WILEY | AREA

"The show must go on!" Fieldwork, mental health and wellbeing in Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences

Faith Tucker (iD) | John Horton

Environmental and Geographical Sciences, University of Northampton, Northampton, UK

Correspondence
Faith Tucker
Email: faith.tucker@northampton.ac.uk

Fieldwork is central to the identity, culture and history of academic Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences (GEES). However, in this paper we recognise that, for many academic staff, fieldtrips can be a profoundly challenging "ordeal", ill-conducive to wellness or effective pedagogic practice. Drawing on research with 39 UK university-based GEES academics who self-identify as having a mental health condition, we explore how mental health intersects with spaces and expectations of fieldwork in Higher Education. We particularly focus on their accounts of undertaking undergraduate residential fieldtrips and give voice to these largely undisclosed experiences. Their narratives run counter to normative, romanticised celebrations of fieldwork within GEES disciplines. We particularly highlight recurrent experiences of avoiding fieldwork, fieldwork-as- ordeal, and "coping" with fieldwork, and suggest that commonplace anxieties within the neoliberal academy – about performance, productivity, fitness-to-work, self-presentation, scrutiny and fear-of-falling-behind – are felt particularly intensely during fieldwork. In spite of considerable work to make fieldwork more accessible to students, we find that field-based teaching is experienced as a focal site of distress, anxiety and ordeal for many GEES academics with common mental health conditions. We conclude with prompts for reflection about how fieldwork could be otherwise.

KEYWORDS
disability, Earth and Environmental Sciences, fieldwork, Geography, higher education, mental health and wellbeing, UK

Preface: on wellness and residential fieldwork

I have never, either as staff or student, come home well from a residential fieldcourse. (Geographer, bipolar affective disorder)

1 | INTRODUCTION

Fieldwork and fieldtrips are central to the identity, culture and history of academic Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences (GEES). Residential fieldtrips are widely figured as a defining feature of the disciplines and a vigorous,

affirmative, collegial, nostalgically-remembered rite of passage. However, in this paper we recognise that, for many academic staff, fieldtrips can be a profoundly challenging "ordeal", ill-conducive to wellness or effective pedagogic practice. Drawing on research with 39 UK university-based GEES academics who self-identify as having a mental health condition, we explore how mental wellness intersects with spaces and expectations of residential fieldwork in Higher Education.

We begin by contextualising the paper in relation to two bodies of literature. First, we locate our research in relation to recent, proliferating accounts of (un)wellness within the contemporary neoliberal academy. While much has been written about wellbeing and disabilities within "the academy" as a whole, we note that discipline-specific experiences of (un)wellness are rarely detailed. Second, we situate the paper in relation to longer -standing critiques of fieldwork and ableism within GEES. While this literature was transformational in critiquing fieldwork as a masculinist, ableist, exclusionary practice, we argue that it constituted an emphasis on *physical* aspects of accessibility and, ultimately, a wealth of resources on *student* experiences. Consequently, the diverse (un)wellness and experiences of academic staff leading fieldtrips have rarely been foregrounded in this context. Following a brief methodological introduction we develop these critiques, presenting qualitative data from a project which explored experiences of Geographers, Earth and Environmental Scientists with disabilities in spaces of academia. We focus on their experiences of engaging in undergraduate fieldtrips as part of their teaching role. Their narratives run starkly counter to normative, romanticised discourses of fieldwork-as-a-good-thing: we particularly highlight recurrent experiences of avoiding fieldwork, fieldwork-as-ordeal and "coping" with fieldwork.

1.1 | Contexts: wellness and fieldwork in the neoliberal academy

There is a growing body of literature that critically reflects on (un)wellness within the contemporary neoliberal academy (Kinman, 2001; Mullings, Peake, & Parizeau, 2016). While the label "neoliberalism" is contested, this work has been powerful in identifying a series of pervasive, internationalised processes through which higher education institutions have become "more commercial in orientation, business-like in…[their] knowledge practices and corporate in…self-presentation" (Peake & Mullings, 2016, p. 266). Some of the compound, negative consequences of these trends for academic staff are now widely reported. Most notably, there is now substantial evidence that neoliberalism in the academy has constituted changes in normative institutional cultures (Mullings et al., 2016) through which academic work has become less secure and more demanding (Kinman, Jones, & Kinman, 2006; Winefield et al., 2003). For example, many critics note that heightened job insecurity, as experienced through fixed-term, part-time and casual roles, has constituted deeply-felt everyday precarities which are "inimitable to mental well-being in higher education" (Berg, Huijbens, & Larson, 2016, p. 173). It is also argued that neoliberal universities habitually treat academics as "human capital", obliging them to,

