Marginal pleasures: Teachers, transgression and transformation

Donna Pendergast and Erica McWilliam


Conference Sub-Theme: Teachers and Learners: New Questions

Subject Area: Teachers' Work

Correspondence to:

Dr Erica McWilliam, Associate Professor
School of Cultural and Policy Studies
Faculty of Education
Queensland University of Technology
Locked Bag No.2, Red Hill, Queensland, 4059.
Ph. (07) 8643412 (W), (07) 2164106 (H).
FAX (07) 8643728

e-mail: e.mcwilliam@qut.edu.au
Abstract:

This paper interrogates the productive possibilities of teaching 'in the margins'. We begin by noting the work done by poststructural scholars to rethink the geometry of margins and centres, given the capillary and shifting nature of power. We apply this understanding to a small group of self-designated marginal individuals teaching in a marginal school subject. What emerges from this doctoral study is a picture of these marginal individuals as pleased in many respects by their very marginality. While they engage in moments of transgression, these are not mobilised by any intent to subvert hegemonic schooling practice: indeed, it is this very practice which allows such teachers the privilege of their transgressive Otherness and greater popularity with students. The distinctions made by Michel Foucault between 'moderation/immoderation' and 'continence/incontinence' in the construction of the ethical individual are used to examine this issue more fully.

Marginal pleasures: Teachers, transgression and transformation

Introduction

Feminist scholarship has often characterised the power relations of teacher/student in terms of space available and denied. Using topographical or geophysical metaphors, feminists have spoken of women's 'spatial anxiety', the fear of being 'on the outer', or 'barred from entry' (Allen, 1992:70). However, spatial metaphors can offer up a more complex relational geometry than 'inside/outside' or 'centre/margin'. And more complex geometry is necessary to any analysis seeking to understand fluid social relationships and the capillary nature of (pedagogical) power. Michel Foucault claims that the government of individuals is achieved not through a simple top-down mechanism or structure, (eg, Teacher-as-God) but through 'the art of listening to the voice of the master and the voice of reason in yourself' (Foucault, 1988:26). To accept this is to be suspicious of any geometrical metaphor about the nature of power that includes fixed margins and centres. Our reading of pedagogical work in schools is produced out of the study of a small number of 'marginal' teachers in a 'marginal' subject (Home Economics). We focus on how their pedagogical bodies work as a site/sight of power/knowledge, produced within a subtle, carefully constructed and yet fluid relational geometry. As a set of power relationships and a form of cultural exchange their pedagogy is gendered, sexed, material - and shifty.

Just as the study of 'marginality' in teaching and learning has been constrained by theory (feminist and otherwise), so too has the study of pedagogical pleasure. Two approaches have been taken to researching teacher 'pleasure' in the professional development literature to date. One is based on the time-honoured idea of positive notions of teacher pleasure as 'psychic reward' or psychological satisfaction (eg, Woods, 1985). The other explores negative connotations of teacher pleasure as a potential problem for the student, eg, as in sexual harassment literature and policy. This paper works out of two other more substantial understandings of the nature of teacher pleasure than is found in either of these traditions - Michel Foucault's understanding of the relationship of pleasure and ethics, and Harvey Ferguson's notion of the carnivalesque.
Ethical pleasures

The relationship of pleasure and the ethical formation of the citizen - whether as teacher, lawyer or any other 'respectable' person - is examined by Michel Foucault in *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality* Volume 2 (1985). Foucault attempts to determine how human beings in the West have come to recognise themselves as individual "subject[s] of desire" (p. 6). That is, Foucault attempts to analyse the ways that individuals "were led to focus their attention on themselves, to decipher, recognise, and acknowledge themselves" as sexually desiring persons (p. 5). Foucault turns to ancient Greece to recover notions of sexuality and desire that preceded a Christian tradition of thinking about sexuality and the flesh. His interest in Greek and Greco-Roman culture is in "how, why and in what form sexuality was constituted as a moral domain," and why such a particular ethical concern "was so persistent despite its varying forms and intensity" (p. 10).

