The
INTERSECTIONS
of a WORKING-CLASS
ACADEMIC IDENTITY

A CLASS APART

Teresa Crew

The Intersections of a Working-Class Academic Identity

PRAISE FOR *THE INTERSECTIONS OF A WORKING-CLASS ACADEMIC IDENTITY*

A hugely important book, which deserves to be read not only by academics, whatever their class, but also all universities, who desperately need to update their policies to encompass central issues of class. Based on research with working-class academics at a wide range of university types, the book is erudite and offers a very significant contribution to the field. Everyone should read the research participants' own proposals for university change – what a wonderful change to present policies and practices they would make! Bring them on!

Professor Valerie Walkerdine, Cardiff University

This rich and thought-provoking book provides a powerful rejoinder to deficit models of social mobility and underlines the profound wealth of knowledge and experience that working-class academics bring to the academy.

Professor Sam Friedman, London School of Economics

The Intersections of a Working-Class Academic Identity: A Class Apart

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

To my Daughters, Jade and Zoe, my pride and joy, and part of the next generation of working-class women in academia. Love Always xx

To Nick, Thank You for everything, even more so recently. Love Always. xx

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Chapter 1

Class in Academia*

Keywords: Diversity; disadvantage; lived experience; definition; class; working-class academics

Overview

Despite ongoing efforts to promote diversity within universities, they continue to reflect and perpetuate traditional patriarchal, colonial, and privileged hierarchies of gender, ethnicity, and class (Phillips et al., 2022). For this reason, universities remain 'oppressive academic institutions' (Tran, 2020, p. 49). Social class, the central theme of this book, holds particular significance because class-privileged academics enjoy significant unearned advantages that facilitate their admission to, and navigation of elite institutions. Additionally, they can access prestigious mentorships, and enhanced employment opportunities. While the academy has historically demanded cultural assimilation from working-class individuals (Reay, 1998), forcing them to navigate 'architectures of exclusion' built on elite and middle-class values (Walkerdine, 2021), a stark reality remains. As bell hooks (1994) poignantly observed, 'nowhere is there a more intense silence about the reality of class differences than in educational settings' (p. 177). One significant silence that has motivated this body of research is the lack of recognition of the impact of an elite-dominated academic landscape. The overrepresentation of scholars from privileged backgrounds perpetuates classism and has potentially deterred talented working-class individuals from pursuing academic careers. Our lived experiences offer a crucial counterpoint to the dominant elite narratives, enriching teaching and research, while challenging academia's power structures.

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*All names of respondents used in this book are pseudonyms. This measure was implemented to safeguard the anonymity of respondents.

Building on my previous work (Crew, 2020), this book advances the scholarship on working-class academics (WCAs) in four ways:

- It consolidates the systemic challenges encountered by WCAs within a framework of classism. This is a vital contribution to sociological literature as discussions on classism in higher education (HE) have predominantly centred around students. While existing scholarship is nuanced and insightful, outside of the field of WCA studies, the experiences of WCAs are frequently oversimplified, relegated to individual struggles and often entirely ignored. This book seeks to rectify this oversight, and in doing so, argues for its inclusion in conversations on equity and social justice within the broader field of education studies.
- The book includes an analysis of existing statistical data on WCAs derived from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). A prior statistical analysis by Friedman and Laurison (2019) of the classed background of people in various professions included academic respondents who also worked outside academia. This book provides statistical insights into those who exclusively work *within* academia.
- While the central premise of this book remains that class is the primary vector of disadvantage faced by WCAs (and other working-class people), academia is not only a classed space. It is 'a white space' (Reyes, 2022, p. 15), and one that is masculine and able bodied too. This book builds upon the intersectional findings established in Crew (2020) and introduces an intersectional analysis of 'institution' and 'subject discipline'.
- Finally, a key objective of my original work was to present an informed alternative perspective to the prevailing deficit viewpoint that characterises research on working-class individuals in HE. In this book, I expand upon the discussion of the cultural wealth of WCAs, first introduced in Crew (2020).

Conducting the Research

Over the course of five years, this research has utilised a mixed methods approach, incorporating qualitative semi-structured interviews and survey data collected in three distinct research phases.[1] A fourth research phase analysed existing

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[1]Prior to interviews taking place, I ensured informed consent by sending the interviewees a copy of the information sheet and permission to record the interview form. I sent respondents the original ethics form (Ethics reference number: BLSS14) so they could have full details of the study. Before the interview, I introduced the study, and reminded respondents of their right to leave the study at any time (and that their data would be destroyed if they did so), then discussed other relevant ethical issues such as confidentiality and storage of data. With regards to the survey, the same details from the information sheet were recorded at the start of the survey. Respondents were then asked to tick yes or no regarding the following statement 'I have read the information above and I am happy to participate'.

statistical data and is discussed in Chapter Two. This study collected data from 255 WCAs from across the UK.[2] Further elaboration will be provided in Chapters Four and Five, but spanning the three phases of data collection, approximately two-thirds of the respondents were female, 10% of respondents were from diverse, ethnic backgrounds, and 1 in 5 had a disability or long-term illness.[3] My interview data revealed that 76% of respondents had parents who were in manual employment, compared with 80% of survey respondents.[4] Both the interview and survey data demonstrated that few had educational advantages via their parents as only 10% of interview respondents and 8% of survey respondents said that their parents had a degree qualification. This is extremely low compared to other research, as in a study of 7,218 tenured faculty members, Morgan et al. (2022) found that over half had parents with a master's degree or higher. In all, 20% of those who completed the survey and 8% of interviewees were in professional employment, with the vast majority of respondents being in forms of manual employment.[5] The data on the type of school attended were less detailed as this question was not included in the survey. Only n.5 interview respondents reported that they went to private school, and each mentioned having some form of a scholarship which enabled them to do so. Just under half of the survey respondents mentioned being a recipient of free school meals (FSM) alongside 70% of the interviewees. There were fewer respondents from either Oxford or Cambridge Universities (Oxbridge)[6] with most either working at post-1992 or traditional institutions. Alongside this, respondents represented over 34 different subject areas, across a wide disciplinary spectrum. Health, Social Sciences, Geography, and Education comprised of the majority of respondents, with sparse representation in fields such as Physics, IT, and Mathematics. The rest of this chapter will introduce my research respondents, before examining the concept of class and what this means in terms of a WCA identity. The final section will outline the structure of the book.

Positioning My Own Experiences

This study is influenced by my working-class heritage, which contributes a lived experience that compliments the existing literature on WCAs. My parents are

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[2]Details of the research design are provided in Appendix One. The experiences of respondents from research phase one were included in Crew (2020). Where appropriate, this will be referred too throughout this book.

[3]Statistics were generally similar in each phase except there were greater levels of men recruited in phase two and lower levels of academics from ethnic minorities.

[4]The slight difference between research methods is because some respondents cited their parents' self-employment, all of whom referred to their parents having a small business.

[5]All names of respondents used in this book are pseudonyms. This measure was implemented to safeguard the anonymity of respondents.

[6]Details such as institution, subject area, and country will be discussed in Chapter Five.

from large working-class cities, Nottingham, and Liverpool. Despite facing intermittent unemployment and relying on welfare benefits, they nurtured aspirations for a better future. This has provided me with a personal understanding of economic and social disadvantage, ambition, and hard work. I was born in 1972, and lived in social housing cross various locations, including Runcorn, Nottingham, Liverpool, and eventually in North Wales since my teenage years. My academic promise may have been evident, but due to my class background, no one was going to say: 'you're bright, go to university' (O'Neill, 2019). My limited economic, social, and cultural capital curtailed any career aspirations. I left school at 16 and found employment in routine service jobs, such as waitressing and retail, before becoming a young mother at the age of 21. Despite being far removed from academia, in my spare time I read academic books and nurtured an aspiration to attend university.

Vague aspirations for university lingered within me until 2003 whereby a chance conversation with a friend, discussing her course, gave me that push to start my own academic journey. Similar to existing research indicating that disadvantaged students are often underrepresented at prestigious universities (McGrath & Rogers, 2021), I chose to pursue my education at a local university near my home, prioritising the convenience of being close to my children's school over the consideration of institutional reputation. Despite struggling with low self-confidence, again common for working-class people (Ryan & Sackrey, 1984), my aspirational capital[7] (Yosso, 2005) drove me forward, even during the most challenging of times. I had numerous financial, social, and cultural obstacles but I persevered, achieving a first-class honours degree, and subsequently completed my master's and PhD degrees. I took on sessional teaching at the university and then secured a permanent lecturing position (Crew, 2020). While this may seem like a smooth and straightforward transition, these years were challenging, characterised by self-doubt and financial struggles. Additionally, I experienced disruptive episodes of ill health. Adopting an intersectional lens (Crenshaw, 1989), it's significant that I've (unwisely) worked without reasonable adjustments, wanting to keep up a 'façade of sameness' (Lourens, 2021, p. 1212). In retrospect, I've been wary about adding a disability to my classed identity as being 'impaired' and 'competent' are typically deemed to be incompatible (Gil Gomez, 2017).

Since entering academia I've encountered numerous people who have made remarks about my social class without fully grasping the bumpy road I've travelled and still traverse. Without the 'Class Matters' collection by Mahony and Zmroczek (1997) I might never have understood that there were 'others like me' who positioned themselves as being 'working class' (Hey, 2003). I recognise that my established position at a reputable university, along with my publications and academic accolades, may initially mask my status as an 'outsider within'

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[7]I will discuss Yosso's forms of capital later in this chapter, with a specific focus on it in Chapter Six.

(Hill Collins, 1986). I'm privileged enough to have a dream job that pays me to read and then talk about what I have read. However, without the financial support of a school bursary for my master's degree or securing a prestigious Economic and Social Research Council funding for my PhD, or having had the opportunity to teach undergraduate seminars, or being employed as a lecturer on precarious contracts for four years, it is highly likely that my academic journey would have concluded with my undergraduate degree. These fortunate circumstances have played an equally, if not more, significant role in my academic success than any personal skills I possess.

I've never 'relaxed' in the academy. While some academics have had a lifetime of reassurances that they are 'worthy' of a position in academia, that has not been my narrative. Despite entering academia in my late thirties with a rich tapestry of lived experiences and a professional background, I have consistently struggled to find a sense of belonging. In fact, I feel more acutely aware of my working-class identity within the academic sphere. It's been 10 years since I gained my lecture-ship and I still wait for that email that will say in that unfailingly polite middle-class way, '*there seems to have been a terrible mistake, you were never meant to have this esteemed academic position*'. It's not imposter syndrome that makes me feel like this, rather I'm just aware, as were many of my respondents, that universities were not originally 'designed' with someone like me in mind.

Nevertheless, I've always recognised that my lived experiences as a first-generation student and subsequently as a WCA are valuable assets in the academic realm. Deeply ingrained within me is a profound sense of justice and empathy, especially when it comes to my students. My working-class heritage, which positions me as a 'queer subject' (Hey, 2003, p. 319) in this academic space, empowers me to forge authentic connections with my students, particularly those who share my working-class heritage. I have deliberately refrained from trying to 'pass' as a typical academic, developing instead a chameleon-like habitus (Keane, 2023) (more of this in Chapter Two) that has enabled me to navigate academic environments with classed authenticity. I live in the same type of social housing I always have and socialise with the same working-class people I always did. My interests align with aspects of lowbrow culture, such as watching football and reality TV, although I do appreciate highbrow culture, such as the theatre and museums. Even my relaxed form of speech, which is casual and sprinkled with the occasional profanity, sets me apart in academia (Crew, 2020). These elements of my identity are my past and my present and serve as a bridge between my students and academia. I've not changed since becoming an academic, I've just read more books.

Defining Class

Despite social democratic parties dropping the rhetoric of class (Nineham, 2023) or reporting that the 'class war is dead' (Blair, 1999), the UK government's 2021 Social Mobility Barometer, found that almost half of the general public (48%) identified themselves as being working class (Social Mobility Commission, 2021).

Class has earned the moniker 'the British disease' (Halsey, 1995), alluding to its persistent presence and the challenges associated with ignoring it.[8] Karl Marx's classic definition, which organises class based on our relationship to the means of production, provides a valuable foundational perspective (Marx, 1867/1990). While not the first to discuss class, Marx understood 'the significance of class for understanding society and for changing it' (Nineham, 2023, p. 17). In contrast, a Weberian view of class, positions it as multidimensional, capturing the intricate interactions among wealth, prestige, and power (Wright, 2002). The contrast between Marx and Weber emphasises the complexity inherent in defining social class. At its most fundamental, class is characterised by factors including income (the amount of money one earns); occupation (the type of job one holds); education (the level of educational attainment); and wealth (the accumulation or inheritance of assets) (Hurst & Nenga, 2016).

Our social class has traditionally been defined through employment-based classifications, such as the Registrar General's Social Class (RGSC), which ranked occupations hierarchically based on skill and manual/nonmanual work. This approach became less meaningful in the 21st century due to changes in work and occupations. Goldthorpe (2007) then categorised individuals into three groups: employers, self-employed workers, and employees. Goldthorpe's classification, while influential in European sociology, differed from the RGSC by including the self-employed. One critique of such classifications is that they assign people to a social class based on their job titles, which may or may not accurately reflect the nature of their work. Since 2001, the National Statistics Socio Economic Classification (NS-SEC) has been widely used in official statistics and surveys. It comprises eight categories, but a simplified three class version is often employed, categorising individuals into higher, intermediate, and lower occupations. This classification presents challenges when categorising service workers and categorise unpaid work.

The work of Pierre Bourdieu, the French sociologist and public intellectual, has come to dominate British Sociology over the last 40 years. Bourdieu, born into a working-class family in southern France, attended an ordinary secondary school before transferring to a more prestigious school in Paris (Britannica, 2024). It is interesting that many obituaries do not explicitly refer to his class heritage, despite him writing a book, 'Sketch for a Self Analysis', that applied his own theories to his working-class background and intellectual trajectory. For Bourdieu, social stratification is based on taste, typically linked to our salary, savings, and possessions (economic capital), our networks (social capital) and what we do in our spare time (cultural capital) (Hill, 2018). In *Distinction* (1984), his classic text, he demonstrated how 'social order is inscribed in people's minds through cultural products, including education, language, values and everyday activities' (1986, p. 471). Bourdieu asserted that the struggles faced by working class students in

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[8]In the aforementioned UK government's 2021 Social Mobility Barometer, 84% of respondents were prepared to identify themselves with a particular social class background, which suggests that these broad 'class divisions' matter to people.

French HE were not rooted in intellectual deficiencies but rather stemmed from the failure of universities to recognise and value their working-class backgrounds (Bourdieu, 1989/1996). He also explored the ways in which forms of capital are cultural signifiers that demonstrate one's place in the social hierarchy. Economic capital affords the elite access to the most prestigious universities, while their accumulated cultural capital means they thrive within these institutions. Their social capital or elite networks will then ensure them professional employment (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), in a specific field (hierarchal social space) of their choice. Although the rules and hierarchies within these fields are not permanently fixed and are subject to ongoing struggles between classes (Bourdieu, 1985).

Inspired by Bourdieu's theoretical concepts and a perception that the conventional ways of thinking about class, characterised by distinct 'upper', 'middle', and 'working' divisions, are somewhat outdated, the Great British Class Survey (GBCS) was developed in 2011 by Professor Mike Savage and Professor Fiona Devine. The GBCS, the largest survey of social class ever conducted in the UK, was also a unique collaboration with the BBC. The online survey attracted 161,400 web respondents, as well as a nationally representative sample survey (Savage et al., 2013) which included questions about social, cultural, and economic capital. Its most significant finding was that the British class system is more complex than had previously been thought. It emphasised the significance of various factors, including education, age, and location, in shaping class dynamics. The GBCS proposed categories (see below) that show there is still an elite, a middle, and a working class, alongside an acknowledgment that people have varied levels of economic, social, and cultural capital:

- *Elite*: Very high economic resources, savings, and investments; extensive social connections; deep engagement with highbrow cultural activities.
- *Established Middle Class*: High economic capital, high-status social networks, strong participation in highbrow and emerging creative culture.
- *Technical Middle Class*: High economic capital, smaller but high-status social circles, moderate cultural capital.
- *New Affluent Workers*: Moderate economic resources; limited social contacts but high range; moderate highbrow, good emerging cultural capital.
- *Traditional Working Class*: Moderate economic hardship, few social contacts, limited participation in high or emerging culture.
- *Emergent Service Workers*: Moderate economic hardship but reasonable income, some social contacts, engagement in emerging culture.
- Precariat: Severe economic deprivation, lowest social connections and cultural capital (Savage, 2015; Savage et al., 2013).

There have been criticisms of the GBCS with Mills (2015) noting that the 'elite' category was not well defined by the procedures used to identify it, and as such, the GBCS 'elite' is too large. Mills suggests that the 'elite' groups should have been defined according to reliable external data sources (pp. 395 and 397). Bradley et al. (2014) identified shortcomings with the GBCS where the selective markers of cultural capital skewed the empirical findings and fostered a negative

view of working class culture. She also remarked that there was a lack of coherence with some groupings (p. 429).

The work of Tara Yosso (2005) provided a much needed, alternative lens to position socially marginalised groups. Inspired by Critical Race Theory (CRT), which challenged conventional ideas about race, racism, and inequality. Yosso contested Bourdieu's view on the value of 'elite' and middle-class 'knowledge' since this framed anyone outside these social classes as being somehow 'deficient'. Yosso (2005) identified community cultural wealth (CCW), as in the knowledge, skills, and abilities possessed by marginalised groups such as linguistic, social/ familial: aspirational, navigational, and resistance capital (pp. 77–80). This model has been used by Flynn et al. (2023) to demonstrate how library workers can recognise working-class cultural wealth within the context of critical information literacy. O'Shea (2016) applied CCW to demonstrate how mature students drew upon lived experiences during their transition to university. Yosso's research will be utilised in Chapter Six to illuminate the forms of 'capital' that WCAs bring to academia.

Overview of the Book

Following this introduction, the rest of this book is structured as follows:

Chapter Two: The Complex Question of Definition examines the literature on WCAs before exploring the commentary on defining a WCA. This includes reference to cultural background and financial struggles, as well as habitus and capital.

Chapter Three: Classism explores the harmful stereotypes, derogatory comments, microaggressions, and minimisation that marginalise WCAs. These experiences inflict an emotional toll through imposterism, isolation, deteriorating mental health, and a pressure to assimilate.

Chapter Four: Intersectional Perspectives examines how gender, ethnicity, and disability status compounds class barriers. Understanding these complex dynamics provides a comprehensive picture of WCAs experience of the academy.

Chapter Five: The Impact of Place discusses how institutions confer status, based on history and prestige, while academic disciplines carry distinct norms that affect cultural fit. These intersections profoundly impact a scholars' identity.

Chapter Six: Working-Class Academic Cultural Wealth presents a discussion of the cultural resources WCAs possess to navigate through academia.

Chapter Seven: 'It doesn't have to be like this', the concluding chapter, provides a summary of the research findings before outlining the recommendations provided by respondents on how academia needs to change.

Chapter 2

The Complex Question of Definition

Keywords: Definition; class; working-class academics; habitus; capital; precarity; casualisation

Overview

Defining a working-class academic (WCA) is challenging for many reasons, not least in the context of Beck's notion that class is a 'zombie' category, one that obscures more than it clarifies in the landscape of 'second modernity' (Beck, 2011, p. 29). In his previous work, *Risk Society*, Beck (1992) explored how risks such as environmental degradation, technological accidents, and financial crises have become central to the modern experience. Unlike traditional industrial risks that affected working class people, Beck argued that the consequences of these contemporary risks are no longer confined to particular social classes but have a universal impact, transcending traditional distinctions. In contrast, Atkinson (2017) maintained that class structures, conflicts, and struggles have endured in the 21st century. Skeggs (2004), aligning with this view, asserted that class is shaped by and is in the interests of those who wield power. As such, scholarship about the working-classes, by the working-classes, i.e. those with lived experience, is crucial because symbolic class violence frequently places working-class people at a disadvantaged position compared to the elite and middle classes (Leeb, 2004, p. 16). WCAs are a complex case study since, superficially at least, their advanced qualifications and professional incomes may set them apart from the stereotypical working class (Leeb, 2004). However, conversations with my WCA respondents revealed that it is more nuanced than that. Chapter Two focuses on the definition and representation of WCAs, before turning to a discussion on academic precarity.

Perspectives on Working-Class Academics

Over a period of 40 years, scholars have intermittently investigated the challenging and unwelcoming environment WCAs experience in academia. Foundational texts from the United States such as *Strangers in Paradise: Academics from the Working Class* (1984) by Ryan and Sackrey, and *This Fine Place So Far from Home* (1995) by Dews and Law revealed the struggles WCAs face, for instance, the feeling of not fitting into academia. The beautifully heartfelt *Limbo: Blue-Collar Roots, White-Collar Dreams* (2005) by Lubrano extended this theme and discussed the internal conflicts WCAs experience when straddling 'two worlds'. In 1997, UK academics, Mahony and Zmroczek published a groundbreaking edited collection of essays entitled *Class Matters: Working Class Women's Perspectives on Social Class*. This book, influenced by a dissatisfaction with writings on social class written primarily from a middle-class perspective, brought together the experiences of working-class women who were studying and working in HE. Their narratives are 'troubled and paradoxical' (Hey, 2003, p. 320). Further texts from outside the UK have delved into contemporary issues in academia. Hurst's 2010 work *The Burden of Academic Success: Loyalists, Renegades, and Double Agents* described the psychological and social costs of academic success. Whereas Michell et al.'s (2015) work *Bread and Roses: Voices of Australian Academics from the Working Class*, and Ardoin and Martinez's (2019) book *Straddling Class in the Academy* offered valuable insights into the obstacles faced by WCAs and the family support they receive.

Various journal articles have extended research themes relating to WCAs. Poole (2023) suggests the importance of discussions on WCAs also come from a positive space, transcending victimhood and heroic narratives (p. 522). Walkerdine (2023) recognises the challenges encountered by working-class researchers while highlighting the transformative potential of their research to inspire pride rather than shame. Pifer et al. (2023) conducted a content and thematic analysis of 218 published narratives from WCAs, to explore the impact of their class backgrounds at work and home. Their research highlighted the challenges that arise when contributing 'one's talents in the liminal space between two worlds' (p. 125). Their study also observed the need for intersectional research on the effects of other identity characteristics alongside their working-class identities (Pifer et al., 2023). Jones and Maguire's (2021) intersectional research on WCA women discussed their 'hybrid identities', as described by Walkerdine et al., (2003) and Lubrano (2005), which meant they did not comfortably 'fit' into either middle-class academia or their working-class 'homes'. The impact of their gender was that they were subjected to lower pay and fewer promotion opportunities compared to their male counterparts (p. 46).

In recent years, three books have emerged from academics within the UK. *Experiences of Academics from a Working Class Heritage: Ghosts of Childhood Habitus* by Binns (2019) focused on the role their background played in helping them to support and develop a rapport with working-class students. In Crew (2020), *Higher Education and Working Class Academics. Precarity and Diversity in Academia*, respondents recalled their lived experience of impostor syndrome,

alienation, and microaggressions. Last, but by no means least, Burnell Reilly (2022) book of autoethnographies, *The Lives of Working Class Academics: Getting Ideas Above Your Station* delved into the journeys and identity negotiation of WCAs. These books collectively expanded the discourse on WCAs by offering nuanced personal narratives. In its entirety, this literature, which also includes numerous US and various UK journal articles by influential academics such as Hey (various); Walkerdine (various); Rickets and Morris (2021), have provided valuable insights into the challenges WCAs encounter in academia. While significant progress has been made in the scholarship on the perspectives of WCAs, there are still gaps in this literature. Most notably, there is a lack of substantial critique of the term 'working-class academic'.

A working class identity serves as a powerful tool for challenging and interrogating the entrenched power dynamics within academia (Mazurek, 2009). Yet incorporating the social identifier 'working-class' into a study of academics introduces inherent tensions and conflicts because as Attfield (2007) critically comments, entry into academia is presumed to be a 'ticket out of the working classes' (p. 33). The term WCA might appear paradoxical as 'working-class' has traditionally implied a position 'below' those from elite or middle-class backgrounds. Working class people are often perceived as being uncouth, irrational, and as having a lack of intelligence (Long et al., 2000, p. 1). This characterisation is particularly intriguing when considering Skeggs's (2004) observation that 'attributing negative value to the working-class is a mechanism for attributing value to the middle class (p. 977), i.e. one is tasteful by judging another to be tasteless.

Those deemed "smart" are expected to climb the social ladder and abandon their working-class identities - problematising assumptions about social mobility (Todd, 2018) and also disregarding the intelligence of those who embrace their class heritage. My respondents had varied engagement with their backgrounds. Some continued to reside in the same neighbourhoods and/or preserved their cultural identities, while others had some distance from their heritage. Francis (2023), who had a hybrid experience, referred to living in the same area, drinking in the same pubs, but reported that he did not feel that he identified as being working class. He did acknowledge however, that he was 'active in its ecosystem' (p. 19), suggesting engagement without necessarily claiming membership.

Yet, I can also recognise that academics defining themselves as being working class may be perceived as denying one's privilege or '*wanting the best of both worlds*' as someone once said to me. One could argue that my respondents are fortunate enough to pursue their passions in research and receive financial rewards for what, for some, may be a pastime. They may engage in international travel, within the limitations of their research budgets, and typically enjoy flexible work schedules. Academia demonstrated increased flexibility amid the COVID-19 pandemic by adopting remote work arrangements. However, data from the Office of National Statistics (2023) indicate that this privilege is less common among working-class individuals. This disparity is also evident in manual employment, where workers, typically from working-class backgrounds, endure repetitive tasks,

fixed positions with little autonomy. Some manual jobs do pay well, typically the dirty, dangerous jobs that men often do, but generally, there is an obvious salary differential between manual and professional employment. For instance, manual roles are often hourly paid at or above the national minimum wage (£10.18), while the average salary for a Lecturer in the UK is £40,761[1] (Universities and College Union, n.d.).

Lynch and O'Neill (1994) concluded that 'if one is working class and formally educated, in the sense of having obtained higher education credentials… one loses one's defining social class identity in part if not in whole' (p. 319). The implication is that even with a degree, one might not be considered working class, reinforcing the stereotype that working-class individuals are not intelligent. Wakeling's (2010) chapter entitled 'Is There Such Thing as a Working Class Academic?', also argued that academics cannot be working class as 'they do not "labour" in the conventional sense' (p. 38). His thoughtful analysis continues:

> It does not follow that the occupational position and life circumstances of a junior professional such as an academic can be compared to that of someone in a 'solidly' working-class occupation such as a bus driver, cleaner or a supermarket checkout assistant…In general, pay and conditions are better in the professions. (Wakeling, 2010)

Examining each point individually, Wakeling's argument, though persuasive, paints a partial picture of working-class employment and overlooks the shifts there have been in the labour market, wherein manual jobs are progressively being replaced by roles that demand technological skills and offer enhanced financial compensation (Deloitte, 2015). These narrow stereotypes of working-class individuals in traditional working-class jobs limits the idea that they may aspire to 'better things' (Hey & George, 2013, p. 102). Widening participation policies have resulted in a surge of students from disadvantaged backgrounds entering HE (UCAS, 2023) with the aspiration of securing higher qualifications for improved job and career prospects. Additionally, it is crucial to recognise that not all members of the academic community enjoy high earnings, or the comfortable lifestyles often associated with academia. While some academics may indeed command substantial salaries and lead privileged lives, this is not universal. Many academics face financial challenges, evident in the disparity between the substantial salaries of professors and the comparatively lower pay received by individuals employed under precarious conditions. Academic casualisation presents a universal challenge, irrespective of class, but it is far easier if you possess independent wealth or inherited resources to cushion the financial blows of temporary contracts. Beyond these financial issues, the measurable outcomes for quality of life, which Wakeling also refers to, are subjective and can vary widely among individuals. Job

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[1]According to the 2019 HE Single Pay Spine (and the typical 2019/2020 university grade system).

satisfaction, work–life balance, and wellbeing can also be influenced by personal factors beyond pay and conditions, such as workplace culture, job security, and the sense of purpose in one's work (Voukelatou et al., 2021).

Upon examining my data concerning definitions of WCAs, I noted that almost half of my respondents (44%; n. 111), were on casualised contracts. This circumstance often exposed them to financial challenges reminiscent of their childhood, as they lacked the necessary economic resources to navigate job insecurity. Furthermore, my respondents reported various other situational, institutional, and dispositional barriers (Warnock, 2016), when attempting to move from short term, casualised contracts to permanent lecturer or researcher positions. WCAs are also not a homogenous group which means there are likely to be differences in pay and opportunities across specific academic disciplines and institutions. There may also be negative experiences, influenced by intersecting aspects of their identity, i.e. gender, ethnicity, and disability, which may be more 'negotiable' when one has elite forms of capital – all of which I will discuss in Chapters Four and Five.

The following section aims to define a WCA. Traditional assessments of social class and socioeconomic status (SES) in higher education have relied on objective criteria tied to parental income, occupation, and education, as discussed in Chapter One. Zweig (2000), argues, it is more useful to define income as an effect, not a cause, of someone's class position: 'Class is not based on income. But income has a great deal to do with class' (p. 66). However, a narrow focus on resource inequalities as the sole determinants of social class, neglect the subjective and intersectional nature of social class, as noted by (Rubin et al., 2014, p. 196). The forthcoming definition places significant emphasis on self-definition. I aimed to ensure that this study accommodates individuals who resonated with a working-class identity in some way, aligning with Davis's (2021) viewpoint on the importance of allowing respondents to express their authentic selves rather than fitting into predefined categories. This consideration is crucial, given that, as Davies pointed out, one respondent 'considered not returning after feeling not working class enough' (p. 5). It is imperative to avoid silencing certain narratives, and subjective measures of class enable more accurate depictions by allowing individuals to reflect on their unique experiences (Rubin et al., 2014).

Defining a Working-Class Academic

Phase One of this study provided a definition of WCAs as being 'one whom defines their background/upbringing as working class and continues to identify in this way' (Crew, 2020, p. 7). This definition emphasises an individual perspective, allowing for the role of memory and lived experience (Pifer et al., 2023). It suggests that being a WCA is not merely a historical label but an ongoing identification, reflecting a commitment to their working-class identity, even as they advance in their academic careers. This 'hints' that the dimensions of a WCA identity extend beyond economic factors, to include cultural and social aspects. In Crew (2020, 2022), I identified four main class markers that were inherent in the findings of Phase One of the study. These 'markers' consisted of a lack of a safety net to 'manage' academic precarity; an uneven access to capital; a complex habitus

and respondents discussed 'utilising lived experience'. In Phases Two and Three of the research process, I shifted the focus back to the respondents and asked them to reflect upon their own definition of a WCA. Specifically, I requested that they consider the statement: '*I identify as being a working class academic*'. They were then encouraged to elaborate on the reasons for their answer. Respondents were intentionally not provided with a predefined description, allowing them to independently reflect on what this term meant to them, and any challenges associated with using the descriptor 'working class' alongside 'academic'. This methodology aimed to capture spontaneously expressed, context specific keywords associated with this identity.

In all, 10% (n.26) of respondents struggled with the moniker WCA, replying 'maybe' or 'not sure' when asked about the term. Their primary source of uncertainty stemmed from their academic roles, which they characterised as not aligning with what they perceived to be representative of a working-class occupation – a sentiment previously noted by Wakeling (2010). These respondents were also similar to what Rowell (2018) described as being 'class drifters' as they perceived their class identity to be undergoing a transformation due to their academic achievements (p. 300).

> *Its complicated… I would say I was from a working-class background but have had a middle class job for 20 years.* [Rosie, a Senior Lecturer Social Work at a post-1992 institution]

> *I feel as though working in academia in a fairly well paid job does mean I am now middle class, but I do have a working class background that I am proud of. It wouldn't figure in any identity of myself.* [Joseph, a Senior Research Fellow Education Policy at a Russell Group institution]

> *I certainly come from a working class background and for most of my own working life have been a factory worker. However, I am now an academic researcher (since the age of 54) and it's hard to see that as anything but a very middle class job.* [Gabriel, a Research Fellow in Employment Relations at a Russell Group institution]

> *Can't help but think that now I've been through the education system, earn the wage I do, have upward mobility and access to multiple opportunities (in multiple areas), it's fetishistic of me to still claim a working class identity.* [Mila, a Senior Lecturer in Gender-Based Violence at a post-1992 institution]

These responses revealed that there was a boundary between their heritage and their present profession, which introduced a flux in their class identities. Owing to their academic roles, acknowledging their working-class heritage posed a challenge for these individuals (Lubrano, 2005). Rosie's response reflected the tension between her roots and her current profession where she

identified with both classes to some extent. Joseph articulated a similar sentiment but retained pride in his working-class heritage even if he felt it didn't play a significant role in his current identity. Gabriel's narrative highlighted the class transition he had undergone, and the impact of occupation on his perception of social class. In comparison, Mila's quotation, which mentions upward mobility and access to opportunities, suggested a potential shift in class identification because of career advancements. Mila's use of the term "fetishistic," implied she was aware of how working-class realities are often romanticised portrayals, skewed towards men (Walkerdine, 2017). Throughout my research, respondents would refer to instances where they had observed class privileged academics temporarily embracing an attractive working-class image until it became inconvenient, where they would then discard it like a disposable accessory, or like 'a snake sheds its skin' (Crew, 2020, p. 23). This shedding of the working-class persona suggests that it was used to enhance their own image or gain social capital.

Despite these issues, the overwhelming majority of my respondents, comprising 90% (n. 229), confirmed an 'underlying and persistent working-class identity' (Hey, 1997, p. 143). An examination of the qualitative data revealed five dominant keywords: 'family' (n. 53 instances); 'identity' (47 instances); 'capital' (n. 44 instances); 'parents' (42 instances), and 'habitus' (n.27 instances). The prominence of these keywords suggests that, for most individuals, being a WCA is deeply embedded in their familial and personal experiences. Respondents such as Emily, a Senior Lecturer Criminology at a post-1992 institution, saw their working-class heritage as being a central part of their identity.

> *It [class] runs through me like a stick of rock. You feel class from where you live (I still live where I always have), my accent, the words I use, the people I know and friends I have. My views, lifestyle and values.*

> *Elements from my life experience – upbringing, education, family, geography, hobbies & interests, accent, clothing – and the classed nature of those experiences have a fundamental impact on my integration as a member of "the academy".* [Sadie, an Assistant Professor in Law at a post-1992 institution]

Emily suggested that her working-class identity is both ingrained and integral, much like the distinctive patterns found in a stick of rock. The passage also indicates that, for Emily and many others, their working-class identity was not a static label but a dynamic force that influenced their perspectives, interactions, and sense of self.

Three distinct themes emerged in the data with regards to how respondents defined their identity as a WCA: 'cultural background', 'financial challenges', and 'a subjective awareness of one's class identity within the academic context'. Given that respondents also referred to 'habitus' and 'capital', the impact of these two concepts will also be included and expanded upon.

Cultural Background

Just over one-third (33%, n. 81) of respondents, emphasised that cultural background should be included in any definitions of a WCA. This can include concrete aspects such as language, leisure activities, and community, or more abstract examples such as values and beliefs.

> *It's so difficult because I think to the outside it almost seems like an oxymoron to put 'working class' and 'academic' together. But so many elements from someone's life experience – their upbringing, education, family, geography, hobbies & interests, accent, clothing – and the classed nature of those experiences have a fundamental impact on that person's integration as a member of 'the academy'. Especially in terms of belonging, fit, academic identity, building relationships with colleagues (and students) and more generally just whether the conditions of 'the academy' allow you to thrive both personally and professionally*. [Sadie, an Assistant Professor in Law at a post-1992 institution]

> *My working class culture, a range of cultures, from now and then, define me and others as a working class academic i.e accent, previously in manual labour, financial struggles, and **lifestyle** factors such as local sports, a strong work ethic and supporting students*. [Eddie, Senior Lecturer in Criminology at a traditional institution]

Sadie's perspective was one that was reiterated by many of my respondents with most recognising that broader cultural and personal dimensions, alongside notions of belonging and fit were crucial aspects of their WCA experience. Eddie also challenged the notion of a singular, monolithic working-class culture and acknowledged the diversity and dynamism of working-class cultures, shaped by factors like gender, ethnicity, and location. Moreover, these cultures are not static entities but rather evolve over time, adapting to changing social, economic, and political conditions. It is also interesting that his perception of cultural identity included a commitment to supporting students. This aspect of social justice is one example of the positive impact that diverse backgrounds can have on the academic community.

