

The impact of symbolic violence on the perceived choices of trainee primary school teachers: a poetic perspective¹

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Abstract

This chapter explores the theme of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2001; Thapar-Björkert *et al.*, 2016), a central theme in my doctoral thesis.

My thesis looked at the experiences of a group of female undergraduate students in their first year of Initial Teacher Education in Primary Education at the university where I teach. I explored the perceived choices my participants made in terms of choosing to become primary school teachers, arguing that symbolic violence is a controlling force in society so powerful and insidious that 'individuals do not question their own role in the production and reproduction of domination and subordination' (Thapar-Björkert *et al.*, 2016, p.9). Through class and gender primary school teaching has insidiously presented itself to be a *suitable profession* for young women.

I position myself as a woman from working-class origins who made the choice to become a primary school teacher and who has recognised the impact of symbolic violence. As a result, some of the chapter is written from an autoethnographic perspective. My overarching methodological approach is narrative inquiry and I have used poetry to present my data throughout. My co-author, Catherine, was one of my doctoral supervisors and we were drawn together by our shared investment in narrative and the impact of early experiences on our subsequent selves. For this chapter we present our own narrative poems describing the impact of symbolic violence on our own lives alongside that of the participants.

Key words:

Class; gender; symbolic violence; narrative; poetry; autoethnography.

Introduction – setting the scene

This chapter was born of my – Laura's – interest in the perceived choices that young working-class and middle-class women make to become primary school teachers. I was joined in the writing of this chapter by my former doctoral supervisor, Catherine, our shared interest in narrative methods having brought us together. My doctoral thesis, using narrative inquiry as a methodology, and underpinned by my data, the literature, and reflections on my own formative experiences as a young woman, argues that primary school teaching is a classed and

¹ This chapter has been developed using extracts from the thesis, Shore, L. M. (2022) Primary school teaching: A classed and gendered profession. Poetically exploring the narratives of female trainee primary school teachers. [Thesis] Faculty of Arts, Creative Industries and Education, University of the West of England, Bristol.

gendered profession. My study focussed on the perceived 'choices' made by female students to pursue a degree in primary initial teacher education; the sample is presented later in this chapter. As the project developed, my research presented a growing and increasingly convincing argument for the insidious influence of symbolic violence in impacting women's 'choices' – a misrecognition of social coercion as active choice. Scott (2012, p.531) discusses the concept of misrecognition in identifying symbolic violence, describing it as 'the linchpin in solidifying an amenable relationship between the dominant and the dominated, the haves and have-nots, the powerful and the power-deprived'. What started as one of my theories took on a significance I have since been unable to leave alone and is the aspect of my thesis developed further in this chapter. As my research progressed, I found it increasingly difficult to accept that symbolic violence is not writ large in our collective consciousness; it 'is generated through the subtle inculcation of power relations upon the bodies and dispositions of individuals' (Thapar-Björkert *et al.*, 2016, p. 9). As a society we are complicit in its hold.

The concept of professional identity and how it interweaves with personal identity is at the heart of the premise of symbolic violence as an invisible force and was a consideration throughout my thesis – an exploration of the perceived 'choices' made by female undergraduate trainee primary school teachers to enter the profession. My data demonstrate how participants had embraced the mantle of teacher from an early age, seeing this as a growing personal identity which, as their teacher education and experience in school settings progressed, shifted towards an embryonic professional identity. Nias (1989) discusses how primary school teachers' personal and professional identities are often conflated in the individual, as was evident in the interviews with participants focussing on themselves as student teachers. Identity is constantly revised and reassessed (Nias, 1989) and I argue that for my participants this is particularly relevant in establishing themselves simultaneously as students and emerging professionals in a work-based context. Riessman (2008) discusses how the sense of shifting identity – which I had identified my participants were experiencing – aligns with the increased presence of narrative as a credible methodology, particularly in the research field of identity. She suggests identity can no longer be an assumption or 'truth' but must be consciously constructed by individuals and, 'in postmodern times... can be assembled and disassembled, accepted and contested, and indeed performed for audiences' (Riessman, 2008, p.7). Throughout my doctoral research it became clear how my own experiences had impacted my professional identity and how, as I progressed through my career, my ontological position as a working-class female teacher, then teacher-educator framed how I approached my work and the values that I brought to it. My research had made explicit the concept of symbolic violence for me some time ago, but it became apparent that my participants were insidiously and unknowingly embracing it as part of their personal and professional identity.