The method by which Foucault undertakes his project is to inquire into the discursive construction of what he terms "techniques of the self" (p. 11). This does not mean an analysis of behaviours or ideas or sociology or ideology, but rather of what he terms *problematisations* (the ways "being offers itself to be, necessarily, thought"), and of the practices on the basis of which such *problematisations* are formed (p. 11). So Foucault takes as the object of his analysis the manner in which sexual activity is made problematic in texts written by philosophers and doctors, focusing on what he terms "prescriptive texts," ie, "texts that elaborate rules, opinions and advice as to how to behave as one should" (p. 12). His understanding is that such texts serve as devices that enable individuals to "question their own conduct, to watch over and give shape to it, and to shape themselves as ethical subjects" (p. 13).

To analyse pleasure this way is clearly a departure from either the idea that pleasure occurs as a spontaneous and sudden outpouring of feeling, or the idea that individuals, when left to their own devices, will sacrifice everything else to maximise their own gratification. Instead, Foucault demonstrates that texts written by Plato, Aristotle and others serve as important ways of training a population in knowledge about the limits beyond which certain attitudes or acts may be considered excessive. This knowledge is applied by individuals to themselves (pp. 45-46). It is not therefore a process of top-down coercion, but one of training individuals in the sort of relationship with the self that is necessary to the achievement of proper pleasure (p. 63). Proper pleasure is not achievable by "going for broke" ie, through excessive or immoderate behaviour - but in the exercise of moderation (p. 65). The ethical individual, as a subject of certain discourses of training about how pleasure ought to be taken properly, "deliberately chooses reasonable principles of action that he is capable of following and applying them" (p. 64). To deliberately choose bad principles and surrender to the weakest desires, thus taking pleasure in bad conduct, is to produce oneself as a "shameless and incorrigible" individual (p. 65).

Foucault shows how the Greeks recognised the struggles involved in the production of the ethical individual by noting the distinction made in certain texts between being moderate and continent, as well as between being immoderate and being incontinent:

Unlike the "moderate man", the continent one experiences pleasures that are not in accord with reason, but he no longer allows himself to be carried away by them, and his merit will be greater in proportion as his desires are strong.

The incontinent individual lets himself be overcome in spite of himself, and despite the reasonable principles he embraces, either because he does not have the strength to put them into practice or because he has not given them
sufficient thought: this explains why the incontinent person can come to his senses and achieve self-mastery. (p. 65)

In the case of the modern teacher, moderation might well be signalled by never raising one's voice in anger, no matter how well provoked by a student, while continence might mean doing the same but returning to the staffroom in a state of heightened emotion. The immoderate teacher, on the other hand, might respond with a raised and threatening voice, not once but often, as distinct from the teacher who loses it in one angry outburst, but feels remorse immediately or soon after.

Of course, the application of categories of moral conduct from one era to another is not as simple as this, and certainly Foucault is not trying to show "how we are just like them". Nevertheless, what does becomes clear is that an ethic was laid down by Plato, Socrates and others that continues to be important to Western thought - "the superiority of reason over desire" (p. 87, our italics). Pleasure is therefore not to be taken "without knowledge . . . and at the wrong time" (p. 87). One takes one's pleasure within reason. In what follows we show how four marginal teachers take their pleasures and also how they self-regulate to ensure that they are never so far from ethical practice that they risked being 'immoderate' or 'shameless'.

The Carnivalesque

We draw on Ferguson's work, *The Science of Pleasure* (1990), in order to explore analysis of the carnivalesque and its possible applications to these 'marginal' teachers. We see this analysis as particularly relevant because carnival was never an alternative to officialdom and orthodoxy, never finally outside orthodoxy, just as the teachers we studied did not take their pleasures outside the demands of teacher professionalism. Carnival in the feudal order of things was a temporal space in which it became possible to indulge the appetites and at the same time parody the practices of officialdom. It was not an alternative to officialdom. Individuals are not freed from orthodoxy by carnival, but they are permitted to indulge themselves, to experience that "unrestrained sensuousness" (p.109) that in all other times and places is verboten.