> constantly seek ways to increase their future value, *through, for example, successful grant applications, peer-reviewed publications (in journals with the "right" impact factor), website blog posts, hits on their personalized socio-scholarly media websites…paper citations…and various other "measures of esteem". (Berg et al., 2016, p. 178)*

In this context, it is argued that a culture of heightened scrutiny and regulatory performance management has fostered working lives characterised by "the pervasiveness of overwork, multiple deadlines, unrealistic expectations, and cultures of competition" (Parizeau et al., 2016, p. 197). These issues, coupled with an academic job market shaped by institutional efficiency measures (Kinman, 2001) and research and teaching practices which often require distinctive, intense forms of emotional labour (McGarrol, 2017), have been strongly linked to increased levels of stress and anxiety in universities (Berg et al., 2016). A number of recent studies have found high levels of mental unwellness in academia. More than half of the respondents in Schuurman's (2009) study, for example, reported that they had suffered a stress-related health condition, and around one-third of the doctoral researchers questioned by Levecque, Anseel, De Beuckelaer, Van der Heyden, and Gisle (2017) were found to be at risk of having or developing a common psychiatric or mental health condition, such as depression.

A recurrent theme within this body of research is the normative privileging of unsustainable, unrealistic, "super-heroic" forms of endurance and hard work within contemporary academia (Mountz, 2016; Pitt & Mewburn, 2016). Parizeau et al. critique a pervasive culture of workplace "martyrdom", arguing that,

> we experience academic cultures and practices that valorize overwork, including expressions of martyrdom, talking about not sleeping or eating and about working all of the time. (2016, p. 197)

It is widely evidenced that these discourses lead many academics to feel they must work long hours (Kinman, 2001), and taken-for-granted pressures to "do more" and "be more productive" often result in feelings of worry, guilt, inadequacy, inefficiency (Fallon-Hogan, 2013) and fear-of-falling-behind (Hawkins, Manzi, & Ojeda, 2014). Expectations attached to academic roles mean that stress is a common, shared experience (Mountz, 2016); however, for those with mental health conditions such as anxiety or depression, this work culture is particularly challenging (England, 2016).

As such, the neoliberal academy has increasingly been critiqued as profoundly ableist. This ableism is manifest in its valorisation of super-heroic – and super *able* – performance (Pitt & Mewburn, 2016) and its casting of diversely *nonsuper* bodies, individuals and social groups as ineffective and unproductive (Simard-Gagnon, 2016). The neoliberal academy is also critiqued for its constitution of spaces in which disclosures of needs, "weaknesses" or "inability-to-cope" feel impossible or, at least, prejudicial to career-advancement. This latter concern is particularly troubling for those considering whether to disclose mental ill-health, or other "invisible" health conditions, within the contemporary academy (England, 2016; see also von Schrader, Malzer, & Bruyère, 2014; Sang, 2017). Indeed, a number of studies conclude that "to formally admit to stress, anxiety, or depression, especially in the early stages of one's academic career, can lead to discrimination" and becoming stigmatised as "unfit-to-be-in-the-academy" or "not-cut-out-to-be-an-academic" (Peake & Mullings, 2016, p. 270). For example, in their research with academic staff in the USA, Price and Kerschbaum (2017) found that fear of disclosure was related to anxieties about losing credibility and respect, being the subject of gossip and being stigmatised as "weak" and "unprofessional". Price, Salzer, O'Shea, and Kerschbaum (2017) show how these anxieties are compounded by typical institutional approaches to mental health. Institutional responses typically individualise responsibility for requesting support (also Mullings et al., 2016), position individual disclosures as "problems" to be solved (also Parizeau et al., 2016), and so often make individuals feel distressingly "visible", other, awkward or out-of-line. Little wonder, then, that many studies of (un)wellness in the neoliberal academy highlight experiences of considerable unease and unhappiness occasioned by "covering-up" mental ill-health in the workplace as individuals seek to "pass" as normatively-able (England, 2016; Price et al., 2017) and adopt enclosive, non-disclosive tactics in relation to their conditions and needs (Horton & Tucker, 2014).

