Title: Teaching to Resistance and Refusal: Feminist Pedagogical Engagements in the UK Higher Education Classroom
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Introduction

Critical feminist pedagogies have sought to emphasise the productive capacity of emotion in the classroom – from joy and curiosity to anger, discomfort, and guilt – alongside positioning refusal and resistance as necessary aspects of transformative learning and social justice. From these perspectives, refusal and resistance can reveal the multiple structural inequalities that plague departments, classrooms, and peer and teacher relations in much of academic life, and a preparedness to teach *to* and *through* resistance and refusal is part of a feminist pedagogical praxis. In this article, we offer speculative reflections on moments of *classroom* resistance and refusal within the limits of the broader institutional life of UK Higher Education (HE). Using an anecdotal method, we discuss the complexity of defining, knowing and assessing the meaning – let alone the productivity – of student resistance and refusal. Our reflections, in their partiality, also point towards the limiting effects of institutional practices on effective and inclusive teaching in the increasingly precarious UK HE context.

Certainly, in the UK HE context in which we, the authors of this article, teach, engaging with resistance and refusal is part of academic life. Emerging student resistances to pedagogical solipsism – such as moves to decolonise the curriculum – occur alongside the internally and externally positioned critiques of both; teacher and student complicity in neoliberal consumer models of education; and conservative attacks on 'generational' refusals to engage with normative modes of academic practice, due to a supposed lack of individual resilience.[1] These discourses have become particularly loaded in the humanities and social sciences – the areas in which we teach. Within our disciplines, and within the largely elite UK university settings on which our reflections are mostly based, students and staff increasingly use methods

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[1] Over the last five years, 'generation snowflake' has become a widely mobilised term used to critique younger people's supposed incapacity to tolerate disagreement, precarity, experiences of mental illness, as well as investments in social justice. Within HE, this has often translated into critiques of Widening Participation initiatives and the supposed 'feminisation' of HE (Leathwood and Hey 2009), evidenced by an investment in mental health and other support initiatives.

of resistance and refusal to demand curricula that reflect the work of non-European and scholars of colour, as well as to see long-taught framings of history, theory, and politics reshaped and contextualised by perspectives from the margins. These efforts highlight the sustained structural inequalities of HE institutions and environments in the UK: attainment and experience gaps for students of colour, and the racism, sexism, classism, and ableism of institutional practices and processes (Ahmed 2012; Akel 2019; Bhambra 2007; Bhopal 2017; Equality Challenge Unit 2013; Rollock 2011; Shilliam 2015).

While these forms of resistance have also faced significant backlash, they arguably both question and embolden critical teaching, learning, and knowledge practices, employing methods that signify an investment in and a dedication to our fields. At the same time, neoliberal discourses of inclusion and diversity have often transformed such critical demands into 'tick box' exercises (Ahmed 2012), 'consuming' these perspectives of 'otherness' (Mehta 2019: 26), and putting them to work in the service of the very institutions they set out to critique. It is not incidental that our disciplines have also become the target in conservative attacks on so-called 'grievance studies' (Spruce et al. 2018). These attacks have dismissed these same questions of identity, inequality, politics, and power, echoing generic accusations of 'left' and 'postmodern' bias within academia. These are not new critiques. However, within the context of a growing, transnational antagonism against 'gender ideology' and 'identity politics' within and beyond academia,[2] both progressive and regressive resistances to learning and teaching practices in our HE classrooms take on a new political weight.

These contemporary concerns also coincide with, and implicate, radical shifts in the expectations and practices of academic and teaching labour, 're-emphasiz[ing] techno-rationalist discourses of human capital and individual responsibility' (Burke 2015: 391) in HE in the UK as well as elsewhere. Staff who are early career, women, and of colour are typically the most precarious within these casualised institutional structures where part-time and fractional employment contracts proliferate – as well as often those called upon to both officially and unofficially accommodate the administrative, care, emotional, and 'diversity work' (Ahmed 2012) of institutions within and beyond their contracted workloads (Barnett 2011; Bhopal 2015; Flaherty 2018; Mehta 2019). In other words, whilst teachers employing critical pedagogies might give particular weight to the importance of resistance within and beyond the classroom, in contemporary HE 'teachers themselves might not be free agents in the school system that often purposefully perpetuates social inequalities and maintains the status quo' (Gore cited in Cooks

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[2] See for instance the blog post series on transnational anti-gender politics in the Engenderings blog: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/2018/08/29/transnational-anti-gender-politics/

and Sun 2002: 296). Moreover, as we argue below, conditions of casualisation and institutional hierarchy are rarely made transparent to students attending these universities.

We argue that examining both teacher and student forms of resistance and refusal within this contemporary context is important, but also note that scholarship discussing such resistance and refusal has sometimes tended to assume the meaning of resistance in advance. Against this backdrop, we seek to reflect on the ability of teachers and students to know the meaning of resistance and refusal within the HE classroom space in any given moment. We ask, which kinds of refusals and resistances are intelligible as productive – how do we as teachers *know* when refusal is pedagogically or structurally useful, or not? How do racialised, gendered, classed, and ableist understandings inform what behaviours, language, and performances count as productive resistance? And how do we make room for productive refusal and resistance in our classrooms within the normative, and often institutionally policed, parameters of student assessment and engagement, and academic working life? As participants in the ever-evolving context of UK HE, our reflections emphasise the certain *uncertainty* of knowing when, for whom, and in which ways resistance or refusal becomes productive.

