barren, smoke-ridden industrial landscapes in Alberta. One night, as though to mock the devastation, the Aurora Borealis shimmers over the bleakness. Beaton reads about Greenpeace activists protesting the ducks that are killed in a polluted tailing pond and a fellow worker asks her, "And who do you think cleans that up? Who puts their life on the line to unclog that pipe? I tell you it sure as fuck isn't the president of Shell" (p. 347). Also, she learns of the effects of the pollution and devastation of the oil sands on the lands of the First Nation people. In the

afterword, she lists them: the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, Chipewyan Prairie First Nation, Fort McKay First Nation, Fort McMurray First Nation, Fort McMurry No. 468 First Nation, Mikisew Cree First Nation, and the Metis communities.

One man, who has nothing to show for years of labor in the oil sands with his only retirement or pension being his "praying for my health to last" (p. 312), warns Kate that many workers come to the oil sands thinking they are coming for a short time only never to leave. Desperation abounds and she receives a resume from a worker, born in 1947, with four years in mining and twenty-eight years at a fish plant in Newfoundland, who hopes to get on at the oil sands. Kate bristles at a reporter who wants her to condemn the men and concludes that the reporter apparently doesn't think "that the loneliness and homesickness and boredom and lack of women around would affect their brother or dad or husband the same way" (p. 375).

Beaton has obstacle after obstacle to achieve her goal of keeping her job for two years to pay off her school loans but what about the others who cannot leave? Beaton tells us in the afterword that this book is her experience of the oil sands and there are thousands of other stories, but this nuanced, thoughtful and multi-level view, told through words and pictures, is one that surely must earn its place in working-class literature.



Reviewer Bio

Katherine Arnoldi's graphic novel, *The Amazing True Story of a Teenage Single Mom* (Hyperion, 1998) tells of her struggle to find the way to college as a teenage mother and also of four years working in a rubber glove factory in Ohio. It won two American Library Association Awards, the New York Foundation of the Arts Award in Drawing, was named a Top Ten Book of the Year by *Entertainment Weekly* and was nominated for an Eisner Award. *All Things Are Labor, Stories* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2007) won the Juniper Prize.

Dion-Glowa, J. (2022) *Trailer Park Shakes*. Brick Books.

Review by Sharon L. Barnes

Justene Dion-Glowa asks a lot of questions. In her first full-length work of poetry, *Trailer Park Shakes*, Dion-Glowa asks, and often answers, questions of herself, of the reader, and of the characters, both two-legged and otherwise, who populate this powerful group of poems exploring life challenged by intergenerational violence, poverty, and institutional indifference that is sometimes outright hostility. Separated into two sections, Dion-Glowa's work makes inquiries into the impact of misogyny, racism, and heteronormativity through the experiences of multiple, complex traumas, bringing visibility to the pain, struggle, and hard-fought efforts at healing, wishing, above all, as she notes in "perch," to "bear witness to the world" (p. 39).

While Dion-Glowa's biography identifies her as a queer Métis writer and human service worker who hails from Win-Nipi (Winnipeg) and currently lives in Secwepemcúl'ecw Territory in British Colombia--indeed some of the finest works in this collection bring forward themes that tie directly to her personal experience as a queer indigenous woman--the poems frequently do their work through a mixture of detail and abstraction that invite application beyond the particular experiences explored in the works. Though some readers might wish for more context-building details in these poems, the emphasis on issues brings the message about harm home.

Two opening ruminations offer Dion-Glowa's combination of philosophical abstraction, attention to detail, and the tension of the experience of complex marginalization that characterizes the best of these poems. In the opening poem, "Tissue," she identifies "desire for specialness" with a spider sac about to burst and "unload its writhing progeny onto this world," observing: "Greatness is a deep valley where/despair also lives." (p. 3)
The second poem, "blur," weaves another common theme, that of monstrosity, with the desire for visibility:

> you feel you must be seen
> as a palpitating monster ready to lunge
> and spread this infection
> to anyone who'll let you
> close enough to bite. (p. 4)

Later in the book, she asks of her "tiny friend" in "kaanookaat {spider}," "What does it feel like to wield power over such a great creature as humankind?" and "How can I take that power for my own?" (p. 8).