Carnival produces "fun," and fun, as Ferguson argues it, is a perverse pleasure (p. 67), which makes it different from the other heterodox modes of thought he calls "happiness", "pleasure" and "excitement". Ferguson explains the place of fun within and outside our order of rationality thus:

The bourgeois order, like any conventional order, is built first upon the renunciation of fun: in fact, upon stern rejection of the plenitude of its possibilities in favor of creation, in reality, of a single conceptual and practical world. In bourgeois society the contrast between this reality and its dissolution as fun has, for the most part, been conceptualized as the opposition between reason and unreason. Fun, however, evading all linguistic designation, playfully insinuates itself into the life of reason itself. (p. 67)

The teachers we studied had 'fun' but it was never the sort of fun that threatened to transgress or transform home economics teaching in any profound way. Indeed, they needed the 'skilled and suffering' orthodoxy of home economics to be firmly fixed in place in order to continue to parody this orthodoxy and to be seen by their students to be 'a-typically' trendy. Their pleasure made available through their marginality rather than despite it. This is in keeping with Judith Allen's (1992:71) reminder about the contradictions of what she calls the 'sleepout syndrome' - ie, that being 'on the outer' in an Australian house is available to be read as either excluded or cool. As Morgan and McWilliam argue (1995: 113), being
'verandahed' can provide much needed relief from the heat of the kitchen, allowing an individual to remain cool and fresh, if less secure and more exposed. The kitchen metaphor seems highly appropriate in the case of home economics teachers whose folkloric attachment to the stove has disallowed so much by way of status within and outside schools.

The Study

The subjects

Home economics as an area of knowledge was selected as a location for pedagogical inquiry because of its marginality as a subject in schools, and within this, marginal home economics teachers were selected because of their refusal to be produced as mainstream home economics teachers. Each of the four self identifying 'marginal' teachers in the 'marginal' field of home economics were interviewed on several occasions and transcripts were produced from audio tapes of the interviews. Some fragments of their texts appears in this paper. Additionally, texts in the form of written student comments, cards and video tapes were made available by the teachers who were the research subjects.

Home economics as a marginalised field

Home economics is marginalised as a site of knowledge production in that it is burdened by taken-for-granted assumptions about what constitutes valued and valuable knowledge in our society. Home economics is a girl's subject (not boy's), taught by women (not men), focusing on the private domain (not public), and practical in orientation (not academic). The subject is framed by its repressive classification as 'women's work'. As a modernist enterprise, home economics is condemned to the margins, 'othered' and 'disempowered', despite the efforts of its own professional associations and practising teachers.

The 'orthodox' home economics teacher?

In research leading to the study which is the focus of this paper, home economics teachers were interrogated as particular sorts of docile bodies, self-governing according to versions of 'proper' professional practice that were made available through inquiry into the culture of home economics teaching. Our analysis revealed that there are, in symbolic terms, two 'bodies' which home economics teachers inhabit simultaneously as orthodox home economics teachers. To be produced as a normal home economics teacher is to possess what we have termed the 'ideal body' and the 'real body'. The study also revealed that mainstream speaking positions of home economists fail to challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions which produce the field of study as marginalised - ie, that home economics teachers are generally compliant with their marginal status.

The 'ideal' home economics teacher is a disciplined body characterised as: organised, hardworking, caring, multiskilled, resourceful and creative. She is assumed to be: a positive role model; of the 'right' weight (not too fat, not too thin); willing to perform as a redemptive agent; a producer of quality products, and so on. The 'real' is the ruined body. In the words of home economics teachers, with "dishpan hands", who is: "cleaner"; "cook"; and "martyr". She has "black rings under her eyes", is "starving", "stressed", and "in poor health", "exhausted and wrecked from home economics work". She is the denying role model and martyr, decentred and genderless, the virgin and the mother figure reinforcing heterosexual normativity, restricted to the site of the home, physically stressed and distressed.
The study which is the focus of this paper sought to look at self-designated 'marginal' teachers who refuse invitations to produce themselves as normal (skilled and suffering) home economics teachers. Interestingly, these potentially transgressive bodies do not trouble the conventions of the profession by refusing to produce themselves as both skilled and suffering. Indeed, all four atypical teachers insist on the idea of the skilled body whilst refusing to suffer. Nevertheless, none of these atypical teachers challenge the conventions of the suffering body for the other home economics teachers. Indeed, they need these norms in place in order to make their own 'trendy' pedagogical departures from the norm.