We begin our discussion with a brief introduction to our methodology, where we borrow from Lisa Baraitser's (2009) and Jane Gallop's (2002) use of 'anecdotal theory' to highlight the complexity of resistance in any classroom interaction. Our article then follows with reflections on three moments of resistance that we have encountered in our teaching, considering the complexity of these encounters with reference to critical pedagogical theory. We introduce these anecdotes about moments of resistance or refusal that we have experienced as teachers in order to reflect on the multiplicity and complexity of refusal and resistance in our classrooms – as well as on the broader context of HE that implicates us, as well as our students, as participants in these dynamics.

Resistant anecdotes

Anecdotes are short narratives that usually blend autobiography with humour, akin to gossip and other kinds of unverified and unauthoritative knowledges – more often told at bars and dinner tables than in academic journal articles. They are 'self-reflective narratives broadly situated within the fields of auto/ethnographies' (Lipton 2017: 489) that highlight something mundane, but at the same time unusual. Importantly, anecdotes tend to be saturated with affect – a personal incident might be turned into an anecdote precisely to convey its affective and/or

bodily dimensions. When anecdotes are used as a method, body and affect are intentionally not divorced from narrative or theoretical formations (Pester 2017). Gallop develops what she terms 'anecdotal theory' precisely to cut through the diametrically opposed connotations that 'anecdote' and 'theory' carry – trivial/meaningful, amusing/serious, personal/public – 'in order to produce theory with a better sense of humor, theorizing which honors the uncanny detail of lived experience' (2002: 2). Thus, the 'quasi-methodology' (Baraitser 2009) of anecdotal theory responds directly to feelings, bodily reactions, and the momentary complexity of incidents deemed worth narrativising, challenging the processes by which 'proper' knowledges are separated from ones considered trivial, amusing, and/or personal.

As in both Gallop's and Baraitser's use of anecdotal theory, then, in this article we use anecdotes as our method in combination with autoethnographic reflections. We begin with the detail of our own lived experience, which is then interrogated for what it can contribute to theory. The three anecdotes that we share below all began as stories told over drinks or dinner, usually to mark moments in our teaching lives that surprised us, and made us feel something – frequently negative feelings such as shame or guilt. Often these moments of student resistance jolted us by suddenly rendering our existing knowledges meaningless, their affective charge amplified by our sense that what we knew was not enough to explain what had happened.

Indeed, prior to writing this article, our understanding of resistance in the classroom broadly fitted with Elizabeth Flynn's typology that differentiates between strategic, counter-strategic, and reactive resistance. For Flynn, strategic resistance involves resistance against structures of oppression; counter-strategic resistance deliberately opposes or undermines the former; and reactive resistance is a 'spontaneous and emotional reaction which may have multiple and conflicting motivations and effects' (2001: 18). And while in some ways the three anecdotes discussed below broadly match this typology, upon reflection, in the moments themselves something about each of them never quite fitted with the narratives and theories we already knew and trusted – they didn't *feel* like straightforward forms of resistance either at the time, or afterwards.

For Baraitser, as for us, anecdotes 'encourage the personal as a kind of uncomfortable-yet-pleasurable intrusion that sticks in the throat of theory, causing it to rethink itself' (2013: 149). We *felt* the difference, the 'something extra' (Baraitser 2009: 98) that could never quite be explained by the existing theoretical models that we had for understanding refusal and resistance in the classroom. We recount these rethinkings below, discussing the openings we found to explain the incidents differently. However, as Gallop suggests, 'the anecdote introduces an opening in teleological narration, but that very opening inspires a teleological

narration which comes to close it up' (2002: 86); inevitably our anecdotes create and sustain certain teleological narratives, while at the same time closing off others. Although here we tend towards complicating clear-cut distinctions between different kinds of resistances – productive/unproductive, strategic/reactive – at the same time we perhaps end up sustaining other kinds of distinctions. Nonetheless, this tension between the anecdote as the account of a singular moment and the urge to embed it within a larger narrative is a productive one, simply because a different way of narrativising an unusual or surprising moment of resistance may tell us something important about the dynamics of both our classrooms and UK HE more broadly.

Of course, by definition anecdotes are not verified (or usually verifiable), and therefore their claim to truthfulness or accuracy rests entirely on the teller. As many teachers will attest, unsettling and surprising moments in teaching are frequent, and over the years they often blur together, get exaggerated in the remembering and retelling, and gain the benefit of new perspectives. Our fictionalised accounts of the three anecdotes below reflect the shared nature of these retellings and, thus, do not represent 'real', singular encounters or students in our individual teaching histories. In combining multiple incidents, and in fictionalising both their contexts and outcomes, our anecdotes hope to reflect the relative frequency of such experiences in the UK HE classroom, and to resonate with others who have had similar experiences – and told similar anecdotes.[3] Importantly then, we do not claim that the anecdotes discussed below are 'real' or 'truthful' in the sense that they accurately describe a specific instance that we experienced in a specific classroom or other teaching setting. Rather, they are abstracted amalgamations of multiple similar instances that we (and likely others) have experienced – despite being co-written, they are told from the first-person perspective in order to capture the immediacy of the affective charge. Indeed, the similar affects of separate experiences of moments of resistance and refusal are what led us to bring these stories together. Drawing on a broader tradition of using counter narratives and anecdotes and/as autoethnographic storytelling within the critical pedagogical literatures (Albrecht-Crane 2005; Coia and Taylor 2013; Gibbs et al. 2019; Mayuzumi et al. 2007; Mehta 2019; Rollock 2011; Smele et al. 2017), our method hopes to capture the complex retelling of affect, feeling, and experience recounted through anecdotes that can contribute to pedagogical knowledge.

