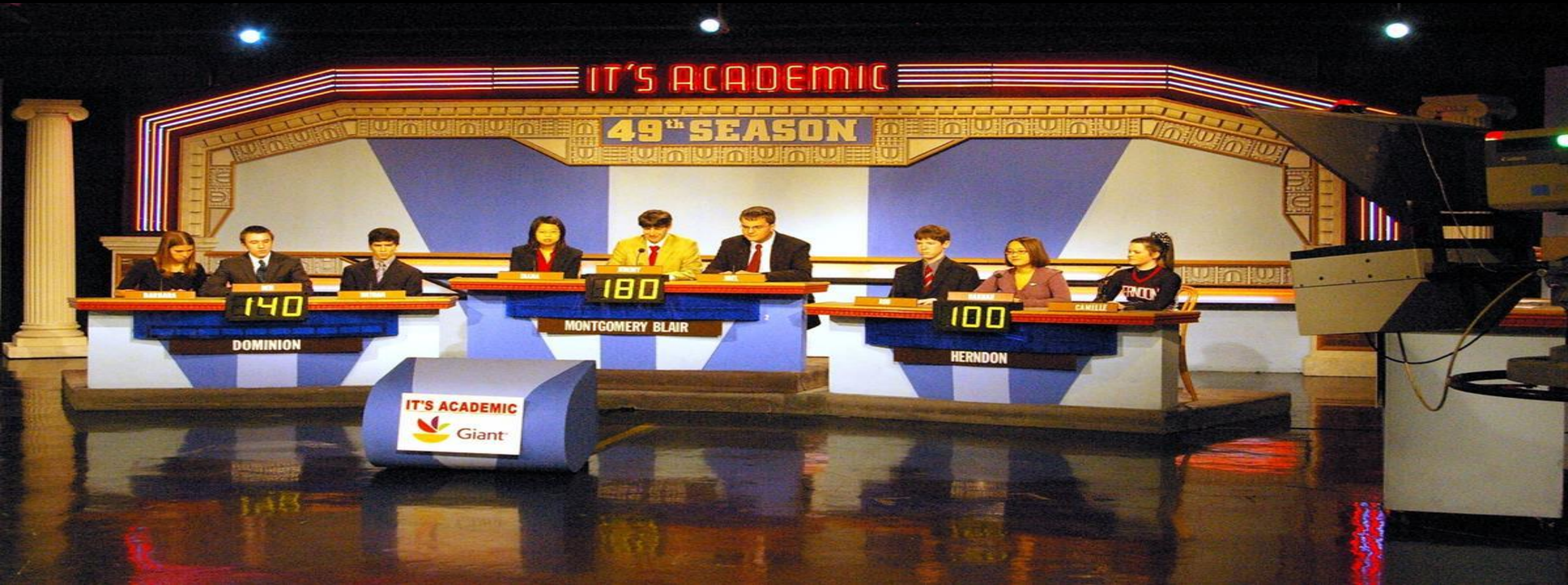




Working class academic capital

**Dr Teresa Crew, School of History, Philosophy and
Social Sciences, Bangor University
July 2020**

Teresa, I thought all academics would speak like the parents of those on University Challenge, but you are, well normal...*[A comment made by one of my students]*