Time and again in these poems, she does wield that power, continually asserting that "something ain't right"(p. 7), in the relationships and institutions confronted here. Dion-Glowa places readers in fearful, painful, and confusing circumstances, giving voice to the experience of powerlessness

in ways that invite readers to contemplate our own positions as co-survivors, as complicit observers, and/or as perpetrators ourselves.

The impact of crushing poverty runs through these poems like the blood of the raven she picks up on the side of the road in "kornay {crow}:" "run[ning] furrows in the creases of my skin"(40). Without anchoring us in a specific place, Dion-Glowa manages through strategic details to bring the forgotten places and people into concrete reality, whether it be the "husk of a town … bleeding out" (p. 5) in "Dust Bowl Masquerade" or the girl who, because of her family's poverty, has "one nice dress" she has to wear to church "every time" in "sunday best"(p. 21).

Vulnerability to violence both interpersonal and institutional is practically inevitable under such conditions. In "Meadowwood Daze," the "children/playing at being grown" attack each other and yet stay friends, because "It's easier to believe in one another/ than it is to believe someone will intervene" (p. 30). Recounting her brother's death in "7 grams," Dion-Glowa returns to the strategy of asking questions, both rhetorical and specific, that drives many of these works:

> How many grams of crack in one's stomach is too much for the
> coroner to rule the overdose accidental?
> Or rather
> what is the threshold for this particular insurance provider? (p. 73)

Noting the doctor's insensitivity, she wonders if her brother is "just another brown boy in that doctor's eyes" and "How long did it take for the ambulance to arrive/ while the kids hid away or bore witness? (p. 73). Deeply individual questions driven by the intersectional personal pains of racism and poverty invite bigger questions about social positioning, as Dion-Glowa makes clear when she ironically observes that the hospital bill "add[s] invoice to injury" (p. 73).

Nowhere is this personal/political duality more heartbreakingly rendered than in the poems that address sexual vulnerability, hers and others'. In "The Van Man," she and her friend Claudette escape the van man's invitation for "a ride" because Claudette is brave and knows to say no and run. The author, "small and scared," wonders what would have happened "if I had been alone," and "if there are other Claudette's out there/ saving little girls/one at a time" (p. 31-2).

In other works, she isn't so lucky. The incredibly powerful "Aces" catalogs multiple experiences of sexual vulnerability and exploitation, noting "I didn't really know/ what *no* was." (p. 50) Understanding rape by age 4 and having a "porn habit" by 6, she observes, "CFS should've taken me when they had the chance to/ help but/we know they make things worse."(p. 49) Depicting a near miss at 15 from the man who tried to coerce her into "doggy style at his house/ The penetration is just so deep he said," compared to "waking up with fingers inside me/while the porno played/Like that other time," and the 20 year old who she dated at 16 who wouldn't acknowledge her in public, Dion-Glowa claims, "I would run without even knowing where is safe/What safe is as a concept" (p. 51) and reflects that "no is a powerful word for someone who/ wields none" (p. 50).

The titular poem, "Shakes," perhaps one of the finest in the collection, reverberates with the other works exploring the mental health crises that living in generationally abusive conditions can create,

"shakes" of a whole different kind. The piece opens by claiming, "The trailer park shakes when the trains go by" and, as is often the case in this collection, a duality emerges when the poet "can't tell yet if it's a comfort or a curse" (p. 17). Dion-Glowa again asks questions, wondering "if the kids know they're poor" but observes that, despite the noise of the contentious neighbors and the heater, and the broken fence and deck, there's a washer and a dryer, a skylight, and a "spectacular" view of the river and desert mountainside out back. In this poem, one of many in which the cyclical forces of social class oppression are overtly addressed, she wonders "how it is that no matter how hard we have worked we/never really make it" and asserts "everything you thought you knew/about how to be an effective adult is just misinformation/ … it really is just one fucked up situation after another in a/ never-ending loop." Ruminating on her Dad's love of trains, she directly posits, "Maybe intergenerational trauma got him/ the way it gets all us imperfect simpletons/ just trying to make it to next pay day" (p. 19).

