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Occupational stigma among FE teaching staff in hair and beauty: Mild but challenging

Abstract:

This article explores how Further Education (FE) lecturers and trainers manage a mild stigma that socially taints their work through a discourse intersecting gender and class. To frame their experiences, I draw upon identity work tactics established within the dirty work literature. Through an interview and observational study, the potency of cultural imagery and discourse is shown to manifest as a stigma. This stigma differentiates those associated with hair and beauty work by imposing discrediting tropes pertaining to skill, class status and social value. Lecturers and trainers become tainted by proxy through association to an industry and interaction with bodies that are discredited through a gender-class discourse. Through close proximal positioning to a tainted subject matter, FE lecturers and trainers rely upon esteem-enhancing strategies to minimize discrediting assumptions. The students they teach may embody stigma through tainted attributes that signal working-class femininity, yet they enable FE lecturers and trainers to minimize taint by drawing from an alternate discourse that celebrates upward cultural mobility and a more refined iteration of femininity. By broadening the landscape of stigma to recognise it as milder than its extreme theorisation in dirty work, this article explores discourse and representation as a centralising source of stigma.

Key words: class, discourse, embodiment, gender, hairdressing, identity work, stigma.

Introduction

> *" I took an IQ test and I flunked it, of course / I can't spell VW, but I got a Porsche [...] cause I'm a blonde. B-L- -- I don't know."*

Candy, from the song 'Cause I'm A Blonde' in Earth Girls are Easy

28 The above quote is from the character Candy Pink, a young woman working at a salon in the
29 1988 film *Earth Girls are Easy*. The characterisation of Candy is all too familiar, a buoyant,
30 preened young woman acting as a receptive ear to the frivolous chatter of the salon. We can
31 see many images of the 'salon girl' throughout popular culture including Dolly Parton in *Steel*
32 *Magnolias* and Frenchy the 'beauty school dropout' from *Grease* (Gimlin, 1996). In
33 *Educating Rita,* a working-class hairdresser searches for fulfilment through the more
34 venerated pathway of university education. Such representations, however misleading or
35 inaccurate, inform the way we recognise, regard and comprehend an occupation and those
36 associated to it. Where negative perceptions of particular work emerge, an occupation may
37 become tainted in such a way that it becomes undesirable, shameful or even, 'dirty' (Hughes,
38 1951). As defined by Hughes in his seminal piece, work that is dirty may be 'simply
39 physically disgusting. It may be a symbol of degradation, something that wounds one's
40 dignity' (Hughes, 1958: 49-50). Hughes' original definition has informed successive
41 empirical work in such a way that locates focus on the experience of stigma in highly tainted
42 occupations. There is subsequently a lacuna regarding the management of a stigma that is
43 milder and less overt. This article therefore broadens the empirical landscape on stigma by
44 exploring how gender/class discourses can socially taint an occupation through proxy
45 association. By exploring tainted work that is milder and less 'dirty', longstanding
46 classifications of stigma are expanded to consider the wider impact of discourse, imagery and
47 embodiment.

48 A stigma persists as an unwanted mark that differentiates and devalues an individual
49 (Goffman, 1997). Taint is used throughout the article to capture stigmatisation by proxy,
50 which individuals experience through association to an industry that reduces prestige
51 (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999; McMurray and Ward, 2014) As the discrediting properties of
52 stigma threaten the construction of a desirable identity, tactics are employed to manage it
53 (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999; Hughes, 1951). As an occupational group with an already
54 fragile professional identity (Robson et al, 2004), we observe how the identity work practices
55 undertaken by FE lectures and trainers reduce social taint emanating from 'association with

stigmatized publics' (McMurray and Ward, 2014: 1127). Building upon a discussion initiated by Kriener et al (2006) and continued by Paetzold et al (2008) and Bamber et al (2021), the under-researched experiences of occupational groups where stigma is *less* dirty, and the work is *higher* status than other 'dirty' occupations are explored. As well as responding to calls to consider the 'less tainted workers and workplaces for signs of occupational stigma' (Bamber et al, 2021: 3), this article also centralises gender/class discourses within work that is stigmatised. The stigma may be milder and the work 'cleaner', but there remains a risk of low self-esteem and heightened anxiety among those affected (Nath, 2011).

Stigma at work has largely been discussed in the context of dirty work, where repugnant, visceral qualities taint the work, invoking disgust and shame (McMurray and Ward, 2014). As stigma can also persist in occupations where the work is cleaner (Bamber et al, 2021; Kreiner et al, 2006), the article sheds light upon how discourses of gender/class socially engineer an occupational stigma that is less extreme. A stigmatising discourse nonetheless generates taint that 'reduces the prestige or esteem of an occupation' (McMurray and Ward, 2014: 1127). This article therefore focuses upon FE lecturers and trainers, who are stigmatised not through the act of teaching per se, but through the teaching of a 'tainted' subject matter. The structure of this article is as follows. In the following section, I will discuss stigma at work, emphasising the disproportionate focus on extreme stigma present in 'dirty' forms of labour. I will then provide an overview of the research setting. Following description of the methodology, I will present the findings, teasing out how stigma informs the everyday practice and identity work of FE lecturers and trainers. Based on this, I theorize that FE lecturers and trainers deflect and reframe inferred qualities emanating from stigma through on-going identity work.

