

# ***Can a critical understanding of emotions enable the creation of more inclusive spaces for belonging and transformation in higher education? Interrogating early career scholars' mentoring into the academy***

Sherran Clarence

Doctoral School and Research Operations, Nottingham Trent University, sherran.clarence@ntu.ac.uk

## **Abstract**

Early career is a particularly difficult academic career period, marked increasingly by casualisation, pressure to publish, teach, supervise and participate in departmental life, and decreased job security. This period may be even more difficult for scholars who identify as Black, non-binary, LGBTQI, as women, Indigenous, international, non-English speaking. Despite measures to advance equality, diversity and inclusion in higher education globally, academics that do not look, sound, speak or behave like the 'somatic' or cultural 'norm' do experience discrimination, both subtle and open in nature (Puwar, 2004; Gagnon, 2021). In these contexts, increasing numbers of early career researchers, including doctoral students, are struggling with the intellectual, personal and emotional issues that the early career period can give rise to, especially where who you are is deemed deviant from the 'norm' and therefore in need of change or subsumption.

Megan Boler contends that academia, like the wider societies it is part of, uses emotions to police ways of being, setting up the 'right' and 'wrong' ways of behaving, being and engaging in academic life. She argues that paying attention to emotions is key to enabling and widening a social justice agenda (Boler, 1999). Emotions here are not understood as personalised feelings but are theorised as sociological artefacts that move and 'stick' within and between different spaces (Ahmed, 2014). Emotion can shape and demarcate belonging; but emotions are hard to pin down and even harder to talk about because they are carefully policed. I argue, therefore, that we need to pay critical attention to what kinds of emotions are constructed in university spaces inhabited by early career and doctoral scholars, and the work that these emotions do. In this paper I connect with both the Hleungwa and Macfarlane thinkpieces, using data from narrative interviews with early career academics which included both visual methods and participatory methods, in that participants were invited to co-create the interview questions or focus with me. In particular, I am interested in how the academics came into academic work, how they are navigating it, and what their sense is of the structures or systems that 'police' belonging. I hope to contribute to the wider conversation on how we create and sustain more socially just, open and transformed universities through adding to the explanatory frameworks and tools we have for exposing exclusion that can be hard to see, and harder to challenge.

## **References**

- Ahmed, S., 2014. *The cultural politics of emotion*. 2nd ed. Edinburgh University Press.
- Boler, M. 1999. *Feeling power: Emotions and education*. Psychology Press.
- Gagnon, J. 2021. Innovation without limits: Imagining a possible inclusive future for researchers. Keynote address, Researcher Education and Development Scholarship Conference, 14 October 2021, Online.
- Puwar, N. 2004. *Space invaders. Race, gender and bodies out of place*. Bloomsbury Academic.

## **Keywords**

diversity, early career researchers, emotional labour, inclusion, feminist theory, social justice