

Emotional masking and spill-outs in the neoliberalized university: a feminist geographic perspective on mentorship

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Abstract

This paper addresses the emotional dimensions of academic mentorship from a student mentee perspective and contributes to an emerging literature on geographies of emotion in higher education. It presents a pedagogical practice of self-reflexive co-mentorship – self-peer-ceptive feminist mentoring – and deploys it methodologically to analyze three biographical narratives. From different student mentee vantage points, these narratives reveal how the scales of the body, the family, and the nation are interwoven within the geopolitical and manifest within mentoring relationships. We argue that self-peer-ceptive feminist mentorship allows people at different academic career stages to share personal experiences of navigating the academy as a means to challenge institutional systems of power. Our argument answers three questions: How and why do we express and manage our emotions in mentoring relationships? What spatial scales are invoked through our emotional experiences and with what implications? How are different power structures embedded in the requirements, practices, successes, and failures of emotional management? Our discussion highlights how emotional masking and spill-outs are tools to navigate the emotional terrain of the neoliberalized academy. We conclude that self-

peer-ceptive feminist mentoring can unsettle the structural hierarchies that require a “masking” of feelings for the sake of professional distance.

Keywords

Mentoring

emotions

self-peer-ceptive

feminism

neoliberalized university

Introduction

This paper is inspired by “Toward mentoring as feminist praxis: strategies for ourselves and others,” published in the *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* by six feminist geographers (Moss et al., 1999) who provide a notable critique of the long tradition of informal mentoring in the academy. Moss et al. (1999, p. 413) remind us, “we need to develop widely based mentoring strategies” rooted in “self-mentoring,” suggesting that we are our own best mentors – that “we must remember and reflect on our own experiences, think for ourselves, and counsel ourselves as taking on the role of our own, most trusted guide” (p. 424). They note that while critical self-reflection of accumulated life experiences is a valuable way to build self-awareness about personal growth, it can also be individuating and thus require significant self-discipline to initiate and sustain. We therefore also “need role models and supporters who can help us discover and integrate our career and our life direction gradually and over time” (Moss et al., 1999, p. 424). We argue that these two recommendations still hold true. They have motivated us to collectively initiate a critical reflection on the limitations, value, and possibilities of feminist mentoring in the context of what scholars have recognized is a radically transformed university – distorted through the imposed logics of neoliberalism – and to collectively practice our own hybrid of *self-peer-ceptive feminist mentoring* through a writing collective that includes undergraduate and graduate students as well as faculty from two different post-secondary institutions. We define self-peer-ceptive feminist mentoring as a pedagogical process of self-reflexive co-mentorship in which people at different academic career stages critically reflect upon and share their experiences navigating the academy and collectively analyze the emotional registers of these biographical stories to gain insight into institutional systems of power.

This paper focuses on the emotional dimensions of academic mentoring relationships with particular attention to the student mentee perspective. While the study of emotions has become increasingly prevalent within the discipline of Geography (e.g. Bondi, Davidson, Bondi, & Smith, 2005; Laliberté & Schurr, 2016; Pain, 2009; Sultana, 2011), there is little work that directly addresses emotions in educational settings (Kenway & Youdell, 2011) and almost none that addresses emotions in relation to mentorship in higher education. We argue that practicing self-reflexivity, which we interpret as a constantly negotiated process of understanding the dynamic socio-spatial characteristics of our emotions, can unsettle the structural hierarchies that require a “masking” of feelings for the sake of maintaining a professional distance. We engage with the feelings of self-doubt, encouragement, and suppression to reveal how without sufficient critical self- and peer-reflection, our emotional responses can both reproduce the power asymmetries of the neoliberalized university and influence our embodied capacities to “affect and be affected” within academia (Laliberté & Schurr, 2016). Yes, the publication year for this citation should be as it is in the references - 2016. ... (p. 3). We use the term “neoliberalized” so as not to create a meta-narrative of what “the neoliberal university” is, but rather to recognize that political-economic processes of institutional change driven by neoliberalism and its associated value systems infiltrate and influence the multiple formal and

informal relations that constitute universities (c.f., Berg, Huijbens, & Larsen, 2016; Brown, 2015; Fraser & Taylor, 2016; Giroux, 2002; Silvey, 2002; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2000). How we define the neoliberal university among our writing collective is that of a reformed institution informed foremost by economic rationalities, including market deregulation, public and governmental disinvestment, managerialist practices, and market-first ideology that expands the casualization and precarity of academic work in an increasingly metric-oriented environment that fails to account for necessary emotional labour not amenable to measurement (Gannon et al., 2015; Mountz et al., 2015). Part of the market-oriented turn of academic work is the replication of working conditions commonly associated with the service industry: an overburdening of emotional labour onto the shoulders of casual, non-tenured, people of color (POC) and women workers (Grandey, Kern, & Frone, 2007; Tunguz, 2016). This shift in the academic work environment reinforces the neoliberalized commodification of higher education and perpetuates the devaluing and gendering of emotional labour, particularly along race and class lines.

To examine the embodied and affective implications of this neoliberalization of the academy, we pose and seek to answer the following three questions: How and why do we express and manage our emotions in mentoring relationships? What spatial scales are invoked through our emotional experiences and with what implications? How are different power structures embedded in the requirements, practices, successes, and failures of emotional management?