87 self defined
working-class
academics from
across UK

Recruited via Twitter,
conferences
& referrals

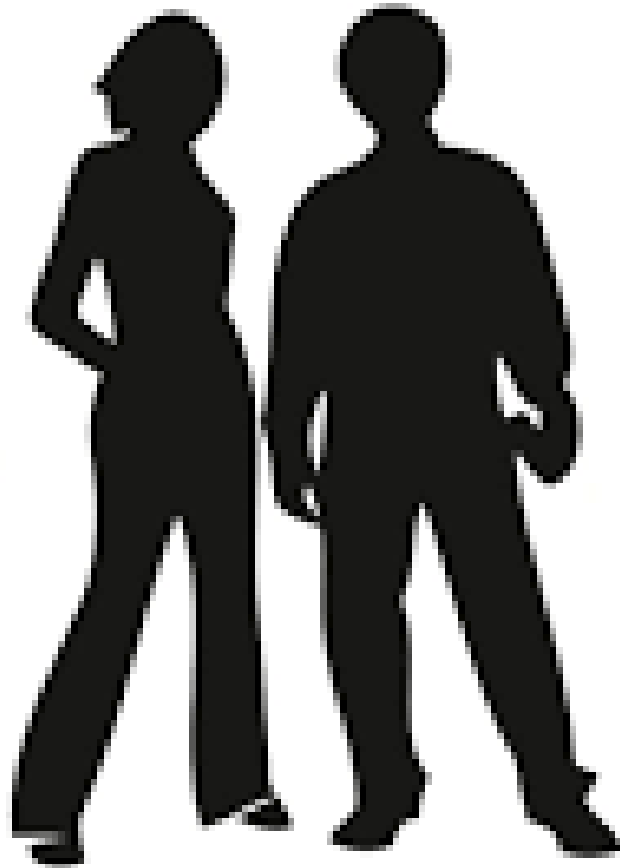
Bourdieu (various),
Yosso (2005) and;
Crenshaw (1989)



