

# Academic Labor: Research and Artistry

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*Volume 5 Prioritizing Ourselves and Our Values:  
Intersectionality, Positionality, and Dismantling  
the Neoliberal University System*

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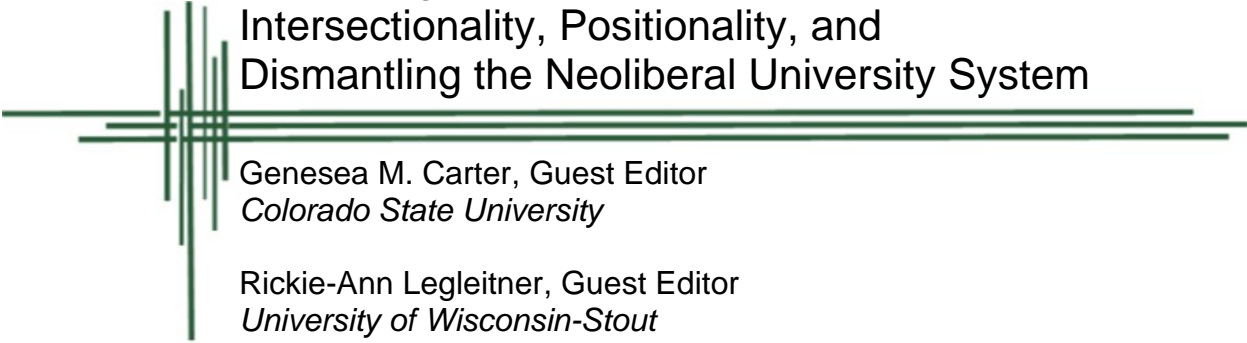
## Special Issue: Volume 5, Issue 1

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# Academic Labor: *Research & Artistry*



## Prioritizing Ourselves and Our Values: Intersectionality, Positionality, and Dismantling the Neoliberal University System

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**I**n this special issue we extend important conversations about how non-tenure-track faculty, tenure-track faculty, and graduate students' academic labor are shaped and impacted by their positionalities and intersectionalities. In a recent Google search, there were 531 million hits on the keyword "academic labor" and 401 million hits on "academia and work." Contrast that with 692,000 hits on "academia and positionality" and 1.1 million hits on "academia and intersectionality." While the Google search results for "academia and positionality" and "academia and intersectionality" are not insignificant, academics cannot have fruitful, ethical, and messy conversations about academic labor without considering

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Rickie-Ann Legleitner is an Assistant Professor of English, Director of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and the Inclusive Excellence Action Plan Coordinator at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. She specializes in American literature and culture, women writers, identity studies, disability studies, and coming-of-age. Her first monograph, *The Artist Embodied: Female Creativity and Development in American Literature from 1850-1940*, is forthcoming from Lexington Books.

how their positionality and/or intersectionality impacts, shapes, or informs that labor. Naming, claiming, reflecting, and analyzing one's positionality and/or intersectionality must go hand-in-hand with conversations about our academic work—teaching, administration, research, service, evaluation, etc.—as our positionality and intersectionality shape how we see the world, live in the world, experience the world, and respond to the world. We devote this special issue to topics of academic work, positionality, and intersectionality because these conversations among all academics—graduate students, non-tenure-track, tenure-track, and administrators—are critical to a well-lived and well-worked life.

Our special issue focuses on the crossroads where academic labor, positionality, intersectionality, and social justice meet. Social justice is an integral part of this conversation because, as Sarah R. Gordon, Precious Elmore-Sanders, and Delton R. Gordon write, “Social justice is the attempt to answer the question ‘How can we contribute to the creation of a more equitable, respectful, and just society for everyone?’” (69). A conversation about identity and experience without social justice is an empty conversation. We cannot dive deeply into examining how our intersectionality and positionality affect our academic labor (and vice-versa) without taking a hard look at whether our academic labor fosters equity, respect, and justice in the workplace. Additionally, many academic conversations about social justice focus on the outward, such as students and their needs. However, before we can enact social justice in our classrooms, in our committees, in our hiring practices, and in our initiatives, we need to enact social justice in our own lives by examining our own equitable working conditions, workplace boundaries, mindfulness strategies, and self-care. We cannot care for others if we do not care for ourselves first. In order to further these conversations, our special issue highlights the ways academics across the disciplines have navigated these crossroads.

We see one prominent ideology—the neoliberalization of the university—implicitly informing our contributors' research and experiences shared within this special issue. While our contributors have not explicitly engaged with neoliberalism, we believe we would be remiss by not drawing our readers' attention to how neoliberalism affects our special issue topics. Neoliberalism is a critical part of this conversation because it affects how academics use and acknowledge their positionality and intersectionality within their academic labor and academic lives (see Sekile M. Nzinga; Abby Palko, Sonalini Sapra, and Jamie Wagman). The neoliberal university, which “relies on the idealization and needs of faculty members as entrepreneurial workers,” systematizes the university to the extent that managerial processes, economic priorities, and emotional disembodiment are prized and prioritized above all else (Vazquez and Levin). A significant cost of the neoliberal university model is the professional “fragmentation” of faculty caused by neoliberal values that “den[y] the roles that personal histories or professional goals play in how

faculty members experience their work and their academic identities” (Vazquez and Levin).

As full-time and stable academic positions dwindle, as academic labor demands increase, as burnout becomes a daily reality for many, and as higher institutions become more systematized, it is critical that academics not shy away from conversations about neoliberalism but face head-on how discourse about academic labor cannot be separated from neoliberalism, positionality, intersectionality, and social justice (see Bryan Alexander; W. Carson Byrd, Rachele J. Brunn-Bevel, and Sarah M. Ovink). As Adrianna Kezar, Tom DePaola, and Daniel T. Scott assert in *The Gig Economy: Mapping Labor in the Neoliberal University*, “[T]he higher education enterprise, at its core, is a relational and people-driven enterprise and that the exploitation of the people that support and maintain the enterprise is not sustainable or ethical” (3). Academia’s neoliberal model forces us to deny the relational and human-driven side of academia; it forces us to deny our positionality and intersectionality for the institution’s greater good. However, we are humans and not robots. And hope is not completely lost. We can create lasting change in our own lives and the lives of other academics when we first slow down and reflect upon how our positionality and intersectionality affects our work and our workplace (see Bryan E. Robinson).

The contributors in this special issue are non-tenure-track faculty, tenure-track faculty, graduate students, and faculty who have left academia. As we have come to know them through email conversations and article drafts, it is clear they are committed to honoring their positionality and intersectionality while also working towards social justice either in their own lives or in the lives of others, in their administrative roles, in their classroom teaching, in their collaborations across departments, in their scholarship and research, and in their communities. We understand each person’s positionality and intersectionality is nuanced and dynamic, so this special issue is not a one-size-fits-all approach to how one might grapple with positionality, intersectionality, academic labor, and social justice. But we do hope *ALRA* readers will be inspired by our contributors’ stories and may be able to apply or adapt our contributors’ recommendations in their own lives and academic work.

For ease of reading, we have organized our special issue into the following sections:

1. **Definitions and Editors’ Positionalities.** In this section, we define positionality and intersectionality through a brief overview of the salient scholarship. We also offer our own positionalities and how they shape our exigencies for this special issue.
2. **Acknowledgement of the Pandemic and Dire Social Context.** In this section, we discuss how the 2020 context, specifically the Covid-19 pandemic and systemic oppression reform, shaped the

issue. We invited contributors to write statements about their experiences navigating 2020, and we offer two statements to readers: Elizabethada Wright and Asmita Ghimire’s statement “As the United States” and Beth Greene’s statement “GTAs in the Time of Covid-19.”

3. **Article Overviews.** In this section, we summarize our contributors’ chapters and highlight their salient arguments.
4. **The Importance of Metacognition and Mindfulness: Discussion Questions and Reading List.** In this final section, we offer possible reflection questions and a reading list for *ALRA* readers. We hope readers come away from this special issue feeling supported and moved to examine their own nuanced and complex identities in relation to their academic work and social justice efforts.

Finally, we must mention mindfulness and self-care. Creating change in our lives and in our institutions is not possible without attuning to ourselves and our needs first. Drawing from the mindfulness and self-care scholarship of Kye Askins and Matej Blazek, Kirsten Isgro and Mari Castañeda, Akemi Nishida and others, we call *ALRA* readers to come back to themselves and their bodies, to ground themselves in their identities and experiences, to turn their social justice work inward first and outward second, and to be inspired to challenge the methods and processes within higher education that no longer serves us, our colleagues, and our students. As you read this special issue, we hope you will:

- Be inspired to take something from each chapter that you might try in your personal life or home institution to create change.
- Contemplate how to create sustainable structures and work practices.
- Move beyond self-care emergency maintenance to sustainable and equitable living that is grounded in internal and external social justice.

### **Definitions and Editors’ Positionalities**

Before we continue with our introduction, we want to define our terms and explain how intersectionality and positionality show up in our special issue. When we solicited our call for papers in 2019, we asked contributors to write about how their intersectionality and/or positionality impacted, affected, or shaped their academic labor and social justice work. We wanted to create a space for contributors to engage with their intersectionality and/or positionality as a way to destigmatize the complex identities our contributors carry with them in their academic labor. We envisioned our special issue as a space where academics could name and claim their intersectionalities and positionalities. As well, we imagined our special issue as a space where our contributors provide specific calls to

action and recommendations. Change cannot happen without concrete action plans or recommendations for moving forward.

### *Defining Intersectionality*

We adopt Columbia law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw's definition of "intersectionality." Crenshaw first coined the term in her 1989 paper "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics" presented at the University of Chicago Legal Forum. In her paper, Crenshaw argues that a "single-axis analysis" applied in antidiscrimination law, feminist theory, and antiracist politics oversimplifies and "distorts" the "multidimensionality of Black women's experience.... Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" ("Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" 139-140). While Crenshaw's paper was specifically critiquing and analyzing how Black women were treated in antidiscrimination law, her term has wide application as many *ALRA* readers know. Reflecting on the application of "intersectionality" two decades later in a 2019 Columbia Law School interview, Crenshaw summarizes intersectionality as "a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. Many times that [single-axis] framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things" ("Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality").

### *Defining Positionality*

In 1988, Linda Alcott developed the concept of positionality in her article "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory." She defines positionality through a feminist lens to show how women have been positioned and defined. Alcott writes, "I assert that the very subjectivity (or subjective experience of being a woman) and the very identity of women is constituted by women's position" (434). Alcott furthers that "the concept of woman as positionality ... shows how women use their positional perspective as a place from which values are interpreted and constructed rather than as a locus of an already determined set of values.... the concept of positionality allows for a determinate though fluid identity of woman that does not fall into essentialism" (434-435). In 1993, Frances A. Maher and Mary Kay Tetreault expanded Alcott's definition of positionality: "gender, race, class, and other aspects of our identities are markers of relational *positions* rather than essential qualities" (118). The concept of positionality provides important contextual information about a person or group. Maher and Tetreault write that positionality "includes an acknowledgement of the knower's specific position in any context, because changing contextual

and relational factors are crucial for defining identities and our knowledge in any given situation” (118). Nearly two decades later in 2010, Mitsunori Misawa succinctly explained that positionality “greatly influences the differences in what individuals have access to in society...whether we want it or not, all parts of our identities are shaped by socially constructed positions and memberships to which we belong” (26).

Our contributors draw from positionality and intersectionality scholarship in a variety of ways: through their literature reviews, through their own positionality statements, through their self-reflections, through their analysis, and through their recommendations. We encouraged contributors to apply the theories in ways that best fit the stories they were trying to tell and the research they were disseminating. We also want to acknowledge our own positionalities and motivations in putting together this special issue.

### *Genesea's Positionality*

I asked Rickie-Ann to co-edit a special issue of *ALRA* while we were sitting in The Stanley Hotel in Estes Park, Colorado, which inspired Stephen King's *The Shining*. Rickie-Ann was in Denver for a conference, and I whisked her away to Rocky Mountain National Park to see the elk and to visit The Stanley. Sitting in the bar we drank specialty cocktails while musing about our teaching, our research, and how our positionalities and intersectionalities shaped both.

You see, I was homeschooled from kindergarten through twelfth grade in a white, conservative, evangelical part of California. Everyone read James Dobson. Christianity was synonymous with Republicanism. The Quiverfull movement was popular. Christian bands like dc Talk and Audio Adrenaline were all the rage. This upbringing, in many ways, crippled my understanding of self, as a white cisgender kid and teenager who longed to be an academic. I was not taught about my white identity, I was not taught about systematic oppression, I was not taught about white fragility, I was not taught how to transition from homeschooling to academia, I was not taught how to be a successful student, I was not taught how to build friendships/mentorships with classmates and professors. Despite my best efforts to adapt and integrate, the non-homeschooling world was unfamiliar and difficult. I regularly felt like an outsider who did not understand the rhetorical situations happening around me.