Stigma, identity and discourse at work

We are all engaged in identity work, defined as a process in which individuals seek to construct an identity that is coherent and stable (Brown, 2014; Ashcraft, 2007). As an ongoing process, identity work involves 'forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or

84 revising' a distinct and coherent sense of self (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003: 1165).
85 Debates on identity work are particularly rife within organisational research (Brown, 2014),
86 given the centrality of work to the way in which we 'we understand and represent our 'self''
87 (Cohen, 2020: 2). Within certain occupations, there is a desire to 'professionalise', an elusive
88 objective underscored by desirable attributes such as knowledge, autonomy and responsibility
89 (Robson et al, 2004). Claims upon professional status are often supplanted by efforts to
90 subvert negative connotations imposed by others. It is an attempt to evade the 'spoiling' that
91 comes through association to a stigmatised occupation (Goffman, 1997; Nath, 2011). In the
92 organisational context, stigma has been theorized as persistent within 'dirty' forms of labour
93 discredited by a discernible 'taint' (Hughes, 1958; Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999; McMurray
94 and Ward, 2014). Kreiner et al's (2006: 621) classification schema captures the variable depth
95 and breadth of taint, which respectively refers to the 'intensity of dirtiness' and the
96 'proportion of work that is dirty'. Within the broad spectrum of tainted work, there is a lacuna
97 regarding occupations where the work is neither extremely dirty nor tainted but suffers from a
98 milder stigma (Bamber et al, 2021; Kriener et al, 2006; Paetzold et al, 2008).
99 Exploring the milder forms of stigma in comparably 'cleaner' occupations allows for
100 a more nuanced appreciation of stigma at work. The tendency to locate stigma as emanating
101 from actual or perceptual 'dirt' risks depoliticising stigma and overlooking the links to class,
102 poverty and economic status (Tyler, 2020). As stigma is socially constructed and upheld, it is
103 also important to consider how contemporary discourse shapes the perception and
104 embodiment of work. Such depictions may be exaggerated, yet they are not entirely detached
105 from the organisational reality they seek to represent and have the potential to confer
106 'associated cultural baggage' upon an occupation (Fine, 1996: 91), which is then reaffirmed
107 and brought to life through everyday talk (Ashcraft, 2007; Robson et al, 2004). It may not be
108 'dirt' that stigmatises an occupation, but the sticky discursive baggage that socially taints it by
109 steering external perception. By considering 'dominant discourses on gender and work'
110 (Schnurr et al, 2019: 417), this article acknowledges the political origins of stigma as a
111 coalition of class/gender status that confers taint upon individuals who fail to espouse 'middle

112 classness'. Despite the transferal of stigma, the experiences of such individuals remain
113 disproportionally neglected within organisational research, which has focused predominantly
114 on those who satisfy the more extreme criteria for 'dirty' work. Yet, by focusing on the
115 experiences of those in 'cleaner' occupations where stigma is mild, we observe the acute
116 implications occupational imagery, which acts as 'a symbol of degradation' (Hughes, 1958:
117 49-50). Here stigma arises not from the task of teaching but from association to matter that is
118 socially tainted by discrediting imagery and representation. Through a series of interviews
119 with FE lecturers and trainers in hair and beauty and ethnographic field notes, this article
120 explores how being stigmatised through association to socially tainted matter ensues identity
121 work that is restorative, defensive and esteem enhancing. The following section will discuss
122 the research setting in greater detail.
123

124 **The research setting**

125 In England, vocational training courses are commonly provided at FE institutions,
126 which includes colleges and training academies. Overseen by the Department for Education,
127 FE courses are typically subsidised by government funding (Department of Education, 2021).
128 Despite the wide variety of courses offered within the FE sector across England, as a non-
129 academic pathway they lack prestige and status (Fuller and Macfadyen, 2012). As a
130 vocational, non-academic pathway for post 16-year-olds, this article focuses specifically on
131 FE lecturers and trainers who specialise in hairdressing and/or beauty as their subject matter.
132 It is what they teach, what they know and comprises an unwavering facet of their identity, as
133 most continue to actively dabble in hair and beauty work. Hence, they maintain a distinct
134 positional proximity to a stigmatised industry. The hair and beauty industry is socially
135 constructed as being of low status and prestige, a configuration that derives from the heavily
136 feminised representation of hair and beauty work (Gimlin, 1996; Hupptaz, 2012), reflecting a
137 workforce where approximately 83% are female (NHBF, 2019). FE lecturers and trainers
138 teach a predominately female cohort of students how to engage physically with customers,
139 enacting touch that is both technical and deferential (Cohen and Wolkowitz, 2018). The

140 deferential touch undermines status on account of a gender binary that privileges disembodied
141 'masculine' forms of work (Jensen, 2017; Schnurr et al, 2019; Ashcraft, 2007).
142 The FE sector also highlights how stigma becomes embodied. Within the dirty work
143 literature, it has been acknowledged that by working in a stigmatised role, there is a risk of
144 personifying that stigma (Ashforth and Kriener, 1999; Jensen, 2017). This article illustrates
145 how discursive imagery re-affirms fixed ideas dictating who should be a hairdresser or
146 beautician based on specific attributes that are gender and class based (Miller and Hayward,
147 2006; Lindsay, 2004). FE lecturers and trainers therefore end up teaching a largely
148 homogenous cohort of students, who embody the low-status attributes already associated with
149 popular representations of hair and beauty workers. Cultural imagery, such as the
150 characterisation of Candy Pink referenced at the start of this article, reaffirms the construction
151 of hair and beauty work as easy labour that 'can be done by "anybody"' (Eayrs, 1993: 32).
152 The stigmatisation of hair and beauty work may imply a lack of skill, yet in order to assume
153 the role of stylist or beautician, there is both training to undergo and qualifications to acquire.
154 Regardless, FE lecturers and trainers face stigmatisation from working with both the 'tainted'
155 subject matter of hair and beauty, as well as students that embody 'spoiled' socio-cultural
156 attributes. Strategies to manage stigma and minimize taint are then reliant upon students as
157 leverage to an enhanced reputation. As lecturers and trainers are denied the chance to directly
158 erase the stigma that plagues the industry that they are tied to, this article explores the
159 strategies employed to tackle the gender/class discourses that taints them through association.
160 I will now discuss the methodology, including the data collection methods used and the
161 analysis.
162

