The Sound of Silence: Hearing the voices of underrepresented students in the classroom
Overview

- Context
- Methodology
- Findings
- Implications/Questions
single mothers are

- bad
- disgusting
- bad for society
- easy
- scum
- damaged goods
- not victims
- bad parents
- desperate
- strong
Methodology

- Framework
- Participants
- Data
“I was aware of kind of the north south divide. ... I’ve never tried to hide my accent or anything like that... but it has come up. ... I didn’t speak so much [in class]. ... Had I said something wrong or something that didn’t sound so intelligent, that would then be attached to the accent and it would... create more of an assumption about me. ... [It’s] almost as if I had to say something more intelligent because of the fact that I had an accent, almost as if I had to compensate.”

Dawn
I Will Keep Quiet

“I do think the differences in my background to others puts me at a disadvantage in terms of knowledge in subjects like politics, history, literature and philosophy. My peers learned about these things growing up from … their parents. … I also noticed it in secondary school from students that came from non-single parent families. They certainly weren't learning it from school so it must have been their home environment. Therefore, when they discuss issues surrounding these subjects, I will keep quiet as I don't really know what they are going on about and don't want to look stupid.”

Zoe
“The lecturer always knew the names of them [private school educated] students. Always. Always talked up to them more, so you'd always find the same people talking, but I think that's because the lecturer would think they were more intelligent. ... It's the words you use as well. So, for example, say that you can't articulate yourself properly. You're as intelligent as the other person, but because you haven't had the same schooling or haven't had the same upbringing, they all think that person clearly knows more than you. ...”

Amber
They’ll Think I’m Stupid

“... I feel intimidated to talk to them [lecturers], and then sometimes I think they'll think I'm stupid. ... I don't put my hand up [in class] because I don't want ... people to laugh at me. ... There's a girl in my class, and ... she's from Peckham. When she speaks, I can see everyone laughing. ... And I'm thinking to myself, this girl has tried so hard to get here, and you all are just laughing at her. I don't want them to do that to me, because I feel like, because I don't speak the same accent or I don't pronounce my Ts.”

Amber
“I noticed that my accent was significantly different ... from everyone else there [in class]. Everyone spoke like the Queen ... and I became really, really self-conscious.

... Over the years I’ve learned to say, say for example when I say water, it’s wa-ter, wa-ter, but-ter; But years ago I would have said wa-er and bu-er (laughs) which people can kind of pick you out a mile off. ... The stereotype of a Cockney is really, it’s really negative as if they’re the most uneducated people and that they ... don’t pronounce their words properly and that it’s somehow a little bit kind of inferior, a little bit dodgy, you know.”

Audrey
“I don't feel like I belong. … I'm not very well spoken, so sometimes I feel a bit put down when people start using big words, and I think, I don't — that's not how I speak. At the same time, I'm an ethnic minority, and in a class full of white people. When we talk about race, it seems like a very touchy subject. … I have firsthand experience. … They'll never fully understand how it feels to be from a working class background. I mean, as well as being an ethnic minority, and mine's a single mom, and she's also unemployed now. So all of that kind of falls into one.”

Heather
“My accent means I’m working class and it means I’m stupid. … You are made to feel ashamed that the way you talk is not clever. You’re not a clever person unless you talk in big words. … And actually I’m a prolific swearer, that’s the working class thing. My swearing is atrocious. So, obviously you don’t do that in front of well-off upper class people, do you?”

Erica
“I don’t want to be judged on my accent. And they do, you know, like people don’t take you seriously because you’re talking in a working class accent. … We’re talking about accents. It’s a very big part of your identity. As soon as you open your mouth, unless you can prove by other means that people should take you seriously, just because you’ve got a working class accent, you lose.”

Erica
Implications/Questions

- Whose knowledge matters? Whose voices are heard? Whose contributions are valued? Whose experiences are validated?
- How are the cultures and practices within our classrooms further reifying norms about who does and who does not belong, as well as who is and who is not seen as legitimate?
- When silent or quiet students are positioned as disengaged, deviant, or academically incapable, what impact does that have on those students?
- In what ways are norms and stereotypes about families perpetuated through classroom practices or through research practices?
- How can our teaching practices contribute to a culture shift that broadens expectations and opportunities and challenges the norms, assumptions, and stereotypes through which underrepresented students are misrecognised?
- What are the real costs and consequences of unequal educational experiences, not just for individuals, but also for society as a whole?