Grotesque pedagogues

Glimpses of the four home economics teachers are presented under the pseudonyms John Brown, Valerie Archer, Marilyn Moore, and Elle Manson. Each of these home economics teachers are 'atypical' in a range of ways. In broad terms, John Brown is an atypical home economics teacher because of his gender. Valerie Archer steps outside the enclosures of the home to include the outdoors. Marilyn Moore's sexy, 'groovy' body is atypical. And the fourth subject - Elle Manson - is atypical because of her overt insistence on touching students. Each of these teachers take pleasure out of their location as marginal to hegemonic norms of home economics teachers.

In order to look at the atypical teachers through a (post)feminist lens as embodied (and potentially subversive) subjects, we looked to Ferguson's (1990) analysis of fun and pleasure as carnival. The carnivalesque has been utilised elsewhere in education by researchers interested in pursuing analysis which offer[s] another way to think through problems of reproduction, resistance, and transformation (Grace 1996:5). Such a lens treats identity as an assemblage rather than as a coherent entity, noting in particular those aspects of the symbolic body that are grotesque and distorted rather than classical and sleek. As grotesque bodies, individual subjects "resist easy classification, and refuse to be individualised or separated from their natural environment" (Mellor and Shilling, 1997:10). As pedagogical bodies, our research subjects were dis-assembled as individual identities and re-assembled as grotesque bodies with transformative potential. This notion of analysis as disassembly and re-assembly is in keeping with the postmodernist idea that bodies are always incomplete but amenable to completion, constantly undergoing change, and this constitutes a departure from orthodox treatments of the body as merely fixed and anatomical (Butler, 1993).

The carnivalesque home economics teacher disrupts the many categories of body norms which exist within the culture of home economics. One way this occurs is in their refusal to be normal (Russo, 1994) as suffering home economics bodies. In what follows we dis-assemble and re-assemble a number of pedagogical bodies which refuse to be kept in their place. They include:

- a fat home economics bodies (refusing to be governed by health with the 'right' body and fitness norms);
- a sexy, groovy home economics bodies (refusing to be governed by norms of a-sexual nurturance);
- an outdoors home economics bodies (refusing to be bound by the enclosures of the home);
- a playful home economics bodies (refusing to restrict themselves to student-centred pedagogy); and
- a touching home economics bodies (refusing the norms of pedagogical probity in relation to student engagement).
These are five temporary assemblages of our own making - fictions emerging out of our analysis. Here the four atypical teachers can perform at their most grotesque, parodying conventional productions of home economics teachers. They perform in carnivalesque spaces which are experienced as brief and temporal moments in which parodying the officialdom of the Home economics ‘Church’ is not only possible but likely.

**Performing as a fat home economics body**

To be both fat and a home economics teacher is unexpected and freakish. Indeed, the utterances of the teacher who is the fat body confirm recognition and acknowledgment of performing as a fat body in a domain which advocates the ‘right’ (not fat) body. The fat body is self-described as "big", "fat" and "overweight" (John). Students likewise regard the fat home economics teacher as freakish, telling the fat teacher "you shouldn't be doing that [eating pies and coke]". Despite the knowledge of food and weight control available through the very subject matter of home economics, this unruly body refuses to be reined in. The fat body refuses to comply with the expectation that home economics teachers' bodies must be self-monitoring and practise abstinence in order to create the well-governed body necessary to proper pedagogical performance.

An obsession with fatness is not restricted to producing ‘proper’ home economics teachers' bodies - it is evident in whole cultures. Indeed, fatness is one category Russo (1994:23) describes in her analysis of bodily distribution and valuation. She explains why the excessively fat body can be grotesque, particularly for women:

> Fatness ... functions as an extremely significant differential in separating off women of different classes and ethnicities (sic), placing them in different fields or markets of representation. (Russo, 1994:23)

Russo (1994) goes on to argue that this is a phenomenon in contemporary western societies, where fat women are thought of as "repositories of shame and repressed desire" (Russo, 1994:24), and this places them in a certain market of representation. Lupton (1996:16) extends such an analysis by arguing that "bodies [thus] become potent physical symbols of the extent to which their 'owners' possess self-control ... an overweight body speaks of gluttony, lack of self-discipline, hedonism, self-indulgence, while a slim body signifies a high level of control, and ability to transcend the desires of the flesh".