Having been told by family and friends how good they are with children, their data demonstrate how this had become central to their perceived identity thereby allowing symbolic violence to embed.

Theoretical framework – beyond Bourdieu

My doctoral thesis was underpinned by Bourdieu's (2011) concept of capitals: a way of examining societal inequalities through a lens not based solely on economic advantage but instead taking account of gender, education and class as embedded, yet often invisible forces governing individuals in society. I identified my themes as cultural, economic and social capital, and the later concept of emotional capital (Nowotny, 1981; Reay, 2004). Yet it is indicative of how my work shifted in emphasis that what started as a focus on Bourdieu's capitals almost reframed itself in terms of the centrality of the concept of emotional capital in the context of the data collected from my participants. From a close examination of emotional capital, the relevance of symbolic violence to my work took shape. I embraced the work of Steedman whose book *The Tidy House* (1982) is an elongated story created by three working-class eight-year-old girls about the lives they expect to grow into, framed by an idea of the house they expect to live in. *The Tidy House* powerfully demonstrates how symbolic violence ensures that the girls quietly understand their educational and aspirational limitations. The girls 'play houses' and while Steedman does not present them as passive victims of working-class culture, ultimately the story the children collectively create is a 'symbol of the inevitability of women's lives' and a presentation of the 'ambivalence of motherhood' (Steedman, 1982, p.33). The voice Steedman gives these children is mitigated by the limitations of their immediate circumstances, and symbolic violence is 'imperceptible, insidious and invisible' (Thapar-Björkert *et al.*, 2016, p.8). The little girls' futures are imperceptibly but clearly mapped and limited even before they become women. It might be said that both their personal and professional identities are conflated: they are *training* to be mothers. In this chapter we argue that symbolic violence continues to embed itself insidiously in the lives of women and this particularly resonates for women from working-class backgrounds.

A methodological journey

Professional doctorates, representing several years of the writer's life and often written alongside the demands of the professional 'day job' are frequently referred to as a journey, and a journey that will peak, trough and shape-shift along the way. My own was no exception. I have referred above to the way my substantive theoretical underpinning shifted from an overarching emphasis on Bourdieu's capitals to an almost revelatory illumination of how symbolic violence operates in society. However, this was not all that changed. My work is underpinned by my own experience as a working-class woman, the first to attend university and from a family who, while wanting the best for me, were not able to help me guide my choices in terms of Higher Education: I was what Ball *et al.* (2002) refer to as a *contingent chooser* - a student from a working-class background whose pathway to higher education was largely self-directed.

As my writing progressed, I had unequivocally embedded myself in my study. Additionally, I had identified narrative inquiry as my preferred methodology with a growing fascination for poetic re-presentation as a powerful means of presenting my data. This fascination was crystallised by the impact that Riessman (2008,), Kim (2016) and Richardson (1995) had had on my work and was an opportunity to revisit approaches learned as an English Literature undergraduate student. As my understanding of narrative inquiry embedded, I began to consider the additional methodological tool of autoethnography. While it was not initially obvious to me that autoethnography – and naming it as autoethnography – had placed itself as central to the project, it had become urgent and non-negotiable, and it took a conversation with Catherine to make me see that. Once I had reached this realisation everything made sense and

All I needed to do was to include my story alongside all the other stories being deposited in my vault. You would never have guessed this little provocation could start an avalanche. It was just a little whisper, a call, a crack. But... (Douglas and Carless, 2013, p.93)

