Uneven Relationalities, Collective Biography, and Sisterly Affect in Neoliberal Universities

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This article deploys a collective biographical methodology as a political and epistemological intervention in order to explore the emotional and affective politics of academic work for women in neoliberal universities. The managerial practices of contemporary universities tend to elevate disembodied reason over emotion; to repress, commodify, or co-opt emotional and affective labor; to increase individualization and competition among academic workers; and to disregard the relational work that the article suggests is essential for well-being at work. The apparent marginalization of feminist and feminine ways of being, thinking, and feeling in academia is examined through close readings of three narrative vignettes, which are based on memories of the everyday academic spaces of meetings, workshops, and mentoring. These stories explore moments of the breaking of ties among women and between men and women, as well as document how feminist relationalities can bind and exclude. The article suggests that academic ties are both part of the problem and the solution to countering neoliberal policies, and that academic relationships, especially with other women, are often experienced as unrealized spaces of hope. Building on feminist scholarship about race and diversity, the article reflects on how relational practices like collective biography create both inclusions and exclusions. Nevertheless, it suggests that the methodology of collective biography might engender more sustainable and ethical ways of being in academic workplaces because it provides the resources to begin to create a new collective imaginary of academia.

Introduction

In March 2014 a group of women from several universities met in Sydney, Australia, to exchange stories about their experiences working in academia.[1] We were nine white women of Australian, British, French, and Italian backgrounds and one Asian Australian; all were academics except for one experienced journalist. We came together through a loose grouping that formed via e-mail and social networking around the timing of Maud Perrier's visit to Sydney, and through our interests in women in academic workplaces and the methodology of collective biography. The meeting took place around a large conference table dominating a room used for faculty meetings. This article originates from the stories that, for the limited time of that day, occupied the executive room and provided a counterpoint to the organizational narratives generally circulating in that space. The initial idea for our gathering was to explore the ties among women in the academy in order to challenge conventional representations of women primarily in terms of their kin ties and/or their relationships to men. We were interested in tracing alternative relationalities, but at the same time we wanted to critically interrogate the idea that *sisterhood is powerful* in the academy, and to critique assumptions that women's relationships with one another are necessarily supportive or collaborative. Indeed, *sisterhood*, when used as a call to identification based on similarities among women as a universal fixed identity, has been roundly critiqued by critical race and class theorists (Friedman 1995; Qi 2010). At the workshop the stories we shared ranged back and forth over our troubled experiences as women academics navigating institutions in which certain emotions do not belong, or else are seen as only belonging to us, and how our relationships with (women) colleagues simultaneously evoked feelings of hope and failure about resistance and change. We suggest in this article that stories are an ideal mode for working into the affective and relational complexities of academic work within the contemporary neoliberal university.

We evoke the *neoliberal university* throughout this article, referencing the reformation of modern universities around primarily economic rationalities. As many scholars have documented, this has entailed market deregulation, public disinvestment, a turn to corporate managerialist practices, and a market-first ideology that has contributed to a number of negative effects: volatile curriculum and program offerings; a constantly changing higher education landscape; continuous restructuring as universities try to anticipate markets; massive increases in student debt; precarious employment conditions; the casualization of academic workers; and regimes of accountability that fail to take into account those aspects of academic labor that are not amenable to measurement (Beck and Young 2005; Canaan and Shumar 2008; Davies and Petersen 2005; Shore 2008). Between and within universities and faculties there is increased competition in every sphere, with individualized entrepreneurialism particularly valued, and an organizational culture that claims to be gender- or race-neutral, but has had

particular costs for women—in particular, for women of color and working-class women (Alemán 2014; Clegg 2013; David 2014; Davies et al. 2005; Joseph 2014; Swan 2010). Paradoxically, alongside the discourses of *freedom* and *choice* that a market ideology promotes are ever more rigorous and onerous regulatory and audit practices. External quality audits, performance measures, benchmarking, league tables, and other such practices are imposed (Swan 2010). Academic subjects are complicit as they adopt and internalize surveillance practices within an intense culture of performativity, and those aspects of academic labor that are not amenable to measurement are overlooked (Canaan and Shumar 2008). These techniques represent new "modes of accounting [that] are deployed to create, sustain, or transform social relations" within universities, as well as many other arenas of social and cultural life (Joseph 2014). While this article is not an elaboration of neoliberal ideologies nor can it map all these elements of contemporary university life, this is the backdrop within which each of us work, and our cooperation in the workshop and on the article is, as described by Massimo de Angelis and David Harvie (2009), of the "horizontal, rhizomatic nature" that has the potential to create "alternative spaces of collectivity" within the neoliberal university (Joseph 140). In our vignettes of women working in the neoliberal university we look for those gaps, contradictions, and opportunities that give us hope for other possibilities. We begin the article by outlining the methodology of collective biography and considering its affinities with feminist academic work. We elaborate the theoretical concepts we draw on, and sketch the affective and relational terrain of the neoliberal university. The vignettes that we examine in the final section enable us to explore the relationalities, emotions, and affects circulating within them, and to interrogate the power relations that enable and constrain ways of being, thinking, and feeling in these academic spaces. In particular, the relations in our stories were suffused with bad affects and suggest some of the ways that academic women are co-opted by, and made both vulnerable and abusive by, neoliberal discourses. We suggest that collective biography provides some political and intellectual resources to begin to generate a new imaginary of academia that disrupts and critiques neoliberal discursive regimes. However, while writing our stories together created connections, it may also disconnect us from racialized, classed, or other unknown "others" and reinforce or reproduce hierarchies among us. Hence, we argue that feminist relationalities can bind and exclude, excluding through the binding.

Collective Biography and Feminist Academic Work

Among the strategies that shape academic ties are the research methodologies that we adopt. Collective biography could be considered as a participatory practice that gestures toward the sort of alternative collectivity that might enable some "wiggle room" into whatever gaps we can find (Ahmed 2014b)—gaps that would allow us to begin to disrupt neoliberal discursive regimes and practices.

While our aim was to undertake a critical inquiry into the collective experiences of white feminist academics in contemporary universities, the method itself can be thought of as a political intervention. While collective biography is often undertaken over a longer period and in a site away from the university, our limited capacities to be away from our usual work responsibilities meant that we opted for a single day at a central site. We participated in familiar academic practices of reading and discussing academic papers around our topic of interest, expanding the conceptual apparatus that was available to think through women's relationships in the academy. Collective biography required us to bring our own lived experiences, bodies, and emotions into our theorizing—to put theory to work in the everyday.