Between us, we have taught at four HE institutions in the UK, mostly as seminar teachers but more recently as lecturers and guest lecturers, on both undergraduate and

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[3] Perhaps reflecting the partiality and unreliability of any anecdote, we found that, on revising this article, it became harder for us to recount specific details or indeed to differentiate the 'real' incidents from the fictionalised.

postgraduate modules in Gender Studies, Sociology, and the Social Sciences and Humanities more broadly. In the anecdotes recounted below, we mostly draw on our experiences as seminar teachers (mainly a role we took on whilst also PhD students), although our later experiences as early career lecturers have not significantly challenged the reflections offered here. As seminar teachers in the UK HE context, we were tasked with delivering weekly seminars to groups of approximately 15-30 undergraduate students, who also usually attended a weekly lecture delivered by the senior academic who acted as the module convenor – in charge of the module's content, structure, and assessment strategy. Many of the experiences that we have combined in the below anecdotes also took place in elite institutional settings, where the student base is mostly, but not exclusively, 'traditional' – highly international, middle-class, and unlikely to be first generation university students. These institutional settings also reflect our own educational backgrounds in a number of ways, and like our students, we embody both privileges and disadvantages in the context of UK HE. Necessarily then, because of the partiality of our own knowledges about privilege and power in the HE classroom, the anecdotes below are also partial – and our examination of them is based on our own, limited, view into classroom dynamics.

'I don't want to': The 'straightforward 'refusal

The words echoed in the hallway, bouncing off the walls, as I tried to figure out how to respond to such a straightforward refusal of learning (or teaching). I was a seminar teacher for an undergraduate module in which students were engaged in group work, preparing for presentations that would be assessed and contribute towards their final grade. I had noticed that one student was not engaging with her group, sitting back in her chair in silence, averting her classmates' eyes. As I approached the student to ask how the work was going, I was met with a sigh and a one-syllable 'fine.' I asked the student to talk to me after the class to try to explore the issue further, away from the scrutiny of her peers. I enquired why she was not engaging with her group, but the response – 'I don't want to' – was not one I was expecting. My request for further information – 'why?' – was met with a similarly frank and simplistic reply: 'I don't like group work.'

This incident resulted in immediate uncertainty on my part. While I, like most HE teachers, was used to some student disengagement in the classroom, I was not used to it being vocalised so clearly and explicitly. In the moment, I tried to respond with some level of care,

while at the same time explaining the requirements of the assessment. I was not sure what the student took away from our encounter, and following the seminar I approached the lecturer (and module convenor) for advice. His suggestion was to explain to the student very clearly that if she continued to disengage from group work throughout the seminars in the run-up to the presentation, she would not be receiving the group grade for the work. There was no ambiguity – for my colleague, this was a straightforward, clear-cut case of refusal, perhaps tinged with laziness or lack of ambition, but certainly not a situation that warranted any further work on my part.

The institutional response, embodied here by the module convenor, reflects sj Miller's suggestion that 'typically students who refuse to do something in, and for, school are positioned as wrong, insolent, indolent and even, sometimes, troublemakers' (2016: 2). As many critiques of normative HE practices have suggested, the individualising discourses of the neoliberal university tend to cast a lack of participation in pedagogical processes as a problem of individual failure, framed 'through judgements about a person's capability, motivation and resilience' (Burke 2017: 430; cf. Leathwood and Hey 2009; Smele et al. 2017). Correspondingly, the institutional solution to the 'problem' of student disengagement tends to be to entrench the teacher's and the institution's positions of authority – in this case reminding the student that her success and continued access to HE depended on her performance within a set of predefined markers of engagement.

However, as many feminist and critical pedagogical scholars have noted, the academic playing field is not level. The ability to figure out the pathways to 'success' in any particular HE setting depends on 'access to privileged resources, capitals and networks' (Burke 2017: 431; cf. Mariskind 2013), the distribution of which is highly unequal amongst students – even in elite institutional settings. The neoliberal academy demands that students conform to very particular narratives and practices of 'success' – but students enter universities with unequal resources with which to do so. Concomitantly, Penny Jane Burke (2015) notes that students often express discomfort with 'student-centred' pedagogical practices that expect them to be active learners, expressing a desire for clearly structured and teacher-controlled classroom spaces. Students' fear of exposing themselves in the classroom is also frequently connected to positions of marginality that they embody in the classroom setting, vis-à-vis other students and/or the teacher.