Financial Challenges

Respondents felt that exclusively concentrating on the economic dimensions of class meant that the definition would lack the necessary nuance for a thorough understanding of WCAs. Additionally, 20% (n. 52) acknowledged that they no longer grappled with the same economic challenges they had faced in the past. Nevertheless, a significant majority (63%, n. 154) discussed the financial difficulties they encountered in both their past and present circumstances. Ellis, a Senior Lecturer in Post compulsory Education at a post-1992 institution included

reflections on the financial aspects of his childhood into his definition of a WCA identity:

> *I would define a working-class academic as someone who hits the majority of these characteristics. Went to a state school, faced inequality of educational experience (e.g. could not afford to undertake educational enrichment opportunities, lacked connections to undertake work placements of genuine interest, limited educational support in home environment because of parent's lack of confidence). Parents did not go to university, worked in service or manual labour roles, and had limited free time. Undertook employment at an early age, alongside education. Was expected to contribute to household income as soon as earning. Had limited point of reference, from friends or family, as to how universities and accreditations operate.*

Ellis's reference to his parents being in manual labour roles, coupled with his observations about not having peers who could help him navigate universities (i.e. social, navigational, and familial capital) reminds us that financial challenges may also contribute to feelings of being an outsider within academia as economic capital often begets access to elite form of social and cultural capital.

Those on precarious contracts and WCAs involved in academia within the last five years, referred to current financial challenges in their definitions of a WCA. They would reference the substantial debts they incurred during their time as students, and the continued financial strains associated with juggling insecure contracts.

> *How do I define a working-class academic? It's a fiendish question because class is a construct. Nevertheless, a working-class academic emerges from a culture and society where working-class values and norms are perpetuated and also facing the kind of financial and societal restrictions that the working-class face. E.g. not being able to exist for any period of time unfunded, even when living at home with parents, in order to undertake study, intern work etc.* [Keith, Principal Lecturer in Teacher Education at a post-1992 institution]

This recognised the importance of personal experiences and societal influences in shaping a WCA identity. Keith's comment on the inability to navigate academia unless funded highlighted the economic constraints that WCAs still encounter.

A Subjective Awareness of One's Class Identity Within the Academic Context

This theme, which was discussed by 51% (n. 125) of respondents, explored the 'subjective awareness of one's class identity within the academic context'. This reflected the commitment of WCAs to infuse their working class identity into

their academic work. For instance, Miriam, a Lecturer in Education and Communities at a post-1992 institution defined a WCA as:

> *someone who genuinely cares and supports students, particularly those from widening participation backgrounds. Strong, stubborn, and often lacking the confidence to truly see all they are capable of, and how incredibly special they really are. Fierce and loyal, protective of their ethics and morals and usually supportive and non-judgemental…Possessing an indomitable spirit, many working-class academics are able to reflect on their pedagogy, they possess the important ability to form trust in their teaching relationships, however, are often not trusted themselves, within the institution…this is a huge mistake, in my humble opinion. We rock!.*

Miriam's quotation provided a multifaceted analysis of the characteristics associated with being a WCA, particularly in the context of her interactions with students. The quotation below also emphasised the outward oriented aspects of a WCAs role in connecting with and benefiting communities through academic endeavours.

> *A working class academic is someone who strives to connect their identity and experiences to give back to their community in some form through academic expertise. Whether this is by highlighting the prevalence of class inequalities within society through teaching of students or being motivated to produce academic work that can provide some benefit to communities they identify or emphasise with (e.g. outreach).* [Kayden, an Assistant Lecturer in Sociology at a post-1992 institution]

Both quotations reflected the strong sense of personal and ethical commitment tied to the WCA identity. While Miriam emphasised the caring and supportive nature of WCAs, particularly towards students from widening participation backgrounds, Kayden's perspective reflected a sense of social responsibility. Both respondents demonstrated an awareness of the challenges and biases faced within academia.

The Impact of Habitus

Habitus, a fundamental concept in Sociology pioneered by Pierre Bourdieu, also serves as a useful lens through which to observe how the behaviours, perceptions, and interactions of WCAs are shaped within the academic sphere. This concept encapsulates both our history (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 82) and our present reality (Reay, 2004). It's an ingrained framework that operates unconsciously and significantly influences how individuals, such as WCAs, think, perceive, and act, thereby moulding the norms, values, and attitudes that they internalise.

The embodiment of social class begins early in life, exerting a lasting impact on our capacity to generate and accumulate capital. Cruz (2021) notes that as the working-classes are constantly exposed to the values and aesthetics of the ruling classes, it's nearly impossible for working class people not to be influenced by their pervasive presences (p. 11). This stark observation helps us understand the characterisation of a working class habitus, which is often defined in opposition to a middle class habitus, and by a lack of educational aspirations (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) (because few people in their family have attended university). A working-class habitus is portrayed as valuing practicality; thus, they typically work in manual employment. The social circles of working-class people are frequently family based, and within their local neighbourhood (which consists of other working-class groups) (Savage et al., 2013, 2015). Working-class communication styles are presented as being more emotive and plainspoken, compared to the reserve and objectivity of elites/middle classes. In contrast to the favoured middle-class habitus, a working-class habitus is often portrayed as one that is perceived to 'lack' and need further development. Habitus has been criticised as being deterministic concept (Archer, 2007), yet ones habitus is dynamic, demonstrating that classed identities can be fluid and adaptable to new experiences. Entering a new field, such as academia, presents an opportunity for one's habitus to evolve, as individuals engage with the unfamiliar. However, the hierarchical landscape of academia often demands that WCAs adapt to the dominant cultural norms, which may necessitate a transformation of their habitus. The following section discusses the different ways my respondent's habitus responded/adjusted to the elite/middle-class field of academia.

Cleft Habitus

Approximately one-third (31%; n. 78) of respondents expressed a sense of being 'in limbo'. Lubrano (2005) resonates with this sentiment, characterising himself as 'two people. I now live a middle-class life…but I was born blue-collar' (p. 5). Respondents conveyed similar experiences:

> *I…come from a working class background and for most of my own working life have been a factory worker. I am now an academic researcher…and it's hard to see that as anything but a very middle class job. But I don't feel like a 'whole' person, I'm split down the middle, a foot in both camps, but not feeling right in any.* [Gabriel, Research Fellow in Employment Relations at a post-1992 institution]

> *Even when I was studying at undergraduate level, I used to define it as two bubbles. I'd go to university, and it'd be a completely different circle of people, completely different group of friendships and relationships, and then I'd come home, and it'd be a completely different environment.* [Bethany, a PhD Student in English and Art History at a traditional institution]

Both respondents articulate their experiences as embodying a dual identity. Friedman (2016) terms this as a cleft habitus or 'habitus clive', where ones personal identity is 'torn by contradiction and internal division' (pp. 129–130). Gabriel's phrases like '*split down the middle'* and '*a foot in both camps*' illustrate the internal conflict and the struggle to reconcile disparate aspects of their identity. Bethany's analogy of '*two bubbles*' is akin to descriptions by Friedman, Cruz, and Lubrano, highlighted the stark contrast between her academic world and her familial environment. These experiences may be expected because as Cruz (2021) explains, working-class people in this situation come up against the threshold of the middle-class world (which will not allow them access), so they become 'a ghost, existing between worlds' (p. 11).

Reay (2013), reflecting on her own experience in an autobiographical essay, stated that 'social mobility can often be a difficult, alienating process… It can tear community and sometimes even the family out of the heart of individuals. I struggled to keep my family close despite moving so far away in terms of social space' (pp. 672–673). Hey (2003) suggests that 'crossing class boundaries' is a chosen 'self alienation' (p. 327). Social mobility had detrimental effects on some of my respondents' closest relationships, and they reported that emotional labour was needed to maintain successful ties with family members and friends:

> *I started doing all this stuff that she [mum] doesn't really get. And it was quite hard…I think we lost a bit of mutual understanding of each other and what's going on. So that was hard. I think it's a bit better now. Now I've been in it [university] for so long, she's kind of had to adapt.* [Claudia, PhD Student in Sociology, at a traditional institution]

> *Although my family have been so supportive, and they've sacrificed a lot of things… every day I'm trying to explain, I'm doing this for my PhD, or I'll go to a conference. They have no idea what I'm talking about…I don't have that person who has gone through something similar to communicate…It can be difficult at times.* [Bethany, a PhD Student in English and Art History at a traditional institution]

A sense of duality extends to social circles, relationships, and communication styles, as both respondents reported a distancing effect that WCAs may experience in academia. Bethany's statement which expressed a sense of isolation, highlighted the emotional strain of navigating academia without a relatable support system. Claudia talks of acquiring new forms of knowledge prized in HE, while her mother is perhaps more anchored in their working-class community, which can make it harder for them to relate. This shift can be particularly challenging for working-class women especially because 'women's desires for…respectability and material wealth' have long been portrayed as markers of 'pretence and triviality' (Lawler, 1999, p. 12).

Respondents described how upward mobility created complicated emotions such as guilt and embarrassment, straining relationships with family and friends. For instance, Diane, a Professor of Engineering Teaching and Learning at a traditional institution recalled how: '*My dad wouldn't make a speech at my wedding because he didn't want to talk in front of my friends*'. The implication being that he didn't want to embarrass her. This tension between familial and academic backgrounds not only set respondents apart from their peers but also accentuated a separation from their families. Lee and Kramer's (2013) research on social mobility aligns with these findings, indicating that even when respondents reported low levels of 'social distance', there was an underlying sense of loss. While the transformative process led to positive employment outcomes, it simultaneously complicated relationships with loved ones.

Abandoned Habitus

The abandoned habitus is one that becomes disconnected from its initial field (Ingram & Abrahams, 2015, p. 150). With the secondary field, specifically the university, exerting a more prominent influence, the primary habitus is effectively 'usurped or overwritten' (Ingram, 2018, p. 68). Among the three discernible 'types' of habitus, a slightly larger portion, just over one-third (37%; n. 78) of respondents, often associated with elite universities, manifested this habitus. This meant that they would 'pass' (or attempt to pass) or assimilate within academic spaces. This strategic response aligns with the recognition that 'maintaining alliances with the working-classes' is typically not rewarded in academia (Arner, 2017, p. 78). Respondents talked of engaging in self surveillance (Leeb, 2004) wherein they concealed details about themselves that might reveal their class background, such as their school attended. As some noted, hiding aspects of themselves was difficult:

> *I try to 'pass', but its easy to slip up. I once defended working class people who voted for Johnston and now my colleagues make comments about it.* [Alan, a Senior Lecturer in Anthropology at an Elite institution]

Alan's quote emphasises the challenges WCAs may encounter when navigating professional environments, where conforming to the dominant culture can lead to identity tensions and social pressure (Lubrano, 2005).

My respondents adjusted their mannerisms and fashion choices to align with what they perceived as being academic norms (Crew, 2020). This approach is also documented by a respondent in Leeb's (2004) study who appropriated academic norms of dress, behaviour and speech as felt they were crucial for being treated with respect (p. 135). Among my respondents, Lucy, a Teaching Associate in Law at a Russell Group institution, and others recalled adopting a more reserved style of dress and speech in academia for this reason. These adaptations were not only driven by a desire for social acceptance. '*Looking/acting middle class will help me when I go for promotion*', said Ellie, a Reader in Health Sciences at a Russell Group institution.

The statement by Ellie connects the act of '*looking middle class*' with potential benefits in professional advancement, such as promotions. This strategic approach reflected the ways in which these WCAs felt they needed to navigate their professional environments.

There was also a gendered and racial element to the data on 'passing' as WCA men and ethnic minority WCAs, in particular, felt pressurised to assimilate in academia by adjusting their sense of humour and speech. Although HE has a 'white male template' (Thomas, 2017), a shared masculinity doesn't guarantee acceptance among privileged male colleagues. A WCA masculinity is a complex interplay of social class, gender identity, and the academic environment. In all, 20% (n. 16) of my WCA male participants faced challenges connecting with their privileged male colleagues, with Alan, a Senior Lecturer in Anthropology at an Elite institution describing it as being a '*clash of cultures*'. Other male respondents felt that they had more in common with WCA women than they did with elite men. Despite some privilege gained by those who assimilated, WCA men still experienced gaps in their confidence. Eddie, a Senior Lecturer in Criminology at a traditional institution explained, '*I changed how I dressed and spoke. But I still feel like an imposter at fancy receptions*'. A pervasive feeling of not fitting in was a common theme among respondents. The 'compulsion to pass' was also a response to racialised expectations, as 28% (n. 12) of ethnic minority WCAs faced pressure to conform to dominant norms and expectations, including altering their appearance and suppressing cultural elements. I elaborate on 'these themes' in Chapter Three.

Chameleon Habitus

In all, 32% (n. 78) of respondents exhibited a chameleon habitus, which could be interpreted as the most favourable adaptation strategy as these respondents navigated both the working-class and academic worlds, they retained their working-class identity while simultaneously acquiring the cultural capital necessary to thrive in academia. This ability to code switch between different social spheres highlighted the adaptability and resilience of WCAs. While acknowledging there were difficulties from time to time, such as negative comments about their accent etc, these respondents adapted to their new environments. As Bourdieu (2000) commented 'changes were incorporated, like unremarked adjustments to the habitus' (p. 157).

> *You don't just leave behind your whole landscape of childhood and life and values and all of that just because you enter into a certain job*. [Jacqueline, a Senior Lecturer in Drama at a traditional institution] (Crew, 2020, p. 36)

> *Academia is an interesting part of my life, but it's not my whole life*. [Dominic, a Senior Lecturer in Education at a post-1992 institution]

Jacqueline's perspective challenged the prevailing notion that professional identity should entirely subsume one's personal history and values upon entering academia. Her experience demonstrated resilience in navigating academia without compromising her authenticity. Similarly, Dominic exemplified a balanced approach to professional life, as he acknowledged his diverse interests and commitments that extended beyond their academic roles.

Respondents with a chameleon habitus spoke about a duality to their sense of being:

> *I change according to my environment, the same if talking to my GP or best friend.* [Pat, a Professor in Biological Sciences at an Oxbridge institution]

> *I am one 'me' when I am dealing with students, colleagues etc, and other with my family. We have more than one side to us.* [Lynn, a Graduate Teaching Assistant in Mathematics at a post-1992 institution]

Listening back on these interviews it appeared that not only did they have multiple facets to their identity, but their adaptability was a professional strategy to navigate diverse social and professional settings. Instead of assimilating, respondents with a chameleon habitus adapted their identities to suit the context and different fields (Abrahams & Ingram, 2013). Crucially, these respondents valued the opportunities that academia provided, such as teaching, research funding, and a salary for their studies, without compromising their authentic selves outside academia. In doing so, they carved out a space within academia that accommodated their classed heritage, ultimately contributing to a more diverse academic community.

Disparities in Capital Accumulation

Bourdieu (1986) conceptualised capital as a form of wealth which allows actors in a specific field to increase their power. One of the persistent observations is that working-class people have limited access to elite forms of capital, likely stemming from their upbringing in resource scarce households (Manstead, 2018). While most WCAs recognised their advanced economic, cultural, and social capital upon entering academia compared to their working-class peers, a closer examination revealed that they felt they were 'behind' their academic peers in terms of capital accumulation.

Economic Capital

Access to economic capital remained a complex challenge for most respondents, with the exception of those in the 'late career' stage (Crew, 2020). Economic capital refers to material assets that are 'immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalised in the form of property rights' (Bourdieu,

1986, p. 242). Wendy, a Postdoctoral Researcher in History, challenged the assumption that academics enjoy financial prosperity, noting that for her, this was far from the truth as she had poor levels of this form of capital in comparison to her peers. Among my respondents, only those in the 'mid and late career' stage did not refer to periods of casualised employment. However, for early career researchers (ECRs) such as Mia, a PhD Student in Administration at a traditional institution: '*the principal problem is precarity*'. Respondents discussed how their precarious contracts resulted in fluctuating and unpredictable incomes. For instance, Daisy, an Associate Lecturer in Human Geography, on a fixed-term contract at a Russell Group institution, talked of earning less than minimum wage, once the preparation of teaching resources was taken into account. Some respondents supplemented their income with ad hoc university work (Crew, 2020, p. 28). Other respondents referred to being financially vulnerable as they lived in expensive cities like London, where multiple jobs were often necessary to make ends meet. Respondents also described how, even after attaining a 'permanent' position in academia, their financial situation did not improve for some time. For instance, Paul, a Teaching Fellow, in Engineering at a Russell Group institution, mentioned that he had spent years paying off debts from his education (Crew, 2020, p. 29).

A further economic challenge discussed by 14% (n. 34) of respondents was the crucial task of securing research funding from nonprofit organisations and government agencies. Obtaining research funding, while not personal income, is an integral and pivotal aspect of academic life that can significantly improve promotion opportunities. There is a growing emphasis on grant acquisition as a measure of academic and institutional success, but it's important to recognise the demanding and time-consuming nature of the research funding application process. Moreover, it has become progressively more competitive and demanding to gain funding. While not explicitly linked with economic capital, respondents would mention in passing that the grant writing process demanded substantial effort and emotional labour. Given that success rates are usually only slightly better than one in five (Times Higher Education, 2019), academics should not have to additionally contend with the inherent biases within the research funding landscape. Review panels may unintentionally favour applicants from more privileged backgrounds, which inadvertently places marginalised groups at a disadvantage, as they may not conform to the conventional mould (Gladstone et al., 2022).[2] The lack of concrete evidence regarding the specific challenges faced by WCAs in accessing research funding leaves a gap in understanding their experiences. My respondents referred to having limited access to established academic networks, which is problematic as this social capital can act as a gateway to the funding opportunities and collaborations needed to advance their research agendas. My respondents discussed the challenges they faced to secure research funding, even when their proposals were promising and innovative.

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[2]For clarity, the aforementioned report referred to statistical data on minoritised 'groups', it did not mention WCAs.

> *Everyone knows that the vast majority of research funding goes to the chosen few institutions, and no matter how forward thinking I am, the rest of us are left trying to be put forward by our institution for the scraps.* [Dominic, a Senior Lecturer in Education at a post-1992 institution]

The stark reality, as exemplified by Dominic's statement, was that respondents affiliated with post-1992 institutions faced additional obstacles. I'll expand on this example of institutional economic capital later on in this chapter.

Cultural Capital

Bourdieu (1984) defined cultural capital as 'familiarity with the legitimate culture within a society'. There are three types of cultural capital: objective (cultural goods, books, and works of art); embodied (language, mannerisms, and preferences); and institutionalised (qualifications and education credentials) (Bourdieu, 1986). Academics with more substantial reserves of this form of capital can navigate the academic landscape more easily. For instance, Cruz (2021) explained cultural capital by referring to her boyfriend having superior cultural currency as he had grown up absorbed in art, giving him a sense of ease in that field. Access to cultural capital was varied, with most respondents perceiving there to be disparities in their access to cultural capital in comparison to their academic peers. Some respondents possessed forms of objectified cultural capital, i.e. owning vintage clothing, and the ability to 'consume' classic literature. Frank, a Lecturer in Geography at a Russell Group institution, referred to his father working as a steward in a London theatre, which afforded him the privilege of attending plays without cost (Crew, 2020). While Ruth, a Lecturer in Geography at a traditional institution, referred to her father, who worked as a professional jazz musician:

> *[T]hat's not necessarily what you think of as a working class profession…but it was…an unstable source of income…I felt like I had access to cultural influences that perhaps others didn't, but at the same time, I was the first in my family to go to university.*

Frank's exposure to cultural events enriched his experiences and cultural capital. It also demonstrated that access to this form of capital is often influenced by family connections and opportunities, something which may be difficult for WCAs to accrue. Ruth's transcript offers a complex perspective on the relationship between cultural capital and social class. Despite her father's profession as a jazz musician, typically associated with middle-class cultural capital, Ruth refers to the financial precarity her father experienced. Although Ruth also recognised her access to cultural influences were resources not readily available to many working-class people, which emphasised the multifaceted nature of cultural capital. Moreover, her status as the first in family to attend university highlighted the significance of educational capital in breaking traditional class barriers.

Respondents acknowledged that their cultural capital had evolved within university, which had enabled them to better understand and navigate the cultural norms of the dominant culture, compared with when they first entered university. Nonetheless, they still felt disconnected within academia due to a lack of shared cultural experiences with middle-class peers, and consequently, reported that they were consistently trying to catch up with their colleagues (Crew, 2020, p. 29).

> *I have got friends whose family have PhDs and they know what they are doing, and they understand the system, what you are supposed to do*. Whereas it's been a lot harder for me to figure it out. [Paige, a Lecturer in Health Sciences at a redbrick institution]

Paige's reference to friends with family members with PhD degrees emphasises that some individuals may have an inherent advantage due to their family's academic experiences. This is likely to give them a deeper understanding of the unwritten rules, expectations, and pathways for success in academia. Paige, lacking guidance from family members unfamiliar with academic careers, faced challenges in navigating the academic world. '*We're not only expected to excel in our field but also to navigate a foreign culture with limited support, constantly adapting to middle class norms*' [Flynn, a Lecturer in Health at a traditional institution]. The quotation by Flynn is an example of the additional hurdles that WCAs may face during their academic journey, whereby they must contend with an unfamiliar terrain and a weaker support network. Despite improvements in understanding and navigating the dominant culture, the WCAs I interviewed struggled with the need to constantly adapt to their middle-class colleagues' cultural expectations and norms.

Social Capital

Social capital is the 'sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119). In other words, talent alone may not be enough to support a successful academic career, and you need personal connections, particularly at prestigious institutions. As Grimes and Morris (1997) noted 'academic work requires a high level of politics' (p. 100) which can open doors to research partnerships or funding. There was relatively less discussion regarding levels of social capital among interviewees, with most referring to their limited academic connections. For instance, Eddie, Senior Lecturer in Criminology at a traditional institution said he didn't have '*insider networks*', and his social circles external to academia could not help him unravel the unwritten norms of academia such as '*self promotion etc*'.

Even when my respondents attended elite and Russell Group institutions, they reported fewer ties to alumni or others who could broker opportunities:

> *Academics look for like minded people, so my network is small.* [Frank, a Geography Lecturer at a Russell Group institution]

> *If there was a project available, I don't believe I would be 'first on the list' of who colleagues would contact.* [Daisy, associate lecturer in Human Geography, on a fixed-term contract at a Russell Group institution] (both cited in Crew, 2020)

When reflecting upon their social capital, others noted that while they had academic networks did not have the same 'reach' compared with their middle-class colleagues. They cited a variety of reasons. For instance, Frank's quotation refers to the presence of 'unconscious bias' which reflects the inclination of people to gravitate towards people who resemble us or belong to our ethnic 'group' or social class. Similarly, Daisy perceived that her identity as a WCA may have influenced whether her colleagues would include her in project collaborations. Her experience finds support in the research of Friedman and Laurison (2019), who conducted comprehensive studies across various professions. They found that risk aversion in recruitment and promotion often lead to a preference for hiring individuals who share similar backgrounds. Moreover, the prevalence of class based microaggressions, to be discussed in Chapter Four, adds to the challenges faced by WCAs in their efforts to cultivate social capital.

Academic mobility is a defining aspect of academic life. Regional stickiness, or emotional ties, can often affect decision making and influence mobility (Finn, 2015). My interviews revealed that WCAs were typically less mobile than their counterparts from traditional academic backgrounds. Female WCA respondents in particular noted that their local ties often negatively impacted their careers, as they were expected to take on caregiving responsibilities within their family, such as caring for relatives. This is supported by existing research as the Women's Budget Group (2020) reported that women typically have the 'double burden' of paid and unpaid work, with women, carrying out 60% more unpaid work than men. Women also spend around twice as much time on unpaid cooking, childcare and housework compared to men, with transport (driving self and others) being the only area where men did more unpaid work than women The female WCAs I interviewed, who did not fit the mould of the '*typical young mobile PhD student*', such as Petra, a Lecturer in Human Geography at a traditional institution, felt that their mobility was constrained in other areas. Respondents such as Yvonne, a Lecturer in Health and Social Care, at a Russell Group institution, mentioned how their international collaborations were affected by having children, as it was difficult to arrange childcare for trips abroad.

Statistical Data on Working-Class Academics

In 1992, a comprehensive study of academics, which solely centred on the British Sociological professoriate, was carried out by Oxford Sociologist AH Halsey. In this study, Halsey found that 17% of his sample had fathers who had or were working in manual occupations (this fell to 13% when analysing professors) (Halsey, 1995). Wakeling (2023) analysed data collected as part of the Great British Class Survey in 2011 and observed that around 23% of the 2,500 academics who

Table 1.   Sociodemographic Characteristics of Academics from Working-Class Backgrounds in UK Labour Force Survey 2014–2022.

Dataset Year [Number of Academics]	Working-Class Background (% of All Academics)	Sex (% of WCA)		Disabled (% of WCA)
		M	*F*	
2022 [192]	20 (10.4)	10 (50.0)	10 (50.0)	3 (15.0)
2021 [275]	39 (14.2)	19 (48.7)	20 (51.3)	4 (10.3)
2020 [223]	21 (9.4)	13 (61.9)	8 (38.1)	4 (19.0)
2019 [219]	25 (11.4)	16 (64.0)	9 (36.0)	2 (8.0)
2018 [226]	21 (9.3)	9 (42.9)	12 (57.1)	–
2017 [216]	18 (8.3)	10 (55.6)	8 (44.4)	2 (11.1)
2016 [249]	36 (14.5)	20 (55.6)	16 (44.4)	2 (5.6)
2015 [247]	24 (9.7)	13 (54.2)	11 (45.8)	4 (16.7)
2014 [242]	36 (14.9)	21 (58.3)	15 (41.7)	5 (13.9)

Notes: WCA = Working class academics.

completed the survey reported working-class origins,[3] although only 10% of the sample self-identified as being working class. Statistical data from the labour force survey (LFS), which drew upon a large survey of professional occupation employees, reported on by Friedman and Laurison (2019) found that in academia only 14% of academic respondents were from a working-class background. Phase four of this research study involved a further analysis of the LFS, conducted in 2023 by Rebecca Linnett.[4] Table 1 provides statistical data from 2014 (when data on the social class of academics first began to be collected).

According to Table 1, the percentage of WCAs ranged from 9% to 15%, with no clear upward or downward trend over the years. The reason for this disparity is potentially because Friedman and Laurison (2019) included respondents working *outside* of academia, while Rebecca Linnett's analysis, as part of this study, focused on statistical data on those working *within* academia. There was also a roughly equal distribution between male and female academics, although in some years, there was a slight skew towards female academics, but this difference was not substantial. Disability status varied between 2% and 5%, with some fluctuations over the years. An explanation of the analysis procedure produced by Rebecca Linnett is discussed in Appendix Two.

Table 7, which is included in Appendix Three, presents data on the ethnic backgrounds of WCAs from 2014 (when data on the social class of academics

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[3]This was likely to have been influenced by its subject matter.
[4]This was part of seed funding I was awarded from Bangor University. I would like to extend my thanks to Bangor University for this funding, and to Dr Rebecca Linnett for her detailed examination of these statistics.

first began to be collected) to 2022. Some key observations included the majority of WCAs across all years were White, ranging from 87.5% to 96.0%. There was limited representation from individuals such as from Mixed/Multiple groups, Indian, Pakistani, Chinese, Other Asian backgrounds, Black/African/Caribbean, and Others. These groups typically accounted for a small percentage of WCAs, often less than 10%. While White academics consistently comprised of the majority, there was some variation in the representation of individuals from other ethnic backgrounds across different years. For example, there was no data for WCAs of Indian or Pakistani heritage in some years, alongside minor fluctuations in the representation of Mixed/Multiple, Chinese, and Black/African/Caribbean heritage. The data indicated a slight increase in the diversity of WCAs in more recent years, with the inclusion of individuals from Mixed/Multiple, Black/African/Caribbean, and Other ethnic backgrounds.

It should be acknowledged that collecting data on WCAs poses challenges, considering the complexity of class identity. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, some may not identify as being working class due to their academic roles. Understanding intersectionality in relation to WCAs is also difficult as while there is a wealth of studies examining the intersection of class and gender in academia, there same cannot be said for other intersections. For instance, when conducting a literature search for research on, 'class and ethnicity and academics', the available literature typically focuses on academics from ethnicity minorities and excluded a class analysis. Incidentally, there was also a significant gap in the available literature regarding the intersections of social class and disability, as well as how class intersected with institution and subject in relation to academics.

The oversight of these crucial intersections in academic research may result from various factors. A significant reason related to gaps in the literature on class and ethnicity could be due to representation as WCAs from ethnic minority backgrounds experience a multitude of barriers in engaging with academia and becoming an academic. Perhaps research on classed intersections has inadvertently suggested that class may have a lesser impact than ethnicity or disability on academic trajectories. This observation could hold significance because, as I will elaborate on in Chapter Four, the microaggressions encountered by my respondents from ethnic minorities, and those with a disability, appear to be less influenced by their class background and more closely related to their ethnicity or disability (See Bhopal, 2022; Rana et al., 2022; Rollock, 2019 on ethnicity; Lorenz, 2022; Brown & Leigh, 2018; Dolmage, 2017 regarding ableism). The lack of attention to these intersections, as well as subject and institution, may also stem from a broader lack of recognition within academic circles regarding the intersectional nature of classed experiences. These collective issues perpetuate the marginalisation of specific groups within the WCA population, reinforcing the need for further scholarship to address these gaps.

In the concluding section of this chapter, I revisit the encounters of WCAs employed on casualised contracts (previously discussed in Crew, 2020). Here, I further elaborate on this discussion to refer to obstacles in gaining research funding when on a fixed-term contract, as my respondents reported this as a significant area of inequality.

Academic Precarity

In 2021/2022, 62,730 staff were employed by HE providers on atypical contracts. These types of contracts meet one or more of the following criteria:

- for less than four consecutive weeks;
- for one-off or short-term tasks and;
- involve a high degree of flexibility (Higher Education Statistical Agency, 2023).

The total full time equivalent (FTE) value of atypical staff in 2021/2022 was 5,595 (Higher Education Statistical Agency, 2023) although it is particularly difficult to calculate the exact number of casualised workers in universities as individual situations differ across departments and institutions, and reliable information about research and teaching contracts can be difficult to access and. higher education statistical agency (HESA) data is also inconsistent as they do not collect information on the length or type of contracts, or on the use of hourly paid staff. It only collects data on the balance of fixed-term contracts, as against open-ended contracts, and on the use of 'atypical' contracts (Crew, 2020, p. 46). Courtois and O'Keefe (2019) reported challenges in engaging with casual university employees, possibly due to their reluctance to discuss their experiences. In alignment with this, the University and College Union (UCU) (2020) found that 17% of those on precarious contracts faced difficulties affording food, while others encountered challenges in keeping up with rent/mortgage payments (34%) and utility bills (36%).

In all, 45% (n. 110) of my respondents were on precarious contracts, and of those, 17% (n. 18) had been regular users of foodbanks and 10% (n.11) had been on the verge of homelessness. Jeremy, a postdoctoral researcher in Geography at a traditional institution, said that his continuous struggles with precarious employment, had left him '*contemplating leaving academia*'.[5] Respondents who experienced precarity, highlighted a number of intersecting issues, summarised in this quotation from Talia, a Research Assistant in Nursing at a traditional institution:

> *My contract currently ends on the fifth of September. And so, for the past, I'd say two or three weeks, I've been searching for maybe like three or four hours a day for new jobs. And that definitely of demotivates you for the job that you're working on now. Because you're not giving it your all, because in the back of your head, you're constantly worrying like, okay, is there more funding coming up, and you're putting energy and effort into different job applications. For you know, hopefully one contract, another 12, one contract, only to be worried again, and under a couple of months' time.*

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[5]It is vital to collate the experiences of those academics who have left or are about to leave academia to see what support they need from the academy.

This quote provides insight into the challenges and anxieties faced by individuals on fixed-term contracts within academia. The speaker describes the unsettling experience of knowing that their current contract is ending soon and the subsequent pressure to secure a new job. Jeremy, a postdoctoral researcher in Geography at a traditional institution, alongside other WCAs, described the recurring pattern of securing a contract, only to face uncertainty on what to do next once the contract ended. The cyclical nature of academia perpetuates these feelings of instability and insecurity.

These structural barriers also meant that WCAs on precarious contracts found it difficult to gain research funding. My respondents on precarious contracts, mirroring Soria (2016), rarely accessed professional development, which then hindered them in crafting competitive research proposals.

> *I need to develop to have a chance at a permanent role, but there are no opportunities*. [Talia, a Research Assistant in Nursing at a traditional institution]

> *Catch 22 – I can't get research funding as my institution won't support me. I can't get a permanent job without a better profile, I can't work unpaid as I'm poor if I don't work, but I can't find work without more opportunities*. [Margaret, a Lecturer in Education at a Russell Group institution]

Respondents on precarious contracts talked of how limited access to institutional support, including research development programmes hindered their ability to navigate the intricate grant application processes. Without this critical support, WCAs struggled to establish a track record of successfully funded projects. Respondents also reported that their heavy teaching loads and administrative responsibilities, which often accompanied precarious contracts, had left them with limited time and resources to develop robust research proposals. Flynn, a Lecturer in Health at a traditional institution, and other respondents on precarious contracts, reported that the absence of job security in his role may have reduced their competitiveness in grant applications as he suggested funding agencies were '*seeking more stable project leads*'. Addressing these issues will necessitate institutions and funding agencies to acknowledge the unique hurdles faced by WCAs on precarious contracts and to implement policies to promote their inclusion within the academic research community.

Among my own respondents on precarious contracts, it was WCA women and WCAs with a disability who were more likely to report difficulties in accessing research funding to pursue their research projects. My data is supported somewhat by statistics from the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) (2023), although their statistical data does not refer to social class. In the 2020–2021 financial year, UKRI reported funding distribution data. In 2020–2021, White males received 57% of principal investigator awards, compared with 24% that were awarded to White females. The next largest difference by gender was for the Asian ethnic group with Asian males receiving 6% of principal investigator

awards, while only 1% were awarded to Asian females. Proportions from the Black, Mixed, and other ethnic groups were similar in terms of the gender of principal investigators. For co-investigators, the highest proportion of awardees in 2020–2021 was also among White males, at 49% compared with 25% that were awarded to White females. The next largest proportion of awards went to Asian males at 6%. Females from the Black and Mixed ethnic groups received 1% of co-investigator awards each. Burns et al. (2019) proposed two potential explanations for gendered (and potentially ethnic) differences in funding application success: either women's applications were inferior or bias against women contributed to the gap. In terms of gender, Burns et al. (2019) emphasised that there is no compelling evidence supporting the notion that male and female researchers are not equally capable. I too did not find any supporting evidence for that, but this was not the remit of my research. Research by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) in 2023a found that while award rates by number of grants were similar for men and women, women consistently applied for smaller grants. Alongside this, research has found that ethnic minority researchers tend to face funding biases (EPSRC 2023b), while those with disabilities often struggle with inaccessible systems (Gladstone et al., 2022).

Gender bias in funding awards is a multifaceted issue influenced by interconnected factors. Speaking with my female WCAs on casualised contracts and most referred to an example of an incident where they experienced unconscious bias relating to grant proposals.

> *I believe in the strength of my ideas, but I've struggled with funding applications. I can't be sure but, even though it was well thought through and composed… a proposal I submitted was criticised for its content. But I had modelled it on one submitted by my male supervisor and he was awarded the funding. So, it's disheartening to think that unconscious bias might influence the evaluation process.* [Margaret, a Lecturer in Education at a Russell Group institution]

Margaret reported perceiving that her ideas were not being judged fairly, suspecting bias or discrimination in the grant evaluation process. This was despite her observing, and attempting to replicate the approach of her male supervisor who shared his funded proposal with her. This is similar to research by Morgan et al. (2018) who argued that gender bias persists within research grant peer-review processes, reflecting the historical and systemic gender disparities present in academic institutions and beyond. Respondents were silent on class/ethnicity/disability funding gaps as such further investigation of these complex dynamics is crucial.

Chapter 3

Classism

Keywords: Classism; stereotypes; derogatory comments; microaggressions; minimisation; imposter syndrome; fitting in; isolation; poor health

Overview

Social class forms a hierarchical structure, that on an institutional level can be a classist system of domination and privilege, which inherently advantages some at the expense of others. Classism refers to the systemic prejudice, discrimination, and exclusion directed towards people with working-class heritage. It involves both conscious and unconscious behaviours that communicate negative judgements about the capabilities of working-class people (Lott, 2002). Notably, two-thirds of respondents (n. 162) identified various manifestations of deeply embedded classism within their academic experiences. This finding is particularly significant given the prevailing tendency to attribute the challenges faced by WCAs to their personal shortcomings rather than systemic classism. Chapter Three delves into the four manifestations of classism that my respondents commonly encountered within higher education (see Fig. 1).
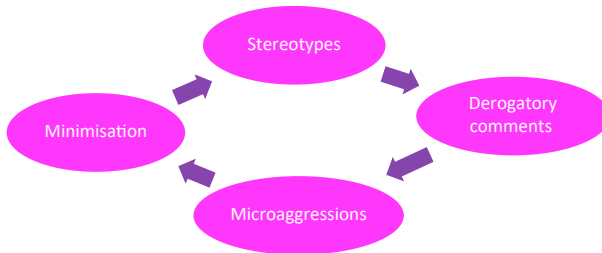
Fig. 1.   Four Manifestations of Classism Experienced by Working-Class Academics.