To date, critiques of the neoliberal academy tend to be generic, imagining a singular "neoliberal academy" and overlooking any specific or distinctive experiences or issues related to particular disciplines, teaching practices or spaces. A key contribution of this paper is to begin to consider how the processes and concerns outlined above might be compounded, extended or complicated by discipline-specific spaces of academic Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences (GEES). We particularly consider the practice of residential fieldwork which is widely figured as axiomatically and distinctively essential to these disciplines (Nairn, 2003). Engagement in fieldwork is central to international subject benchmarks (Hall, Healey, & Harrison, 2004) and exposure to field-based teaching understood to be necessary for GEES students to gain a satisfactory understanding of their subject (Clark & Jones, 2011). In UK Higher Education, for example, Driver notes that undergraduate students in GEES disciplines,

> are required to undergo some sort of field training, the assumption being that the complete geographer is one who can conduct field-work according to certain standards – in other words, safely, skilfully and effectively. (2000, p. 268)

Since field trips are "a key component in which geography students learn how to act and think like geographers" (Nairn, 1999, p. 272), staff engagement in field-based teaching can be seen to be central to the subject-identity of academic staff – in short, to be a "proper" GEES academic one must engage in field-based teaching.

The history and imperative of GEES fieldwork has been widely critiqued from postcolonial, feminist and disability rights perspectives. Interlinked critiques of fieldwork as always already ideologically-colonialist/exploratory, masculinist and ableist were important in galvanising more considerate, reflexive, politicised ways of working in many parts of the GEES disciplines. Key criticisms – which, sadly, still feel pertinent in many settings – made plain that GEES fieldwork too-often reproduces valorisations of "heroic" expeditionary exploration (Rose, 1993), norms and representations of "able-bodied" physicality and endurance (Hall et al., 2004; Nairn, 1999), and senses of "failure" and "burden" for participants unable to "keep up" (Maguire, 1998). Many academics in the GEES disciplines have worked tirelessly to develop modes of fieldwork that are more inclusive and accessible (Hall & Healey, 2005). Excellent evidence-based, discipline-specific guidance is now widely available to support the inclusion in fieldwork of undergraduate students with mobility (Gardiner & Anwar, 2001), hearing (Wareham, Clark, & Laugesen, 2001) and visual impairments (Shepherd, 2001), learning disabilities (Chalkley & Waterfield, 2001), and mental health conditions (Birnie & Grant, 2001). However, through this paper we develop two arguments about this body of work. First, we argue that a tendency to prioritise and – very affirmatively – "solve" physical, sensory and mobility barriers to accessibility has led to a relative silencing of other accounts of

(un)wellness in the field. Second, we suggest that the production of a wealth of resources on student needs and experiences has often tended to silence the experiences of the diverse GEES academics who organise and participate in fieldwork in Higher Education.

For reasons that will become sadly – at times painfully – clear, we highlight the fieldwork experiences of GEES academics who self-identify as having mental health conditions. Their shared – but lived-in-isolation – experiences of fieldwork-as-ordeal stand in marked contrast to the celebration of fieldwork as an essential, affirmative activity within their disciplines. In so doing, we extend a body of research on mental health and fieldwork which has overwhelmingly been student-focused. In Birnie and Grant's work, for example, residential fieldwork is highlighted as a major concern for undergraduate students with mental health conditions because,

> *amongst the different teaching and learning modes that we use, fieldwork has perhaps the greatest potential to put students into unfamiliar and testing situations in which they may feel anxious and unable to cope. (2001, p. 3)*

Birnie and Grant (2001) identify ten factors that may contribute to this anxiety: being away from home; being away from supportive friends and family; being in a challenging physical environment; being in a challenging social environment; being asked to divulge personal responses; living communally; being on unfamiliar territory, particularly when in a foreign country; completing tasks in groups; travelling long distances using unfamiliar modes of transport; and being away from professional health support. Residential fieldtrips can also cause anxieties because of communal-based living, eating and sleeping arrangements and a lack of privacy (Nairn, 2003). However, to date, there has been limited recognition of ways in which these characteristics of fieldwork *matter* for academic staff who, in addition, have to deal with the challenges, stresses and contingencies of organising and running fieldtrips, and supporting students. As we will show, for many GEES academics, fieldwork is experienced as a deeply challenging obligation in which the anxieties and unwellness of the neoliberal academy are intensely experienced.

