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

Oonagh M. Harness

Newcastle Business School, Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

Correspondence
Oonagh M. Harness, Newcastle Business School, Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK.
Email: oonagh.harness@northumbria.ac.uk

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 the association with 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 recognize it as milder than its extreme theorization in dirty

work, this article explores discourse and representation as a centralizing source of stigma.

KEYWORDS

class, discourse, embodiment, gender, hairdressing, identity work, stigma

1 | 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.

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

A stigma persists as an unwanted mark that differentiates and devalues an individual (Goffman, 1997). Taint is used throughout the article to capture stigmatization by proxy, which individuals experience through the association with an industry that reduces prestige (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; McMurray & Ward, 2014). The discrediting properties of stigma threaten the construction of a desirable identity, hence tactics are employed to manage it (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Hughes, 1951). As an occupational group with an already fragile professional identity (Robson et al., 2004), we observe how the identity work practices undertaken by Further Education (FE) lectures and trainers reduce social taint emanating from 'association with stigmatized publics' (McMurray & Ward, 2014, p: 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, p: 3), this article also centralizes gender/class discourses within work that is stigmatized. 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 & 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 stigmatizing discourse nonetheless generates

taint that 'reduces the prestige or esteem of an occupation' (McMurray & Ward, 2014, p: 1127). This article therefore focuses upon FE lecturers and trainers, who are stigmatized 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, emphasizing the disproportionate focus on extreme stigma present in 'dirty' forms of labor. 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.

1.1 | 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 (Ashcraft, 2007; Brown, 2015). As an ongoing process, identity work involves 'forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising' a distinct and coherent sense of self (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p: 1165). Debates on identity work are particularly rife within organizational research (Brown, 2015), given the centrality of work to the way in which 'we understand and represent our 'self'' (Cohen, 2020, p: 2). Within certain occupations, there is a desire to 'professionalize', an elusive objective underscored by desirable attributes such as knowledge, autonomy, and responsibility (Robson et al., 2004). Claims upon professional status are often supplanted by efforts to subvert negative connotations imposed by others. It is an attempt to evade the 'spoiling' that comes through the association with a stigmatized occupation (Goffman, 1997; Nath, 2011). In the organizational context, stigma has been theorized as persistent within 'dirty' forms of labor discredited by a discernible 'taint' (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Hughes, 1958; McMurray & Ward, 2014). Kreiner et al.'s (2006, p: 621) classification schema capture the variable depth and breadth of taint, which respectively refer to the 'intensity of dirtiness' and the 'proportion of work that is dirty'. Within the broad spectrum of tainted work, there is a lacuna regarding occupations where the work is neither extremely dirty nor tainted but suffers from a milder stigma (Bamber et al., 2021; Kriener et al., 2006; Paetzold et al., 2008).

Exploring the milder forms of stigma in comparably 'cleaner' occupations allows for a more nuanced appreciation of stigma at work. The tendency to locate stigma as emanating from actual or perceptual 'dirt' risks depoliticizing stigma and overlooking the links to class, poverty, and economic status (Tyler, 2020). As stigma is socially constructed and upheld, it is also important to consider how contemporary discourse shapes the perception and embodiment of work. Such depictions may be exaggerated, yet they are not entirely detached from the organizational reality they seek to represent and have the potential to confer 'associated cultural baggage' upon an occupation (Fine, 1996, p: 91), which is then reaffirmed and brought to life through everyday talk (Ashcraft, 2007; Robson et al., 2004). It may not be 'dirt' that stigmatizes an occupation, but the sticky discursive baggage that socially taints it by steering external perception. By considering 'dominant discourses on gender and work' (Schnurr et al., 2020, p: 417), this article acknowledges the political origins of stigma as a coalition of class/gender status that confers taint upon individuals who fail to espouse 'middle classness'. Despite the transferal of stigma, the experiences of such individuals remain disproportionally neglected within organizational research, which has focused predominantly on those who satisfy the more extreme criteria for 'dirty' work. Yet, by focusing on the experiences of those in 'cleaner' occupations where stigma is mild, we observe the acute implications of occupational imagery, which act as 'a symbol of degradation' (Hughes, 1958, p: 49–50). Here, stigma arises not from the task of teaching but from an association with matter that is socially tainted by discrediting imagery and representation. Through a series of interviews with FE lecturers and trainers in hair and beauty and ethnographic field notes, this article explores how being stigmatized through an association with socially tainted matter ensues identity work that is restorative, defensive, and esteem enhancing. The following section will discuss the research setting in greater detail.