Stereotypes

Most respondents who cited classism as being part of their everyday experiences, encountered stereotypes about their identity. Disgust has played a central role in structuring stereotypes of working-class people. As George Orwell explains in *The Road to Wigan Pier*:

> the…reason why a European of bourgeois upbringing… cannot without a hard effort think of a working man as his equal…is summed up in four frightful words…which were bandied about quite freely in my childhood. The words were: 'The lower classes smell'. (p. 74)

Lawler (2005) also referred to the feeling of disgust that the middle classes have towards the working classes. The former are presented as educated, well-mannered, and clean, while the working classes have historically been portrayed as mad, bad, and dangerous to know. Orwell offers another observation of the working class in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1958) which is particularly telling in the case of WCAs:

> [Its] taken for granted that a working class person…is a figure of fun, except at odd moments when he shows signs of being too prosperous, whereupon he ceases to be a figure of fun and becomes a demon. (p. 8)

So not only are working-class people unfairly labelled as culturally inferior, but a 'prosperous' working-class person is perceived as a disruptive force, one that challenges the established social order.

Pathologising and entertaining fantastical notions about the working classes is often considered to be socially acceptable (Walkerdine, 2023). In popular culture, they have often been stereotyped as 'chavs', a term that portrays them as 'backward and worthless' (McDowell, 2006, p. 839) and as lacking ambition, possessing poor social skills, and exhibiting tasteless consumption habits (Adams & Raisborough, 2011, p. 83). Research by Kallschmidt and Eaton (2019) found that individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often face stigmatisation in the workplace. This is also true for WCAs, who, despite their advanced credentials, frequently encounter biased stereotypes that portray them as uneducated and unsophisticated. For instance, my respondents perceived that their academic peers assumed they were less intelligent due to their working-class heritage.

> *A typical moment was after giving a seminar with a friend about this study we were doing, my friend was asked questions about our research framework while I was 'bantered' with by the same posh people about football.* [Riley, a Lecturer in Education at a traditional institution]

It's taken me a good few years of working life to figure out why when middle class people met me…the very first question they would ask me is 'how is your football team doing'. The assumption was clear, I was working class and that would be the only point of reference. [Frankie, a Student Support Officer at a Russell Group institution]

Despite my academic achievements, I feel my working class accent and heritage reduces me to a simplistic caricature of stupidity. [Flynn, a Lecturer in Health at a traditional institution]

These were not outlier views as most WCAs I spoke to referred to hearing negative or stereotypical views about working-class people. This is part of a wider tendency for academia to perpetuate unquestioned stereotypes and biases related to working-class people, alongside promoting the contrary notion of meritocracy and equal opportunity. Eddie's experience highlighted the differential treatment he and his colleague received after a seminar, implying that some 'typical' academics may resort to casual topics like sports when interacting with perceived WCAs, potentially dismissing their professional expertise. Frankie's statement, who also referred to being asked about football, illustrated how class-based assumptions can lead to narrow and inaccurate characterisations of individuals. In my interview with Flynn, a Lecturer in Health at a traditional institution, his frustration and disappointment were evident that despite his evident success in academia, he still experiences prejudiced perceptions due to his class heritage. Collectively, these quotations illuminated the enduring nature of class-based stereotypes, demonstrating their resilience. The quotations also highlight the necessity of acknowledging the multifaceted nature of individuals' identities beyond surface-level indicators such as sports preferences.

Research by Warnock (2016) referred to incidences of WCAs being assumed by students to be janitorial or food service staff rather than academics. Among my own respondents, only a small number (n. 3) at elite institutions had experienced this, and it was their academic colleagues, not their students, who misclassified them:

One academic, whose department I had just joined, said loudly to another – isn't there a service lift – I was the only other person in the lift so obviously addressed at me. [Peter, a Lecturer in History at an Elite institution]

Peter's experience reflects how subtle remarks can make a WCA feel out of place or inferior. It also points to the scepticism that some WCAs may face regarding their qualifications and/or suitability for academic roles. These prejudicial attitudes serve to uphold class boundaries within academia and deny working-class scholars' full acceptance into elite professional circles.

Respondents also faced persistent stereotypes that undermined their perceived competence and merit. In all, 9% (n. 22) recounted instances of work evaluations

that disregarded their scholarly contributions and consequently impeded their career advancement and recognition.

> *My performance development review was horrible. There was no acknowledgement of the work I had put into my new modules, or my research. In fact, I was relentlessly critiqued. This was despite my research being cited extensively and the external examiner complimenting my new module.* [Margaret, a Lecturer in Education at a Russell Group institution]

> *My Head of School wouldn't put my name forward for either a promotion or for a university teaching award. She said I had to publish much more. But when my new Head started, they were surprised I had I not gone for promotion. I couldn't exactly say it was because of my previous Head.* [Alan, a Senior Lecturer in Anthropology at an Elite institution]

These interview extracts go some way to support Lubrano's (2005) view that, 'if you are working class and an academic, you'll never receive the credit that you should' (p. 168). As mentioned earlier, Margaret's experiences highlighted a glaring disparity between her dedicated efforts and the recognition she received. This apparent discrepancy was further amplified by the contrast between the external acclaim for her research and the persistent criticism she faced within her institution, raising concerns about potential biases influencing the evaluation of her academic contributions. This lack of support and transparent communication left Alan feeling undervalued and potentially hindered his career progression. In both cases, these discrepancies highlight the need for fair evaluation criteria, as well as effective support from academic leadership within institutions.

Derogatory Comments

Reay (1997) referenced discourses that reinforced her working-class inferiority but celebrated middle-class superiority, leaving her feeling 'lesser than'. In my previous work, Crew (2020), I identified various instances where respondents expressed discomfort regarding aspects of their 'presentation'. I elaborate further by providing additional examples of derogatory comments that respondents reported, particularly in relation to accent.

Food

The refined taste often associated with the consumption patterns of the elite and middle classes served as a backdrop to the perceptions my respondents held regarding the strategic use of food choices by their academic colleagues to reinforce the existing class hierarchy. Ryan, a Research Associate in Palliative Care at a traditional institution, shared an experience of being '*made fun of for drinking*

granulated coffee and drinking Stella'. This underscored how seemingly trivial choices, such as beverage preferences, can serve as markers within a hierarchical structure. Ruby, a Research Associate at a Russell Group institution, recalled an incident during a dinner with colleagues where her choice of steak and chips was met with raised eyebrows, as if it were an unrefined or 'common' selection, in stark contrast to their more restrained choice of a salad. This narrative highlights the loaded nature of food choices, laden with social meaning and judgement (Bourdieu, 1984). Amber, a Lecturer in Criminology at a traditional institution, conscious of her dietary restrictions due to irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), noted her manager's tendency to disparage her 'simple lunch'. She suggested that a chicken and avocado sandwich from Pret a Manger might have been met with less disapproval. This aligned with Smith Maguire (2016) observation that WCA preferences are often dismissed as being 'basic' by privileged colleagues, while foods from more middle-class establishments like Pret a Manger are elevated to a higher status, reinforcing the cultural capital and perceived 'superior' tastes of privileged academics.

Humour

My respondents frequently referred to their sense of humour as being a social barrier within academia. Eleanor, a Gender Studies Researcher at a traditional institution, noted she could immediately relax around others from similar class backgrounds, as they engaged in mutually enjoyable forms of *'taking the piss'* (Crew, 2020). These responses mirror studies indicating that sense of humour often corresponds with social positioning and class habitus (Kuipers, 2010). Comedy frequently functions as a tool to uphold the boundaries of cultural and class identity (Friedman, 2014). Elite forms of humour tend to be based on tacit social rules so there are frequently greater limits on subjects considered appropriate for comedic treatment. Working-class humour tends to incorporate irony, and irreverence, allowing those from similar backgrounds to bond through mutually understood references considered fair game for mockery. However, working-class styles of humour such as playful teasing are often marginalised due to a lack of comprehension. Countering this requires openness to diverse modes of humour and avoiding universalising classed notions of 'appropriate' humour.

Accent

An often-cited indicator of class is accent (Levon et al., 2019) although having a regional accent doesn't necessarily denote a working-class background. My interview data was filled with numerous examples of how accent was an immediate marker of class distinction, with 68% (n. 167) of my WCA respondents reporting at least one instance of accent bias. As Bourdieu (1977) notes, one's language, including accent, reflects our social positioning, with working-class speech often framed as inferior, when compared to elite/middle-class language. Respondents described feeling judged in a negative manner due to their regional

accents. Gracie, Lecturer in Criminal Justice, and Policing,[1] who felt she had a pronounced Midlands accent, talked about times when she had been asked to '*speak properly*'. Lyla, a Research Fellow in Maritime Safety at a post-1992 institution, and Olive, a Lecturer in Organisational Psychology at a traditional institution, shared their experiences of being openly ridiculed for their speech patterns in academic environments. Both expressed the view that they had been stigmatised as being 'common'. Gracie, Lyla, and Olive's experiences highlight the bias against accented speech, which often results in assumptions about intelligence (see previous research by Sharma et al., 2019).

My respondents with regional accents faced scepticism about their qualifications. Michelle, a Lecturer in Health Psychology at a Russell Group institution, described how an employment recruiter's tone shifted upon hearing her Northern accent:

> *I had some discussions over email with a senior civil servant recruiting for a job, everything over email was nice and pleasant, we arranged a phone call to discuss further and as soon as I opened my mouth her tone noticeably changed – i.e., as soon as she heard my Northern accent – she was Southern and well spoken.*

This statement by Michelle highlighted a potential instance of accent-based discrimination in a professional context. Accent-based discrimination can be a form of linguistic bias, where judgements about an individual's abilities, or suitability for a role are made based on the way they speak (Levon et al., 2021). While Adam, a Senior Lecturer in Sociology at a Russell Group institution, felt comments about his accent were relatively insignificant, most respondents reported feeling downhearted with the frequent mocking and mimicry they experienced. Ryan, a Research Associate in Palliative Care at a traditional institution[2] recalled that a departmental head 'joked' that '*she'd be ashamed if her grandkids'* spoke with Ryan's accent. Kristen, a Lecturer in Healthcare Management at a Russell Group institution described being on a 'Teams' meeting with her boss, alongside:

> *really senior doctors, responsible officers and medical directors, people at that level, and we were having a projects advisory group meeting. So when we first you know, first come on saying hello to people on teams, somebody said Scouser [referring to Kristen being from Liverpool] hide your handbag.*

The experience recounted by Kristen is an example of accent-based discrimination within academic and professional settings, while Ryan's encounter with the departmental head, is a form of derogatory humour that also targets individuals based on their regional accents. The more positive view that Adam provided is

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[1]This respondent did not list their institution.
[2]A Research Associate in Palliative Care at a traditional institution.

contrasted with the vast majority of respondents who reported frequent mocking and mimicry. Adam's view, while a singular example, does highlight though, that there is a subjective nature to such experiences. Nevertheless, the persistent negative commentary about working-class speech patterns exerted a detrimental influence on my respondents, reinforcing the perception that certain accents were 'inferior' or less desirable, thereby potentially hindering their career advancement.

Microaggressions

Almost half (47% n. 115) of my respondents reported experiencing frequent microaggressions. A term coined by Pierce (1970), microaggressions, are defined as subtle forms of structural oppression that manifest as verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities (whether intentional or unintentional), that communicate derogatory, or negative slights (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271). Bourdieu (2007) described how some individuals appear to have reconciled with the view that this soft or symbolic violence was 'their destiny' (Ganuza et al., 2020, p. 455). The type of microaggressions experienced by my WCA respondents included surprise at or questioning of credentials/qualifications, having their ideas overlooked in meetings, and/or being denied advancement opportunities available to privileged peers. Haney (2016) described how 40% of his respondents had heard disparaging comments about working-class people and 63% held the belief that the university was/is a hostile place for those from working-class backgrounds (p. 91). Microaggressions are often described as being relatively minor by respondents, but respondents such as, Margaret, a Lecturer in Education at a Russell Group institution, described these experiences as being like a '*death by a thousand cuts*' as the continual questioning that she and others, experienced, felt as if it was slowly depleting any sense of belonging they had. Theo, a Politics research fellow with classed/ethnic minority heritage, recounted episodes where he felt his actions and speech had been policed. These microaggressions, often experienced by ethnic minority respondents like Theo, highlighted the subtle ways in which ethnic minority WCAs were subjected to scrutiny and surveillance, acting as persistent reminders of their marginalised position (Bhopal, 2022; Hill Colins, 1986).

In my previous work, (Crew, 2020), I detailed how my interviewees regularly faced pointed remarks about their working-class backgrounds. As Jack, a Teaching Associate in Mathematics at an elite institution recounted, he was at a formal dinner, and a fellow academic remarked, '*I bet this is the first time someone like you has been here*'. While Jack commented that this comment was said lightly, such remarks imply that WCAs don't belong in such settings. Another example of a microaggression is given by Luke, a Social History Professor at a traditional institution, who discussed attending an interview for a position at an elite university. During the interview, he was questioned about whether someone from his background could 'fit in' at such an institution (Crew, 2020). This crass form of questioning reiterated the class-based distinctions between him and his colleagues and served to reinforce notions that university spaces are the 'natural' province of the elite/middle classes (Gorski, 2012). These experiences also perpetuate underlying views that the working class must adapt to dominant cultural norms

rather than the need for academia to embrace and welcome diversity. Research by Lauren Rivera (2015) goes somewhat in explaining what Luke experienced at his interview. Her study examined recruitment practices in high-paying entry-level positions in the US, such as those in top-tier investment banks, management consulting firms, and law firms. Her findings revealed that hiring decisions often hinge on the concept of 'fit' or, as Riveria described it, 'cultural matching'. This research emphasised the systemic nature of the issues Luke encountered, illuminating the broader context of class-based disparities within academia and the professional world.

The intersection of class and ethnicity produced further, quite direct instances of microaggressions. Respondents such as Theo, a Black Politics Research Fellow,[3] recounted incidents when colleagues have implied that his promotion was solely attributed to his ethnicity, disregarding his evident academic qualifications (Crew, 2020). Alongside this, four respondents, including one interviewee and three survey participants, identified as having Gypsy Roma Traveller heritage.[4] All but one respondent recalled instances of offensive remarks from both staff members and students concerning Gypsy Roma Travellers. Research conducted by Hurst (2010) revealed that WCAs may face inquiries about their credentials and bear the burden of assumptions that their PhDs were obtained through 'diversity scholarships'. Two of my WCA respondents with Gypsy Roma Traveller heritage referred to having to explain to their colleagues that their academic positions were not secured through such programmes. This assumption is particularly perplexing considering that the remarks originated from privileged academic peers, who, as established, enjoy various academic privileges themselves. Academics who intersected both working class and ethnic minority identities appeared to be subjected to a double burden of microaggressions, experiencing both questioning of their qualifications and promotions due to perceived worthiness, and experiencing a higher frequency of such instances compared to their White working-class counterparts. I'll expand on this in Chapter Four.

My data also found that WCAs frequently faced microinvalidations, i.e. subtle comments and behaviours that negate or nullify their experiences of class bias (Sue et al., 2007). These invalidations can be deeply damaging as they deny people's lived reality. A common example from my data was where respondents described hearing their privileged colleagues dismissing examples of classism, or

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[3]Respondent didn't give details of his institution.

[4]This represented a substantial number of respondents with Gypsy Traveller heritage, particularly noteworthy given the barriers they encounter in accessing higher education (HE) [source: https://www.cfey.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/KINGWIDE_28494_FINAL.pdf]. The Gypsy Traveller community, as a cohort, has not received extensive attention concerning HE, potentially leading to gaps in academia's understanding of their full representation in HE. Given my prior research experience with Roma and Gypsy Travellers, and my established networks within the community, it's possible that my survey on WCAs reached a more comprehensive representation within this particular community.

flippantly declaring '*we are all middle class now*'. Such throwaway remarks serve to silence working-class perspectives by framing class identity and examples of discrimination as subjective. For instance, when reporting specific microaggressions, Margaret, a Lecturer in Education at a Russell Group institution, was told she must have '*read too much into*' an incident. While Leah, a Sociologist who has worked in various institutions, recalled how, at times, academic friends had invalidated her very real experiences by dismissing her concerns as paranoia. She described the challenge of addressing microinvalidations as '*it's difficult to confront feelings of vague uneasiness*'. Even when raising issues formally, Theo and other respondents found that perpetrators were frequently absolved. Theo recounted being told: '*you know she was joking*' (Crew, 2020, p. 86). Excusing these subtle indignities as mere unintentional actions minimises the cumulative harm caused by these persistent experiences (Fine et al., 2018). These narratives represent 'the symbolic violence behind…who (is allowed to) feel and what they are allowed to feel' (Hey, 2011, p. 216). Such frequent slights can both isolate WCAs and wear down their confidence, once again signalling they will never fully belong.

Despite facing repeated slights and microaggressions, WCAs are often expected to manage their emotions and suppress their natural feelings of anger or frustration. This expectation stems from the unwritten rules of conduct prevalent in elite academic circles, which emphasise composure, restraint, and a detached demeanour. As Warnock (2016) observed, this expectation places an additional burden on WCAs, who must navigate the academic landscape while also conforming to these unspoken norms of emotional regulation. The experiences of respondents like Eddie, a Senior Lecturer in Criminology at a traditional institution, and Tomos, a Senior Lecturer in Psychology at a post-1992 institution, exemplify this pressure to maintain emotional restraint. Both individuals described feeling confined by the elite/middle-class norms that permeate academia, which often demand that academics remain 'civil' even in the face of rude behaviour or insults. This expectation, they felt, constrained their ability to express their authentic selves and added another layer of complexity to their already demanding professional lives. The enforcement of emotional restraint on WCAs can have detrimental consequences. By suppressing their natural reactions to negative experiences, WCAs may internalise feelings of anger, frustration, or even humiliation, leading to emotional exhaustion, burnout, and a sense of alienation from their academic communities.

Minimisation

WCAs also reported examples of classist attitudes that devalued their scholarship, especially when their research addressed issues of inequality. My WCAs such as Peter, a History Lecturer at an Elite institution, discovered that openly discussing class backgrounds seemed to trigger defensiveness among his more advantaged colleagues. As Arner (2017) notes, 'few are comfortable with their own privilege being highlighted' (p. 79). Classism can also manifest through a perception that those from disadvantaged backgrounds lack academic capabilities (Gorski, 2012;

Lott, 2002) (hence why the idea of a WCA is so contentious). While some WCAs incorporated a class-based perspective into their scholarship, there was a diversity among the WCAs who participated in my research, and not all incorporated class as a component of their research. Several respondents mentioned the assumptions they encountered about their research, namely that, as they were WCAs, they *only* specialised in subjects associated with class:

> *I conduct research in the broad area of sports, but due to my background and accent, its assumed that I conduct research on football hooliganism!.* [Eddie, Senior Lecturer in Criminology at a traditional institution]

> *Colleagues expect me to do community based research. These presumptions have meant that I've not been put forward for departmental funding as they don't provide for community based research.* [Tomos, a Senior Lecturer in Psychology at a post-1992 institution]

These dismissive attitudes underestimate the intellectual rigour of WCAs, revealing a bias rooted in class-based stereotypes. This highlighted the challenges WCAs face in dispelling preconceived notions about them based on their social class.

Reay (1997) observed that the lived experience of inequality held by WCAs is frequently undervalued and subjected to substantial criticism by more privileged academics. Nearly one in five (19.5%, n. 47) of my respondents reported encountering instances where their research on social class was not accorded due respect:

> *I wanted the role of Director of Research, but despite having a strong research and funding record, my research on social class was perceived as being emotionally charged, and I was told I needed more experience.* [Dominic, a Senior Lecturer in Education at a post-1992 institution]

> *I had my yearly review with my line manager [a female, very middle class professor]. Halfway through, without it being the topic of discussion, she dismissed class as a zombie category, berated me about a small research project I produced about class and then preceded to tell me I needed to have more academic outputs if I wanted to be taken seriously.* [Flynn, a Lecturer in Health at a traditional institution]

Several respondents also believed that while they faced critique whenever they produced research on social class, peers from prestigious backgrounds who also conducted research on inequalities and marginalised perspectives, which included class, did not appear to encounter the same level of scrutiny for their work. This

perception may stem from the presumed neutrality often ascribed to academics from privileged backgrounds, where elite knowledge is equated with objectivity and academic excellence. Conversely, as many of my respondents discovered, their scholarship was more likely to be characterised as a form of advocacy rather than academic scholarship. Dominic's experience raised questions about the fairness of the evaluation process, as despite his strong publication and funding record, he felt there was a hidden bias against him based on his class heritage. Flynn's observation of his yearly review raised questions about the recognition of research related to class issues in academic institutions. Both accounts indicated potential bias or at least some insensitivity towards research about social class, which can adversely affect further research opportunities, ultimately undermining inclusivity within academic institutions.

As an aside, Dominic, a Senior Lecturer in Education at a post-1992 institution commented that:

> *The academy will never accept people like me, like you. If you are working class and an academic, you'll never receive the credit you should. If you publish in a field, you won't be recognised as the leading person, even if your work, your research, your concepts have changed that field. You will always be secondary to a middle-class academic.*

Dominic articulated a profound sense of disillusionment within academia, particularly regarding the acknowledgement and opportunities available to him as a WCAs. His opinion was reiterated by other respondents.

The Impacts of Classism

In addition to the specific incidents of stereotyping discrimination and exclusion highlighted previously, my respondents also referred to various psychological and emotional impacts resulting from their cumulative experiences with classism in academia. Profound feelings of self-doubt, anxiety, and imposter syndrome alongside isolation, loneliness and the perennial feeling of being a 'fish out of water' were typical for my respondents. Other respondents referred to their deteriorating mental health, alongside strained family relationships, and in some cases, periods of grief over 'shedding' their working-class identity. However, there was a glimmer of positivity as respondents also referred to their solidarity with other WCAs.

Imposter Syndrome

My research aligned with Hurst (2010) and Lubrano (2005) and found that WCAs experienced both anxiety and imposter feelings. Imposter syndrome is estimated to affect around 70% of high achievers (Buckland, 2017), although Breeze (2019) theorises it as a 'public feeling' disproportionately situated among marginalised

groups. I could see evidence of this in my interviews as respondents from all types of institutions expressed concerns about inevitably being 'found out' and would talk of having a lack of confidence:

> *I had an idea for our department, but I have no self-confidence so kept it to myself. The imposter syndrome sometimes comes. In case someone figures out that we're not meant to be here*. [Ivy, a Research Fellow Health Services at a traditional institution]

Ivy's hesitation to share ideas further exemplifies the self-doubt and inadequacy WCAs feel in academic spaces. Yet, her narrative suggests that imposterism is not a constant state but rather an intermittent struggle, exemplified by her fear of being exposed as an imposter amidst the academic elite. Listening to many of my female WCA respondents I was reminded of an excerpt from Reay's (2018) book *Miseducation: Inequality, Education, and the Working Classes* where she said that 'there is a terror of getting it wrong. And the chances of getting it wrong intellectually are enormous for working class girls'. Amelia, a Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences at a Russell Group institution, revealed a deep sense of anxiety and insecurity with regards to her work. Whereas other female WCAs such as Margaret, a Lecturer in Education at a Russell Group institution reported that '*no matter how well people tell me I'm doing, I always feel I can and should be doing better*'. Margaret expressed a perpetual feeling of inadequacy. Driven by a desire to impress both students and peers, she and others would often engage in excessive preparation, leading to debilitating stress and an unsustainable workload. Academic spaces can impose a persistent, internalised belief that specific individuals are undeserving of their professional success and status. These respondents talked of feeling like pretenders who had somehow 'slipped through the cracks' into academic environments not meant for them. Reay (2021) referred to her working-class respondents frequently talking about 'never being good enough', which she felt was linked to a perception that more elite students were both more intelligent and socially accomplished (p. 58). My respondents felt imposter syndrome due to cultural differences in diet or accent etc clashed with unspoken academic norms, putting pressure on them to assimilate.

I gathered limited data on male WCAs who reported experiences of imposterism, as the topic wasn't extensively discussed. When it did surface, their narratives centred on distinctions between themselves and academics from elite social classes and the privileges these academics had – or '*unearned advantages*' in the words of Alan, a Senior Lecturer in Anthropology at an Elite institution. Male WCAs were candid about their masculine privilege, particularly if they could successfully 'pass' as elite or middle class. Notably, a subset of participants (n. 5) touched upon their interactions with female academics from affluent backgrounds. The encounters described by Lucas, a Senior Lecturer in Health at a traditional institution, mirrored the experiences of other male respondents addressing this issue. Lucas acknowledged his gender-based advantages and discussed advocating for

his female colleagues. He stated that he made efforts to be an ally, promoting female colleagues for keynotes, panels, and publication opportunities, but he observed that female academics from advantaged backgrounds were often content to '*address their gender related disadvantages but would remain silent on their class privilege*'. This statement, echoed by four other male WCAs served as a poignant reminder of the intersectionality of privilege, illuminating that elite or middle-class women may not always recognise or be willing to acknowledge the privilege they have due to their class background. This insight aligns with Meadhbh Murray et al. (2023) research, who drew upon Sara Ahmed's (2012) 'diversity work'. They argued that the imposter feelings experienced by marginalised academics are often a response to and reinforced by the exclusionary atmosphere prevalent in universities (p. 749).

My research revealed a distinction between the experiences of respondents at elite institutions and those at post-1992 universities, where respondents at the latter institutions were less likely to mention experiencing imposterism. This difference may be attributed to the increased diversity of staff and student bodies at post-1992 institutions, including a higher proportion of WCAs. This nuance suggests that while imposter syndrome may be a shared experience, its intensity or visibility could vary based on the perceived status of the academic institution. The lower frequency of references to imposter syndrome at post-1992 universities could also be influenced by different institutional cultures, or perhaps even there being a more supportive atmosphere that can mitigate the intensity of imposter feelings, as respondents were more likely to mention informal peer support structures. Conversely, the prominence of imposter syndrome in elite institutions may be attributed to there being a more competitive environment. This observation warrants further exploration into the factors contributing to imposter syndrome in different academic settings.

Not Fitting In

Skeggs (1997) posed the thought provoking question, 'what happens when we become academics?' (p. 33). My respondents' narratives were permeated by discourses of 'not fitting in', with some referencing Bourdieusian social theory, such as the metaphor of feeling like a 'fish out of water' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This feeling was often exacerbated in elite university settings, where there was a perception that one's values diverged from the prevailing majority. My female WCA respondents specifically reported experiencing anxiety in these prestigious university settings, whether as employees or invited speakers. This anxiety appeared to stem from a variety of factors, including feeling like an outsider and/or having a lack of confidence. Amelia, a Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences at a Russell Group institution, described her decision to decline a position at an Oxbridge institution, a role she felt she would have excelled in. However, she opted against it, stating, '*working there would make me ill. I'd never feel as if I belonged in such a place. I wouldn't feel good enough*'. This finding aligned with research by Binns (2019), where just under 80% of her respondents expressed

a preference for remaining at their current institution, even though they were suitably qualified to apply for academic positions at Elite and Russell Group universities. Amelia's quotation exemplified the extreme anxiety associated with working at an elite university, while others described a general sense of feeling as if they would not fit into academia. Such a feeling is not exclusive to WCAs, but it can be particularly pronounced for these academics. Some respondents attributed this to their lack of private schooling or not having attended at prestigious universities, which they believed hindered their progress in academia. Harper, a PhD Candidate in Sociolinguistics at a Russell Group institution, echoed these sentiments: '*I have admittedly compared myself to other academics who have studied in private schools or had wealthy parents*'. Harper, and others would talk of comparing their own background in comparison to that of their colleagues, which often left them feeling inadequate as a result. Comparing their own working-class background to the more privileged backgrounds of their colleagues is inherently negative as their social class is a disadvantage in academia. While Hunter's comparison to others may be indicative of imposter syndrome, respondents would continually reference a desire to fit in.

Some ethnic minority WCAs referred to aspects of their culture as impacting on how they felt they 'fit' within academia. Three female ethnic minority WCAs referred to avoiding displaying cultural elements such as braids, headwraps, or saris, as they perceived that they faced additional scrutiny if they wore colourful, cultural attire – experiences which align with findings by Rollock (2019). Those respondents who described themselves as 'passing' within academia, reported having to constantly navigate a tightrope, balancing their professional aspirations with a desire to maintain their cultural authenticity. This was exhausting, requiring them to constantly adapt and conform to external expectations rather than being embraced for their unique identities. The privilege of blending into academic spaces, as Showunmi and Maylor (2013) point out, is one that whiteness affords. For ethnic minority WCAs, this privilege is often denied, forcing them to navigate a more challenging and exclusionary environment. They must not only contend with the classed barriers but also the racialised expectations that demand assimilation into white cultural norms. The scholarship of Kalwant Bhopal (see reference list) is vital here in highlighting the urgent need for institutions to address these systemic issues and create more inclusive and equitable spaces for all, regardless of their racial or ethnic background.

Isolation

Isolation refers to a state of being physically or emotionally separated from others – something that runs contrary to the concept of academic collegiality (Churchman, 2002). Isolation can be voluntary or involuntary, temporary or chronic, and can occur due to social characteristics, geographical distance or if one has mental health issues. All of the working-class students Reay (2021) interviewed from 'Southern University' mentioned experiencing some degree of isolation. Despite all the positive aspects of being an academic (to be discussed in Chapter Six) a slight majority (51%, n. 125) of my respondents referred to being

isolated, with most saying this was due to a loss of connection to their family, friends, and working-class culture since entering academia. WCA respondents in Hurst's (2010) research described how they experienced disconnection from childhood friends, a sense of alienation from family members, and a perception of growing apart from their former selves. Like Lubrano (2005), my WCAs powerfully described how the transition into HE as being one that induced a huge sense of grief and bereavement, with some, such as Yvonne, a Lecturer in Health and Social Care, at a Russell Group institution, describing it as '*losing a big part of me that I'll never get back*'. These respondents described there being a cultural separation from their tightknit working-class roots. Others lamented the need to 'shed' parts of themselves: '*my accent to my cultural references now seem redundant if I am going to keep navigating academia*' [Petra, a Lecturer in Human Geography at a post-1992 institution]. These were complex emotions, as Ellie, a Reader in Health Sciences at a Russell Group institution, and other respondents had experienced a sense of grief over '*the impact on my working class identity*' [Rudra, a Lecturer in Criminology at a traditional institution]. While acknowledging the progress they had achieved through upward mobility, for Rudra and others, it exacted an emotional toll, a mourning for discarded parts of self and '*cherished relationships*'.

My respondents also described how they resented the dominance of elitist academic norms which defined their working-class heritage as inferior. As previously discussed in Chapter Two, respondents feared revealing details about their family upbringing, or their current family situations which might invite judgement or awkwardness:

> *You bet I've hidden my cultural roots from other colleagues – what, let them know my mum works in a supermarket, my dad left us and that my sister was pregnant at 16? I would be judged*. [Eddie, Senior Lecturer in Criminology at a traditional institution]

> *My colleagues do not know me. I'm afraid they won't understand where I'm coming from if they knew about my family's struggles. They might judge me and make assumptions about my background and my capabilities*. [Rudra, a Lecturer in Criminology at a traditional institution]

Both reported that it was difficult to build authentic friendships within the academy as they could not openly discuss their working-class heritage. Eddie's comment highlighted the fear of judgement he felt from colleagues who might not understand his class experiences. This reflects the sense of vulnerability and potential stigma that WCAs may face. Rudra's quote encapsulates respondents have a fear of judgement and have a constant need to prove their worth in the face of societal biases.

On a much more positive note though, there was a sense of solidarity and unity throughout my interviews with WCAs as they would refer to 'us', when they shared their frustrations. Respondents, particularly those from post-1992 institutions would refer to having friendships among other WCAs which they

said served as a '*vital support system*' [Petra, a Lecturer in Human Geography at a post-1992 institution], a unique bond rooted in shared experiences. In all, 22% (n. 54) of respondents mentioned examples of support networks and advocacy for WCAs such as the Working Class Academics Conference, the Alliance of Working Class Academics, and various university-led networks and associations which provided support to WCAs. Respondents would often tell me that 'we' needed to build upon these existing support networks and class-focused conferences. Other respondents referred to a need for a dedicated peer support space[5] as they felt such spaces could play a vital role in providing resources, mentorship, and a sense of belonging to WCAs. This was something reiterated by a majority of respondents (61%, n155).

Respondents also mentioned the various small conferences, with a central theme of 'class', that they had attended. They referred to the class solidarity and friendship that they experienced at these events and how it was overwhelming (in a good way) at times. Such events provided a platform for discussing class-related issues in academia but also fostered a sense of class solidarity:

> *Being among others with the same experiences, I can be me*. [Yvonne, a Lecturer in Health and Social Care, at a Russell Group institution]

Attending such conferences was empowering as my respondents could find validation in their experiences. Respondents attended these conferences even if they did not conduct research in this area as it meant that they had likeminded academics to '*reach out to*' [Amelia, a Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences at a Russell Group institution], and they '*didn't feel like they were alone*' [Margaret, a Lecturer in Education at a Russell Group institution]. The unity and sense of belonging experienced by WCAs at these events helped to combat feelings of isolation.

Poor Health

Respondents like Florence, a Research Fellow at a post-1992 institution, and others, lamented that '*the constant need to downplay my background has made me feel quite distressed*'. Florence went on in more detail about how depressed this had left her. Sadly, she wasn't the only one. Around 38% (n. 92) of my respondents described experiencing profound physical and mental health impacts stemming from the cumulative toll of concealing one's class identity. This finding is a continuation from Crew (2020) where I revealed that female WCAs, were more likely than their male counterparts to report challenges related to their mental and physical health. Margaret, a Lecturer in Education at a Russell Group institution, who described how:

> *You have to put on a mask every time you step into that environment, and it takes a toll on your mental and emotional wellbeing.*

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[5]There are a few of WCAs like myself who are considering setting up something like this, so do feel free to contact me if you are interested so we can gauge what is needed.

Margaret's statement encapsulates the profound impact concealing aspects of themselves on their health. Those on precarious contracts were more likely to describe their poor health, with 72% (n.79) reporting symptoms such as chronic stress, insomnia, and physical ailments. A synthesis of research on the effects of academic precarity on academics revealed conditions such as stress and anxiety, as well as a lack of development opportunities (Solomon & Du Plessis, 2023). Jeremy, a postdoctoral researcher in Geography at a traditional institution, explains the stark situation they face: '*You better hope no relative is seriously ill, or that you don't get ill or actually are disabled*' (Crew, 2020, p. 60). Deb, a Teaching Fellow in Health at a post-1992 institution, emphasised a cascading effect: the loss of institutional access between temporary contracts interrupted their research progress. This then complicated their ability to secure stable employment. This then created a ripple effect that took a toll on their overall health. All the while they looked for the next temporary contract. Chapter Four expands on these issues by including the intersection of disability.

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Chapter 4

Intersectional Perspectives

Keywords: Gender; academic housekeeping; ethnicity; representation; classed and racial microaggressions; disability; precarity; reasonable adjustments; conferences

Overview

While social class exerts a significant influence on the experiences of WCAs, a lesser examined dimension is the intersection of class with other vectors of disadvantage. Intersectionality is a theory coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) in her critique of US antidiscrimination law and social justice movements. It serves as a crucial tool for illuminating the connections between intersecting inequalities that traditional frameworks of thought often fail to adequately grasp (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill Colins, 1989). Crenshaw challenged the assumption that women are a homogeneous group and highlighted Black women's unique experiences of both racism and sexism. An autoethnographic account by Akbar (2022) supports this intersectional approach, as he noted that his biography is 'not as simple as solely identifying as coming from a working class background…it is several complex layers of the dual identities amalgamated into one' (p. 74). Jones and Maguire (2021) described how the WCA women in their study felt they were often 'positioned differently by colleagues and students' (p. 1), compared to other academics. While scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins and Valerie Hey have compellingly argued that WCA women of colour endure an 'outsider within' status, being excluded by both gendered and classed hierarchies (Hey, 2003; Hill Collins, 1986). Alongside this, scholars with disabilities from disadvantaged backgrounds described the difficulties of navigating academia (Dolmage, 2017). Chapter Four expands our analysis by exploring the experiences of WCAs when gender, ethnicity, and disability intersect with their class heritage.

Gender

According to higher education statistics agency (HESA data, females accounted for 49% of full-time staff and 66% of part-time staff working in HE during 2021/2022 – although the statistical data demonstrated that female staff members were more likely to be working as non-academic staff (63% of non-academic staff were female, compared with females representing 48% of academic staff). Women continue to be underrepresented at senior levels, holding just 30% of professor positions in the UK in 2021/2022 – although there has been an increase of two percentage points since 2020/2021 (HESA, 2023). Research by Santos and Dang Van Phu (2019) revealed that being female has a negative association with academic rank, even after controlling for many factors such as age, marital status, responsibility for household chores, field of research, whether they have children or hold a PhD or not as well as the percentage of working time spent on teaching and teaching related activities. Gender was not found to be significant when academics (male and female) had children after seniority had been secured (p. 2). There were further examples of gendered inequalities, such as female academics had a lower chance of authoring invited commentaries in medical journals compared with men with similar scientific expertise, seniority, and publication metrics (Thomas et al., 2019). Female scholars in the UK also tend to receive lower research funding compared with their male colleagues (Wijnen et al., 2021) and fewer citations, i.e. articles written by women as primary authors had approximately half the number of citations as those with men as the primary author (Chatterjee & Werner, 2021). This is significant as research impact is often gauged primarily through the number of citations a publication receives. Although this should be examined on a subject level as Borchardt et al. (2018) found that in Chemistry, the importance of a research article is only partly captured by its citation rates.