The interesting matter of the fat body represented in this study is that it is a male body, and a home economics body. No pedagogical body can be fat with impunity in a home economics context, given that all home economics teachers are expected to self-regulate through appropriate resistance, denial, and control of food, regardless of their gender. The fat body becomes the site of anxiety and shame, of guilt, frustration and anger. The fat body is a freakish, mutant anatomy in the home economics landscape and thus is a risky body which can parody normality. The grotesque, fat body contrasts with the ‘civilised’ body which is "constructed as the body that is self-contained, that is highly socially managed and conforms to dominant norms of behaviour and appearance" (Lupton 1996:19).

This freakish body is not unlike other carnivalesque bodies in that it performs exaggerated desire, and displays of excitement and passion when involved with the preparation, presentation and consumption of food in the home economics classroom. For example, Elle admits that "I just love food, and eating". She is unashamedly "passionate about food", "getting all worked up" (Elle) about its presence in the classroom. Students are likewise encouraged to display their pleasure and excitement. They "run up and show [Elle] ... and they say, 'do you want some?' ". Elle reacts with excitement, indicating that "the more excited I am the better they've done". This is in keeping with Lupton's (1996:31) argument...
that "food stirs the emotions" and that "for many, the pleasures to be gained from food are the high points of their everyday sensual experiences". Lupton argues that there is pleasure to be gained from transgressing the norms of self-control with respect to food and pleasure, but that these embodied sensations fall outside of safe territory. In this instance, this safe territory is the site of 'proper' home economics teaching.

Performing as a sexy, groovy home economics body

Teachers use fashion and clothing as public claims for inclusion within their social category (McDowell, 1995; Finkelstein, 1997). McDowell (1995:89) found this to be common across various social categories. For example, women in professional positions in large merchant banking corporations dressed "exceedingly carefully and conformed to the norms that insisted that they did not mark themselves out as 'the other' ". Similarly, Weber and Mitchell (1995:71) note that teachers "know how to dress". For women in particular, this means a de-sexualising of their attire and with that, a de-sexualising of their body. As Weber and Mitchell (1995) argue, and as this research also suggests, teachers - and even more so home economics teachers - are expected to be asexual, motherly and dowdy. Thus the presence of bodies clad in sexy clothing, with drinking and smoking as self-professed habits, is rendered a carnivalesque presence. Such bodies are dangerous to the norms of home economics as a pedagogical endeavour.

The sexy home economics teacher is not ignorant about the issue of 'know how to dress'. However, there is evidence in the study of a teacher using attire as a means of working against the norm, parodying the 'unmarked' female teacher by being 'remark-able'. Garments are worn as a means of resisting the identity of 'proper' virginal and motherly teacher, and instead sexualising the pedagogical persona. This is a powerful mechanism, because, as Finkelstein (1997:157) argues, "whenever these styles [in this case the teacher style] are toyed with, then fashion is reiterating its ability to influence human subjectivity ... [so that] [F]ashioning the body becomes a practice through which subject positions are also fashioned". The home economics body which refuses to hide its sexuality - which steps out of the asexual, motherly, virginal norms - flaunts this by means of attire. Marilyn wants, through her choice of clothing, to "imprint on them [students]", that she is 'other' to a typical home economics teacher.

Just as certain freakish home economics teachers consciously work against orthodoxy, McDowell (1995:89) found that some respondents in her study on merchant bankers deliberately flouted the conventions and blurred the boundaries of dress in order that attire become a "more pleasurable performance that could be used to create or subvert a particular image". Like McDowell's subjects, the carnivalesque bodies of the sexy, groovy, home economics teachers are as sub/versions of the image of the typical home economics teacher, given the double imperative to order in being a female teacher AND specifically a home economics teacher. However, Weber and Mitchell (1995:71) note that the strategy of dressing a little differently from the norm - but within the boundaries - is common practice. That is, it is 'normal' for teachers to be a little 'abnormal' in their dress, viz:

... each teacher has a distinctive style that peeks through that first-glance uniformity, offering a counter-text, proclaiming a rebellious conservatism or a conservative rebellion. In dressing , we exert our right to be ambivalent, and we reveal our individual attempts to both 'fit in' and be ourselves in many ways ...