163 **Methodology**

164 The research reported in this article was conducted within 6 FE institutions, including four
165 colleges and two training academies. The FE colleges provided a range of vocational courses
166 typically intended for post 16-year-old school leavers, which included hair, beauty and
167 barbering. The training academies, which included Learning and Training Academy (LTA)

168 and Experience Hair and Beauty Academy, differed to FE colleges in that they only provided
169 training in hair and beauty. All organisations included in this research awarded Level 1
170 National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) for school leavers. Additional higher level NVQs
171 were also provided, with the majority of qualifications being awarded through the same
172 governing board, the UK City and Guilds. Apprenticeships were also offered for students who
173 were working in a salon. Students on an apprenticeship typically spend 1-2 days each week in
174 an FE setting, with the remaining hours spent working in a salon. Full-time courses were
175 approximately one year long, while part time courses were two years duration. Students
176 working towards their level 1, 2 or 3 NVQ qualification had regular contact with FE lecturers
177 and trainers throughout the week. The main role of the research participants concerned
178 teaching hair and beauty in either a classroom setting or within the in-house salon area. Staff
179 also supported students during formal assessments and monitored students' progress while on
180 placement in industry. Beyond these 'official' duties were the pastoral obligations that
181 comprised a less acknowledged part of all participants' work.

182 A convenience sampling strategy was employed, resulting in the recruitment of a
183 relatively homogenous demographic with similar occupational experience (Cresswell, 2007).
184 Given the dearth of empirical research exploring how hair and beauty is taught in the FE
185 context, convenience sampling was an effective means of accessing individuals with
186 appropriate experience. Through convenience sampling, individuals currently delivering
187 teaching and training for hairdressing and/or beauty at colleges and academies were
188 contacted. All organisations contacted were based in the North-East of England, the poorest
189 region in England where the annual household income is below the national average
190 (Macdonald et al, 2018). The sample comprised 22 participants, including 15 from FE
191 colleges and 7 from training academies. Table 1 illustrates the participants' details, including
192 the focus of their teaching, which for all concerned either hairdressing or beauty, or a mix of
193 the two. When asked about their current role, participants identified either as 'lecturer', 'tutor'
194 or 'subject leader'. Regardless of job titles or place of work, it was confirmed during
195 interviews that all participants worked in a teaching capacity. As shown in table 1, only one

196 participant was male, reflecting the longstanding female dominance in the hairdressing and
197 beauty industry (Sharma and Black, 2001). The single male interviewee taught on both
198 hairdressing and barbering courses. Though no official figures were obtained from
199 participants, it was confirmed during interviews that most students studying hairdressing
200 and/or beauty were female. The largely female student cohort reflects the gendered
201 demographic of the industry, where females comprise 83% and 94% of those working in hair
202 and beauty respectively (NHBF, 2019). Participants reported that the majority of students
203 were school-leavers aged between 16-18 years old, with the exception of a small number of
204 mature students.
205
206 Insert table 1 here
207
208 Interviews lasted between 45-60 minutes. Interview questions sought to gain insight
209 into participants' 'perceptual world' (Martin, 1994: 390) and included: 'what is the hardest
210 aspect of your job?' and 'what type of skills are the hardest to teach and why?'. Such
211 questions were intended to draw out the challenging realities of their everyday practice. All
212 interviews were conducted within the participants' place of work and were recorded and
213 transcribed. Twelve of the interviews were one-to-one interviews and two were group
214 interviews comprised of 3 and 4 participants respectively. The rationale for conducting group
215 interviews was pragmatic, as they were a means of accommodating participants' busy
216 teaching schedules. As interviews were conducted during the working day, group interviews
217 were an appropriate way to collectively speak to participants, both over the course of an
218 extended lunch break and in the remaining hours after students went home. The two group
219 interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes.
220 Challenges regarding group interviews were anticipated, particularly in relation to
221 ensuring that individual opinions were expressed, and a groupthink mentality was avoided.
222 However, as the interview progressed and the questions became more provocative, the detail
223 that participants divulged was not generic but nuanced to reflect their own experiences.

224 During the group interviews questions were addressed to each participant, ensuring all
225 interviewees provided individual responses. In parallel there was also lively discussion as
226 participants shared answers with one another and were enthused by the 'supportive
227 environment of a social gathering' (Ainsworth et al, 2014: 45). The response after the two
228 group interviews was that most participants had enjoyed the experience, likening it to a "good
229 old catch up" (Rita) without the formality of a scheduled team meeting. Compared to the one-
230 on-one interviews, the group interviews permitted a deeper insight into the sensitivities of
231 teaching by facilitating a 'non-threatening environment' (Kreuger, 1988: 18). During the
232 group interviews participants shared some of their most challenging experiences not just with
233 me, but with each other. Many of the detailed accounts of confrontations with students or
234 vivid reflections on students' troubled backgrounds, originated from the group interviews,
235 where the social setting aided the flow of discussion.

236 The interviews were supplemented with observations conducted at a single site.
237 Following a conversation with staff at the Learning and Training Academy (LTA), I was
238 permitted to observe teaching, which consisted of lessons in the salon training area and
239 occasionally, in the classroom. Approximately 50 hours of observations were undertaken
240 during which field notes were recorded. Throughout this, I sat amongst students often at the
241 back and recorded handwritten notes. Although no data was collected from students, I did on
242 occasion have lunch with them and spoke informally throughout breaktimes. In reflecting
243 upon my own identity as a middle class, young female, there were noticeable qualities
244 emanating from disparate socio-economic relations between myself and students. Students
245 regularly smoked on their breaks, spoke about struggling financially and a few were single
246 parents or carers. This posed a sharp contrast to my own background of a university education
247 and a stable familial context. Despite these acute relational differences, I endeavoured to
248 soften pronounced features of my status as a researcher and emphasise shared commonalities
249 with students, who like myself were mainly young women.