The COVID-19 pandemic heightened and exacerbated pre-existing gender disparities, resulting in the emergence of the she-cession (Profeta, 2021). The school/childcare closures meant that many parents lost access to institutional and informal childcare support which significantly impacted the paid and unpaid labour of parents, particularly of course, mothers (Yavorsky et al., 2021). Since the start of the pandemic, many women curtailed their research activities, begun fewer new projects, and acquired less research funding (Cardel et al., 2020; Gao et al., 2021, cited in Caldarulo et al., 2022). Ucar et al. (2022) estimated that the gender gap in academia suffered an approximately 12-month setback during the lockdown months of 2020, while COVID-related research areas suffered an additional 18-month setback.

When gender intersects with social class research suggests that it can have a negative influence on academic careers. For instance, Ostrove's (2003) research on American female students found that working-class women were more likely to experience imposter syndrome, although this study only compared them to females from other social classes. Alongside this, a study conducted by the British Federation of Women Graduates (2023) revealed that female academics frequently faced pressure to assume time-consuming responsibilities that their male counterparts tend to decline. Unfortunately, these tasks typically do little

to enhance female academic prospects for career advancement. For instance, a PhD study by Rachael Goodwin (2022) included a classed and gendered analysis of academic housekeeping. She found that this work was often exacerbated by 'working class traditional feminine caring roles within the home, on top of the emotional labour conducted in HE' (p. 135), These additional tasks left one respondent revealing that she felt like she was a 'dogsbody' (Goodwin, 2022, p. 136). WCA women are still encouraged to take on nurturing and service roles within the profession due to their working-class values and upbringing.

Despite Walkerdine et al. (2001) aptly asserting 'that social class is an overwhelmingly masculine category', it is interesting that research on the gendered impact on WCA experiences, typically focuses on female WCAs. This may stem from the assumption that male WCAs can leverage their gender to gain academic authority. However, Pease (2015) argues that WCA men can also feel like outsiders, and any masculine privileges are offset by disadvantages stemming from their working-class heritage. In Pease's case, he argues that any advantages stemming from his masculine identity were counterbalanced by his working-class background. Hadley (2022), a 'late onset entrant into academia' (p. 154), adds further complexity in his poignant illustration of the emotional toll that his PhD journey took. He referred to being 'very aware of [his] accent, not… terribly confident and although accepted, not quite fitting in' (p. 155). These narratives are important as they provide some evidence to demonstrate that WCA men may not be entirely confident in academia, despite the perception that their masculinity eased their passage through academia. Hadley's autoethnography contributes to the growing understanding of the nuanced ways in which WCA men navigate the academic terrain, revealing that their journeys involve a constant negotiation of identity within the academic realm. Incidentally, it is interesting that in the chapter abstract,[1] Hadley (2022) refers to himself as being a 'bateleur' (i.e. a tightrope walker, an acrobat, a buffoon) (p. 418), as the latter word is often associated with the working classes. Johnston and Bradford (2022) research on working-class male students undertaking care-based degrees demonstrates the impact of class and gender from a masculine perspective. The WCA men they interviewed felt that they were somehow trespassing in the care field. Whereas Watts (2015) noted in his autobiographical chapter that 'being a reader with a good memory and some facility at writing made me a bit odd' (p. 21). This illustrates the unique challenges faced by WCA men as working-class masculinities may clash with academic pursuits such as reading (Wilhelm & Smith, 2014).

The following section, including Table 2, outlines details of the respondents who took part in this research according to their gender.

In Phases One and Three of the research, there were a significantly greater number of female respondents compared to males. Phase two had a more even gender division although female respondents still formed the majority.

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[1]https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780429330384-15/riding-auto-biographical-phd-rollercoaster-robin-hadley

Table 2.   Gender of Respondents According to Each Research Phase.

Phase One		Phase Two		Phase Three		
M	F	M	F	M	F	*Rather not say.*
26	66	31	42	23	65	1[a]

[a]One respondent within the survey (Phase Three) indicated 'rather not say' in response to a question about gender and then a voluntary question about whether the gender they identified with was the same as your sex registered at birth.

Within the academic context, intersectionality recognises that individuals may encounter distinct challenges and advantages arising from the intersection of their various identities. The narratives illuminated the intersectionality of class and gender within the academic landscape. For instance, Harriet, a Senior Lecturer in Criminology, spoke of accent bias, referring to the mockery she had faced for her accent and the gendered expectations in academic roles. Orla, a Tutor of Economic and Social History at a Russell Group institution, also reported instances of mockery related to her (Scottish) accent. Orla referred to examples of gender bias being evident as she talked of being treated differently from her male colleagues, with students using titles like 'Miss' or 'Ms' instead of 'Dr'. Zara, a Research Fellow in History affiliated with a Russell Group university, encountered accent bias too: '*I frequently feel that my accent and appearance are subjected to judgment*'. She referred to challenges as she was precariously employed, which exacerbated for Zara, who, without family support, found herself unable to easily relocate, limiting her networking opportunities. Despite these challenges, Zara talked about how her experiences had equipped her with the ability to connect with non-traditional students – something that should make her an asset within the institution. These experiences are particularly challenging for WCA women as they face double bias (gender & class), leading to layered discrimination and pressure to constantly prove themselves.

Overall n. 12 respondents (n. 9 females) acknowledged their experience with bullying by checking the corresponding checkbox in the survey. This matched research by Simpson and Cohen (2004) who found there was a significantly higher proportion of women who experienced bullying. Few respondents (n2) provided written accounts of bullying in their surveys, with both examples coming from men. The Anti Bullying Alliance defines bullying as 'the repetitive, intentional hurting of one person or group by another person or group, where the relationship involves an imbalance of power. It can happen face to face or online'. Workplace bullying can include a wide spectrum of actions, including (1) Verbal abuse – such as demeaning personal attacks, (2) Public email, or social media shaming – can be in person in a meeting, via group, and (3) Isolation – being cut off from colleagues who can support you. Bullying within academia is a complex phenomenon and can manifest among individuals of any gender, class, or background, although targets of bullying are often the most vulnerable members of

the workforce (Mahmoudi, 2020; Tight, 2023), i.e. people on casualised contracts and early career researchers (ECRs). Both narratives in my data drew attention to the issue of social class within academia. Archie, a Head of School and Professor at a Russell Group institution, disclosed '*persistent bullying*' in academia. Archie's experience included being '*constantly bullied and dismissed by middle-class women, while snooty men just ignore me*'. Bobby, a Lecturer and Researcher in Sociology at two institutions, talked of having had an awful time in academia, referring to a '*weird middle class sterilised passive aggressive culture*'. Archie's narrative, particularly the use of '*constantly*' suggests that it wasn't an isolated incident but a recurring pattern. Bobby's narrative implies a sense of difference or a cultural clash from the restrained atmosphere in academia. As academia involves hierarchical power structures, if middle-class academic women (as referred to by Archie), hold positions of power or perceive themselves as having more status, they might misuse this power dynamic. The competition for resources, recognition, and opportunities in academia may also lead to bullying behaviours as individuals vie for limited positions or resources. Stereotypes about WCA men as either being more privileged due to their gender or being perceived as having less prestigious educational backgrounds, thus, being less competent or capable, appeared to contribute to these discriminatory actions.

One respondent, Riley, a Lecturer in Education at a traditional institution, who did not give details of their gender identity faced classism, accent bias, and a lack of opportunities within their department. Riley expressed scepticism about the potential for change in academia they believed that research like 'this' provides a platform for WCAs to speak openly about their experiences. Riley's narrative highlights the multifaceted challenges faced by WCAs in academia, extending beyond gender identity to encompass issues of class, social background, and personal expression. Their experiences of feeling excluded and undervalued highlight the pervasive nature of classism and accent bias within academic settings. The experiences of Riley and other WCAs underscore the need for continued efforts to promote equity and inclusion in academia.

There was one key theme found in the data in relation to the intersection of class and gender in academia.

Academic Housekeeping

Academic or institutional housekeeping refers to administrative or service tasks such as advising students, mentoring colleagues, reviewing for journals or grant awarding bodies, serving on committees, contributing expertise to civic and charitable bodies, etc. (Macfarlane, 2018), that are usually performed without resources and little recognition (Bird et al., 2004). As perhaps is to be expected, women in academia are disproportionately burdened with these nonpromotable tasks (Van Veelen & Derks, 2022). Hochschild's (1979, 2003) concept of "emotional labour" illuminates the demands created by the feminisation of academic labour. Macfarlane (2018) notes that male academics do engage in this form of 'housework', it's just that women usually contribute more. In their book

The No Club, Babcock et al. (2022) demonstrated that women are 44% more likely to be asked to do academic housekeeping and are 50% more likely to say yes to this work in comparison to men. A paper by Wilson et al. (2021) in part talks of the 'guilty burden of pastoral care' (p. 5), where mainly female academics are 'over-worked…pressurised and overburdened by the volume of pastoral cases' (Wilson et al., 2021).

In all, 51% (n. 84) of my female respondents and 38% (n. 31) of my male respondents referred to academic housekeeping. Within universities, work is categorised into core and support activities. Core activities for faculty primarily revolve around teaching, grant writing, publishing, and disseminating scholarly work. Whereas 'service' activities, often perceived as less prestigious, encompass tasks such as committee work, advising students, and making civic contributions (Bird et al., 2004; Hochschild,1979 & 2003). Despite the indispensability of all these activities, they are not uniformly valued. There exists a hierarchy in the perception of their importance and prestige within the academic landscape. Among my own respondents, gender disparities in the participation of academic activities were evident, with male WCAs being more likely to serve as editors (a prestigious admin task). Male WCAs also reported a higher likelihood of participating in open days. When probed about the reasons behind this, three male WCA respondents attributed it to what they perceived as their female colleagues having to unfairly shoulder additional caregiving responsibilities, such as childcare and looking after family members. Female WCAs were typically involved in the full range of tasks cited above, in particular participating in committees and helping students in need of support. These time-consuming tasks were so commonly gendered that female respondents such as Margaret, a Lecturer in Education at a Russell Group institution, noted that '*being a woman academic means doing all the bullshit jobs and not being promoted like men are*'. While I don't have data on how this affected pay and promotions, female respondents referred to these tasks as being both low in status and invisible.

My respondents perceived there to be a classed element to academic housekeeping as they felt, in comparison to their more elite peers, they would be more likely to understand the difficulties faced by students, particularly those from working-class backgrounds. Mazurek (2009) argued that WCA women are often encouraged to embrace nurturing and service roles within the profession. Petra, a Lecturer in Human Geography at a traditional institution, posits that this tendency may arise from the fact that WCAs like herself often demonstrate a robust sense of compassion and care for their students due to the relatability they share. She proceeded to suggest that this does not imply that individuals from economically, socially, or culturally privileged backgrounds are not caring towards their students. Petra hypothesised that WCAs might demonstrate a heightened level of investment in their students' well-being, rooted in a desire to shield their students from the challenges and hardships they themselves had experienced. WCAs, motivated by their own backgrounds and past struggles, often gravitated towards fostering a positive and nurturing learning environment, aspiring to be the educators they yearned for during their own academic pursuits. The male WCAs I

interviewed also talked about the pastoral care they provided to students, a trait typically associated with female academics.

> *I'll spend up to an hour to speak to the students one on one, because I enjoy it. But …I suppose that ends up being quite popular with other students and therefore taken full advantage of by other staff.* [Samuel, a Teacher in Classics & Ancient History at a Russell Group institution]

> *The biggest contribution is the way I teach. I've been through an educational system that I found to be very tough so I know what kind of teacher I don't want to be like* [Ethan, Graduate Student in Sociology at a Russell Group institution]

Samuel's interactions with students appear to stem from his genuine interest in teaching and supporting students. However, he also expressed concern that his willingness to go above and beyond might lead to others taking advantage of him, a concern also observed by most of my female respondents. This raised questions about the fair allocation of workloads and highlighted the importance for institutions to recognise (potentially through remuneration and acknowledgement in promotion) these voluntary efforts. All of the male WCAs I interviewed who mentioned such tasks, even Samuel who certainly appeared to do his 'fair share', acknowledged that their female counterparts were much more likely to do more of the academic housework in their institution. Furthermore, respondents such as Lucas, Senior Lecturer in Health at a traditional institution, perceived that their administrative work may receive greater recognition for promotion purposes compared to their female colleagues.

Ethnicity

Statistical data from HESA in 2021/2022 revealed that of academic staff with declared ethnicity, 72% were White, 3% Black, 11% Asian, 3% Mixed, 3% 'Others', and 9% 'Unknown' (HESA, 2023).[2] Academics defined as ethnic minorities remain underrepresented at senior levels. Of 21,760 professors with known ethnicity, only 12% were ethnic minorities – 65% who identify as an ethnic minority were Asian (HESA, 2023). There has been a historical failure to recognise Black scholars, something that persists today, as there is both an invisibility and hypervisibility that many WCA academics of colour face, i.e. they are both invisible in terms of recognised competence yet are scrutinised and expected to be tokens of diversity (Lander & Santoro, 2017). Despite the posters of contented-looking people of colour adorning these institutions, the stark reality persists: universities often articulate their 'commitment to diversity' through speech acts rather

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[2]These percentages are rounded up so will not add up to 100.

than substantive and meaningful practices (Ahmed, 2007). Research finds that academics of colour experience isolation, lack of support, and devaluation of their work (Turner et al., 2008 cited in Bhopal, 2022). Alongside this, a report by Karran and Mallinson (2017) revealed that when compared to White staff, ethnic minorities reported significantly higher rates of disciplinary threats, were denied promotions, and faced infringements on academic freedom due to their gender or race. Joseph Salisbury's research (2021) illuminates that ethnic minorities frequently face scepticism regarding their qualifications and/or intellectual capabilities. On the flip side, they are sometimes praised in a patronising manner for their articulateness.

Class and ethnicity intersect in complex ways, not as isolated categories (Ferree, 1990). For instance, Mahony and Zmroczek (1997) talked of how some of the black female academics of African and African Caribbean origin she spoke to mentioned that despite their middle-class accents, it was frequently presumed that they were working class (p. 21). Working class women of colour, who typically experienced classed, gendered, and racialised biases (Hills Collins, 2019), faced stigma as intellectually deficient and tended to be subjected to harmful stereotypes as lazy and undeserving (Gorski, 2012). The effects of these intersections are still evident within UK academia. For instance, Bhopal's 2014 report on Black British academics outlines how they face triple glass ceilings due to intersecting gender, ethnicity, and class barriers, evidenced by severe under-representation at senior levels. In a report for a University and College Union by Nicola Rollock (2019), interviews with 20 black female professors in the UK revealed that these scholars faced a culture of passive bullying and racial micro-aggressions that narrowed their chances of promotion. Alongside this, Akbar (2022) talked of his journey into academia from an intersectional perspective of being British-born, of Pakistani heritage and a Muslim male, noting that intersections of classist and racist discourses operated to alienate and exclude him in academia.

Table 3 shows that in Phase One of the research, the majority of respondents were White, with 77 individuals falling into this category. Owing to the structure of how the data in this phase was recorded, 22 respondents were classified as being 'BME'. In Phase Two, White respondents formed the majority (n.68) of interviewees, there was an increase in respondents from diverse ethnic backgrounds – notably, there are 6 respondents from the Asian or Asian British category, n. 3 from Black or Black British (Caribbean or African), n. 2 from Mixed or multiple ethnic groups, and n.6 did not give details of their ethnicity. In Phase Three, the distribution of respondents across ethnic groups was similar to Phase Two, with slight fluctuations in the number of White respondents (n. 68), and those who did not give their ethnicity (n. 6).[3]

Respondents revealed that they faced a myriad of challenges within academic spaces. For instance, Ari, a male of Asian British ethnicity, aged 36–45, shared a compelling narrative focusing on the intricate layers of his identity. Teaching Arabic Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at a prestigious Russell Group

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[3]One respondent in the survey left the question blank.

Table 3. Ethnicity of Respondents According to Each Research Phase.

	Phase One	**Phase Two**	**Phase Three**
Asian or Asian British	0	1	6
Black, Black British, Caribbean or African	0	3	1
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	0	2	3
White	72	68	74
Not listed[a]	0	0	6
BME[b]	20	0	0

[a] Not listed was given as an option but respondents did not or were unable to write the ethnicity in the space given.

[b] In 2021, the UK government stopped using the terms BAME (black, Asian and minority ethnic) and BME (black and minority ethnic). One of the recommendations, found in a final report on COVID-19 disparities, was that researchers should refer to ethnic minority groups individually, rather than as a single group. There are limitations with the term BME as it homogenises people from minority ethnic backgrounds. When conducting the interviews for Crew (2020), I recorded the individual ethnicity of respondents in the book, but when I recorded their ethnicity in the appendix of the book, I used the term BME. I have felt uncomfortable using this term so moving forward in the next phase of the research I have used individual ethnic groups, or people of colour when referring to ethnicity.

institution, Ari highlighted challenges encompassing classism, accent bias, and microaggressions. His experiences, rooted in racism and Islamophobia due to his Muslim Indian heritage and working-class background, exposed pervasive biases within the academic environment, emanating from both colleagues and students. Alongside this, Sabin, a Lecturer in Education Studies, talked of enduring racism and classism in his professional life. Similarly, Ari, specialising in Islamic Studies at a Russell Group institution, emphasised the intersectionality of discrimination due to his Muslim Indian heritage and working-class background. Their accounts also highlight the complexity of challenges faced by male WCA. The status of being male and an academic often entails patriarchal privileges within elite structures designed to subordinate and exclude women. However, Black WCA men encounter a dual disadvantage due to the convergence of their ethnicity (being black) and their socioeconomic status (working class). Alongside this, Black academics (male and female) are often subjected to excessive scrutiny, potentially leading to them being overlooked for promotions (Bhopal & Jackson, 2013). Both these factors can independently contribute to social inequalities, and their intersection compounds the challenges faced by these individuals, such as discrimination.

Isla,[4] a female working in Education, at a traditional university had an academic journey marked by financial constraints and isolation. Facing challenges

[4]Isla referred to her ethnicity as being not listed. As discussed previously, not listed was given as an option but respondents did not or were unable to write the ethnicity in the space given.

on short-term contracts in her early career, she encountered a lack of understanding from colleagues about the financial struggles associated with academia. Alfie, a Black British, Caribbean, or African male, pursuing a PhD in Sports Science at a post-1992 institution, referred to '*the daunting reality of academic precarity and insecure contracts*', highlighting his lack of economic capital. Despite these hurdles, Alfie observed that his institution was welcoming to people from diverse backgrounds, which signals a potential positive shift in inclusivity. Amelia, a female in the 46–55 age group pursuing a PhD in Global Health at a Russell Group institution, also shared a narrative that revealed struggles with academic precarity, alongside many other issues, i.e. isolation, difficulties fitting in, and confrontations with classism, microaggressions, and discrimination. Research tells us that ethnic minorities continue to be both underrepresented in universities, and more likely to be on precarious contracts (Baltaru, 2023). While my early research revealed a disproportionate likelihood for WCAs with a disability to encounter casualisation, I observed a similar trend among WCAs of colour, although to a lesser extent. While my data didn't reveal specific reasons, existing research on ethnic minority academics (Bhopal, various; Joseph-Salisbury, 2021; Rollock, 2019), this could be influenced by various inter- connected factors such as structural inequities, implicit bias and discrimination may be factors.

There were two key themes found in the data in terms of the intersection of class and ethnicity in academia.

Representation

Despite efforts to diversify academia, WCAs of colour remain underrepresented across UK higher education, especially at senior levels (Arday, 2018; Rollock, 2019). While aiming to recruit a diverse pool of WCAs of colour for this research, I recognised that their underrepresentation might reflect the wider WCA population. The reasons for this *possible* disparity are multifaceted and may vary by region and according to institution. Some contributing factors include; structural inequities such as systemic racism and discrimination; unconscious bias as well as cultural expectations. This lack of representation can be difficult because as Flynn, a Lecturer in Health at a traditional institution, noted, '*being the only Black academic often means getting treated as the token "Black representative" who can speak for everyone*'. Flynn's observation about tokenisation suggests that institutions may view diversity as a box to be ticked rather than valuing the unique contributions and expertise of individual academics. Other respondents also expressed concerns about being treated as tokens of diversity. Joy, a Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences at a Russell Group institution, commented that her research expertise was overlooked in order for her to 'tick boxes', she said '*I was made diversity champion despite directing major research projects. My qualifications as a Director of Research were ignored*'. Flynn's and Joy's experiences highlight significant challenges related to diversity and representation within academia, particularly for Black academics. Joy's experience reveals a different facet of the problem, that institutional efforts to address diversity can sometimes be superficial, rather than focusing on substantive change.

Classed and Racial Microaggressions

Even though class identities are fluid, Wong (2022) recalls that when he describes his identity as being a 'working class Chinese man from a small seaside town in Malaysia' he often receives pushback. He describes one of those incidents here:

> *I tried to explain my humble origins by uttering 'I'm just a working class Chinese boy from a small seaside town in Malaysia' but with her eyes narrowed, she replied, 'There are many things I could say about you, Steve, but working class isn't one of them'. I wanted to defend my statement, but her facial expression spoke volumes.*

Wong's research describes the subtle (and not so subtle) microaggressions that ethnic minority WCAs of colour experience in academia. Various studies (Gabriel & Tate, 2017; Johnson & Joseph-Salisbury, 2018; Morrison et al., 2023; Rollock, 2019; Sian, 2017) have all found racial microaggressions were a common experience for academics from ethnic minorities in the UK. In all, 36% (n. 15) of my respondents who were WCAs of colour experienced frequent racially and classed informed questioning of their qualifications and competence. For example, Theo, a Politics Research Fellow[5] recalled being praised as he was 'articulate', implying surprise at their skills. '*What they meant was I am very articulate for a black guy*' (Crew, 2020, p. 87). Theo's quotation refers to a problematic racial stereotype, the 'articulate black man'. This trope suggests that Black men are not typically well-spoken, so when they are, it is seen as exceptional or surprising. This reinforces racial bias by implying that Black people should conform to lower expectations regarding their communication skills. Hall (2001) theorises that this distressing stereotype is related to the supposed 'ability of African American men to threaten America's masculine male power structure' (p. 114). This stereotype can be marginalising because it perpetuates the idea that being articulate is unexpected or unusual for a Black person.

McGee and Martin (2011) provided numerous examples of classed/racial microaggressions such as Black STEM students being mistaken for janitorial staff. In my interview with Joy, a Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences at a Russell Group institution, she recalled being asked for her ID when entering buildings with White colleagues who weren't questioned. This experience was recalled by three other respondents. Joy went on to say that she was once required to ask for the head of her school to come to '*vouch for me*'. Joy's experience points to a distressing instance of systemic racism and implicit bias. Moreover, the incident where she had to request the head of her school to vouch for her, is a clear example of the extra burdens and mental load faced by people of colour in academia. Such situations highlight the need for greater awareness, education, and institutional changes to combat racism and promote inclusivity in higher education.

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[5]Respondent didn't give details of his institution.

Dismissing or avoiding discussions of racial, and or class bias was also something my WCA respondents of colour experienced in academia. Joy, from the previous paragraph, provides a further example:

> *I was in a meeting and the topic of racial bias in academia arose. Remember I'm the only person from a BME background there. The head of school brushes the comment aside, saying now was not the time or place to discuss this, but we should be certain that there are no issues with race in our school. And if anyone thinks there is, then they need to take better advantage of the resources on at the university. I sat there flabbergasted, knowing I should speak out, but I was one person. What a way of shutting down any discussion!*
> (Crew, 2020)

The various instances of racial microaggressions and biases, of which there were many, among WCA respondents of colour, highlight the inappropriate assumptions based on appearance that some ethnic minorities can often face. The supposed need to prove their identity or status is not an example of security features in action at an institution but is an overt manifestation of racial bias. Joy's quotation emphasised that these daily microaggressions collectively contribute to a culture of exclusion for WCA of colour and can have detrimental effects on the emotional well-being.

Before moving to the next section, which focuses on disability, it is crucial to acknowledge that White researchers, including myself, often face challenges when recruiting participants from diverse ethnic backgrounds (Farooqi et al., 2022). Unethical research practices in the past have sown seeds of mistrust towards research institutions and researchers, particularly within ethnic minority communities.[6] Building rapport and trust with potential respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds can be challenging due to this inherent mistrust. White researchers may lack cultural sensitivity and access to minority networks, hindering connection, communication, and recruitment (Prinjha et al., 2020). Conscious of these challenges, I highlighted the study's focus on ethnicity and promoted it widely (e.g., approaching WCAs of colour, asked respondents to nominate people, advertising via Twitter/X, webinars, conferences). These strategies increased the numbers of ethnic minority WCA respondents in Phase One, but there was still scope to recruit more respondents.

While my findings have added to the literature on the diversity of WCAs, my findings in relation to class, ethnicity and gender needed more definition. Reflecting upon my approach, and having conducted research with the community, I was able to recruit Gypsy Roma Traveller WCAs. It is clear that moving forward I

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[6]A famous example of an unethical research study is the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, often referred to as the Tuskegee Experiment, a notorious and unethical clinical study conducted by the US Public Health Service, from 1932 to 1972.

need to develop my networks with other WCAs from ethnic minorities. I have also recommended that existing support networks for WCAs represent the full diversity of WCAs.

Disability

The number of staff known to have a disability increased by 2,645 compared to 2020/2021[7] (HESA, 2023). In all, 4% of academics with a disability were professors; 5% of 'other senior academics' had a disability, as did 6% of academics defined as 'other contract level'. This is likely to have been underreported as 14.6 million people in the UK had a disability in the 2020/2021 financial year, representing 22% of the total population (UK Parliament, 2023). Universities, historically structured for able-bodied academic staff (Stone et al., 2013), have witnessed the emergence of a performance-driven working culture due to heightened globalisation, marketisation, and bureaucratisation in higher education (Brown & Leigh, 2018). Consequently, individuals with disabilities may opt not to disclose their disability status, potentially influenced by the prevailing working environment. This decision may also be because an academic's worth is often categorised by whether their institution views them as 'earners' or 'costers' (Brown & Leigh, 2018, p. 265). Academics who secure research grants, attract students, or engage in activities that contribute to the institution's financial success are regarded as 'earners'. These academics are valuable assets that bring prestige. This emphasis on revenue generation can incentivise types of research, teaching or activities that attract more funding or students. Academics who are not great income generators or whose work is not financially lucrative may be categorised as 'costers'. In this context, the value of their contributions may influence their job security and professional recognition. Brown and Leigh (2018) felt academics with disabilities have two choices regarding disclosure: one entails revealing the disability, allowing for access to specific forms of support and identification as someone with a disability, while the other option involves refraining from disclosing the disability and then avoid potential discrimination and stigma (p. 987).

A report by Sang (2017) found that academics with disabilities experience a number of barriers to full participation in academic life, ranging from a lack of access to reasonable adjustments (RAs) to fatigue and inaccessibility of buildings (for teaching, meetings, informal social interactions, etc.). When the intersection of social class is considered, academics encounter barriers rooted in both classism and ableism. For example, classist assumptions of intellectual inferiority become compounded with assumptions of physical or mental deficiency (Dolmage, 2017). An elite/middle-class academic with a disability may have more resources, so differences in social class may counteract the effects of disability. Class privilege, for example, might afford better medical treatment, a resource potentially unavailable

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[7]Scottish HE providers account for 1,115 of this increase which is largely thought to be attributed to a change in reporting practice.

to a WCA with a disability who does not have comparable economic resources. Waterfield et al. (2018) drew on Garland Thomson (2011) concepts of 'fit' and 'misfit' to exemplify how university environments can significantly contribute to the experience of disability. This concept of 'fit' and 'misfit' revolves around the notion that the physical and social environments of universities can either accommodate or hinder the well-being and success of people with disabilities. In an inclusive and accommodating setting, they may experience a better 'fit', where they can effectively navigate and thrive within their academic roles. Adding the intersection of class to this emphasises further ways that they may or may not 'fit in the academic environment'. Overall, these studies demonstrate that socioeconomic status can either compound or help overcome some aspects of disability marginalisation. However, there was a lack of research on the intersections of class and disability in terms of academics. As Maamri and Dipper (2021) noted that having low socioeconomic status and a disability can lead to a double disadvantage when it comes to social mobility, further research on WCAs with disabilities is increasingly important.

Table 4 outlines the details of the respondents who took part in this research according to their disability.

Table 4.   Respondents with a Disability or Long-Term Illness According to Each Research Phase.

Phase One		Phase Two		Phase Three[a]		
Does not have a disability	**Has a disability**	**Does not have a disability**	**Has a disability**	**Does not have a disability**	**Has a disability**	**Rather not say**
86	6	61	12	57	33	1

[a] One respondent in phase three said 'Rather not say' when asked 'Do you have a health condition or disability that will last for 12 months or more'?

Across the three phases, there was a noticeable shift in the composition of participants with a disability. Phase One predominantly comprised respondents without disabilities, while Phase Three exhibited a significant increase in the number of participants with disabilities. This transition towards a more inclusive representation of participants with disabilities in Phase Three can be attributed to a deliberate change in the research study's recruitment approach. From Phase Two, there was an explicit emphasis on recruiting respondents based on multiple intersecting factors, including ethnicity and disability. This expanded outreach likely played a pivotal role in diversifying the respondent 'pool', leading to a more representative and inclusive sample in later phases.

The narratives of WCAs with disabilities highlight the complexities they face in HE. For instance, Demi, an Associate PVC Education and Deputy Dean, Business and Law at a post-1992 institution, narrated a disheartening incident during a staff seminar where she shared her PhD thesis. Instead of receiving support and acknowledgement of her disability (ADHD), she faced the adverse reaction of

several academic colleagues walking out. This incident emphasised there can be a lack of understanding and empathy within the academic community towards individuals with invisible disabilities. Nicola, an academic in History at a post-1992 institution, emphasised the discrimination she had experienced:

> *I think I am discriminated against most for being disabled. It's small microaggressions and because of all the equality and diversity groups, the least understood in higher education.*

While I did not uncover existing research to directly support Nicole's claim that disability is the 'least' understood within equality and diversity frameworks, subsequent sections clearly demonstrate the significant challenges faced by WCAs with disabilities.

Sienna, a Professor of Engineering Education at a small specialist university, talked about the difficulties of being neurodiverse and not having an instinctive understanding of unwritten rules, particularly when coming from a background with limited exposure to certain norms.

> *I was an engineering professional before I became an academic and would ever have been able to go directly into academia – nobody in my family even had GCSEs/O levels. Being neurodiverse means unwritten and hidden rules are particularly confusing and opaque – this is compounded when you don't come from a background where you instinctively know what to wear, how to address people, how to pronounce certain words and so on.*

The statement supports existing research that has found that the 'hidden curriculum', in universities can marginalise minoritised groups such as neurodivergent students, hindering their ability to fully realise their potential (Sulaimani & Gut, 2019). Sienna observed that Engineering, her field of study, is especially conducive to WCAs, particularly those who are neurodiverse. She justified this perspective by highlighting the explicit rules, relative meritocracy, and greater tolerance for straightforward communication within the discipline compared to others. The assessment of the 'rules' in Engineering and the ease of having blunt conversations is challenging to comment on without further evidence. Also, embracing the notion of engineering as a meritocracy implies that the observed under representation of women (as well as ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds) are underrepresented in the engineering profession (EngineeringUK, 2022), must result from fair and meritocratic processes. Luna, a respondent with multiple intersections – a Lecturer in Creative Writing at an institution established in 1963, a WCA, and a single parent with ADHD – shared a narrative similar to Sienna, as she too emphasised the difficulties of navigating the unspoken rules of academia. The experiences of these respondents highlight the need for greater awareness and accommodation for individuals with invisible disabilities within academic institutions.

There were three key themes found in the data in terms of the intersection of class and disability in academia.

Precarity

The intersection of disability and class in academia reveals a challenging landscape. Jetha et al. (2020) have found that individuals with disabilities are more likely to find themselves in precarious, low-paid, and insecure job positions. This intersectionality is further illuminated by Moser's (2006) study, who highlighted how class factors into the disability equation as those with social, cultural, and financial resources have a privileged position. The precarious nature of employment faced by disabled academics becomes apparent when examining the reliance on fixed-term contracts among interview participants. In Phase One, all five academics with disabilities were on precarious contracts. Although Phases Two and Three revealed fewer respondents who were *currently* on precarious contracts, respondents still reported that they had previously experienced precarity, and that their casualised contracts ranged from as little as four hours per week to full-time positions. WCAs with disabilities talked about the prevalence of short-term and fixed-term contracts throughout their academic careers. For instance, Petra, a Lecturer in Human Geography at a traditional institution shared that she had '*been shuffled between temporary lectureships on five different contracts in three years*'. This trend mirrors a broader pattern where individuals with disabilities are not only disproportionately represented in insecure appointments but are often caught in a cycle of short-term posts rather than gaining stable employment or career progression (Dolmage, 2017). These contracts offer little job security and lead to a constant state of uncertainty about future employment. The challenge for WCA respondents with disabilities being on fixed-term contracts is that it exacerbates the vulnerabilities they already face due to their disabilities. For instance, most who had experienced precarity mentioned the importance of financial support, as they were typically not able to borrow money from their parents.

My WCA respondents with disabilities reported that the constant pressure and instability of temporary academic appointments took a significant toll on both their disability-related and general health. Almost 40% (n. 19) of WCA respondents with disabilities reported heightened anxiety and stress from both the lack of job security and the ongoing need to '*prove themselves*' [April, a Lecturer in Biomedical Sciences at a traditional institution]. Furthermore, some WCA respondents with disabilities shared experiences of delaying disability-related healthcare, such as physical therapy, surgeries, or mental health services appointments, and avoiding regular check-ups. These respondents hesitated to request medical leave or reduced hours during disability flare-ups or prolonged illnesses, fearing potential repercussions on contract renewals. This hesitancy stemmed from both the financial implications of turning down work and the anxiety of jeopardising their already precarious positions, as also highlighted in Grimshaw et al. (2016) and Hadjisolomou et al. (2021). The consequence of these actions for my respondents was an elevated risk of health conditions worsening in the case of Brandon,

a Teaching Assistant in Health Studies at a post-1992 institution. Respondents were also constrained by tight budgets that compelled them to compromise their well-being, sacrificing anything from their nutrition to self-care, as outlined by April, simply to meet essential expenses. In essence, the intersection of disability and class in academia illustrated persistent challenges, spanning from employment insecurity to health risks.

Reasonable Adjustments

Pearson and Boskovich (2019) found that academics with a disability face a multitude of challenges within the academic landscape, ranging from physical accessibility to administrative hurdles, often compounded by limited financial resources. My own respondents talked of how navigating these obstacles could be likened to an additional, unwanted full-time job. Despite the Equality Act 2010, inequalities can still persist, as evidenced by the ongoing struggles of academics with disabilities to obtain RAs (Inckle, 2018). Academics with disabilities often find themselves in protracted battles with rigid university bureaucracies, where even basic RAs or accommodations could be met with denial or insufficient provisions. requesting accommodations might overburden their already understaffed colleagues. My WCA respondents with disabilities talked of resorting to masking their needs to appear 'normative', as they felt they had a challenging predicament:

> *I have never ever asked for those. I'm not sure they would be granted. I think they would be talking me into redundancy*. [Elijah, Head of History at a traditional institution]

Elijah's remark denoted a common fear among academics with disabilities, which is the reluctance to request accommodations for disabilities, even though RAs are guaranteed in law. He suggests that he has refrained from seeking RA due to concerns about job security and the potential negative perceptions of colleagues or superiors. Elijah's reference to the possibility of being '*talked into redundancy*' emphasised the precarious nature of academic positions, particularly for those on fixed-term contracts or in roles with limited job security. Elijah's statement hints at the potential discrimination that WCAs with disabilities may face within their institutions.

My respondents referred to the consequences of working without the necessary RAs as being profound, often resulting in burnout and a compromise of their overall well-being and mental health, a point also highlighted by Inckle (2018).

> *I enjoy this job, its fascinating but I've done it so long without reasonable adjustments that I'm losing that enjoyment and it's making it harder to function. I feel I'm walking in treacle, feeling quite down*. [Amelia, a Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences at a Russell Group institution]

> *I'm struggling to keep up with marking my assessments, and writing lecture slides each week. I'm exhausted and depressed.* [Margaret, a Lecturer in Education at a Russell Group institution]

Both respondents describe feelings of burnout, exhaustion, and depression, illustrating the broader issue of the need for institutions to provide appropriate support and RAs to prevent burnout among their staff. However, at the end of their interviews, both Margaret and Amelia expanded on their experiences and referred to feeling like their disabilities were under constant observation and evaluation by their superiors (something also referred to by Gil Gomez, 2017). This atmosphere of scrutiny left them hesitant to request RAs, as they felt it would be perceived as seeking charity rather than advocating for necessary, and lawful, accommodations. This fear of judgement and reluctance to seek the support they need further highlighted the importance of promoting discussions about RAs so that individuals could access the necessary assistance without fear of stigma or prejudice.