During my master's program, I started socially and politically leaning left. With every class, I leaned a little more left. By the middle of my doctorate program I was in a full-blown identity crisis: I did not know what I believed, I did not know if God existed, I did not know if Jesus brought salvation, and I did not know what to do with my whiteness. But I could not talk to anyone about my spiritual and identity upheaval—not my parents, not my best friend, not my boyfriend, not my professors, not my classmates. In getting to know Rickie-Ann after she joined the faculty at University of Wisconsin-Stout, where I was an assistant professor, I



realized there was much I could learn about diversity, inclusion, and women's and gender studies from her. It is not an overstatement to say she helped me process my upbringing and reconsider my politics.

By 2017, when I left UW-Stout for my position at Colorado State University, I was ready to dive head-first into every campus diversity and inclusion training I could attend. I was introduced to the University of Michigan's Program on Intergroup Relations and concepts of dialogue across difference. I learned how my whiteness affects my ways of being and my ways of seeing the world. I learned to reflect on my internal racism. I learned to confront and process hard truths about my upbringing. The journey has been incredibly painful but essential. The old ways of being and believing no longer work for me.

After seven years of painful self-examination, while sitting next to Rickie-Ann in The Stanley bar, I realized this special issue was necessary. We academics need to have more conversations about how positionality, intersectionality, academic labor, and social justice affect all facets of our lives, including how they intersect with latent effects of our upbringing and our sense of who we have been and who we want to be. I hope editors and publishers continue to create space for these often difficult and risky conversations.

#### *Rickie-Ann's Positionality*

I'm a white cisgender bisexual woman who was born in Flint, Michigan. I have a middle-class background and was raised in a diverse environment where I learned to value community service, collaborative work, and education. While I'm now open about my sexuality, that wasn't always the case. Despite my liberal and private school education, sexual education was lacking both at school and at home. In the days when the internet was still new, I didn't even know what terminology I was seeking to encapsulate my identity, nor did I understand that what I was feeling was okay. My Catholic high school and undergrad taught me that it would be easier to deny the less mainstream parts of myself, and I continued to do this throughout my graduate school career, even when I was in seemingly inclusive environments.

It wasn't until I came to work for UW-Stout that I felt compelled to share my identities more publicly. I found support in colleagues like Genesee whose personal mentorship made me feel comfortable enough to be open, and I found that my students appreciated these moments of honest disclosure, and that it made them more comfortable with exploring their own personal connections to the content we analyzed together in literature, composition, and women's, gender, and sexuality courses. While my openness helps me connect with my students, it does make me feel uncomfortably vulnerable and unsafe with many of my colleagues with whom I do not have personal relationships. This is true regarding my sexuality, my position as a survivor, and with my depression and anxiety. I have faced prying and personal questions, biased assumptions, and

countless microaggressions from those whose education supposedly means that they are informed and progressive. This complicates committee work, departmental and college meetings, and other opportunities for collaboration.

My identity is tied to helping others—specifically helping students come to understand their own positionality and role in their communities and in the world. I am increasingly frustrated with academia at large, as my ever-growing obligations take away from my ability to aid my students on their journeys of self-discovery. While I have been fortunate enough to secure a tenure-track position in an English department that also houses the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies minor that I advise, my workload involves 4/4 teaching; extensive equity, diversity, and inclusion-related service; and research obligations that are not sustainable. Moreover, I am approaching tenure at a time when universities continue to function as neoliberal patriarchal white supremacist systems. However, I remain invested in learning about identity, how we become the people we are, how we can grow, and how we perceive and can empathize and understand other identities and perspectives. I want to foster understanding so that my students can develop and contribute to our world as global citizens. These competing ideas often cause a lot of stress and distress about my employment and my continued ability to serve myself and my community. As emotional labor is a major component of my service, teaching, and research, I find myself on the brink of burnout.

This issue is significant to my own journey of finding balance, determining if and how I can help in dismantling white supremacist misogynistic capitalistic systems while building institutions based on equity and inclusion, and learning how to best serve my values in my interactions with my colleagues and students. I would not be on this journey without the support of generous friends such as Genesee, and I am grateful that she invited me to collaborate on such a meaningful project.

### **Acknowledgement of the Pandemic and Dire Social Context**

While acknowledging our positionalities is vital to framing our work on this special issue, we also want to recognize that this issue was written in the midst of an unprecedented and tumultuous year: 2020. We have experienced a global pandemic, global protest movements against police brutality and systematic oppression, global disasters due to climate change, and a tumultuous presidential election in the U.S. Despite 2020 upending our lives in many ways, there is a weirdly kairotic moment to the special issue work of our contributors, peer reviewers, and editors also happening in 2020. The global events of 2020 force us to confront more deeply how our personal and professional lives, identities, advocacy efforts, self-care, religious and spiritual beliefs, lived experiences, education, background, race, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, etc., impact us—and academics everywhere—on a daily basis.

The events of 2020 have forced many of us to ask probing questions about our own lives, the work we do, the courses we teach, the pedagogies we adopt, the ways we interact with colleagues and students, the reading lists we assign, the expectations we manage in our academic roles, and many more. At the core, we see a few key questions arising from our contributors' articles as well as 2020-specific academic discourse emerging about who we are, who we want to be, and where work and identity fits into it all:

1. What are my values, and how can I be aligned with them?
2. What informs and shapes my values, and how can my values best serve myself, my colleagues, my students, and my community?
3. How might I be more inclusive and equitable in my everyday work and interactions with others?
4. How can my values aid me in creating more inclusive spaces that take into account intersectionality and positionality?
5. How might I pivot or adapt my academic work so that my values are aligned with the work that I do?
6. Who else on campus (offices, organizations, committees, faculty, etc.) shares my values and can work alongside me to increase collaboration and support?

As you read this special issue, we invite you to ask these questions of yourself, too. You might consider using them as personal journal prompts, in your annual evaluation reflections, and in committee discussions. The more time we spend reflecting on our values and how they (should) inform our decisions, the more conscious we will be about how our academic identities align with our personal identities.

Additionally, we did not want to ignore the context in which our contributors were writing and we were completing our editorial responsibilities. We have all been affected by Covid-19, the protest and reform movements emerging in the wake of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, David McAtee, and Rayshard Brooks' murders (and the continued police brutality and murders of BIPOC before and since the summer of 2020), the U.S. presidential election, and the national fallout of the election results. Given the strain and grief of 2020, we wanted to create a space in the special issue to make our contributors' emotional and mental labor visible. We invited contributors to address 2020 by writing a 300-500 word open-genre statement to name and claim their experiences, commitments, and/or challenges as they tried to balance their academic labor, positionalities and intersectionalities, and social justice efforts. We share with you two statements. The first is by Dr. Elizabethada Wright and Asmita Ghimire titled "As the United States." The second statement is by Beth Greene titled "GTAs in the Time of Covid-19." We invite you to lean into their statements as exhortations and calls to action for all academic faculty. You might consider using their statements for your own personal

journaling, in graduate class conversations, and in committee meeting discussions.

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### **As the United States**

Elizabethada A. Wright, professor at University of Minnesota Duluth  
Asmita Ghimire, Ph.D. student in Rhetoric and Composition at The  
University of Texas El Paso

In the wake of George Floyd's murder as well as the disproportionate number of COVID deaths and infections among minority populations, the United States has been focusing on the systemic problems within this country's police departments and health care systems, but too little focus has been on systemic problems within this country's system of higher education.

This special issue highlights some of the many ways higher education victimizes academic labor, but there are far more ways the university promotes institutional racism. An example of the attitude entrenched in much of higher education can be seen in Tomas Hudlicky's now infamous publication in *Angewandte Chemie* declaring what is wrong with his field. Among other things, Hudlicky bemoans that encouragement of diversity in his discipline promotes mediocrity. Though many have rushed to condemn Hudlicky, few universities take concrete action to address attitudes such as his.

For example, at the University of Minnesota (UM) EOAA complaints led to findings that some departments exhibit undeniable systemic hostility toward women and minorities, but UM claims it cannot do anything beyond metaphorical slaps on the hand. Similarly, following the murder of Floyd in its state, UM made clear it supported BLM, but a year earlier its Board of Regents rejected attempts by people to rename buildings named after individuals with demonstrated racist histories.

Just as UM announces its support of BLM but does not demonstrate this support through action, it states its support for employees, but then cares little about their welfare when finances come into play. For example, at the UM, the economic exigences following the COVID crisis put untenured faculty in the unenviable position of signing contracts allowing UM to withdraw them if enrollment does not reach UM's prescribed levels. Such an offer may leave some qualified individuals without an income within an industry that hires infrequently. Additionally, it leaves these faculty with potential medical bills to be paid since their summer health insurance would be revoked with the offer.

So what are the solutions? We don't have sufficient space to address all here, but there are potential solutions which address the intersections of finances, talent, and ethics.

Certainly, institutions need talent and money to operate, and often the ethical appeal of equal opportunity may seem a luxury with these requirements. Yet considering how many contingent faculty with

advanced degrees work for poverty level incomes, the assumption that people with talent need such high salaries seems faulty. This assumption is relevant to discussions of systemic racism when considering the fact that members of minority groups are overrepresented among contingent faculty and underrepresented in higher education's administration.

We are not suggesting, however, that everyone receive poverty level salaries, but that pay be more equitably distributed—and that we need to consider how higher education is financed. Too many decisions are made because of financial dictates. Higher education needs to find models other than its current neo-capitalist ones to create a structure that rids us of systemic racism.

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### **GTAs in the Time of COVID-19**

Beth Greene, Ph.D. candidate in the Communication, Rhetoric, and Digital Media program at North Carolina State University.

Some scholars believe that contingent faculty, including GTAs, are detrimental to students, especially traditional students in their first year of undergraduate education, the students GTAs come into contact with the most (see Jaeger and Eagan “Examining Retention and Contingent Faculty Use in a State System of Public Higher Education” for an example of such a study; see Johnson “Contingent Instructors and Student Outcomes: An Artifact or a Fact?” for a discussion of methodological flaws in such research). I think this unprecedented time has shown that part-time faculty and GTAs are just as willing—if not more so—to go above and beyond for their students as any other teacher. I've seen this willingness in my peers and in the GTAs I mentor through my position as the Graduate Assistant Director of First-Year Writing. According to Eric P. Bettinger et al. in “When Inputs are Outputs: The Case of Graduate Student Instructors,” undergraduate students tend to experience positive effects from taking courses with GTAs—who are typically well-acclimated to campus culture since they are students themselves—while GTAs can also gain much from the experiences offered by our assistantships. In their study, the authors found that undergraduates who take classes taught by GTAs are more likely to major in that subject and that GTAs “are more likely to complete their doctoral degree in a timely manner and more likely to be employed subsequently by a college or university” (64). This not only shows a reciprocal/symbiotic relationship between GTAs and our undergraduate students, it also refutes the idea of scholars like Jaeger and Eagan that GTAs as contingent faculty members negatively impact first-year students.

This positive impact is especially important to note during this pandemic as many of our administrators have placed faculty members and students at risk for the sake of what has been called “the first-year experience” while knowing that no matter what we do, no matter how hard

we try to make things business-as-usual, students entering college for the first time in the 2020-2021 academic year will have an experience unlike any other. The same can be said for first-year graduate students and GTAs teaching for the first time, a stressful experience made more so by the constant changes involved in trying to hold classes with face-to-face elements.

What I am most proud of when it comes to my cohort friends and the wonderful GTAs I'm honored to mentor is how they're so focused on ensuring that their students are okay, that they feel safe in their zoomspheres, that they're doing everything they possibly can to make this time in college as painless and easy as possible. My fellow GTAs are trying to be the best teachers they can be while also trying to be the best students they can be. It hasn't been easy for any of us, but that level of dedication and care is so admirable.

### **Article Overviews**

*ALRA* is an open-genre journal, and in this special issue we share with readers several genres, ranging from the lyric essay to the traditional research article, that powerfully capture academics' research, teaching, and personal experiences. These chapters capture varying experiences, positionalities, and intersectionalities, in ways that are sometimes explicit or implicit.

The labor of composing, revising, and editing these chapters was completed during a time of global and personal distress. This, combined with the intimate nature of these essays, means that an incredible amount of emotional and academic labor went into this issue. We cannot stress enough how much we value the work of our contributors, peer reviewers, and editors in making this issue come to life so that we might have a larger conversation about the academy, positionality, intersectionality, and labor. Moreover, these chapters speak to each other, and we are impressed with both the diversity and unity that we find in this issue. We also value that each of our contributors shared not only their experiences but also looked forward, offering calls to action and/or practical next steps and solutions.

In "Surviving Communicative Labor: Theoretical Exploration of the (In)Visibility of Gendered Faculty Work/Life Struggle," Angela N. Gist-Mackey, Adrienne Kunkel, and Jennifer A. Guthrie introduce the concept of "communicative labor" to better explain "how communication (i.e., literally listening, speaking, writing, etc.) becomes emotionally-laden work amid research, teaching, and service in ways that threaten healthy work/life norms," particularly for women. Their scholarly examination of communicative labor is reinforced with compelling personal narratives, and they conclude by offering practical next steps and calls to action to ensure more equitable hiring, compensation, and evaluative processes that make all types of labor valued and visible.