So there is 'normally' a little paradox in teachers dress. But how much beyond normal is not 'normal' for a home economics teacher? For this project, the unruly bodies both 'fit in' and yet do not 'fit in'. Elle's 'corporate jacket' image is not radical - but her version of short, sexy
and brightly coloured skirts certainly is. Valerie's outdoor, Army, rough clothes are a 'surprise' but this freakish body soon returns to 'normal' in the orthodox setting of the classroom. John's chef uniform in some respects offers a more recognisable performance of food production than home economics teachers usually engage in, bringing to the home economics teacher a new authority and legitimacy. Marilyn's groovy, sexy body is very risky indeed in its refusal of certain undergarments - a grotesque, perverse body whose deformation refuses to be 'supported' by garments that speak of virginal mothers.

These examples are beyond the 'normal' extent of individuality in teacher dress, evoking 'surprise' in students. Home economics students are clearly 'surprised' by the parodic materiality and performativity of these pedagogical bodies. Marilyn's students seem to feel free to respond to her invitation to be seen as sexy. Her students commented openly on her body. The students speak of "that look" (Student, aged 17) and of the "inspiration from [Marilyn's] body" (Student, aged 16). Marilyn is self-consciously an embodied teacher, engaged in mind and body learning with her students. Teachers can pay a high price for 'surprising' students, but these teachers are careful not to risk too much. In Foucault's terms, they never risk being an immoderate and therefore shameless individual. They are 'too professional' for that!

**Performing as an outdoors home economics body**

The 'outdoors' home economics teacher is something of an oxymoron, but is nonetheless recognisable in the data of the 'atypical' home economics teachers. Activities include abseiling, canoeing, camping and other outdoors and 'Army-like' escapades. These are 'freakish' performances for home economics teachers, who are characterised as "quite domesticated and involved with what's in the home" (Valerie, emphasis added).

Contrary to 'proper' home economics teachers, outdoors bodies are engaged in risky activities, both in terms of physical danger and also in terms of the pedagogical conservatism of home economics. The classroom pedagogy of the outdoors body has parallels with a military model of instruction and activity - drilling, marching, lining up, yelling orders, and swearing (John). It also involves: "the latest developments in technology in terms of climbing equipment and camping equipment"; "taking students abseiling ... so that they can feel what trust is"; and "excursions to a camping store" (Valerie). It is these strategies that are utilised rather than "exercises in trust circles and things" (Valerie) in the classroom, which typify home economics as a nurturant pedagogy.

This shift from the nurturant, student-centred classroom to the hard, sweaty, masculinist world of the Army and the outdoors clearly cuts across the cultural traditions associated with and expected in home economics classes, and particularly, conformity to the enclosures of the home. The cloistered, feminised world of home economics is exposed to, and reinscribed by, this hard, masculinised world beyond the hearth. Students are enrolled as co-performers and co-authors in a play with new scenery and thus a new site is established for home economics as pedagogy. The students may be enabled to 'see' other possibilities than the normal home economics domain through the transgressive site and sight of the outdoors body engaged in such an active, experience based pedagogy. Valerie insists on "apply[ing teaching] ... into real life" (Valerie) in the hope that students recognise "home economics [as] vitally important ... not just restricted to the home, [but] to all facets of life" (Valerie).

The performance of outdoors home economics bodies includes dirty fingernails and physical adornment in 'daggy', dirty clothes, and this denotes a further shift from the civility of the
normal home economics body. Again, it must be acknowledged that the clothing worn by teachers 'produces' a particular pedagogical performance. After an examination of teachers' clothing choices, Weber and Mitchell (1995:71) note that dressing as a teacher:

... involves reconciling, suppressing, ignoring, or dealing in some way with the ambivalence and tensions between different ways of living one's social and personal self under the banner of 'teacher'.

These outdoors bodies sometimes appear to reconcile, to suppress, to ignore and to deal with tensions associated with this conflict. Valerie, for example, deals with this dilemma by consciously maintaining two dress codes. This could be thought of as a type of cross-dressing (Russo, 1994), making quick costume changes between home economics attire and outdoors attire, but occasionally being caught out and having to 'wear' the taunts and giggles of student surprise if caught wearing the latter in traditional home economics classrooms. The expectations of the students are ruptured by the teacher, because her outdoors clothes are "not normal to what I would wear for my home economics clothes" (Valerie, Line 24).