Precarity also had an impact as WCAs with disabilities were frustrated that they were often required to repeatedly navigate bureaucratic processes to secure RAs with each contract renewal and at each new institution. Yvonne, a Lecturer in Health and Social Care, at a Russell Group institution, expressed concerns about her contract ending, saying she'll have to start '*all over, persuading a new university to accommodate me*'. Instead of establishing stable support systems, WCAs with disabilities found themselves in a constant battle for their support needs. April, a Lecturer in Biomedical Sciences at a traditional institution, told me how she would face extra academic work due to her disability. She would be required to coordinate and ensure access to teaching buildings, which added to her workload despite support for students with disabilities being available (Crew, 2020). Some respondents who had experienced these difficulties, referred to the need for a central place to record RAs so that details could be updated in and between contracts.

Conferences

Attending academic conferences is crucial for scholars to present research, build professional and cultural capital, and foster collaborations. Precarious academics face even greater challenges when attending conferences due to their economic instability (Grimshaw et al., 2016). For instance, Samuels (2017) found academics with disabilities often could not afford expenses related to disability needs, such as assistive technologies or conference attendance due to low pay in insecure roles. As Mark a Lecturer in Engineering[8] said; '*Funding for conferences is nigh impossible and if you can't afford to pay…you don't develop that all important social capital*' (Crew, 2020, p. 60). Those relying on part-time stipends faced particular struggles making ends meet. Without family wealth to draw on, my WCAs with

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[8]Mark preferred not to give details of his institution.

disabilities reported a lack of finances to attend conferences. Even small expenses required for equitable participation, like taxis to campus when unable to use public transport, became burdens for my respondents. Respondents, both with and without disabilities talked of their concerns that conferences for academics with disabilities were not always fit for purpose. These classed/disability-related disadvantages restricted access to vital networking opportunities. As with research by Brown and Leigh (2018), my respondents found that inclusion often comes with hidden costs, for instance, paying for personal assistants to enable conference participation, and having to pay costs upfront.

There have been attempts to tackle these issues. The organisers of Ableism in Academia conference aimed to demonstrate the achievability of inclusive practice as well as demonstrate best practice in conference organisation. The conference received overwhelmingly positive feedback for its focus on accessibility as it allowed them to participate from the comfort of their homes. Conference organisers made efforts to cater to diverse needs, creating a comfortable atmosphere where attendees felt free to be themselves. Notable aspects included sending conference packs to delegates and providing a sit-down lunch, fostering a more relaxed environment for discussion (Brown et al., 2018).[9]

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[9]They have created a one-page summary[9] of the strategies discussed in the article, emphasising the importance of accessibility in academia.

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Chapter 5

The Impact of Place

Keywords: Institution; elite universities; Russell Group institutions; post-1992; subject; Social Sciences; Geography; Education; STEM; Classical Studies; Physics

Overview

Within the academic sphere, scholars' identities are often profoundly influenced by their institutional affiliation and the academic discipline in which they are engaged in teaching or research. Institutional contexts may influence an academic identity by bestowing status and networks (Bourdieu, 1990). Simultaneously, the academic subject can play a pivotal role in shaping one's intellectual and professional identity. The specific discipline may not only define the scope of knowledge an individual acquires but can again influence the networks an individual builds and the ways in which they contribute to the broader academic discourse. Both institution and subject discipline exhibit hierarchical structures with positions of dominance and subordination, determined by individual and institutional forms of capital (Naidoo, 2004). Chapter Five explores the intricate interplay between these settings, examining how they shape the nuanced dynamics of identity inclusion/exclusion for WCAs.

Institution

Understanding the intersection of institutions is crucial in unravelling the experiences of WCAs. Drawing on McDonough's (1997) concept of 'organisational habitus', Reay et al. (2001) introduced the idea of 'institutional habitus'. This concept highlighted that social class may be both a structuring force and a

structured entity within an organisation. Each type of institution will have distinct characteristics (Ball et al., 1995). An institutional habitus is useful in examining how a university can shape the trajectory of academics as it might influence teaching methodologies, guide the scope of the research conducted and contribute to the overall academic culture within the institution. An institutional habitus plays a role in shaping individuals' perception of belonging. Using the example of students at a post-1992 institution, Byrom and Lightfoot (2012) found that one key feature that this type of institution offers them was the comfort blanket of home (p. 129). My interview with Luke, a Professor in Social History at a traditional institution, explores this as he discussed the time he interviewed at an elite institution. '*One of the questions they asked me was, given the background you've come from, you know, how do you think you'd would fit in at [name of elite institution]?*' (Crew, 2020, p. 83). At the heart of this question lies the assumption that Luke's background would not align with the institution's culture, casting doubt on his ability to adapt to its established norms and practices. The inquiry itself highlighted a broader issue of class-based assumptions and expectations within academia, where, as we know, individuals from working-class backgrounds may often be viewed as outsiders.

The institutional habitus of elite universities such as Oxbridge,[1] derive their status from being ancient institutions, with both being founded more than 800 years ago (Cambridge University, 2023; Oxford University, 2008). There is a strong emphasis on upholding historical prestige and traditions. A prominent illustration of this is college dining, a tradition that involves 'performances that reinforce the idea of social stratification through the repeated re-enactment of roles and boundaries' (Dacin et al., 2010, p. 1394). These institutions have a longstanding reputation for prestige which lead to opportunities for career advancement. Oxbridge can exacerbate feelings of exclusion for those who have not assimilated into the elite culture. Both institutions address the potential for 'not fitting in' this on their websites.[2] Although the cynics among us might say that a more immediate strategy to address this issue might be to increase representation from working-class students. Research by Leeb (2004) considered the experiences of working-class women in elite academia (at one of New York City's elite private academic institutions). Her study highlighted that these female WCAs often concealed their origins and experiences, perpetuating a self-surveillance cycle to conform to elite norms. Leeb proposed that openly embracing WCA identities in academia could disrupt this dynamic, though, as noted by Reay (2006), this suggestion fails to acknowledge the complexity and challenges involved.

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[1]Oxbridge is a portmanteau of Oxford and Cambridge, the two oldest, wealthiest, and most famous universities in the United Kingdom (Worswick, 1957).
[2]https://www.history.ox.ac.uk/article/imposter-syndrome and https://www.ice.cam.ac.uk/course/imposter-syndrome

Red brick[3] institutions are also renowned for their research excellence. They were the original widening participation institutions as they opened up universities to women and people from disadvantaged backgrounds (Whyte, 2015). Alongside this are Russell Group institutions,[4] an association of 24 research intensive universities, established in 1994 in the UK. The group represents its members' interests to the government (The Russell Group, n.d.). Redbrick universities were originally from industrial cities and were known for engineering. These universities are now part of the Russell Group (Times Higher Education, 2023). WCAs at Russell Group may struggle if they mainly encounter students and faculty from advantaged backgrounds. While these institutions acknowledge the need for diversification,[5] their efforts often prioritise student-level initiatives.[6] Davis (2021) co-produced knowledge with eight respondents that he described as 'Academics with Working Class Heritage (AWCH)', at Russell Group institutions. He found that AWCHs viewed their in-between class status as beneficial, allowing them to perceive social spaces uniquely compared to those academics from typically advantaged backgrounds. Although he acknowledged that there were also occasional moments of emotional dissonance which served as reminders of their outsider status.

In 1992, the binary classification that once separated universities and polytechnics in the UK was abolished, creating a unified HE system. However, an examination of publicly available data on research activity, teaching quality and the socioeconomic composition of students, revealed that binary distinctions continue to persist (Ratcliffe, 2017). Traditional (pre-1992) universities are marked by higher levels of research activity, greater financial resources, and an economically privileged student body. Boliver (2015) found that teaching quality levels remain similar across traditional and new (post-1992). While teaching-focused institutions are still typically seen as being less prestigious, the first results from the teaching excellence framework (TEF) placed many post-1992 universities in the highest 'Gold' category (Times Higher Education, 2017). Post-1992 institutions tend to prioritise student diversity, which can create an inclusive environment for WCAs. While research by Binns (2019) did not focus on academics from post-1992 institutions, I include it here as her study investigated the social mobility experiences of 14 WCA from a single university that was not either an elite or Russell Group institution. Of interest was her finding that there was a hesitancy

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[3]The term was coined by Bruce Truscot (Edgar Allison Peers) in *Red Brick University*, which states: 'It is primarily with eight of the twelve English universities that this book is concerned: Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Nottingham, Reading and Sheffield' (p. 25) and, with respect to Durham, that 'its Newcastle college, perhaps, can properly find a place in this survey' (1951, p. 24).

[4]The Russell Group is one of the four 'mission groups'.

[5]See the following strategy 'How universities, regulators and Government can tackle educational inequality' from the Russell Group https://russellgroup.ac.uk/media/5858/pathways-for-potential-full-report-may-2020.pdf.

[6]Although I accept that they could also be promoting diversity for academics, I just haven't observed evidence of this on their website (an example of their public approach to widening participation).

among participants to leave their current institution and pursue positions at more prestigious establishments. Binns clarified that while a few interviewees anticipated such a shift in the future, the majority prioritised personal comfort and wellbeing over career advancement.

Table 5 outlines the details of WCAs taking part in this study, classified by how they described their type of institution.

Table 5.   Respondents and Their Institutions According to Each Research Phase.

Institution	Phase One	Phase Two	Phase Three
Elite	7	4	4
Red brick	14	3	0 0
Russell Group	20	21	19 17
Traditional	24	34	22
Post 1992	22	10	30 34
FE/HE institute	0	0	2 2
Various	2	1	4 4
Distance learning	0	0	0 2
Independent	0	0	5 0
Outside UK	0	0	2 5
Did not indicate	3	1	1 1
"Small Specialist"	0		1 1
Federal University		0 0	1
Research Centre	0		1
	92	75	
		73	

In Phase One, the majority of participants were from 'Red brick' universities, with a significant number from 'Traditional' institutions and 'Oxbridge'. In Phase Two, respondents were mainly from traditional institutions. In Phases Two and Three, the number of participants from 'Red brick' institutions significantly decreased, while those from 'Russell Group' remained relatively stable. Notably, there were respondents in institutions from 'outside of the UK' in Phase Two. The following sections will present findings from four types of institutions: elite institutions, Russell Group universities, post-1992 institutions, and universities abroad, as these were the institutions that respondents referred to in terms of class and its intersections.

Elite Institutions

In all, 7% (n. 18) of respondents were from elite institutions. Among these respondents, there was an even gender mix, but there were fewer ethnic minority

respondents and only one respondent reported having a disability. While not universal, respondents tended to exhibit more of an abandoned habitus, i.e. they typically tried to assimilate into the elite culture. An example of this is from Bryan, a Research Fellow in History who said '*I've learned to adapt my behaviour and speech and I've toned down my accent, and I've become more cautious about what I say in front of colleagues*'. Bryan's self-censorship and restraint suggested a conscious effort to modify his identity so that he could adopt the values, beliefs, and practices of the elite institution.

Respondents reported having both the traditional and non-traditional pathway:

> *I had a traditional route, I went to school, went to sixth form, was good in a couple of things, physics in particular. Applied to university, to [elite institution] got in, one of 1500 in that sixth form. I'm from Middlesborough…Only one person got into Oxford or Cambridge that year, which was me. So, I went to [elite institution] and studied natural sciences. I always thought I would want to aim for academia. Even from a child, quite young. My mum was a schoolteacher and she taught chemistry. My mum had been to university…so, that means I'm not first generation in that sense, but my dad hadn't and no one else in my family had, as far as I know*. [Eric, Post-doctoral Research Assistant – Psychics, at an elite institution]

> *My girlfriend in sixth form came from a very middle class family, and she said she was going to do this [her degree], so I'm going to do it. So, I did it without any real plan for what I was going to do and then had a bit of a panic. I ended up working as a teaching assistant for a year and then did my undergrad at Cambridge, which was a weird experience. I mean, we can talk about that as we go on, but lots of cultural dissonance, lots of feelings of displacement and to have habitus and alienation from both through both my cultural origin and from [elite institution] itself, and not really fitting in was a dislocation*. [Fred, a PhD Student in Education at an elite institution]

The two narratives offer insights into the academic journeys of WCAs at elite institutions. Eric's academic trajectory is, in comparison to many of my WCAs, more linear and conventional. Eric's mother's profession as a schoolteacher is likely to have played a role in shaping his aspirations for academia as research demonstrates that educated mothers often pass their cognitive ability and financial resources on to their children (Vegard et al., 2021), but also an educational know-how which can help bolster their children's educational status. Eric's mention of being the only one from his area to get into an elite institution emphasised his exceptional achievement and possibly the challenges he faced in his community. Whereas Fred's narrative shows a more complex and non-traditional path to academia. For instance, he refers to there being a sense of 'displacement', which is more typical for WCAs. Fred's experience was also marked by his struggles to 'fit' with the culture of the university, and challenges in navigating the elite institution.

There was one theme found in the data regarding WCAs at elite institutions.

Class Pride

Analysis of my data revealed WCA respondents at elite institutions had a profound sense of pride in their class heritage. This persisted even though some respondents opted to conceal their working-class background, aligning with studies such as Lehmann (2014) and Kallschmidt and Eaton (2019).

> *Working in an elite educational institution is a testament to the incredible journey I've undertaken, it fills me with an overwhelming sense of pride coming from a working class background to this prestigious setting. I carry with me the resilience, determination, and unique perspectives that my background has instilled. In these halls, I feel like I represent social mobility at its purest, this makes me committed to breaking down barriers and to inspire others from similar backgrounds to pursue their own dreams.* [Alan, a Senior Lecturer in Anthropology at an Elite institution]

Alan's quotation indicated that respondents like him had a strong emotional connection to their heritage as their journeys involved overcoming barriers, further amplifying the sense of pride, fuelling his resolve to dismantle obstacles that may hinder access and advancement for other WCAs. Incidentally, Alan also referenced how his background has shaped his character and worldview, something he considered to be valuable assets. These, more positive reflections from WCAs like Alan, will be expanded upon in Chapter Six.

Russell Group Institutions

In all, 20% (n. 50) of respondents were from Russell Group institutions. There were slightly more female respondents and a minor increase in ethnic minority respondents and WCAs with disabilities compared to respondents at elite institutions. Most respondents at Russell Group institutions, such as Layla, a PhD Student in Sociology, experienced a cleft habitus, described in Chapter Two, in various ways by Friedman (2016), Cruz (2021), and Lubrano (2005):

> *Me going into academia doesn't change the fact that my family still (try to) live on Universal Credit, and that I don't have access to the kinds of material and cultural support that many (most, even) of my peers do. It's a difficult question because when I think about whether I am working class in an academic context, I feel no hesitation – I absolutely am! But when I'm home with my family, I feel different – I have access to cultural and material opportunities that they don't, like travelling abroad for conference paid for by my funders. So I don't not feel working class there, I just feel differently about it. But in academic contexts, there is no hesitation: absolutely!*

Layla's quotation highlights a dual identity, akin to what Lubrano (2005) described as feeling torn between their working-class roots and their academic roles within universities. She, like other respondents at Russell Group universities, recognised that her academic achievements had created a degree of separation from her family's circumstances. At times these were emotional interviews as respondents reflected upon the social distance from their families, prompting them to question whether academia was a worthwhile pursuit amidst the 'loss' of family ties.

The data from respondents at Russell Group institutions highlighted two themes.

Mentorship Gaps

An integral component of the academic world, mentorship involves experienced academics guiding and nurturing the intellectual and professional journey of students and colleagues (Marino, 2021). As Chapter Two discussed, WCAs may have limited access to social capital and as such may benefit from mentors who can relate to their specific challenges. Respondents at Russell Group institutions were more likely to report a lack of mentors. This mentorship gap can hinder their professional development and career advancement. Ethan emphasised a specific challenge reported by WCAs in accessing effective mentorship at Russell Group institutions:

> *The issue of mentorship…I know that some people are very proactive in terms of asking for collaboration. I just don't see myself doing that. It should come from the supervisor, he's very busy doing lots of work, lots of work that relates to the kind of work I'm doing. He knows that I'm here…So, it would feel like I'm begging which I guess it's probably classed to some extent. I also think that given that I already don't feel that I belong, if I were to ask, I anticipate that I'll be rejected to put it quite bluntly and that would hurt me too much. So, I'm not willing to take the risk at that point.* [Ethan, Graduate Student in Sociology at a Russell Group institution]

While mentoring relationships often develop informally, through intentional or coincidental networking (Ward et al., 2020), Ethan suggested that as he was hesitant to approach a busy supervisor, mentorship initiatives should ideally originate from supervisors. This view, which was reiterated by most respondents, was likely to be influenced by a fear of rejection and the hierarchical nature of academia. Narratives such as Ethan's highlighted the decision to prioritise emotional wellbeing over potential academic benefits.

Kerry's account offers a poignant illustration of a further challenge that WCAs can encounter in the context of mentorship and support.

> *I signed up for their mentoring programme when I first joined. I got paired with somebody. Don't get me wrong she was great, but she was in a different department. I remember we had a meeting, and I*

was excited, [thinking] hopefully she's going to give me some good pointers, because I have no idea what this career trajectory looks like. Academia is precarious, so all my contracts are six months long, you're constantly contract hopping. Maybe, she can give me good pointers about how I can get more security. I do think that's a strong feature of having a working class mentality. I always panic about where's my next job is, I can't afford to take two months off. I had this meeting with her, I was very enthusiastic about it. You write a little blurb about yourself, and you send them your CV and they give you helpful pointers. She looked at my CV and said, so, you're doing a doctorate at a [post 1992 institution]? She said you need to start being realistic about your pathway in academia. I guess I didn't think that was a thing anymore, that kind of post-92 snobbery. She said you might need to really consider that you might not become an academic because of where you've done your doctorate. I just didn't know what to say. [Kerry, a Research Associate in Modern Languages and Linguistics at a Russell Group institution]

Kerry's proactive approach in seeking mentorship in academia is something that is, unfairly, not always linked with WCAs. Her initial enthusiasm about the mentoring program is evident. Although her encounter with her assigned mentor was difficult, Kerry's reference to her '*working class mentality*' is a harsh self-critique, accentuating the anxieties often ingrained in a WCA habitus about the need for a stable income. Her mentor's suggestion that Kerry's academic pathway might be limited due to her institution highlighted the prevailing biases against post-1992 institutions, which are typically perceived to be inferior when compared to elite or Russell Group universities (Boliver, 2013).[7] This interaction had a profound effect on Kerry's confidence and sense of belonging in academia. Potential mentors should consider that these experiences can be demoralising and deterring individuals from pursuing academic careers reads as a harsh suggestion from a mentor.

Inequities in Career Advancement

Respondents at Russell Group institutions also referred to there being restrictions in career advancement opportunities, regardless of their qualifications and achievements. A survey by the UCU (2022) demonstrated that most WCAs feel their class has affected their career progression, and nearly half believed it had affected their initial recruitment into the profession. Whereas research by the Social Mobility Foundation (2023) reported that professional workers from working-class

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[7]Although as I discuss later in this chapter, my own respondents did refer to the lack of resources in post-1992 institutions.

backgrounds (not just from academia) are paid an average of £6,291 – or 12% – less per year than those from professional managerial backgrounds. My respondents went further and discussed perceived biases in promotion and hiring processes that benefit scholars from privileged backgrounds. As Yvonne, a Lecturer in Health and Social Care, at a Russell Group institution explained:

> *I've published more than some of my colleagues from elite families. I have brought in more funding, yet I'm passed over for leadership and promotion.*

Despite feeling that they outpaced advantaged colleagues in terms of productivity, some WCAs described there being an invisible barrier to progression, a classed ceiling as described by Friedman and Laurison (2019). Discriminatory assumptions about their abilities appeared to hinder their upward mobility. Margaret, a Lecturer in Education at a Russell Group institution echoed this sentiment, saying:

> *In meetings, I'll make a research suggestion and it gets shut down by the professors from Oxbridge backgrounds. But then ten minutes later, one of them will propose the exact same idea I said earlier, and suddenly it's praised as highly innovative.*

These slights accumulate, signalling to WCAs that decision makers underestimate their insights and potential, reflecting underlying classist biases. Without access to the same privileged social networks as their colleagues to advocate for their advancement, WCAs can find it hard to advance. Ellie, a Reader in Health Sciences at a Russell Group institution summed it up as: '*You reach a certain level and then it's like hitting a brick wall. The path to full professorship seems closed off no matter how strong your profile is*'. Together, the quotations highlight how classist assumptions about lacking the 'right' dispositions, connections, or background continue to obstruct WCAs at Russell Group institutions from accessing senior positions.

Post-1992 Institutions

In all, 16% of respondents (n. 40) were from post-1992 institutions. Respondents from these institutions demonstrated the greatest diversity in respondents in terms of representation of ethnicity and disability. Although my data did not fully support Binns (2019) finding that WCAs hesitated to leave their current institution and pursue positions at more prestigious establishments, it is relevant that my WCAs at post-1992 institutions were more likely to exhibit a chameleon habitus. This implies they shifted seamlessly, i.e. where they shifted between their working class and academic identities, embracing both without feeling the need to 'assimilate'. While acknowledging that I lacked comprehensive details about their day-to-day lives, it seemed that respondents at these institutions were

the most content among those surveyed. For instance, their chameleon habitus meant that they valued academia but were also able to stay 'true' to their authentic selves.

> *I've never pretended to be someone else. My working class heritage is obvious, but so is how much I enjoy the job. I'm very grateful to have my academic pursuits, but also, I'm still 'me'. You mentioned the typical academic before. Well, that's not me, but I'm still a great academic.* [Dominic, a Senior Lecturer in Education at a post-1992 institution]

This finding, regarding the habitus of WCAs at post-1992 institutions, may be attributed to these universities typically having a more diverse student body (Waller et al., 2015). Such diversity means that post-1992 universities might have less rigid academic traditions, leading to a more flexible environment where WCAs may not feel they have to conform to a particular academic ideal. Exemplified by Dominic's embrace of both his heritage and academic identity, respondents from these institutions demonstrated a heightened awareness of the challenges faced by first-generation students, compared to those from other university types.

The data from respondents at post-1992 institutions highlighted one key theme.

Lack of Resources

Almost 20% (n. 9) of my respondents from post-1992 institutions referred to perceptions of there being fewer professional development opportunities, in comparison to those afforded to their academic peers at older universities. Dominic, a Senior Lecturer in Education at a post-1992 institution refers to how this '*hinders our academic progress*'. Petra, a Lecturer in Human Geography at a post-1992 institution, referred to there being limited opportunities (in terms of both time and resources) to establish professional networks. Respondents also mentioned that securing research funding was particularly challenging due to the competitive environment. Looking at example data from Research England on existing funding arrangements across institutions, they allocated almost £2 billion in funding based on research excellence in 2021–2022. The University of Oxford was awarded the largest share of funding of all English institutions, with the University College London in second place and the University of Cambridge in third place. The top 10 included universities at Bristol, Nottingham, and Birmingham (McIntyre, 2022). Strike (2014) argued that it was unlikely that any of the post-1992 universities received more than 10% of their income (including fees) through research funding. This had a knock-on effect as in terms of effectively participating in and competing for research funding, respondents specifically highlighted needing further guidance on proposal writing and developing networking connections in academia.

Universities Abroad

While I did not intentionally seek out respondents working abroad, these WCAs academics provided compelling insights into navigating classed experiences within international academic institutions. I felt that their inclusion may inspire other researchers to conduct research in this arena. Sang and Calvard's (2019) qualitative research conducted with 30 academics at various stages of their careers in both Australia and New Zealand found that academic migration tends to reflect the privileges of white, Anglo-Saxon male academics and to perpetuate gendered and racialised hierarchies. Although this literature doesn't explicitly addresses WCAs, it highlights the common experience of precarious academics who are frequently compelled to transition from one short-term contract to another – a challenge that WCAs might find particularly difficult. In all, 2% (n. 5) of my respondents talked of working in universities outside of the UK. Among the WCAs working abroad, there were slightly more females, a good mix of different ethnicities and representation of disabilities. This extract from Reuben, an Assistant Professor[8] at an elite university in Asia[9] interview, discussed some of the difficulties he encountered:

> *My situation is somewhat complex. Because I am employed in [country in the continent of Asia], I feel that many of the markers of class evaporated in the face of ethnicity – i.e., I am seen as white and foreign, which seems to erase my class. However, whenever I interact with academics from other institutions (e.g., by email or Zoom), I become conscious of my working-class background. For example, many of the middle-class academics I talk to appear to have an inherent confidence and are able to phrase things in ways that I just cannot and, to be honest, would not, as it just comes off as artificial and contrived. However, I often come away from conversations feeling second rate, despite the fact that I have published a lot of research. I feel this tension between wanting to be authentic (i.e., say things how I want to say them) and wanting to be recognised as a "real" academic. This translates into me writing in a way that is alien to me. Really, writing academically is like speaking another language! I am currently on a 3-year contract, so precarity always lurks in the background.*

Reuban's narrative revealed significant tensions. While working abroad, his identity as a (privileged) white foreigner typically took precedence over his

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[8]While the respondent provided his full title, I have not given it here as it might identify him.

[9]I have refrained from specifying the country in which this particular WCA (and others) work. This decision is motivated by the concern that revealing this information might inadvertently identify them.

working-class background. However, when engaging with Western academics abroad, his class consciousness would then remerge. These academics often perceived these challenges as their personal shortcomings (Mallman, 2017, p. 235), failing to recognise the systemic disadvantages they faced. Reuben, for instance, revealed how precarity exacerbated these tensions as with his livelihood being uncertain, he felt the need to suppress his working-class identity and adhere to more typical academic norms.

Violet, a Postdoctoral Fellow in Sociology at a private European university (which she described as being quite prestigious), echoed the sentiments of many WCAs in the UK. She expressed common experiences of not fitting in, having imposter syndrome, and the fear of being exposed as someone who doesn't truly belong in academia.

> *I feel that I don't fit…I feel an impostor and have this kind of fear that eventually someone will notice it and my academic life will end.*

Despite her negative experiences in academia, Violet's interview exuded an inspiring spirit of defiance. Her account of working with marginalised people revealed a newfound sense of rebellion against the challenges she had faced:

> *I have felt so comfortable working with these young people that it reminded me why I do research. They don't see themselves as being disaffected, they are confident in their abilities. It made me think about my own identity. I do not want to pretend to be someone else. I'm rebelling by being me. We need to change…and focus on our assets.*

This transition from an outsider status to championing her classed heritage as an asset was a powerful testament to the resilience and potential of WCAs, demonstrating the wealth that WCAs contribute to the academic community. This will be expanded on in more detail in Chapter Six where I discuss the cultural wealth that my respondents possessed. Overall, the experiences of WCAs working in universities abroad were shaped by a combination of personal factors, the specific host country's culture and policies, and the dynamics of the academic institution. Building a strong support system and embracing the opportunities of an international academic career could potentially help WCAs navigate and thrive in this context.

Subject

The inclusion of subject as a classed intersection is important as the Becher–Biglan typology (to be discussed later in this section) proposed that academics have a strong association with their respective fields, typically serving as custodians for their academic disciplines. Bourdieu's (1977) theoretical framework highlights how these academic disciplines, like institutions, are fields with their own distinct rules for success, shaped by various forms of individual capital (Naidoo, 2004) – essentially, the 'rules of the game' – that confer advantages

within that field. This understanding includes the activation of relevant cultural capital by demonstrating mastery of dispositions highly valued in specific educational fields.

The psychologist Anthony Biglan developed a widely used classification system for academic disciplines based on the cultural beliefs and norms held by their members The Biglan (1973) classification characterised academic disciplines along three dimensions: (1) pure/applied (e.g. Mathematics/Engineering), (2) hard/soft (e.g. Natural Sciences and Humanities/Social Sciences), and (3) life/nonlife (e.g. Biology/History). Overall, the 'hard' natural sciences tend to garner more respect, with the 'soft' sciences typically receive less esteem (Doberneck & Schweitzer, 2017). He also distinguished disciplines in terms of their reputation, norms, and scholarship.

Building upon Biglan's (1973) classification, Becher's seminal work, *Academic Tribes and Territories* (1989, with a second edition in 2001 co-authored with Paul Trowler), provided a standardised approach to categorising the content of diverse curricula. Neumann et al. (2002) then clustered academic disciplines into four main groupings: Hard Pure, Soft Pure, Hard Applied, and Soft Applied – each with their own epistemological characteristics. They refer to this structure as the Becher–Biglan typology (Table 6). This classification, while not always straightforward as different facets of a discipline may be emphasised by individual researchers and university departments (Becher & Trowler, 2001, p. 39), provides a useful framework for understanding the diverse academic landscape.

Table 6.   The Becher–Biglan Typology.

Discipline Type	Disciplines
Hard Pure	Maths (including Statistics), Science (including Chemistry and Analytical Sciences, Earth and Environmental Sciences, Life Sciences, Physics and Astronomy)
Soft Pure	Social Sciences (including Economics, Geography, Politics and International Studies, Psychology, Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology), Arts (including Art History, Classical Studies, English, History, Music, Philosophy and Religious Studies)
Hard Applied	Technology (including Computing, Design, Environment, Engineering)
Soft Applied	Education, Modern Languages, Health and Social Care (including Nursing, Social Work and Youth Justice), Business School (including Law)

Source: Table adapted from Coughlan and Perryman (2011, p. 14).

Broader structures of power and privilege often mean that some subjects have greater prestige than others (Bourdieu, 1990). Despite their comprehensive nature, the labels 'hard' and 'soft' disciplines can have pejorative connotations,

implying a lower level of rigour in certain academic fields (Berliner, 2002). Those fields that are closely aligned with elite interests, for instance, Medicine, Business, and Law, tend to have an elevated status. In contrast, academic disciplines associated with marginalised groups, i.e. more applied subjects tend to have a lower status. These hierarchies tend to mirror wider social inequities, and as such, disadvantaged students are less likely to study STEM subjects (Ro et al., 2021). A key reason, proposed by Brooks (2014) is that working-class people lack "science capital" - science-related cultural/social capital through knowledge, behaviors, and networks (Archer et al., 2015). This framing risks a deficit view of working class groups, overlooking diversity of experiences within.

Academics may research and/or teach in a specific subject discipline for a myriad of reasons. Their choice often stems from personal interest, expertise, skills, and educational background, including subjects studied from school to university. Factors such as research funding, academic networks, and career aspirations can influence the selection of their field. Some academics may prioritise research opportunities, while others often focus on teaching or community engagement. Academic disciplines often have distinct cultures shaping assumptions of who 'fits' within that field (Hudson, 2017). According to Bourdieu's (1977) theoretical framework, subject disciplines, similar to institutions, function as fields with distinct rules for success (pp. 80–97). To thrive in academic settings, individuals must comprehend and operate within the specific norms, behaviours, and knowledge – the 'rules of the game' – that confer an advantage in that context. Bourdieu (1977) argues that leveraging field-specific cultural capital is crucial for successfully navigating the academic landscape. However, possession of valued capital alone is not sufficient. The distinct cultures within academic disciplines may inadvertently marginalise scholars without a habitus ingrained in the established norms and practices of those specific fields.

Across the three research phases, I interviewed WCAs from 34 different subject areas, representing a wide disciplinary spectrum (see Fig. 2).

Fig. 2.   List of Subject Disciplines of Respondents.

Unfortunately, I am unable to offer a thorough breakdown of respondents across each subject area due to a considerable number of incomplete or missing responses in the survey data. Nevertheless, it was evident that certain fields such as Health, Social Sciences, Geography, and Education had a more substantial representation in the dataset compared to others. In contrast, there were lower numbers of respondents in some STEM subjects, which remained low across all phases, with sparse representation in fields like Physics, IT, and Mathematics. I was unable to ascertain whether WCAs were/are less likely to pursue STEM-related academic careers. Furthermore, more detailed research is warranted to comprehensively map WCA representation across subject disciplines and to gather a qualitative understanding of subject choice. The subsequent sections of this chapter will delve into the disciplines explicitly referred to by respondents in their interviews and survey narratives. It's important to note that discussing these specific disciplines does not imply their overarching significance for WCAs; rather, it signifies their relevance as indicated by the respondents in influencing their experiences.

Social Sciences

According to the Becher–Biglan typology, the Social Sciences are included in the 'soft pure' disciplinary group. Coughlan and Perryman (2011) describe the Social Sciences as a discipline that considers the 'whole' or entirety of a subject matter. The Becher–Biglan typology suggests that there is an inclination towards qualitative research methods in this discipline, emphasising the quality and nature of phenomena rather than quantitative aspects. In terms of UK Sociology, a 2010 *International Benchmarking Review of UK Sociology* asserted that 'British Sociology remains weak in quantitative methods' (Byrne, 2012, p. 13). This has inspired a number of initiatives aimed at improving the inclusion of quantitative data within the discipline, of which the Q-step programme is the most recent (Hampton, 2018). However, Williams et al. (2019) argued that despite possessing world-class large-scale datasets and being at the forefront of methodological development, UK sociology has never been a quantitative discipline. With the exception of Psychology and Economics, UK Social Science disciplines have historically been marked by humanist approaches rather than quantitative ones from their inception (p. 337). The Becher–Biglan typology states that scholarly inquiry in the Social Sciences is often carried out independently, without extensive collaboration. This is likely to have developed since the typology was produced as researchers in all disciplines are being pushed to collaborate. However, Lewis (2017) suggested that Social Scientists may not embrace collaboration in greater numbers because of the value they place on their autonomy or freedom to pursue their own ideas.

Within the academic discipline of Social Sciences, scholars share a set of dispositions, values, and attitudes that shape the diverse field. Encompassing subjects such as Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology, Economics, and Political Science. The Social Sciences prioritise empirical research to investigate social phenomena, emphasising evidence-based approaches, rigorous data analysis and practical application of research findings to bridge theory and practice

(Bryman, 2016). Interdisciplinary collaboration is a hallmark of the Social Sciences, reflecting their deep interest in understanding and exploring the complexities of society (Serpa et al., 2017). The habitus of the Social Sciences may be characterised by a commitment to addressing inequality, discrimination, and disparities through research and advocacy, something which can potentially attract WCAs who may be passionate about understanding and addressing these societal disparities (Gamoran, 2021; Staines et al., 2023). As scholars in this field have to navigate hierarchical power structures, this too can shape their interpretations and contributions to research and teaching. While varying by subject, this multifaceted habitus defines the dynamic and evolving nature of Social Sciences.

Almost one in five (n. 46) of respondents reported that they were within the Social Sciences. Of all the subject areas, respondents in the Social Sciences exhibited the strongest sense of belonging within their subject discipline. Echoing the sentiments of respondents in Grimes and Morris (1997), who described 'feeling at home in Sociology' (p. 144), my WCA respondents expressed positive views about the subject due to its alignment with their values and interests.

> *Sociology stands for positive social change within communities.* [Matt, a Lecturer in Sociology at a Russell Group institution]

> *Sociology represents values such as social justice.* [Amelia, a Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences at a Russell Group institution]

However, respondents did note that navigating the complex landscape of the Social Sciences could be difficult. As Kayden, an Assistant Lecturer in Sociology at a traditional institution noted, interdisciplinary collaborations presented difficulties for WCAs such as himself due to his limited access to academic networks, crucial for forming collaborations. Developing effective communication skills, another integral component, could also be challenging for my respondents because at times they had not had the same opportunities (as their advantaged peers) for public speaking or academic writing, and, as such, may feel less prepared (Grimes & Morris, 1997, p. 143) for an academic career. These challenges show the need for tailored mentoring and workshops to help WCAs overcome barriers. Such targeted support initiatives also signal universities are invested in WCA success and dismantling obstacles to them accessing and thriving in academia.

Education

According to the Becher–Biglan typology, Education is included in the 'soft applied' disciplinary group. This is described by Coughlan and Perryman (2011) as follows:

> 'Dependent on Soft Pure knowledge, being concerned with the enhancement of professional practice and aiming to yield protocols and procedures'. In common with Hard Applied disciplines, Soft Applied disciplines also feature 'multiple influences and interactions on both their teaching and research activity'. (p. 406)

The academic discipline of Education has been characterised by epistemological weaknesses, often attributed to a deficiency in 'the consensus and coherence observed in some of the more established disciplines' (Furlong, 2013, p. 2). This critique, while offering valuable insights, fails to acknowledge the interdisciplinary nature of education. Education draws upon the theoretical foundations of soft pure disciplines like Social Sciences and Arts, while also incorporating the practical applications of hard applied disciplines like Technology. This duality is evident in the emergence of digital classrooms (Haleem et al., 2022). Academics in the applied disciplines were more likely to engage in publicly engaged research and creative activities, teaching and learning initiatives, and service-oriented practices (Doberneck & Schweitzer, 2017).

Education, as a subject discipline, aims to establish practical and applicable guidelines, which resonate with the practical and applied orientation often attributed to the WCA habitus. However, before embracing these notions of a WCA habitus without empirical evidence, a comprehensive mapping of WCAs and their academic affiliations is vital.

The field of Education encompasses a shared set of values and attitudes among scholars and practitioners. It is diverse and interdisciplinary, spanning subdisciplines like Childhood Studies, Higher Education as well as career and vocational education.