But the whisper, call or crack meant that I had the bare bones of a thesis. I talked at length with Catherine about this and about how our different backgrounds had resonated with each other.. We talked about how we had found our way in the world when young women while also doing our best to suppress the imposter syndrome (Clance and Imes, 1978) which so often taps the shoulder of women who have shifted class or expectations of upbringing. It therefore made sense for this chapter to be a collaboration between Catherine and me because the symbolic violence I am writing about is one that is deeply resonant for us both, albeit present in different ways. A further commonality was that Catherine, like me, had also studied English

Literature as an undergraduate and also went on to use narrative inquiry with her students leading to her own EdD study.

Narrative methodology is not for everyone, and I recall in that first EdD session the rolling of eyes as some peers refused to embrace it as a serious way of approaching research. However, my world was changed listening to Catherine lay herself bare as she read from her autoethnographic writing. I was enormously excited at these new possibilities for my work; being vividly presented to me was life beyond case study which in one afternoon transformed my assumptions about what research is. My excitement grew further as I immersed myself in narrative and embraced poetry as a legitimate method. The appeal of poetry for me was underpinned by Richardson's (1995, p.704) assertion that:

Poetics strips those methodological bogeymen of their power to control and constrain. A poem as "findings" resituates ideas of validity and reliability from "knowing" to "telling". Everybody's writing is suspect – not just those who write the poems.

Both Catherine and I had poems to tell about ourselves, about our journeys to where we are today. We acknowledge the subjectivity of our work and embrace it as 'suspect' while celebrating it as a powerful and moving medium through which to present and understand our stories:

Fairies by Catherine

When I was six, I ran away to be with the fairies.

They lived at the far end of the field beyond our garden.

I took a plastic bag containing only my best dress

To be beautiful in their company.

Nobody noticed I had gone.

Twelve years on I left to be with the fairies.

My plastic bag contained only the lightest of loads.

Mini-sized parcels of self-confidence, self-belief and self-worth.

Other students arrived loaded with trunks,

Heavy with family tradition and expectation,

The self-confidence spilling out over the edges for all to see.

And did I ever meet my fairies? I have glimpsed them: yes.

They have been the few who have danced through my life.

*Leaving a delicate but discernible imprint.
They have helped me weave the story of who I am.*

The Only Slave by Laura

*The Latin teacher said,
Next week
We'll have a Roman feast.
We'll all dress in togas (white sheets from home)
And lie on sofas (our desks)
Be fed grapes (I started to feel uncomfortable)
And drink goblets of wine (wine?)*

Lying on the desks in sheets – wow!

*Then the Latin teacher said
I just need a couple of you to be the slaves,
To go around the class feeding grapes to the other girls.
Don't worry though, you'll get grapes too.
I don't remember what happened next but what I do remember,
Palpably and painfully
Is that I was a girl who didn't fit,
Who wore Salvation Army sale clothes
And that I had to volunteer to be a slave before I was volunteered.
The discomfort that I had felt earlier had manifested.*

*When I was 14 years old
I did not have the social capital to lie on a desk and be fed grapes by someone whose brilliant
white socks stayed up without elastic garters.
I don't remember the feast; only that I was a slave, **the** slave: no one else volunteered.
They were better than me,
They were from a different class.
I was the only slave.*

We found using poetry to be a liberating way of identifying and naming how, through experience and upbringing, we both had experienced symbolic violence. Mirroring this, through the re-presentation of my data as poetry in the doctoral thesis I was able to foreground the experiences of my participants.

This is also the direction in which this chapter travels. Once data have been acknowledged as a construct, re-producing the data as poetry liberated my thinking further. This introduction sets the scene for the chapter in which data are presented as poetry and framed where appropriate with autoethnography. In this chapter we hope to show how language in the form of careful poetry can be used to unmask and make visible the insidious impact (Thaper-Bjorkert, 2016) of symbolic violence (Thaper-Bjorkert, 2016). The poetry presents the words my participants spoke; words might have been taken out, nothing has been inserted or substituted nor has the word order has been changed. We hope to use this engaging narrative method to engage readers with this critical subject matter.