250 During the observations, I also focused on developing rapport with staff. Generally,
251 establishing a rapport with staff was relatively straightforward once I explained the nature of

252 my research and professed a genuine interest in their work. Moreover, several staff members
253 explained that they were accustomed to speaking about their role with student support staff
254 and external inspectors. Following the end of teaching, there was often a window of time
255 before teaching staff went home where I was able to ask impromptu questions based on what
256 I had observed. After typing up the handwritten notes, the observational data amounted to
257 approximately 40 pages of reflective field notes and verbatim jottings. Extracts from the
258 original field notes are included in this article, both in a verbatim and paraphrased format.
259 The two sources of data were triangulated and analysed together. Following the
260 exploratory questions that motivated the research, a thematic analysis was conducted, in line
261 with the six steps devised by Braun and Clarke (2006). This was deemed the most effective
262 means of teasing out key themes and ideas consistent across the dataset. Table 2 represents
263 the process of coding, using a limited number of key quotes to illustrate how coding at first
264 and second order led to theoretically grounded themes.
265
266 Insert table 2 here
267
268 The data was initially re-read so as to develop preliminary codes which consisted of
269 the first order codes in table 2 that represent the data at a descriptive level. Following this,
270 second order codes were established that collapsed descriptive first order codes together to
271 create more conceptually relevant codes. Reflecting the iterative nature of a thematic analysis,
272 the second order codes were reviewed, and the data was revisited. Based on salient themes,
273 such as stigma and identity work, the data was interpretated through works by Goffman
274 (1997) and Hughes (1951, 1958), as well as contemporary empirical research such as
275 Ashforth and Kreiner (1999), Kreiner et al (2006), Cohen (2020), Ashcraft (2007) and
276 Bamber et al (2021). Participants' accounts were then read as suggestive of a stigmatised
277 working experience and an on-going endeavour to resolve social perceptions. The
278 presentation of the data is therefore structured into two parts. Firstly, I will explore the stigma
279 associated with hair and beauty work, before then discussing the identity practices employed

by participants. It is on this basis that this article concludes by suggesting a broader conceptual landscape of how stigma is experienced at work.

Identifying stigma in hair and beauty work

When asked about the most challenging aspect of their job, several participants spoke to a stigma connected to the external perceptions harboured by those outside of hair and beauty work. Carla (LTA), for example, explained that "everyone thinks hairdressing is just for young girls from poor families" who are "just messing about with their hair". In discussing the origins of this assumption, participants spoke of schools as sifting students based on embodied qualities of class and gender. Tina (SA) explained that: "where they [students] haven't done well academically and they've been told go to hairdressing, you know you've failed GCSEs, get yourself into hairdressing". Similarly, Emma (WC) commented that "schools think oh well put them into hair and beauty and I think actually, we've had students come to us and we've thought why? Why would anybody put this person in hair and beauty?". Emma's (WC) questioning hints to a widespread misallocation of students by schools on account of a gross underestimation of the social and technical skillset required for a hair and beauty career. During observations at the training academy, participants spoke of similar frustrations emanating from a careers event at a nearby school the week before:

> Kate is discussing with other members of staff how unimpressed she was last week after attending a careers event, where the academy was set to have a stall to attract prospective students. She describes how the school placed her table at the far corner of the hall and failed to distribute any of the leaflets she had provided in the weeks prior. (Field note #1)

The field note above illustrates the frustrating treatment of hair and beauty work by schools, who rather than regarding it as a respectable career choice, promote it exclusively as a fall-back option that is *infra dig* for students with academic potential. This contributed to a

308 discrediting representation of hair and beauty as simple work that requires minimal skills
309 (Eayrs, 1993). Ellie (NDC), for example, felt that “people think that this is faffing about with
310 hair and make-up, it’s really not”. Carla spoke of a “stereotype” attached to hair and beauty
311 that dissuades schools from supporting more academic students to pursue it, on the basis that
312 “educators in school and in sixth form see it as something people do who aren’t very clever”.
313 Similarly, Sophie (SA) suggested that such opinions stigmatise the work of hairdressers and
314 beauticians: “I think there is a stigma attached to hair and beauty that it’s an easy course and
315 they don’t have to know much to qualify”. Using Goffman’s (1997) definition of stigma as
316 being a differentiating attribute, we see how hair and beauty work is relationally positioned
317 amongst other occupations as inferior due to the perception of skill required. Exogenous
318 opinions of hair and beauty reaffirmed this stigma, such that Katherine (NEC) spoke of
319 “people’s opinions on hairdressers”, judging these to be “uninformed, they haven’t worked a
320 day in a salon”. After identifying a stigma in hair and beauty, participants’ talk became
321 defensive, restorative and protective over a stigmatised industry that is poorly understood and
322 misrepresented. The following section will discuss two approaches taken to manage stigma.
323