As a feminist methodology collective biography aims to recognize discursive effects, incorporate bodily knowledge and affect, and move beyond the concept of individualized, psychological subjects with linear trajectories toward an understanding of "subjects-in-relation" and "subjects-in-process" (Gannon and Davies 2012, 79). We do not suggest that the memories that we recall and inscribe in our stories evoke any pure truths of an event from the past; but rather that memories are constituted, inevitably, from the "particular time, place, discursive frame and present self of the writer" (Davies and Gannon 2006, 13). The stories are merely the best that we can write at that particular moment, inevitably partial and contingent, as well as responsive to the stories, details, and affects that are in circulation in the workshop space.

Our process began with gathering together a group of people interested in exploring the affective politics of women's relationships in the academy, which was the focus of Perrier's visit to several universities in Australia. Prior to the workshop she circulated notes and papers on sisterhood and collective biography methodology. The bundle included a paper by Black feminist Audre Lorde (2007[1984], 70), who wrote that "beyond sisterhood is still racism." We began by telling stories of our own mixed experiences of sisterhood, and then writing our stories in response to our agreed-on provocation "remember a time when the affective politics of academia became visible." Rather than deciding which stories we would tell before we arrived, our storytelling was more volatile and generative so that stories spun off one another in unexpected directions, with some of the memories situated away from academia in other feminist institutions. Thus, the workshop space enabled affective flows to emerge and circulate within the group. Our discussions were lively and wide-ranging, including many references to diverse feminist scholarship that might help us understand what was going on in particular memories and across the memory stories. As the day closed we agreed that we would like to collaborate in writing an article using the stories that we had generated during the workshop.[2] The collective production of meaning continued following the workshop, as we coauthored this article and continued to read and think through the stories and the academic workplaces we had written about. Gradually, as the article circulated among us, with each

writer contributing to the development of the argument, scholarly literature, and analysis of the stories, we developed a shared conceptual repertoire to help us understand what might be going on in the moments that we had selected to explore.

Relationality, Affect, and Emotion in the Neoliberal University

The conceptual anchor for this article is *relationality*. While some argue that there is now a "relational turn" in social theory (Dépelteau 2013), referring to actor-network theory, relational sociology, and the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the concept of relationality, in fact, has been deployed for some considerable time in feminist theorizing: from the feminist psychoanalysis of Nancy Chodorow (1980, 1995) to the moral-development theory of Carol Gilligan (1982, 1987) and the political theory of Seyla Benhabib (1992). Significantly for thinking about workplaces, feminist geographers like Gillian Rose (1997), Sarah Whatmore (1997, 2002), and Doreen Massey (1994, 1999, 2005) have long theorized *space* as inherently relational. Across these bodies of work the concepts of *relationality* and *relations* are understood quite differently. At its most basic, however, relationality refers to the way that individuals are embedded in social relations and connections that lead to intersubjectivity and interdependence rather than autonomous individualism (Redshaw 2013). Thus, what we take up as our individual subjectivities—how we recognize our *selves*—is not disembodied or "disembedded" (Benhabib 1992), but always and inevitably in relation with others (Redshaw). As Carolyn Pedwell (2010) sums it up: we are discursively and socially interdependent. She goes on to say that we depend on and affect one another within and across cultural and geopolitical contexts. Importantly, as critical race theorists argue, conceiving of feminist relationality does not mean stressing sameness or equivalence among women; indeed, as Lorde (2007[1984]) warns, white feminism can distort commonality, thus flattening differences; rather, the aim is to explore the relationships of power and mutuality, or the "constitutive connections" among women (Pedwell 2010, 32). *Relationality* is thus a much-debated concept, but one that challenges Western notions of masculinist individualism, separation, autonomy, and independence.

The proliferation of managerialist and audit technologies in higher education institutions, including increased pressures for performance and production, has had negative consequences on the identities, bodies, and psyches of academic workers. Hence, experiences and forms of relationality are being reconfigured in detrimental and discriminatory ways. Managerialism marginalizes the expression of emotions like fear and anxiety and privileges mastery, instrumentality, invulnerability, and emotional self-control (Kerfoot and Knights 1998; Knights and McCabe 2002). Bronwyn Davies and Eva Petersen (2005) describe the "disillusioned" academic worker, and John Beck and Michael Young (2005, 184) evoke the sense of "alienation and anomie." The introduction of practices

of audit, competition, surveillance, and accountability into higher education places increasing pressure on academics who become "ontologically insecure" within a context of constantly changing expectations: unsure about "whether we are doing enough, doing the right thing, doing as much as others, or as well as others, constantly looking to improve, to be better, to be excellent" (Ball 2003, 220).

Social interactions, human qualities, and values seem to disappear under the pressure of neoliberal regimes. Don Watson describes the all-pervasive language of neoliberal managerialism as "unable to convey any human emotion, including the most basic ones such as happiness, sympathy, greed, envy, love or lust. You cannot," he says, "tell a joke in this language, or write a poem, or sing a song. It is a language without human provenance or possibility" (qtd. in Davies 2005, 1). Although relations are involved they are different types of relations, as "authentic social relations are replaced by judgmental relations wherein persons are valued for their productivity alone. Their value as a person is eradicated. This contributes to a general 'emptying out' of social relationships, which are left 'flat' and 'deficient in affect'" (Lash and Urry 1994, 15, qtd. in Ball 2003, 224). Again, performance has no room for caring, except where it is co-opted to further the practices of neoliberalism (ibid.). Cris Shore (2008, 291, quoting Marilyn Strathern 1997) suggests that "accountability reduces professional relations to crude, quantifiable and inspectable templates," and Davies (2010, 54) states that "the hyper-individualism, fostered under neoliberal governmentality, produces lives that are 'nasty and brutish.'"

Research into gendered aspects of the neoliberal university suggests that despite claims of gender neutrality, with an individualized and competitive workforce the sector is "more sexist and gender inequitable than ever before," and, we also add, racialized and classed (Alemán 2014, 127). In particular, "feminist passions and politics" are at odds with neoliberal accountabilities and metrics where "misogyny [poses] as measurement" (David 2014, 5). Moreover, the traditional relational work (Fletcher 1998) of caring, networking, and being "friendly" and "supportive" in universities continues to be performed by women, and is expected of women formally through workload allocations and informally through work processes and interpersonal interactions. Contemporary cognitive capitalism promotes culturally feminized forms of labor based on the typologies of administration of work itself (precarity, fragmentation, mobility) and on skills (interpersonal relations, emotional intelligence, communication). These modalities draw on a sexual and racial paradigm that capitalizes on difference (Morini 2007, 43). There is an intensified expectation that women will pick up this relational work as it becomes more necessary in the face of the brutality and instrumentalism of neoliberalism and audit. Women's relational labor is co-opted by educational institutions to perform the work of neoliberal reform (Leathwood and Read 2009). Moreover, women's relationships are recruited—for example, through mentoring schemes. Of course, for women of color there are

racialized and racist processes at play, meaning that academics of color are not viewed as having the same feminine qualities from which to draw institutional capital, often being positioned as angry and unfriendly.