As Burke (2017) suggests, the shame that students feel about not fitting in or matching institutional expectations, with all of their gendered, classed, and racialised undertones, is often experienced and expressed as individual lack of confidence or capability. Although the student

in question neither vocalised nor visibly manifested a positionality or difference that might have indicated an experience of marginalisation in HE, it is of course entirely possible that she did, in fact, *choose* disengagement as a strategy for survival and self-preservation in an environment hostile to her identity, background, or positionality (Harlap 2014; Miller 2016). The institutional imperative to employ authority and discipline as a response to students' perceived lack of interest, motivation, or ambition leaves no space for such interpretations. The immediate recourse to authority and hierarchy, thus, refuses to acknowledge the possibility that a vocalised 'I don't want to' could, in fact, mean 'I cannot', or 'I don't want to, because of the risks associated with doing so' – or even 'because I'm scared' or 'not under these circumstances.'

I return to the incident discussed at the beginning of this section often, imagining what *could* have happened. In my imagination I would slowly build rapport with the student, invite her to see me in office hours, and eventually she would trust me enough to participate in a dialogue with me – she would reveal some difficulties in her personal life, or some kind of a positionality of marginalisation, or anxiety about giving presentations, or perhaps even bullying by the other group members. I would put in the labour, employ the tools in my pedagogical arsenal, enact the kind of pedagogy that Christa Albrecht-Crane describes as 'friendship', where the goal is 'to keep the conversation going between interlocutors who remain unsettled and exposed' (2005: 508). For Albrecht-Crane, such moments of student resistance are opportunities not 'to reinforce a teacher's privileged position (by use of force, for example, grading power), but to let go of such positions, to go along with the revolution and, perhaps, to discover as yet unarticulated modes of learning' (2005: 498; cf. Miller 2016). Similarly, in my imagination, the student would eventually feel comfortable enough to reveal what was preventing her from engaging with the learning activity, enabling us to work together to remove whatever barriers she faced, or at least mitigate their effects in the classroom – and the learning could commence. Her words of refusal would no longer bounce off the walls, unanswered, like they did in our first encounter, but instead they would be heard and become part of the learning experience (Jones 1999).

But what unsettles me about this wish, and particularly about my strong desire to resolve the 'problem' within the classroom walls, is that it sustains both the individualising and the hierarchical nature of the resolution – even if it does so in a less punitive manner than the managerial response. As Elizabeth Ellsworth points out, any attempt at a democratic dialogue between teachers and students must also grapple with the fact that 'strategies such as student empowerment and dialogue give the illusion of equality while in fact leaving the authoritarian nature of the teacher/student relationship intact' (1989: 306). Would the successful dialogue I imagined transform the student's experience of HE, or simply support her to better match its

narrow requirements? If her 'I don't want to' did, in fact, mean 'not under these circumstances', should the commencement of learning, her eager participation, necessarily be the end goal that I should envision? Might it be possible that the 'circumstances' that she refused also include how, where, and when we want and ask students to learn? And perhaps most critically, would this individual moment of connection and transformation, even in its idealised form, have allowed the resistance to echo off more walls than these? Or in other words, could this individual, albeit relational, solution ever offer more than *individual* mitigation in the context of broader institutional and pedagogical expectations of assessment or the classroom space?

As we suggested above, teachers themselves are often not free agents in an HE environment that is geared towards maintaining the status quo and reinforcing inequalities (Cooks and Sun 2002). Maria Do Mar Pereira (2012), similarly, highlights how the exact things that are needed to transform students' experiences of discomfort into productive learning moments or tools – time, energy and emotional investment – are often lacking in our current HE institutions, especially for frequently underpaid and overworked associate and assistant teachers. As Do Mar Pereira suggests, perhaps I was feeling simultaneously exhausted, faced with an intense workload and very little time, and pressured by the managerial imperative to maintain the status quo. Without the ability to influence the broader structures and expectations of the module, let alone those of the institution as a whole, casually employed HE teachers can experience a sense of powerlessness to hear student refusal as anything but that, or to engage with student discomfort in any meaningful way.

But in an echo of Burke's (2017) discussion of the shame that results from the individualising framing of students' failure to engage with pedagogical processes, such incidents can also lead to teachers feeling individual shame – about the lack of a resolution, about our failures to be good feminist educators, about not finding a way to engage students further *despite* the institutional constraints. Thus, perhaps under these constraints, the shame I felt about not turning this particular student's refusal into something productive was as much about my own role in HE as it was about hers. For Richard Boyd (1999), resistance is a 'two-way street' – teachers resist students as much as students do us, and teacher responses are often imbued with defensiveness. If Boyd is correct, and the teacher-student relationship is frequently one of antagonism, is my wish also a wish for the student to accept me and my pedagogical invitation, to see value in my pedagogical approach, and to see me as separate from the monolithic and hierarchical institution? And, does my shame – my wish for a better solution to one student's concerns – become just another example of individualising resistance in the absence of institutional care? What I do know is that, if the very institutional structures that she

refused are what ultimately prevented me from doing anything else but attach to them even more tightly, this instance of refusal was anything but straightforward.