324 **Managing stigma through identity work**

325 **(1) Reframing the skills required for hair and beauty work**

326 In responding to the stigma identified in the previous section, interviewees relied upon
327 positive identity tactics to reframe the negative qualities of hair and beauty work (Ashforth
328 and Kreiner, 1999). In particular they appealed to a more prestigious subject matter of science
329 and maths. Sophie (SA) for example, asserted that hair and beauty work is “actually quite
330 science based. You know like, you need to know mathematical equations to mix up colour,
331 ratios, angles, measurements, things like that”. Similarly, Anne (SA) spoke of the
332 misunderstandings that permeate stereotypical representations, explaining that students arrive
333 with misinformed ideas about the intellect required for hair and beauty: “I think students
334 don’t realise how important that is, so that can be quite a bore, all our students have to do
335 Maths and English as well so if they haven’t hit GCSE grade 4, they all have to go and re-do

336 it, between the age of 16-18, that's compulsory, it's a government thing now." Hence, rather
337 than hair and beauty being an option for students who have failed their exams, Anne (SA)
338 emphasises that the government now require all hair and beauty students to attain a minimum
339 of a C grade in core subjects of Maths and English. This speaks to the unrecognised
340 physiological and anatomical knowledge required for hair and beauty work. Gemma (LTA)
341 for example explained that:
342
343 > "There's quite a lot of big words to remember, beauty is even worse because there's
344 > all the anatomy and physiology, a lot of the treatments they have to do, they have to
345 > know where all the systems in the body are, how all the muscles work, they [students]
346 > need to understand about different medical conditions."
347
348 For students, who thought hair and beauty consisted of "playing with hair" (Tony, NEC), there
349 was resistance to the more scientific side of their training. Interviewees contended that students
350 did not anticipate the need to learn about "the science, the structure of hair" (Rita, NEC) and
351 the functioning of certain "bones and muscles" (Lara, LTA). This was reaffirmed during
352 observations at the training academy where scientific terminology was evident:
353
354 > During an afternoon session in the 'classroom', where students are taught about the
355 > theory side of hair and beauty, I notice the walls are covered in large, bold print outs
356 > of single words such as 'anagen', 'telogen', 'catagen', 'exogen', which I'm informed
357 > are stages of the hair growth cycle. There are also detailed, cross-sectional diagrams
358 > showing the structure of a hair follicle. (Field note #2)
359
360 The prominence of these technical terms could be read as an attempt to negate the
361 stigmatising attribute that defines hair and beauty work as low skill (Eayrs, 1993). The use of
362 a scientific lexicon reframes the technical prerequisites needed to practice hair and beauty. In
363 other words, students need to know about the science of hair to be stylists: they need be able

364 to correctly apply hair dyes, products and other chemical solutions. Similarly, beauty students
365 required a clear grasp of dermatology in order to provide appropriate services for clients
366 based on their skin type. To do either of these they need to understand aspects of the science
367 behind these processes.

368 Interviewees also portrayed hair and beauty work as multi-faceted. Beyond the
369 scientific understanding, students needed to be socially adept, posing as "a counsellor and a
370 friend to the customer" (Tony, NEC). As hair and beauty work is an intimate service
371 encounter that can include close bodily contact and free flowing emotionally charged talk
372 (Author, 2020), participants emphasised the need for social acuity and intuition. The
373 complexities of social interaction within a salon were reported as being masked by a stigma
374 fixed to hair and beauty work.

375

376 "It's typical ideas about salon girls, they think you just chit chat away all day and that
377 every client is your best friend, but this is a professional, workplace setting" (Naomi,
378 NEC).

379

380 In outlining the exhaustive reality of customer-facing work, Rachel explained: "you have to
381 be really pleasant all the time, you have to communicate, be professional, it's a customer
382 facing industry". Relatedly, there was an emphasis upon "building a rapport with someone
383 without crossing too many boundaries" (Laura, NEC). Similarly, Jenny alluded to
384 communication with clients being a more refined accomplishment as students recognise "that
385 professional boundary and knowing what to tell them and what not to tell them, some young
386 ones find that difficult cause they think hairdressing is just being able to waltz into a salon
387 and just talk and talk and talk". Here we see how popular discourse promotes an occupational
388 reality where hair and beauty work consists of endless chatter (Huppatz, 2012). Participants
389 instead projected a lived experience of the salon as a professional working environment,
390 where client relationships were nuanced and overarched by regulatory boundaries that needed
391 to be adhered to and respected.

392

393 **(2) Social weighting and valorisation through alternative discourse**

394 Participants acknowledged hair and beauty as a stigmatising industry, where homogenous
395 workers that embody tainted attributes reaffirm external perceptions of who should be a
396 hairdresser/beautician. FE lecturers and trainers must therefore navigate working with a
397 tainted subject matter and with students, who on account of their embodied qualities also
398 embody stigma. Although students embodied tainted attributes, lecturers and trainers
399 mobilised these in a process of 'taint management by proxy' that enhanced the status and
400 value of their work. This process consisted of participants undoing the stigmatising attributes
401 of students, transforming qualities that signal low status, into a more refined display. As these
402 characteristics were acquired through familial upbringing, they needed to be 'undone':

403

404 "It's a lot harder to teach that, you're trying to undo, those intrinsic skills that you're
405 getting from your family, your parents and your role models aren't you, so you're
406 undoing stuff rather than just starting blank and moving forward." (Janet)

407

408 Here Janet (NEC) positioned her work as corrective by re-orientating ingrained attributes in
409 ways that allowed students to go 'forward'. The emphasis upon "undoing stuff" also aligned
410 with Anne's (SA) comment, who spoke of addressing students' understanding of what
411 constitutes appropriate conduct in the salon and in the workplace more generally:

412

413 "They don't realise, they'll talk to us sometimes, well not just sometimes, quite badly
414 and we'll say "do you realise how you spoke to us?" but they don't actually realise
415 the way they spoke […] they probably speak to mum or dad like that and then they
416 come here thinking this is just a salon where anything goes, but actually we have
417 quite high standards here I think so you know it's like this is what's expected."