Ethical considerations

In terms of my substantive research and in the spirit of narrative methodology, the desire to listen to stories and remain reflexive in terms of my own 'background' and positionality was at the heart of my work. My aim was to 'gather data not change people' (Patton, 2002, p.405) alongside my overarching intentions of searching for new knowledge and understanding of a phenomenon (Jupp, 2006). Both perspectives are supported by qualitative research's claim to, through the creation of new ways of knowing, make positive future impact. Clandinin and Connelly problematise the issue of ethics in the context of narrative inquiry in their discussion of how attempting to *completely* address ethical considerations prior to the commencement of research is not wholly satisfactory because of the organic nature of the methodology. To do this 'works against the relational negotiation that is part of narrative inquiry' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.170). Over time some of the principles at the heart of my research shifted and this I discussed with the participants. That their data were to be presented as poetry was a principal discussion area and one they were all fascinated by; yet ultimately none wanted to see the end result. This was potentially because they were all at an advanced stage of their degrees by this time. However, when I reflect on this – and particularly with the benefit of hindsight – I acknowledge that it was incumbent on me as researcher to address issues around member checking and to have potentially tried harder to encourage them to engage. On a more personal level Catherine and I are both aware of the references we have made to our own families in this chapter and have worked hard to adhere to the principle of 'do no harm' (BERA, 2018). That said, we are aware that while we have discussed experiences that are at the heart of the making of us as women, our families may have different perspectives.

The sample

Table 1 presents participant data illustrating and developing my argument for the often-unseen impact of symbolic violence. My sample comprised of young (no more than two years away

from post-GCSE education) women who self-identify as working or middle-class. They were all in their first year of primary initial teacher education degree at the university where I teach. To ensure clarity and context, the table demonstrates the backgrounds of the participants I have chosen to use in this chapter. My subsequent discussion will refer to these participants by pseudonym followed by their self-identified social class, both indicated in parentheses and in bold text (ie: **name**, **w/c** or **m/c**):

Table 1 about here

Theorising marginal voices

We argue that symbolic violence can be used to theorise how marginalised voices are not heard in the milieu of the dominant discourse (Thapar-Björkert *et al.*, 2016). We earlier contextualised this by our opening autoethnographic poems; mine describes an early experience of being marginalised by social class and Catherine's how she was marginalised by familial expectations. Against the backdrop of our poetry, this chapter looks initially at symbolic violence as a societal factor insidiously favouring dominant groups and individuals, and the discussion in this section addresses this to provide a credible and convincing argument that symbolic violence is a prevalent and enveloping phenomenon in our society. We then narrow the focus to how it can be argued that symbolic violence, in the context of choices for women, is a powerful pervasive force potentially leading young women into primary school teaching via discourses of caring (Acker, 1995). We illustrate this with my data indicating how participants claim to *love children* and how they were told *You like children / you want to be a primary school teacher*. In this section we make the argument that symbolic violence is intrinsically interwoven with the concepts of embedded and contingent choosers and 'hot knowledge' (Ball *et al.*, 2002) – the understanding of how higher education 'works' is passed down to young people from family and family contacts where family and social networks can share information about institutions and qualifications based upon the family's own experience or that of others in their network.