2 | METHODS

The following sections present data from research with Anglophone, university-based academics who work within GEES disciplines and define themselves as "disabled". Testimonies were collected via an online survey that was publicised via Anglophone mailing lists and networks. An online survey guaranteed anonymity and afforded respondents space to discuss personal experiences they may not have disclosed via other research methods. The call for respondents drew on the definition of "disability" used in the UK policy context: "a physical or mental [condition] that has a substantial and long-term. . .effect on. . .day-to-day activities" (HMSO, 2010, Section 6.1). The survey received 75 responses in total (for details of the wider study and its methods, see Horton & Tucker, 2014). The following analysis specifically focuses on data from 39 respondents working in the UK (and therefore having similar, comparable cultures/scales of undergraduate fieldwork) who identified themselves as having a mental health condition.

The survey included quantitative and extended qualitative questions about experiences of working within the GEES disciplines, including field-based teaching practices. As we have previously reported (Horton & Tucker, 2014), responses were sharply polarised between academics with physical, sensory or mobility impairments who were affirmatively activist around accessibility and inclusivity within their institutions, versus those with mental health conditions who tended not to disclose their condition within the workplace. In particular, the first group typically worked tirelessly to support the inclusion of students with physical, sensory or mobility impairments in fieldwork. Collectively, their narratives could be read as affirmation that significant strides have been made, across GEES disciplines, to resolve common accessibility issues and make fieldwork more inclusionary for participants with diverse physical-bodily-sensory capacities. While this progress is to be celebrated, in this paper we foreground the very different, often-silenced, experiences of the second group to explore intersections between mental health and fieldwork.

Characteristics of survey respondents are summarised in Table 1. The sample includes those from a range of roles, institutions, disciplinary backgrounds and career stages; it also encompasses academics who have disclosed their condition to colleagues and students and those who have disclosed to "no-one" within their institution or discipline (see Horton & Tucker, 2014 on disclosure and isolation). The number and type of teaching-related field activities respondents engaged in also varied: around half undertook at least one full-day or part-day fieldtrip per academic year; a similar proportion attended at least one residential trip in the UK each year; and around one-third took part in residential fieldwork in another country.

TABLE 1 Characteristics of survey respondents

	Frequency	%
Subject specialism		
Geography	29	74
Environmental Sciences	7	18
Earth Sciences	3	8
Type of institution		
"Russell Group" university	12	32
"Pre-1992" university	17	45
"Post-1992" university	9	24
Current role		
Teaching assistant	4	10
Researcher	10	26
Lecturer	21	54
Senior lecturer	4	10
Mental health condition[a]		
Depression	15	38
Mental health issue/Mental health problem	9	23
Depression and anxiety	4	10
Depression and other condition(s)	4	10
Depressive episodes	2	5
"Long-term mental health issues"	2	5
Eating disorder	1	3
Bipolar affective disorder	1	3
Borderline personality disorder	1	3

[a]Respondents' own definition of their mental health condition.

The following sections are structured around recurring themes that emerged strongly and affectingly in these respondents' accounts of undertaking undergraduate fieldtrips as part of their teaching role. Many respondents provided long, detailed and moving accounts of their experiences. The words of respondents are thus drawn on extensively to illustrate their experiences in these contexts. We recognise that the terminology associated with mental health and wellbeing is complex, nuanced and value-laden (see, for example, Parizeau et al., 2016; Peake & Mullings, 2016; Price & Kerschbaum, 2017). We therefore use respondents' own ways of describing their conditions and experiences.

3 | NARRATIVES OF FIELDWORK, MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The following sections explore respondents' accounts of fieldwork. First, we discuss how fieldwork can be experienced as an ordeal, drawing attention to how both the physicality of fieldwork and the social interactions embedded in it can negatively impact on wellbeing. Second, we outline the various coping strategies adopted by individuals to deal with the challenges associated with field-based teaching. Third, we consider how workplace culture ensures that "the show must go on". To help maintain anonymity, information about trip locations, types of institution and participants' roles has been omitted from the data presented here.

3.1 | Fieldwork as an ordeal

The long working hours, physical exertion and emotional labour associated with fieldwork, and in particular residential trips, meant for some respondents that fieldwork was experienced as an ordeal. They cited exhaustion, jetlag and a lack of time to recover as key factors affecting their wellbeing.