The discipline consists of typical quantitative and qualitative methodologies, alongside objective analyses and action research. The field encompasses perspectives from teachers, researchers, administrators, and/or policymakers. This diversity is further enriched by the individual backgrounds and values within the educational domain. The field exhibits a tendency to shift its focus intermittently, turning to Psychology on some occasions, and exploring Anthropology, Sociology, Cultural Studies at other times (Yates, 2004). While there may be variations within each subfield, professionals tend to adopt student-centred approaches and value diverse learning styles (General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland, 2019). Academics in the field of Education engage in research and scholarship to advance knowledge in areas such as educational theory, policy, and practice and may value evidence-based decision-making. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are central to the field, as are attempts to address educational disparities (Machost & Stains, 2023), which means it's an attractive discipline for WCAs who may have faced difficulties in their education.

In all, 10% (n. 26) of respondents were in the field of Education. Similar to Ardoin and martinez (2019), my respondents were more likely to cite a desire to '*foster inclusivity in education*' [Margaret, a Lecturer in Education at a Russell Group institution] as their primary motivation for entering this academic field. In this spirit, five respondents emphasised the unique perspective they brought to the Education field, a lived experience that empowered them to provide a '*reality check to self proclaimed experts*' [Natalie, a PhD Student in Education at a post-1992 institution]. Respondents implied that 'experts' may not have a true understanding of the challenges faced by people who had experienced disadvantage, suggesting that these 'expert' opinions might stem from assumptions or stereotypes rather than real world experiences. Financial barriers in pursuing

professional development courses and certifications were also cited by other respondents (n. 3). Additionally, Ellis, a Senior Lecturer in Post-compulsory Education at a post-1992 institution, and two others highlighted the difficulties they experienced in accessing research funding for educational research, a finding that extended beyond those specifically teaching or researching in the field of Education. Mirroring a report by Gladstone et al. (2022), my research revealed WCAs facing funding gaps, citing a lack of networks and biases against less prestigious institutions and WCAs. Targeted interventions to build networks, skills, and address biases could enable WCAs to attain research funding parity.

Geography

Like the Social Sciences, under the Becher–Biglan typology, Geography is included in the 'soft pure' disciplinary group. Coughlan and Perryman (2011) describe this as having a holistic approach, a nuanced and detailed exploration of subject matter, with what is often seen as a qualitative bias. Unlike the hard pure fields, there is a continuous relevance and application of knowledge. Scholars in these disciplines often work independently with distinct areas of focus. Geography is a multifaceted discipline that explores the spatial dimensions of our world. Geographers study the Earth's physical environment, including landforms, climate, and ecosystems, while human geography delves into the social, cultural, and economic aspects of our planet (Gough, 2023). Geography, as a discipline that captures the richness of our diverse world, should be one that inherently embraces diversity by cultivating a nuanced understanding of the world and its role within it (Milner et al., 2021). Geography is also highly interdisciplinary, drawing insights from areas like Environmental Science, Sociology, and Economics (Hill et al., 2018). Moreover, Geography's emphasis on spatial relationships and its commitment to training professionals aligns with the ethos of inclusivity, allowing individuals from various backgrounds, including WCAs, to engage in meaningful research and contribute to decision-making processes. Geographers often work in academia, government agencies, urban planning, environmental consulting, and other sectors where spatial analysis and problem-solving skills are highly valued.

This dynamic field continues to evolve, reflecting the ever-changing global landscape and the pressing need to address complex geographical issues in our interconnected world (Career Explorer, n.d.). In his chapter in the *Geographical Association (GA) Handbook of Secondary Geography*, Professor Alastair Bonnett describes geography's aim to study the world, both near and far, as being the most far-reaching and ambitious of any discipline. Geography as an academic discipline has faced dual challenges of fragmentation and visibility. The breadth of knowledge demands specialisation, creating sub-communities within departments. Geography struggles for visibility and credibility in academic life despite strengths in teaching and international research reputation. The discipline contends with outdated perceptions, impacting its representation in broader academic contexts (Johnston, 2003). For WCAs navigating this discipline, these challenges may be particularly pronounced, the struggle for visibility and credibility may

intersect with issues of representation, as WCAs may find it challenging to overcome entrenched biases and stereotypes within the discipline. Despite these challenges, WCAs in Geography bring a unique perspective, informed by lived experiences, to address the discipline's evolving landscape.

In all, 7% (n. 18) respondents reported that they were employed at a university within the discipline of Geography. The discipline's interdisciplinary nature attracted some respondents (n.4) as they had the perception that this broad subject area could potentially open doors to diverse career opportunities. Respondents encountered financial challenges within this field. Connor, a Professor of Engineering Geology at a Russell Group institution, highlighted the significant financial investments required to gain entry to his primary field of Geology and the broader domain of Physical Geography.

> *[You] need to have wet weather gear…geological hammers…and boots and so on. [W]e certainly help with financial aid, by providing students some key equipment…its part of the fees, a welcome pack.*

Connor observed that Geology and related fields often require other specialised equipment which can be costly. These expenses can create a barrier for students and academics without economic capital. For instance, WCAs may encounter several challenges such as the need for resources such as GIS and remote sensing, specialised equipment and databases. Since many Geography programmes entail fieldwork, this necessitates expenses related to travel and accommodation. As previously discussed in Chapters Three and Four, these costs are typically borne by the academics themselves and reimbursed at a later stage. However, WCAs may struggle to fund these activities, limiting their ability to conduct comprehensive research. Like many subjects, Geography relies on collaboration and networking to access research funding and job opportunities. Without access to these research funding or grants, WCAs may find it difficult to conduct research and publish their work. Notably, my respondents within the field of Geography were more inclined than those in other subject areas to report that mentorship programs were within their institutions. However, it's important to acknowledge that these programmes were relatively new, and as such, there is limited academic evidence regarding their effectiveness.

Classical Studies

Classical Studies, one of academia's oldest disciplines, is the study of ancient Greeks and Roman cultures, spanning language, literature, history, and artifacts. Classics is also included in the 'soft pure' disciplinary group. Classicists are typically required to demonstrate proficiency in ancient Greek and Latin languages as there is a strong emphasis on the reading and interpretation of original texts and other primary materials, such as classical literature, epic poetry, drama, philosophy, and prose. Additionally, the study of classical archaeology within Classical Studies involves excavations, artifact analysis, and the examination of material culture, reflecting a multidisciplinary approach that may require resources not

equally accessible to working-class individuals. Classicists often draw inspiration from other disciplines like History, Philosophy, Art History, and Linguistics, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the classical world. However, access to such interdisciplinary knowledge can be influenced by social class, as individuals from privileged backgrounds may have greater exposure to diverse educational resources. Furthermore, engaging with the philosophical ideas of ancient luminaries like Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics constitutes a significant aspect of the Classics habitus, potentially creating disparities in familiarity and interpretation based on educational backgrounds and access to philosophical traditions.

The intersection of Classical Studies with social class is further manifested in the role of Classicists as educators. Many individuals in this field actively participate in teaching classical languages, literature, and culture across diverse educational levels (Whitmarsh, 2021). However, the accessibility of classical education can be influenced by social class, as individuals from more affluent backgrounds may have greater access to classical language instruction and related resources. This educational dimension introduces a socioeconomic element to the dissemination of classical knowledge, potentially contributing to disparities in exposure and engagement with the field based on varying socioeconomic backgrounds. Classics scholars are part of a global network of scholars who share a common interest in the ancient world. They participate in international conferences, collaborate on research projects, and maintain ongoing intellectual exchanges with colleagues from around the world. Again, these activities are made more difficult when an academic has varied access to economic, social, and cultural capital.

My respondents talked at length about the challenges they faced within the Classics field. Clare (2022), in his personal narrative of his trajectory from undergraduate to post-PhD researcher, found that while those without elite stores of economic, social, and cultural capital can face classism in any discipline, the inherent elitism within the classics and ancient history field adds an extra layer of difficulty for the working classes to succeed (p. 31). Classics is an elite subject, because, as observed by Simpson (2021), classical civilisation is scarcely taught in schools, let alone Latin and Greek. For the past three centuries, the Classical curriculum, traditionally associated with prestigious private schools, has granted privileged access to Oxbridge for the select few enrolled in these schools (Hall & Stead, 2020, p. 10; 24 cited in Perale, 2023, p. 26). Proficiency in Ancient Greek and Latin is crucial in the Classics, which poses difficulties for WCAs as some may not have had the opportunity, or feel they have the ability to study the subject (Perale, 2023). WCAs can also feel disempowered to either teach or conduct research in this field due to high levels of imposter syndrome (compared with other subject areas) and a lack of economic and cultural capital (Perale, 2023). The critical examination of primary materials, including ancient manuscripts and inscriptions, can be challenging for WCA who may have had limited access to these resources. Engaging in classical Archaeology, which often involves excavations and artifact analysis, can also require financial resources.

The Classics involve a deep appreciation for Literature and Philosophy. While there is no inherent reason why WCAs cannot embrace these disciplines, their educational backgrounds may initially make them feel out of place within the Classics habitus. The Classics Survey exposed stark WCA underrepresentation with a 'leaky pipeline' through to the senior ranks. Recommendations included collect class and intersectional data; boost Classics in state schools; sustained outreach; remove cultural, financial barriers across careers (Canevaro et al., 2024).

In all, 2% (n. 6) respondents were in the field of Classics. The following quotes offer poignant insights into the challenges faced by WCAs striving to establish themselves in this elite discipline:

> *I think ultimately, because I do Philosophy and Eastern religions, I am forever learning Latin, Greek and Sanskrit terms and it can be difficult… So, what I tend to do then is I'll go on Bugle put in how you say or how do you pronounce put in the word and I listen to it multiple times, so I can say it, and then it won't look as bad in the lecture*. [Kane, Lecturer in Eastern Religions at a traditional institution]

> *So I'm in Classics and ancient History…The problem with that is that they tell you, you can get along as an ancient Historian. You can't. What you need is to learn the languages. You need Greek and Latin. The problem with that is that Greek and Latin are taught to very posh kids at very posh schools. I worked on an outreach project for two years here in Liverpool. And it was all about delivering Greek and Latin GCSEs. And it was only the posh schools that could afford it. I tried to change that around. But then I got a job taken off me and given back to a senior member of class as a member of staff, which is why I'm grubbing around for teaching work now. There's a history of elitism in Classics and ancient History*. [Samuel, Teacher in Classics & Ancient History at a Russell Group institution]

> *I don't have a private education (obviously) so as an early modernist it's easy to feel inadequate; people assume that everyone has Latin and probably a bit of Greek! I often see discussions on Twitter of how you can't be a proper early modernist without those Classical languages*. [Ruby, independent scholar[10]]

These quotes highlight the intersection of educational privilege, access to resources, and the impact of these factors on academic opportunities. In Kane's

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[10]Respondent didn't provide name of the subject area in which she teaches/conducts research.

narrative, the challenges of learning Latin and Greek were further exacerbated by his dyslexia – something that can impact on your experience no matter your social class. Patterson (2020) aptly observed that Latin is not a subject readily adaptable for those with learning disabilities. The second quote by Samuel addressed the issue of elitism in Classics and Ancient History. He expressed frustration with the inaccessibility of Greek and Latin education, particularly its concentration in independent schools. The lack of access to the Classics can be seen in the statistics for A-levels, where 76% of Latin and 92% of Greek candidates came from independent schools. In terms of university admissions, fewer than a quarter of Oxford classicists in 2019 came from state schools (Cunliffe, 2022). The reference to an outreach project highlighted that Samuel had attempted to address this imbalance. However, outreach and engagement programmes tend to be only available at universities that teach Classics-related subjects, so widening participation into the Classics from outside the institutions can be difficult. Ruby's quotation highlighted how classical language proficiency is deeply embedded in the traditions and norms of this academic discipline, making it difficult for WCAs to break through these barriers. Collectively, these quotations illuminate the difficulties that WCAs without access to classical language education may face in academia.

Physics

The academic subject discipline of Physics is included in the hard pure disciplinary group. In the context of physics, Coughlan and Perryman (2011) describe a cumulative, atomistic structure that signifies the gradual accumulation of knowledge over time, emphasising fundamental components and addressing universal principles within the field. While the Social Sciences typically have qualitative approaches, Physics utilises quantitative reasoning by applying mathematical concepts to depict the world (White Brahmia, 2019). Academic communities in Physics are competitive yet sociable dynamic and multiple authorship are commonplace (Coughlan & Perryman, 2011). Within Physics there is a set of shared values, orientations, and attitudes, although individual variations exist. Physicists have an appreciation for empirical evidence and scientific rigour: Physicists value empirical evidence and scientific rigour. They are trained to design and conduct experiments, collect data, and interpret results in a systematic and objective manner (Rosen, 2009).

Like most academic disciplines, Physicists are trained to think critically and to approach problems with creativity and ingenuity. They are skilled at evaluating evidence, constructing arguments, and developing innovative solutions to scientific challenges. However, scepticism is instilled in the discipline as Physicists are trained to question assumptions, challenge existing theories, and rigorously test hypotheses (Rosen, 2009). Problem-solving is a central focus, with Physicists dissecting complex problems and devising systematic approaches for resolution. Given the long-term nature of Physics research, patience and persistence often become part of their habitus (Rosen, 2009). Elements of what eventually

evolved into physics were primarily derived from the fields of astronomy, optics, and mechanics, methodologically unified through the study of geometry (Kisak, 2015). Physics may be challenging for WCAs as science capital is unevenly distributed across social groups, with a strong concentration among more privileged individuals (Archer et al., 2015).

In all, 2% (n. 4) respondents referred to being in the field of Physics. Elaine, a Teaching Associate in Science at a Russell Group institution, illuminates several important themes related to class, gender, networking, and mentorship in the academic field of physics:

> *It's mainly…blokes…So, you'd go away to a lab somewhere. You must stay there, but then you'll be going out at night and things for meals, they'll be talking to each other about activities that you wouldn't consider doing. So, then you can't really join in in the conversation. You feel a bit left out because you haven't got similar experiences to them. They build up these networks, and they… choose people who they get along with, similar sort of people to them. So, it's hard and so when you're looking to move on, they've already got their eye on someone who they're going to employ. It's hard to get someone to support you. To help you move on in Physics, you've got to have some sort of mentor to take you under their wing. Seems like it's always somebody you already know who's going to get the job. They're already lined up sort of thing… So, it's basically if you're not like them, they don't take you on. That's how it feels.*

Elaine highlighted the gender disparities within physics, particularly in male-dominated subfields like Nuclear Physics. Physics has one of the largest gender gaps in STEM according to an analysis of more than 36 million authors of academic papers over the last two decades (Holman et al., 2018). Written evidence to the UK Parliament by the Institute of Physics (IOP) (2022), on representation in the Physics sector, reported it also has a significant underrepresentation of people from disadvantaged backgrounds, disabled people, those who identify as LGBT+, and minority ethnic groups. Despite socioeconomic background not being a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, the IOP collects data on its membership every four years in its anonymous member diversity survey. The IOP used the highest parental qualification as a proxy for the socioeconomic background of respondents. In 2015, 11% of respondents reported that their parents held no qualifications, this had dropped to 7% in 2019 (IOP, 2022, 2020). At present, the representation of women in the nuclear science workforce within member countries of the Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA) is at 20% (The National Nuclear Laboratory, 2023). There is no comparable data available on class diversity in nuclear science.

Going back to Elaine's experience about being excluded from conversations about networking events, this is indicative of the challenges women often face

in male-dominated STEM disciplines. She also highlighted the significance of networking in academic progress. The exclusionary nature of these groups, which often favour individuals with similar experiences, further perpetuated inequalities in the field. Elaine suggested that mentorship plays a crucial role in advancing one's career in physics. However, she implied that these opportunities may be biased towards individuals who are already known to those in influential positions. This is similar to the findings by Friedman and Laurison (2019) who found that one of the key drivers of the class ceiling is sponsorship, i.e. where those further up the ladder coach newer entrants (p. 217). This too can disadvantage WCAs. When asked about the intersection of class and gender, Elaine implied that women in high positions in Physics may predominantly come from advantaged backgrounds, hinting at the interconnectedness of class and gender disparities in the field. While Elaine indicated that financial resources may not be a direct barrier, she acknowledged the competitive nature of securing funding in Physics, which can be challenging for WCAs. Her statement also emphasised how the lack of representation can profoundly impact an individual's sense of belonging and career progression.

Practicality Versus Theory

Hasenjürgen (1986), somewhat patronisingly, constructed WCAs as being 'theory distant' (cited in Dressel & Langreiter, 2003). This observation should come as no surprise to the reader so far because as I've established, descriptions of the skillset of WCAs tend to only emphasise their perceived deficiencies. *If* indeed there is a perceived reluctance among WCAs to engage with theory, this may stem from the pervasive pathologisation of the working class in theoretical discourses. Leeb (2004) suggests, this could be viewed as another attempt to elevate the status of elite/middle-class scholars at the expense of WCAs. Working-class individuals may prioritise the acquisition of practical skills for two key reasons: firstly, they may lack the financial resources that would allow them the leisure to engage extensively in theoretical contemplation, and secondly, they recognise the importance of maximising their employability. Interestingly, only one of my respondents mentioned theory in a critical manner, but not in the way one might expect. Terri, a PhD student in History at a traditional institution observed '*I've been looking at Social Theory recently because I don't like Theoretical History as it tends to collapse on contact with reality*'. While Terri has a certain scepticism with Theoretical History, she expressed a preference for engaging with social theory, suggesting an interest in exploring abstract concepts, models, and frameworks for understanding societal phenomena. Another respondent revealed that he was writing a book on musical theory [Richard, a Professor of Culture at a traditional institution]. This variation underscored the need to avoid generalisations when discussing WCAs and their interactions with theory. While some may approach theory with scepticism, others embrace it enthusiastically, reflecting the rich tapestry of academic perspectives within the WCA community.

Directly opposing Hasenjürgen's (1986) view of WCA being 'theory lite' was Talia, a Research Assistant in Nursing at a traditional institution:

> *When I was doing my undergrad… it was to become a community and youth worker. I wanted to help my community. So, it was very practical based. Obviously, we had the theories behind the practice. And I found myself when I was maybe my third year, I was like, oh, God, I kind of prefer the theory more than the actual practical side. So, when I was in my fourth year, I thought, Okay, I want to do a master's afterwards. But I didn't want to do a master's in community youth work, because again, it was the practice, and I loved it, but I wasn't as interested in it. So, I applied to do a master's in sociology. And so I went, and I did my master's in sociology. And then after finishing that I was thinking, oh, God, I'd really like to do a PhD next. And so, I worked for a year as a research assistant to make sure it's what I really wanted to do. And now I'm beginning my PhD in September.*

Talia's quotation is interesting as she acknowledged that she initially pursued her undergraduate studies with a practical orientation in mind. WCAs, like Talia, might prefer applied degrees as they may hold perceptions about the relevance of theoretical and applied degrees in their communities. They may choose degrees that they believe will have a more practical and immediate impact in her community. However, in her exposure to theory, she recognised a preference for the theoretical aspects of their discipline. The cost of education can also be a significant factor for working-class people, thus WCAs may initially have chosen degrees that lead to more immediate and stable job opportunities, typically associated with applied degrees such as healthcare, engineering, or technology. Yvonne, a Lecturer in Health and Social Care at a Russell Group institution, mentioned that she gravitated towards applied degrees because she had limited access to classic theoretical books. This transformation in Talia's academic interests may also indicate a simultaneous growth in her cultural capital. As she delved into new areas of study and diverse intellectual perspectives, she suggested she not only broadened her knowledge base but also enriched her understanding of different cultural contexts, narratives, and theories.

My interview with Ellis, a Senior Lecturer in Post-compulsory Education was especially revealing on the subject of theory. Ellis recounted the time when he was teaching FE in Media and IT Production. He had previously worked at the BBC before transitioning to the FE college. As an aside, he observed that there were seven people on the interview panel, and '*not one of them had a Liverpool accent*'. Ellis didn't get the job, and talked about the feedback he received:

> *They said that I was fantastic, but we didn't feel you had a good grasp of educational theory. I've been teaching educational theory for four years. All I've done is speak about different approaches to pedagogy, and then how that links with technology. I thought it wasn't a*

> *fair assessment. They said I was great on the technology stuff, and experience in media, and I was thinking that is bollocks, because we rarely get in-depth descriptions, just discussions and approaches around communities of practical critical pedagogy. I spoke about all those things.*

Ellis's statement underscored the challenges that WCAs may face in academia, where their qualifications and expertise may not always be recognised or valued in the same way as those from more privileged backgrounds. It also potentially underscores that Hasenjürgen's view of WCAs as 'theory distant' or lacking in certain areas may inadvertently contribute to a bias against them. This highlighted the importance of challenging stereotypes and ensuring that assessments of academic candidates are fair, thorough, and unbiased.

Bernard, a Senior Lecturer in Networking at a traditional institution, presented a nuanced perspective on the role of theory and practical skills in academia, particularly in the field of technology. He emphasised the significance of practical skills in certain industries:

> *We [some universities] have a snobbery about skills. In my industry, you need to have people who can configure routers, and switches, otherwise airplanes don't stay in the sky. It is as crucial as that. So having all this lovely academic theory is good, but if our students can't go and actually do this dangerous thing [keep airplanes in the sky], theories are useless.*

Bernard shared his journey into academia, highlighting that while he did not hold a doctorate or a postgraduate qualification, he did possess valuable industry experience. He stressed the importance of bridging the gap between academic values and practical skills, drawing attention to the necessity of advanced technical abilities in fields where the application of theory directly impacts real-world outcomes.

> *A colleague and I developed a programme and basically off that I was headhunted to carry on developing postgraduate programmes. I have no doctorate, no postgraduate qualification of my own, but I have the industry experience. I came in, very techie with industry experience and an understanding of academia from my FE perspective. We started off and developed that programme.*

Bernard's viewpoint challenged the dichotomy of theory versus practicality, advocating for a more balanced approach that integrates academic theory with practical skills. He highlighted the importance of reflecting on the culture of pre-1992 Polytechnics, where advanced technical expertise was crucial, especially in technology-driven industries where lapses could lead to severe consequences such as technological failures and security breaches.

> *You know, in university, there are certain academic values, which could be perceived as snobbery. I sit sort of very much on the side of, we've got to have these skills, these technical abilities, we've got to reflect upon the pre-92 Polytechnic culture where individuals must be very advanced at what they do, and very clever, otherwise you're going to be hacked and your bank is not going to be able to trade. There's going to be all sorts of technological problems. I'm teaching those kinds of individuals.*

Bernard's perspective illuminated the complex interplay between academic qualifications, practical skills, and industry experience within the academic context, emphasising the need for an adaptable approach, particularly in fields where the convergence of theory and practice is crucial for success.

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Chapter 6

Working-Class Academic Cultural Wealth

Keywords: Cultural wealth; aspirational capital; navigational capital; social capital; familial capital; linguistic capital; resistant capital; perspective capital

Overview

Previous chapters have highlighted numerous instances of classism faced by working class academics (WCAs). Additionally, my respondents shared insights into their contributions to academia, emphasising how their unique perspectives, shaped by lived experiences, enrich the scholarly landscape. Chapter Six develops Yosso's (2005) conceptual model of 'community cultural wealth' to highlight the cultural assets and strengths – or cultural wealth – of WCAs. This contribution was not readily identified by respondents, as WCAs tend to underestimate their value. Soria et al. (2023), for instance, highlighted the resilience of WCAs and their profound insights into matters of equity and justice, likely stemming from their experiences of managing limited economic resources. Chapter Six also refers to 'funds of knowledge', i.e. culturally developed knowledge, skills, and practices present within households and communities (Moll et al., 1992).

Community Cultural Wealth

Critical race theory (CRT) provides a framework for identifying, analysing, and challenging the ways that race and racism interconnect with other axes of oppression and how these dynamics collectively shape the everyday experiences of individuals of colour (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Yosso's influential 2005 article, 'Whose culture has capital?' developed 'CCW', a conceptual model that

identified the diverse forms of capital which people of colour use to resist and successfully navigate the education field. Her framework acknowledges obstacles but emphasises the wide spectrum of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and networks held by socially marginalised groups, which are often overlooked and uncredited. CCW is a flexible framework and can be used to provide an important counterbalance to the misrecognition of WCAs and their skills. While Bourdieusian theory allows for various interpretations, it is frequently perceived from the perspective of the white middle class, often portraying those outside this demographic as having deficits. By utilising Yosso's framework we can observe the cultural resources that WCAs leverage for empowerment, to persevere through challenges and to succeed academically despite systemic barriers. Forms of CCW include: aspirational capital (resilience and hope), navigational capital (manoeuvring institutions), social capital (community resources and peers), familial capital (cultural heritage),[1] linguistic capital (communication), and resistant capital (skills fostered through opposition) (Yosso, 2005, pp. 77–80). Alongside the six forms of cultural weath first discussed by Yosso (2005) – and developed by Crew (2020) to discuss WCA cultural wealth – Cole (2019) referred to perspective capital i.e perceiving situations through diverse worldviews. These examples of cultural wealth are summarised in the following figure and expanded in the next section.

WCAs demonstrated **aspirational capital** by exhibiting resilience in overcoming academic hurdles and economic challenges, supporting communities and finding inspiration in role models..

WCAs exhibited **navigational capital** through academic advising, mentorship, and innovative teaching strategies

WCAs conveyed **linguistic capital** by embracing their linguistic diversity.

WCAs illustrated their **familial and social capital** through support networks which included family and virtual communities.

WCAs portrayed their **resistance capital** through pedagogical approaches, challenging imposter syndrome & expressing varied perspectives on industrial action

WCAs displayed **perspective capital** by leveraging their diverse experiences to provide unique insights, empathy, and advocacy for positive change within academia and beyond.

Fig. 3.   Working-Class Academic Cultural Wealth.

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[1]Social and familial capital are often analysed together.

Aspirational Capital

Aspirational capital refers to the resilience and capacity to sustain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the presence of real and perceived obstacles (Yosso, 2005). Disadvantaged communities may harness this capital to help envision possibilities beyond their current circumstances. Łuczaj (2023) found that her respondents 'home-grown resilience…[could] also positively impact teaching or research duties' (p. 203). In the face of potential barriers, aspirational capital also serves as a form of resistance. A systematic review by Denton et al. (2020) evaluated the presence of CCW in STEM education. With 28 studies identifying at least one example of aspirational capital, this was the most cited form of CCW. In Dika et al. (2017), ethnic minority students discussed pursing their objective of attaining an engineering degree. Descriptive quantitative data highlighted the prevalence of various types of cultural wealth, with aspirational capital being particularly prominent. Many studies described this persistence as contingent upon an ability to remain focused on goals despite barriers to students' aspirations (cited in Denton et al., 2020). Research by Brooms and Davis (2017) discussed how Black males derive meaning from their educational experiences, argued that aspirational capital can help marginalised students to cope with common academic challenges like classism and imposter syndrome. Similarly, Morrison (2010) found that working-class female students' aspirational capital was something encouraged by their mothers. Academic staff and family members also played a significant role in nurturing aspirational capital among marginalised students (Denton et al., 2020).

As preceding chapters have outlined, my respondents faced numerous obstacles navigating academia's elite/middle-class culture. But Lucas, a Senior Lecturer in Health at a traditional institution, observed that the mere presence of '*people like us*' demonstrates resilience (and a form of aspirational capital) as WCAs often persevere in their careers despite facing pressures to conform to elite or middle-class norms. Bev, a PhD Student in Sociology at a post-1992 institution expands on this:

> *I've had setbacks in my life, because of my background, but I can see that there's a way through them, whereas I think if I had not had those challenges, and I came up against a wall, something that was really difficult, like doing a PhD. I've seen it in other people, they just fall apart. When really the situation they're facing i.e., just doing a PhD with enough money and no kids to look after, is not actually that difficult. Obviously, everyone's experience is different, but I think when you've had setbacks and you've had to fight that bit harder for your education, you fight that bit harder to get a foot in the door, and that's helped me, I think if I didn't have that as part of my character, because of my upbringing I would have quit by now.*

Bev acknowledged the setbacks she had experienced due to her background but suggested that these challenges provided a unique advantage when encountering difficult situations, such as pursuing a PhD. Despite setbacks, Bev contrasted her

own experience with that of others who may not have faced similar challenges. The notion is that the extra effort invested in fighting for education and opportunities had instilled a tenacity that helped her overcome obstacles. Overall, Bev demonstrated the transformative power of facing and overcoming challenges. A significant minority of respondents (13%, n. 32) reported that despite feelings of exclusion, isolation, and the acknowledgement of the inherent challenges, they persevered in their aspirations of securing an academic position throughout their doctoral studies. These respondents showed admirable determination and resilience, pursuing academic goals despite adversity from working-class backgrounds.

My respondents expressed a further example of aspirational capital by their desire to support others from their working-class communities. Bryan, Research Fellow in History from an Oxbridge institution articulated this sentiment, stating, '*My academic journey has always been anchored in a desire to bring about positive change in the community I come from*'. Another respondent, Becky, a PhD student in English from an Oxbridge institution echoed this commitment, affirming,

> *Being a working class academic is not just about personal achievement; it's about leveraging my position to uplift the community that shaped me. I want to bridge the gap between academia and the everyday lives of people in my neighbourhood.*

Becky described organising various community-based art projects to preserve the cultural heritage of her community. Whereas, Alan, a Senior Lecturer in Anthropology at an elite institution, was actively engaging in a collaborative project with a local business to facilitate connections between academia and industry. Alan, Bryan, and Becky exemplified how being a WCA extends beyond personal accomplishment; it's a tangible expression of a desire to make a positive impact beyond the walls of academia.

While aspirational capital can be a positive response to negative experiences, respondents acknowledged that it was hard to keep going at times, leading some to contemplate pursuing alternative career paths beyond academia. Approximately 5% (n. 12) of respondents expressed being so profoundly demoralised by the precarious nature of academia, that they had seriously contemplated leaving the field, particularly because they struggled to demonstrate the tangible benefits to their families. Lucy, a Teaching Associate in Law at a Russell Group institution articulated this sentiment, stating, '*What do I have to show? We are short of money, I'm tired and don't have time for my partner*' (Crew, 2020, p. 59). Both Jack and Robert emphasised that it was to sustain themselves in the long term due to the limited hours allocated for undergraduate teaching. Robert, a Teaching Associate in Business Studies at a post-1992 institution, talked of his financial hardships during our interview, disclosing that he had relied on his friends for meals due to his dire financial situation. Similarly, Jack, a Teaching Associate in Mathematics at an Oxbridge institution, rescheduled our online interview due to financial constraints regarding his internet access. The economic precarity of some respondents led them to contemplate leaving academia at the end of the semester. Robert explained his predicament, stating:

> *If I don't manage to secure some additional work, such as being a research assistant for a few months, I'm going to have give up my PhD, and academia, for the foreseeable future.*

This sobering reality shows the immense financial challenges faced by PhD students from working-class backgrounds. Despite their determination, a lack of financial stability during the critical PhD training period can derail careers before they start. Without addressing these barriers, academia risks losing a range of talent and diversity.

The presence of successful role models and mentors emerged as another facet of aspirational capital identified by my respondents. These accomplished academics served as tangible examples, demonstrating to my WCA respondents that their aspirations were indeed achievable. Yvonne's sentiment, a Lecturer in Health and Social Care at a Russell Group institution, resonated with this notion. She observed, '*Seeing professors from backgrounds like mine showed me I could do it too. They paved the way*'. Yvonne's statement demonstrated that role models personified the future selves that my WCA respondents could envision. For instance, Amelia, now a Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences at a Russell Group institution noted: '*My PhD advisor pushed me. I wouldn't have made it through without him*'. Role models not only made desired identities seem attainable but also actively contributed to the resilience of some WCAs.

Respondents expressed concerns that, given the underrepresentation of WCAs in academia, the mentors they were matched with were often from middle-class backgrounds. While respondents acknowledged the positive qualities of their mentors from different class backgrounds, they referred to there being a lack of shared experiences and perspectives. As Petra, a Lecturer in Human Geography at a post-1992 institution, remarked, '*She was helpful and kind, but I didn't have anything in common with her*'. Respondents, particularly those at elite institutions, lamented the dearth of mentors who shared their working-class heritage, echoing a broader lack of research on academic mentoring tailored specifically for WCAs. The importance of ethnicity and gender 'matching' when allocating mentors has been established by both Blake Beard et al. (2011) and Nickerson (2020), but the significance of considering social class background in mentor/mentee relationships remains overlooked. Considering that WCA aspirations endure despite well-documented exclusions, there is a compelling case for further research into effective mentoring practices that consider the specific challenges and aspirations associated with their class heritage.

WCAs who enjoyed the privilege of successful mentorships displayed a profound commitment to paying it forward by providing support to students and aspiring academics throughout their academic journeys. While this behaviour could be seen as an example of navigational capital, showcasing effective navigation of academic systems, it is fundamentally rooted in aspirational capital. The core motivation driving these respondents is twofold: first, to challenge the deficit discourse surrounding working-class individuals, and second, to serve as inspirations for others from similar backgrounds. Respondents such Yvonne, a Lecturer in Health and Social Care at a Russell Group institution, discussed the

prevalent negative portrayal of working-class students and academics and passionately highlighted that: '*we are not fucking useless you know, we can do so much despite everything there has been in our way*'. Yvonne's words reflected a perspective of empowerment and a commitment to challenge negative stereotypes. Ellie, a Lecturer in Health Sciences at a Russell Group institution, speaking from her experience as a student, mentioned: '*I know how important it is to have a visible presence of BME staff members, so I will always be that presence at open days, at school events'*. She also expressed her aspiration to establish an organisation aimed at assisting working-class people in HE, having witnessed the struggles faced by her friends and family when they embarked on their own academic journeys. Ellie's quote served as a powerful reminder of the importance of representation, mentorship, and support networks in fostering an inclusive and equitable academic environment.

Research conducted by Manstead (2018) indicated that working-class people often demonstrate higher levels of empathy and a greater willingness to offer support to others facing challenges. This emphasised the potential for working-class people to be strong advocates for positive change within academia. Darren, a PhD Student in Gaming from a post-1992 institution talked of wanting to inspire others: '*I was once asked as part of the interview for the PhD what my teaching style was, I don't know the pedagogical language, but in essence, I want to inspire people*'. In Crew (2020), two of my respondents with a disability reported that role models with disabilities were vital to create a sense of belonging in HE, for students and academics. Although both acknowledged that some people with disabilities may not want to emphasise their disability or to be 'shoehorned into the disability champion role' (Martin, 2017, p. 26).

Navigational Capital

Navigational capital refers to students' skills and abilities to navigate institutions such as universities. It's similar to the resourcefulness that Hurst (2010) suggested that her participants associated with their working-class perspective. Yosso (2005) explains that this form of capital empowers people to manoeuvre within hostile environments. As an example, Wright et al.'s (2016) research involving young black males discussed how they would use black community organisations to navigate educational challenges. These organisations provided them with valuable advice, mentoring, and information on education and training opportunities. In turn, this support then allowed them to effectively convert their social capital into navigational capital (p. 28). While not specifically related to WCAs, Nikolaraizi and Hadjikakou (2006) outlined how role models from within the Deaf community provided strategies on how to cope with distressing situations when navigating the 'hearing world'. Łuczaj (2023) found that one of her respondents referred to a type of entrepreneurship, a form of navigational capital, which enabled her to navigate academia (p. 199).

One manifestation of navigational capital among my respondents, was the academic advising they performed for students from disadvantaged backgrounds as part of their faculty responsibilities. While most academics are expected to provide

support in this manner, my respondents wanted to help students manoeuvre through the often opaque and unwritten rules of academia. Respondents in Hurst and Nenga (2016) study discussed mentoring working-class students where possible. Several of my respondents had a similar approach. Craig, a Lecturer in Mental Health,[2] remarked:

> There is a hidden curriculum. So, I'll often read through essays before submission, and provide in depth feedback…I care about the students and have this constructive approach to feedback, to help them make progress.

Craig suggested that this may be something other WCAs might discuss, and he was correct. Nearly two-thirds (65%, n. 165) of my respondents expressed their commitment to providing this level of support for their students:

> If you're a working class person whose been successful academically, you also know how painful it can be for someone to get poor grades…. It can be really hard…I guess what makes you more caring, is having this experience that was bumpy, and you know very well, that others don't have such a bumpy trajectory.

The academic advising role undertaken by these academics was often a means of 'paying it forward', i.e. passing on their own hard-earned knowledge and experience. Craig's approach to mentoring epitomised this as he actively guided his students through the fundamentals of essay writing and offered comprehensive feedback. His caring and constructive style demonstrated that WCAs often possess a high degree of empathy and a genuine understanding of the challenges students might encounter.

Similar to the findings of Listman's (2013) study on support for deaf mentees through exposure to a broader scholarly community, my respondents expressed a desire to empower both students and early career researchers (ECRs) by integrating them into research-related activities. Respondents shared numerous examples[3] of innovative practices that they had included into their modules. Some of these initiatives included:

- *Conference Engagement:* students actively participated in conferences, providing experience of real-world academic discourse and networking.
- *Writing Retreats:* online and in-person writing retreats, dedicated spaces for collaborative writing efforts and a sense of community.
- *Research Task Hub:* a centralised hub or a 'one stop research shop' where students engaged in various research tasks beneficial for the school.