The outdoors performance demands an admission that the pedagogical practices in which such teachers engage are "everything that I've been told not to do [at University]" (John, Line 142). Hence, to perform as an outdoors body in home economics means to acknowledge that such practices run counter to the 'proper' teaching of home economics. This is a freakish, mutant anatomy in the home economics landscape and thus is a risky body which acts as a parodic performance of normality.

Performing as a playful home economics body

The idea of having fun in the classroom offers the potential for subversion through irony and parody. Playful home economics bodies provide temporal moments where fun is possible, even central in pedagogy as performance. This is at odds with the rationality of the 'proper' home economics teacher, who is produced in folkloric terms as: "conservative" (Marilyn); "domesticated" (Valerie); "fussy" (John); "from a fairly sheltered background" (John); who "wouldn't say 'shit' for a shilling" (John) and who does "not relate to a lot of the students" (John). In fact, Marilyn argues that typical home economics teachers lack any sense of fun, stifling students creativity and sense of adventure by relying on formulas and instructions for everything. In her words, "you can't have an original thought [there is] no room for students creativity [and this is] very sad". Indeed, she insists that typical home economics teachers are so lacking in fun that they "put students off".

It is a very seductive idea that one can be the only bright light in a dull pedagogical place. This means framing the pedagogical place as "so boring, dreadful, so irrelevant and the learning so meaningless that only some superhero heroic deed can save the day" (Weber & Mitchell, 1995:82). The playful teacher becomes the hero, releasing students from the mundane predictability of the recipes, formula and patterns of 'proper' home economics classrooms. Marilyn certainly performs in this role, as superhero to students to enable their escape from the boredom of 'proper' classes. As she says, "as soon as I hit the door, it's like TA-DA I'M HERE, I'M HERE TO ENTERTAIN YOU" (Marilyn). She claims that she uses whatever it takes to make her classes fun for students, including "lollies, bribery and corruption through to cajoling" (Marilyn). Her students recognise this embodied performance, noting her as having "humour, happiness and energy" (Student, aged 16).

Signs that a teacher has achieved such hero status can be that they are considered worthy of a stanza in the graduating students' song, as John is because he dispensed with the conventional teaching practices that dominate the prescribed pedagogy of home economics.
Johns propensity to "sing and dance and cook, which all home economics teachers should do" (Student, aged 16), and "joke around in class which makes it fun" (Student, aged 15) was seen to be a transgressive and pleasurable performance.

Elle gets excited with and by her students in her playful pedagogical performances - for a teacher. She admits that she "ham[s] it up a bit because I know they [students] enjoy it so much" and "it gives them real pleasure" (Elle, Line 187). Such playful teachers often win admiration from the students, but they also condemn their teaching counterparts to a less attractive identity as 'orthodox' or boring.

Performing as a touching home economics body

To take pleasure in touch is risky pedagogy. The grotesque body engages in tasting, looking at and smelling food to gain excitement and pleasure (Elle and John), as well as actively, knowingly and freely touching students (Elle) as part of this embodied performance. The touchy, sensory body refuses to reject feelings of passion, love and pleasure, instead performing desire, excitement and passion in their pedagogical performance. The pleased teaching body in turn encourages students to touch, taste, look and use other sensory means to display excitement. As Elle explains "it gives them [students] real pleasure", and "they get real excited". The relationship is a mutual circulation of desire between teacher and students, such that Elle "can tell the more excited I am the better they've done" (Line 189).

Mellor and Shilling (1997:5-6) suggest that humans "acquire information through their bodies" and that "seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting are activities which, quite literally, 'make sense' of the world in a variety of ways", yet, "to smell, to taste or to touch someone or something ... run[s] the risk of spoiling the integrity of one's identity" (p.44). Hence the sensory body of the home economics teacher runs the risk of spoiling pedagogical integrity. Despite the fact that indulging appetites is improper, Mellor and Shilling argue that "modernity's promotion of cognitive apprehension cannot eliminate the passions and sensations of bodies, however much it has tried to manage or repress them" (p.156). So the grotesque body of home economics teachers should resist the desire for sensual experiences, but instead refuses this constraint and is characterised instead by openness and a refusal of normal sensual boundaries.