1.2 | The research setting

In England, vocational training courses are commonly provided at FE institutions, which includes colleges and training academies. Overseen by the Department for Education, FE courses are typically subsidized by government funding. Despite the wide variety of courses offered within the FE sector across England, as a nonacademic pathway, they lack prestige and status (Fuller & MacFadyen, 2012). As a vocational, nonacademic pathway for post 16-year-olds, this article focuses specifically on FE lecturers and trainers who specialize in hairdressing and/or beauty as their subject matter. It is what they teach, what they know, and comprises an unwavering facet of their identity, as most continue to actively dabble in hair and beauty work. Hence, they maintain a distinct positional proximity to a stigmatized industry. The hair and beauty industry is socially constructed as being of low status and prestige, a configuration that derives from the heavily feminized representation of hair and beauty work (Gimlin, 1996; Hupptaz, 2012), reflecting a workforce where approximately 83% are female (NHBF, 2019). FE lecturers and trainers teach a predominately female cohort of students how to engage physically with customers, enacting touch that is both technical and deferential (Cohen & Wolkowitz, 2018). The deferential touch undermines status on account of a gender binary that privileges disembodied 'masculine' forms of work (Ashcraft, 2007; Flensborg Jensen, 2017; Schnurr et al., 2020).

The FE sector also highlights how stigma becomes embodied. Within the dirty work literature, it has been acknowledged that by working in a stigmatized role, there is a risk of personifying that stigma (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Flensborg Jensen, 2017). This article illustrates how discursive imagery reaffirms fixed ideas dictating who should be a hairdresser or beautician based on specific attributes that are gender- and class-based (Lindsay, 2004; Miller & Hayward, 2006). FE lecturers and trainers therefore end up teaching a largely homogenous cohort of students, who embody the low-status attributes already associated with popular representations of hair and beauty workers. Cultural imagery, such as the characterization of Candy Pink referenced at the start of this article, reaffirms the construction of hair and beauty work as easy labor that 'can be done by "anybody"' (Eayrs, 1993, p: 32). The stigmatization of hair and beauty work may imply a lack of skill, yet in order to assume the role of stylist or beautician, there is both training to undergo and qualifications to acquire. Regardless, FE lecturers and trainers face stigmatization from working with both the 'tainted' subject matter of hair and beauty as well as students that embody 'spoiled' sociocultural attributes. Strategies to manage stigma and minimize taint are then reliant upon students as leverage to an enhanced reputation. As lecturers and trainers are denied the chance to directly erase the stigma that plagues the industry that they are tied to, this article explores the strategies employed to tackle the gender/class discourses that taint them through association. I will now discuss the methodology, including the data collection methods used and the analysis.

2 | METHODOLOGY

The research reported in this article was conducted within 6 FE institutions, including four colleges and two training academies. The FE colleges provided a range of vocational courses typically intended for post 16-year-old school leavers, which included hair, beauty, and barbering. The training academies, which included Learning and Training Academy (LTA) and Experience Hair and Beauty Academy, differed to FE colleges in that they only provided training in hair and beauty. All organizations included in this research awarded Level 1 National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) for school leavers. Additional higher level NVQs were also provided, with a majority of qualifications being awarded through the same governing board, the UK City and Guilds. Apprenticeships were also offered for students who were working in a salon. Students on an apprenticeship typically spend 1–2 days each week in an FE setting, with the remaining hours spent working in a salon. Full-time courses were approximately 1 year long, while part time courses were 2 years duration. Students working toward their level 1, 2, or 3 NVQ qualification had regular contact with FE lecturers and trainers throughout the week. The main role of the research participants concerned teaching hair and beauty in either a classroom setting or within the in-house salon area. Staff also supported students during

formal assessments and monitored students' progress while on placement in industry. Beyond these 'official' duties were the pastoral obligations that comprised a less acknowledged part of all participants' work.