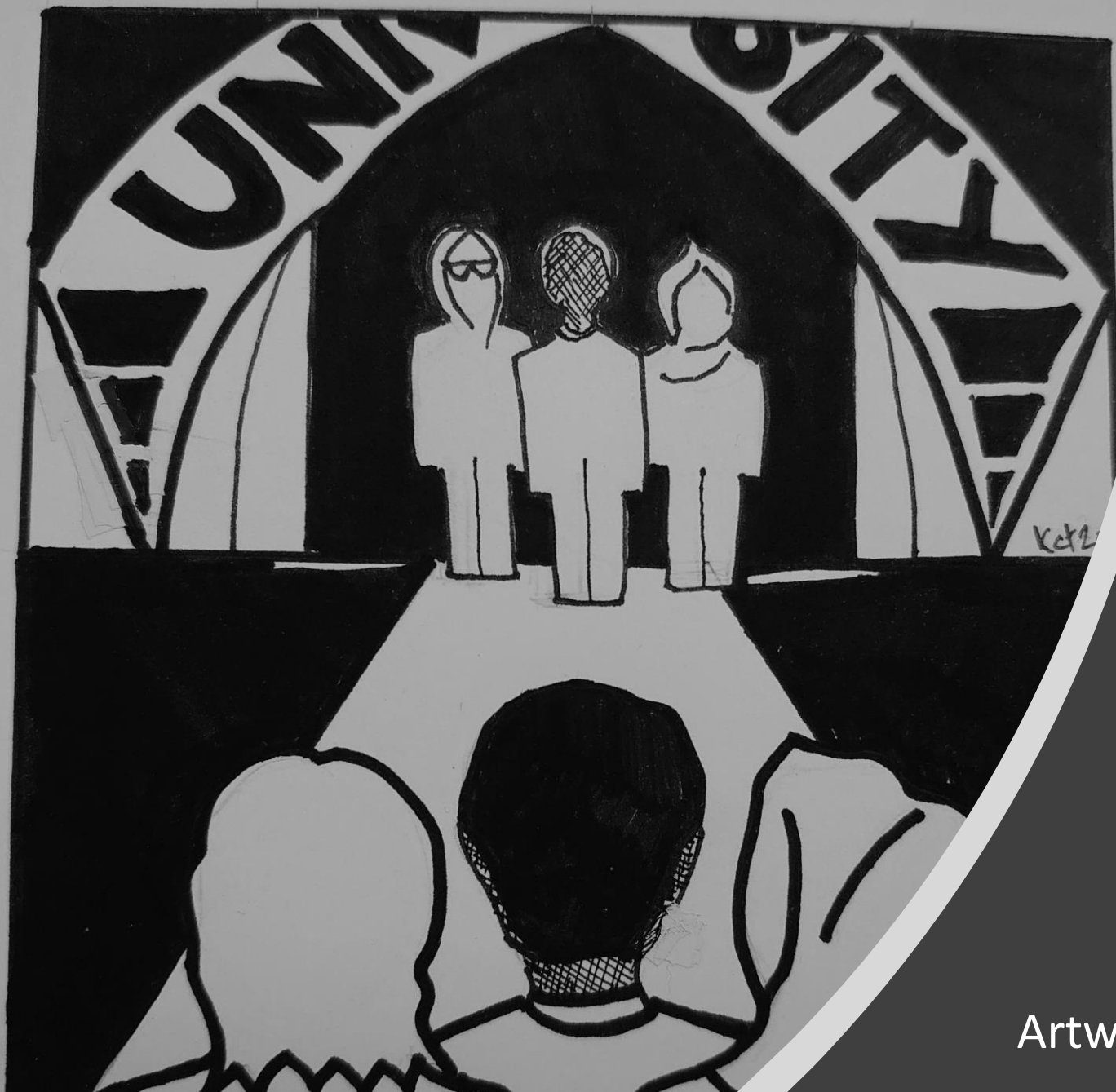
Artwork by Kate Thomas 2020

What are the positive aspects of being a working class academic?

Student



Support



“I’ve still not forgotten what it is like to be a student. The sacrifices that it takes, especially when you have little money, caring responsibilities and a life outside that does not gel with the university experience”.

Artwork by Kate Thomas 2020

Supporting them INTO higher education

Role models

“Having someone from my background would have been a source of motivation/inspiration and would have made it easier for me to consider a career in the Sciences. I love going to schools as girls especially will say I want to be like you”. [Jane, a researcher in Biological Science at a Russell Group institution]

Sources of information

“I run a monthly drop in at a local community centre where I talk about university, help them choose courses and write personal statements. It’s only right that I pass it on this knowledge” [Lynn, a Graduate Teaching Assistant in Mathematics at a Post 1992 institution].

Supporting them THROUGH higher education

Two key methods to support students to **construct a professional identity**:

Promoting role models for their students

“I organise the employability seminars. I thought here is a chance to make sure we hear from diverse voices. But also, importantly, local people in professional employment”. [Jane, a Biological Science researcher at a Russel Group institution].

Being as welcoming as possible to students who might not traditionally ‘fit in’:

“Once a term I arrange for us to have cake and coffee in the class and we chat about different areas of interest. It gives the students a chance to talk to me on a different level. My evaluation is fantastic as one thing they always say is they get to know me a little in that one lesson”. [Elaine, a Researcher in Social Sciences at a post 1992 institution].



Working class academic pedagogy

A teaching approach with social justice at its heart. It engaged with students from a strength's perspective, embraced shared experiences and encouraged students as co-creators of knowledge.

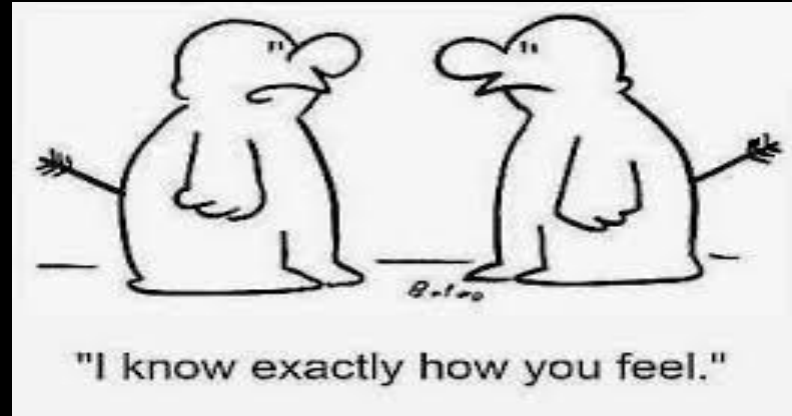
Artwork by Kate Thomas 2020

Embracing shared experiences

“My family would talk about the Battle of Orgreave, so I worked with second year undergraduate class, alongside their local historical society to discuss this historical event. The wealth of information was a two-way process as students had family members who had been involved”. [Jamie, a Lecturer in History].