Symbolic violence – society's invisible force

Bourdieu (2001, p.1) describes symbolic violence as 'a gentle violence, exerted through the most part by the purely symbolic channels' and for my participants, and for Catherine and me, it was an experience impacting our childhood, our choices, and who we are as adult professional women. My data demonstrate how my participants had internalised the mantras of being told that they were good with children. My own classed and gendered identity made me feel never quite good enough and the autoethnographic poetry presented in the

introduction and below demonstrates symbolic violence at the hands of trusted adults, and for Catherine enacted by familial values. These familial values coveted a model of womanhood encompassing 'marrying well', homemaking, material acquisition and child rearing, echoing Steedman's (1982) girls 'playing houses', with little value placed on academic learning, career aspiration or any form of reflective criticality. With this absence of endorsement, stepping into a new space as the first in her family to go to university was unsurprisingly fraught with self-doubt and a lack of entitlement for Catherine, and the building of confidence was a fragile endeavour. Meanwhile, an early memory for me of symbolic violence at the metaphorical hands of a trusted adult was an incident in a primary school assembly where our genuinely loved and respected head teacher was talking about foreign travel in his morning assembly. Reay (2017) discusses how class shame has become embedded in working class psyche. As demonstrated in the poem below, the shame I felt was palpable and, reflected in the clarity with which I still recall this incident, treacherous:

Spanish Seas by Laura

In primary school

Mr Leonard

A generally good bloke,

An understanding and fair head teacher,

Did an assembly about foreign travel.

He asked all the children who had

been abroad

To put up their hands.

In the mid-70s many families with a 'liveable' income could take their

Big Holiday

Abroad.

Largely to Spain.

The envy.

A Spanish sea of hands shot into the air.

Mr Leonard said, as there are so many of you let's make it easier,

So, STAND UP

*If you have never **been abroad.***

The parquet floor was scuffed and so were my shoes.

And my white socks would not stay up on their own.

The playtime that followed was a very miserable one for me, my brother and a couple of other unremembered kids.

The kids whose parents barely scraped that 'liveable' income.

This autoethnographic poem demonstrates how easily working-class children can be made to feel 'other' by casual and thoughtless assumptions made by advantaged adults. I argue that symbolic violence works to limit expectation; my data demonstrate that time and again for my participants symbolic violence has played a part in how they conceptualise themselves.

Teaching was never an option for me. In terms of my family's working-class expectations in the early 1980s that would have been too grand; my symbolic violence took the form of an office job. My mum had been a successful and well-regarded secretary, a world away from the long hours of factory and cleaning jobs of her parents forced to make ends meet in the context of the economic challenges of the 1930s and '40s. She had worked hard to achieve this and was proud and wanted this for me. My quiet rebellion rejected this expectation as I silently resisted learning how to type and do shorthand. I did not know what I wanted for myself – that came much later – but I knew that I did not want *this*, her life, and subsequently the suffocating straight jacket of office work that I had seen friends 'succumb' (in my eyes) to. The friends were all women, all went to their offices dressed the same, their bosses were all men and – like my mother's experiences 30 years earlier – joked about resignedly deflecting the unwanted attention of those men. Thapar-Björkert *et al.* (2016, p.148) discuss how feminist research has highlighted the breadth of symbolic violence towards women in terms of emotional and psychological violence in society, stating how repeated actions 'subordinate certain groups of people, [and] mask[s] the underlying power relations'. Thapar-Björkert *et al.* (2016, p.148) go on, citing Bourdieu and Wacquant, to give the example that 'the dominance of men is legitimated as the natural order of things in which women are consigned to inferior social positions'. Of course, I was not familiar with the theory of symbolic violence, but I knew that unwanted physical advances in the workplace were wrong, and that this was not going to happen to me. For Catherine, the more deeply she engaged with her own education, the more removed she felt from her own family value sets and the more critically she engaged with them. Born into a competitive large family environment she found herself entered for the wrong competitions and speaking the wrong language. She recognised that what was not said by those around her had often had as big an impact on her development as what had been said, albeit that much of this was unconscious as symbolic violence so often is:

Lost Words by Catherine

It was nobody's fault

*I did not speak until nearly four
 Having two older sisters to speak for me
 And no one to listen.*

*It was nobody's fault
 I looked inwards instead of outwards
 And took refuge in stories
 Preferring to inhabit those worlds.*

*It was nobody's fault
 They did not notice
 And encourage my differences
 Too focused on replicating
 shared patterns
 *and beliefs.**

*It was nobody's fault
 They did not
 question
 reflect
 and notice
 Times changing.*

*It is nobody's fault
 That we stand together
 but apart
 Family without knowing
 Loving but not understanding.*

'Choosing' to teach?