Beth Greene moves into exploring the unique role that graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) serve in academia as both students and faculty,

and the difficulties that come with trying to navigate these sometimes disparate roles, especially when also trying to manage the marginality that comes with disability. In “Studenting and Teaching with Chronic Pain: Accessibility at the Intersection of Contingency and Disability,” Greene introduces the concept of “transparent vulnerability” to “confront issues of accessibility faced by GTAs, particularly those with disabilities, and what we as an academic community can do to improve the situation” as she offers guidance for more open discussions of disability in order to create more accessible and inclusive environments.

In her personal investigation of positionality, Peggy Johnson ruminates on the marginalization she experienced “at a workplace dominated by a strongly established white male hierarchical power structure with deep religious overtones.” In “Through a Glass, Darkly: The Hidden Injury of Ageism in the Academy,” Johnson uses a mixed genre lyric essay form in order to help readers better process their own experiences with and of marginalization. Johnson additionally offers next steps towards more equitable and inclusive practices that aim to combat ageism and other acts of discrimination.

In their examination of the biases they’ve experienced as Non-Native English Speaking Teachers (NNEST) working in the field of rhetoric and composition, Elizabethada A. Wright and Asmita Ghimire argue that NNEST “are ideally positioned to advantage the first-year composition class by incorporating their multidimensional perspectives to help first-year students respond to rhetorical situations.” In “FYC’s Unrealized NNEST Egg: Why Non-Native English Speaking Teachers belong in the First-Year Composition Classroom,” they analyze multilingual pedagogical practices as well as threshold concepts, positing that while composition studies have evolved to value multiple “Englishes” in student writing, the field must also progress to valuing what NNEST teachers have to offer students. As such, the editors of this journal have opted to engage the CCCC’s “Statement on Second Language Writing and Multilingual Writers” and “recognize and support multilingual writers’ practices of integrating their unique linguistic and cultural resources into writing” by preserving the unique linguistic expressions that strengthen this piece.

Moving abroad, Anuj Gupta considers how a student’s trauma expressed in a literacy narrative assignment disrupted his own positionality and led to “strong convictions about the need to reposition academic writing and labor in Indian universities in a manner that sees the epistemic value of emotions in academic writing and the ethical value of care-work in academia as essential ingredients required to create a socially just world.” In “Emotions in Academic Writing/ Care-work in Academia: Notes Towards a Repositioning of Academic Labour in India (& Beyond),” Gupta offers deep personal reflection and a call to action to empower marginalized students by ultimately challenging the power structures and hierarchies that perpetuate this trauma.

In “We Could Convert the Lines, But Not The People: A Postmortem on Changing Working Conditions in a Writing Program,” Jamie White-Farnham critically analyzes her positionality and expounds on her seemingly successful work as a writing program administrator (WPA) in converting “part-time adjunct positions to full-time lecturer positions on my small branch campus of a state university.” Her personal and theoretical analysis shows how structural success may not lead to improved morale if the desires of those laboring in the impacted roles are not considered, and she warns against making shared value assumptions, especially in academic hierarchies.

Further examining the positionality of administrators (specifically WPAs) and their relationships with part-time faculty, Melvin E. Beavers posits that mindfulness can help administrators see themselves as agents of change and justice, advocating for and supporting contingent faculty—faculty whose positionalities and intersectional identities must be considered, and who ultimately must be empowered to reject that very advocacy if it does not serve their needs or desires. “Administrative Rhetorical Mindfulness: A Professional Development Framework for Administrators in Higher Education” breaks down a professional development program utilized in the spring of 2020 that was enacted with the ARM framework and is grounded in detailed doctoral research and personal experience.

Expanding our discussion of contingency and positionality, Sarah Bartlett Wilson and C. Veronica Smith assert in “Contingent Faculty Performing Scholarship and Service: Examining Academic Labor and Identity at a Public Flagship University,” the importance of acknowledging the positionality of NTTF, especially in regard to their unacknowledged or unvalued labor, and the dissonance between the enjoyment found in the classroom and their marginalized positions within the university. Their study is grounded in both theory and personal experience, and it aims to “to provide important local data that can inform our more global conversations around contingent faculty labor and their often-overlooked contributions to scholarship and service.”

Each of these pieces offers scholarly and personally driven examinations of positionality, intersectionality, and labor that we hope sparks reflection, conversation, and, ultimately, action to promote more equitable, inclusive, and inspiring academic environments.

### **The Importance of Metacognition and Mindfulness: Reflection Questions and Reading List**

In this final section, we want to again draw attention to our humanness: as much as this collection is scholarly and theory-based, we do not want to ignore that we are humans first and scholars second (see David Mills and Mette Louise Berg; Esther O. Ohito). Too often academic conversations, conferences, collections, issues, and articles ignore our human needs and personal identities and focus on our academic roles as if “academic,”



“teacher,” “scholar,” “researcher,” “administrator,” “non-tenure-track,” “tenure-track,” “graduate student,” etc., are the only identity(ies) we hold.

With a mindful eye to the cognitive and emotional labor of academic work, we offer reflection questions and a curated reading list to support *ALRA* readers in their own personal and professional work. Reflection and reading are both exercises in metacognition. Metacognition is the act of purposefully and meaningfully thinking about thinking. Engaging in metacognition on a regular basis is critical to changing behavior as it disrupts automatic actions and ingrained beliefs that have become commonplace from repeated action (Gollwitzer and Schaal 125). As Dilwar Hussain explains, “A person can regulate cognitions only when he/she has categorized knowledge about cognition” (133). Metacognition asks us to slow down, process, and move forward with new understanding.

We encourage readers to use the following questions and reading list to reflect upon automatic actions, such as not setting workplace boundaries or suppressing emotions around identity. Readers might consider using the following questions and reading list for a faculty reading group, a professional development workshop, or to spur conversations among faculty, administrators, graduate students, friends, and family.

### **Reflection Questions**

- How does your positionality and/or intersectionality influence and affect your work?
- How does the positionality and/or intersectionality of your colleagues influence and affect their professional lives and lived experiences?
- What are the driving neoliberal values creating personal and professional fragmentation in your own life?
- How do your identities and/or positionalities make you more inclined to take on additional work that exceeds the work of your colleagues or goes beyond your job description?
- How might you make visible the invisible labor of your work?
- How do your social and political identities create discrimination and/or power?
- What boundaries do you need to set in your teaching, research, and administrative work that honor your positionalities and/or intersectionalities?
- How might you need to communicate more clearly to your students and colleagues how your positionalities and/or intersectionalities inform or affect your teaching, research, and administrative work?
- How do you balance the labor of social justice with sustainable self-care practices?
- What might a sustainable, inclusive, and equitable university look like at all levels?

- What might you do to create more sustainable and equitable models in your program, departments, colleges, etc.?
- How do you align your values and the tenets of social justice with your everyday labor? And how might you use that alignment to shift the goals of your program or department?

### Curated Reading List

- Abby Palko, Sonalini Sapra, and Jamie Wagman's *Feminist Responses to the Neoliberalization of the University: From Surviving to Thriving*
- Anne Helen Petersen's *Can't Even: How Millennials Became the Burnout Generation*
- Bill Burnett and Dave Evans' *Designing Your Work Life: How to Thrive and Change and Find Happiness at Work*
- Connie Burk and Laura van Dernoot Lipsky's *Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others*
- Damon Zahariades' *The Art of Saying No: How to Stand Your Ground, Reclaim Your Time and Energy, and Refuse to Be Taken for Granted (Without Feeling Guilty!)*
- Elizabeth Flynn and Tiffany Bourelle's *Women's Professional Lives in Rhetoric and Composition*
- Ellen C. Maycock and Domnica Radulescu's *Feminist Activism in Academia: Essays on Personal, Political and Professional Change*
- Emily Nagoski and Amelia Nagoski's *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle*
- Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs, Yolanda Flores Niemann, Carmen G. Gonzalez, and Angela P. Harris' *The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia*
- Gaëtane Jean-Marie, Cosette M. Grant, and Beverly Irby's *The Duality of Women Scholars of Color: Transforming and Being Transformed in the Academy*
- Jennifer J. Edwards and Ndidi Amutah-Onukagha's *The Black Woman's Guide to Advancing in Academia*
- Khara Croswaite Brindle's *Perfectioneur From Workaholic to Well-Balanced: One Therapist's Guide to Get You There*
- Kimberlé Crenshaw's *On Intersectionality: Essential Writings*
- Kirsti Cole and Holly Hassel's *Surviving Sexism in Academia: Strategies for Feminist Leadership*
- la paperson's *A Third University is Possible: Uncovering the Decolonizing Ghost in the Colonizing Machine*
- Maggie Berg and Barbara Seeber's *The Slow Professor*
- Margaret Price's *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life*

- Narelle Lemon and Sharon McDonough's *Mindfulness in the Academy: Practices and Perspectives from Scholars*
- Patricia A. Matthew's *Written/Unwritten: Diversity and the Hidden Truths of Tenure*
- Robert Sutton's *The No Asshole Rule* and *The Asshole Survival Guide*
- Roxane Gay's *Difficult Women* and *How to Be Heard*
- Sue Jackson's *Differently Academic?: Developing Lifelong Learning for Women in Higher Education*
- William B. Rouse's *Universities as Complex Enterprises: How Academia Works, Why It Works These Ways, and Where the University Enterprise Is Headed*

We recognize our discussion questions and reading list are far from exhaustive, but combined with the resources provided in each chapter, we hope they help readers on their own journeys of understanding, growth, advocacy, and balance.

### **Conclusion and Acknowledgements**

We cannot affect lasting change in the academic workspace, in our personal lives, and in our communities if we do not look deeply at how our intersectionality, positionality, and social justice efforts affect and are shaped by our academic position and work. We see a real need to have more conversations across academia—in scholarly publications, in committees, in standing groups, in departments, in colleges, and in and across institutions—about how our lives, work, and social justice efforts are shaped by our intersectionalities and positionalities. We sincerely hope our special issue will extend conversations in your department, college, university, social circles, conference panels, committees, and elsewhere.

A heartfelt thanks to our contributors who had the momentous task of writing and revising their chapters in 2020. Without their commitment to this project, this special issue would not have happened. We also profusely thank Brian Cope, Doug Cloud, and Leni Marshall for their thoughtful feedback and last-minute calls for help. Finally, we thank Sue Doe, Sarah Austin, Mary Hickey, Catherine Ratliff and the entire team of *Academic Labor: Research and Artistry*. They supported and encouraged this project from day one, for which we are grateful.

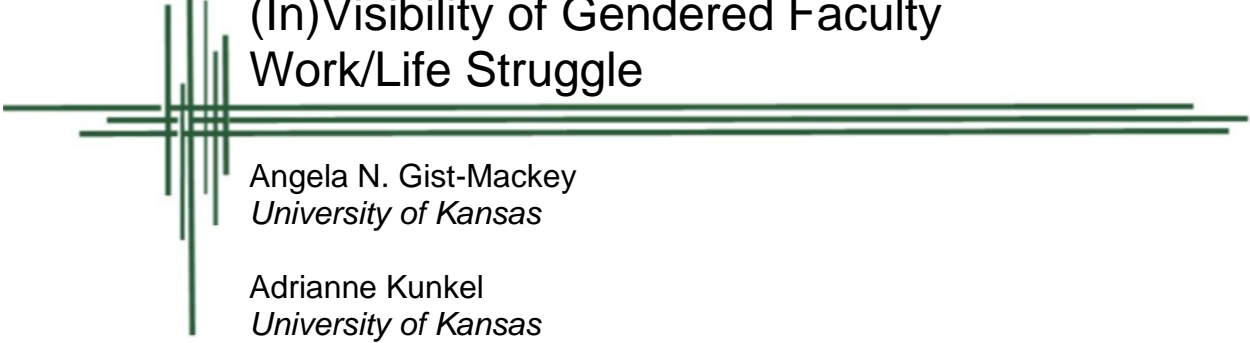
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# Surviving Communicative Labor: A Theoretical Exploration of the (In)Visibility of Gendered Faculty Work/Life Struggle



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### Abstract

The work experiences of faculty in higher education often entail being overworked and stressed, and this is particularly true for women faculty and faculty of color. This essay is situated at the intersection of gender, race, axiological, epistemological, and occupational identities. In this metatheoretical argument, we propose a new concept *communicative labor* by exploring how existing scholarly frameworks regarding workplace emotion, compassionate communication, and gendered work intersect to inform the experiences of critical women scholars and the ways their labor is communicatively manifested across research, teaching, and service. More specifically, we argue that communication itself (i.e., literally listening, speaking, and writing) becomes emotionally-laden work amid the research, teaching, and service performed by critical women scholars. We aim, through our articulation of communication labor, to disrupt dominant narratives of what faculty work lives *should* be, and we call for a paradigm shift in the way faculty labor is socially constructed so that we can improve critical women faculty's success and well-being.