We draw attention to how relationality in the academy both causes a problem and is part of the solution. Universities simultaneously repudiate and depend on feminized forms of labor. While these forms may be co-opted and put to work in the form of so-called collaboration, networking, and plugging the institutional-care gaps in teaching and collegiality, they can also provide alternatives to neoliberal, gendered, and racialized forms of governance. The conventional ideal of unworldly, unemotional academia reproduces the Cartesian divide between mind and body, as academic work is seen as "*mindful* and *bodyless*" (Swan 2005, 318). This is because the body is viewed as an intrusion into the careful intellectual work of thinking, reading, and scholarly writing, leading to what Terry Eagleton calls "tight-lipped, joyless austerity" (qtd. in ibid., 318). The specific historical social positions of sexed, classed, and racialized bodies—and the connections among these bodies—are disregarded when academic authority lies in "pure mind" (ibid., 318). Hence, Sue Clegg (2013) suggests that universities themselves can be understood as "affectless spaces" marked by the "discursive erasure of emotion," while at the same time deploying affective economies that reinforce privilege and disproportionately disadvantage women (75–76). However, the managerialist practices that have come to dominate university labor tend to "re-deploy emotion and affective work as neoliberal practices" by, for example, naturalizing the "pastoral" dimensions of pedagogical work as women's work (81). Make no mistake, however, she says because "affect is at the very core of higher education's logics in research, in teaching and in its forms of organisational management" (82).

Emotions like anxiety, fear, and frustration recur in many accounts of work in the neoliberal academy, while others suggest that emotions and practices like kindness and friendship can subvert neoliberal logic (Clegg and Rowland 2010; Cronin 2014). We are mindful that there are dangers in over-privileging emotions as the unalienated part of the self, and wish to avoid reproducing a dichotomy between affective freedom and social determinism because affects themselves are also produced within and through unevenly distributed and circulated power relations.

Thus far in this article we have used both *emotion* and *affect* to signal our interest in the dimensions of academic life that have to do with *feeling* rather than the more usually emphasized *thinking* aspects of our work. Both terms are used in scholarship on women in academia; however, there are important nuances between them. The theoretical notion of *affect* that has emerged in recent years differs from a commonsense understanding of emotion, which is usually seen to adhere to individual subjects. *Affects*, in contrast, move between bodies; they are "intensities that pass body to body [and] resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies" (Seigworth and Gregg

2010, 1). Feminist scholars like Valerie Hey have worked to "socialize" affect and Sara Ahmed and other critical theorists have worked to "racialize" it, arguing that affectivity should not be seen as universal. Affect does not circulate evenly; friendliness does not "stick" to people of color, whereas fear does (Ahmed 2004).

The responsibility to construct and discipline the individualized self—as it exists within normative discourses and networks of relations—operates with particular force on girls and women, who are always-already at risk of failing to secure that position (Gonick 2004a; Ringrose 2007, 2013). It has long been suggested that girls tend to be socialized as "helpers" or relational beings, making it exceptionally hard for them to let go of their investments in "caring, being helpful" relational subjects (Singh 1993, qtd. in Hey and Bradford 2004). Femininity, as Jessica Ringrose suggests (2013, 90), is still a site of "perpetual failure" because the ideal of "non-competitive and nurturing" femininity collides with various "axes of competition." Conventional gendered discourses that ascribe qualities of "niceness," compliance, and conformity to white middle-class femininity may also suggest that women are particularly susceptible to audit technologies and the compliant subjects that they require. Modes of regulation associated with neoliberalism thus mobilize new subject positions that map onto familiar gendered conventions. Contemporary femininities are characterized by the requirement to be both "aggressors and nurturers" (Ringrose 2007, 2013). Irreconcilable tensions between being a relational subject and exhibiting the kind of individualized agency previously associated with masculinity (Gonick 2004a) are heightened for women in neoliberal regimes because such difficulties are experienced as the result of personal failures or successes. Although there is talk of collaboration and interdisciplinarity, individual performance is surveyed and rewarded. The subject positions made available to academics through neoliberal managerialist discourses elevate the individualized agency and competitiveness inherently associated with white masculinity (Alemán 2014; David 2014; Gonick 2004a; Swan 2010). The collective, relational, and emotional aspects of working in the academy, such as social and disciplinary relations that are traditionally associated with white feminine dispositions and feminist discourses, are backgrounded while competitive individualism is rewarded.

Stories like those generated through the processes of collective biography bring into visibility the affective and relational complexities of academic work. As Patricia Stout, Janet Staiger, and Nancy Jennings (2007) found in focus groups with women professors, their stories were "drenched in affect"—they cried, expressed "intense anger," demoralization, and often took on a stance of fatalism as they recounted the exclusion and humiliation they had experienced through institutional promotion and tenure processes (135). Stout and colleagues suggest that negative reactions and emotions tend to be feminized and individualized rather than understood as produced within institutional practices. In our analysis we approach our stories about relationships among

and between academics as the objects of our exploration rather than focusing on the individual actors as independent, discrete entities.

Collective Biography as Hope and (Im)possibility

Although most of us did not know one another prior to the workshop, our coming together was facilitated by existing networks of feminist ties. This coming together had a "human feel" that is often absent from academic life and relationships. While we acknowledge the inequalities of informal ties and the fact that access to networks is unevenly distributed by race and gender (Swan 2015), our workshop enabled a temporary sociality among the participants. There was a warm and trusting atmosphere for most of the day, noticeable by the way people greeted one another, how we listened and paid attention to one another's stories with critical approbation, and the kindness that our hosts exhibited to those of us who had come from other universities and overseas. In all of this we performed relational work (Fletcher 1998). Trust was enabled by the fact that we were not working with one another daily because we are located in different institutional organizations and have widely divergent academic histories. This also meant that disclosure of our working relationships felt safer. This was in spite of the fact that the room in which we conducted the collective biography was a boardroom, lined with heritage-listed art deco wood panels and carvings, retained from the previous life of the building as the headquarters of one of the major media companies in Australia. While the furniture was standard corporate style, the overall atmosphere of the room was not aseptic. But as Ahmed (2014a, n.p.) writes of walking into a room, "what we may feel depends on the angle of our arrival . . . the atmosphere is already angled; it is always felt from a specific point." She goes on to argue that an atmosphere felt welcoming by some may not be experienced in this way by a woman of color. Indeed, one woman of color left the workshop halfway through and we do not know why; furthermore, one nonacademic woman did not become involved in the collaborative writing. Hence, feminist relationalities can bind and exclude—excluding through the binding.