My doctoral thesis starts with a statement, not a question, and asserts that primary school teaching is a classed and gendered profession; I explore and demonstrate this assertion through the narratives of my participants and the literature demonstrating the strength of the argument. My thesis examines the ways in which primary school teaching has been viewed as women's work, engaging with the work of Reay (2017), Plummer (2000) and Maguire (1997). These women from working-class backgrounds identified how they were marginalised and limited in terms of choices of profession, and all identify their own experiences as framed

by both gender and class. For them teaching, for a 'bright' working-class girl, was a more of an assumption than a considered choice. Symbolic violence legitimises these everyday assumptions and repackages them as choice, and my data illuminate how symbolic violence appeared to impact my participants' perceived choices. As a result, these choices and decisions revolve around discourses of caring (Vogt, 2002) and are foregrounded in the literature relating to the expectations for and of young women in the world of work (for example, Maguire, 2005; Acker, 1995). This is particularly resonant for working-class women because of the traditional and historical positioning of females at the centre of the home not the workplace; discourses of caring subsequently become embedded cultural scripts (Acker, 1995). This positioning resonates for both Catherine and me. While aspiration for me was limited by the 'glass ceiling' of typing in an office, for Catherine the very idea of women working was not one that was regarded as a serious option in her family.

As a result of symbolic violence, the prospect of women working with and being 'good with children' becomes natural and obvious and embedded in the daily rituals of life (Thapar-Björkert *et al.*, 2016). My data demonstrate that Polly has always been 'good with young children' and Kate has been told by family and others that 'you like children / you want to be a primary school teacher'. Maguire (2005, p.6) states

The gendered nature of being a teacher... is conflated with discourses of caring and discourses of mothering. For this reason, it is perhaps not difficult for women to imagine a future where they work with children. From there, it is an easy step to start imagining being a teacher.

This gendered perception of primary school teaching is demonstrated overtly in some of my working-class participants' data re-presented as poetry below:

Helping a child

To understand something

That was definitely

Something I wanted to do,

For a degree

For my life. (Lucy w/c)

That's a good girls' job.

They said.

*My brother said
It's not a job for him.
Men don't work with little kids. (Kitty w/c)*

*I have noticed this -
Females are a lot more dominant
In teaching.
Educating
As a career thing
I never really noticed before university
How few men there are. (Emma m/c)*

*Maybe teaching is seen as a motherly role
Perhaps that's old fashioned.
But it sort of requires
Empathy
And typically feminine traits.
Obviously
Times are changing.
It's more socially acceptable
For men to have empathy
And it's more encouraged.
For men to express emotions
Maybe that is why more men.
Are going in for it. (Carrie w/c)*

Alongside the working-class voices I have presented is securely middle-class Polly. Polly does not discuss how primary school teaching is women's work, nor does she ponder the lack of men on her course. She presents, however, a subtle awareness of how symbolic violence works in society and is playing out in her life:

*Everyone's always told me
I'm good with young children.
That's what I've been told.
From my mum
From my family friends
When they say to you*

You're really good with children

What do you think you're going to do with that?

There was no option

To say

You know what?

I'm going to become a firefighter! (Polly m/c)

To return to the concept of professional identity, it might be argued that Polly's identity is being established while still a child herself – *what do you think you are going to do with that?* – working in tandem with an almost wry acknowledgment of how symbolic violence is playing out in her life.