To critically engage with the acts of emotional masking and “spill-outs” (Bullough & Draper, 2004, p. 286) as requirements to succeed in a neoliberalizing academia, we explore scholarly feminist geographical literature on the inequalities of neoliberalized universities in relation to mentorship and the politics of emotion. We then detail the collective biographical feminist methodological approach that informed the project of this paper, shaping the data collection, analysis, and writing processes. Three narrative voices articulate different student mentee vantage points revealing how various spatial scales manifest within mentoring relationships. They reveal how and why we manage our emotions in mentoring relationships and the different power structures embedded in the requirements, practices, successes, and failures of emotional masking. We conclude by reflecting upon the transformative possibilities of self-peer-ceptive feminist mentorship to grapple with how the neoliberalized university influences and disciplines us, impacting upon how we mentor ourselves and each other.

Mentorship and networks of support in the neoliberalized university

In their landmark paper, Moss et al. (1999) identify key characteristics of the university as they encountered it, particularly its masculinism and related spiral of exclusions. They outline how to mentor women and other marginalized people in the skills and capacities needed to withstand the ferocity of the academy, while also calling for “challeng[ing] the system” and for “dismantling academic structures” that they see as rooted in the masculinist values that pervade all spheres of the university. However, the university as presented by Moss et al. (1999) appears to be a static space in which the exclusions named are longstanding, solid, and substantial. Brown (2015, p. 181) notes that in recent years, “the saturation of higher education by market rationality has converted higher education from a social and public good to a personal investment in individual futures, futures construed mainly in terms of earning capacity.” Scholars have also brought attention to the ways in which this exclusionary institutional space continues to evolve through a tighter relationship between its own masculinist structures and the logics of the market (e.g. Brown, 2015; Dowling, 2008; Gill, 2010; Ginn, 2014; McDowell, 2004; Peake, 2015).

Scholars have also considered the masculinist dimensions of universities with particular reference to the “homosociability” that shapes relationships, hierarchies, and the extent to which emotional labour, required for mentoring and working, is recognized or valued within a department (Grappendorf & Henderson, 2008; Leonard, 2001). Following

Connell's (1995) proposal that gender is closely linked to the history of institutions, Dominguez-Ruvalcaba (2007, p. 100) argues that our effort to deconstruct the patriarchal system demands paying "attention to men acting in the world of men," including in the context of "homosocial spaces." Dominguez-Ruvalcaba (2007, p. 110 and p. 121) observes that patriarchy rests upon a "homosocial system that entrusts the functioning of politics to complicities and secrets" in which "the order of masculine homosociety is not subsumed by the binary rules of gender," but rather is based on "a logic of depowering" in which dominant forms of masculinity are constituted in often violent relationship with subservient parties. When people, especially those who identify as feminine or identify as women, are repeatedly "confronted with a mismatch between their lives and the masculine life of academe," a negative spiral of self-devaluation can set in (Barata, Sandeep, & Leggatt, 2005, p. 239). The effects of this devaluation are many and varied, but are perhaps most visible in the absence of women and people of colour in the upper echelons of university research and administrative hierarchies. The "imposter syndrome," for example, is often felt by people without insider knowledge of academia, particularly non-male, first-generation, immigrant, racialized, and working-class students who "fear being exposed as outsiders in a privileged and exclusive milieu in which they are not quite sure of the rules and practices of belonging" (Aguiar, 2001, p. 189). Imposter syndrome is not confined to the student experience; it often lingers even as one gains academic experience and promotion through the ranks.

Gill (2010, p. 241) cautions that, if we are to resist such toxicities associated with academia, we must seriously wrestle with how our own "deep love for the 'myth' of what we thought being an intellectual would be like... binds us more tightly into a neoliberal regime with ever-growing costs, not least to ourselves" and often on the shoulders of others. The fundamental destructiveness of "the affective lived experience of precarity" that now marks the Anglo-American university is something that Linda Peake (2015, p. 264) urges us to address. Like Peake, members of the Great Lakes Feminist Geography Collective (GLFGC) and others call for an explicitly feminist approach to slow scholarship as a response to workload intensification in the neoliberalized university (Martell, 2014; Mountz et al., 2015; O'Neill, 2014). GLFGC members reflect on Lawson's (2007) "ethics of care" and propose a practice that challenges unequal power dynamics as a path toward constructing social and institutional relations that ensure mutuality and well-being, prompting a conscious feminist disruption to the competitive nature of academia. For Lawson, care challenges neoliberalism's tendency to contribute to the systemic marginalization of others. As feminist scholars, how and with whom we form relationships of care determines the reach of our influence. Care may have the potential to create and inform channels of solidarity, but we ought to also be critical of whether this is a strategy of accommodation rather than transformation. An ethics of care also resonates with Moss et al.'s (1999, p. 421) earlier call for the fostering of a "caring collegial environment." Feminist mentoring and its engagement with an ethics of care can become one way by which to generatively build and sustain intellectual communities.

The practice of feminist mentorship can be distinguished from traditional directive and hierarchical mentorship (especially those associated with the departmentally assigned duties of undergraduate advising and graduate supervision) through qualities of mutual empathy, empowerment, caretaking, reciprocity, and authenticity. Being a feminist mentor can demand significant emotional labour and recognition of the value of connected knowing whereby "knowledge is constructed within the contextual experiences and boundaries of the knower" (Fassinger as cited in Benishek, Bieschke, Park, & Slattery, 2004, p. 439). It can thus require a deep and respectful cultivation of individual well-being within the learning process, while also being sensitive to vulnerabilities and intersections that shape mentee lives. It can include sharing knowledge and power to help mentees to achieve positive learning experiences and successes and to strive to realize their full academic potential. Such sharing is ideally done with commitment and integrity, and in recognition that no one mentor can meet all of a mentee's needs.