A convenience sampling strategy was employed, resulting in the recruitment of a relatively homogenous demographic with similar occupational experience. Given the dearth of empirical research exploring how hair and beauty is taught in the FE context, convenience sampling was an effective means of accessing individuals with appropriate experience. Through convenience sampling, individuals who currently deliver teaching and training for hairdressing and/or beauty at colleges and academies were contacted. All organizations contacted were based in the North East of England, the poorest region in England where the annual household income is below the national average (Macdonald et al., 2018). The sample comprised 22 participants, including 15 from FE colleges and seven from training academies. Table 1 illustrates the participants' details, including the focus of their teaching, which for all concerned either hairdressing or beauty or a mix of the two. When asked about their current role, participants identified either as 'lecturer', 'tutor', or 'subject leader'. Regardless of job titles or place of work, it was confirmed during interviews that all participants worked in a teaching capacity. As shown in Table 1, only one participant was male, reflecting the longstanding female dominance in the hairdressing and beauty industry (Sharma & Black, 2001). The single male interviewee taught on both hairdressing and barbering courses. Though no official figures were obtained from participants, it was confirmed during interviews that most students studying hairdressing and/or beauty were female. The largely female student cohort reflects the gendered demographic of the industry, where females comprise 83% and 94% of those working in hair and beauty, respectively (NHBF, 2019). Participants reported that the majority of students were school-leavers aged between 16 and 18 years old, with the exception of a small number of mature students.

TABLE 1 Participant details

Participant name	Age	Subject specialism	College/Academy
Rachel	Unknown	Beauty	NDC (North Dudley college)
Ellie	35	Hairdressing and beauty	*Interviewed as a group*
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)
Katherine	35	Hairdressing and beauty	*Interviewed as a group*
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)

Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 min. Interview questions sought to gain insight into participants' 'perceptual world' (Martin, 1994, p: 390) and included: 'what is the hardest aspect of your job?' and 'what type of skills are the hardest to teach and why?'. Such questions were intended to draw out the challenging realities of their everyday practice. All interviews were conducted within the participants' place of work and were recorded and transcribed. 12 of the interviews were one-to-one interviews and two were group interviews comprised of 3 and 4 participants, respectively. The rationale for conducting group interviews was pragmatic, as they were a means of accommodating participants' busy teaching schedules. As interviews were conducted during the working day, group interviews were an appropriate way to collectively speak to participants, both over the course of an extended lunch break and in the remaining hours after students went home. The two group interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes.

Challenges regarding group interviews were anticipated, particularly in relation to ensuring that individual opinions were expressed, and a groupthink mentality was avoided. However, as the interview progressed and the questions became more provocative, the detail that participants divulged was not generic but nuanced to reflect their own experiences. During the group interviews, questions were addressed to each participant, ensuring all interviewees provided individual responses. In parallel, there was also lively discussion as participants shared answers with one another and were enthused by the 'supportive environment of a social gathering' (Ainsworth et al., 2014, p: 45). The response after the two group interviews was that most participants had enjoyed the experience, likening it to a "good old catch up" (Rita) without the formality of a scheduled team meeting. Compared to the one-on-one interviews, the group interviews permitted a deeper insight into the sensitivities of teaching by facilitating a 'non-threatening environment' (Kreuger, 1998, p: 18). During the group interviews, participants shared some of their most challenging experiences not just with me but with each other. Many of the detailed accounts of confrontations with students or vivid reflections on students' troubled backgrounds, originated from the group interviews, where the social setting aided the flow of discussion.

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

During the observations, I also focused on developing a rapport with staff. Generally, establishing a rapport with staff was relatively straightforward once I explained the nature of my research and professed a genuine interest in their work. Moreover, several staff members explained that they were accustomed to speaking about their role with student support staff and external inspectors. Following the end of teaching, there was often a window of time before teaching staff went home where I was able to ask impromptu questions based on what I had observed. After typing up the handwritten notes, the observational data amounted to approximately 40 pages of reflective field notes and verbatim jottings. Extracts from the original field notes are included in this article, both in a verbatim and paraphrased format.

The two sources of data were triangulated and analyzed together. Following the exploratory questions that motivated the research, a thematic analysis was conducted, in line with the six steps devised by Braun and Clarke (2006). This was deemed the most effective means of teasing out key themes and ideas consistent across the data set. Table 2 represents the process of coding, using a limited number of key quotes to illustrate how coding at first and second order led to theoretically grounded themes.