The lens of choice – embedded and contingent choosers

Ball *et al.* (2002) demonstrate how familial input into young people's choices around higher education are an important indicator of their subsequent success and, I argue, have the potential to mitigate the impact of symbolic violence. Ball *et al.* (2002, p.337) discuss contingent choosers who are 'typically a first-generation applicant to higher education...' whose family can provide emotional but not practical support, and this is apparent in the narratives of my working-class participants and in the stories of Catherine and me. In contrast to this are middle-class embedded choosers for whom university attendance was never a binary choice but an expectation that Ball *et al.* (2002, p.342) name as being 'part of a cultural script, a *'normal biography'*. Embedded choosers are also endowed with hot knowledge, a phenomenon located securely in middle-class habitus where family or social networks can share 'first or second-hand recommendations or warnings related to specific institutions based on some kind of "direct" experience' (Ball *et al.*, 2002, p.337. Both middle-class Anna and Polly discuss how their parents had input and interest in their potential career choices. The parents of both women were insistent that they must be sure that they are making the right choices at this early stage. Anna presents her mum as vehement:

My mum always,

Wanted,

To make sure

That I was making the right decisions.

So even before the week I moved to uni

She was saying:

Are you sure this is what you want to do?

Are you sure this is what you want to do?

*She made sure I had spoken
To the right people
And asked the right questions
Beforehand.*

To make sure

I was sure.

I was sure though.

My dad

He was more laid back.

And he thought

That if I knew what I wanted to do

Then I would do that... (Anna m/c)

In earlier data Anna had situated her father as working-class, in contrast to her semi-professional mother's middle-class status. As being partially endowed with appropriate hot knowledge and cultural capital to get to university, but with a parent who has no understanding or experience of HE, Anna is closer to the position of a contingent chooser. Maguire (2001) identified such participants as 'hybrids' whose class identities and identifiers may not be fixed in the way that Polly's is. My data and the research I have situated it in suggest that the further away from embedded chooser status an individual is, the more vulnerable they are in terms of symbolic violence.

Polly is the child of two successful professional people whose support for her future has been explicit from a very early age. Polly's embedded chooser status is unquestionable and while perhaps demonstrating an awareness of symbolic violence as discussed above, she is also very clear about the importance of being sure about her choices from the perspective of *both* parents:

They were really supportive,

Really pleased.

A bit

Are you sure?

Not a paramedic?

Not paediatric science?

Not in a telly-off sort of way

Not trying to discourage me.

But... Are you making the right decision?

Make sure you're sure. (Polly m/c)

Reay (2002, p.29) discusses how 'middle-class mothers push their children towards high academic performance' in a way that working-class families, because of their lack of access to sufficient funds of capital, and particularly cultural capital, are unable to do. Both of Polly's parents have attended university, as has Anna's mother. Their parents were anxious to ensure that Polly and Anna were 'sure' that they wanted to train to be teachers, and at *this* university. By presenting my working-class participants' tendency to align themselves to working with children from a young age themselves, I have described how cultural scripts are embedded in the concept of symbolic violence. For Polly and Anna, the cultural script has shifted: 'Choice is part of a cultural script, a 'normal biography'' (Reay *et al.*, 2005, p.112). And choice, I argue, affords a degree of distance from symbolic violence.

What is also of significance in my data was the middle-class participants' narrative in terms of the course and the learning, which I see as an indication of how symbolic violence enacts itself differently across social classes. This sits in contrast to my working-class participants whose reasoning is situated in the narrative of working with children and their parents wanting them to be 'happy' as evidenced in, for example, Lucy and Kitty's data:

Both of my parents.

Their main thing.

Is that they want me to be happy

In what I choose. (Lucy)

They always said

Do what you want

You must do what you want.

As long as you're happy.

That's the important thing. (Kitty w/c)

Both Anna and Polly, meanwhile, had different perspectives. Anna stated, in terms of her choice to follow this specific route into teaching (as opposed to doing a non-vocational degree followed by the one-year postgraduate course) 'I thought a three-year course would be better and more beneficial / In terms of learning about the pedagogy'. Similarly, when talking about friendships and fitting in on the course, Polly felt that at the heart of her experience:

It's about the learning.