Within academia, a significant part of mentoring involves career and institutional socialization – connecting mentees into networks that help them at whatever career stage to become more visible to their peers. In its ideal form, being a feminist mentor can involve combining such roles as coach, counsellor, friend, role-model, and point-of-reference (Bell, Golombisky, & Hirschmann, 2000). In these different roles, conversations and reliable presence can be used as the conduits for simultaneously providing validation of strengths and capabilities, encouragement, and motivation as mentees make their own decisions and shape their own trajectories. Each mentoring relationship, whether formal or informal, invariably has its own dynamic and place along a continuum of connection and quality.

Psychologist Mulvey (2012, p. 183) proposes that women (implicitly understood here as cisgender) have particular mentoring needs that can perhaps more productively be met in reciprocal, “lateral and multi-dimensional” relationships. While we find the idea of cisgender woman-specific forms of mentoring problematic in their essentialism, we do acknowledge that the hierarchical forms of mentoring normalized in institutions of higher education tend to perpetuate the status quo and maintain the marginalization of non-dominant groups. Therefore, while we challenge Mulvey’s idea of a women-specific form of mentoring, we do support her call for forms of co-mentorship in which individuals can take turns listening, advising, and inspiring one another in a spirit of cooperation rather than competition. The reciprocity inherent in co-mentorship, with its dependence on shared trust and self-disclosure and commitment to being genuinely “transparent, consensual, and mutually beneficial” (Shore, Toyokawa, & Anderson, 2008, pp. 17, 18), informs our understanding and practice of self-peer-ceptive feminist mentoring. We imagine self-peer-ceptive feminist mentorship as a radical engagement with the practices that challenge discourses of institutional discrimination (hooks, 2003, p. 89).

It is, however, imperative not to neglect the specific intersections of identity through which people navigate mentoring relationships. Mentorship opportunities are constrained as well as enabled by particular identities. The relative ease through which some people can navigate the terrain of academic mentoring relationships is necessarily bound up with axes of power cross-cut by complex articulations not just of gender, but also of racialization, class, health, (im)mobility, and (dis)ability (for further discussion of issues of diversity within academe, see Lomax (2015) and Ahmed (2012)). While feminist mentoring can potentially renounce hierarchy, it does not always, and the practice remains riddled with its own challenges and contradictions. Engaging critically with emotions, we argue, is a valuable way in which to both identify and understand some of the unresolved complexities of these contradictions.

Emotional geographies of mentorship: the labour of masking and bounding emotions

In the context of an academy that is increasingly managed by neoliberalizing discourses, we are at a risk of becoming “roboticized” (Kern, Hopkins, Al Hindi, & Moss, 2014). Institutional demands to “strategize” our time have minimized space for us to *feel* through our work as our productivity is often valued in terms of quantity (Askins, 2009). We are encouraged to silently manage our academic anxieties about emotions (Berg et al., 2016; Morrison, Johnston, & Longhurst, 2013); we are pressured to “mask our emotions” to allow for the production of objective spaces that we are required to fill with professional distance (Bullough & Draper, 2004, p. 285). In certain situations, such as in lectures, during office hours, and over the course of one-on-one supervisions, expressions of particular emotions are variously considered appropriate dependent upon the institutional and embodied positionalities and privilege of the individual. Part of the socialization of the academy is that students are trained in the appropriate expressions of emotions in designated times and spaces – what is often referred to as professionalization. However, the expectation to mask emotions is not simply tied to experience or position within the academic hierarchy; with the privileges of academic seniority combined with being white, cisgender male, middle-class, heterosexual, and able-bodied also come a greater freedom of expression potentially with less societally-imposed necessity to

either justify belonging or curtail discriminatory assumptions (Berg, Gahman, & Nunn, 2014). We argue that “emotional masking” is itself underpinned by feelings because the spaces that we fill with “professional” distance are mediated and (re)produced by our emotions. Thus, emotional masking does not disconnect us from our emotions; rather, it demands hard emotional work and often repression – we can never escape feeling, even when attempting to adhere to institutional expectations concerning professional self-discipline.

Inevitably, our deep emotional investments spill out though not always in ideal times or places. Instead they often flood into professional spaces, entangling, consuming, and confusing the boundaries of our emotional and professional selves. And then, they circulate between certain bodies and objects, sticking some subjects together in exclusive (bodily) social spaces of symbolism and identification that are distant from “racialized, gendered, sexualized and otherwise differentiated bodies” (Laliberté & Schurr, 2016, p. 3). Emotional spill-outs create distinct spaces of inclusion and exclusion in academia (Zembylas, 2011), whereby particular emotions allow specific bodies to align with others based on the neoliberal values (e.g. market logic, competitiveness, and individualism) that simultaneously cement “differentiated bodies” on the margins (Ahmed, 2012). In Zembylas (2005) review of the scholarly literature on emotions and teaching in the 1980s and 1990s, he identifies two waves that address, respectively, the psychological and sociological production of emotions amongst teachers within educational environments. This literature, however, neither addresses the socio-spatial nature of emotions nor the role of emotions, particularly from a student perspective, in relation to mentorship. When literature in higher education engages with students’ emotions, it focuses on managing their emotions within learning (e.g. Pritchard & Wilson, 2003) rather than on the relational politics of emotions connecting students and teachers. In what follows, we seek to understand the complicated emotional relationships associated with mentorship in the academy from a mentee perspective.