TABLE 2 Coding table

Data extract	First order code	Second order code	Theme
"I think just sometimes people realize 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	Misrepresentation of hair and beauty work	Stigma associated with hair and beauty
	Students need lecturers in the workplace	Lecturers assisting in school to work transition	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	Appropriate topics of conversation	Teaching students professional boundaries with clients
	Students warned about being too loud	Suitable manner of communication	
"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 sway perception	Impact of wider discourse and imagery	A stigmatized working experience
	Schools reproduce existing stereotypes	Societal misunderstanding of hair and beauty work	

The data was initially re-read so as to develop preliminary codes that consisted of the first order codes in Table 2 that represent the data at a descriptive level. Following this, second order codes were established that collapsed descriptive first order codes together to create more conceptually relevant codes. Reflecting the iterative nature of a thematic analysis, the second order codes were reviewed, and the data was revisited. Based on salient themes, such as stigma and identity work, the data was interpreted through works by Goffman (1997) and Hughes (1951, 1958) as well as contemporary empirical research such as Ashforth and Kreiner (1999), Kreiner et al. (2006), Cohen (2020), Ashcraft (2007), and Bamber et al. (2021). Participants' accounts were then read as suggestive of a stigmatized working experience and an ongoing endeavor to resolve social perceptions. The presentation of the data is therefore structured into two parts. First, I will explore the stigma 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.

2.1 | Identifying stigma in hair and beauty work

When asked about the most challenging aspect of their job, several participants spoke of a stigma connected to the external perceptions harbored 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 General Certificate of Secondary Educations (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 at 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 career event that took place at a nearby school, the week before:

> Kate is discussing with other members of staff how unimpressed she was last week after attend-
> ing 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 fallback option that is *infra dig* for students with academic potential. This contributed to a discrediting representation of hair and beauty as simple work that requires minimal skills (Eayrs, 1993). Ellie (NDC), for example, felt that "people think that this is faffing about with hair and make-up, it's really not". Carla spoke of a "stereotype" attached to hair and beauty that dissuades schools from supporting more academic students to pursue it, on the basis that "educators in school and in sixth form see it as something people do who aren't very clever". Similarly, Sophie (SA) suggested that such opinions stigmatize the work of hairdressers and beauticians: "I think there is a stigma attached to hair and beauty that it's an easy course and they don't have to know much to qualify". Using Goffman's (1997) definition of stigma as being a differentiating attribute, we see how hair and beauty work is relationally positioned among other occupations as inferior due to the perception of skill required. Exogenous opinions of hair and beauty reaffirmed this stigma, such that Katherine (NEC) spoke of "people's opinions on hairdressers", judging these to be "uninformed, they haven't worked a day in a salon". After identifying a stigma in hair and beauty, participants' talk became defensive, restorative, and protective over a stigmatized industry that is poorly understood and misrepresented. The following section will discuss two approaches taken to manage stigma.

2.2 | Managing stigma through identity work

2.2.1 | Reframing the skills required for hair and beauty work

In responding to the stigma identified in the previous section, interviewees relied upon positive identity tactics to reframe the negative qualities of hair and beauty work (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). In particular, they appealed to a more prestigious subject matter of science and maths. Sophie (SA), for example, asserted that hair and beauty work is "actually quite science based. You know like, you need to know mathematical equations to mix up color, ratios, angles, measurements, things like that". Similarly, Anne (SA) spoke of the misunderstandings that permeate stereo-typical representations, explaining that students arrive with misinformed ideas about the intellect required for hair

and beauty: "I think students don't realize how important that is, so that can be quite a bore, all our students have to do Maths and English as well so if they haven't hit GCSE grade 4, they all have to go and re-do it, between the age of 16–18, that's compulsory, it's a government thing now." Hence, rather than hair and beauty being an option for students who have failed their exams, Anne (SA) emphasizes that the government now require all hair and beauty students to attain a minimum of a C grade in core subjects of Maths and English. This speaks of the unrecognized physiological and anatomical knowledge required for hair and beauty work. Gemma (LTA) for example, explained that:

> "There's quite a lot of big words to remember, beauty is even worse because there's all the anatomy and physiology, a lot of the treatments they have to do, they have to know where all the systems in the body are, how all the muscles work, they [students] need to understand about different medical conditions."