'I'm just playing Devil's advocate here, but…': Resistance as participation

In a compulsory undergraduate module on social welfare, a student, a frequent contributor to class discussions, smiles and raises his hand. I hesitate. His comments are frequently introduced as 'playing the devil's advocate' – framed as oppositional, drawing exasperated breath from fellow students, demanding responses on specific points of contention that disrupt the general focus of the class. He has also expressed opposition to what he perceives the political inclination of the class to be, his critiques implicitly reflecting a broader assumption of 'left-bias' in academia, as well as (his perception of) my gendered embodiment of it.

The student also appears to represent, to me, many of the markers of privilege common to elite universities. He speaks in the language of grammar school debate classes and constructs his contributions with finesse and humour. He does well in assessments, finely balancing a general disapproval with a consistent willingness to engage. His cultural awareness of institutional norms and hierarchies is apparent – he seems well liked by many of his peers, is punctual, makes eye contact, and participates in extracurricular events.

Earlier in the semester the module convenor has asked me not to directly critique students or their contributions in class, because seminars should be a 'safe space' where students can test their ideas. Struggling to do so, I have, admittedly, retreated. I typically take one comment from this student per class at a point when I feel the most resilient – though he raises his hand much more frequently. This approach has felt woefully inadequate in protecting other students who may be implicated in and by his often implicitly racist and sexist statements. I spend countless evenings ruminating on my response, questioning my capacity to facilitate healthy learning environments.

After some weeks of such 'managing', the student's behaviour seems to escalate as he begins to openly condescend other students in class for their 'progressive' opinions. Speaking to the convenor, I am informed that the staff across different modules share my concerns. At the same time, I am reminded that other students are best placed to respond to these kinds of contributions in dialogue. I am left with the nagging sense that my colleague views me as overly sensitive to this form of behaviour.

Understood productively, interactions such as the one recounted here might be framed

as psychosocial resistance to learning, resistance that pushes against the boundaries of comfort and presents an opportunity for social change. Though often interpreted as wilful 'ignorance', Susanne Luhmann (2012) questions whether such ignorance might be better understood as co-constituted with knowledge. Rather than troublesome distractions to be avoided, student resistance to progressive discourses compels teachers to ask: 'what is there to learn from ignorance?' (Luhmann 2012: 128), and to reflect on our abilities to transfer knowledge in an uncomplicated, authoritative manner. Resistance here is often presented as the beginning of a transformative push and pull, as both the teacher's and the students' knowledge is in flux. Importantly, for Albrecht-Crane, these discomforting moments are shared by students and teachers: 'when students resist progressive pedagogies, they express a fear, a horror, of losing the security afforded to them through identification with the social system. In turn, teachers feel the same sort of horror as they encounter student resistance' (2005: 504).

Certainly, within the context of growing attacks on progressive modules – as well as more broadly on the proliferation of discourses of 'identity politics', the 'feminisation' of HE (Leathwood and Hey 2009), and the 'snowflake generation' – these interactions cause me discomfort as a teacher. Such accusations tend to fall almost entirely on students and staff within the critical social sciences and humanities – more specifically, those who teach critical race, gender, sexuality, and postcolonial studies and/or those who are seen to embody these perspectives. Further, while these perceptions are longer-standing, their resurgence in the moment of 'anti-gender' attacks within and beyond academia travels asymmetrically in classrooms. As Albrecht-Crane suggests, relations that exceed the classroom 'become acutely relevant in conservative environments, in which progressive, left-leaning teaching approaches meet face-to-face with a student population that increasingly has become conservative' (2005: 494-5).

The circulation of phrases such as 'left-bias' always strikes me in these moments. The phrase precedes these interactions, yet in the moment implicates me, or rather, perceptions of me as a scholar and teacher. Admittedly, it makes me feel defensive, coupled with a (gendered) fear about my ability to command authority in the classroom. And because such critiques often frame other disciplines and their pedagogies as neutral and rational – in contrast to their feminised, emotional, and trivial academic siblings – I fight not to respond with the assertion that I *am* a rigorous scholar, my perspectives *are* rational and important, as to do so would confirm the binary that the accusation seeks to sustain.

This is not to say that refusal or resistance to progressive agendas never feels productive as a teacher. I have more generally been delighted to find that students are

increasingly well-versed in conversations that had previously seemed confined to academia – ready and agentic in their engagement with, and sometimes resistance to, the critical debates of their time. Often, resistances to progressive content do appear as productive 'moments of rupture' (Albrecht-Crane 2005: 498) that 'disrupt the essentialization and reification of all binaries' (Miller 2016: 2) and the power dynamics of a classroom. Particularly when such resistance yields challenging conversations between students, or students and teachers, I am pleased to see a class negotiate difficult questions about their assumptions and priorities. Concede to a moment of not knowing. Bravely work to articulate disagreement. Maybe settle somewhere close to where we began.

Yet, the resistance described in the above interaction, while certainly formed within the relational dynamics of the class, appears less as an experience in disrupting power dynamics so much as a reification of them. In our experience, students engaging in resistance to perceived 'leftist' teachers (and fellow students) through inflammatory statements often employ strategies that are not only acceptable, but also encouraged, within broader academic practice. Student resistances that are articulated from a position not of marginalisation, but of relative privilege, employing a 'rational' and eloquent approach (Burke 2017), do not risk the same consequences as those discussed in the above section. When critiques are largely spoken in the name of 'rationality', cleverness, and 'debate', they, thus, come to reflect the absence of 'a level playing field' (Burke 2017: 431), as mentioned earlier. Further, the claim that classes should be 'safe' for student exploration, resistance, and disagreement – or that student contributions are *always* productive – is applied unevenly. Thus, such claims can work to perpetuate and confirm racialised, classed, linguistic, and gendered inequalities in the classroom (Ellsworth 1989; Jones 1999; Mariskind 2013; Mayuzumi et al. 2007) – rather than to dismantle them. So, while resistance and refusal are commonly, and often rightfully, framed as having the *potential* to challenge the status quo of academic institutions – do they always?