In this way, the embodied performance of sensory, touchy, pleasured home economics bodies is voyeuristic and carnivalesque since it is outside of the norm of classroom emotions and sensory experiences - for both students and teachers. The surprise, excitement and pleasure of touch is risky business. This perverse, excessive and grotesque performance of eroticism (and its suggestion of immorality) parodies the traditions of the teaching act, and is risky business in a world where eroticism and touch are dangerous teaching strategies. Elle rejects this barrier, declaring with pride that "I touch students all the time" (Line 142). And yet, she is aware that "It's probably not the right thing to do" (Elle, Line 142) and "could be misconstrued" (Elle, Line 149). This is a freakish, risky performance which opens spaces for transformation and radical change in the pedagogical relationship, where pleasure is reintroduced into the pedagogical relationship.

The embodied grotesque home economics teacher

The assemblage of the carnivalesque body of home economics illustrated in the preceding analysis is a grotesque spectacle which has some parallels with Russo's spectacle of a freak in a freak show. Russo (1994:80) suggests that "the freak is doubly marked as object and
other within the world of spectacle”. Similarly, home economics teachers are doubly marked as object and other within the world of teachers, who may also be characterised as freaks.

Could the embodied performances of these grotesque home economics bodies be in any way subversive? Is the ‘fun’ and ‘pleasure’ in which these grotesque bodies are engaged dangerous?

One way of considering this question is to apply the concept of ethical pleasures proffered by Foucault (1985). The carnivalesque bodies of home economics are at odds with the orthodox bodies of professional teachers. They frequently engage in risky practices. They are excessive, shameless and incorrigible, taking pleasure in ‘bad’ conduct such as drinking and smoking and engaging in sexual practice (though these behaviours are not in the classroom, but are implied to be part of the lives of these teachers), attired in ways which were not 'normal', using military drilling and other undesirable pedagogical practices, touching students, creating desire and excitement. However, applying the categorising of ethical individuals in ancient Greece (Foucault, 1985) to home economics teachers, such unruly embodied performances, while not moderate, may be argued to be continent -- that is, the bodies are in a constant struggle to stay within the bounds of continence. For example, the fat body is used as an exemplar of the failure to self-regulate around matters of food intake. The outdoors body quickly reverted to the dress of the home economics teacher so as to counter the surprise of the students. The touchy body knew what parts of the student body it was acceptable to touch, and was appropriately shocked by the reciprocal touch of students.

In terms of pedagogical performance, these teachers understand where the boundaries lie. They know which rules they can 'safely' break and engage in the 'right' transgressions which do not risk their positioning as a home economics teacher beyond 'surprising' their students. Such continent behaviours are, according to Foucault (1985), considered to be virtuous because these individuals are in a constant fight to maintain the bounds of the ethical individual as they are constantly experiencing pleasures that are beyond reasonableness, but they deny these desires and pleasures to remain within the bounds of the ethical teacher.

At the same time, they work against tidiness and any nostalgic yearning for the ‘docile’ home economics body that emerges in the versions of typical home economics bodies. These are the skilled home economics body and the suffering home economics body - moderate, ethical individuals who fit within orthodox prescriptions. The atypical bodies do not conform to the expectations that home economics teachers must suffer and must be moderate, defying prescriptions of normality. These bodies show that home economics pedagogy has its own space for carnival, for fun, parody and perversion, and above all, pleasure - but those who claim both pleasure and professional status know the boundaries of ethical pedagogy as performance.

Pleasure in the margins

This re-working of the marginal teachers in the marginal subject of home economics has revealed that certain embodied subjects do indeed occupy different positionings to those traditional positionings which have come to be expected and assumed of teachers -- in this case, home economics teachers. This work offers a glimpse of the embodied perverse pleasures, even naughtiness, some continent home economics teachers engage in to escape the suffering which is 'normal' in the performance of home economics pedagogy.

The parodying in which these atypical teachers engage is risky business. However, the risk is minimised - though not expunged - through their own self-regulation as continent bodies.
While they engage in moments of transgression, they are not mobilised by any real desire to subvert orthodoxy - indeed, it is orthodoxy itself which allows such teachers the pleasures of their transgressive Otherness.
References