418

419 Anne reasons that students' failure to recognise the inappropriateness of their interaction was
420 due to an inability to discretely tailor communication toward different contexts. Participants
421 spoke of students struggling to speak in a manner appropriate for the professional sphere of
422 work. Emma (WC) therefore questioned: "how do you then change them [students] around
423 and say you're going into the customer service industry where that's not acceptable?".
424 Similarly, Chloe (EHB) explained that where students tended to be "a bit huffy and slam
425 things", she reminded them that "you can't do that, you're not in school now you're in the
426 real world, you can't do that in front of clients, you can't say that". Participants therefore
427 positioned themselves as supporting students during a grand transition into "the real world" of
428 work through correctional guidance and shifting embodied practice.

429 At the heart of their interactions with students, participants spoke of being
430 compassionate. In recalling students having "meltdowns, tears and storming out" (Emma,
431 WC), there was an empathetic acknowledgement that "they're very unsure coming into a new
432 environment" (Kate, LTA). As a precursor to the workplace, the FE context was recognised
433 by participants as a new environment for students, requiring a different set of learned
434 behaviours. Rita (NEC), for example, noted "some of them come in straight from school so
435 it's teaching them different ways of behaving". Similarly, Naomi (NEC) asserted that the
436 transition from school to further education was like "going from being a child and an adult if
437 you like, so they come in with sets of behaviour that needs adjusting to fit the job role." In
438 attempting to prepare students for "the job role", Chloe (EHA) spoke of them adjusting to the
439 more severe consequences that follow misbehaviour in a workplace setting: "some [students]
440 just don't understand it's not school, it is work, you can lose your job and then you're back to
441 square one, so we have to help them step up and become an adult". Again, running
442 throughout the data was an emphasis upon supporting students through a significant period of
443 transition, wherein they go not only from student to stylist and/or beautician, but from student
444 into adult.

445 Across the data there was an acute awareness of the students' socio-economic
446 backgrounds. As Laura (NEC) explained, "they're challenging students because they've all

447 had different backgrounds and a lot of them come with different baggage especially some of
448 the level 1 students, so it's overcoming those barriers." (Laura). Level 1 students are
449 primarily 16-year olds who have just left school. The metaphorical "baggage" reflected the
450 potential for issues resulting from a turbulent domestic life to linger on as "barriers" that
451 impede learning. Katherine (NEC) therefore spoke of needing to know about students'
452 "backgrounds, what they do on a night-time, friendship groups, what they do at home, drugs,
453 alcohol. It's part of your job really". Through the virtuous act of supplanting the parental
454 deficiencies that characterised some student's lives; participants spoke of the pastoral care
455 extended to students:
456
457 "I always say they need some TLC and they do, some of them have been abused and
458 come from horrible backgrounds […] I put a lot of humour into it, it's getting them to
459 bond with you […] I'll say, "I'm your mam while you're here" and Susie does the
460 same, they know they can come to us at any time throughout that year" (Nell)
461
462 In emphasising the 'TLC' given to students, Nell (NEC) speaks to the locus parentis type role
463 assumed by participants. Highlighting the added pastoral complexities of their work allowed
464 participants to draw discursive occupational analogies that affirmed their social value
465 (Kreiner et al, 2006; Ashforth and Kriener, 1999; Cohen, 2020). The embedded concern for
466 student's emotional welfare and knowledge of familial instability led participants to
467 appropriate the identity of "social workers" reasoning "we tend to get a bit more personal
468 with them [students]" (Gemma, LTA). In conveying their personal involvement with students,
469 several participants spoke of instances in which they were required to operate in a quasi-
470 parental capacity:
471
472 "I got a phone call once from someone's mam, saying can you come and get her out
473 of bed, I can't because she's addicted to online gaming. All sorts. I mean is that not
474 the parent's responsibility to get them out of bed?" (Kate, LTA)

475

476 Similar incidences of participants undertaking duties pertaining to student welfare and safety
477 were apparent within the field notes, where staff discussed having to take taxis to students'
478 houses to ensure they attend lessons. At the more extreme end, Gemma (LTA) recalled
479 urgently following a student beyond the premises after she repeatedly threatened self-harm. In
480 magnifying the pastoral undertones of their work, a latent comparison was made to the work
481 of 'traditional' teachers working in a secondary school context:

482

483 > "When they come in from school, they're so used to schoolteacher mode we kind of
484 > show them that we're human […] the first thing they do when they walk in is call us
485 > by our first names, you know rather than Mr such and such or whatever it's a big
486 > transition and I think it lowers a lot of boundaries for them" (Tony, NEC)

487

488 In releasing students from "schoolteacher mode", our participants 'humanize' the teacher-
489 student relationship. This allows for greater emotional depth and connectivity. In connoting
490 altruism and compassion, participants explained that fostering more affectively charged
491 student relations intensified their pastoral duties: "they tell us lots, sometimes stuff we don't
492 want to know, more than just their tutor, we want to know what's *really* going on with them
493 more than a normal teacher would" (Gemma, LTA). The comparative language used here
494 reinforces a 'rhetorical distance' that positions participants as 'unlike' traditional teachers
495 (Cohen, 2020: 143), going to extra lengths to ensure student wellbeing. The differences cited
496 presuppose and allude to shortcomings among traditional teachers, whose interactions with
497 students are comparatively superficial. By contrast, the deeper emotional ties forged within
498 FE led students to disclose unreserved personal accounts regarding "what is *really* going on".
499 Participants also positioned themselves as enculturating students and subsequently
500 facilitating entry to an otherwise inaccessible landscape of occupational opportunity:

501

> "I enjoy that side of the job because you can make a massive difference with someone who has you know maybe come from a disadvantaged background […] You can really turn their life around and help them with their social skills, help them to communicate that little bit better, point them in the right direction for a job, give them a skill for life, it rehabilitates them. I think beauty and hairdressing does a lot more for students than people think it does. It gives them so much more. […] I think you turn them into little ladies" (Jenny, LTA)

A salient point concerns the figurative emergence of students as "little ladies", a term that connotes an embodied shift, in which stigmatising attributes are concealed (Nath, 2011). Referring to the students as "ladies" speaks to an idealised transition into competent service workers. Moreover, "lady" suggests an elite femininity comprised of a gentrifying transition signalled by high-brow cultural nuances such as 'speaking with a 'posh' accent and conducting oneself in a 'proper' fashion' (Crossley, 2005: 30). Seemingly, the embodiment of more cultured attributes and refined comportment indicated upward social mobility: "they walk through the door and they've got false eyelashes struggling to stay on, leggings on, their hair doesn't look great and then toward the end of year and when they come back after, they've got their lipstick on, their hair looks that bit neater, it just it transforms someone". Here Irene (LTA) juxtaposes disparate forms of femininity, with "leggings" and misapplied "false eyelashes" confirming working class imagery, while the transition toward "lipstick" and "neater" hair signals a more culturally refined femininity.

Participants framed students' embodied transformations as enriching their career prospects. Naomi (NEC), for example, asserted, "without us doing our motherly thing here at college in level 1 and 2 those kids might actually stay NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and never do anything with their lives". Participants taught skills that gave students a renewed sense of purpose, as well as a trajectory with greater opportunity. Highlighting the transferability of skills, Emma (WC) asserted that: "a lot of our learners you know will go onto health and social care or onto caring jobs, nursing, retail or other

hospitality, customer facing jobs so there's lots of transferable skills there." Similarly, Katherine (NEC) explained that "even if then they don't pursue the pathway of hair and beauty, we've equipped them with so many transferable skills it allows them to make side steps." Participants countered the discourse that stigmatised them by situating themselves as arbiters of a more refined embodied skillset. By enriching students' embodied capital, participants spoke of the additional employment opportunities afforded to them.

Discussion

This article explores the link between discourse and stigma, fleshing out how cultural imagery of hairdressing work socially taints those associated to it. The perception of hair and beauty work upholds a tainted 'hairdresser type' that intersects working classness and femininity (Juul and Byskov, 2020) and is therefore denied status and/or prestige. Despite participants' involvement in the industry being peripheral, the association to a tainted form of labour sullied their otherwise 'clean' identity, prompting participants to defend and refute discrediting assumptions (Nath, 2011). By exploring the stigmas associated with occupations that are 'less universally admired' (Meisenbach, 2008: 260) but not categorised as 'dirty' work (Bamber et al, 2021), an underexplored series of tensions emerge as individuals attempt to avoid a subtler 'spoiling' of identity (Goffman, 1997). Much like individuals working in extreme forms of 'dirty' work, participants employed positive identity strategies in an effort to reshape 'what they understood others' perceptions to be' (Cohen, 2020: 148; Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999). However, as the stigma that afflicted participants was milder, a novel process of 'taint removal by proxy' was observed, whereby the act of working with 'tainted' matter was reframed through alternative discourse.

The stigma faced by participants may not be extreme, yet it can amount to an identity that is neither stable and fulfilling, nor entirely fragmented and blemished. In capturing the lived realities of a strained identity, external perceptions of an occupation are magnified, amounting to an ongoing process of identity work (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). The complexities of this stigma were, however, magnified when unpacking how participants

558 countered discourses on gender/class intersectionality that stigmatised hair and beauty work.
559 The tainted social positioning of hair and beauty work was underpinned by discourse
560 intersecting gender/class that inform the hierarchal organisation of labour (Jensen, 2017;
561 Crawford and Mills, 2011). Configured as a 'realistic aspiration for the working-class girl',
562 hair and beauty work is widely regarded as a low status form of labour (Sharma and Black,
563 2001: 918). Hence, a homogenous pool of students with particular attributes are encouraged
564 toward hair and beauty on the basis they already embody a recognizable 'type' (Juul and
565 Byskov, 2020; Lindsay, 2004). These students may embody the stigma that participants
566 sought to evade, yet they emerged as central to the process of 'taint removal by proxy'.
567 Identified by one participant as "undoing work", the embodied capital of students, tainted
568 though it may be, provided leverage for participants to minimize taint.

569 In terms of strategies employed to manage a milder stigma, the data illustrates efforts
570 that are discursive and material. Discursively, participants analogised their teaching as a
571 rehabilitative process that seemingly saved students from the chaotic, unstable trajectory that
572 awaited them on account of their socio-economic backgrounds. This reflected participants'
573 identification to a role beyond that of *just* hair and beauty lecturer/trainer, to social worker, a
574 role recognised by alternative discourse as more socially valued. In assimilating occupational
575 analogies to achieve a more desirable identity (Cohen, 2020) and conceal the discrediting
576 qualities of their work (Nath, 2011), the discursive strategies employed by interviewees spoke
577 to a stigmatised occupational reality. Discourses on gender and class that inform the
578 hierarchal organisation of labour may bolster stigma, yet alternative discourses that celebrate
579 middle classness were central to participants' identity work. Here we observe the inter-
580 relations between discourse and materiality, as participants sought to erase the embodied
581 attributes that signalled working-class womanhood (Skeggs, 2005; Lindsay, 2004).
582 Participants then spoke of reshaping students' embodied capital to reflect a quasi-middle-
583 class status through a process of upward inculturation that enabled students to become *better*
584 than what they are and *more* than they thought they could be – a familiar and longstanding