Staff and students continue to be expected to work between 8am-11pm on physical geography fieldcourses. This concerns me greatly ... I have never, either as staff or student, come home well from a residential field-course and this gives me great cause for concern in relation to vulnerable students. (Geographer, bipolar affective disorder)

I lead/co-organise two fieldtrips, although I do not enjoy the experience. Physical exhaustion, jetlag and distance from friends/partner affect me badly. (Earth Scientist, depression)

I find I feel worse if I get very tired, which is quite normal when running a field trip. It would be nice to get some time off in lieu if you have spent the whole/most of the weekend teaching or supervising students. (Geographer, depression and anxiety)

I do not look forward to taking daytrips – I find them physically and emotionally exhausting. (Geographer, depression and anxiety)

The stress and anxiety associated with the responsibilities of organising and running field-based teaching activities, and the emotional labour of "looking after" students exacerbated existing health conditions for many of the respondents.

Practically every fieldtrip I have taken with students has resulted in some sort of "flashpoint" for my condition. I love fieldwork itself – but I'm talking more about the logistics and stress involved in transporting, housing and looking after 50 students. (Geographer, mental health difficulties)

Teaching stresses me out massively, and fieldtrips are like an intensified version of that. (Earth Scientist, depression)

Fieldwork can be a nightmare for a self-doubting, antisocial self-harmer!! (Geographer, depression)

Hall et al. (2004) note that the extracurricular and social activities associated with residential fieldwork present particular challenges in relation to the inclusion of disabled students in all aspects of the fieldwork experience. Residential fieldtrips generally involve the social practices of eating, drinking and living as a group. This "concentrated social environment" (Hall et al., 2004, p. 275) presents challenges for staff too. Respondents highlighted difficulties and distress related to social interactions and drinking cultures, and how the "contained" nature of the working environment and peer pressure meant that these were difficult to avoid.

I do my duty but I find interacting with students in such an intense way very difficult. I am very sensitive to jokes and banter – in the past I have found students' comments and jokes whilst on fieldwork very hurtful. And I hate going to the pub because I can't drink ([because of] meds). (Geographer, depression)

In general, I find fieldwork incredibly challenging. I am a very shy person, and I find "normal" social interactions challenging ... Fieldwork means being away from home, away from trusted people, away from the routines and coping strategies that keep me sane. Being on fieldwork (residential I mean) intensifies feelings of awkwardness and lack of control. Long journeys or flights are especially difficult – being forced to interact with one's neighbour is (silly though it sounds) an annual anxiety for me. (Geographer, various mental health issues)

I find fieldwork an ordeal – forced into social interactions with colleagues and students. I find the drinking games unbearable, but tolerate it out of a kind of peer pressure. (Geographer, depression and anxiety)

During residential fieldtrips academic staff are always "on show", facilitating both academic and social aspects. For some respondents this created anxieties and distress, particularly when the pressure of "passing" was added to this (see following section). The nature of fieldwork means that students and staff may be exposed to behaviours of others that they were not previously aware of (Birnie & Grant, 2001). For those staff who had not disclosed their health condition to colleagues, this was especially difficult.

After escaping from colleagues, I have binge-eaten in many a hotel room … like an extension of the game; keeping up the compulsion whilst on show in the field. (Geographer, mental health problems and eating disorder)

Fieldtrips are very isolating. I find that kind of intense scrutiny – being under the gaze of students and colleagues – difficult to cope with. I just want to get away from them! (Geographer, mental health)

Panic attacks, clamming up, having to escape for a smoke and bit of solitude. All very embarrassing when it happens in front of senior colleagues. (Environmental Scientist, depression)

The possibility that fieldwork can be a space of raw isolation, worry, hurt or panic for many Geographers, Earth and Environmental Scientists seems to us to be rarely acknowledged. The realisation that fieldwork can be a haunting, troubling, upsetting "ordeal" for professional, experienced, postdoctoral adults in field-leader roles is deeply challenging. While we wish to celebrate the significant work which has rendered fieldwork more accessible and inclusive in so many ways, there is clearly a need to consider how normative fieldwork practices might still be exclusionary and distressing for some participants.