   We do not know why these two women left the process; curiously, we did not ask and did not discuss it until we were fairly well along with writing the draft of the article and were deep in our thinking around neoliberal practices and their effects on academic subjectivities and labor. There could be many explanations, including simple pragmatics, but as feminists we should look for other answers; for example, a lack of comfort in performing the collective biography techniques; a sense that only certain types of stories or feelings were valued (feminists of color challenge white feminists' inability to understand racism, for example); linguistic conventions that are the effects of racialized and classed capital; a feeling that the collective did not include them. The remaining group's collective building continued in spite or because of these dynamics.

Considering the neoliberal penchant for surveillance, self-audit, and accounting for the self, one of the provocations that arose through the writing of this article was whether the stories that are told and written by participants in collective biography workshops might also be thought of as (neoliberal) practices of audit, thereby creating yet another space in which to evaluate ourselves reflexively. Certainly, given that writing an academic article was always in the cards, each contributor made choices at every turn about which stories to tell and how to tell them, performing an academic feminist subjectivity in their storytelling. Stories have been included or excluded not according to censorship, selectivity, or whether some sort of feminist "group-think" might be in operation (although a certain comfort with both the technique and content prevailed), but according to the vicissitudes of the developing argument. The stories that were written and the discussions we had during our workshop about all of them are also part of the shared knowledge-building that we were involved in throughout and after our day together. From our collection of six stories we have selected three to discuss in this article. Each of them is about a specific everyday scene or moment that we recognized in academic life, and each includes sufficient material and embodied detail to bring the scene to life. The affective and political charge of each of these stories resonated among us as we wrote and reread them.

Our stories suggested Clegg's (2013, 82) claim that "affect is at the very core of higher education's logics," and they address two of the areas she identifies: teaching, and the micro-practices of organizational management. It is important to note the affective charge of the day itself. Despite the distance that some of us had covered and the pressing responsibilities in our own academic lives, for many of us the day felt like a bubble of hope and possibility within what we sometimes felt to be intellectually and affectively eroded academic communities in our home institutions. This was reflected in our e-mail exchanges after the workshop. Although both the workshop and the writing of this article were initiated by one of the women, all those who continued through the writing process felt a level of ownership and responsibility. The article was handed over from one author to another on a weekly schedule, with no explicit direction or defined task except to further the emerging argument. Questions were asked and responded to via e-mail, mostly giving a license for each participant to interpret the task and take their own approach to the particular contribution they wanted to make; for example, "I don't mind my initial writing being messed with and written over, deleted, I think it's all part of the process." The writing was led by curiosity and the pleasure of doing it together, and the risk involved was low. There were no institutional imperatives for us to engage in this process, yet the deadlines were met and the article was written into existence. This is not to idealize the short amount of time and space we spent together, but for those of us who participated in the process, we feel that this collective relational encounter helped us not only to theorize gendered emotions at work, but to also

begin to produce a practice of relationality that mobilizes women's relationships in ways that might subvert neoliberal logics. However, as we have noted, not all the workshop attendees continued their participation. Relationality itself is political and therefore is unevenly distributed both structurally and affectively. Merely declaring a space open so that people may choose (or choose not) to enter into it—whether it be a room, a workshop, a process, a collaboration—does not make it so and may mimic the unconvincing claims of gendered, racialized, and classed neutrality within neoliberalism.

The remainder of this article explores the contradictions, ambivalences, and relational complexities for women in academic workplaces through some of the stories that were written in our collective biography. All participants wrote a story around biographical tales of dissent and discomfort with neoliberal dynamics. Some of us wrote about redemptive moments of friendship or bonding, some wrote institutional critiques, and some opted for narratives of friction. We chose three of these stories, which were recognized as combining the narration of specific events with experiences of relationality in the neoliberal academy that were common to us all. Each of these stories is situated in an everyday context with which all of us are familiar: a committee meeting, a workshop, and a supervisory relationship. The narrative perspective varies because the three authors have respectively chosen to use the first person, the third person, and a pseudonym, "Celia," for the central subject. The emotions and events are written in sufficient detail so as to be as close as possible for us to have "an embodied sense of what happened, to imagine in our bodies and minds what it was like to be there" (Davies and Gannon 2006, 3). We do not use the stories as transparent empirical data for an evidence-based critique of neoliberal institutions, but rather as analytical entry-points for prying open categories like *academic women* and *emotional women*, as well as to explore discursive and material effects and practices (Davies 2010, 60). Thus, the possibility of agency, which we would argue is always contingent, provisional, and discursively and materially situated (Gannon and Davies 2012), lies in our collaborative analytical work. This is a different type of agency around the "subject-in-relation" rather than the agency of the "successful powerful heroic lone individual" (Davies and Gannon 2009, 312). As we have drafted this article we have coded and categorized elements of the stories and explored themes that emerge across and between them, but rather than extracting fragments to embed in our argument, we present them here intact in their particular narrative form. This enables us to attend to tone, genre, and voice—to the story as a narrative artifact—as comprising a crafted text. In our discussion we consider the relationalities that are entailed in each of the vignettes, the emotions and affect circulating within them, and the power relations that enable and constrain ways of being, thinking, and feeling in these academic spaces. We also look for gaps, contradictions, and opportunities that give us hope for other possibilities.

Story 1: All Blokes and Hairy-Legged Feminists

I receive the agenda for the gender equity meeting. I see that the representation on the committee has changed to be more "strategic" and includes all the deans of faculties, although is being "serviced" by human resources. In practice this means all blokes, with women included to do the servicing. Funny, given that it is all about getting more women into senior academic roles. I wondered why I was still there, clearly out of place, and thought I might just be a blip of history. I feel curious and worried about the meeting.

I arrive at the committee room and my being out of place becomes even more obvious when it comes to sitting at the table. I wonder where to sit: with the women who were bunched together or to find a seat among the blokes? I grab the closest seat, which is near the bloke chairing the committee (not the usual chair, but filling in for this meeting). He smiles briefly at me and then turns to joke with the blokes arriving that this was their third meeting together today. I am not part of this and feel even more uncomfortable.

We move on to the agenda to discuss the range of strategies that are happening. One of the members asks about a space open to all women, a university-wide event that we used to run where women got to discuss their issues with the vice chancellor, who during that period was a woman. This space was now closed and had become a consultation by invitation-only for a selected group of twenty. Someone asks why this had changed; the response of the chair is that "it used to be run by a group of hairy-legged feminists who had their own agenda—times have changed."

The room falls silent. One dean, who was sitting beside me, mutters under his breath that it was an inappropriate comment from a chair, but says it only to a colleague sitting on the other side of him. I wait to see if anyone will comment, but no one does. My heart is pounding and I know my face is red, but I am determined not to let this comment slide. I say that I am very familiar with this consultation and chaired the group that organized it. I say that this group did considerable work around improving conditions for women at the university. I do not say anything about how we should be respectful in how we discuss women.