You feel like a student because you've got to learn

.... So you do feel a little more like a student than a professional

You've still got to be learning.

But some of the time you are teaching

I think you get a bit of a muddled identity. (Polly m/c)

While terminology such as 'pedagogy' and 'identity' is used by the teaching team from the outset of the degree, my professional experience tells me it takes more than just the month these undergraduate student teachers had been with us for the term to embed. Polly and Anna are demonstrating hot knowledge beyond that of their peers in this example and appear to grasp of the 'rules of the game'. Bourdieu (1998, p.25) discusses 'the game' in terms of the invisible social barriers middle-class students pass through to achieve and experience beyond academic success at university, and how an understanding of 'the rules of the game' is embedded for middle and upper-class families, enabling them to 'make better educational investments and earn maximum returns on their cultural capital'. In contrast, working-class families are not able to imbue their children with this degree of insight and Reay *et al.* (2005) discuss the 'uneven playing field' that is therefore created. For my working-class participants and for Catherine and myself, lack of knowledge of, let alone understanding of the game, allowed symbolic violence to play an early and resonating part in the formation of our personal and initial professional identities.

Conclusions

In this chapter we have argued that symbolic violence is a powerful and insidious force which pervades society in an invisible and destructive way. We looked firstly at the 'big picture' of symbolic violence and how it impacted us both from an early age and then narrowed our lens to look at how it impacts young women finding their way in society and making choices about their future. What resonates as we close the chapter is the role that the people we are closest to play in deepening the impact of symbolic violence in our formative years. We discussed how the prevailing discourse in Catherine's family favoured homemaking as the role for women, while mine viewed women's work as a very particular and binary phenomenon – an office, not a factory. Both were damaging perspectives and it could be argued that Catherine and I were the ones who 'got away'. However, we still carry those formative years and attitudes with us; they remain prevalent in our families and haunt us still.

Our concluding thoughts are ultimately that it is education that can challenge symbolic violence. Education shines a light on the insidious processes that permeate society and allows

us to reflect upon and question the expectations that we have grown up with, both in terms of family and institutions. A casual glance at the media, at social media and at the significantly higher number of women than men on our primary education degrees demonstrates that there are still deeply embedded attitudes and cultural scripts (Acker, 1995), suggesting that primary school teaching largely remains *women's work*. However, as educators, it is our responsibility to encourage consistent critical reflection, not only on the practical aspects of students' practice but also on their motivations for wanting to teach young children. This is how we as academics have the 'power' and privilege to help nurture the teachers of tomorrow, educating the children they teach and challenging dominant discourses in the classroom. It is education that helped both Catherine and me to identify and ultimately resist the impact of the symbolic violence that was part of our formative years. For me, despite my lack of confidence, I worked hard, it took a while, but I quietly resisted the office. As a contingent chooser I did not engage with higher education until I was in my mid-twenties, but I found my way myself, it just took a little longer than for many others. Catherine also identifies as a contingent chooser, and states that 'education has enabled me to interrogate my own upbringing and recognise symbolic violence which I have been at pains not to replicate with my own children – their upbringing is significantly different to mine.'

The work that we have engaged in together, indeed the journey we have travelled, has made us each understand ourselves and our own stories far more powerfully than had we been going solo. Beyond our academic reading, the discussions we have had as women and as daughters have had real impact on us as authors. The conversations I have had with Catherine have made me see the value of my own story right from the beginning of my doctoral journey, and now I see the story as an important part of my life as an academic. Meanwhile, Catherine has found that accompanying me throughout my journey has deepened her own understanding of the role of symbolic violence in her life and helped her to come to terms with familial patterns which cannot be changed, as seen in her second poem written for this chapter. As is common with narrative enquiry, the process has been of inherent personal value to us both.

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