585 trope that can be observed in *Pygmalion/My Fair Lady* and contemporary retellings such as
586 *Educating Rita*.
587
588 **Conclusion:**
589 This article explores the ways in which an occupational group, whose work is less tainted,
590 experience and manage a milder stigma. Existing research on stigma management (Ashforth
591 and Kreiner, 1999; Kreiner et al, 2006) is furthered through the recognition of stigma as
592 present among occupations that are excluded from the 'dirty work' categorisation. The stigma
593 identified by FE lecturers and trainers emanates from a gender/class discourse that 'taints' the
594 occupation through cultural images, representations and tropes. Within these depictions, are
595 embodied qualities intersecting gender and class classness (Huppatz, 2012; Lindsay, 2004)
596 that schools use to sift a homogenous cohort of students into hair and beauty, subsequently
597 reaffirming existing representations. As such, FE lecturers and trainers are stigmatised not
598 through the task of teaching, but from association to a socially 'tainted' subject matter. Their
599 reduced proximity to the stigmatised industry of hair and beauty work may soften the impact
600 of stigma and amount to a milder taint, yet lecturers and trainers are unable to directly tackle
601 it. In managing the discursive perceptions that discredited their identity (Nath, 2011; Brown,
602 2014), participants relied upon students as leverage to an enhanced status. This points toward
603 a circularity in both the affliction and management of stigma, whereby the students who
604 embody tainted qualities also provide discursive leverage that allows lecturers and trainers to
605 minimize taint. Within literature on stigma, this process of 'taint removal by proxy' is a
606 relatively unexplored angle that may conceptually enrich future research.
607 Empirically, this article contributes by representing a broader range of stigmatised
608 voices at work (Bamber et al, 2021; Paetzold et al, 2008). In terms of practical insights, we
609 illustrate how much time FE lecturers and trainers devote to the stigma management process
610 during everyday interaction with others. By connecting discourse with stigma, this article
611 draws attention to the lived realities of occupational groups whose stigmatised experience of
612 work would otherwise, go unnoticed by organisational research. In fleshing out how imagery

613 and public representation shape the definitive features of an occupation (Ashcraft, 2007;
614 Crawford and Mills, 2011), the sociological implications of this article extend beyond the
615 domain of hair and beauty. There is conceptual purchase to the insights posed, in that they
616 highlight the struggles endured by those working in an occupation where pronounced imagery
617 informs perception. Whether it is depictions of the subordinate, servile woman acting in a
618 customer-facing role (Gustavsson, 2005), the flamboyant, effeminate male hairdresser (Hall
619 et al, 2007) or the compassionate female care worker (Jenson, 2017), such prominent imagery
620 gives rise to a stigma that confers otherness, inferiority and misunderstanding. Beyond this
621 article, I implore others to explore how discourse and the hyperbolic imaginings of their own
622 work incite difference and generate misunderstanding. Relatedly, I encourage reflection on
623 the strategies we employ in our own daily interactions with others to rebuff, denounce and/or
624 navigate the discursive representations that can demarcate, and ultimately stigmatise us.
625

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734 Table 1: Participant details

Participant name	Age	Subject specialism	College/Academy
Rachel	Unknown	Beauty	NDC (North Dudley College) *Interviewed as a group*
Ellie	35	Hairdressing and beauty	
Molly	43	Hairdressing and beauty	
Tony	37	Hairdressing and barbering	NEC (North East College)
Rita	36	Beauty	NEC (North East College)
Laura	45	Hairdressing and beauty	NEC (North East College)
Naomi	32	Hairdressing and beauty	NEC (North East College)
Amy	39	Hairdressing and beauty	NEC (North East College) *Interviewed as a group*
Katherine	35	Hairdressing and beauty	
Janet	42	Beauty	
Nell	41	Hairdressing	
Emma	54	Hairdressing	WC (Worthington College)
Chloe	30	Hairdressing	EHB (Experience Hair and Beauty)
Kate	42	Hairdressing	LTA (Learning and Training Academy)
Jenny	39	Beauty	LTA (Learning and Training Academy)
Gemma	37	Hairdressing	LTA (Learning and Training Academy)
Irene	30	Beauty	LTA (Learning and Training Academy)
Carla	28	Hairdressing and beauty	LTA (Learning and Training Academy)
Lara	34	Hairdressing	LTA (Learning and Training Academy)
Anne	42	Hairdressing	SC (Southmore College)
Sophie	45	Beauty	SC (Southmore College)
Tina	48	Hairdressing	SC (Southmore College)

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737 Table 2: Coding table

Data extract	First order code	Second order code	Theme
"I think just sometimes people realise it's harder than what they thought, that actually when they're out in the real world and they've not got the tutor or the trainer by their side, and they're having to do it themselves that they're struggling to do it." (Carol)	Perception of hairdressing as easy Students need lecturers in the workplace	Misrepresentation of hair and beauty work Lecturers assisting in school to work transition	Stigma associated with hair and beauty Broadening the social value of one's work
"If they're sitting talking about the weekend antics and it's getting a little out of hand, I'll give them the eye to say let's reel that in girls, but they can talk about oh yeah I'm going to go out but when it gets loud and leery that's the difference." (Leanne)	Student interactions with clients Students warned about being too loud	Appropriate topics of conversation Suitable manner of communication	Teaching students professional boundaries with clients
"I think one of the main challenges is the stereotype, I think sometimes students who would be brilliant in the hairdressing industry, who maybe have really good grades at school are dissuaded from going into vocational areas because educators in school and in sixth form see it as something people do who aren't very clever." (Chloe)	Stereotypical ideas sways perception Schools reproduce existing stereotypes	Impact of wider discourse and imagery Societal misunderstanding of hair and beauty work	A stigmatised working experience

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739