I expect that someone else might take this up. No one else speaks; they shift uncomfortably in their chairs and nobody looks at me or the chair. I am furious and can feel my heart racing, my body shaking, the space closing in on me. I feel like leaving the meeting, but know that this would make me even more vulnerable and be seen as "hysterical." I sit quietly and say nothing more during the meeting.

As the meeting closes one of the women comes up to me with a pitiful expression on her face and asks if I am okay. She asks if I would like to "debrief." This makes me feel so much worse—as if it is my problem and need some counseling for it. I leave feeling humiliated.

I do not know what to do. Should I write to the chair about it? Should I resign from the committee? I feel I can do little to make any difference. I also remind myself that I made a commitment not take on issues on behalf of others that I can probably

do nothing about anyway. I feel that no matter what I do I will be positioned in a particular way as the "emotional woman." In the end I do nothing, but to this day ponder just what I should have done.

The academic relationalities in the story of the gender equity meeting entail vast differentials of power between the institutional men and the remnant feminist—the previous chair from an earlier iteration of the committee. Paradoxically, an apparent increase in the importance of gender equity policies and strategies to the university as a whole has, as the writer suggests, nearly emptied the room of the women to which it pertains and has silenced their voices. This is suggestive of the institutional shifts that happen when "diversity work" becomes legislated and existing equity practices are reshaped into "an inequality regime given new form, a set of processes that maintain what is supposedly being redressed" (Ahmed 2012, 8).

Throughout the story a clear binary is set up among women broadly, the writer in particular, and "blokes." In the space of the meeting the women are "bunched together" while the men spread themselves about, performing a particular form of homosocial masculinity in their "blokey" and "jokey" embodiment. The word *bloke* alternates with *deans* through the story, and the implication is that all the positions of power—not only in the room, but across the entire institution—are held by men who reinforce this power by their "blokey" ways of being together. This evokes the "managerial masculinity" that Ana Alemán (2014) suggests has exacerbated patterns of women's exclusion from positions of power in contemporary universities. The descriptor of "service," which once might have been part of the charter of public universities like those we work in, is here used merely to reinforce the subservient position of the women in the room. The men take up the speaking space in the room as well. The pivot point of the narrative is the "hairy-legged feminist" jab from the (temporary) chair of the meeting. But although at least one of the male deans recognizes the inappropriate nature of the disparaging comment made by the chair, his minimalist response —"mutter[ing] under his breath"—seems to relegate him to the subservient position that is otherwise occupied by women, where commentary occurs in peripheral spaces, in the barely audible comment to a neighbor or the "debrief" offered after the meeting. The pervasive silencing and omission of women are reinforced by other details: the many important meetings that these men share, the termination of the open forum for women to speak about their concerns to the vice chancellor (who we presume is a man), the reformulation of the committee to include the institutionally powerful figures of deans, and the subsequent excluding of women. In Ahmed's (2014a) terms the atmosphere is "angled" to the "blokes'" way of being; this is so, the story suggests, not only in this meeting, but throughout the university.

The story suggests that the time for feminism in the institution is past. This is certainly how the chair sees it, as he states that "times have changed."

In contrast to the earlier formation, when the feminists "had their own agenda," the present is somehow implied as being without a political agenda (although of course it has a meeting agenda). However, any suggestion that the present is more neutral (as though this equates to equity) is demolished by the precision with which the scene of the meeting is described in the story; how the movements of eyes, bodies, and voices are tracked, and the ironic use of the word *strategic*, denoting the dominance of certain types of institutional power and the pervasiveness of corporate managerial discourse throughout the institution. Although the woman in the meeting may be merely "a blip of history," the story also provides a (hopeful) glimpse of other, more horizontal and inclusive ways of doing equity work. There is an alternative, we are told obliquely. Perhaps there is a sense of nostalgia for a feminist past in this story, but as Clare Hemmings (2011) notes, nostalgia can be a seductive though paralyzing position for feminists. We wonder instead whether it might be possible to resituate more inclusive, less hierarchical—and therefore we would say more "feminist"—institutional practices as strategic for the proper functioning of the university.

This account is saturated with affect and emotion, and all of it seems to be attached to female bodies. Particular emotions are named: the woman is "worried," she is "uncomfortable," she is "furious" and "humiliated," and she is afraid that others will label her as "hysterical" and "emotional." An atmosphere hostile to any sort of emotion—apart from a brief smile or joke—is created and sustained not only for supposed hairy-legged feminists, but for anyone who might dissent. Thus critique itself is made impossible, and asserting any sort of tie to feminists is difficult. Several unnamed others ask questions of the chair, but this leads only to his dead-end comment about hairy-legged feminists. The provocation seems indicative of an emotion, perhaps anger, as he wields it as a weapon clearly directed at the woman in the story. The others avert their eyes. The curious metaphor of "the room falls silent" makes us wonder how a room falls silent and what this denotes about the potency of silence and the circulation of affect despite and within it. Into this silence, it is the body of the woman that erupts. Her "heart is pounding" and her "face is red," and later in the meeting she feels her "heart racing" and her "body shaking." The resolution and exacerbation of the problem in the story happens after the meeting when one of the other women mobilizes another emotion, approaching her with a "pitiful expression" and an offer to help her debrief. What we might read as simply feminine empathy and support following a moment of overt bullying in a public space is entirely devoid of any political effect; indeed, it serves to further demoralize the "victim," who is undoubtedly positioned as a "feminist killjoy" (Ahmed 2014b), which leaves her with nowhere to go. Emotions circulate unevenly so that particular emotions "stick" to certain bodies, marking them as inferior, dangerous, pathological, or anachronistic (Ahmed 2004). The fury of the feminist in the face of institutional erasure cannot be expressed. In the neoliberal university affective excesses are not professionally strategic;

they signify subjects who are not playing the game. No emotions—or more precisely, only the "right" sort of emotions—are allowed, nothing hysterical or that challenges the fabrication of us all working toward an ideal of excellence that can be measured and controlled.