Self-peer-ceptive mentorship in practice: feeling out a research methodology

Taking up Diana Leonard’s (2001) call to challenge homosociability and Nayak’s (2009, p. 26) call to “find ways to name and transform the ‘conditions’ and conditioning of academia,” we have fostered a sense of community and caring to realize an intellectual project that allows us to talk about some of the emotional layers of academia and to work cooperatively within them. We have mobilized the feminist mentorship principles detailed by Moss et al. (1999) of collaboration, respectful exchange, listening, and group consultation processes to establish the trust and common ground needed to realize a collective writing project of and about feminist mentorship that is deeply enmeshed within our lives as feminist undergraduate and graduate students and faculty.

Our writing collective is comprised of a small group of seven feminist-identified scholars at different points in their academic careers – from undergraduate student to doctoral candidate to tenured professor. We have sought to create a “safe space to discuss feminist ideas in academe” (Barata et al., 2005, p. 235) while recognizing that feeling “safe” is a privilege that is differentially distributed based on embodied positionality (hooks, 1994). We produced an informal learning environment that would motivate us to self-reflect upon our understanding and practice of feminist mentoring by focusing on “ideas that push us off-centre, perhaps even make us uncomfortable” (Lawson, 2010, p. 53).

We employed a methodology based on collective biography, which draws on people’s experiences to break the barriers between research subjects and objects. As suggested by Gannon et al. (2015), collective biography can be a tool for generating alternative imaginaries of academia through participatory writing practices among feminist colleagues. Our collective explored this model of collective writing and biographical disclosure through reflecting on the “self” through sharing memories of our own feminist mentoring relationship experiences. This process created a collective understanding of

the (dis)connections between our stories and how these experiences were entangled in various webs of power that we see as directly resulting from the neoliberalization of the academy, as well as the pervasive frameworks of gender, class, and race privilege that exist within and beyond neoliberalism. We argue that employing collective biography as a practice of feminist scholarship allows us to interrupt the neoliberal idealization of the “self-sufficient” masculine academic subject by both revealing “relationalities” among feminist peers and providing a space for emotional masking and spill-outs to be supported, unpacked and rendered productive in constructing generative and lasting feminist mentor-mentee relationships (Gannon et al., 2015; Kern et al., 2014).

For this paper, authors maintained personal journals in which they reflected on their own experiences of being mentored and shared selections with the group for discussion. We used the basic qualitative research technique of participatory diagramming to identify key themes and emotions that could structure our analysis. Following Kesby (2000, p. 425), we practiced participatory diagramming by (i) generating a specific research question; (ii) collaboratively designing a diagramming tool; (iii) collectively discussing possible responses to the question; (iv) and using paper and markers to produce a large diagram responding to the research question. This participatory diagramming methodology was particularly appealing because the visual and tactile nature of diagramming facilitates the contribution of less dominant personalities and helps them to express their “voice” without necessarily requiring them to “speak”. Over two years, we met on a monthly basis and collaborated virtually on a shared online document. In this way, the discussions we have engaged in both face-to-face and in writing are deliberate efforts to insert knowledge production into “actually existing social practices” in ways that attend to “the equality of knowledge and the development of relations that enable a translation across different positions” (Bresnihan & Byrne, 2015, p. 39).

Although there are many stories to be told from our journals, we have focused on the experiences of three students (one undergraduate and two graduate) in order to provide narrative coherence in the scaled context of our argument. Moreover, a student perspective is under-represented in feminist writing on mentorship in higher education, which prioritizes the experiences of faculty members (e.g. Chesney-Lind, Okamoto, & Irwin, 2006; Humble, Solomon, Allen, Blaisure, & Johnson, 2006). Collectively, these three student mentee stories illustrate a variety of mentorship encounters that speak not only to the embodied positionality of the respective authors, but also to the uneven terrains of power that characterize the academy.

Voice 1: making space

I sat across from Professor X in her office. I watched myself listening to her. I watched myself maintain a placid look on my face as I was told that I shouldn't take this class or do that research project. I objected. I stated my case. She told me I was wrong. The more she spoke, the more convinced I was that I did not want to work with her as my supervisor anymore. I went home and called my parents. My mother told me to listen to X – that she is the professor and knows best. Crying, I said, “I can't keep living someone else's version of my life.” My mother hesitated and said, “I'm sorry, it's just how I was raised – not to question authority.” I was so shocked by this admission that I vowed to stand up for myself.

A few days later, I worked up the courage to tell X I was switching supervisors. Her reaction justified my concerns about working with her. She told me that I was making a huge mistake, that I would regret not having access to her connections and resources. When I still didn't budge, she told me that the only reason I had gotten into the program was because she had advocated for me. That really, I didn't belong there. Without her, she implied, I was nothing. When I felt there was nothing more to say, I left her office and walked back to the office I shared with five other graduate students. X followed me and

continued yelling at me from the doorway. The looks of concern and confusion on the faces of my peers made it clear I was not alone in thinking her behaviour was inappropriate.

Years later, I referred to this as my “break-up” with X because it was so emotional. She yelled; I cried. As glad as I was to get out of that relationship, I have since come to appreciate that she truly believed she was mentoring me. She thought she was showing me how to succeed in academia. But it was her version of success, not mine.

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Three of us were huddled around Professor Y’s computer at her kitchen table, looking over an earlier draft of our paper. Z and I, both Y’s graduate students, were working through ideas and possible theoretical frameworks. I sat back at one point and smiled. This was what I had always wanted out of my academic experience – this moment of collaboration. My relationship with Y had not always been this easy. As my supervisor, she was also the one who was responsible for vetting my work. She was the one I had to please. Often I knew that she wasn’t satisfied with what I was writing, but I didn’t know what I should do differently. Her approach was to let me work it out for myself. In hindsight, I appreciate that she was letting me find my own way, but at the time it just felt like I didn’t know the “right” way to do things.