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**F**aculty work lives in higher education are often filled with experiences of being overcommitted, overextended, and stressed (Mullainathan and Shafir 1). In fact, scholars have explored scarcity of time in faculty life and how being overcommitted, overextended, and stressed becomes the “new normal,” producing harmful outcomes related to work satisfaction, decision making, and well-being (Mullainathan and Shafir 2). Unfortunately, the time-consuming work done by faculty in institutions of higher education is inequitably distributed and some, namely women faculty and faculty of color, are systematically overburdened, inhibiting their success and well-being (Portillo; Shuler 278).

We aim to explore how existing scholarly frameworks (i.e., workplace emotion, compassionate communication, and gendered work) intersect to better explain the experiences of critical women scholars, and how their labor is communicatively manifested across research, teaching, and service. We propose a new concept of “communicative labor” to better explain how critical women scholars who participate in a combination of engaged scholarship and critical pedagogy negotiate social interaction in their work lives. Specifically, we articulate how communication (i.e., literally listening, speaking, writing, etc.) becomes emotionally-laden work amid research, teaching, and service in ways that threaten healthy work/life norms. Personal narratives have been incorporated throughout the article as vignettes to illustrate our collective experiences with

communicative labor. This metatheoretical argument begins with a series of personal narratives explaining how we feel about our work, followed by an overview of scholarly frameworks for workplace emotion and compassionate communication. Next, we review gendered work/life experiences using personal narrative and propose a notion of communicative labor applying it to three domains of faculty work: research, teaching, and service. Finally, we address theoretical and practical implications of this work.

### **Intersectional Positionality**

This essay emerged out of a series of conversations between the authors that revealed common experiences with work. In the spirit of transparency, we share our positionalities. We are women faculty who have worked in research-intensive public universities. We represent various points along the academic labor hierarchy in regard to faculty life. Angela Gist-Mackey is a tenure-track assistant professor. Jennifer Guthrie is a former tenured associate professor who is no longer working in academia. Adrienne Kunkel is a tenured, full professor. We are all critical, qualitative scholars conducting engaged scholarship in our respective local, home, and academic communities. Angela identifies with a historically marginalized racial identity and Adrienne and Jennifer as members of the racial majority in the United States of America.

We recognize our positionality as faculty at research-intensive (R1) public universities implicates our perspectives on research, teaching, and service. It is not our intention to privilege the R1 experience, nor to marginalize two-year, private, liberal arts, community colleges, or teaching-intensive institutions, or the valuable roles of staff, adjuncts, lecturers, non-tenure-track faculty, and students. We realize that the performance of work in higher education contexts other than our own is both similar and different in many ways. As critical scholars, we own the potential for implicit biases that may emerge in our argument and invite those from the wide diversity of positions to join us in this conversation. All experiences are important, and we aim to further nuance the discussion regarding labor in higher education.

Our lived experiences throughout the promotion and tenure trajectory highlight emotional and psychological aspects of doing this work. We would like to be transparent about how we are feeling about our work.

### **Working through Workplace Emotion**

We invite you into our stories about our experiences with academic labor, as we explore the question: how do you feel about your work? We explore a range of positive, negative, and ugly emotions that are tied to our communicative labor.



*Angela Gist-Mackey*

If I am honest, I have mixed feelings ranging from despair to hope. The longer I am in this career path the more I feel the exploitation of my labor. It feels as if there will never be an end to this exploitation, especially for critical women scholars. It is even more challenging knowing how patriarchal and White our profession's structures and systems are. It feels like I am toiling to no end, but there are moments of hope. I'll share a story to illustrate one powerful moment that continues to encourage me. In 2018, I taught an undergraduate class in our organizational communication track for communication majors about workplace relationships. The curriculum I designed takes an in-depth approach to issues of diversity, identity, and equity. On the first day of class I had a student, a graduating senior, who told me publicly during his class introduction that he hated it when professors pushed their agendas on him. I did not quite know how to take that. I proceeded with the curriculum I believed in and to which I am committed. This curriculum is for upper-division students and challenges them to think critically about their own identities (privilege and marginality), as well as how their communication influences others in the organizations in which they participate. It requires students to hone a level of ethical sensitivity in regard to their organizational behavior and illustrates the need for inclusive organizations, as well as how to use culturally sensitive communication.

As a class, we grappled with issues related to gender, race, ethnicity, social class, sexuality, age, and (dis)ability. We learned about bias, prejudice, and discrimination. I remember talking with that same student after class about social class inequity, which is a topic related to my research. He had experienced class discrimination having grown up in rural America near poverty. Later that semester, this student's group project hosted an insightful panel discussion about issues of diversity in the workforce.

On the last day of class that same student, who began the class resisting the curriculum, told me he believed he changed for the better because of my class. Within the past year, I submitted a letter of recommendation for his graduate school application. He is applying to a master's program in education and teaching. There are no words for the deep sense of joy and hope I have when I am part of the change needed in the world. Now this student will touch the lives of other students, and I was a positive part of that journey.

*Adrienne Kunkel*

I love the work that I do, but I am not a fan of the intense politics and the patriarchal nature of academia. Early in my career, I did not really "see" the politics at work, despite the warnings from my father, who spent over thirty years as a professor and seventeen years as a department chair. But now, as a more advanced scholar, I find the politics to be tedious, time-consuming, disempowering, and sometimes soul crushing. With the

newfound freedom I felt post-tenure, I thought my life would become freer, with more opportunities to do what I wanted. To an extent, my expectations were correct. However, I seem to be sought out more and more by graduate students looking for an advisor. And I would say this is the case for many critical women scholars. It is an implicit piece of our job description. For the most part, I am okay with these new tasks, especially the mentoring of graduate students, which I truly love. However, that said, the advising load for critical women scholars is heavily imbalanced. We tend to do twice as much mentoring as our male colleagues, which means we have less time for our own research.

Slowly and surely, I have also come to understand that academia, much like most institutions in our society, is extremely patriarchal and White. Sadly, it seems that faculty are like cogs in the machine. No one really seems to care all that much about the work/research we are doing, as long as we are doing it and being “productive.” The people with the most power to make decisions at work and who seem to control most of the information (i.e., the administration), with some exceptions, are predominantly White men. My feminist background, and the critical focus of my research, naturally bump up against and work to disrupt academia’s patriarchal nature. Unfortunately, the harder I push, the harder I get pushed back. It is an unfortunate and frustrating cycle. The one thing that keeps me revved up and excited, though, is my teaching and the mentoring of graduate students. They are the shining lights in my career.

*Jennifer Guthrie*

I had nightmares about tenure denial. I was terrified when it was my time to go up. I knew how incredibly lucky I was to have a tenure-track job. I finally heard the news that I had been “granted tenure and promotion.” Many people gave me congratulations with the reminder, “Next is full!” I then read a post by Sh\*t Academics Say that read, “The tenure-track: A pie-eating contest where the prize is more pie.” I looked around and thought, “This is it?” With more responsibilities, I had less and less time to do the things that made me happy about the job in the first place: teaching and doing community-based research. Throw in a toxic work environment, and I was stretched way too thin. I realized I was a barely-functioning workaholic, and I wanted to *have* a life instead of my job being my life. I called my advisor and dear friend, Adrienne Kunkel, sobbing that I felt I was failing out of academia. (Thanks for the communicative labor and social support, Adrienne!) And then it dawned on me: It’s not that I can’t hack it; it’s that I don’t want to anymore.

After dedicating twelve years of my life to academia, I decided to walk away. I had to grieve leaving academia, and a dear friend who also left academia said, “Academia is one of the most abusive employers.” With my positionality and privilege, I have it incredibly easier than many other folks. I know I was lucky and privileged to have a tenure-track job. I have listened to well-meaning folks try to convince me how selfish, fool-

hearty, and ungrateful walking away might be. I told Angela and Adrienne: “With this job, I gave and gave and gave, and it was never enough, and it just made me feel like sh\*t about myself.” And with that, I knew it was a form of self-care for me to leave.

### *Summary*

Our disclosure represents the wide range of emotions we feel about our work. We will continue to explore our emotional experiences with work throughout this essay, as we have experienced authentic emotion as part of our work, the necessity to control our emotional displays for our work, and the way workplace relationships infuse our work with meaning. In order to frame our argument, we first present the terrain of workplace emotion (Miller et al. 232).

### **The Terrain of Workplace Emotion**

Work can be the source of a range of positive (i.e., Lutgen-Sandvik et al. 3) and negative (i.e., Waldron 9) feelings. The exploration of work as an emotional experience is well-documented in organizational studies (i.e., Hochschild 5; Kramer and Hess 67; Miller et al. 231; Waldron 9). In particular, there are a variety of emotions experienced in the helping professions, which include higher education faculty. We begin by reviewing the “terrain of emotion” in the workplace (Miller et al. 232) before exploring emotionally-laden communication as constitutive of the labor faculty do: research, teaching, and service. Katherine Miller et al. (232-233) identified five types of workplace emotion: (a) emotional labor (Hochschild 7), (b) emotion work, (c) emotion with work, (d) emotion at work, and (d) emotion toward work. Each type of workplace emotion is reviewed below; however, we recognize these categories are not exclusive of one another.

### *Emotional Labor*

Performances of emotional labor are frequently prescribed by management/supervisors as the way that work should be executed (Wharton 335). Emotional labor occurs when employees control displays of their emotions in inauthentic ways that benefit the organization and is achieved through two communication behaviors: surface and deep acting (Hochschild 33). Surface acting involves superficial changes in emotional displays to serve organizational objectives. It often includes “disguising what we feel” and “pretending to feel what we do not” (Hochschild 33). For instance, customer service employees are told to smile to boost customer satisfaction. In higher education, a controversial rhetoric referring to students as customers implies emotional labor is part of faculty work. Deep acting, like surface acting, commodifies emotion, but to a higher degree because it requires a sense of inner denial. When deep acting, employees persuade themselves, as well as customers, that they are feeling emotions that benefit organizations. For example, service industry

employees may convince themselves it is pleasurable to serve unreasonably difficult patrons.

#### *Emotion Work*

In contrast to the inauthenticity and prescribed nature of emotional labor, emotion work occurs when one's labor requires authentic displays of emotion (Miller et al. 234). Extant research regarding emotion work has focused on service-oriented, helping professions (i.e., healthcare, social services, education, and ministry), which often include emotionally-charged workplaces. Emotion work may be embodied in a wide range of feelings, from positive to negative (Miller et al. 235). For instance, higher education faculty may sincerely feel genuine pride for student success or sorrow for student failure.

#### *Emotion with Work*

Relationships are central to work lives (Sias 2) and are the impetus for emotion with work (Miller et al. 236). Emotion is bound to emerge as employees begin, maintain, and negotiate workplace relationships. Faculty develop relationships within and beyond a variety of bureaucratic structures, including relationships with students (undergraduate/graduate), staff, co-authors and collaborators, faculty colleagues, supervisors (i.e., department heads/chairs), and administrators (i.e., deans). When employees feel like they are respected in workplace relationships, satisfaction, happiness, and senses of dignity and belongingness are often experienced; when employees are treated poorly, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and overall well-being are threatened (Lucas 622).

#### *Emotion toward Work*

Both the joys and frustrations of careers are accounted for by emotion toward work, which is emotion targeted toward one's work or job (Miller et al. 238). Preliminary scholarship designed to study emotion toward work examined job satisfaction, while contemporary research explores stress and burnout in connection to work (Tracy 167). Workaholism is a phenomenon related to emotion toward work that has been associated with workload and anxiety (Shifron and Reysen 136). Other experiences that may prompt intense emotion toward work are role conflict, ambiguity, and person-to-job fit (Miller et al. 238). Faculty experiences of emotion toward work may accompany breakthroughs in the classroom, during research, while publishing, or with pressures to perform extra role service work.

#### *Emotion at Work*

Emotion at work encompasses emotional spillover from personal to work life, emerging when emotions borne outside the scope of work affect workplace roles, experiences, performances, and/or relationships (Miller et al. 237). Emotional responses to life events (e.g., death, marriage, and diagnoses) can motivate, distract, and produce/reduce effectiveness in, and

availability for, workplace responsibilities. All employees negotiate complex lives. For instance, the tenure-track timeline often coincides with women faculty's biological clocks. Work-life negotiation must often be managed intrapersonally and communicatively with others. Ideally, compassion is needed, called upon, and displayed in such encounters and interactions.

### **Compassionate Communication**

Individuals working in helping professions, such as academic faculty, often express and experience compassionate communication as part of employment. Acts of compassion in the workplace reside under the umbrella of emotion work, or engagement with authentic emotion as part of work (Miller et al. 235). Miller adapted a tripartite process of expressing compassion in the workplace (originally articulated by Kanov et al. 812): (a) noticing, (b) connecting, and (c) responding (223). These three processual phases connect to specific communication skills.