Story 2: Standing Naked among the Clothed Proper Feminists

The body/work workshop had felt like a riskily doomed experiment all along, a tentative yet brazen step out of the good-girl line: she had tried to organize something that would feel true to her desire to challenge conventional ways of knowing about bodies that prevail in the academy. After the speakers' papers she had asked the academics to reflect on their bodies as workers. First, they looked at photographs of famous feminists for inspiration and then drew their own bodies as academics so that they could explore embodiment at work differently. In trying to make the embodied nature of academic labor visible she had hoped for a different kind of intellectual exercise where bodies would not be erased or hidden for a change. Louise, one of the participants, had been a shadowy, shady presence during the embodied activities. This smirky, noncompliant presence added to her anxiety. Louise had visibly disliked being asked to do some drawing; her disengagement suggested that this kind of exercise was beneath the real *intellectual she was.*

After the workshop she joined Louise and Alison in the university bar. Alison was the sharp and more senior feminist academic whose support and encouragement she longed for. Alison and Louise sat opposite each other, smugness written across their faces. Her heart sank at their shared coziness. "So how was the workshop?" Alison asked. Louise's answer, under her breath, was barely audible, but felt both violent and infantilizing: "There was not enough proper academic discussion for my liking." The words did not come out of her mouth and she looked down at the floor. She had not anticipated these women's rejection, which was of a way of working, not a rejection of her—but it felt the same. The snide remark caught her unawares, paralyzed by the unexpected humiliation. She had fantasized a safe and open space; instead, she found that she was cut out of a place of shared coziness, built with gossipy and conspiratorial tones, of the other two women. The knot in her stomach tightened as the conversation moved on and the wine flowed, but she pulled the good-girl mask back on. They just did not get it/her, or perhaps she had caused too much discomfort in asking them to talk about their own bodies? Alison's response felt like a defense to being asked to do something confronting, and there was definitely no space to open up a conversation about why and how this felt uncomfortable. Lodged at the back of her tongue was the bitter taste of exclusion, and its ripples formed a shattering of hope about her place here. This attempt to mess with academic conventions felt like standing naked among the clothed, proper feminist academics who refused to get undressed; Louise and Alison looked like shrieking school girls embarrassed about their pubic hairs. No more fooling around they told her, not if you want to play with the big girls. After walking home she

could not get warm for a long time, and yet could not get rid of the burning outrage
at their dismissal. Not to expect protection was one thing, but benevolent tolerance
was another. She vowed from then on to keep her distance from Louise. Adding to
the shaming she had just experienced was another crimson layer of pain she was
peeling off—the feeling that she should have spoken up for the workshop and what
it meant to her.

In contrast to the previous story, our second story is entirely concerned
with academic relations among women within a designated feminist space. As
the author describes it, this was a workshop *for* women offered for academics
and postgraduate students. This is not the high-status context of the meeting
full of deans/"blokes" in that participants and the organizer are relatively junior
in the institution. This does not mean that the stakes are any lower or that
the damage to an emerging academic subjectivity will be any less. Indeed, it is
the vulnerability of the woman in the narrative that stands out in this story. It
also raises questions about pedagogical risk and the long traditions of feminist
work in academia to subvert and play with convention. This space does not
seem to be safe; trust is, at best, tenuous and contingent. Although the nature
of the institution is not stressed in this story and it is more intimate than the
previous one, it may be the case that some sorts of risk-aversion—at least in
the context of tight competition for tenured employment in the sector—may
be characteristic of contemporary universities.

The story unfolds as a classic example of mean girls ganging up on and
excluding, in a supposedly classic feminine way, the nonconformist individual
from their tight circle. Words like *smirky* suggest that the author feels she is the
recipient of fake and insincere (adolescent) feminine wiles. This sort of "indirect
and relational aggression" (Ringrose 2013, 31) is not essential to femininity, but
is a consequence of the discursive constitution of physical violence as mascu-
line. Therefore, feminine violence is constituted as not-masculine, not-direct,
and not-physical (and therefore as *relational*). As Ringrose (2013) and Marnina
Gonick insist (2004b), these are discursively constituted categories that are
widely generated, circulated, and reinforced in families, education systems, and
psychologizing discourses that dominate popular culture, and they vary along
axes of class, race, and ethnicity. This means, for our analysis, that more or
less the same behavior in these two stories is very differently depicted by the
authors: while the man muttering a comment under his breath to the person
beside him at the meeting was a sign of weakness, in this vignette the woman's
comment is much more loaded and wounding. Louise's comment to Alison is
"barely audible but felt both violent and infantilizing." The "smugness that is
written across the faces" of the two women suggests to the author that they are
arrogant and self-assured in contrast to her vulnerability. From her perspective
the "cozy" feminists keep her out in the cold, such that she cannot get warm.
And they are impervious to her emotions. Sometimes we can anticipate what

might be going on in a particular space; we might even have emotional premonitions like the woman in the previous story who is both "curious" and "worried" before she enters the space. And sometimes we do not. This woman does not anticipate her rejection, unlike the woman in the first story who knew she was outside from the start.

Vulnerability is a key trope throughout this story, and it illuminates how vulnerability itself is both an embodied condition and the result of the uneven distribution of privilege embedded in institutional practices (Fineman 2008, 2010). This woman feels that she has exposed herself figuratively and literally, thinking that she is in a safe (feminist) environment, but meeting a chilly rejection, as one of the participants has refused the invitation to expose herself. Emotions in this story emerge obliquely, but are also located in the body. Rather than the fury of the first story, which though silent is ultimately apparent to others in the room, this emotion is further repressed: "words don't come out of her mouth"; "lodged at the back of her tongue was the bitter taste of exclusion"; "the knot in her stomach tightened." Although she seems not to have let slip the "mask" to show or express these emotions while she is in the bar, their embodied effects continue to impact on her as the paradox of not being able to "get warm for a long time" is felt simultaneously with "burning outrage" and a "crimson layer of pain."

The location of this scene is the supposedly convivial space of the university bar, where the women are sharing drinks after the workshop. The space that she had naively expected to be "safe and open" was not a material space—neither the bar nor the workshop nor the university—but the elusive, imagined space of feminist acceptance. The rejection of "it/her," where method and subjectivity slide into each other, is overwhelming, and the "shattering of hope about her place here" expands well beyond these material and immediate spaces. The binary that is set up in this story between the "naked vulnerability" of the woman in the story and the "clothed, proper feminist academics" reinstates the cool rationality and disembodiment of appropriate academic practice. In contrast to our first story, which positions a hostile masculine university against the feminist practices of the past and demonstrates only *ineffectual relations* among women in the present, this story focuses entirely on *troubled relations* among women. It reminds us that we cannot make naïve assumptions about women's ways of being, thinking, and feeling in university life. Relations among women in universities are as subject to widely circulating and disparaging discourses of femininity, material inequalities, and structural competition as any other social and cultural locations and result in the exclusion of other women. Indeed, as theorists argue that the gendering of the neoliberal university is brutish, white individualist masculinity is predicated on the exclusion of certain forms of femininity and the inclusion and instrumentalization of others. Women are rewarded for performing masculinity so long as they do not beat the boys at their own game.

Story 3: Judith Disappears and Celia Is Endlessly Grateful

Celia needs Judith to disappear. She wants her gone. But Judith is here to stay. Celia fantasizes about the bad things that could happen to Judith or her family. It would have to be a terminal illness—or a terrible accident perhaps. She pieces together little details that she could glean from their small talks about Judith's family to imagine what misfortune could befall them. It would have to be tragic, unbearable, that would hit Judith so hard she would have to disappear, she would have to go. She would leave Celia's space and stop messing with her mind and work.