But here we were, all three of us struggling to find the “right” way to write this article. Watching Y struggle with us as we negotiated our individual and collective thinking processes was enlightening for me. It was that moment when I realized that I wasn’t the only one who didn’t know the “right” way to say things. It was something everyone struggled with, no matter where they were in their career. I had lost sight of this in the isolating process of dissertation writing. But in this moment, I enjoyed the collective struggle of it. The fact that Y was walking through the muck of partially formed ideas made a huge difference in my view of the process and her attempts to mentor me through it. It almost felt like a moment of co-mentorship in the midst of a structurally hierarchical relationship. It gave me hope.

This first voice begins their narrative appearing to be distanced and disconnected from the self. With a reprimand, however, the self becomes verbally and physically present; it reconnects with the moment and pushes back seeking to challenge and disrupt the hurtful assertions of power. This confrontation takes place in the supervisor’s office, a space in which power hierarchies are amplified through ownership. The supervisor assumes a condescending tone that closes down the conversation with curt authority, expecting to be neither challenged nor questioned, as a parent might with a child. But a parent is socially expected to offer unconditional love and forgiveness. Instead, the supervisor adopts the authority of a parental role without the nurturing dimensions. When her authority is challenged, it is described quite intimately as a “break-up”, revealing that in this, like any relationship, there are unspoken rules and patterns of (mis)communication. Previously masked emotions of anger, frustration, and resentment that manifest as yelling from the supervisor and tears from the student are embodied emotional spill-outs that extended across space and time. They spilled across a threshold from the privacy of an office into the witnessed public of a hallway and left traces in the present.

The first voice narrates the exercising of agency; a supervisory relationship is dismantled and a new relationship is created in which co-mentorship is made possible through collective processes of writing and knowledge production. Here, learning extends beyond the disciplining structures and spaces of the academy. A kitchen table in a home becomes a site of social and intellectual reproduction. Professional boundaries are spatially and temporally reconfigured as knowledge is produced through intellectual struggle and collaboration. When the power landscape is no longer hierarchical, emotional spill-outs do not have to be felt or interpreted as hurtful or threatening, instead, they can be the basis of an enriching learning environment.

Voice 2: staying the course

The four years of my undergraduate degree were seminal in the development of my political, sexual, and emotional literacy. In the winter term of my second year, I changed majors after taking “Women and Work” with Professor R who was the Women’s Studies professor we could count on to attend every event held by the campus Women’s Centre. R was known for tirelessly working within women’s crisis centres and for always standing with student groups who voiced concern over access and safety issues for women, queers, disabled, people of colour, and low-income students on campus. Through R’s classes, I learned that knowledge is experiential, because our lives mattered. R was an ally and an agitator; the loud, raging, and angry feminist mentor who made us feel supported and cool. In my graduating year, contract faculty members’ went on strike. At the time, all but one of the core Women’s Studies faculty were adjuncts. After several years of R’s courses, which ran more like organizing sessions and solidarity networking, students responded to R’s call to support striking instructors. On the picket line, I recall R saying something like, “It’s better to go down with the ship than let it sail somewhere you never wanted to end up in the first place!” When I decided to apply for graduate school, R was encouraging, and also made me promise to continue being outward about my feminism in the academy. R said that there were not enough of “us” to lose even one.

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During my undergraduate degree, I learned the importance of priming the classroom. Priming means setting the stage for everyone to participate, to feel included, and to be as comfortable as possible in their learning environment. My approach to this technique involves students and the instructor collaboratively establishing people’s needs and expectations, and discussing how to go about ensuring the opportunity for everyone to contribute. As a PhD student, I took on a TA position in an Equity Studies class. I was brimming with excitement to go through the priming exercise with students. Hands popped up around the room and everyone had contributions to offer. We created lists of student’s learning styles and pet peeves, and lists of what made students feel listened to and respected. By the end of the exercise, we agreed that racism, sexism, clicking one’s pen repeatedly, and interrupting peers were things to keep out of the classroom. The students also expressed an interest in learning through music, role-playing, and storytelling.

Late in the course, we had a week of material that covered trans and queer identities. Following the first lecture of the week, a student asked to speak to me privately. They had been triggered by the professor’s lecture that day, and told me they may not contribute to discussion in tutorial. We developed a plan to make sure the student felt supported as we walked to our classroom together. Later in the week, I checked in with the student and learned that they were feeling comfortable, confident, and had processed the materials from the previous lecture. During tutorial that day, the student stated they had something to share with the class. They stood and announced publicly (for the first time ever) that they are trans. Following the student’s announcement, the active listening skills we had discussed at the beginning of the term were in full effect. Students looked at their peer, heads nodding and leaning in acknowledgement that they had heard and understood, saying “yes,” saying “thank you for sharing that with us,” and “that’s awesome”. Still standing before their peers, the student said, “I knew I could tell you,” and sat down in their chair smiling before saying, “Okay!” indicating it was time for us to move on with the lesson. Those students reminded me that every day we teach requires us to not only show up, but also to continuously be accountable to our classrooms and the wellness of students; to carve out and uphold these spaces together.

The second voice helps us situate the interpersonal relationships of mentoring within the politics of the neoliberalized university, including the ways multiple systems of oppression weave their way in and through the classroom. Mentorship, in

these examples, is most meaningful when it spills out of the assumed bounds of a classroom – either in terms of political activism on campus and in the local community or creating space for different bodies/experiences/emotions in the classroom. Mentorship provides a means of modeling how not to accept the rules – in the case of the strike, for example, how not to allow the university to use job precariousness to dictate how education is provided. Such a political project involves making visible how both students and teachers are vulnerable to the oppressive structures of neoliberalism.