During the first phase, helping professionals notice a need for compassion through attentiveness (e.g., observation, asking questions). After a need is noticed, helping professionals engage in cognitive-affective processes to connect, which includes perspective-taking and emotional empathy (Stiff et al. 210). The ability to connect facilitates socially-supportive, verbal and nonverbal communication in the final phase of responding (MacGeorge et al. 317).

Miller (236) notes connecting and responding are relational in nature, concluding that helping professionals could effectively navigate the dialectic of connection and autonomy (Baxter 70) by employing "detached concern" (Miller 226). This allows helping professionals the ability to negotiate boundary work between self-care and the care of others whom they serve.

### **Gendered Work**

Historically, divisions between public and private domains of work have been heavily gendered and sex segregated (Allen 44, 51). Women have traditionally carried the load of private domestic unpaid labor, which has often been rendered invisible and socially constructed outside the domain of "real" work, albeit problematically. Even in contemporary times, women professionals shoulder disproportionate loads of domestic unpaid labor (Sandberg 110). Conversely, men have traditionally engaged in public, visible domains of paid labor. The inequity between visible and invisible labor has manifested in gender pay gaps (World Economic Forum 8), voids of female representation in leadership roles (Parker et al. 8; Rauhaus and Schuchs Carr 31), and sexist/patriarchal norms (e.g., sexual harassment, male-dominated industries) evident in society (e.g., Keyton et al. 665; Manjoo).

Organizational scholars who explore the nature of work typically identify American workplaces as implicitly gendered in masculine,

patriarchal ways (Acker 140). Despite the reality that women in many fields are obtaining educational and professional expertise in rates that surpass men, there is still a “masculinist vision” (Davies 669) of many professions (Wallace and Kay 390). This vision assumes gendered performances of work, including extensive work hours and long-term, upwardly mobile, uninterrupted careers.

*Troubling the Boundaries of (In)Visible Labor*

Critical women scholars often blur the lines between public-private labor as we work. Disruption of these boundaries occurs in two ways: (a) engaging in private invisible labor as part of our public professions and (b) violating work-life balance due to high levels of empathic emotion required for the work we do.

From one vantage point, the work critical women faculty do is public: teaching classes (e.g., sage on the stage; Singhal 7), presenting at conferences, and conducting research in the community. However, there are many private aspects of this job, such as mentoring students, conducting research interviews behind closed doors about traumatizing experiences, reading and critiquing dissertation chapters at home, and writing revisions of manuscripts in private offices.

We argue that the private aspects of faculty labor are exacerbated for critical women faculty because we are more often sought out to serve as mentors, counselors, coaches, and/or friends. The labor of critical women scholars often exceeds the professional boundaries that are explicitly articulated in institutional contracts. Institutional policy, such as employment contracts, are written in language perceived to be neutral and rational (Dougherty and Goldstein Hode 1730). However, the ontological experience of being a critical woman scholar is directed by not only who critical teacher-scholars are, but also by gendered embodiment (i.e., Ellingson 34; Martin 353). Women have been stereotyped as emotional, nurturing, and caregiving (Cuddy et al. 703; Fiske et al. 879), and such connotations are discursively constructed into occupations, despite the obvious masculine overtones of the profession.

Many critical scholars take axiological ownership of the emancipatory goals of critical traditions, which are connected to social justice efforts, both inside and outside the academy. However, such commitments lead to particular experiences of gendered faculty work in ways that are likely unbalanced, unhealthy, and disproportionate. The results of gendered faculty labor exist at the nexus of institutional inequity (both systemic and structural) and personal responsibility.

*Summary*

The work lives of critical women faculty are gendered, as women have been historically and socially constructed as emotional beings and nurturers (Cuddy et al. 703; Fiske et al. 879); the five types of workplace emotion (emotional labor, emotion work, emotion with work, emotion at

work, and emotion toward work) are implicated in the roles of women faculty. However, critical women scholars who promote equity are at risk for being overburdened as their workloads may be largely performed backstage in non-public settings and thus, rendered invisible. For example, we tend to be sought out frequently as academic advisors by graduate students, or when the department needs an assessment related to diversity, equity, and inclusion, it is often our voices and bodies that fill the space. Also, heightened instances of workplace emotion experienced within a continual work-life boundary struggle both call for, and result from, the provision of heightened compassionate communication. Next, we present a metatheoretical approach that connects the concepts of workplace emotion, compassionate communication, and gendered (in)visible work, proposing a new concept we have labeled communicative labor.

### **Metatheoretical Proposal: Communicative Labor**

For this metatheoretical analysis, the focus is explicitly on communication skills since we theorize about the work of faculty who primarily execute knowledge work through discourse. We contribute to a conversation about the professoriate by articulating often obscured experiences embedded in academic work. Faculty enact work by employing communicative skills such as: listening, speaking, responding, disclosing, writing, reading, and presenting. Also, communicatively professing knowledge is perceived as inherent to faculty occupations (Singhal 7). We are faculty in the discipline of communication. Our discipline engages metacommunication because *what* we teach/research, communication, is also the *way* we teach/research: by communicating (Lindlof and Taylor 172). Faculty in general are continually engaged in communicative labor.

We offer a working definition of “communicative labor” as the ongoing, interconnected tasks requiring the use of communicative and literate skill sets (i.e., listening, speaking, responding, disclosing, writing, reading, negotiating, and analyzing) to execute work in a way that is undergirded by workplace emotion (i.e., emotional labor, emotion work, emotion with work, emotion at work, and emotion toward work) and compassionate communication. The notion of communicative labor is not exclusive to academic professions generally or critical women scholars specifically. Instead, we argue that the work of communicative labor becomes greater for critical women scholars in regard to research, teaching, and service because of the emotion-laden experiences infused into these facets of these particular occupations.

The concept of communicative labor exists at the intersections of workplace emotion, compassionate communication, and gendered occupational experiences. Communicative labor accounts for the way that explicit communication skills/competencies (i.e., listening, speaking, disclosure, negotiating, writing, reading, and giving feedback) emerge holistically in our occupation in ways that require emotionality *and* rationality. Next, we address the communicative labor in relation to

research, teaching, and service. Each author has shared a personal narrative in order to illustrate the application of this concept to faculty work life.

### **Communicative Labor in Research**

In this section, we name aspects of research that are often omitted from publications. This section addresses the communicative labor inherent to research for critical women scholars. Our research includes three core components: engaged community-based scholarship, critical emancipatory approaches, and qualitative methodology. Collectively, we have partnered with unemployment agencies; workforce programs; domestic violence shelters; addiction treatment centers; non-profits; and anti-poverty organizations. The nature of our research entails heightened experiences of communicative labor because it is highly emotional, intellectually demanding, and requires extensive communicative skills. We address the communicative labor inherent to: (a) the negotiation of access to community-based sites, (b) co-designing research with community partners, (c) qualitative data collection, (d) qualitative data analysis, and (e) presentation and publication of critically-engaged scholarship. To illustrate the communicative labor inherent to engaged community-based research, a narrative vignette is shared to show what is involved for women scholars who are committed to critical epistemology and axiology.

#### *Adrienne's Personal Vignette*

In the summer of 2009, I met a new colleague, and we excitedly shared our passion for engaged community-based research to help survivors of abuse and domestic violence. We decided to collaboratively design a multiple-method longitudinal case study that would ultimately become an ethnography of a domestic violence organization.

There were several steps we took to negotiate our access to the research site. In the fall of 2009, we decided one way to demonstrate our passion, credibility, and to literally “get our feet in the door” of the organization, was to complete the 40-hour training to become volunteer advocates (step one). I found this training gripping, powerful, and moving. With each session, I could feel my advocacy wings growing.

In early spring of 2010, upon completion of our training, we drafted a formal letter to the leadership inquiring about developing a research project regarding the organization (step two). In this letter, we argued why we thought our research could benefit the organization and potentially affect positive change in the lives of domestic violence survivors. We also championed our training experiences and disclosed our previous work on gender justice and community activism. We offered to co-design our project with organizational members. In certain ways, within the letter, we felt like we were engaged in high levels of careful self-presentation. We wanted them to like us, trust us, and feel like we



were the right people to be involved with regarding research. Along with our letter, we sent in our résumés, a tentative research plan, and names of colleagues that could attest to our research experience.

Within the month, the Executive Director reached out to us, and we were able to set up a meeting. (Whew, step three completed!) With anticipation and great nervousness, we shared handouts describing the purpose and timeline of our project, as well as the possible methods we could employ in our research (of course noting that everything was negotiable given their desires/needs). In our meeting, we assured our potential research partners that: (a) all data would be kept confidential, (b) participation in different phases of the research would be voluntary, and (c) no identifying information would be used when presenting or writing our research. Additionally, we informed them we would develop a presentation of our findings for the entire staff and Executive Board overseeing the organization (which we did; it was one of the most nerve-racking experiences of my career). Further, we argued our research could potentially aid in the generation of survey and narrative data to secure future funding for the organization.

The leadership was impressed with our plan and gave us approval to move forward (step four!). From start to finish, including our training, planning, and negotiation, it took eight months to gain access, and 10 months before data collection commenced. Thus, we were successful in launching our multi-year, engaged community-based scholarship with the organization, and this ongoing research has continued to evolve with several different angles/researchers.

### *Negotiation of Access*

The rigor of conducting engaged community-based scholarship is communicatively and emotionally taxing and begins with negotiating access. Successful negotiation requires competencies in rapport-building, asserting scholarly needs (written/verbal), and listening to community partners. These processes require emotional labor and emotion work. Approaching an organizational site with either a “cold call” or a “warm lead” requires a controlled, confident display of affect to promote one’s expertise, play up institutional prestige, and persuade gatekeepers. This display of emotion can be beneficial to one’s department and institution. These displays of emotion constitute emotional labor because research complications are typically masked via emotional labor, since the goal is to gain access. Concerns are disclosed and negotiated generally after access is gained, which is a strategic and ethically complicated matter.

Emotion work is also present because sites of research are often connected to one’s critical axiological commitments, which are engaged with an ethic of care (Deetz 101). Authentic emotional disclosure is often part of the negotiation of access. Some organizational sites are skeptical of academics wanting to study vulnerable populations. This

communicative labor requires persuasion, incorporating ethos, pathos, and logos via emotion work.

In negotiation, it is critical to assert one's scholarly needs and listen to the needs of the community partner. As tenure-track/tenured scholars, we are up front with our need to publish in order to sustain our careers, which are tied to the inherently exploitative nature of research. Disclosing this reality requires communicative labor through careful and ethical framing, so that it does not heighten pre-existing concerns of community partners.

Additionally, listening to the needs of one's community partner is paramount to successful engaged scholarship. Laura Johnson explains that designing research without community stakeholders' input would be inauthentic and would likely fail to address the key issues salient to the community (65). Listening fosters mutual understanding about research strengths (i.e., support existing programs, clients/patrons, and community health) and limitations (i.e., intrusive and/or exploitative).

#### *Co-Designing Research*

Collaboratively designing engaged research is a strategic and relational process. Explaining not only the importance of, but the rationale behind, ethical (e.g., IRB approval, protection for human subjects, and compensation practices for participants), well-designed (e.g., carefully constructed rationale, protocol, and procedures) research is important and requires emotion with work because scholars should avoid patronizing "ivory tower" stances. Instead, Maria Dixon and Debbie Dougherty recommended scholars who interact with research partners take a collaborative tone in order to build and maintain research partnerships (16).

#### *Data Collection*

Collecting data for critical, qualitative, engaged scholarship incorporates communicative skill in regard to emotion work, emotion with work, and emotion toward work. As critically engaged scholars, we embody the instrument of data collection. In our collective case, scholarly observation and interviews have put us in the field alongside participants who are experiencing oppression, violence, and suffering. Documenting such observations is a written form of communicative labor, while talking with and listening to interview respondents are verbal and nonverbal forms of communicative labor. The communication with participants during various facets of data collection includes relationship building, disclosure, and privacy management competencies, among others. Much of this work is invisible (Corey and George 30). Authentic emotion work is inherent to this process as is emotion toward work. We have felt frustrated, sad, angry, shocked, happy, grateful, satisfied, fulfilled, relieved, surprised, frightened, and deeply moved (among other emotions) during data

collection. Feeling and authentically communicating that emotion is the communicative labor related to data collection.

### *Data Analysis*

Analyzing critically engaged qualitative data requires emotion toward work and, at times, emotion at work. As data are transcribed/reconciled, the audio tapes are listened to again. Revisiting participants' words can be emotional, prompting emotion toward work, which has also been a result of comparing/contrasting the experiences of participants across a data set. Emotion at work is prompted by self-reflexive processes of reflecting on one's own lived experiences during analysis. We personally analyze communication of participants in ways that blend emotionality and rationality. Also, we believe in the notion of writing as a method of inquiry, which requires emotion toward work, especially as we listen to traumatic stories.