Judith made a point of telling everyone that she wanted women to succeed at work. She prided herself for being a mentor and protecting and pushing other women forward, encouraging them to claim leadership and ownership of their work. No more filling in the gaps—you got to own it, girl! Be a leader, be in charge, be named on the projects you are working on, be acknowledged for being a leader!

Celia breathes in and out. This new thing! Judith is at it again, destroying everything Celia has built up over the years. Everything that made her proud, ripping it to pieces with a smile. Judith is cornering Celia, suffocating her; no rest at night either because Judith is invading her dreams.

Celia feels that she tried everything: lengthy conversations with Judith about the purpose of their work, e-mail exchanges involving other people, "papers" and "cases" elaborating on ideas that Celia believes in. Judith always has a "table," a one-pager, a printout of "just some ideas I came up with" in response, rejecting, smashing everything Celia has to offer. Judith is her boss. There is no way forward with this, through this, not with her. Celia needs Judith gone. . . .

Celia is at home, having some breathing space, away from the stale air in the office. She hears an e-mail ping. Judith. Celia's chest tightens and stomach starts churning. What now! Oh . . . an e-mail documenting Celia's achievements and all the wonderful qualities that she has exhibited in her work over the months. No introduction for this, no reason given. The ability to work with difficult people in challenging circumstances is mentioned. "For your portfolio" it says.

Celia is confused. Judith must live in a parallel universe? No, Celia is infuriated, she can hardly breathe. How dare she! Now Celia has to respond and thank her. . . . Six months later Judith is gone, evaporated. Celia and others carefully dismantle everything Judith started. No problem feels insurmountable. Celia is endlessly gratefully for the blissful harmony of the universe.

Our final story also turns to relations between women within the formal contexts of the university. Here, the "big girl" (to borrow from the language of the previous story) is the formal workplace supervisor of Celia, the woman centered in this vignette. This memory story includes traces of multiple face-to-face meetings with her boss, Judith. These are the sorts of meetings that are usually located within various human-resource managerialist frameworks. Practices like the mentoring that Judith espouses ("protecting and pushing other women

forward, encouraging them to claim leadership and ownership of their work . . . you got to own it, girl"; the efficiency of "a 'table,' a one-pager, a printout of 'just some ideas I came up with'" that hijack meetings and leave no space for real discussion or divergent thinking; the insincere "for your portfolio" e-mail) make sense only within these paradigms. Likewise, Celia's futile responses to push back—"e-mail exchanges involving other people"; "'papers' and 'cases' elaborating on ideas"—are part of the technologies of the managerial university. The story builds up layers of frustration through these cumulative encounters with the micromanaging Judith that seem only to unravel and undo each aspect of Celia's work. Finally, it settles on the particular scene of Celia, working at home and hearing the "ping" of the next unwanted, contradictory e-mail. Judith both pushes and provokes Celia and consoles and nurtures her; she is both "aggressor and nurturer" (Ringrose 2007, 485), displaying the schizophrenia that contemporary femininity demands. These emerge as irreconcilable tensions between being a relational subject and exhibiting the kind of competitive individualized agency that is normatively associated with masculinity.

However, rather than the emotional implosion of the previous stories, this story foregrounds the pleasure of Celia as she recounts this as a tale of *Schadenfreude*. The description of "six months later" describes how Judith got her comeuppance and how the "blissful harmony of the universe," or at least of Celia's workplace, was restored. The story takes on a fairytale quality in which the evil stepmother (read putatively feminist boss) disappears. While Celia might be considered another feminist killjoy, this story takes a turn when the imagined punishments that Celia would bring down on Judith seem somehow to be realized. The resolution of the story is that Judith "is gone, evaporated." Celia might be thought of as a sort of "mean girl" herself—fantasizing about a "terminal illness" or "terrible accident . . . be tragic, unbearable, something hitting Judith so hard that she would have to disappear, she would have to go." The story is melodramatic and as enjoyable to read as it was to write. Despite her likely incapacity to respond to Judith in any effective way—again, it is almost always Judith who takes up the speaking space and space of action in the story—Celia has a vivid imagination, which she puts to work in managing Judith's impact on her working life.

Her story is again drenched in affect, in feelings that manifest in her body though are not as easily namable as emotions. Even at home her "chest tightens and stomach starts churning" when Judith makes contact. Judith, she says, is "cornering" and "suffocating" her, "messing with her mind and work" and even "invading her dreams." Celia is under assault from Judith on all fronts, but not without resources. These are, however, entirely individual resources, unrelated to any supportive contexts, strategies, or relations in or outside the workplace. The story reminds us that work relations are about much more than the actual work of teaching or research that characterize our university locations. There is also the work that is done with emotions and the body.

For Celia there seems to be no escape from Judith, as they are locked into an intense and interdependent relationship where relationality is configured in ways that Celia experiences as detrimental and discriminatory. Yet, both women appear to be doing the "right thing": Judith enacts her role as manager through technologies like e-mail, which is an "inspectable template" that suggests that she is a diligent and supportive manager. Celia responds by having "tried everything," without effect. The story suggests the complexity of workplace relations and pervasiveness of managerialism, which leaves no way to respond to practices that have the guise of "support," and where to speak against these practices would be viewed as overreacting. The story supports Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff's (2011) suggestion that women are the quintessential subjects of neoliberalism, with its increasing "emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline . . . individualism, choice and empowerment [that] coexist with, and are structured by, stark and continuing inequalities and exclusions" (4). Ironically, within this performance of proficiency and compliance both women, as with other workers, are locked into "judgmental relations wherein persons are valued for their productivity alone" (Lash and Urry 1994, 15, qtd. in Ball 2003, 224). Affect circulates in the story within Celia's body and her fantasies, but it is not expressed in her relations with Judith, and we are left with no sense of the latter as a thinking/feeling being in this workplace, except for wondering whether the unwanted gift of the e-mail "For your portfolio" might be intended as recompense.

This story illustrates that there is no universal, fixed identity for sisterhood, and that we can make no assumptions that practices of caring will emerge among women in universities or in any other sites or that women will "support" other women in ways that are recognized by them as supportive. Although the story does not give us anywhere to go in a practical sense, in terms of bullying practices at work or clues for "managing upwards" (to borrow a managerialist concept), it does underline the energy that can be sourced from fury and the importance of the imagination—even if, as in this instance, this is mobilized well after the impossible situation has been resolved. The story does not change past events, but it pries open another way of thinking and feeling about how to respond to workplace situations that seem to be "suffocating" us, and it also hints at the breadth of unexpected resources that might be available. Rather than appropriating feminine compliance as the default response to workplace problems or repressing inappropriate ways of thinking/feeling at work, the story suggests that there are always alternatives. Thinking about these stories, we are also left wondering whether the sort of open-ended equity arrangements or other sorts of workplace women's networks from the past that are hinted at in the first story might have been useful to Celia and to the women in the second one. At the same time, we are aware that such formalized institutional responses can be recruited as another technology of surveillance. Perhaps the hierarchies of seniority present in each of these stories—the deans and the remnant feminist,

the smug, more experienced academics and the less-experienced workshop pre-senter, the manager and the woman she supervises—need to be balanced with more horizontal ways of interacting with one another. We would suggest that despite its limited purview, the day we spent together and the intellectual and emotional resources it offered may have been one of these spaces.