The two moments articulated by the second voice are intimately linked through a commitment to mentorship as a political project of co-learning in which the positions of mentor and mentee are purposefully blurred. Priming the classroom is a pedagogical technique to realize this blurring by allowing students the space to co-mentor each other and disrupt power by assuming ownership of the classroom as their space. Both moments also illustrate the importance of life stories – with all of their historical and geographic specificity – to the university experience. The third voice expands this insight by drawing attention to how geopolitical processes are embodied in mentoring relationships.

Voice 3: to find sweet tea, rooftops, sunrise, and stars

I started my undergraduate degree at a university in a small Canadian town, 9732 km away from Amman, Jordan – the city where I grew up, the city to which my family was displaced from Palestine. The town was cold, quiet, and dark. It was the exact opposite of Amman, which bubbled with life until the early hours of the morning, where food vendors sometimes felt generous enough to share free falafel and sweet tea. I began longing for its breathtaking rooftops and its starry nights, its warmth and energy. In my imagination, Amman became perfect: romanticized, illusory, far.

I pushed the limits of my social anxiety. I was the only person of color in my entire dorm. I was out of touch. That didn't exactly position me as the best candidate for a new friend.

“Are you going home back West this summer?”

“...West? you mean “East” as in... from the Middle East?”

“Yeah, whatever.”

Silence.

This made it difficult for me to even consider approaching professors. Often, they were exalted on a podium before 850 students, seemingly oblivious to where I was from, what I was thinking. How could I have a conversation with them? What if I mispronounced a word or said something wrong? In lecture, they only discussed “Canadian” issues and examples; they were part of a world that forgot me and people who looked like me.

Then came the day my History professor entered class and announced that he had details about an exciting travel opportunity. I listened closely. He declared that his department was sponsoring a Taglit-Birthright trip to Israel. “If you're Jewish, you qualify! It is your right to see your homeland. Contact me if you're interested.” I flinched, then I froze. This announcement was not for me. I couldn't even cross a checkpoint, let alone contact the professor to sign up. No, he didn't know that I was there, fading, silenced. Israel displaced me, and the professor erased me. I left the lecture hall in quiet tears.

I refused to initiate a single conversation with a professor or a TA as the entire academic year passed me by. No educators, no role models, no guidance. Come April, I realized that I couldn't see the sun anymore – only my imagined warm sweet tea on Amman's streets and rooftops and mystical early hours of the morning, at a dizzying distance. I packed up all I had in my first-year dorm room and promised myself to never look back.

* * * Would it be possible to shift this paragraph break to the center?

With high expectations, I enrolled at a university in Toronto the following fall. On the first day of class, I learned there would already be an assignment due the following week, one asking us all to reflect on our own multilayered diasporic identities. Some students protested that they, along with their parents and grandparents, had lived in Canada their entire lives. What could they write about, they wondered, if they had nothing to do with diaspora?

“If you’re not Indigenous to Turtle Island, you’re definitely diasporic. Figure it out,” Q, the professor, declared. It was at that point that she began to leave a lasting impression on me.

The task wasn’t as easy as I initially thought it would be. I tried. I failed. 6:00 PM, Wednesday evening: I faced a blank Word document. I had no words. 9:00 PM 11:00 PM 12:00 AM The silences permeated my mind, repeatedly pulling me back to no words. 1:00 AM Noisy loops. 2:00 AM Anger. Pain. 3:00 AM No words. 4:00 AM Desperation. Hesitation. In tears, I crawled back into the only place I knew how to be Palestinian: my imagination. What would it be like to watch the sunrise on a Gaza beach rather than from my dormitory window? What would sunrise in Jerusalem be like, strolling through the old city and collecting Arabic pastries from the neighborhood bakery? 6:25 AM I had nothing but illusions to describe.

“This brought me to tears. Please come see me after class,” Q said to me as she handed our papers back. I quickly realized that I had no reason to hesitate. Q and I longed for the same places – places that would never be ours. Please ensure that the following deletions are implemented in the final text. This is very important, and I have chosen to proceed in this way to avoid risking the disclosure of Q’s identity. Please let me know if anyone has any concerns with this decision. ~~She grew up Jewish in Canada, placeless, all too familiar with the persistent pressure to disappear, physically and discursively.~~ We talked about our imaginings ~~of Palestine, of Israel,~~ of mythical mornings and generosity and rooftops and sweet tea and stars. ~~Nobody understood my existential pain like she did.~~ We talked about different ways of coping, always meeting exactly between the same words, the same silences: how to exist, dispossessed, invisible, unwanted, placeless.

Our meetings never seemed long enough. Q taught me how to challenge the boundaries of my comfort zones while also keeping my struggles at the center. She helped me understand the validity of my own imaginings and the importance of learning to articulate them. And, perhaps most importantly, she held my hand for what was the beginning of a quest with no answers – a quest crowded with ghosts, sweet tea, sunrise, rooftops, and stars.