### *Presentation and Publication*

Every time we present findings, it requires emotion with work, emotion toward work, and, at times, emotional labor. Presenting research prompts emotion toward work via communicative labor because we audibly speak the words of participants, temporarily embodying their stories. As we write, we aim to uphold the integrity of our participants, which requires an element of contextualized emotion with work since our relationships with participants live through the manuscripts. Continually revisiting data facilitates emotional reactions, which are manifest in a combination of (in)authentic emotional displays depending on the audience. For instance, job talks require confident emotional displays, while community presentations can be emotionally authentic. Sharing stories with audience members verbally and in written format creates a chain of emotional reactions whenever our scholarship is revisited. Finally, publishing requires communicative labor via emotion with work because publishing includes relationships with collaborators, editors, reviewers, and audiences.

### **Communicative Labor in Teaching**

Communicative labor also plays out in our pedagogy. As critical teachers and mentors, we strive to embody the values that are central to us as scholars. When we teach, we aim to foster and nourish critical thinking skills and awareness of the social world through student-centered learning and engagement. We try to construct learning environments that are interactive, dialogical (Burbules 21), and brave (Arao and Clemens 141) spaces that allow for the free expression of student voices, but also for their exposure to, and acceptance of, perspectives that vary from their own (MacDermid et al. 32; Schniedewind 26). We try to make the unteachable teachable and the uncomfortable comfortable (hooks 183), while attempting to meet students where they are in their learning (Dunn

40). We approach teaching with great emotional investment and caring, relational effort, patience and accessibility, and by modeling social awareness, advocacy, and activism. Thus, communicative labor is manifest in our teaching in: (a) curriculum development, (b) teaching or professing, (c) giving and/or receiving feedback, and (d) showing compassionate concern. To illustrate the experience of critical teaching and mentoring, a vignette is provided showing the communicative labor involved in critical pedagogy.

*Jenny's Personal Vignette*

I have had five, typically full office hours weekly and have been told I spend “too much time” with students. Because of the nature of my research and classes, a common scene often unfolds: “I haven’t told anyone this...You said we can discuss resources? Can I close the door?”

I stay in my lane. I am not a counselor. But I am trained in how to respond to disclosures. And I catch a lot of disclosures. My campus has an online form you can submit if you are concerned about a student. I let students know that we can fill it out together, so they have control of their narrative. The folks who receive those forms and “triage resources” know me well.

One day, my office hours started with a “Can I close the door?” from a current student. My heart pounded the entire hour that we talked as it eventually became apparent the student was experiencing suicidal ideation. I was relieved they were willing to fill out the form because I did not want to have to report it—even though I knew I had to as a mandated reporter—without the student’s consent. Within minutes, someone was at my door to take the student to Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). My heart broke. My hands were shaking. I was so worried about this student but also about how I handled the situation. As I was trying to collect myself, another knock. Repeat scene, but this time a past student disclosed that they had been sexually assaulted, blamed themselves, and had not told anyone. We filled out the form. I went through the scripts from all my training/research. My phone rang. The student preferred that I walk them to CAPS, and I glanced at the clock. I had to start my graduate seminar in 15 minutes. I apologized that I needed to send a text (giving my students a task) and that I could be a bit late, but I needed to start class. They said they understood, but I felt horrible rushing us on our way. At CAPS I asked, “Are you a hugger?” Tears streamed down their face as they nodded and reached out their arms. We hugged, and they walked inside.

I put on sunglasses to hide my immediate tears. I stopped in a parking lot and hid behind a dumpster while I took deep breaths between sobs, checked my makeup, and tried to flip a “mental switch.” After a few beats, I put on a fake smile and breezed into the seminar room. I said, “Thanks for your patience! Let’s dive in.”

### *Curriculum Development*

Developing and designing the content and structure of classes requires both emotional labor and emotion toward work. The literal act of writing syllabi, assignment descriptions, and grading rubrics are communicatively laborious. But the communicative labor runs more deeply than these tasks. As critical women scholars make decisions about what content to include in classes, it involves emotional labor because the sometimes-controversial content taught might affect students' emotions positively and/or negatively (MacDermid et al. 33). Students might feel empowered by the material, yet they might also have dissenting perspectives. When students are resistant or have negative reactions to the content, we may have to put our own biases and perspectives aside (thus engaging in emotional labor) to negotiate different learning styles and to navigate students' emotions. Emotion towards work is present in developing the structure of classes and classrooms. What we care about and view as pedagogically salient may not match students' views or expectations about the curriculum. Communicative labor is involved in developing our courses because we are constantly self-reflective and open to revising previous practices. Hence, our communication is adaptive and responsive to the needs of students.

### *Teaching or Professing*

The process of communicatively constructing, delivering, and sharing the content for classes requires emotion toward work, emotion work, and emotional labor. As critical women scholars, we often teach (i.e., profess/speak/dialogue) about topics that we care about immensely. Undoubtedly, some students embrace these topics, while some are resistant. In these instances, emotional labor may be used to "disguise" true feelings towards a topic so as not to exclude or marginalize any voices. Classrooms can often be intense spaces (hooks 205) where thoughts and feelings about particular topics are literally "on the line." Sometimes students are open and willing to engage with material and, at other times, they simply do not know *what* to say (or *how* to say it), which is part of their communicative labor. Thus, teaching is an attempt to balance everyone's perspectives, while remaining open, fair, and simultaneously critical. The ultimate goal is to teach students that it may be difficult when they encounter issues and ideas different from their preexisting beliefs, attitudes, and values (and that it is okay). We want students to be open and forthcoming; however, we also want to encourage them to carefully (and critically) consider course material and the audience of co-learners.

Additionally, when teaching, we sometimes use personal examples or stories to illustrate concepts. Personal disclosure is another form of communicative labor inherent to our pedagogy, which sometimes puts us in vulnerable positions. Personal disclosure requires emotion toward work and emotion work. Clearly, as critical women scholars, when

we share our own experiences to help students make sense of a concept, we do so with the utmost care and authenticity. We are personally invested in how the use of our own experiences affect classroom dynamics and student engagement. If it goes well, we feel empowered; if it does not, we feel deflated. Oftentimes, students' emotional labor means we may not truly know what is (in)effective because they are masking their reactions. We embrace emotion as part of learning.

#### *Giving and/or Receiving Feedback*

We place great emphasis on how and when we communicate feedback to students, which involves emotion work and emotion with work. Emotion work is involved when giving feedback because we can celebrate when students perform well, yet we often feel a sense of deep regret when students perform poorly. For example, giving a failing grade may indicate the student performed poorly on an assignment, but from our vantage point, it could also mean we failed in our explanation of what was required to accomplish the assignment or our mentoring of how to achieve the learning objectives. Emotion with work is involved when providing feedback because we prioritize relational work as we aim to establish connections with each student and to develop and maintain a classroom culture where everyone is on an equal footing as possible. However, when students simply get something incorrect, we feel obligated to communicate that fact, which invokes a hierarchy of knowledge. That hierarchy of knowledge often violates our axiological commitments to equity.

Similarly, as critical women scholars, we take the feedback we are given to heart, which involves emotion work, emotion toward work, and emotion with work. When receiving positive comments about our teaching, we are encouraged or energized. Yet, when receiving negative feedback, we feel sorrow or sadness. Likewise, when students meet milestones in their learning, we feel joyous. However, if a student fails to meet a milestone, we may feel remorse.

#### *Showing Compassionate Concern*

As critical women scholars, we also tend to care a great deal about the overall well-being of our students. Showing concern for students involves emotion work, emotion toward work, and emotion with work. Emotion work is involved in showing concern because if students encounter harmful life experiences, we feel a great sense of empathy and desire to appropriately intervene in the course of events. Here, compassionate communication (Miller 226) is relevant because throughout our careers we are noticing, connecting, and responding (Miller 230). Emotion toward work emerges when the boundaries between our lives and our students' lives are so porous that emotional contagion can occur (Miller 226). Often, as critical women scholars, we are often perceived as "friends" to our students. However, emotion with work is invoked when that connection is taken for granted and our expertise is not respected. The constant

negotiation between professional and personal boundaries are often blurred, which incorporates both benefits (i.e., heightened levels of honesty, authenticity, and learning) and costs (i.e., work/life struggle and/or questioned credibility).

### **Communicative Labor in Service**

Communicative labor is also inherent in the public and private service work we do. Our community-based scholarship and social justice-oriented work often entail conducting service in communities and with research partners (i.e., becoming a volunteer as part of ethnographic work and ensuring the sites also benefit from the research). Moreover, our pedagogy often entails showing concern and compassion for students, which has a tendency to lead to student advocacy and support during office hours and beyond. Thus, the lines between our research, teaching, and service are often hazy—especially considering the amount of service required to enact these duties with an ethic of care (Deetz 101). Our service is often invisible in terms of curriculum vitae lines or what is “counted” for promotion and tenure. Accordingly, communicative labor is apparent in public-private service regarding: (a) recruitment of prospective students, (b) appointed and implied service, and (c) graduate student mentoring. To illustrate the communicative labor involved in academic service, a vignette is provided to show the level of involvement that is tied to critical axiological commitments.

#### *Angela’s Personal Vignette*

In the Fall 2015 semester, our department experienced a racial incident that led to my involvement in an investigation about a faculty member’s conduct, facilitation of a departmental town hall meeting regarding our departmental climate, aiding the department in organizing a series of trainers to facilitate diversity and inclusion workshops (one of which I personally facilitated), countless hours of graduate student mentoring about how to address issues of diversity in the classroom, and the eventual request to conduct recruitment trips that would diversify our prospective graduate student pipeline. In the interest of space, I focus on the recruitment trips below.

For three consecutive years, I strategically planned, managed, and executed recruitment trips to a series of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Each year the trips grew in scope. Two of these trips took place during research leave. On these trips I met with prospective graduate students, faculty, and administrators from a variety of departments at three different HBCUs. These trips were wrought with a range of positive and negative emotion. From a positive perspective, it did me good to be on a campus full of students who looked like me. It was inspiring to them to meet me, a third generation Ph.D. in a Black American family. I knew I was engaging in a highly complicated task but had yet to realize just how complex.

Asking students to come to a predominantly White university in the Midwest from their predominantly Black urban campuses in the South was a challenge. I did my best to cultivate an honest and realistic preview of our institution. I disclosed what we could offer in terms of funding and graduate education. At times, I often questioned how transparent I should be about the racial incidents that had unfolded in our department and on campus leading to the very recruitment trips I was taking. At this early period in my tenure-track career (second to fourth years), I was unable to assess whether these students would actually thrive in our academic program until we admitted a student, Jordan (pseudonym), who moved to Kansas and began one of our graduate degrees.

Jordan struggled, at best, despite my, the department's, and the graduate school's efforts to advocate on their behalf. Jordan left the program after one semester. As Jordan's advisor and the person who directly recruited this student to our program, I felt wholly responsible for their negative experience and took ownership over the negativity this student experienced. Words cannot fully express the emotional distress, regret, pain, and disappointment I feel for having participated in a system that fostered a negative experience in the life of a student. I continually engage in reflection over this and other service opportunities I have participated in, no matter how willingly or reticently I engaged in them. I cannot always anticipate the outcomes, but at times the outcomes have been at the expense of those I wish to serve most.

#### *Recruitment of Prospective Students*

Recruiting prospective students into our graduate programs is a form of communicative labor that entails emotional labor, emotion with work, and potentially emotion toward work as professors communicate with recruits. Although departments have unique recruitment goals (i.e., growing programs and/or publicizing a new track), the overarching objective of such service is to attract the "best and brightest" students, while assessing the "fit" between prospective students and our programs. We realize such aims are problematic. Yet, in these activities, faculty often assume roles that resemble sales or marketing in that they are encouraged to directly reach out to prospective students and/or to brainstorm ways to advertise programs (e.g., reaching out to colleagues at other universities, developing ad placements for conference booklets, and sitting at graduate fairs). These activities entail emotional labor vis-à-vis the customer service aspects of recruitment duties: making sure to be pleasant and prompt in communication with prospective students, so that the impression of the department is warm, friendly, and encouraging. Providing a positive impression with potential recruits may also involve masking any negative affect. The recruitment and application process also involves emotion work: students often experience a range of emotions while applying, and this can affect faculty members. For example, faculty may experience disappointment if application processes do not go smoothly, anger if a



recruit is not accepted to the program, or excitement if a recruit chooses their program. Finally, the recruitment process may entail emotion toward work because faculty inherently communicate beliefs about the work they do while communicating with prospective students. Moreover, faculty may experience emotion toward work regarding recruitment and selection processes. For example, faculty may feel dissonance between recruiting “top” students and selecting students based on fit, or they may experience emotions regarding admission criteria (e.g., are GRE scores a fair way to rank order applicants?).