“Students kept a diary of the experiences of a fictional character from travelling over to England on Empire Windrush, to the first few months settling down. Due to their own experiences of this issue, the writing was nuanced, with understandings of class and racism”. [Theo, a Politics research fellow]





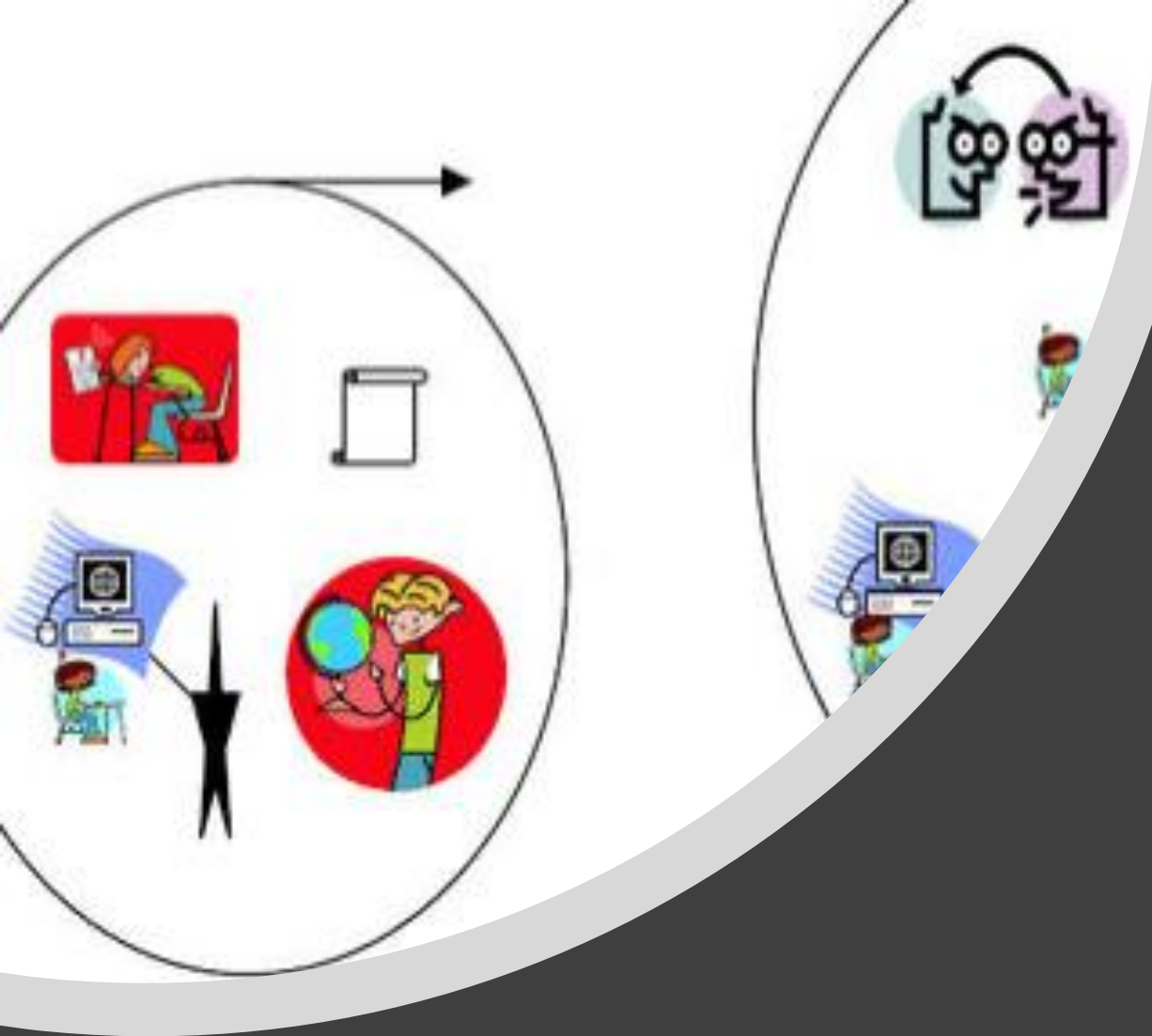
“ ‘Old style’ academics make theories sound dry and irrelevant. They talk about poverty but they don’t sound angered, frustrated, upset. This matters to students, as for them, universities are supposed to be about good people standing up for those who are disadvantaged. A group of students complained to me the other day because a lecturer quoted benefit rates incorrectly and had no idea of how little housing departments help people like them. They are teaching subjects with no personal experience, nor it seems interest!” [056]

Engaging with students from a strength's perspective

Zipin (2009) refers to 'dark' or hidden finds of knowledge e.g. domestic violence, mental illness, and drug addiction (p321).