As is often the case with underdogs, especially working-class ones, fierce love of family, despite the violence, deep will to survive, despite the suicidal ideation and consistent structural and personal harm, and wicked humor in the face of the odds being stacked against you also abound in these poems. Two of the three final poems in this book are my favorites. While they don't negate the horrors, affronts, and indignities explored earlier, "n8v aunties" offers the details that make her indigenous auntie's home become a refuge, though not without loss, as when she describes her autie's home as the place:

> where it becomes painfully apparent you have not yet felt the song
> pour from your hand to douse a drum
> where the rattle lies still cuz there was no one to teach you how to
> shake it –even your auntie doesn't know that. (p. 80)

But here at n8v auntie's where "the cedar hangs above every door," where the stories come with a "feast of KD and tomato soup," cousins and neighbors understand each other as family, and "the backyard is small but full of toys for kids/ that are too young to be her own" (p. 81), and "it's always so comfortable no matter how full or cramped or cluttered" (p. 82). The beautiful final poem, "Claim Laid" is "a prayer for the dead and dying" wishing for peace, reconciliation, and rest, ending with:

> I hope sagebrush bursts through your cedarwood coffin
> and Eagle carries you home to Creator
> I hope Thunderbird screams your name
> and Coyote howls a lament for your spirit's journey
>
> We will keep the fire burning for you
>
> to light your way home (p. 84-5)

In these challenging, questioning, deeply personal, and darkly political poems, Justene Dion-Gowa asks difficult questions, and the stories she tells as partial answers offer little space for distance, which is as it should be in such poetry of witness.

Reviewer Bio

Sharon L. Barnes is Associate Professor and Chairwoman of the Department of Women's & Gender Studies at the University of Toledo.

Daniels, J. (2023) *The Luck of the Fall.* Michigan State University Press.

Review by Sherry Lee Linkon

Thirty years ago, Jim Daniels hooked me with his poems about work and working people. Some were laugh-out-loud funny while others were more poignant, and they all felt gut-punch real. I still regularly use "Factory Love" and "Short Order Cook" to get students thinking about how work can be at once exploitative and fulfilling. I've written before about Daniels's Digger series of short stories, which stretches across a couple of decades in both the writer's career and his character's life on the assembly line. While I love his poems, I also admire Daniels's range as a writer. And he's a hard worker. He has published more than 30 books of poetry, seven story collections, and four screenplays, plus several edited collections. Jim Daniels might be a "Tenured Guy" -- a hilarious send-up of academic workplace politics that was a popular favorite anytime he read at a Working-Class Studies conference or event -- but he is also a very productive guy.

In *The Luck of the Fall,* his latest story collection, Daniels takes us into the lives of the kind of white working-class men who have been described in much contemporary discourse as "left behind." These are not the displaced workers of deindustrialized Detroit. These are their sons and grandsons, men for whom Digger's ambivalence about spending years at the Sterling Axle Plant represents a modest and unattainable dream.

These stories reveal the depth and persistence of loss that the industrial working class suffered as the world changed around them. Like earlier generations who struggled to recover from the loss of good union factory jobs, these men are also recovering -- from addiction, failed romances, low expectations, and limited opportunities. In the title story, Daniels's narrator looks back fondly on a childhood when fathers worked overtime, boys "beat on each other out of reckless affection or subconscious preparation for our assembly-line futures" (3). Instead of growing up into stable lives, the boys and girls of the narrator's memory become addicts who reconnect with each other accidentally, "in the light of the bare-bulb lamp on the naked floor of that abandoned house that had been repurposed for drugs" (5). These are not stories of triumphant resilience. They are stories of resignation and, in some cases, of giving up.