For students, who thought hair and beauty consisted of "playing with hair" (Tony, NEC), there was resistance to the more scientific side of their training. Interviewees contended that students did not anticipate the need to learn about "the science, the structure of hair" (Rita, NEC) and the functioning of certain "bones and muscles" (Lara, LTA). This was reaffirmed during observations at the training academy where scientific terminology was evident:

> During an afternoon session in the 'classroom', where students are taught about the theory side of hair and beauty, I notice the walls are covered in large, bold print outs of single words such as 'anagen', 'telogen', 'catagen', 'exogen', which I'm informed are stages of the hair growth cycle. There are also detailed, cross-sectional diagrams showing the structure of a hair follicle. (Field note #2)

The prominence of these technical terms could be read as an attempt to negate the stigmatizing attribute that defines hair and beauty work as low skill (Eayrs, 1993). The use of a scientific lexicon reframes the technical prerequisites needed to practice hair and beauty. In other words, students need to know about the science of hair to be stylists: they need be able to correctly apply hair dyes, products, and other chemical solutions. Similarly, beauty students required a clear grasp of dermatology in order to provide appropriate services for clients based on their skin type. To do either of these, they need to understand aspects of the science behind these processes.

Interviewees also portrayed hair and beauty work as multifaceted. Beyond the scientific understanding, students needed to be socially adept, posing as "a counselor and a friend to the customer" (Tony, NEC). As hair and beauty work is an intimate service encounter that can include close bodily contact and free flowing emotionally charged talk (Harness et al., 2021), participants emphasized the need for social acuity and intuition. The complexities of social interaction within a salon were reported as being masked by a stigma fixed to hair and beauty work.

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

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

2.2.2 | Social weighting and valorization through alternative discourse

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

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

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

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

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

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

Across the data there was an acute awareness of the students' socioeconomic backgrounds. As Laura (NEC) explained, "they're challenging students because they've all had different backgrounds and a lot of them come with

different baggage especially some of the level 1 students, so it's overcoming those barriers." (Laura). Level 1 students are primarily 16-year-olds who have just left school. The metaphorical "baggage" reflected the potential for issues resulting from a turbulent domestic life to linger on as "barriers" that impede learning. Katherine (NEC) therefore spoke of needing to know about students' "backgrounds, what they do on a night-time, friendship groups, what they do at home, drugs, alcohol. It's part of your job really". Through the virtuous act of supplanting the parental deficiencies that characterized some student's lives, participants spoke of the pastoral care extended to students:

> "I always say they need some tender, love and care (TLC) and they do, some of them have been abused and come from horrible backgrounds […] I put a lot of humor into it, it's getting them to bond with you […] I'll say, "I'm your mam while you're here" and Susie does the same, they know they can come to us at any time throughout that year" (Nell)

In emphasizing the 'TLC' given to students, Nell (NEC) speaks to the locus parentis type role assumed by participants. Highlighting the added pastoral complexities of their work allowed participants to draw discursive occupational analogies that affirmed their social value (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Cohen, 2020; Kreiner et al., 2006). The embedded concern for students' emotional welfare and knowledge of familial instability led participants to appropriate the identity of "social workers" reasoning "we tend to get a bit more personal with them [students]" (Gemma, LTA). In conveying their personal involvement with students, several participants spoke of instances in which they were required to operate in a quasi-parental capacity:

> "I got a phone call once from someone's mam, saying can you come and get her out of bed, I can't because she's addicted to online gaming. All sorts. I mean is that not the parent's responsibility to get them out of bed?" (Kate, LTA)

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

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

In releasing students from "schoolteacher mode", participants 'humanize' the teacher–student relationship. This allows for greater emotional depth and connectivity. In connoting altruism and compassion, participants explained that fostering more affectively charged student relations intensified their pastoral duties: "they tell us lots, sometimes stuff we don't want to know, more than just their tutor, we want to know what's *really* going on with them more than a normal teacher would" (Gemma, LTA). The comparative language used here reinforces a 'rhetorical distance' that positions participants as 'unlike' traditional teachers (Cohen, 2020, p: 143), going to extra lengths to ensure student well-being. The differences cited presuppose and allude to shortcomings among traditional teachers, whose interactions with students are comparatively superficial. By contrast, the deeper emotional ties forged within FE led students to disclose unreserved personal accounts regarding "what is *really* going on".