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[2] The respondent preferred not to give details of his institution.

[3] I don't identify respondents here because some approaches are unusual, and as such might identify them outside of this study.

- *Writing Kickstart Exercises:* Activities crafted to assist students overcome procrastination and boosting productivity.
- *Peer Teaching:* Encouraged 'peer-to-peer teaching', allowing students to share their expertise and fostering a collaborative learning environment.
- *Cross-Year Mentorship:* First-year students are paired with more experienced students who provide guidance and support.
- *'Genius Hours'⁴:* Dedicated time where students work on projects of personal interest, encouraging creativity and self-directed learning.
- *Academic Paper Writing:* Integrated academic paper writing into postgraduate courses.
- *Staff/Student Working-Class Network:* Established a network that connects staff and students from working-class backgrounds, promoting mentorship, shared experiences, and a supportive community within the academic setting.

These examples encapsulated the diverse strategies employed by WCAs to enrich the academic experience, empowered students, and cultivated a culture of active and meaningful engagement with the academic community.

Despite the various innovative initiatives, my respondents often faced resistance from their Heads of Department. Instead of receiving recognition or promotions, they encountered criticism, particularly in elite and Russell Group universities. Notably, a small but significant percentage (4%, n. 11) of respondents reported being labelled as 'handholders' by their colleagues.

> *I've worked hard on providing these resources for my students, all students, although the aim is to primarily help working class students, and all my institution can do is to call it handholding.* [Eddie, Senior Lecturer in Criminology at a traditional institution]

> *Colleagues at my university have been 'concerned' that I'm lowering standards with my handholding.* [emphasis added by author following the emphasis in the interview]. [Alan, a Senior Lecturer in Anthropology at an Elite institution]

The use of the term '*hand holding*' refers to the prevailing perception that supporting working-class students academically is overly nurturing. My co-writers in an article I wrote with Flynn et al. (2023), agreed with this perspective, noting that: 'if it's with, you know, working class students…students of colour it becomes spoon feeding and you're lowering standards. Whereas if it's with other students, it's called scaffolding knowledge and it's ok. It's really loaded' (p. 173). The distinction made between '*hand holding*' and '*scaffolding knowledge*' suggested a discrepancy in how these supportive practices are perceived based on the demographic characteristics of the students receiving support. These reflections reveal potential biases in creating equitable educational environments.

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⁴https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/genius-hour-questions/

My respondents reported that supporting disadvantaged students was an inextricable aspect of their professional responsibilities, as aptly expressed by Alan, a Senior Lecturer in Anthropology at an Elite institution, who referred to it as a '*moral obligation*'. Undeterred by institutional pressures that marginalised student advocacy, my respondents remained steadfast in their dedication to providing support tailored to their students' needs. These criticisms not only uncovered the deeply ingrained biases surrounding the definition of valid academic work but also illuminated the unrecognised time and emotional labour invested in student mentorship. Echoing the broader undervaluation of student support, 9% (n. 22) of respondents reported that their student support initiatives were not acknowledged in their annual performance reviews, despite being an integral component of their workload.

An analysis of the data revealed an uneven distribution of navigational capital among respondents, with WCAs on precarious contracts having limited access to this essential resource. This disparity seemed to arise from the need for strong professional networks, which WCAs in precarious academic positions struggled to establish and maintain due to the insecure nature of their roles within academia. As mentioned in Chapter One, WCAs like Flynn, a Lecturer in Health at a traditional university, faced significantly reduced access to professional networks. In some instances, these challenges were exacerbated by their limited familiarity with colleagues on permanent contracts. Casualised staff often lack autonomy as universities typically prioritise resource allocation and support for academics holding permanent positions, for instance, Talia, a Research Assistant in Nursing at a traditional institution perceived that she did not have the same level of academic support, including mentorship and professional development opportunities. This disparity in access to navigational capital compounds the existing challenges faced by WCAs on precarious contracts, hindering opportunities for career advancement.

Linguistic Capital

Yosso (2005) cited linguistic capital as being the knowledge, skills, and resources related to language and communication. It encompassed the ability to effectively use language in various contexts and the advantages that this language proficiency offers. Something as simple as a shared sense of humour can represent linguistic capital bonding. Bourdieu (1986) conceptualised linguistic capital as being a form of social capital. According to Bourdieu (2000), language is a kind of wealth (p. 467). Linguistic capital operates at both individual and systemic levels, conferring privilege or disadvantage. Individually, it influences how marginalised people navigate social worlds through available linguistic resources. Bourdieu's conception of linguistic capital differs from Yosso's quite significantly. Bourdieu primarily emphasises the linguistic superiority of the middle classes, often without acknowledging that this perspective is rooted in the supposed linguistic inferiority attributed to the working classes (Leeb, 2004, p. 94). Whereas Yosso's concept of linguistic capital emphasises the skills of marginalised groups and the social biases that promote certain voices over others, i.e. those from advantaged social backgrounds being privileged over WCAs.

One embodiment of WCAs linguistic and navigational capital was evident in their discussions with disadvantaged students about the lived experiences of adapting communication to different environments. For instance, Alan, a Senior Lecturer in Anthropology at an Elite institution openly shared his lived experiences of adapting communication to different environments with his students.

> *I tell students to use the language that fits where you are…I explain how I shift between home dialect with family and academic speak at university. Both have value. It helps students know that academics code switch too.*

Alan believed that '*exposing the hidden rules of universities liberates knowledge*', Dominic, a Senior Lecturer in Education at a post-1992 institution, echoed this sentiment, stating, '*I let students know that the game is tough, but it can be done – with luck and hard work*'. These perspectives demonstrated the crucial role WCAs play in bridging the gap between their students' backgrounds and the academic world. For WCAs like Alan and Dominic, proficiency in academic language served as a valuable tool to empower their students. By sharing their own experiences of navigating the academic landscape, WCAs such as Alan and Dominic, helped students gain the confidence to help them thrive in HE.

Linguistic capital encompasses the prestige attributed to specific speech patterns within a society's power dynamics. This facet of cultural wealth involves the biases ingrained in societal structures that elevate particular voices. In academia, an individual's accent, such as 'received pronunciation', can serve as an illustration of embodied cultural capital, whereas a regional accent may label them as an outsider. As discussed throughout this book, many of my respondents reported being stigmatised due to their regional accents, however, a shared or similar accent can also foster community, with students responding well to scholars who 'sound like them'. Dominic, a Senior Lecturer in Education at a post-1992 institution, who said he had a strong Newcastle accent, remarked: '*Students often express appreciation for my Geordie accent, as it helps them feel more relaxed and comfortable*'. While fluency in privileged linguistic styles is typically desired, linguistic diversity, such as a 'Geordie' accent, has its own unique value. Yvonne, a Lecturer in Health and Social Care at a Russell Group institution summarised, '*My local, regional accent is a reminder to students that academics are not just posh people*'. This statement highlighted the importance of authenticity and relatability in academic settings. By using their local, regional accent, Yvonne and others demonstrated that they were not only an expert in their field but also someone who is approachable and relatable to students from diverse backgrounds. This accessibility is particularly valuable for students who may feel intimidated by the academic environment, as it humanises academics and makes them seem more approachable. Moreover, the use of a local accent can be seen as a subtle form of resistance against the stereotypical perception of academics as elitist and detached from the realities of their students.

Familial/Social Capital

Familial/social capital refers to those cultural knowledges nurtured among kin (Yosso, 2005, p. 79) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition (Yosso & Burciaga, 2016, p. 2). It encompasses the social, cultural, and economic benefits that come from one's family background. The strength of family capital is typically determined by the family culture that can be transferred to the next generation. This is crucial as the wealth and quality of family resources play a decisive role in shaping employment opportunities. Family networks can serve as a gateway to job prospects, mentorships, and valuable connections within professional and social circles, aiding in identifying scholarships, assisting with application preparation, providing guidance, and facilitating the acquisition of education and employment. This form of capital has been widely theorised by many such as Coleman (1998), Putnam (2000), and Bourdieu (various). Like Bourdieu, Coleman perceived social capital to reside in the social structure of relationships among people, whereas Putnam defined social capital as being those connections among individuals and the trustworthiness that emerge from these connections. Yosso's conceptualisation of social capital expands upon Bourdieu's as it additionally recognises the cultural wealth generated through community spirit and mutual support. It is not just who you know, but the knowledge, care, and cohesion nurtured through communal ties.

Research on familial capital often utilises the narratives from students of colour at universities within the United States, so direct comparisons with WCAs in the UK are not possible. However, it can help us understand how familial capital manifests. For instance, research by Matos (2015) found that family encouragement is a form of familial capital, as is support from academic advisers (Carter Francique et al., 2015). Students of colour in US universities tended to look for support from ethnic-focused student organisations, as these were spaces where they felt a sense of belonging (Fernández et al., 2023). O'Shea (2016) interviews were primarily characterised by the voices of 'others', with several parents specifically reflecting on the substantial impact their children had on their educational pursuits. Respondents with disabilities relied on familial/social capital for practical assistance. For example, Tina, a Lecturer in Secondary and Post-Compulsory Education at a post-1992 institution, stated, '*My parents happily read my work aloud when my vision worsens. They're my rock*'. This emphasised the importance of family support as a source of strength and encouragement in the face of personal difficulties.

Beyond family, my respondents demonstrated familial capital through university networks and associations such as Afro-Caribbean societies and women's networks. Despite challenges, communal ties, whether with university administrators or campus groups, provided advice, validation, and solidarity. Online disability communities also played a significant role in providing moral support. Brandon, a Teaching Assistant in Health Studies at a post-1992 institution, and a wheelchair user, emphasised, '*I couldn't navigate ableist campuses without my community. We cope together*'. Tina and Brandon underscore the crucial role of support networks for WCAs, especially those dealing with disabilities or encountering

ableism in academia. Brandon's mention of online disability communities aligns with Bricout's (2004) research, highlighting the value of virtual networks in offering moral support and addressing ableism.

Resistance Capital

Resistance capital refers to the resources, skills, and strategies that individuals or communities possess to resist, challenge, and navigate oppressive systems or structures. Resistance capital stresses the desire to challenge power dynamics, advocate for social justice, and challenge inequity (Yosso, 2005). Samuelson and Litzler (2016) observed students exhibiting resistant capital, with the aim to change stereotypes and succeed despite racial discrimination. Some addressed microaggressions, while others expressed the desire for increased diversity within existing systems. One of the respondents' fathers in Tolbert Smith (2022) research provided him with a navigational and resistant strategy by teaching him oppositional behaviour that would challenge the negative perceptions others had of Black men. Whereas Kornbluh et al. (2022), who conducted 145 surveys with minority and first-generation students, found that they expressed awareness of systemic inequities which facilitated a desire for social action. Most participants in Strangfeld (2022) provided an example of resistance capital as a desire to improve upon the economic conditions of their parents and other family members. Finally, Revelo and Baber (2018) qualitative study with Latino/a STEM students saw resistant capital in the form of role modelling and participating in community outreach. These respondents were committed to giving back to their communities not only as a way to challenge the gap between the Latino/a community and college, but to also promote STEM programs and careers which do not have many Latino/a students.

Das (2023) highlighted that the academic classroom is a crucial battleground for ideological class struggle, especially within the Social Sciences and Humanities. He asserted that professors often espouse ideologies that align with the interests of the ruling class, inadvertently perpetuating capitalist structures and reinforcing class divisions. An instance of resistance capital manifested through the introduction of WCA pedagogy, a teaching approach I presented in Crew (2020) where respondents would refer to having pedagogical assets that emphasised social change. What emerged as an intriguing finding was that as the study progressed, through all three phases, a sizable proportion (68%, n. 167) of respondents, particularly in the fields of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, continued to provide examples of how their classed experiences influenced their pedagogical approaches. The first aspect involved adopting a 'strengths-based approach' to teaching (Crew, 2020, p. 116), emphasising the inherent strengths of students (and WCAs) within the university environment, rather than focusing on their perceived shortcomings or limitations. This corresponds with the concept of 'funds of knowledge' (FoK), which was initially introduced by Wolf (1966) and then elaborated upon by Moll et al. (1992), wherein households are repositories of knowledge. This perspective refers to practical skills (home maintenance), social competencies (community organising), personal/local knowledge (understanding

of local geography, landmarks, and historical events), and life experience (conflict resolution skills). This manifested among my own respondents and their students, with reference being made to '*coping mechanisms for dealing with adversity*' [Margaret, a Lecturer in Education at a Russell Group institution]; '*class based discrimination*' [Jeremy, a Postdoctoral Researcher in Geography at a traditional institution] and '*political perspectives shaped by personal experiences*' [Sophie, a Teaching Assistant in Biological Sciences at a Red Brick institution]. These examples emphasised the importance of understanding and incorporating the rich knowledge that WCAs and their disadvantaged students bring to the academic environment. However, academia often overlooks WCA cultural wealth. Lived expertise can not only enhance teaching, research, policymaking but it strengthens institutions who value people from all backgrounds.

A second strand of WCA pedagogy is whereby respondents 'co-created knowledge' with their students (Crew, 2020). Traditional pedagogy revolves around rote memorisation, a practice criticised by Freire (1970) for treating students as passive recipients. Instead, a Freirian approach shifts the teacher's role from the sole instructor to being a collaborator where both teachers and students engage as learners, fostering a sense of equality and shared knowledge (Freire, 1993). Respondents in this study had a variety of examples such as '*projects that allowed us to apply theoretical knowledge to real world scenarios*' [Alan, a Senior Lecturer in Anthropology at an Elite institution], or 'contributing to ongoing research' [Dominic, a Senior Lecturer in Education at a post-1992 institution] and as outlined in Crew (2020) '*students as consultants to help embedding employability skills into a programme*' [Amy, a Teaching Fellow in English at a Russell Group institution].

A further dimension of this pedagogy involved the 'inclusion of lived experience'. Amelia, a Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences at a Russell Group institution described designing assignments whereby students could apply their lived experiences to propose solutions to social issues. Margaret, a Lecturer in Education at a Russell Group institution incorporated diversity in her reading list whereby she selected material that represent a wide range of lived experiences. In an assessment set by Jeremy, a Postdoctoral Researcher in Geography at a traditional institution, students wrote a diary of a fictional character travelling to England on the Empire Windrush. Brandon, a teaching assistant in Health Studies at a post-1992 institution, wanted to make what was '*historically invisible, visible*'. He utilised his personal experiences with a physical disability to help students conceptualise the evolving nature of our understanding of disability throughout specific historical periods (Crew, 2020). The 'incorporation of lived experience' within this pedagogical framework not only acknowledged the richness of students' backgrounds but actively leveraged these experiences to enhance learning, transforming their education into a more participatory and inclusive process. This culturally responsive teaching enables students to engage with course content in personally meaningful ways.

'Incorporating social justice' was the final component of a WCA pedagogy. LeCourt (2006) emphasised that the pursuit of social justice in education involves fostering student consciousness and addressing inequalities in their lives. My

respondents gave examples of applying social justice principles across their curriculum. This included diversifying reading lists, to more extensive actions such as partnering with national social justice organisations and using activist strategies to effect positive change in their local community. Other respondents described engaging in grassroots community organising as part of their teaching, leveraging their resistance capital to push for social change. Dominic, a Senior Lecturer in Education at a post-1992 institution, co-founded a research group on employment disadvantage, noting '*I draw from my family's union history to stand up to exploitation*'. Whereas Sal, a Lecturer in Social Studies at a traditional institution, who volunteered with housing justice advocates, explained that she '*had first hand insights of homelessness which I include in my teaching*'. Respondents emphasised mutual learning was embedded in their teaching through what Delgado Bernal (1998) calls 'pedagogies of the home', similar to FoK. This refers to the informal learning experiences that individuals encounter in their homes. This concept recognises the importance of familial and cultural influences on an individual's educational development, acknowledging that the 'home' plays a crucial role in shaping one's knowledge, values, and skills. Rather than the typical top-down teaching methods Sal reflected that she facilitated students to organise local community fundraising events. Overall, these educators grounded their teaching philosophies in social justice by including students in their teaching practice.

Another example of resistance capital is related to my data on imposter syndrome. Just under 20% (n. 44) of respondents explicitly challenged the narrative of imposterism. Instead, they emphasised their competence and significant contributions within the academic sphere. For instance, Flynn, a Lecturer in Health at a traditional institution, asserted that '*I refuse to buy into the idea of imposter syndrome; I am here because I deserve to be. My capabilities speak for themselves*', as did Danielle, a Graduate Teaching Assistant at a Redbrick institution, who was clear that: '*we are just as capable, if not more capable, than other academics as we are here, as academics, despite overcoming barriers*'. Both responses demonstrated a resistance to the imposter narrative but also a sense of self-worth, emphasising the competence and resilience of WCAs in academia. This perspective provided a counter-narrative to the notion that WCAs lacked competence, and, as such, experienced imposterism. These respondents had a resilience, that surpassed mere defiance. Mark, a Lecturer in Engineering,[5] encapsulated this by stating:

> *My background is a strength, not a limitation. It enriches academic landscapes as I have diverse insights that tend to be overlooked. I've earned my place here, unlike some privileged academics.*

This perspective not only countered the imposterism narrative but also framed the WCA experience as an asset rather than a deficit, showcasing their agency in reshaping the discourse within academic environments. The emphasis on the enrichment of the academic landscape through the '*diverse insights*' that respondents like Mark offer the academy was a powerful assertion of the unique value of WCAs in this intellectual environment. Mark also boldly asserted the legitimacy

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[5]Mark preferred not to give details of his institution.

of WCAs like himself in academia. Mark boldly affirmed the legitimacy of WCAs like himself in academia, asserting that they have earned their position, distinguishing them from the typical academic who may benefit from unearned advantages.

My data uncovered a provocative example of resistance capital, one which related to the current[6] Universities and College Union (UCU) strikes. As working-class people have a history of support for strike action, their comments on the strike were to be expected. From 2018, the UCU, a trade union representing around 110,000 staff at UK universities, has organised a series of industrial actions. Referred to as the 'three fights', there were three core campaigns:

1. Pay – fair compensation with a pay increase that meets or exceeds inflation (RPI) plus 2%, or 12%, based on whichever figure is higher.
2. Pensions – advocating for the reversal of reductions in pension benefits and ensuring a secure retirement for academic staff.
3. Equality – gender, ethnic, and disability pay equality, and addressing the use of precarious contracts and excessive workloads (Lewis, 2023; Universities & Colleges Union Left, 2023).

The elected representatives on UCU's higher education committee (HEC) voted to begin a marking and assessment boycott (MAB) from 20th April 2023. This meant that all UCU members in HEIs who took part in the strike were asked to cease all summative marking and associated assessment activities/duties (Universities & Colleges Union, 2023). In reaction to the MAB, some universities have perceived this boycott to represent a 'partial performance' of contractual duties – and have exercised their legal right to reduce/or to not to pay salaries in full (WONKE, 2023). As of August 2023, more than 60 employers said they would deduct between 50% and 100% of wages from those taking part in the MAB (Lewis, 2023, p. 23). The UCU informed their members that if their employer made these deductions from their daily pay for partial performance, they could claim from the fighting fund (UCU, 2023).

In all, 6% (n. 15) of respondents mentioned the UCU strikes either during their interview or in the survey data.[7] Among those, nine expressed their support for the strike. One respondent stated: '*I participated in the UCU strike to voice my concerns about fair pay and working conditions within academia*'. Another respondent echoed this sentiment, noting, '*The UCU strikes have been an essential way to collectively address pay inequalities and insecure contracts*'. Others defended the boycott, arguing that the need for systemic change necessitated strike action: '*powerful institutions only respond to disruptive actions*', said one respondent, while another said: '*a strongly unified strike sends an unavoidable message that exploiting*

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[6]At the time of writing, September 2023.

[7]In light of the UCU strike being the subject of discussion, I present this data in a collective manner, departing from the individual approach adopted throughout this book. This divergence is to provide an additional layer of protection for respondents' anonymity while discussing resistance capital.

academic labour is unacceptable'. Their participation in the strikes was portrayed as a proactive stance to address systemic issues, particularly in terms of precarious contracts. The choice of phrases such as '*essential way*' and '*meaningful change*' suggested a belief in the effectiveness of collective action to bring about transformative shifts in the academic landscape. Moreover, the respondents justified the strikes as being a necessary measure, viewing them as a potent tool to challenge and disrupt established power dynamics. The idea, as expressed by one respondent, that '*powerful institutions only respond to power*', reflected a strategic perspective, indicating a belief that unified, impactful actions are essential to compel institutional change. This perspective aligned with a broader narrative that sees the UCU strikes not only as a protest against immediate issues but as a means to convey an unmistakable message against the exploitation of academic labour. In essence, these responses highlighted the UCU strikes as being a pivotal moment for those participants who supported the movement, showcasing a belief in the potential of collective action to address systemic challenges within academia.

Nevertheless, a small minority (2%, n. 6) of respondents expressed reservations about the UCU strikes. As mentioned earlier, these respondents held a distinct perspective on their academic roles, differing from the prevailing views among their colleagues. Despite reporting that their academic peers viewed academia as being demanding, my WCA respondents, with backgrounds in manual labour and challenging jobs, generally considered their academic workloads to be less strenuous compared with their previous manual jobs. This standpoint shaped how they conceptualised the nature of academic labour and their class identity as academics. Respondents recognised the mental strain of academia and the detrimental impact of casualisation. However, their prior physically demanding jobs, which had adverse effects on their physical health, framed their academic work as comparatively comfortable and privileged by comparison. This standpoint also shaped how they perceived the UCU strikes. While recognising the need for change, as many of my respondents were/had been on precarious contracts, all had some reservations about the strike. For instance, one respondent said: '*supporting the cause is important, but there are more effective ways to bring about lasting change in academia*'.

Discussions over the recent marking boycott revealed divisions among my WCAs on how best to leverage their resistance capital. Their perspective was interesting considering many respondents had grown up in families who were either involved with or supported the miners' strikes in the 1980s, the action that was symbiotic with the working-class struggle. This again highlighted the complexities within academia, where individuals' classed experiences could lead to varying interpretations of collective actions such as strikes. Although my respondents wanted to address inequities, they felt that at times, ways of referring to the MAB on social media were often excessive displays of privilege. This is encapsulated in the following comment:

> *I've lost count of how many wage slips were flashed on social media. They could have conveyed the salary reductions without the vulgar performative displays. Many working class people would be grateful to earn half of what those people have left following deductions.*

These perspectives reflected the complex navigation of resistance capital. While participants desired reform, some questioned whether the aggressive approach of the MAB was the most strategic path forward compared to other forms of collective actions that they felt '*would cripple the university system*'.

When questioned about how they would pursue systemic reforms instead of resorting to strike action, my WCA respondents proposed leveraging their collective power over knowledge production. Research by Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) observes that working-class people are also often 'sensitive to questions of power distribution in society" (p. 98) and may want a counter system of social order that opposes excessive hierarchy and exclusivity' (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988, p. 136). In all, 2% (n. 5) of my respondents claimed that ceasing all academic research was the way forward, remarking that such a radical strategy could exert far greater pressure on universities than walkouts or marking boycotts ever possibly could. As one respondent stated, '*It's simple – we down "tools" and halt our research output*'. This sentiment was echoed by another respondent:

> strikes will only briefly disrupt routines, but if you want change, real change, if you want the universities to come to the table, stop giving them [the universities] our intellectual capital.

Instead of engaging in what one of my respondents described as '*posing with wage slips*',[8] they argued that collective research abstention was a more strategic resistance tactic. This approach would have the bold aim of '*transformational change rather than mere temporary disruptions*'. By weaponising their knowledge production, the university's core money-making mission, one respondent suggested that they '*could expose the business model that depends on exploiting scholarship for profit*'. These WCAs advocated for a form of activism within academia that exposed and challenged the underlying systems and structures they perceived to be problematic.

Perspective Capital

Jackson-Cole (2019) presented this as a resource that enabled ethnic minority students of colour to contribute to academia. Hurst (2010) was an early proponent of perspective capital as she referred to the ability of working-class students to recognise multiple perspectives and ways of thinking about research relating to minoritised groups. This view was influenced by their own experiences of being 'left out of academic conversations'. Jackson-Cole utilised this perspective to explain how one respondent had a profound understanding of the

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[8]The respondent in question was discussing HE staff facing salary deductions in marking boycott: https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/jul/30/university-bosses-attack-staff-pay-protest-wages-queen-mary-university-london. 'Posing with wage slips referred to some academic staff protesting about these salary deductions by posting a picture of their wage slip that showed how much of their salary had been deducted due to the marking boycott'.

complexities surrounding the reluctance of some Gypsy Traveller communities towards child vaccinations. The respondent in question connected the historical persecution endured by Roma communities over centuries to their inherent fear of the authority of government agencies. She was also able to propose strategies to address the issue. Her contribution encapsulated the power of perspective capital, as she was able to draw upon her nuanced awareness of how some ethnic minorities have endured a history of harassment, surveillance, and abuse. This form of perspective capital emerged as a vital tool in enhancing academia's understanding of the complex dynamics surrounding marginalised communities. Hurst's (2010) respondents actively sought out courses that challenged their perspectives, such as international studies, African Diaspora literature, and transgender identity courses. They were unafraid to share their diverse viewpoints (p. 124).

The lived experiences of my respondents provided an example of perspective capital. As Dominic, a Senior Lecturer in Education at a post-1992 institution attested, '*My main accomplishment is that I can help someone understand more about the difficulties that poverty stricken families experience. It's a systematic issue, it doesn't represent a moral frailty*'. Amy, a Teaching Fellow in English at a Russell Group institution, explained that having come from a disadvantaged background, '*I see injustices and inequities that others dont*'. My respondent Mila, a Lecturer in the School of Education and Communities at a traditional institution, echoed this:

> *We bring understanding, we bring humour, we bring authentic news, we bring sadness sometimes…I believe, and I've done trauma informed training…that my past trauma means I can relate to lots of different things…So, I notice little changes, whereas the other people don't care.*

These excerpts demonstrated that WCAs enrich the academic environment by providing a deeper understanding of societal issues, greater sensitivity to injustices, and a unique capacity for empathy. Similar to the findings of Hurst (2010), my respondents discussed their advocacy for other academics facing inequalities, sharing instances where they offered pastoral support to female academics experiencing sexism, to ethnic minority colleagues who had encountered racism, as well as academics confronting issues of ableism, heterosexism, transgenderism and other forms of discrimination. As already highlighted, these perspectives can contribute to more inclusive and effective forms of teaching and support for students.

Sal, a Lecturer in Social Studies at a traditional institution felt that her working-class heritage also gave her '*insights into the reforms needed in higher education*'. Jamie, a Lecturer in History at a traditional institution, agreed: '*our ability to understand varied perspectives, built from navigating different worlds, can solve problems and reduce conflicts when applied collectively*'. These examples highlighted how WCAs exhibit multifaceted worldviews which empower them to see their background as an asset. My data also revealed that WCAs applied

perspective capital as a resource for broader societal improvement. Theo, a Politics Research Fellow[9] expanded on this:

> *Because our journeys have often been a lot less traditional we see institutions that are rooted in tradition…where everything is old fashioned. We can come in with our different perspectives and we can…change, modernise, awaken these institutions and be a force for good.*

These respondents felt that their different perspectives could serve as a catalyst for driving positive change, to challenge the status quo and contribute to societal improvement. My data revealed that some WCAs see themselves as agents of change, bringing in fresh perspectives and actively participating in the transformation of these institutions.

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[9]This respondent did not wish to give details of their institution.

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Chapter 7

'It doesn't have to be like this'

Keywords: CHANGE; recommendations; data; intersectionality; longitudinal

Key Findings

Definition and Measurement

A working class academic (WCA) identity is nuanced, with elements such as cultural background, financial challenges, and the subjective awareness of one's class identity within the academic context. Approximately 90% of respondents identified as WCAs, while the remaining 10 percent cited complex tensions around embracing this identity.

Classism

WCAs in higher education faced pervasive classism, manifesting in stereotypes, derogatory comments, and pressure to conform to elite/middle-class norms. Microaggressions, such as mockery of speech and dismissal of ideas, eroded their sense of belonging. Classist attitudes and biased evaluations hindered scholarly achievements and impeded promotion. The impact of these experiences included imposter syndrome, discomfort with differences, isolation, and strained relationships. The pressure to 'pass' exacerbated mental health issues, notably in the context of academic precarity.

Intersectionality

Classed intersections unveiled a range of complex themes and experiences:

Class and Gender: Gender disparities were evident in non-promotable tasks, with women shouldering more advising, mentoring, and committee work. Male WCAs were more likely to engage in prestigious activities, reflecting classed elements and differing perceptions of student difficulties.

Class and Ethnicity: Respondents emphasised dual disadvantages due to class and ethnicity. Ethnic minority WCAs of colour face potential discrimination and underrepresentation, especially at senior levels, leading to tokenism and microaggressions, revealing systemic racism and bias.

Class and Disability: The intersection of disability and class in academia presents challenges, with disabled individuals often in precarious, low-paid positions. Obtaining reasonable adjustments posed difficulties, as some feared it may impact upon job security. This led to the masking of needs which then contributed to burnout. Economic challenges also arose, hindering access to conferences and networking opportunities.

Class and Institution: At elite institutions, WCAs often concealed their working-class roots, but demonstrated a sense of class pride. In contrast, those at Russell Group institutions experienced tension between their backgrounds and their roles in elite/middle-class academic environments, leading to strained relationships with family and friends. Access to, and their experiences of, mentorship were difficult. Working at post-1992 institutions offered limited opportunities for research funding, which then contributed to disparities in research opportunities.

Class and Subject: Despite a strong sense of belonging, Social Science WCAs encountered difficulties. In Education, interdisciplinary barriers, resource access, and curriculum design challenges were discussed. Geography WCAs faced obstacles like equipment costs. Classical Studies noted accessibility issues and elitism, compounded by learning challenges. Physics WCAs highlighted networking, mentorship, and funding competitiveness impacting career progression.

Community Cultural Wealth

Across three phases, respondents expanded on Yosso's (2005) cultural wealth to demonstrate examples of WCA cultural wealth. In navigating the challenging terrain of academia, respondents demonstrated aspirational capital by maintaining academic ambitions despite facing exclusion. Concerns about mentorship scarcity led to a commitment to pay it forward, inspiring others and advocating positive change. Navigational capital was evident in their dedication to supporting students through various initiatives, though undervalued and met with resistance. Linguistic capital was strategically employed to empower students, utilising academic language and local accents for accessibility. Familial and social capital

played a crucial role, with academics turning to these networks for practical and emotional support. Through their resistance capital, respondents influenced academia through innovative pedagogy, rejecting imposter syndrome, supporting University and College Union (UCU) strikes, and proposing withholding intellectual capital to challenge exploitative models. They also employed perspective capital to provide distinct views and promote inclusion, positioning themselves as change makers.

Fostering Positive Change

Halfway through my interview with Yvonne, a Lecturer in Health and Social Care at a Russell Group institution, she poignantly remarked, '*It doesn't have to be like this, you know*'. I endorse Reyes (2022) plea for 'academic justice' – a system in which all members of the academy can fully participate in academic life, characterised by strong support and acknowledgement of the value and significance of our ideas, research, and backgrounds (p. 158). This chapter outlines the practical strategies and recommendations provided by my respondents in response to the following question:

> 'In an ideal world, if you were to offer recommendations to make a positive impact on the academic journey of working class academics, what actions would you suggest?'

This chapter makes six recommendations, based around a 'CHANGE' framework (Fig. 4).
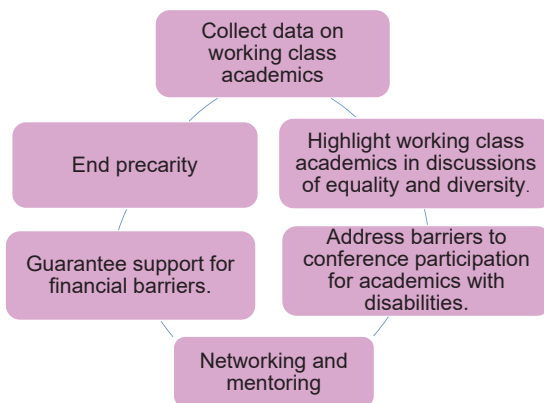

Fig. 4.   A CHANGE Framework.

Collect Data on Working-Class Academics

Friedman and Laurison (2019) highlighted that the first step towards meaningful change is accurate measurement. One reason why class statistics have not historically been collected in academia is because class/socioeconomic status is not a protected characteristic. The UK Government has worked together with the Bridge Group[1] to publish directions on how employers could measure class background in their workforce. This measurement included four main areas: type of schooling; free school meal eligibility; parental occupation; and whether parents had a degree qualification. While supportive of the need to collect data, some respondents raised concerns about where definitional 'lines' would be drawn. Determining the exact moment when an individual transitions out of the working class is complex and presents a challenge that could potentially undermine crucial discussions about class in academia.

Despite these concerns, a significant majority of respondents (79%, n. 195) were insistent that universities and other academic organisations, including Research Councils (such as the Economic and Social Research Council; Arts and Humanities Research Council; Innovate UK, etc.) and subject associations (such as the British Sociological Association; The British Psychological Society; Royal Academy of Engineering, etc.), should include a question in membership surveys, or other forms of data collection, regarding the social class of their staff. This would mirror the approach taken with other protected characteristics. Sally, who was currently pursuing her PhD in Social Sciences at a traditional institution, noted the need to map the numbers of WCAs not only within an institution, but also within various departments, and according to their seniority level and contract status. Such data could then serve as a foundation to ensure a greater representation of WCAs. For Sally, these data were vital as without it:

> *[there is] less impetus for institutions to do anything. Arguments for better class based representation in academia need to be made using evidence. If it was collected, we could then use this data to make these arguments.*

Sally argued that this data-driven approach could advocate for better representation, help identify areas of best practice and shape academia to be more inclusive and better aligned with the needs and experiences of working-class individuals.

Highlight Class in Discussions of Equality and Diversity

Over half of respondents felt that class was an equality and diversity issue in academia. For instance, Archie, a Sports Science PhD Student at a post-1992

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[1]https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/768371/Measuring_Socio-economic_Background_in_your_Workforce__recommended_measures_for_use_by_employers.pdf

institution, called for acknowledging class as a protected characteristic and urged universities to embrace their socioeconomic responsibilities.

> *Make class/socioeconomic background a protected characteristic in law, so that unis can be measured publicly on their success rates – not just for students – but for staff too*. [Archie PhD Student in Sports Science at a post-1992 institution]

This has also been raised in Friedman and Laurison's (2019) *The Class Ceiling* and discussed by Ricketts et al. (2022), who have both argued that the inclusion of social class as a protected characteristic in the Equality Act (2010) would create an immediate and clear legal mandate for initiatives to reduce class-based discrimination. Van Bueren (2021) compellingly argued that making class a protected characteristic, could prohibit class discrimination and help address socioeconomic biases. By formalising these commitments, universities would be held responsible for creating an environment where socioeconomic background is not a barrier to advancement. Institutions would then be expected to proactively tackle the challenges faced by WCAs.

At the time of writing,[2] England has not enacted the power to put in place a public sector duty regarding socioeconomic inequalities, a power exercised by both Scotland and Wales. Since 2018, Scottish public bodies making strategic decisions have been legally obligated to address inequalities resulting from socioeconomic disadvantage, known as the 'Fairer Scotland Duty' under Part 1 of the Equality Act. Similarly, Wales implemented the socioeconomic duty in 2021. Although not explicitly prohibiting discrimination based on socioeconomic grounds, the introduction of this duty is a potential first step towards addressing class discrimination. Socioeconomic disadvantage is defined as low income, low wealth, material deprivation, and area deprivation – measurable categories that could serve as a foundation for protecting social class under the Equality Act but might not necessarily support the protection of WCAs. Another approach involves measuring class origins based on our parents' occupations during our teenage years. The question arises: Can a WCA also be protected with this metric? Drawing a parallel from Taylor v Jaguar Land Rover Limited, where gender reassignment was deemed 'a spectrum', individuals at various points on the socioeconomic spectrum could qualify for protection. This approach broadens the legislation to encompass aspects of class making individuals susceptible to discrimination beyond a direct correlation with financial means (Murphy, 2022).

Alongside this, while universities allocate resources to departments responsible for diversity training, there is a noticeable absence of emphasis on social class:

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[2]October 2023.

I would insist that diversity and inclusion training include content relating to the characteristics of people who identify as working class – and make it clear that people…have real or perceived limitations that are not outwardly obvious. [Adrian, a Lecturer in Business Environment and Development at a Russell Group institution]

Ask universities to make public the steps they are taking to include class in diversity initiatives/hiring practices. [Ruby, a Research Associate at a Russell Group institution]

HEI's need to understand that they need to implement equity in the workplace to ensure working class academics can have the same opportunities to progress as upper and middle class ones… When it comes to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) initiatives its a case of not just talking the talk but walking the wall today not tomorrow. [Ari, who works in Arabic Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies[3] at a Russell Group institution]

Eliminate class pay gaps, more equity. [Demi, an Associate Pro Vice Chancellor (Education)]

Both Adrian and Ruby noted the importance of addressing class-based discrimination and promoting inclusivity in higher education institutions. Adrian talked about incorporating content related to working class characteristics into diversity and inclusion training so there is a better understanding of both the challenges and diversity among WCA. Whereas Ruby's statement emphasised transparency and accountability in combating class discrimination. She suggested that universities should signal a commitment to promote class inclusivity and equality within academia. Ari's quote further implied that there may be a gap between rhetoric and reality within some universities. It reflected an awareness of the need for change to address historical disparities in HE and promote a fair and inclusive environment.

