RETHINKING ACADEMIC SISTERHOOD: REFLECTIONS ON RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN WOMEN IN RESEARCH PRACTICE AND WITHIN THE IVORY TOWER

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Overview

◦ Positioning sisterhood as a sibling relationship

◦ Exploring sisterhood in the field

◦ Research relations and sisterhood

◦ Class, gender and sisterhood in the ivory tower

◦ Finding and understanding sisterhood

◦ Concluding thoughts

Defining Sisterhood

- What is sisterhood?

- Shared experience, community, trust?

- A bond between two or more girls, not always related by blood. They always tell the truth, honour each other, and love each other like sisters (Urban Dictionary)

- So what do we know about sisters?

Sisterhood and the Sibling Relationship

◦ The trouble with siblings (Lucey 2013)

◦ Ordinary aggression and ordinary femininity

◦ Pathologisation of female aggressivity

◦ Abnormal and malformed femininity

◦ Potential and proximity of love and hate as unconscious emotional forces (Klein 1988)

◦ Issues of individuation and differentiation are the main spurs to conflict

Sisterhood and Separateness

◦ Mary's sister is physically and socially removed

◦ Faith left home for university

◦ After leaving for university Faith has never resided in Hystryd and visits are occasional

◦ Moving away socially or geographically de-stabilises kinship relations, in this way Faith became 'the other' (Mannay 2013)

Education and Separation

◦ Mary: My sister just wanted to be a teacher, my sister absolutely loved school… Absolutely loved it, and that's what she wanted to do, teach… And they loved her they'd had all my other brothers and sisters and their names were never mentioned, it was always like Faith (pause) Faith loved school and school loved Faith

◦ Hidden Injuries of Class (Sennett and Cobb 1993)

Individuation, Differentiation, Betrayal

◦ Mary: My three brothers would probably be the drinkers in our family, my one sister who lives in Dublin, she loves a drink, yeah she loves a drink but like she likes wine and champagne, even things like, my sister's very sociable …She likes lots of parties in the house

◦ Interviewer: Ah yeah

◦ Mary: Ah I can't stand the thought of that (laughs) she entertains people, ah Jesus

◦ Intergenerational aspects – mothers, daughters and the impact of the past in the future – the long shadow (Mannay 2013)

Sisterhood and Conflict

◦ Tanya: "It's only my sister, she'll only have a go at me"

◦ Interviews interrupted by constant telephone calls

◦ Wider family expectations, envy and culturally gendered discourses around 'good' motherhood

◦ Collide with Tanya's own ambitions with painful effect

◦ Positioned as a 'bad mother'

◦ Putting her own needs before those of her children

Education and Conflict

○ " I was going into an exam…my sister left messages – phone messages on my answering…on my mobile I couldn't' answer to her, and um…"phoning social services on you, what kind of mother are you…leaving your son" oh terrible"

○ "I don't want to argue or I don't want arguments – life is too short for arguments and all that. But like they do…they have…given me a terrible time, because well…and I think and my friends do say - your sister is jealous, she is jealous and I just think she is pathetic some of the things she does.

○ Some things she has said. It is awful. Dreadful what she has said – like phoning social services, you should be ashamed she said, you should be in the house with the baby, …you shouldn't be in uni... what kind of mother are you leaving your son... and I said Scott what can I do, I can't win – whatever I do is wrong, it's not, it's not good enough..... – I do feel guilty coz like I said to Scott, even a few weeks ago - I am finishing, I am quitting, I said I need to go back to what I used to be before"

Individuation, Differentiation, Betrayal

◦ 'Border crosser' (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001)

◦ Cultural and gendered expectations around motherhood

◦ Studentship acts as a source of anxiety and conflict.

◦ Tanya is caught between established affective rhythms which hold the family together and the possibility of being something else – somewhere else.

◦ Sisterhood - jealousy and/or unconscious defence against change

◦ In university Tanya seeks relational bonds with women "who are like sisters"

◦ These relationships are influential in maintaining participation and transition

Researcher, Participant and Sisterhood

- Feeling the connection – class, place, education
- Ethics, emotion and confidentiality (Mannay 2011)
- Ethics, faithfulness and dissemination (Mannay 2014)
- Feeling the disconnection
- Trouble in the ivory tower
- Individuation and differentiation

'Sisterhood' in the Academy?

◦ Hairdressing and heroine

◦ Feminist doctrines

◦ Classed codification

◦ Feeling the disconnection

◦ 'White trash' and big TVs

◦ Differentiation

WHITE
TRASH
BARBIE

'Sisterhood' in the Doctoral Community?

Their fantasy

◦ Lone parent

◦ Previously "on benefits"

◦ Free undergraduate education

◦ Given 1+3 funding undeservedly while 'better' students self funding their masters because did not get scholarship

◦ Couldn't be bothered to attend every lecture

◦ Complaints to module conveners, my supervisor and administration

My reality

◦ Married

◦ Previously Medical Secretary

◦ Student loans

◦ Won 1+3 funding because I graduated with first class hons and on the merit of my research proposal.

◦ Living with ME

◦ Two kids, two buses and two hours

Sisterhood in the Academy

- A bond between two or more girls, not always related by blood. They always tell the truth, honour each other, and love each other like sisters (Urban Dictionary)
- Class, gender, place, recognition, connection
- Sisterhood and the presenters
- But can a commitment to sisterhood move across these links, boundaries and barriers?

Concluding Thoughts

◦ Ordinary aggression and ordinary femininity

◦ Potential and proximity of love and hate as unconscious emotional forces

◦ Issues of individuation and differentiation are the main spurs to conflict

◦ But can we transcend class divisions and codification of beliefs about the right type of feminist, colleague, woman and sister?

◦ In 'rethinking sisterhood' - what kind of 'sisterhood' can be envisaged?

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