3.2 | Coping with fieldwork

Respondents outlined a range of strategies they had adopted to deal with the challenges associated with field-based teaching. Some reported that they "put on a brave face" or sought time away from social interactions. As Birnie and Grant (2001) note, maintaining confidentiality in respect to health needs can be particularly challenging within fieldwork settings. Where academics had not disclosed their health condition to colleagues (or students) the need to "pass" was strongly felt. Respondents' comments suggest that expectations of "super-heroic" coping and performance (Simard-Gagnon, 2016) are particularly deeply felt during residential fieldwork.

Plenty of times I have "hidden" away from the crowd, in the minibus, pub or (on residentials) in my hotel room. In the past, this has led to anxiety and awkwardness with colleagues (e.g. wondering why I wasn't answering my hotel door or mobile phone). (Geographer, mental health episodes)

Some days it involves gritting teeth and putting on a brave face. (Environmental Scientist, depression)

A number of times, I have just had to get away to find some space for myself. (Geographer, depression and anxiety)

A small number of respondents identified adjustments made to support their engagement in fieldwork. Some indicated that simple changes to the fieldwork setting – such as having a single room – enabled them to participate in residential trips. Others indicated that they made adjustments to other aspects of their life (both within and outside the workplace) to help them cope with the demands of fieldwork.

I request a single room for residential accommodation because of my sleep difficulties. (Geographer, mental health problems)

Field-based research is key to my teaching – but this means that I have had to find ways of COPING with fieldwork. i.e. my condition has not limited the amount of fieldwork, but means that I have to focus on coping with the amount of fieldwork I have to do. (Geographer, mental health difficulties)

For a few respondents, being out in the field was viewed positively, with the intense workload resulting in a change of focus.

Strangely, my condition is less present whilst doing fieldwork, perhaps the focused and purposeful activity that takes place in a concentrated period of time [means] that I don't have time to dwell on matters, I simply get on with things. (Geographer, depression and anxiety)

> *Being out in the field is a time when the mind is occupied and all the demons seem irrelevant. It's all the other times (4am, wide awake, worrying about a work dispute) that you have to worry about! (Geographer, long-standing mental health issues)*

However, anxieties about fieldwork and the potential impacts on their health meant that many respondents actively avoided field-based teaching. Some reported that they had withdrawn from fieldtrips in the past because of health problems, with concerns about "letting others down" adding to their anxiety about engaging in field-based teaching in future.

> *I have turned down opportunities to go on residentials to exotic locations as I don't think I would cope. I am very anxious about spending so much time isolated with my colleagues – I find the staffroom culture intimidating, to be honest (I go out of my way to avoid the staffroom at lunchtime). (Geographer, depression)*

> *Fieldwork makes me ill – therefore I avoid it and contain it as much as possible. Exhaustion, intense stress and anxiety. (Geographer, clinical depression)*

> *Had to cancel leadership of couple of trips in last academic year, letting others down and adding to their workloads. (Environmental Scientist, depressive episodes)*

These various coping strategies seem to us to represent a particularly intense form of the self-regulatory pressures and anxieties critiqued in accounts of the contemporary academy. The day-to-day challenges of residential fieldwork evidently require distinctive forms of "covering up". The recurring focus on "coping", "putting on brave face", "gritting one's teeth" or feeling guilty about requesting support suggest that fieldwork can be a space in which experiences of the "neoliberal" academy are magnified, heightened or brought more sharply into focus.

3.3 | Workplace culture

Respondents were asked whether their health condition had prompted changes in fieldwork planning and practices within their department. None of the 39 respondents reported that this had been the case. Many indicated that the needs of teaching staff were seen to be "irrelevant" and that there was not a culture of changing departmental practices.

> *The fieldwork goes ahead, irrespective of the needs of teaching staff! (Geographer, mental health difficulties)*

> *My issues are not relevant to my department. The fieldwork has to be integral, irrespective of whether I'm having an off day! (Environmental Scientist, depression)*

> *The show must go on! Even through the (mental) pain barrier. (Geographer, mental health problems)*

> *Not an option to change or cancel things on my account. Try not to put people out too much. (Geographer, depression)*

> *I am seen as the problem, not the planning/practices! (Environmental Scientist, depressive episodes)*

For some, decisions made at departmental level meant that they were relieved of field-based teaching responsibilities. While many respondents highlighted a lack of recognition of the needs of staff with mental health issues, some acknowledged that changes to departmental culture were unlikely given the reluctance of staff to disclose their health conditions.