Demi's quote from the previous paragraph referred to her belief that there are pay and promotion disparities linked to social class. Research by the Social Mobility Commission (2017), which used extensive data from the labour force survey (LFS) to examine access to the professions and the impact of socioeconomic background on earnings, found that those from working class backgrounds with professional positions earned, on average, £6,800 (17%) less each year compared to their more affluent colleagues. Even when individuals from working class backgrounds possessed the same educational qualifications, roles, and experience, they were paid an average of £2,242 (7%) less. The most significant class pay gaps were identified in the fields of finance (£13,713), medicine (£10,218), and IT (£4,736).

Individuals from working class backgrounds also encountered difficulties in career progression within professional roles and often did not achieve the same

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[3]The respondent didn't indicate his position in this discipline.

levels of earnings or success. The report, authored by Friedman et al. (2017) also suggests that individuals in professional employment from less privileged backgrounds may be less likely to seek pay raises, have limited access to networks and work opportunities, or, in some instances, refrain from seeking promotions. The 'class pay gap' could also be attributed to conscious or unconscious discrimination or subtle employment practices that result in 'cultural matching' within the workplace. I am not able to expand on these findings with data in relation to class-based pay gaps or hiring disparities in academia as this was a subject that was only raised by a comparatively small number of respondents (n. 12), with promotion being the most frequently mentioned concern (n. 9). Respondents who mentioned issues surrounding low pay and limited promotion in their interviews, also noted it was difficult for them to provide any concrete evidence that their class played a role in receiving lower pay or the obstacles they faced in relation to promotion and career advancement.

> *I certainly experience a pay gap due to my class background. I also feel I'm less likely to be promoted compared to my socially advantaged colleagues. I'd be a professor by now if I was posh, but how do I prove that?* [Eddie, a Senior Lecturer in Criminology at a traditional institution]

As all five respondents said similar comments, I intend to conduct research in this area. The focus being to identify if differences in promotion and exist and if they result from single or multiple factors, i.e. biased hiring practices, and/or systemic inequalities.

Alongside this, three-quarters of respondents felt that raising awareness of WCAs as an identity was a crucial step towards addressing the often overlooked challenges and contributions they bring to the academic landscape. For instance, Bernard, a Senior Lecturer in Networking at a traditional institution, felt that there needed to be '*less of a taboo in talking about it'*, i.e. social class in academia. Others, such as Isla, working in Education[4] at a post-1992 institution, felt that open conversations about class dynamics within academia were essential to enable WCAs to feel it is appropriate and '*to feel more comfortable to call themselves working class, and to address the challenges we face'*. Respondents also perceived there to be a pressing need to acknowledge that as working class people may have experienced disadvantages in various social and educational contexts, they may also have had varying levels of familiarity with elite forms of capital (Reay et al., 2009), but still possess other forms of cultural wealth (Crew, 2020, 2021, 2022; Jackson-Cole, 2019). This recognition can ensure that pathways to success are equally accessible, regardless of one's background. Embedding this understanding into institutional systems removes assumptions about who can be an academic, eliminates the need for constant explanations and allows individuals

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[4]When asked what is your title including the subject do you teach/conduct research in? Isla said 'Education'.

to focus on their scholarly contributions. For instance, Orla, a Tutor of Economic and Social History at a Russell Group institution highlighted the need to '*acknowledge that class continues to impact career progression in HE and take steps to challenge unconscious bias*'. To mitigate biases, acknowledging their existence is crucial. Tony, a Lecturer in English Literature at a traditional institution, goes further and points out that universities should take pride in and, celebrate the valuable contributions and diverse perspectives their WCAs bring to the academic community.

Address Barriers to Conferences for WCAs with Disabilities

While focusing primarily on class, this book also delved into examining intersecting forms of disadvantage, such as disability. The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a rapid shift to virtual events, revealing their numerous benefits, including eliminating travel requirements for both attendees and speakers. Respondents provided valuable recommendations for fostering disability-inclusive conferences. Suggestions included:

1. **Comprehensive Accessibility Planning:** Event organisers must prioritise comprehensive accessibility, providing transport allowances for carers, wheelchair access, captioning, microphones, signers, slide copies, dietary considerations, and accessible restrooms. This ensures inclusivity without making individuals with disabilities feel singled out.
2. **Options for Crowds and Streaming:** To accommodate those with anxiety or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in crowds, events should consider having separate rooms where participants can choose based on their comfort levels.
3. **Consider accessibility right from the start when planning your event:** Proactively market your event as accessible by securing services like live captioning and sign language interpretation in advance. Include dedicated sections in registration forms for attendees to communicate necessary adjustments and provide contact details for direct discussions. Send accessibility reminders in email confirmations and joining instructions to prioritise participants' needs.
4. **Consultation and Inclusivity:** Event organisers should consult participants with disabilities on how to improve access and actively involve them in the planning process. This should also include granting carers free attendance if necessary and ensuring accessible venues and facilities.
5. **Accessible Accommodation:** For overnight events or retreats, accommodations should be fully wheelchair accessible and consider various disability needs. Event organisers must proactively seek venues that are disability friendly and inquire about accessibility features.
6. **Financial Support:** Funding applications and bursaries should factor in the additional expenses that participants with disabilities may incur, including those related to accessibility and care.
7. **Variety of Needs:** Recognise that disabilities vary greatly, and a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't suffice. Event organisers should be flexible and adaptable in accommodating a range of disability-related needs.

These recommendations aim to create a more inclusive and accessible environment for academics with disabilities in the literary and writing community, ensuring that their diverse needs are met, and they can participate fully in such events.

Networking and Mentoring Opportunities

Returning to a broad focus on WCAs, they also expressed a strong desire for increased networking opportunities and more visible and accessible institutional support networks specifically designed for WCAs. These institutional networks could provide a space for connecting, sharing experiences, and seeking advice within a community that understands the challenges they face. Respondents referred to a need for these networks to be geographically distributed, ensuring that WCAs from all regions could access and benefit from them.

There was also an urgent call for support with mentoring among most of my WCAs, the suggestion being that this could foster a more supportive academic landscape:

> *There needs to be knowledge sharing and mentoring among working class academics.* [Lily, a Senior Research Associate in Public Health at a traditional institution]

> *Increased support, awareness, Mentors? Until I was accepted onto a programme I was naive and didn't realise where to go for support etc. I didn't know there were websites to guide someone to write a research proposal. I feel that working class academics need support to navigate the academic system.* [Willow, a PhD Student in Applied Social Sciences at a post-1992 institution]

> *Personally, I have benefitted from good academic mentoring. I would suggest this ought to be more formalised in academia.* [Sebastian, in Economics[5] at a post-1992 institution]

Mentoring was seen as a means to bridge the gap between the academic system and those from working class backgrounds, offering vital support in navigating the complexities of research proposals, program applications, and career progression. The value of mentors who share similar lived experiences is highlighted, reflecting the power of role models in providing guidance and inspiration. While some have personally reaped the benefits of effective academic mentoring, the collective plea was for a more formalised and comprehensive approach to mentoring, not only for WCAs but also for students. Overall, respondents acknowledged the potential of mentorship to propel positive change within the academic community.

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[5]When asked what is your title including the subject do you teach/conduct research in, Sebastian said Economics.

Respondents felt that mentorship within academia needed to extend beyond a mere supportive 'presence'. Useful mentorship hinges upon the need for mentors who possess a profound understanding of the unique challenges faced by WCAs. An example of this is the Network for Working Class Classicists,[6] a network set up to provide support for working class people engaged in the study, work, or exploration of the Classics. The network's primary emphasis is on fostering mutual encouragement, offering practical assistance, and advocating for the inclusion of class-related issues within the field of Classics. Returning to my respondent's, the consensus was that there was the necessity for mentors who comprehended the financial and societal limitations that WCAs frequently experience.

> *I just don't know what I'm supposed to know…. someone…understanding of my background…because I feel like just sometimes, it's just ignored. For example, one of my supervisors, she suggested with the PhD, I could even have a reading retreat, like go to Italy for a month, and I thought, oh, my going to Italy for a month on a PhD salary, I don't have the money to just eat often. And I think it's just sometimes even though your supervisors are so lovely and so helpful. In terms of my work, I feel like I could do with someone to just show me the ropes a little bit more*. [Leanna, a PhD in Psychology at a Russell Group institution]

Leanne's quotation demonstrates the importance of having a mentor who understands the realities of the mentee's circumstances. For instance, while the suggestion may be well-intentioned, the affordability of a WCA, especially for someone in the early stages of their career, engaging in a reading retreat in Italy is not feasible. This illustrates the need for a mentor who is sensitive to the financial constraints faced by those from similar backgrounds. Moreover, the desire for a mentor who can 'show the ropes' takes on added significance within the context of academia. Mentoring is especially important to WCA because as Rickett and Morris (2021), alongside my own findings, revealed, WCAs can often undertake admin roles that focus on student support, tasks which tend to be unrewarded via promotions processes. As other respondents mentioned, securing research funding could be particularly challenging for WCAs at post-1992 institutions due to competition and limited institutional support, further guidance would be helpful for these academics, and perhaps even those from other types of institutions.

Guarantee Financial Support

Proposing that universities guarantee financial support for WCAs may seem like a significant request. However, my respondents consistently emphasised that without such support, their academic progression beyond a degree qualification

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[6]https://www.workingclassclassics.uk/

would have been challenging, if not impossible. Archie, a PhD student in Sports Science at a post-1992 institution felt so disillusioned with academia that he suggested we should be '*knocking it all down and start again: it is built for elite life – it is exclusionary'*. Respondents such as Archie and Evelyn, a PhD candidate in Translation Studies at a traditional institution, advocated for increased financial support for PhD students, particularly for those who also have caregiving responsibilities, as highlighted by Evelyn. Anya, who was pursuing her PhD in Legal Education at a traditional institution, expressed a strong belief in the idea that all PhD students should be recognised as employees of the university. She emphasised that the work carried out by PhD students, including teaching and admin responsibilities, warranted this employment status, aligning with the notion that their contributions are integral to the functioning of the academic institution. In 2020, the UCU adopted a policy to campaign for postgraduate researchers (PGRs) to be recognised as members of staff. The idea is that PhD students should receive legal protection akin to that of employees, encompassing the right to participate in labour actions through a trade union. Acknowledging research as a form of labour would signify a significant cultural transformation within the university sector.

A further financial issue raised by a small number (n. 12) of respondents related to the expectation that students should work without financial compensation. Bev, who was pursuing her PhD in Sociology at a post-1992 institution, discussed the prevalent assumption that academics should write up research papers and books during what Bev described as 'spare moments'. This prevailing academic cultural norm often overlooked the significant time and effort required for these academic pursuits. It also fails to uphold the principle of fair compensation that is common in other professional domains. Additionally, this expectation does not consider that not all academics have the financial capacity and privilege to work in this manner. I'm reminded of two of my respondents, discussed in Crew (2020), who were on precarious contracts. At the time of our interview, Amy, a Teaching Fellow in English at a Russell Group institution, was concurrently juggling three part-time jobs while pursuing her PhD. This arrangement, aimed at covering her living expenses left her with limited time to dedicate to writing the essential research papers that could enhance her prospects of securing academic employment. Simultaneously, she lacked the financial means to forgo those jobs and, instead, engage in unpaid work to produce journal articles. Clara, a Lecturer in Geography at a red brick institution, had been in a similar situation when she completed her PhD:

> *My friends chilled out [after completing their PhD], whilst I was like… shit what am I going to do?…I could hold out for another year, two years if I was from another background…I could get my books out, a couple more papers and go for a [prestigious] lectureship, but because I need to have something now, I am calling up [unnamed university], asking if you still have work for me. So, yeah, it changes your opportunities.* [added by author]

These examples by Bev, Amy, and Clara, illuminate the financial implications ECRs face when writing research papers. Amy's situation illustrates the financial strain that many early career researchers (ECRs) face, where the ability to do unpaid academic work is both a luxury and a privilege. Clara highlighted the long-term impact of these financial constraints, where WCAs often need to prioritise short-term stability over the pursuit of elite academic positions which may demand unpaid work to attain the necessary credentials.

The financial challenges faced by WCAs, particularly those who are ECRs, become more pronounced when it comes to participating in academic conferences. These events incur substantial expenses, necessitating academics to have access to significant economic resources. Many academics have access to institutional funding that covers the financial cost of conferences, however, many others do not. The financial burden associated with multi-day conferences, i.e. expenses such as registration, accommodation, travel, and sustenance alone can easily exceed £1000. Eddie, a Senior Lecturer in Criminology at a traditional institution, emphasised that certain conferences are held in European or US locations, necessitating air travel. Attendees must also consider factors like currency exchange rates and the potential expenses associated with obtaining visas for these international events. Jade, a Teaching Assistant in Classics at an Elite institution noted that many conferences required that you stay at the specific, often expensive hotel where the conference is being held. While reasonably priced accommodation is available, it is typically situated much further away, adding on more travel time and expense. While some conferences include meals in their registration fees, others don't, which can consequently raise the overall cost. Additionally, Petra, a Lecturer in Human Geography at a traditional institution highlighted that '*if you have specific dietary requirements due to a disability, allergy, or medical condition, these expenses will likely be your own responsibility*'. For those with dependents, such as children, providing for their care during your absence is another financial factor to consider. STEM-related events are often even more expensive. Alongside this, the cumulative costs of attending multiple conferences in a year can be substantial.

The expenses associated with attending conferences can pose a significant challenge for WCAs, who lack institutional funding or stable academic positions, even WCAs with funding may find it difficult. For example, Mary: PhD Student in Economics at a post-1992 institution, and Seb[7] both emphasised how the upfront costs of conferences can result in financial hardship:

> *I do get reimbursed but the initial outlay of booking a conference is something that puts me in financial hardship.* [Mary]

> '*Your supervisor says: There's this great thing coming up that you should attend. It's going to be crucial*', '*Oh yeah, absolutely*'. '*It's going to cost you 250 pounds*'. *I don't have 250 pounds, I don't have 50 pounds, I don't have rent for this month.* [Seb] (both cited in Crew, 2020, p. 61)

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[7]Seb did not feel comfortable giving details of his institution or subject area.

There is a stark reality that for many WCAs, conference attendance, which is something that is seen as essential for academic development and their academic CV, is financially unfeasible. Fixed-term contract holders like Emily, a Senior Lecturer in Criminology at a post-1992 institution, and Jade, a Teaching Assistant in Classics at an Elite institution, experience even greater challenges due to their academic precarity. Free or low-cost one-day conferences become the pragmatic choices, although these events are often scarce or more easily accessible to respondents living in London or major cities, where academic association headquarters are typically concentrated. My respondents in Wales (outside of Cardiff); in Scotland (outside of Edinburgh and Glasgow) and in Republic of Ireland (outside of Dublin) reported having fewer opportunities to attend free conferences.

Conference grants are presented as being the solution, as these offer free or subsidised registration, accommodation, and travel. However, such grants are highly competitive and frequently come with specific requirements, like presenting a paper or being a member of the research association associated with the conference – although the latter, once more, can present challenges for financially constrained individuals. When WCAs do meet these criteria, applicants applying for conference grants need to demonstrate their value for money, which again is often particularly challenging for financially disadvantaged ECRs with limited academic experience. One in five respondents highlighted the difficulties they encountered when trying to obtain conference grants. Each respondent expressed the challenge of '*marketing myself*', as noted by Lucas, a Senior Lecturer in Health at a traditional institution, in their grant applications – a skill that elite/middle-class groups often find less problematic. Research conducted by Towers (2008) revealed a gender bias in certain conferences, indicating that women were less likely to be chosen as presenters compared to their male counterparts. Towers attributed this inequity to unconscious gender bias, as the selection of conference presenters took place in closed-door meetings. While my own respondents acknowledged the presence of gendered biases, over half of them believed that the class-based composition of selection committees, along with the influence of unconscious bias, might unintentionally favour candidates from more privileged backgrounds.

Other respondents referred to the smaller academic groups set up within professional societies, noting that while they provided useful networking opportunities, they also demanded unpaid labour from ECRs, thereby further disadvantaging my WCAs without economic capital. Additionally, my respondents on precarious contracts talked of having to juggle multiple contracts to supplement their income, which meant they were unable to facilitate conferences unpaid. This disparity in access to networking opportunities underscores the need for financial support to level the playing field for WCA seeking to engage with the academic community.

There was an urgent plea from many of my respondents, including Orla, that there needed to be a reform of the cumbersome reimbursement and expense systems. The demand is that all funding should be readily accessible in advance, rather than requiring individuals to bear these costs for professional obligations.

> *Get rid of reimbursement/lengthy expenses systems! All funding should be available in advance. Staff should not have to pay out of pocket for professional lunches (that they are required to take guests to) and should not have to wait an excessive amount of time to be reimbursed.* [Orla, a Tutor of Economic and Social History at a Russell Group institution]

These reflections demonstrate the deeply rooted financial challenges faced by WCAs, revealing a stark gap between institutional rhetoric and the practical support available.

Bev, a Sociology PhD Student at a post-1992 institution, provided a compelling account of the meticulous scrutiny she underwent regarding her personal expenses when applying for financial support from the university:

> *I think for me and other early career researchers who I've spoken to who are also really hard up and not from backgrounds where they've got any parental financial support. That is the biggest thing. Universities come out with all those wellbeing things, come and do yoga with us come and do mindfulness with us. Or, if you're struggling come and talk to financial services, they can help you. In reality, they don't, because I've tried, and they don't give you any money. They tell you that you shouldn't have spent your money. That's basically the gist of it. They endlessly ask you what you spend your money on, and you have to take bank statements in and if you redact any of it, they shout at you, and you think OK, this is not OK.*

Bev went on to give the comparative example of one research foundation's provisions for researchers in the Netherlands, which emphasised the potential for tailored financial support based on personal circumstances. This demonstrates that there is a more compassionate and adaptable approach to financial aid. The overarching theme that emerged from my conversations with my WCA respondents is the compelling need for comprehensive and proactive financial support mechanisms that recognise and address the unique challenges and financial constraints faced by WCAs.

Anya, a PhD student in Legal Education at a traditional institution, emphasised that PhD students should be recognised as employees of the university, especially given their vast contributions to research and publications. She also underlined the importance of adequate financial support, fair stipends, and benefits for researchers, stressing that financial constraints hinder equal participation and networking opportunities. Whereas Ivy, a Research Fellow in Health Services at a traditional institution, talked about the allocation of university resources and reported that volunteer initiatives needed to be more inclusive, which would allow all staff members to contribute without financial setbacks. In addition, Ivy touched on the visibility of scientists on platforms like Instagram and Twitter, cautioning that while these platforms seem diverse, it's essential to address the actual representation within academic settings.

My WCA respondents noted the importance of addressing the financial barriers that hinder the entry of working-class individuals into academia. As Adam, a Senior Lecturer in Sociology said:

> *I funded both my masters and PhD myself through working in retail, then later teaching, but with the increase in fees and more general increase in the cost of living, I don't think that is as possible. Indeed, if I were starting my PGT studies now could I afford it? Maybe my masters, but not my PhD. I wouldn't be an academic now due to my class background.*

This experience of self-funding, through retail work and teaching, reveals the uphill battle that many WCAs face. The rising costs of education and living expenses further exacerbate this challenge, potentially deterring talented individuals from pursuing advanced academic paths. The prospect of starting postgraduate studies now is met with uncertainty regarding affordability. Respondents advocated for the expansion of funding opportunities that are specifically tailored to individuals from working-class backgrounds. This includes a call for funded PhD positions and grants, aimed not only at ensuring accessibility but also at dismantling the 'leaky pipeline' that results in many working-class individuals leaving academia due to financial barriers. Listening to the experiences of my WCAs from post-1992 institutions, such as Emily, a Senior Lecturer in Criminology at a post-1992 institution, as they discussed the challenges they faced when seeking funding from various research councils, it became evident that immediate action is required to dismantle the implicit biases that put post-1992 academics at a disadvantage during the funding application process. Emily's statement, '*I'm ignored because of my class and where I do my research*' echoes the sentiments of numerous others at such institutions. These changes are essential to foster a more equitable academic landscape, one that nurtures the talents of all aspiring scholars, regardless of their class and institutional background.

End Precarity

All but two respondents on precarious contracts, and a small number of respondents who were not, at the time of the interview or when completing the survey, experiencing casualisation felt that addressing academic precarity was imperative for creating a more equitable and stable environment within academia. Raven, a Research Associate in Palliative Care at a Russel Group institution, voiced the concerns of many WCAs who were employed in a precarious manner:

> *Precarious employment is endemic to all academics…, however, I feel that the stress and anxieties of precarious employment are heightened for working class academics. Whereas others have the financial capital and often family support that can help tide them over in between contracts, these do not exist for me. If I do not have a job, I cannot pay the bills or rent. This puts me…in a constant and*

> *circular state of anxiety where time and energy is spent on worrying and trying to find the next source of funding and/or employment, completely stifling creativity and morale.*

Molly, a Lecturer in Health Psychology at a Russell Group institution also noted that '*not all of us have family money/mortgage free properties/other sources of wealth we can draw on if we're not working*!' My WCA respondents also felt that we should abolish precarious employment as these insecure contracts meant that we were losing talented researchers and academics. Elijah, a Postdoctoral Research Associate in Historical Geography at a traditional institution talked of making '*the active choice not to pursue any further academic opportunities in advance of my current contract expiring in June*'. This is not unusual as a growing number of my respondents were not sure 'how they would keep going'.

Respondents suggested a multifaceted approach to address precarity. Kerry, a Research Associate in modern Languages and Linguistics at a Russell Group institution proposed that universities should provide permanent, full-time research contracts that offered flexibility between different projects as a potential solution to the ever-fluctuating landscape of academic employment. This approach could alleviate the burden of juggling multiple short-term contracts and create a more predictable career trajectory. This was suggested by one in eight respondents. However, Sir Anton Muscatelli, the vice Chancellor at Glasgow University observed that 'there is no way any university could guarantee a completely open-ended contract without having funding that is more than 12 or 24 months, it just can't work. We would have to paradoxically shrink the size of our research base which would not be helpful either. Instead, he pointed to the role of public funding bodies to extend their funding horizons beyond the short term (Times Higher Education, 2022). The UCU supports stable work arrangements in universities, and as such has advocated that research funding agencies should make secure employment a grant condition. This is a potential strategy to tackle academic precarity as research funders hold significant influence in academia, and by tying funding to secure work arrangements, they incentivise universities to take action. This can have a direct and substantial impact on reducing casualisation. However, its effectiveness could be enhanced if universities also consider another UCU recommendation that awarding bodies like Athena Swan and Investors in people should assess how casualisation impacts upon institutions' goals and objectives. This is a valuable proposal as it encourages institutions to consider the broader consequences of casualisation. The effectiveness will depend on whether these evaluations lead to concrete actions to reduce precarity.

A further recommendation from the UCU is that the Office for Students should mandate universities to disclose the proportion of classroom teaching hours delivered by hourly paid staff, encompassing lectures, seminars, demonstrations, tutorials, and fieldwork. Mandating universities to disclose the number of teaching hours delivered by hourly paid staff could be a positive step as it encourages transparency and accountability regarding casualisation in academia. However, the effectiveness depends on how strictly this mandate is enforced and whether it leads to meaningful changes in employment practices.

Recommendations for Further Research

There are three important research gaps that need to be addressed:

1. **Lack of data:** Many studies are based on small, localised samples, and there remains limited information on the experiences of WCAs in different countries and regions. There is also a significant lack of quantitative data on the representation of WCAs across institutions, disciplines, and intersecting characteristics.
2. **Intersectionality:** Future research should adopt an intersectional lens to delve into the complex interplay of identities in shaping the experiences of WCAs.
3. **Longitudinal studies:** Prioritising longitudinal research will provide invaluable insights into the nature of challenges faced by WCAs at various career stages.

Concluding Thoughts

In academia, a striking paradox endures. While efforts have been made to confront and address barriers associated with gender, ethnicity, and disability, there remains a disturbing 'structured silence' (Skeggs, 1997) surrounding class-based privilege. More evidence is needed on the ability of dominant classes to control the narrative. The 'hostile ignorance' of some, more privileged peers (Ferguson & Lareau, 2021, p. 1) has perpetuated the marginalisation of WCAs and the important perspectives that they bring to the academy. However, with academic precarity becoming increasingly common, academia risks losing working-class voices in the near future unless proactive measures are taken to address this issue (Clare, 2020).

I speak directly here to my peers who benefit from class-based privileges within academia and remind them that your working class colleagues have supported you in confronting sexism, racism, ableism, and other forms of discrimination. I urge you to actively support your WCA colleagues in dismantling classism within our universities. Ways forward include:

*   **Educate yourself** about the issue. Read about the experiences of disadvantaged students and their academic colleagues and familiarise yourself with the various forms of class-based discrimination they may encounter.
*   **Listen** to the experiences of disadvantaged students and academics. Provide platforms for them to share their stories and perspectives and listen without interruption or judgement.
*   **Believe** the experiences of disadvantaged students and academics. When they tell you about the discrimination they have faced, don't dismiss their experiences, or try to explain them away.
*   **Build relationships** with disadvantaged students and academics. Get to know them as people, and build relationships based on mutual respect and understanding.
*   **Advocate for change**. Use your privilege to speak out against class-based discrimination and to centre the voices of WCAs. Advocate for policies and practices that will create a more equitable university environment.

To my fellow WCAs, this book has served to illuminate the imperative for informed strategies and robust support systems that can lead to a more inclusive and equitable higher education landscape. Your voices, often drowned out by the echoes of privilege, can resonate as pivotal agents of change. After all, 'what's the point of being an academic if you're not critical?' (Bhopal, 2023). I've been so very fortunate to have 'found' the scholarship of WCAs as your words and actions have kept me warm when academia has been icy. My call for transformation is not a mere suggestion; it is an impassioned plea to dismantle barriers, dissolve silences, and to take control of our own narrative. '*It doesn't have to be like this…*'.

Appendix

Appendix 1

This study utilised mixed methods research, an approach whereby researchers collect and analyse both quantitative and qualitative data within the same study. This enables researchers to have a panoramic view of their study, observing the data through diverse research lenses (Shorten & Smith, 2017, p. 74). This study had four phases as shown in Fig. 5.
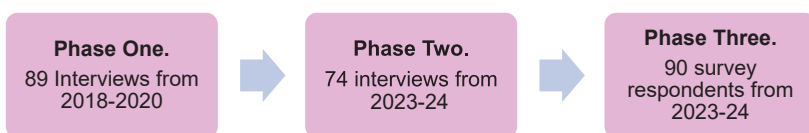
Fig. 5   The Research Process.

Phase One: First Stage of Interviews

Phase One of the research involved conducting 89 semi-structured interviews, in 2018–2019. The interviews lasted from 40 to 120 minutes. Both Phases One and Two used a qualitative interview approach to uncovering the variety of experiences and perspectives of my WCA respondents. Qualitative approaches are often unfairly critiqued as lacking rigour and being biased, although as Anderson (2010) notes, qualitative research is in-depth, valid, and reliable paradigm. A qualitative approach also empowers respondents to share their stories. Respondents were recruited using three methods: via Twitter, now known as 'X'; at conferences and through referrals from other academics. Recruiting via 'X', and at conferences are both useful recruitment strategies because they enable you to broadly target individuals according to the specific areas of interest, academic fields, or institutions you wish to engage with. It was important to be mindful of the potential for these approaches to create echo chambers.[1] Data from these interviews have since been reported in my first book on the topic, *Higher Education and Working-Class Academics: Precarity and Diversity in Academia.*[2] Where appropriate they will be referred too, and expanded upon, in this text.

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[1]Something I addressed in Phase Three.
[2]Also reported in Crew (2021). Navigating academia as a working-class academic. *Journal of Working-Class Studies*, *6*(2), 50–64.

Phase Two: Second Stage of Interviews

In Phase Two, I conducted 74 semi-structured interviews, from 2021 to 2023. Interviews again lasted between 40 and 120 minutes. This phase had two aims – to expand on the intersectional findings from Phase One, and to expand upon examples of Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth. This phase also asked respondents for recommendations on how to transform the WCA experience. As with Phase One, interviews were conducted online as respondents were from across the UK and at times there were 'lockdowns' due to COVID-19. Online data collection can enhance accessibility by eliminating geographical constraints. This was ideal as I was able to interview people from all across the UK. While participation poses challenges for those without access to video conferencing applications, this wasn't an issue for my academic respondents. Establishing rapport with respondents was not challenging, given our shared backgrounds. Mellor et al. (2014) emphasise that having a similar class background can be beneficial in interview settings. My interviews often resembled friendly conversations, and I still feel the emotional impact of my respondents sharing their challenging experiences and discussing the assets they possessed. This shared experience created a powerful sense of solidarity, which, in turn, fostered trust and openness. My respondents may have felt more at ease sharing their authentic feelings with someone like myself who shared their cultural background.

Phase Three: Survey

In Phase Three, a survey methodology was employed to mitigate potential researcher bias. Leveraging my cultural heritage proved advantageous in recruiting respondents and conducting interviews, as indicated by Patel et al. (2003). Nevertheless, I wanted to ensure that my personal experiences did not unduly impact the data collection process. Despite amassing approximately 1,600 pages of interview data, I chose to gather additional survey data to corroborate the themes I had identified. Notably, there were some distinctions between the two methods. While the interviews yielded rich, detailed personal narratives, survey participants provided more concise examples which spanned a wider range of topics. Although less elaborate, the survey data conveyed valuable insights. Notably, my role as the interviewer appeared to facilitate rather than unduly influence respondents' narratives. However, as will be discussed on page 17, further data analysis revealed that survey participants were more inclined to critique the term WCA.

Recruiting Respondents

This study was advertised on the social media platform called 'X', previously known as 'Twitter', and at various academic conferences. I also received referrals from respondents who had already taken part in the research. As there is no

commonly agreed definition of WCAs, when selecting respondents, I required that they:

1. self-define[3] as a 'working-class academic[4]';
2. currently/worked in the last 6 months at a UK university.

The survey was also advertised on the social media platform 'X', in the same manner, with a focus on self-definition. I collected the views of a diverse range of WCAs including respondents from various subject areas and types of institutions and, in a variety of academic roles: from Professors to Research and Teaching Fellows, Senior Lecturers, Lecturers, early career researchers (ECRs), and PhD students.

The respondents also include three people who, at the time of the research, were working in professional and support services (PSS). I include these narratives as their lived experience are often ignored in academia as they 'exist somewhere in the middle'. A place that is familiar to WCAs (Ardoin & martinez, 2019, p. 79) but for different reasons. Upcoming research by both Jess Pilgram Brown and Darren Flynn, alongside the aforementioned, Ardoin and martinez (2019) should be consulted for a more comprehensive understanding of those working in PSS. Although the experiences of PSS respondents differed from those with teaching and research responsibilities, they similarly expressed the view that they did not 'fit into' the elite arena of academia. June, one of my PSS respondents, succinctly described it as follows: '*Even if you have a well paid, high status job in academia, if you sound or "act" working class, you won't quite fit in, regardless of your job title*'. We will revisit the theme of 'assimilation' across the next two chapters.

Phase Four: Analysing Labour Force Survey Data

Friedman and Laurison (2019) analysis of the Labour Force Survey (LFS) indicated that individuals from privileged backgrounds in elite occupations in higher managerial and professional roles earn, on average, 16% more than their colleagues from working-class backgrounds. Notably, this income disparity persists even when comparing individuals with identical educational attainment, occupational roles, and levels of experience. They also found that 14% of academic respondents were from a working-class background. I applied for seed funding within my institution[5] to analyse available LFS data on this subject.

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[3]Like Leeb (2004), self-definition was employed strategically as it was a means to allow respondents to break what the silence about what being working class 'feels' like for an academic. I also did not feel it was appropriate for me to 'judge' who is working class and who is not.

[4]I will discuss what is meant by this term later in the paragraph.

[5]Thank you to Rebecca Linnett for her fantastic work analysing the LFS.

After discussing the scope of the project and identifying WCA in the dataset, Rebecca Linnett, the Research Assistant for this phase of the study, analysed the LFS in depth to provide overall numbers of WCA, as well as statistical data on intersections such as gender, ethnicity, and disability. These will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Details of Respondents

Respondents' class backgrounds were assessed using four approaches derived from Social Mobility Commission guidelines:

- Parental occupations (this can gauge socioeconomic origins).
- Type of school attended (this can potentially signal economic and cultural advantage/disadvantage).
- Eligibility for free school meals (FSM) (this can indicate economic deprivation).
- Highest parental qualifications (this can reflect educational advantage).

Parental occupation is the most accurate measure available to assess socio-economic background. It is also widely used throughout academia. Asking respondents about the type of school attended is a common measure of advantage, given the high proportion of independent school-educated individuals at top universities and across elite professions. Receipt of FSM is another example of how disadvantage is compared, and there is good evidence of the enduring importance of parental qualifications on life outcomes (Social Mobility Commission, 2021). Additionally, I asked my respondents to define their own class identity, specifically by framing the research invitations in a way that invited those who considered themselves to be WCA to participate.[6] Finally, during interviews and surveys, I observed language, references, and dispositions that displayed evidence of working-class upbringings. Many descriptions aligned with research on working-class identity and culture. Combining respondents' background details with inductive observation of class markers (discussed in Chapter Two) provided a rich understanding of their social class status from different vantage points.

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[6]Some participants reached out, prior to taking part in the research, to seek clarification on whether I considered them to be working class. I would always say to respondents that it wasn't for me to define whether they are/were working class or not, and that we could discuss issues such as this as part of the interview, if they wished to take part.

Appendix 2

The following is the analysis procedure Rebecca Linnett used when analysing the LFS.

1. Check whether the dataset has the following variables and check that they contain the data expected:
    > AGE
    > DISEA (disability)
    > ETHUKEUL (ethnicity)
    > NSECM10/NSECM20 depending on year (occupations, incl. FT student)
       • Check whether variable type needs changing to *Numeric*
    > SECTRO03 (sector, incl. university)
    > SEX
    > SMEARNER (main earner in household @ age 14)
    > SMSOC103/SMSOC203 depending on year (3-digit parental occupation)
       • Check whether variable type needs changing to Numeric and measure needs changing to Scale.
    > SOC10M/SOC20M depending on year (2111.0 to 2115.0, 2119.0, 2311.0)
2. Recode the three-digit parental occupation codes contained in **SMSOC103/ SMSOC203** into a new variable (**NS_SEC**) representing the equivalent NS-SEC class.
3. Create a dummy variable called **FT_Student** based on **NSECM10/NSECM20** which codes whether or not the respondent is a full-time student. Label values as
4. 0.00 = Not a student and 1.00 = Full-time student.
5. Filter dataset (this needs to be done each time the dataset is reopened) to only include academics (SOC10M/SOC20M = 2111.0 to 2115.0 or 2119.0 or 2311.0), only include those working within the university sector (SECTRO03 = 5.0), exclude people aged under 23 or over 69 (**AGE**) and exclude people who are in full-time education (**FT_Student** = 0.0).
6. Check the output from the previous step to check this has worked:
    > SOC10M/SOC20M (should be scientists, science professionals & HE teaching professionals only)
    > SECTRO03 (should be University only)
    > AGE (should be 23–69)
    > FT_Student (should be not a full-time student)
7. Filter dataset to only include NS-SEC Classes 6 and 7 and SMEARNER = 5.0 (no earners in household when respondent was age 14). Syntax will re-run earlier filters and then run descriptives for variables of interest (SMEARNER, NS_SEC, SEX, ETHUKEUL, DISEA).
    > **4a – Results descriptives 2010.sps** (2014–2020 datasets)
    > **4b – Results descriptives 2020.sps** (2021–2022 datasets)

Appendix 3

Table 7. Ethnicity of Academics from Working-Class Backgrounds in UK LFS, 2014–2022.

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
White	19 (95.0)	35 (89.7)	19 (90.5)	24 (96.0)	19 (90.5)	17 (94.4)	32 (88.9)	21 (87.5)	32 (88.9)
Mixed/multiple groups	1 (5.0)	–	1 (4.8)	–	–	–	1 (2.8)	2 (8.3)	1 (2.8)
Indian	–	2 (5.1)	–	1 (4.0)	–	–	–	1 (4.2)	–
Pakistani	–	–	1 (4.8)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Chinese	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1 (2.8)
Other Asian background	–	–	–	–	–	–	1 (2.8)	–	–
Black/African/ Caribbean	–	–	–	–	1 (4.8)	1 (5.6)	1 (2.8)	–	1 (2.8)
Other	–	2 (5.1)	–	–	1 (4.8)	–	1 (2.8)	–	1 (2.8)

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