Indeed, in spite of the sexist and racist nature of the student's comments, his demeanour and approach allowed him to frame what strongly appeared as 'bad faith' contributions as the productive, if boundary-pushing, behaviour that academia encourages. More accurately, his resistance to the content – and its presumed ideology – was not articulated *as* resistance or refusal within the broader framework in which we teach. Rather, it was presented through an approach of flattened neutrality (signalling independence, rationality, individualism) and neutral affect (in the form of debate, argumentation, abstracted objectivism) that tend to be privileged and rewarded in institutional life (Giroux 2003). These acceptable forms of 'hegemonic masculinity' can, as Penny Jane Burke and Gill Crozier (2014) argue, be taken up by different

subjects that are not always male. However, 'only certain bodies can be positioned as legitimate and authoritative in relation to hegemonic patriarchal discourses of masculinity (which play out differently across different pedagogical contexts)' (Burke and Crozier 2014: 54).

Moreover, access to the linguistic, cultural, and emotional resources to 'play the devil's advocate' masks the fact that the content of such comments often has the effect of alienating other students, trivialising either the content of the class or the experiences of others, or even directly threatening others' expression or being. In these moments, it is the very recourse to *productive* modes of academic conduct that belies the harm that the comments might entail for others, as well as their recognition as resistance by teachers. As such, the institutional preference to see students respond to each other's comments, challenge each other, and creatively explore their ideas in dialogue, assumes that we all recognise, respond to, and know the boundaries of productive dialogue in the same way. This ignores not only that not all students have access to a dispassionate entry into the conversation, but also that, in Magda Lewis' words, 'under such circumstances, asking women [or students of colour] to "speak up" and intervene on their own behalf would [reproduce] exactly that marginalization that the young man's demand was intended to create' (1990: 478).

As such, when a broader resistance to progressive learning is framed *through* the conventions of learning, the productivity of dialogue comes into question, as does the role of the teacher in facilitating it. As Ellsworth argues, prioritising dialogue in these instances rests on the 'assumptions that all members have equal opportunity to speak, all members respect other members' rights to speak and feel safe to speak, and all ideas are tolerated and subjected to rational critical assessment' (1989: 314). But how can we as teachers know that such capacities are present? Pereira argues:

> Reflection on discomfort needs to pay *more attention to context*. In other words, it must more explicitly interrogate how the specific material and institutional conditions in which we teach impact upon our capacity to work with students' discomfort in generative and supportive ways. (2012: 132, emphasis in the original)

The interaction described above suggests just this. Whether resistance is read as productive (or even as resistance at all) relies on its proximity to dominant understandings of academic convention, behaviour, and tone. Is what remains unsettling and uncertain about such interactions the fact that they reveal the non-alignment of broader institutional preferences with my own attachment to feminist pedagogical claims? Is it that they reveal the dual mobilisation of 'dialogue' in both critical and non-critical frameworks? What do these moments of resistance-as-

participation teach either me or the students involved about the ways in which institutional expectations for participation can also *align* with power and inequality beyond the classroom? Or, do they merely confirm that within the contemporary power dynamics of HE, only some will be rewarded for advocating for the devil?

'You raise an important point…': 'Productive 'resistance and institutional refusal

I am teaching a group of enthusiastic Sociology undergraduates on an elective module on gender. It is week seven of the 12-week module, and the first in which students have explicitly read and heard critical race perspectives in the lecture, which is taught by a senior academic. The students' discussions have challenged this ordering, as they have been actively drawing out the stakes of intersecting understandings of gender, race, class, and sexuality since the first week of the module. Thus far, teaching has been an overwhelmingly enjoyable experience – moderating, rather than drawing out, impassioned discussion – as the relatively diverse student group has grown used to collectively encouraging each other in their disagreements. As an early career teacher, I have been warmed by the generosity students have afforded each other, and me.

But this week I enter the seminar room to an unusual affect. Students have been talking rapidly to each other, but fall silent as I walk in. The usually light-hearted tone of our initial interactions is absent: students quip short responses and avoid my eye contact. Eventually, one student addresses the elephant in the room: 'I guess I'm just a bit shocked that this is the first week we're talking about race in this course. I was so excited for this week. But then the readings are twenty years old and aren't even written by black authors.' Another student agrees, before the class collectively nods – whether sharing or just discovering the problem, I am unsure.