“The students have produced some wonderful pieces of writing that touch upon their personal experiences of poverty and mental health” [Lucy, a Teaching Associate in Literature at a Russell Group institution].





Co-creators of knowledge

“We know our subject areas but co-creating with students shows respect for their knowledge”
[Unity a Researcher in Social Policy at various institutions].

Students were involved in course redesign and choosing between different assessment methods



Embedding social justice.

Ensuring their courses were representative of the voices of national and local working-class people

- used various activist strategies such as
 - raising money for the organisations,
 - social media campaigns to raise awareness of an issue
 - connecting their assignments with the aim of social change.

What forms of capital do working class academics bring to the academy?

Yosso (2005) focuses on the wealth of 'cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts of socially marginalised groups that often go unrecognised and unacknowledged' (p.69).

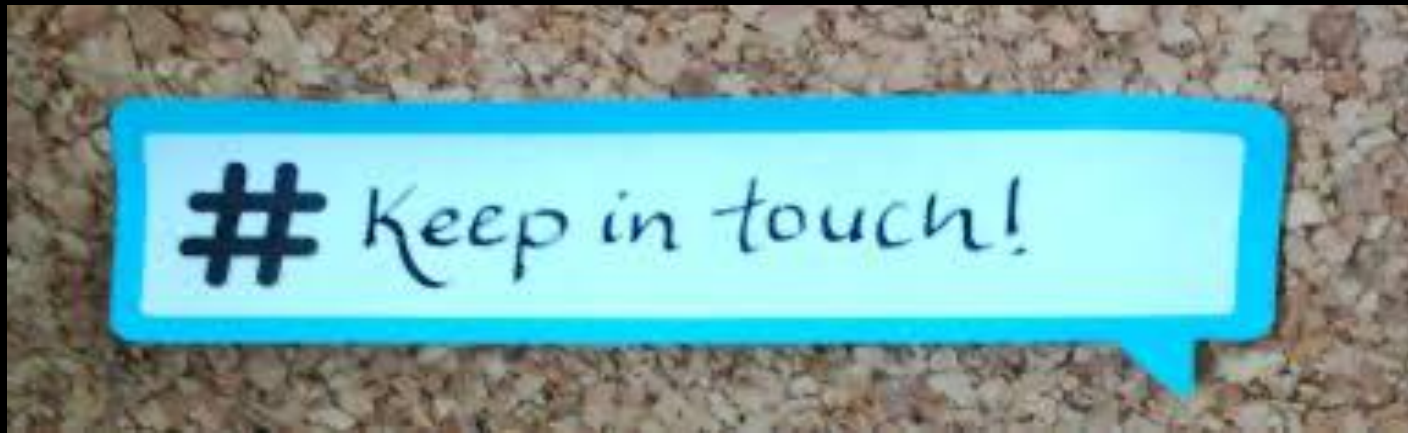
- a) Aspirational
- b) Linguistic
- c) Familial/Social
- d) Navigational
- e) Resistance (p77-80).



Moving forward

- Recognise class inequalities
- Challenge stereotypes about working-class communities
- Show solidarity to others on the margins of academia
- Reach out to likeminded academics
- Remember you bring your own capital to academia.





Email t.f.crew@bangor.ac.uk

Twitter: @DrTeresaCrew

References.

Hey, V. (2003) Joining the Club? Academia and Working-class Femininities. *Gender and Education*, 15:3, 319-336

Hoggart, R. (2013). Introduction in, G. Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*. London: Penguin Classics,

P. Mahony & C. Zmroczek (Eds.). (2005). *Class matters: Working-class women's perspectives on social class*. London: Taylor and Francis