But Daniels also helps us understand how limited economic options can prompt attitudes and actions that make things even worse. We see that link in the title story, where Daniels explains that because the children of displaced autoworkers "could not shoot" the "faceless bad guys" who shut down the plants, "we shot each other until houses were abandoned by our parents, or by us" (5). Often writing in first person, he takes us into the minds of men with few options who often choose the least promising door. In "Heart-Attack Bear," a group of high school friends reunite, including some who have moved away to pursue professional careers, but the story's narrator feels shame and frustration over his less successful path. He feels invisible, "a fat, balding middle-aged man." He went to Michigan Tech briefly "to play football," but he wasn't big enough or fast enough to get off the bench, and he "didn't put much value on the free education." So he dropped out and

married his high school sweetheart. Divorced after more than twenty years, he still mourns his marriage and still lusts after his former sister-in-law. "I'm a guy from Detroit," he thinks. "I can fix a lot of things, but not my life" (61). As in much of Daniels's writing, the first-person narration invites us to empathize with these characters in part because we understand their flaws.

A few stories expand the range of vision to people whose situations aren't as clearly influenced by economic and social decline. In "The Girl in the Tie-Dyed Shirt outside Spice Island," a long-married couple sit in their car "waiting to pick up some takeout" (93). They aren't quite happy, but they are stable: "My wife Meg idling in the driver's seat. I sat beside her, idling also. After thirty-three years, it was the best we could do. At least we hadn't stalled. At least we weren't rolling backward down the hill" (93). In "Single Room" -- the only story told from a female point of view -- we see the world from the perspective of an anorexic college student. She has returned to campus after study abroad, and she has turned inward. She's changed her major to English because she likes writing poetry, but "now her voice is disappearing along with the rest of her, . . . even her thought bubbles seemed blank" (104). She is determined to remain isolated, but the story also shows her beginning to connect with a guy who is equally determined to break through to her.

"Single Room" is at once heartbreaking and the tiniest bit hopeful, as is "Corrections," which offers glimmers of hope along with a tinge of warning. The story follows Hank, who values the relationships but not the crime and violence of his old motorcycle gang. As we follow him on a trip home to Detroit for the funeral of a gang member, we learn how he is trying to rewrite his life. He works as a guard at a private prison, and he is hoping to marry a woman from the Philippines with whom he's been corresponding. The story comes late enough in the book that, without Daniels offering any specific evidence, we suspect that she is a fraud. But Hank writes sincerely, promising her that he is trying to be a good man, that he will take good care of her and her family. Meanwhile, his gang wants his help in killing an old buddy whom they blame for the death of another gang member, and he must decide what to do. In Hank, we see the draw of a better life but also the many obstacles that keep that better life, like his correspondence girlfriend, perpetually in the distance.

While a sense of regret runs through these stories, Daniels's characters do not imagine the more prosperous past as a site of nostalgia. Instead, their nostalgia is focused on earlier days when romances were still full of hope, when going to college or into the plant seemed like it might enable a good life. And Daniels always reminds us that those good times were not as good as people remember. In some stories, he takes that even further, showing how nostalgia can trick us into foolish hope. In "Just a Crack," the narrator goes to visit an old girlfriend. She had sent him a letter, "about us, everything she remembers, and missed." The narrator recognizes the appeal of "some clear, simple, burnished nostalgia for back when we were wanna-be rebels." But he also understands that their reunion will not return them to the time before "rebellion washed away in our self-manufactured storms" (110). Addiction has too strong a hold on this woman, as does her violent boyfriend.

The stories in *The Luck of the Fall* highlight the continuing effects of economic and political shifts that began decades ago. Decades of struggling with bad jobs and low pay, addiction, and most recently the pandemic have lowered people's expectations and left many depressed. In Jim Daniels's eyes, though, the humans of the Rust Belt are not "left behind." They take center stage, and Daniels makes sure we see their whole stories, not just their struggles.

Reviewer Bio

Sherry Lee Linkon is Professor of English at Georgetown University. She is the author of *The Half-Life of Deindustrialization: Working-Class Writing about Economic Restructuring* and, with John Russo, of *Steeltown USA: Work and Memory in Youngstown*. The founding president of the Working-Class Studies Association, she was one of the founders of "new working-class studies" as a field.