In situating the lack of mentorship available at the beginning of her undergraduate study, the third voice makes visceral how colonialism infiltrates the assumed universality of the neoliberalized university. She describes experiences of exclusion – experiences in which she is constantly reminded of her embodied difference. These experiences of alienation contribute to the production of an imposter syndrome (Aguiar, 2001), that manifests as a longing for inclusion and recognition inside and outside of the classroom. Emotions spill out, punctuating and cross-cutting her stories: running out of the lecture emotionally distraught, losing sleep over writing an assignment, and connecting over similar experiences of dislocation and belonging. Such emotional spill-outs necessitate prioritizing which emotions are masked and which are allowed to overflow (e.g. loneliness, frustration, disconnection, and alienation) in different times and places. In the silence of the transition between her vignettes, we see the struggle and the stamina necessary to keep going, to be willing to try again at another university with the hope of finding a place where she is seen and heard. She illustrates the possibilities that personal connections can nurture, while disrupting the idea of the personal as just individualistic and not also geopolitical.

Feminists understand geopolitics as more than the nation state, they direct the analytical gaze geographically and historically to multiple spatial scales, from the personal to the transnational. “[A] feminist geopolitics... embodies an approach that advocates a finer scale of ‘security’ accountable to people, as individuals and groups, and analyzes the spaces of violence that traverse public/private distinctions” (Hyndman, 2001, p. 219). When this final narrative is read as simply an illustration of homesickness, it is politically decontextualized from the geographies of ongoing colonialism that refract understandings of “home” for displaced populations. To individualize the emotional experience of displacement is to perpetuate a violence that reduces institutional structures of exclusion to personal pathology. To individualize responsibility for social ills is part of the larger neoliberal project of responsabilization in which the burden associated with collective experiences of colonialism is downscaled (Laliberté, 2015). Within neoliberalism, responsibility for social risk is shifted from the state to the individual with a focus on “personal responsibility” and “self care” (Lemke, 2001, p. 202).

The third voice illustrates that multi-scalar geopolitical processes are embodied and embedded in the histories and spatialities that students and instructors bring into the educational process; it demonstrates geopolitical insecurity at the scale of the body and the potential violence enacted by the neoliberalized university. “Violence, especially of the liberal varieties, is often most easily perpetrated in the spaces and places where its possibility is unequivocally denounced” (Puar, 2007, p. 24). Universities bill themselves as quintessential liberal spaces where the development of any individual is possible. Yet for the third voice, the possibility of her obliteration – both social and academic – was real. Her social death was side-stepped through a chance encounter with a mentor who actively resisted the neoliberalized university and recognized a parallel lived experience of alienation and struggle. Through mutual recognition and affirmation came a sense of belonging and security and the possibility for co-mentorship.

The emotional labour of masking and spill-outs

The three voices narrate variously scaled lived experiences of mentorship and its dislocations from the bodily and interpersonal, to the local and outward again to the global. These are the scaled trajectories through which emotional labour moulds our everyday experiences. In the context of mentoring relationships, emotions are central to how we, as feminists within academia, understand the different burdens and constraints placed upon us. Sometimes we choose to offer additional emotional labour to support our political agendas, as exemplified when faculty intellectually engage with students outside of the classroom. Sometimes that choice is denied us – we are forced to do “extra” emotional labour just to exist within the system, as evidenced by the many ways the third voice negotiated with the ways in which she did not belong. Regardless of the intention, we understand emotional labour as a scalar politics that illuminate everyday moments that (re)produce the status quo within the university as well as opportunities for intervention. Varied expectations of emotional labour and the political decisions of how and with whom emotional energy is offered are a means by which inequalities are (re)produced within the academy.

As also shown above, the geopolitical processes manifest in mentoring relationships are embodied experiences. Even as we acknowledge the multi-scalar processes that inform and construct these emotions, the body (physically, cognitively, and discursively) becomes the site of emotional experience, management, and manifestation. The examples above demonstrate how masking functions as an emotional labour of perseverance within the university. This is clear when the first voice distances herself from her supervisor, concealing and internalizing her frustration to avoid being disciplined until she is emotionally ready. When the second voice describes a student gaining sufficient confidence to unmask their emotions, we appreciate how long-standing practices of institutional socialization have led them and other students to habitually conceal their personal stories in order to conform to the assumed norms of the neoliberalized classroom “saturat[ed]... by market

rationality that has converted higher education from a social and public good to a personal investment in individual futures, futures construed mainly in terms of earning capacity” (Brown, 2015, p. 181.) The third voice viscerally describes rapidly leaving the classroom in an attempt to hide her tears. In all three examples, masking, can be understood as a process of endurance within an academy reconfigured by neoliberal ideology (Brown, 2015).

Even when emotions are masked, they are likely to manifest in other ways and settings such as the third voice’s swallowing of frustration in the face of Birthright trips and then choosing to leave the program altogether. This expression has the potential to be a spill-out; it is an expression of emotion that breaks the compartmentalization of emotion expected within the neoliberalized university. Previously masked emotions can sometimes spill out negatively as abuses of power, which can be seen when Professor X yells into the doorway as the first voice decides to observe a change in their supervisorship. They can also spill out positively, depending on the dynamics of the spaces in which they occur. The second voice, for example, speaks of priming the classroom, or negotiating within the space to accommodate for spill-outs that are affected and informed by different student embodiments.

Masking and spill-outs are tools, employed consciously and otherwise, that help us to navigate the emotional terrain of neoliberalized academia. While spill-outs offer an outlet for the expression of a variety of feelings: excitement, joy, anxiety, self-doubt, or fatigue, for example, masking is often an act of self-preservation. Emotions that may be consequential to one’s position or relationships in the academy, if expressed openly, are masked or hidden away, manifesting and usually spilling over elsewhere. Attending to the sites where spill-outs occur exposes the connectivity between our public (professional) and private (personal) selves. Our public selves carry over into private spaces, and otherwise masked or private emotions can also spill out into public settings.