Conclusion

Our stories demonstrate some of the ways in which academic women are co-opted by neoliberal discourses and made both abusive and vulnerable by them. The relations in our stories were pervaded with bad affects, ranging from paralysis and resignation to hate, sarcasm, hopelessness, and willfulness. Our processes of recalling and writing our stories enabled us to reclaim voices that may have been absent in the events narrated in the stories themselves. They demonstrated that the body, when overwhelmed by bad affects, speaks through both hackneyed and inventive registers. Our stories suggest that the supposed gender and race "neutrality" of the neoliberal university is a dangerous illusion, where the gender equity committee comprises a group of powerful men who move together across the spaces of senior management, and where women academics can position one another in demeaning and hierarchical ways.[3]

As we suggest, our processes of collective biography and collaborative writing produced particular kinds of intellectual and emotional relations at the same time that we recounted moments of emotion and affect. The workshop and writing can be understood as an intersubjective emotional space in which certain modes of sisterhood were enacted and challenged. As Anne Cronin (2014) writes, the sharing of emotional stories moves beyond talking to creat-ing a space in which emotions are made and experienced. Talk and emotions are generated intersubjectively, are not located in any one individual, and can produce a felt corporeal bond through the sharing of feeling and relational prac-tices, such as offering support and listening. In so doing we inserted particular modes of being and relationality into the neoliberal university, producing a rare political and epistemological space. The collective relational encounter helped us to not only theorize gendered emotions at work, but to produce a practice of relationality that constitutes a way of mobilizing the subversive effects that women's relationships can have on neoliberal logics.

Our workshop put into place a form of temporary sociality characterized by intense, if fleeting exchanges. At an intellectual and political level it pro-vided the resources to begin to generate a new imaginary of academia, with some wiggle room for disrupting and critiquing neoliberal discursive regimes (Ahmed 2014b). Coming together to write about gendered emotions at work produces practices of relationality that constitute a form of resistance, which complements and subverts therapeutic approaches to neoliberal atomization and alienation. Elaine Swan (2008) has argued that the critiques of therapeutic

cultures as individualizing and depoliticizing are too simplistic and fail to take into account how these psychological economies also provide resources for coping with the difficulties of producing oneself as an enterprising neoliberal self. Liz Bondi (2005) has also shown that voluntary-sector counselors resist some technologies of individualization and explicitly view their practices as enabling patients to become conscious of and counter broader social inequalities. Building on these nuanced accounts of the political dangers and potential of therapeutic practices, we see collective biography processes as entwined with a broader therapeutic culture, but potentially more transformative because they involve collective (rather than individual) thinking and writing, leave a visible public trace through publication, and consider emotions as both reflecting and shaping wider social structures.

Ultimately, two women—an Asian Australian and a white nonacademic—left the process and we do not know why. We do not know how or whether these women felt excluded from our collective process of inquiry, but it raises questions about who gets to constitute a collective that we continue to ponder. This suggests that the relational practices of our academic work—even those that seem to provide "alternative spaces of collectivity"—remain ambivalent, complex, and certainly racialized and classed (Joseph 2014, 140). While we may find some hope that we might create more horizontal and collective modes of navigating the corporate university while we work to share our collective experiences among networks of women, these modes of relating are still structured by race, class, and other potential categories of difference (for example, tenured and nontenured, student and staff, faculty and professional support, and so on). Telling our stories and generating practices of relationality may have created connections and ties, but it also may have disconnected us from racialized, classed, and unknown "others" and reinforced or reproduced hierarchies among us. Stories and emotions remembered and recounted in collective biography are structured by race, gender, and class and need not be shared or produce identifications; in fact, they could fracture potential connections.

Relationality itself is political and differentially distributed, regardless of any assumptions that might be made of "open" spaces or "choices." Feminists of color and working-class feminists have made it clear that white middle-class feminist processes and spaces can feel closed to them emotionally, politically, and theoretically. Furthermore, as our article has demonstrated, relationality takes shape from affect, identifications, and dis-identifications. The collective biography process can enable the invigoration of politically important relations, but our experience reminds us that we should not assume that a feminist collective precedes the process of sharing stories, or is even produced from the process. It reminds us that sisterhood attempts to produce commonalities and equivalences, but that this can also be part of the problem.

Appendix

An E-mail Aside as We Circulated Drafts of This Article

"Being away from the university has given me a different ethical vantage point. I have realized that I find it almost impossible to think and act in an ethically upright way inside this institution. During this time I re-learnt a language which has been almost erased or twisted in current universities and which I had largely forgotten over the last ten years of working in higher education. Words like: community, intuition, courage, integrity, generosity, vulnerability resonated with me, and this sound-feeling grew louder and clearer to me. I'd like to call for us to reclaim these words—they are powerful tools to change the way we think about others and ourselves, the work we do, and why we do it—and to practice these words in our classrooms and meetings. And wherever we can we need to speak up when other words (like performance and monitoring) are taking their place and this jars with us in some way (I know I often haven't done it)."

Song Lyrics Evoked by the "Call for Papers" for This Special Issue

Sebben che siamo donne paura non abbiamo
Abbian delle buone belle lingue, abbian delle belle buone lingue
Sebben che siamo donne paura non abbiamo
Abbian delle buone belle lingue, e ben ci difendiamo

This is a protest song sung by women working seasonally in the rice fields of Italy's Po Valley in revolt against *padroni*, the landowners. It says that "even if we are women we are not scared, we have fine, beautiful tongues and we can defend ourselves." This came to mind while reading the "Call for Papers." In Italian the word for *tongue* and *language* is the same, so the song can also mean that we have the linguistic capacity to defend ourselves.

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Notes

1. Although the workshop took place in Australia, the authors of this article have been academics in universities outside of the country, including the UK, United States, and several European countries. While there were eight participants for the full

workshop, several women left earlier in the day and seven of us expressed interest in continuing to work collaboratively by writing the article.

2. The three stories were written during the workshop by women who also coauthored this article. No stories were used from workshop participants who did not continue through to the collective writing of the article. Analysis of the stories and the ensuing discussions were contributed to equally by all the authors through the article's multiple iterations, from draft to final version.

3. For this suggestion and many others, we are indebted to our thorough and intelligent reviewers, whose comments enabled us to extend our thinking and sharpen our arguments as we revised the article.

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