I agree with the student and her resistance to the readings. I feel that her engagement with the representation of knowledge both demonstrates analytic depth and marks a commitment to the class, as well as to gender and anti-racist politics within academia more broadly. Yet, that the critique falls on this particular week, and not others, troubles me. I worry that the timing sustains accepted notions of when and where race is seen to be relevant to both the discipline and the classroom – stuck to particular lecturers, topics, or contexts, and silenced (or not heard) in others. But I say none of this to the class. Indeed, I am both inside and outside in this moment of interaction. I have been grateful for my part-time job teaching at a new

institution, but I am suddenly conscious that, for the students, I now represent that institution – despite my position as a casually employed seminar teacher. I also find myself wondering whether I am allowed to question my senior colleague. And so I say: 'yes, I think this is a good point. It's important to engage with not just the readings, but the terms in which they have been set. Do you want to express a little more about what you think the effect of this choice of readings is?'

The student is visibly upset with my reply, offering only a few short sentences before the conversation shuts down. The class becomes a struggle, with few further perspectives on the readings brought up. I find myself, for the first time this semester, watching the clock. At the end of the class, the student comes to speak to me, and asks me why I didn't just change the readings. I am surprised, and admit, albeit with some hesitation, that I do not set the readings, assessments, or curriculum. The student frowns and seems surprised.

Within critical humanities and social science classrooms, the above form of resistance is almost always framed as productive. Manifesting as analytical, articulated concerns, such resistance points to an in-depth engagement with the module materials, as well as with their relevance to inequalities beyond the classroom. It signifies a reflexive understanding of academic knowledge and representation – precisely the kind that critical, feminist teachers hope to engage. Indeed, if:

> critical pedagogy emphasizes that student resistance to the experiences of institutionalized education is forged from the contradictions they perceive between the dominant discourse of school knowledge on the one hand and their own lived experiences of subordination and violation on the other (Lewis 1990: 471),

then the student in my class was articulating these contradictions in a meaningful way. From these perspectives, this student was mobilising her own recognition of the inequalities reproduced within academia to try to compel curricular and institutional change. Her claim also echoed and substantiated the consistent efforts of both students and staff to 'decolonise the curriculum' – a critique that has both developed from within and implicated the social sciences and humanities in the perpetuation of colonial knowledges in HE. But the encounter also suggests that forms of resistance are embodied by students and teachers differently – perhaps even more so in the case of teachers who are themselves also (PhD) students.

Looking back on this encounter, what strikes me most is not the passionate moment of 'rupture' (Albrecht-Crane 2005: 498). Rather, it is the withdrawal of the initially enthusiastic resistance – withdrawn specifically when I asked the student to say 'a little more.' It is my feeling

that the refusal to respond to my question, and the later flattening of the class, was a reaction to my own dispassion or absence from the agreement that our classes had previously functioned on. In the absence of my sharing in the students' critique of a senior member of staff explicitly, my question appeared, first, as a call to reframe her resistance as just another teaching moment, and second, as a demand on the student, who felt it insulting to do the work of explaining to her teacher. In this way, my question reiterated the hierarchical norms of participation of the classroom – I retreated into the very conventions of academic practice that sustain the representational issues she was resisting.

Here, a resolutely 'productive' form of student resistance came into contact with the institutional failings of those charged with responding to it. By revealing to the student my own inability to address her concerns with much more than academic and pedagogic convention, her consciously articulated resistance was met with an institutional refusal – transforming her engagement into (in this case momentary, but potentially longstanding) frustration and disillusionment. While my own status as an early career teacher informed my refusal to adequately respond to this student's concerns, the 'end' to our conversation in the classroom was of course not an 'end' to the feelings that compelled it. Commonly such frustrations are further displaced onto staff and students of colour, perceived as better able to hear them, as Akanksha Mehta suggests in her discussion of the labour that women of colour staff members undertake within projects of decolonising curricula:

> In the practice of feminist pedagogy, especially one that centres POC students in the white university that alienates them, it is but obvious that the classroom extends beyond the walls of the timetabled rooms where we see students every week for lectures and seminars. My office becomes the classroom; the café becomes the classroom; the corridor becomes the classroom; that little tiny space outside the door of the classroom becomes the classroom; the bus-stop becomes the classroom; my phone, my email, my Skype become classrooms; my smoke break in my secret spot behind that building under that tree becomes my classroom. (2019: 26; cf. Barnett 2011)

In other words, when institutions and institutional representatives fail to attend to students' productive resistances, the onus is placed further on early career staff, and staff and students of colour, to bear the brunt of this work.[4] Of course, these avenues for pastoral support are vital in

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[4] Sofia Akel's report into experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic students at Goldsmith's University of London found that many students seek counselling and support from BME staff where 'BME staff often

unequal university spaces, as well as a meaningful form of work. But given that younger, women, and of colour early career academics increasingly find themselves teaching on hourly-paid, short-term contracts, receive harsher criticism for their teaching, and are expected to take on a larger share of emotional and administrative labour beyond their assigned roles, these issues bear consideration (Bhopal 2015). Indeed, the point here is not to mark these resistances as unproductive. It is, rather, to suggest that meaningful moments of student engagement with, and resistance to, institutional concerns are frequently displaced into these spaces, channelled away from the staff and institutional sites that could and should be responding to them. Indeed, as Mehta reminds us: 'we [are] well aware of what [counts as] *productive and valuable work* in the neoliberal university and what [does] not' (2019: 28, emphasis in the original).