#### *Appointed and Implied Service*

Service activities such as committee work, reviewing manuscripts, or providing training involve emotional labor (e.g., being a “team-player”), emotion with work (e.g., experiencing the ups and downs of working in groups), and emotion toward work (e.g., feeling satisfaction from being “good” departmental citizens). As critical women scholars navigate the political landscape of completing required service activities, a double bind can exist when scholars are expected to do the “right” amount and type of service (i.e., to uphold a formula of 40% research, 40% teaching, and 20% service). However, as previously mentioned, the lines between research, teaching, and service are often blurred for critical women scholars, and peripheral service involved in teaching and research do not “count” as service in terms of vitae lines (e.g., writing recommendation letters for students, providing career coaching, or listening and empathizing with stakeholders). Moreover, tensions exist between service activities that are appointed, implied, and chosen. For example, critical women scholars may feel emotion toward work regarding the push-pull between desired versus expected service. They may easily become overburdened by service activities required to fulfill their critical pedagogical and research commitments, while maintaining expected departmental, university, and disciplinary service loads. Additionally, critical women scholars—and especially women of color—are often appointed for service as “token” experts (Kanter 219) or “spokespersons” (Nadal et al. 157) but nonetheless paradoxically face judgment for taking on too much service. In these cases, service stemming from the burden of expertise (along with potential accompanying microaggressions experienced in the process) inherently involves emotional labor, emotion with work, and emotion toward work.

#### *Graduate Mentoring*

Critical women scholars’ mentoring of graduate students further involves listening, talking, reading, and writing, which are all emotionally-laden tasks. Listening and determining the best response to graduate students’ ideas, concerns, performance, and feedback, while gently guiding them, involves emotional labor, emotion with work, emotion toward work [e.g., providing informational, tangible, and/or emotional support (Cutrona 4) or using Socratic questioning to guide project design], and emotion toward

work (e.g., encouraging students to reframe negative perceptions of academic life). Reading students' work—often multiple times—involves emotion with work and emotion work as faculty navigate various emotions from frustration or disappointment when students appear to be struggling, to triumph when they succeed. Additionally, because social justice-oriented students seek out critical scholars as advisors, mentors may also experience emotional contagion from the emotion work involved in reading the sometimes heart-breaking accounts of participants. Providing critical feedback regarding these important topics is another form of emotion work and emotion with work, as mentors must navigate giving rigorous, yet supportive feedback on sometimes emotionally-laden topics. In addition to written and verbal feedback given directly to the student, critical women scholars may spend a large amount of time writing recommendation letters. As previously mentioned, critical women scholars—and particularly women of color—are often “tapped” for additional service because of their expertise or compassionate care. This can result in writing more than their fair share of recommendation letters, which involves emotional labor and emotion work (e.g., tensions between portraying the student in the best light while being fair and honest) and emotion with work (e.g., having to say “yes” or “no” to requests).

Finally, critical commitments to mentorship involve showing compassionate concern with graduate students' professional and personal well-being. This implied service can even be a lifelong commitment as mentors are available throughout their mentees' postgraduate careers. While this mentorship relationship can be incredibly rewarding, it may nonetheless contribute to work/life spillover, especially considering virtual accessibility. Faculty may struggle with the tension of being a supportive and available mentor, while also trying to maintain boundaries and bracket personal time. When considering that critical women scholars may be tapped for additional mentorship, these rewarding relationships can also involve emotional labor, emotion work, and emotion toward work as the number of mentees grows throughout the lifespan of one's career.

### *Summary*

Communicative labor is a common thread running through the various facets of faculty work in research, teaching, and service. We close this manuscript by providing theoretical and practical implications for managing the complex, experiential reality of communicative labor as well as suggestions for surviving disproportionate burdens of communicative labor.

### **Discussion**

We offer theoretical and practical implications for surviving communicative labor in a spirit of encouraging a more equitable higher education system. Theoretically, the notion of communication labor contributes to scholarship regarding the ideal self (Wielend 511),

paradigmatic narratives (Linde 620), and workaholism (Shifron and Reysen 136). We call for a paradigm shift in the way faculty labor is socially constructed. Practically, we provide suggestions to mitigate the systemic inequities in the burden of intense communicative labor at the macro-, mezzo-, and micro-levels of higher education.

### **Theoretical Implications**

We present the notion of communicative labor, which we define as the ongoing, interconnected tasks requiring the use of communicative and literate skill sets (e.g., listening, speaking, responding, disclosing, writing, reading, negotiation, analyzing, and giving feedback) to execute work in a way that is undergirded by workplace emotion (i.e., emotional labor, emotion work, emotion with work, emotion at work, and emotion toward work) and compassionate communication. This concept is an effort at theoretically articulating the way communication is constitutive of the labor in which faculty engage. When we make invisible labor explicit, we can foster positive change (Corey and George 45). Our aim in articulating communicative labor is to disrupt the dominant narratives about what faculty work lives *should* be, which is tied to the notion of a paradigmatic narrative (Linde 620).

In institutions, such as higher education, with historically-situated bureaucracies, there is an omnipresent paradigmatic narrative that tells a story of the ideal trajectory (Linde 621). For instance, Charlotte Linde defines paradigmatic narratives as “a representation of the ideal life course within an institution, including its stages, preferred time for attaining each stage, preferred age at beginning and end, possible options, and so forth” (621). Specifically, Linde goes on to provide the paradigmatic narrative of an academic: “[T]he move from graduate student to tenure-track position to promotion and tenure, and status within a department...However, the pattern is clear, even if individual instantiations differ...For the professoriate, this career is institutionally reified, with each stage achieved through institutional decision” (621). Our engagement in communicative labor resists this linear trajectory because it often requires us to go beyond the contractual divisions of a 40/40/20 percent divide in our time devoted to research, teaching, and service, respectively. The nature of communicative labor blurs boundaries in ways that are directly connected to gendered and occupational identities and axiological commitments. Unfortunately, all work is not valued equally.

We resist the notion of an “ideal self” as part of our work and disrupt this dominant narrative with authentic representations of our work via communicative labor. Stacey Wieland identified the way workers perform ideal personas as employees who were both highly productive and practiced healthy work-life balance (523). However, Wieland’s participants were using the persona to mask the work-life struggle they experienced in order to meet high levels of productivity (520). Indeed, they endured heavy workloads and consistently delivered high quality work

within short periods of time by rendering the bulk of their work invisible. Wieland's participants concealed their work/life struggle by under-reporting the number of hours worked each week and overdelivering in their productivity (520). In this sense, their productivity was rendered highly visible, while their sacrifice remained invisible in order to uphold an ideal. We encourage scholars to resist this by using the concept of communicative labor as a way to talk about our (in)visible work.

Our discussion of communicative labor is an attempt at discursively naming the often obscured aspects of our work that are arduous, burdensome, and rewarding. The goal is to enhance visibility for aspects of the job that do not neatly fit into a forty-hour work week or a 40/40/20 division of time, but rather require our whole selves 100% of the time in discursive and material ways. The acts of communication (e.g., listening, speaking, responding, disclosing, writing, reading, negotiation, and analyzing) are discursive in nature and the corresponding emotion is embodied.

### **Practical Implications**

Disproportionate communicative labor is the result of a combination of systemic inequities in higher education and gendered work/life spillover. There are a range of practical implications. We present our recommendations beginning at the macro-level, scaling to mezzo- and micro-levels of organizing. Following suit, we present a three-tiered call-to-action in order to help mitigate some of the negative outcomes of disproportionate communicative labor.

#### *Macro-Level Call-to-Action*

Institutions of higher education are moving toward capitalistic models of education being driven by for-profit models of organizing. This is negatively affecting employees across hierarchies of higher education, even at non-profit institutions. Economic pressures to increase enrollment, secure seven-figure donors, and boost operational budgets challenge the virtues of education in problematic ways. This is evident in the recent admission scandals across the nation (Medina et al.). Arguably, the brunt of this capitalistic force is on faculty and, more specifically, on critical women scholars who are interpellated into academic labor disproportionately. Those who engage communicative labor from a critical standpoint are likely being systematically pushed to perform in ways that exceed individual capacity yet are not rewarded or supported institutionally for the communicative labor that is rendered invisible. Thus, at the institutional level, it is necessary to enact policies, procedures, and programs to support the well-being of faculty whose invisible labor is often exploited.

If a critical mass of institutions agreed to recognize, value, and compensate faculty for invisible aspects of communicative labor, all higher education professionals would benefit from a more authentic

representation of the work being done. If faculty were collectively committed to sharing the invisible communicative labor, our discipline would benefit from a more equitable distribution of work, and the evaluations of our labor might better account for the holistic range of work we do rather than simply rewarding productivity (e.g., numbers of publications and/or numbers of credit hours enrolled) over people (e.g., relational dynamics of our work). At its core, this would require a paradigm shift that would reimagine aspects of our profession, including tenure requirements, hierarchical rank ordering of institutions (e.g., R1, R2, Liberal Arts, etc.) and personnel (e.g., administration, faculty, staff, and students), value and compensation for service work, more equitable compensation, and a restructuring of admissions and hiring practices.

#### *Mezzo-Level Call-to-Action*

At the mid-level, we call on departments and colleges to think about employee well-being as central to their mission and strategic plans in ways that are actionable and construct tangible material differences. Colleges and departmental units should be held accountable for the overall well-being of their employees. Promotion of policies that genuinely and authentically foster self-care would be beneficial. This would require leaders to hold disengaged parties accountable so that they are sharing the load of communicative labor. Shannon Portillo explains that too often the onus of disproportionate service is put on underrepresented faculty to decline requests for service. However, there is another facet of this equation that could help to remedy the imbalance, specifically “a call for white men to do more service” (Portillo). This would require mezzo-level leaders to hold such faculty accountable for sharing in the communicative labor and for systems and structures to be put into place that will ensure that expectations for an equitable division of labor are enforced. Exploitation of underrepresented faculty is simply an unacceptable status quo that perpetuates existing systems of privilege.

#### *Micro-Level Call-to-Action*

At the micro-level, we urge critical women scholars to engage in self-care and to vigilantly be self-protective (Scott 57). “Self-care” is a common buzzword in contemporary rhetoric. We do not mean that women should engage in superficial activities that will not make a substantive difference in the quality of their personal and professional lives (e.g., like taking an extra bubble bath). The type of long-term, emotionally-laden communicative labor we have disclosed could easily reach a tipping point and cross over into trauma.

Communicative labor can often lead to trauma stewardship (van Dernoot Lipsky and Burk 11). If trauma stewardship is not carefully and thoughtfully considered, it can lead to workaholism (Shifron and Reysen 136), stress (Ray and Miller 357), and burnout (Tracy 166), which can collectively lead to negative mental and physical health outcomes

threatening one's literal survival. When critical women scholars engage in their research, teaching, and service, they are at risk for second-hand trauma that could start as emotional contagion transferred from our research participants, students, and occupational burden.

As critical women scholars, we need to be cognizant of some of the ways second-hand trauma can manifest: (a) feeling helpless and hopeless (van Dernoot Lipsky and Burk 48), (b) sensing one can never do enough (van Dernoot Lipsky and Burk 59), (c) feeling chronically exhausted (van Dernoot Lipsky and Burk 81), and/or (d) experiencing feelings of guilt (van Dernoot Lipsky and Burk 95-98), fear (van Dernoot Lipsky and Burk 99-101), and/or anger and cynicism (van Dernoot Lipsky and Burk 101-104). When these feelings arise, it is time to take action! Taking action can be difficult because employees in higher education have reported their belief that it is problematic for their careers to admit reaching burnout when compared to other employment sectors (Zaluska et al. 32). We must resist this belief and advocate for ourselves.

Self-care includes, but is not limited to, the pursuit of healthy lifestyle choices (van Dernoot Lipsky and Burk 121), seeking and receiving social support (Sarason and Sarason 116), patience (van Dernoot Lipsky and Burk 123), and mindfulness (van Dernoot Lipsky and Burk 217). According to Karla Scott, engaging in self-care requires "strategies to support physical, emotional, and spiritual wellness needed for strength, survival, and success" (57). It is important to engage in these self-care processes, which could incorporate better time management, withdrawing from commitments, unplugging, and striving to thrive. We call the colleagues of critical women scholars to surround them with social support in informational, emotional, and instrumental ways. When we are cared for, we can best care for others.

