Geography fieldtrips and mental health.

Faith Tucker (she/her) & John Horton (he/him)

@GeogNorthampton
@John_Horton_

Contents.

- (Un)wellness in the neoliberal academy.

- Spaces of geographical education as ableist and exclusionary.

- Fieldwork/fieldtrips as inaccessible.

Fieldwork ambivalence.

Us: Yaay, Geography fieldwork!! #awesome!! #FieldworkRocks!! :-)

Also us: *Countless* instances of profound stress and anxiety during geographical fieldwork; *countless* little first-hand experiences of gendered, classed and ableist exclusions in the field; *countless* times we have wanted to be *anywhere-but-on-a-fieldtrip*...

(Tucker, Waite & Horton, 2022, p.563)

'Disabled' staff and off-site activities project.

- Anonymous online survey with 75 Anglophone Geography, Earth & Env Sciences academics.

- Reflections / memories of fieldtrips and academic workplaces.

    (Horton & Tucker 2014)

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Fieldtrip anxieties and unwellness.

"I have never, either as staff or student, come home well from a residential fieldcourse."

"Practically every fieldtrip ... has resulted in some sort of 'flashpoint' for my condition."
(Tucker & Horton, 2019)

Fieldwork as a space of undisclosed distress.

"When a student I used to find the atmosphere of fieldtrips difficult to handle ... Believe me - you don't want to have a panic attack in front of all your friends 100s of km from home!! Crying silently in a bunk bed in a hotel in [Mediterranean resort] would be a low point."

(Tucker, Waite & Horton, 2022)

Fieldwork as a space of undisclosed distress.

"After escaping from colleagues, I have binge-eaten in many a hotel room... ; keeping up the compulsion whilst on show in the field."

(Tucker, Waite & Horton, 2022)

COVID-19 and fieldwork.

- Fieldwork pre-COVID-19 and during pandemic restrictions.

- Online survey with UK-based staff about designing and delivering fieldtrips (n=48).

(Tucker & Waite, ongoing)

COVID-19 and fieldwork.

- Before COVID-19 – lots of residential trips, lots of international trips.
- Nearly all in-person fieldtrips during pandemic restrictions were in the UK and non-residential.
- Most staff taught themselves how to use software/technology to develop online fieldwork alternatives.

	In-person trips before COVID-19	In-person trips during COVID-19	Online trips during COVID-19
Felt supported by colleagues	83%	85%	**60%**
Felt supported by dept leadership	63%	77%	**44%**
Had sufficient time to plan	65%	46%	**28%**
Felt confident planning	80%	77%	**52%**
Felt confident delivering	89%	86%	**60%**
	n=48	n=13	n=24

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	In-person trips before COVID-19	In-person trips during COVID-19	Online trips during COVID-19
Fitted in well alongside home/family commitments	65%	**85%**	64%
Personal situation made it challenging to participate	16%	**8%**	**0%**
Had a positive impact on my wellbeing	70%	77%	**32%**
Felt comfortable participating	85%	85%	**68%**
	n=48	n=13	n=24

Fieldwork and intersectionality.

- Experiences of fieldwork of Global Ethnic Majority (GEM) students.
- Semi-structured interviews with recent/current GEM students (n=8).

(Tom, Waite & Tucker, ongoing)

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Fieldwork and race.

"In my culture, my mum would speak to me in my language. So she'd call me on these trips and she'd be speaking to me in my language, and usually if I wasn't on a fieldtrip I'd reply back in my language, but because I was on a fieldtrip I'd just reply back in English just to avoid certain questions... I'd say there are certain things you have to alter to avoid further questions [...] or to avoid being really really excluded from the group you just have to, not Westernise yourself, but you get what I mean." (Black African, Woman)

Fieldwork and race.

"I had to share a room with three White girls [...] I wear wigs. But in the Black community wearing a wig is just a protective style for your hair [...] And then I'd go on these field trips. So... at night-time it would be time for me to take off the wig because I've had it on all day and I want to just relax as I would in my normal spaces. It felt a bit awkward to, like, take it off and explain to them... So sometimes I'd just go to the bathroom and take it off and put a headscarf on and then just kind of go to bed. But people would still be like 'oh my gosh, what has happened to your hair?' I'd be like 'oh it's a wig'. You just have to explain like what's going on. So stuff like that did make me feel like 'urgh'." (Black African, Woman)

CHARACTERISTIC[13]	GROUP(S) MOST LIKELY TO DECLARE	GROUP(S) LEAST LIKELY TO DECLARE
GENDER[14]	Women (4.7%)	Men (2.1%)
AGE[15]	21-24 years (7.0%)	18 year olds (2.3%)
ETHNICITY[16]	Mixed (4.3%) White (4.3%)	Black (1.5%) Asian (1.5%
POLAR4[17]	Quintile 1 (4.6%)	Quintile 5 (3.2%)
TARIFF GROUP[18]	Accepted applicants at medium tariff providers (4.0%)	Accepted applicants at high tariff providers (3.0%)
SEXUAL ORIENTATION[19]	Bisexual (15.6%) Gay women/lesbian (15.2%)	Heterosexual (2.6%)
CARE EXPERIENCE[20]	Declared 'in care' on UCAS application (9.2%)	No care experience declared (3.5%)

Figure 3: Accepted UK applicant groups most and least likely to declare a mental health condition in 2020[21]

UCAS (2021)

Prompts for reflection.

- What do these challenging findings say about our disciplinary norms, exclusions and privileges?

- What aspects of fieldwork that may contribute to anxiety or distress are done out of habit rather than necessity?

- What other aspects of geography education may present similar challenges to mental health and wellbeing?

- How do we normalise talking about – and prioritising – mental health and wellbeing in geography education?

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