The day-to-day specifics – hierarchies, constraints, and precarities – of institutional life remain largely opaque for most students. Misrecognitions and misunderstandings of both academic institutions and academics' lives travel through the resistances and refusals that take place in the classroom – both for students and for teachers. My surprise at the student's misrecognition also reveals my reliance on it. It informed the previous authority with which I had facilitated our conversations in the classroom, as well as my student's initial hesitation to truly articulate her critique. And it also informed my unwillingness to critique a senior staff member and my student's initial belief that I would. Certainly, the above interaction still feels necessary, productive, and meaningful. But perhaps, just as in the earlier examples, there is no way of knowing in advance – or indeed, afterwards – what marks resistance as productive (and for whom). And it was certainly a case where student resistance was made ambivalent through its meeting with institutional refusal.

Conclusion

We began this article with a commitment to critical feminist pedagogies that have sought to highlight the meaningful role of emotions in HE classrooms. Our article did not just seek to further illustrate the importance of resistance, emotion, and refusal in the classroom in terms of the potential value they add to institutional spaces or to students' learning, but also to highlight the ambivalent nature of resistance both within and beyond the classroom walls. Based on feminist pedagogies that insist that 'critical pedagogues are always implicated in the very structures they are trying to change' (Ellsworth 1989: 310; cf. Harlap 2014), we argued that

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volunteer additional labour and time to support BME students serving as relatable role models who may be more likely to understand their experiences' (2019: 41).

resistance, refusal, and emotion in classrooms implicates students, teachers, and institutions differently within the structural inequalities of HE and broader life – and whether such implication is productive is not always clear.

To do so, our article recounted three fictionalised anecdotes about moments of resistance or refusal in our UK HE classrooms. Positioning such anecdotes as allowing us to explore 'something extra' (Baraitser 2009: 98), we examined the ways in which these likely familiar moments of student resistance and refusal complicate the necessarily 'productive' nature of emotion to learning when considered in more detail, and in context. From a resistance to 'left bias' to a refusal in the face of 'progressive' solipsism, these anecdotes pointed to broader questions about knowledge, politics, and meaning that relationally shape our classroom interactions. Here, 'straightforward' moments of resistance such as simply not participating, playing the 'devil's advocate' through conventional academic parlance, or carefully articulating a refusal towards institutional citational practices, pointed towards the unequal footing on which students and teachers enter and participate in HE, within a context of institutional unwillingness to respond to such inequalities.

Yet, we were drawn to thinking about these anecdotes precisely because they point to the often contradictory ways in which resistance and refusal become productive or unproductive for teachers, institutions, and students in any given moment – and rarely in the same ways. In story one, a potentially meaningful moment of discomfort, and an opportunity for an alienated student and a feminist teacher to begin a dialogue, met a swift institutional response – there was little institutional commitment to asking what that refusal might tell us. For the teacher, this was a moment of both institutional and feminist failure; for the student, perhaps a familiar demonstration of alienating institutional power. In story two, when a student, who more successfully reflected institutional norms, demonstrated an attachment to ignorance that curtailed the productive capacity of dialogue with others, his dispassionate and depersonalised presentation of resistance was seen to warrant no institutional response at all. For the teacher, and potentially other students, this moment marked a reification of the classed, racialised, and gendered boundaries of educational practice, and certainly not a critical testing of them. In story three, a moment of critically articulated resistance that might have started an important dialogue was left unanswered, likely displaced from the spaces and representatives that it was most intended to implicate by its attempted absorption into 'productive' class engagement. As participants in and writers of these fictionalised anecdotes, we suggest they highlight the enduring uncertainty of whether any such moment of resistance or refusal can be characterised as either productive or unproductive. Our exploration of these anecdotes, thus, works to disrupt

Flynn's (2001) typology of strategic, counter-strategic, and reactive resistance, opening up *more* questions about these different kinds of resistances: how can we know which of these, if any, are 'productive', and for whom, in what moments, for how long?

Moreover, what our anecdotes suggest is that any specific moment of resistance or refusal (strategic or otherwise) in the classroom implicates both teachers and students beyond the encounter, as well as the institutions in which these encounters take place. In each of these moments, as teachers we felt constrained by the institutions we were at once critical of and beholden to the demands of, as well as frustrated with our feelings of incapacity to respond to the experiences of our students as they move through them. As Sandra Smele et al. reflect,

> Perhaps most importantly, [--] we are also at risk of making mistakes in our practices of eliciting personal stories, 'calling out' unexamined privilege and fostering emotional dissonance within our classrooms given that we too are implicated in the systems of oppression and privilege that we seek to challenge and transform. (2017: 701)

Perhaps, then, we too are left with an uncertainty regarding what to make of our own feelings of displacement, 'emotional dissonance', and implication, as formulated in these anecdotes. Do these partial stories about student resistance and refusal tell us as much, or more, about our own moments of rupture and refusal as they do about our students', reflecting as they do moments in which our own attachments to good feminist teaching were suddenly in question? Does sharing them over after-work drinks or in a special issue on feminist pedagogies mark their transformation into something 'productive'? Or does telling them (and hearing them) constitute another form of unrecognised emotional work in excess of our contracted hours and expectations? Perhaps they too exist as another individualising displacement of our own emotions, frustrations, and refusals that keeps us attached to, rather than resisting, the constraints and power of institutional life.

Acknowledgements

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