> *Partly it has not changed because I have not highlighted to colleagues the state I am actually in by the end of a trip and I have the ability to mask all but most serious elements of the illness in public on a short term basis. (Geographer, bipolar affective disorder)*

> *I no longer have responsibility for any fieldwork. Being relieved of these duties was simultaneously a source of great relief and great sadness. (Geographer, depression [episodic])*

These data suggest that taken-for-granted fieldwork practices produce exclusionary effects and experiences for many GEES academics with common mental health conditions. These findings also suggest that despite significant multidisciplinary efforts to make fieldwork more accessible and inclusive for students, there is asymmetry in accommodations for staff. As a result, the respondents did not seem to have a sense that affirmative change to fieldwork was possible for people with their condition.

4 | CONCLUSIONS: HOW COULD FIELDWORK BE OTHERWISE?

The data presented in this paper suggest that commonplace field-based teaching practices are experienced as sites of profound distress, anxiety and ordeal for many GEES academics with common mental health conditions. Typically, respondents described the sheer effort and sadness with which they tried to work "through the (mental) pain barrier". The phrase "the show must go on" seemed to us to encapsulate the resigned way in which these efforts were described. Evidently, for these GEES colleagues, anxieties about performance, productivity, fitness-to-work, self-presentation, scrutiny and fear-of-falling-behind were felt particularly deeply during fieldwork.

What to do with the realisation that fieldwork can be an immiserating, isolating experience in which the pain of the neoliberal academy is intensely felt? Strikingly, the respondents quoted here offered very few recommendations when asked how fieldwork could be enhanced for colleagues in their position: instead, they emphasised fraught strategies of "coping" or "masking" emotions, or else resorted to avoiding fieldtrips altogether. However, we note that their narratives reproduce a sense that fieldwork is inevitably like this; fieldtrips are imagined as *necessarily* challenging, hard, lonely, exhausting and miserable. We conclude, then, with four prompts for reflection about how fieldwork *could* be otherwise.

1. Practically, how could fieldtrips be organised in ways that reduce their tiring, emotional intensity and make them a bit more relaxing, settling and affirmative for all? (For example, through shorter working days, including "down time" in the daily schedule, providing meaningful time off in lieu for staff involved in field activities).
2. How might innovative and more supportive fieldwork practices be promoted and shared, both within GEES and with other field-based disciplines?
3. What longstanding norms of fieldwork behaviour and culture (e.g., around drinking, meals, socialising) could be adjusted to preclude wearing, exclusionary effects?
4. What forms of care, support, collegiality and collaborative reflection might be useful in moving beyond the fieldwork "ordeals" described in this paper?

ORCID

Faith Tucker http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1013-3398

REFERENCES

Berg, L. D., Huijbens, E. H., & Larson, H. G. (2016). Producing anxiety in the neoliberal university. *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe Canadien*, *60*, 168–180.

Birnie, J., & Grant, A. (2001). *Providing learning support for students with mental health difficulties undertaking fieldwork and related activities*. Geography Discipline Network, University of Gloucester. Retrieved from http://gdn.glos.ac.uk/disabil/mental/index.htm

Chalkley, B., & Waterfield, J. (2001). *Providing learning support for students with hidden disabilities and dyslexia undertaking fieldwork and related activities*. Geography Discipline Network, University of Gloucester. Retrieved from http://gdn.glos.ac.uk/disabil/hidden/

Clark, H., & Jones, J. (2011). The use of a fieldwork audit to anticipate barriers to fieldwork for disabled students. *Planet*, *24*, 42–49.

Driver, F. (2000). Editorial: Fieldwork in geography. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *25*, 267–268.

England, M. R. (2016). Being open in academia: A personal narrative of mental illness and disclosure. *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe Canadien*, *60*, 226–231.

Fallon-Hogan, V. (2013). *An examination of working hours, work-life conflict and psychological well-being in Irish academies*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Discipline of Health Promotion, National University of Ireland, Galway.

Gardiner, V., & Anwar, N. (2001). *Providing learning support for students with mobility impairments undertaking fieldwork and related activities*. Geography Discipline Network, University of Gloucester. Retrieved from gdn.glos.ac.uk/disabil/mobility/mobility.pdf

Hall, T., & Healey, M. (2005). Disabled students' experiences of fieldwork. *Area*, *37*, 446–449.

Hall, T., Healey, M., & Harrison, M. (2004). Fieldwork and disabled students: Discourses of exclusion and inclusion. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, *28*, 255–280.