Given that emotions, space, and place are mutually constituted (Morrison et al., 2013), emotional spill-outs are necessarily spatial interactions, whereby our masked emotions move from the surfaces of our bodies and stick to those of others, bringing us closer *towards* each other *within* and *through* particular places (Ahmed, 2004). Our emotional spill-outs, however, do not have to (re)produce neoliberal spaces. hooks (2003), for instance, suggests that we can intentionally direct our emotional spill-outs to challenge the status quo of the academy. As both educators and learners, we can choose to care and we can choose who and what we direct our care towards. Acknowledging that these choices are inevitably embedded in our social locations, institutional contexts, and personal emotional terrains, and acknowledging that to care is not an act that can necessarily be disentangled from the intricate hierarchies of institutional power (Lawson, 2007), we see in hooks’s observation the imperfect potential of caring mentoring relationships to support the conditions for liberatory change from the site of the individual to the spaces of higher education more broadly.

Reciprocal vulnerability and trust formation

Trust plays a vital role in the relationship between mentors and mentees. The three voices narrate the value of personal and intellectual connection within the contemporary academy, particularly the importance of mutual respect that can be built from the sharing of reciprocal vulnerability. Such sharing, we maintain, unsettles the adamant foundations of the neoliberalized university. It permits an ethics of care that blur the spatial boundaries between public and private – it denies the bounding framework by which masking and spill-outs operate – and provides a common meeting place upon which the hierarchies of mentor-mentee relationships are disrupted. Moreover, this blurring can be a foundation for political action. For the first voice, a collective writing project was political because it involved a group of feminist scholars writing about the physical and sexual violence experienced on a university campus. For the second voice, the role modeling of a feminist

professor informed the future trajectory of the emerging scholar's pedagogical approach in the classroom years later. For the third voice, the avoidance of social death was achieved by the embodied commitment to the embodied existence of Palestine. These varied political actions emergent from an "ethics of care" exemplify an "ethic of resistance" (Peake, 2015) that challenges the masculinist ideology of the neoliberalized university. In place of individualized strategies for advancement and the requisite power games that distort educational priorities, spaces are sought instead for building community that prioritize care and collective responsibility.

Conclusion: feminist geopolitics of self-peer-ceptive mentorship

In her critique of liberal society, Puar (2007, p. 24) reminds readers that to deny culpability or to assume "that one is not implicated in violent relations toward others, that one is outside of them" is to perpetuate violence. We have held ourselves responsible and accountable for the relations we are enacting in our writing collective. In acknowledging the different positionalities and the different places, moments, and time through which we have journeyed, we recognize that we cannot distance ourselves from the embodied practices in which we are learning and teaching.

The insights disclosed by mentees are under-represented in the scholarly literature. For us, the feminist mentee position is powerful and instructive because it has contradictory wants. On the one hand, it desires to be part of the academy and to learn how to navigate institutional systems and cultures. On the other hand, it pushes back, often in anger and frustration, against the status quo and desires an intellectual community not based upon exclusion and competition. We have also privileged feminist mentee voices because they permit connection to the messy moments of struggle that characterize many academic journeys yet are rarely shared privately or publicly. Even as we find moments of resonance between our stories that can be supportive and empowering, these multiple stories also remind us of our different positions of privilege that have granted us access to an academic system that simultaneously and categorically excludes others.

The emergent unfolding of our self-peer-ceptive feminist mentorship process engaged us in unforeseen ways with the geopolitical implications of our experiences. Self-peer-ceptive mentorship invokes the scale of the body and the intimacy of interpersonal relations while feminist geopolitics reminds us that the scale of the body is embedded in the formation of institutions, nation-building projects and processes, and transnational configurations. It is precisely here where we find the transformative possibilities of self-peer-ceptive feminist mentorship as a means of disrupting and challenging neoliberalized academia. Through this approach, we imagine different collective configurations of care and learning that challenge neoliberal iterations of competitive individualism.

We offer self-peer-ceptive feminist mentorship as a model of mentoring that we hope will be taken up by others and practiced as a way of realizing alternative social relations within and beyond the neoliberalized academy. While there is no blueprint, we draw upon our experiences as a student-faculty feminist writing collective to provide provisional guiding principles for how to operationalize self-peer-ceptive feminist mentorship:

- Establish informal learning environments beyond the disciplining structures and spaces of the university that can foster the reproduction of alternative forms of intellectual and social relations. Work to build trust in these learning environments so that participants feel comfortable sharing their experiences and confident that their stories will not be shared publicly without permission.
- Use journaling, collective biography, participatory diagramming, and other forms of collaborative writing as a means to individually reflect upon and collectively analyze the discomforts and emotional vulnerabilities produced through participation in neoliberalized academia.
- Approach mentorship as a political project of co-learning and reciprocal vulnerability that is not only

grounded in everyday lived experiences but also strives to practice social justice activism and skill sharing within the academy.

- Use this type of mentorship to actively challenge the market rationality of the neoliberalized university by making space for reflection on how we orient our presence in the academy towards the common good. No matter what your positionality is upon entering into this type of mentorship experience, be aware that your roles will vary between: coach, counselor, friend, role model, point of reference, co-learner, and person in need of support.
- Acknowledge that mentoring involves a commitment of emotional labour to the self and to others; as mentoring roles shift, so do accompanying responsibilities that will often involve: providing a reliable presence, listening, advising, validating strengths and capabilities, and acting cooperatively with accountability, integrity, and respect.

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The authors comprise the Fem-Mentee Collective Please can you also add to this statement:

The authors comprise the Fem-Mentee Collective and their names are listed alphabetically. ...

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