Participants also positioned themselves as enculturating students and subsequently facilitating entry to an otherwise inaccessible landscape of occupational opportunity:

"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 stigmatizing attributes are concealed (Nath, 2011). Referring to the students as "ladies" speaks to an idealized transition into competent service workers. Moreover, "lady" suggests an elite femininity comprised of a gentrifying transition signaled by high-brow cultural nuances such as 'speaking with a 'posh' accent and conducting oneself in a 'proper' fashion' (Crossley, 2005, p: 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 stigmatized 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.

3 | 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 & Byskov, 2020) and is therefore denied status and/or prestige. Despite participants' involvement in the industry being peripheral, the association with a tainted form of labor 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, P: 260) but not categorized 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, p: 148; Ashforth & 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 & Alvesson, 2003). The complexities of this stigma were, however, magnified when unpacking how participants countered

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

In terms of strategies employed to manage a milder stigma, the data illustrates efforts that are discursive and material. Discursively, participants analogized their teaching as a rehabilitative process that seemingly saved students from the chaotic, unstable trajectory that awaited them on account of their socioeconomic backgrounds. This reflected participants' identification to a role beyond that of *just* hair and beauty lecturer/trainer, to social worker, a role recognized by alternative discourse as more socially valued. In assimilating occupational analogies to achieve a more desirable identity (Cohen, 2020) and conceal the discrediting qualities of their work (Nath, 2011), the discursive strategies employed by interviewees spoke of a stigmatized occupational reality. Discourses on gender and class that inform the hierarchal organization of labor may bolster stigma, yet alternative discourses that celebrate middle class-ness were central to participants' identity work. Here, we observe the interrelations between discourse and materiality, as participants sought to erase the embodied attributes that signaled working class womanhood (Lindsay, 2004; Skeggs, 2005). Participants then spoke of reshaping students' embodied capital to reflect a quasi-middle class status through a process of upward inculturation that enabled students to become *better* than what they are and *more* than they thought they could be—a familiar and longstanding trope that can be observed in *Pygmalion/My Fair Lady* and contemporary retellings such as *Educating Rita*.

4 | CONCLUSION

This article explores the ways in which an occupational group, whose work is less tainted, experience and manage a milder stigma. Existing research on stigma management (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Kreiner et al., 2006) is furthered through the recognition of stigma as present among occupations that are excluded from the 'dirty work' categorization. The stigma identified by FE lecturers and trainers emanates from a gender/class discourse that 'taints' the occupation through cultural images, representations, and tropes. Within these depictions are embodied qualities intersecting gender and class classness (Huppatz, 2012; Lindsay, 2004) that schools use to sift a homogenous cohort of students into hair and beauty, subsequently reaffirming existing representations. As such, FE lecturers and trainers are stigmatized not through the task of teaching, but from the association with a socially 'tainted' subject matter. Their reduced proximity to the stigmatized industry of hair and beauty work may soften the impact of stigma and amount to a milder taint, yet lecturers and trainers are unable to directly tackle it. In managing the discursive perceptions that discredited their identity (Brown, 2015; Nath, 2011), participants relied upon students as leverage to an enhanced status. This points toward a circularity in both the affliction and management of stigma, whereby the students who embody tainted qualities also provide discursive leverage that allows lecturers and trainers to minimize taint. Within literature on stigma, this process of 'taint removal by proxy' is a relatively unexplored angle that may conceptually enrich future research.

Empirically, this article contributes by representing a broader range of stigmatized voices at work (Bamber et al., 2021; Paetzold et al., 2008). In terms of practical insights, we illustrate how much time FE lecturers and trainers devote to the stigma management process during everyday interaction with others. By connecting discourse with stigma, this article draws attention to the lived realities of occupational groups whose stigmatized experience of work would otherwise go unnoticed by organizational research. In fleshing out how imagery and public representation

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

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Oonagh M. Harness is a Lecturer in Critical Management and Organisation Studies at Northumbria University. Her research interests include emotional labour, temporality, embodiment at work and the service industry. She has also published in *Work, Employment and Society*.