Hawkins, R., Manzi, M., & Ojeda, D. (2014). Lives in the making: Power, academia and the everyday. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, *13*, 328–351.

HMSO (2010). *Equality Act 2010*. London, UK: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Horton, J., & Tucker, F. (2014). Disabilities in academic workplaces: Experiences of human and physical geographers. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *39*, 76–89.

Kinman, G. (2001). Pressure points: A review of research on stressors and strains in UK academics. *Educational Psychology*, *21*, 473–492.

Kinman, G., Jones, F., & Kinman, R. (2006). The well-being of the UK academy, 1998-2004. *Quality in Higher Education*, *12*, 15–27.

Levecque, K., Anseel, F., De Beuckelaer, A., Van der Heyden, J., & Gisle, L. (2017). Work organization and mental health problems in PhD students. *Research Policy*, *46*, 868–879.

Maguire, S. (1998). Gender differences in attitudes to undergraduate fieldwork. *Area*, *30*, 207–214.

McGarrol, S. (2017). The emotional challenges of conducting in-depth research into significant health issues in health geography: Reflections on emotional labour, fieldwork and life course. *Area*, *49*, 436–442.

Mountz, A. (2016). Women on the edge: Workplace stress at universities in North America. *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe Canadien*, *60*, 205–218.

Mullings, B., Peake, L., & Parizeau, K. (2016). Cultivating an ethic of wellness in Geography. *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe Canadien*, *60*, 161–167.

Nairn, K. (1999). Embodied fieldwork. *Journal of Geography*, *98*, 272–282.

Nairn, K. (2003). What has the geography of sleeping arrangements got to do with the geography of our teaching spaces? *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, *10*, 67–81.

Parizeau, K., Shillington, L., Hawkins, R., Sultana, F., Mountz, A., Mullings, B., & Peake, L. (2016). Breaking the silence: A feminist call to action. *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe Canadien*, *60*, 192–204.

Peake, L., & Mullings, B. (2016). Critical reflections on mental and emotional distress in the academy. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, *15*, 253–284.

Pitt, R., & Mewburn, I. (2016). Academic superheroes? A critical analysis of academic job descriptions *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, *38*, 1–14.

Price, M., & Kerschbaum, S. L. (2017). *Promoting supportive academic environments for faculty with mental illnesses: Resource guide and suggestions for practice*. Temple University Collaborative. Retrieved from http://tucollaborative.org/sdm_downloads/promoting-supportive-academic-environments-for-faculty-with-mental-illnesses-resource-guide-and-suggestions-for-practice/

Price, M., Salzer, M. S., O'Shea, A., & Kerschbaum, S. L. (2017). Disclosure of mental disability by college and university faculty: The negotiation of accommodations, supports, and barriers. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, *37*(2), https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v37i2.5487.

Rose, G. (1993). *Feminism and Geography: The limits of geographical knowledge*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Sang, K. (2017). *Disability and academic careers*. Retrieved from https://migrantacademics.wordpress.com/2017/05/18/its-like-having-a-second-job-disability-and-academic-careers/

Schuurman, N. (2009). Work, life and creativity among academic geographers. *Progress in Human Geography*, *33*, 307–312.

Shepherd, I. (2001). *Providing learning support for blind and visually impaired students undertaking fieldwork and related activities*. Geography Discipline Network, University of Gloucester. Retrieved from www2.glos.ac.uk/gdn/disabil/blind/blind.pdf

Simard-Gagnon, L. (2016). Everyone is fed, bathed, asleep, and I have made it through another day: Problematizing accommodation, resilience, and care in the neoliberal academy. *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe canadien*, *60*, 219–225.

von Schrader, S., Malzer, V., & Bruyère, S. (2014). Perspectives on disability disclosure: The importance of employer practices and workplace climate. *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, *26*, 237–255.

Wareham, T., Clark, G., & Laugesen, C. (2001). *Providing learning support for d/Deaf and hearing impaired students undertaking fieldwork and related activities*. Geography Discipline Network, University of Gloucester. Retrieved from gdn.glos.ac.uk/disabil/deaf/index.htm

Winefield, A. H., Gillespie, N., Stough, C., Dua, J., Hapuarachichi, J., & Boyd, C. (2003). Occupational stress in Australian university staff: Results from a national survey. *International Journal of Stress Management*, *10*, 51–63.