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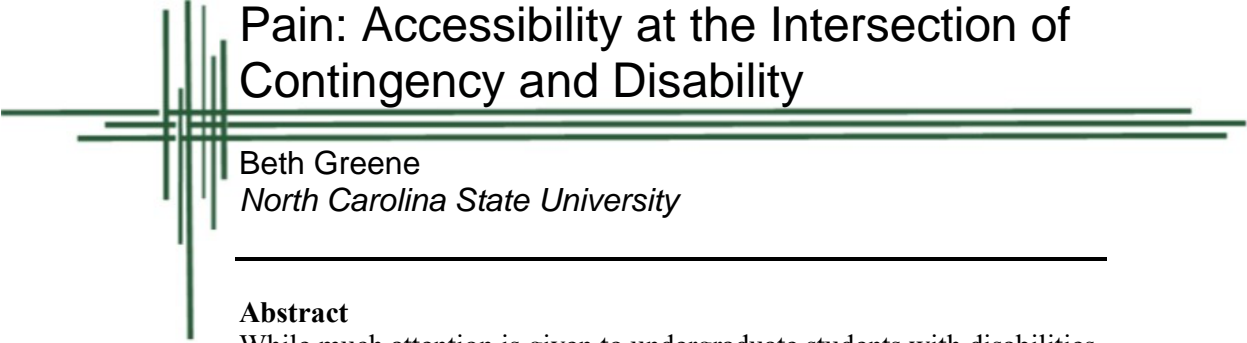
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# Studenting and Teaching with Chronic Pain: Accessibility at the Intersection of Contingency and Disability

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## **Abstract**

While much attention is given to undergraduate students with disabilities, far less is devoted to graduate students, particularly those who also act as faculty: Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs). This article discusses issues of accessibility encountered by these contingent faculty members, specifically GTAs who have invisible disabilities, and how approaching discussions of contingency and disability with an ethos of transparent vulnerability—a level of transparency that necessarily leads to vulnerability—can help combat the stigma that continues to surround contingency and disability in higher education.

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**G**raduate teaching assistants (GTAs) hold a special place in academia. We are both students and faculty, a dual identity that can be difficult to navigate, particularly when other identities, such as being a person with a disability, converge to create an intersectional reality that highlights the marginality of both contingency and disability (see Breslin et al. for a discussion of intersectionality). In line with this special issue's themes of intersectionality, social justice, and academic labor, this piece focuses on a practice called transparent vulnerability that can help confront issues of accessibility faced by GTAs, particularly those with disabilities, and what we as an academic community can do to improve the situation.

Since I'm discussing accessibility as it applies to two issues—contingency and disability—I think it's important to discuss this concept

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not as I often see it in higher broadly and not as I often see it in higher education research: as a concept linked directly to disability and/or to race and/or to class that is widely discussed as an issue to be aware of when working with undergraduate students and that generally focuses on technological accessibility. So, for this article, I've created a definition of accessibility that extends characterizations of accessibility in disability studies scholarship (such as inaccessible texts and spaces; see Brewer et al. and/or Damiani and Harbour for such characterizations) as well as adapts the traditional dictionary definition of accessibility to encompass both disability and contingency: something or someplace is accessible when someone is able to reach it with minimal impediments. In reverse, this means that the object or space one needs to have or should have access to is unavailable to them. To be clear, the issue here lies with the object or space, not with the individual; however, it becomes the burden of individuals who experience issues with accessibility to make these issues hypervisible and to be advocates for more and better accessibility in higher education. While this may be unfair, it is also an opportunity, one that GTAs who can "pass" as able-bodied, thanks to their invisible disabilities, are in a unique position to take up.

GTAs who live at the intersection of contingency and disability are well situated to combat the stigma that continues to surround both identities in higher education by tackling issues of accessibility. Specifically, we can do this by approaching discussions of contingency and disability with what I call "transparent vulnerability"—a practice that involves self-disclosing at a level of transparency that necessarily leads to vulnerability, a practice similar to the one described by Angelica Paz Ortiz et al. in "Positionality in Teaching: Implications for Advancing Social Justice." In this article, I define transparent vulnerability and describe my experiences as a GTA with a disability, including how I began to practice transparent vulnerability, before discussing GTAs in three ways: as contingent labor, as faculty members with disabilities, and the accessibility issues we face. I then explain how we all can practice transparent vulnerability, including what it can look like and how this approach could effect change, starting with conversations among GTAs.

Before beginning, I want to make it clear that I am not arguing for a mass disclosure of contingent status and/or disability from all GTAs. That would be highly unethical. What I am doing is inviting those who are comfortable and willing to share their experiences in order to make issues of accessibility so visible that they can't continue to be ignored. Then we can work towards creating a truly open and welcoming environment in our academic institutions together.

### **Transparent Vulnerability**

GTAs, both those with disabilities and our able-bodied peers, face issues of access in our current academic climate. In an effort to work towards better spaces in academia, I argue that GTAs who can "pass" as able-

bodied are in a unique position to address misconceptions about contingency and disability and to tackle issues of accessibility. We can do this by being transparent and, therefore, vulnerable. In a nutshell, transparent vulnerability involves a level of transparency that necessarily leads to vulnerability. This doesn't mean entering a space and immediately disclosing every single thing about faculty status and/or disability, but it does mean practicing a minimum amount of self-disclosure. This practice can be described as a form of positionality born out of intersectionality. In other words, GTAs with disabilities can use the unique positions granted to us by our dual status as both student and faculty member to raise awareness about the intersectional issues we face.

Throughout this article, I will provide examples of transparent vulnerability in practice. This includes examples of how I've embraced this practice, how other GTAs could utilize this practice in specific situations, and how transparent vulnerability can highlight and confront the issues GTAs face in higher education. Finally, I will detail specific approaches to practicing transparent vulnerability in the last section of this article.

### **Author Positionality**

As I write this article, I am in my third year as a Ph.D. student in the Communication, Rhetoric, and Digital Media program at North Carolina State University. Upon entering the program, I received a teaching assistantship as an instructor of record in the first-year writing (FYW) program where I taught ENG 101: Academic Writing and Research for three semesters and am now serving as the Graduate Assistant Director. Teaching FYW as a GTA wasn't new to me as I began as a GTA in another FYW program teaching ENG 1101: Writing and Inquiry in Academic Contexts I and ENG 1102: Writing and Inquiry in Academic Contexts II during the second and final year of my Master of Arts (M.A.) in English program at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. My position as a second-time GTA is also informed by the positions I held during the two years I "took off" between graduate programs, meaning that I have worked at five different institutions teaching FYW and advanced composition throughout the past six years, always as a contingent faculty member of one type or another.

After graduating with my M.A., I found work as a part-time faculty member at Central Piedmont Community College, South Piedmont Community College, UNC-Charlotte, and at a satellite campus for Shaw University, a Historically Black University. While I was able to make enough money to cover my bills, teaching six classes at three institutions was not what I expected for my first semester out of graduate school. I had idealistically anticipated landing a full-time position somewhere and barely knew what an "adjunct"—the official title of at least two of my positions—even was. Little did I know that I had greatly underestimated the state of the job market in my field of composition and rhetoric. It

wasn't until I completed an independent study on academic labor in the fall 2019 semester that I realized the use of contingent labor in academia had been steadily rising since the 1970s (see Connors; Mendenhall for the history of contingent labor in academia), or that I would have far less job security and no health benefits as an adjunct instructor compared to what I had as a GTA. Returning to graduate school for a Ph.D. allowed me the time and support to learn more about the role of contingency in higher education, information I didn't know I needed as an M.A. student, and time and support I didn't have as a part-time faculty member.

Both job security and health benefits are important to me because I am one of the thousands, if not millions, of faculty members with a disability. When I was 17, I was diagnosed with a chronic pain disorder called fibromyalgia (fibro for short). Most days, this means that it's difficult for me to stand or walk for extended periods of time, so I tend to sit or lean on things to relieve some of the pressure on my knees and back when sitting in a chair for a while isn't an option. This is how my habit of sitting on a table, desk, or podium began, a habit some may see as unprofessional and one I didn't begin until after I graduated from my M.A. program. For me, this not only helps to relieve my fibro pain, it also helps to create an informal classroom environment. Casually sitting on a table sends a different message compared to stiffly standing behind a podium or looming over students from a taller-than-me desk chair; seeing me at ease encourages my students to be at ease, too.

Sitting on the table is also far less awkward than dragging the teacher-desk chair to the center front of the room. I can sit and switch sitting positions as needed—something I can't do much of in the desk chair—and my students can still see me. And I know they can see me because, in the spirit of transparent vulnerability, I disclose my disability to my students on day one to explain why I sit where I do and ask them if they can see and hear me well. In classrooms where sitting on a table isn't an option, I scope out the best places to lean, and I look forward to planned activities during which I can sit for short periods while my students work. Incorporating such collaborative learning activities into my lesson plans began as a pedagogical best practice but quickly doubled as a personal best practice for self-accommodation, an act that is normal for many GTAs with disabilities, both visible and invisible (Fedukovich and Morse). Again, I also let my students know that they can always call me over if they need me since I'm not always physically able to make the rounds.

I find it so important to disclose my disability to my students because they don't usually see it. My fibro, classified as a permanent physical disability, is largely invisible. I experience a low level of pain somewhere every day, but after over a decade of living with fibro—and, more recently, having Gabapentin to help—I'm accustomed to this normal amount of pain and can easily ignore it. My disability only makes itself visible at certain times: (a) when I begin to slow down or limp due to pain and fatigue, (b) when I experience cognitive difficulties from fibro fog (or

brain fog) that noticeably impair my ability to communicate effectively, and (c) when I have a major flareup that keeps me on my couch.

However, there are times when I make my disability visible through acts of self-disclosure. For example, I have a state-issued handicap placard that always hangs from my rearview mirror, partly because it's hard and annoying to take it down and put it back up, partly because my terrible fibro-addled memory means I'll probably forget, and partly because I've long gotten used to the disbelieving stares I frequently receive, stares that recently intensified when I began to use a walker during the harder days. I also now openly identify as a person with a physical disability and am comfortable having the conversations that live at the core of transparent vulnerability with anyone.

As a GTA in a Ph.D. program, I tell my students, peers, teachers, and administrators why I sometimes have to miss class, why I sometimes don't make sense when I speak, and why it sometimes takes me a while to figure out what I'm trying to say or to recall a word or phrase. I also explain to them why accessibility is so important to me, both as a GTA and as someone with a disability. This is a level of self-disclosure I wasn't necessarily comfortable with as an M.A. student building a professional identity who wasn't sure she wanted her students to know she was a brand-new teacher, or when I was working solely as a part-time faculty member between graduate programs.

I always told my teachers and supervisors about my fibro, but, in the latter case, not until after I had been hired as I was afraid it would hinder my desirability. I also didn't discuss my fibro with my students until/unless I had to cancel class due to a flareup. As an M.A. GTA, I was trying my best to have a good start to what I've always seen as a life-long career and didn't want to be viewed as unreliable or difficult, especially since I needed my paltry stipend to help pay my tuition and fees. As a part-time faculty member, I knew I was easily replaceable and wanted to do everything I could to appear indispensable, especially when I learned what it felt like to have all of my classes bumped to full-time colleagues during my second semester as an adjunct instructor. As a Ph.D. GTA, however, I have guaranteed funding for four years, a level of job security that made me comfortable enough to think about what kind of message choosing to "pass" as able-bodied until I no longer could was sending to my students and peers.

I realized that I was also somewhat "passing" as a full-time faculty member, though not consciously. Other than my email signature containing my institution-issued title of Graduate Teaching Assistant for First-Year Writing or Adjunct Instructor of English, I rarely if ever talked to my students about my position in the university hierarchy and what it meant. In retrospect, I suspect this was an unconscious decision on my part, driven by my awareness of the stigma surrounding GTAs and some non-tenure track (NTT) faculty—particularly part-time NTT faculty holding the title of adjunct instructor—as not being real teachers. This also

sent a message: that contingent status, like disability status, should be hidden in an effort to gain respect from both students and colleagues. Now, however, I practice transparent vulnerability with my students by talking to them about what my position is and what it means. It helps that my students think being a Ph.D. student is a mythical designation and is therefore cool.

What I want far more than my students thinking I'm cool is for them to understand that as a GTA with a disability, there are a lot of obstacles that I face, and these obstacles impact not only me and other GTAs with disabilities but students as well. If GTAs with disabilities aren't hypervisible and being vocal about what we need and how our universities should be more accessible, nothing will change. As some undergraduate students also face issues of access, and all undergraduate students are the main consumers in a neoliberal university, they make for a major ally in efforts to increase accessibility for all, and GTAs are the best suited to lead the charge if many of us stop attempting to "pass," consciously or unconsciously, as full-time faculty members and/or as able-bodied.

While not all GTAs are fully funded, all of us receive stipends and are usually more valuable to a university than our NTT peers since our successes in graduate studies bring prestige to our institutions (Wright), and we're much cheaper than full-time NTT faculty. As I mentioned earlier, this affords me more job security—along with benefits—as a GTA than as an adjunct instructor of English, especially when considering that I'm largely protected by my primary status as a student. On top of all this, we also take up a large slice of the contingent faculty pie, which means that we're best positioned to take up issues of accessibility with less risk to our jobs, a point that becomes clear when looking at GTAs as contingent faculty members.

### **GTAs as Contingent Labor**

Faculty members with contingent appointments and/or with disabilities have historically faced stigma, discrimination, and issues of access in higher education. These issues and histories have been well explored by scholars like Jay Dolmage, Brenda Jo Brueggemann, Stephanie Kerschbaum, Margaret Price, Robert J. Connors, Seth Kahn, William Lalicker, Amy Lynch-Binieck, and others. In the following section, instead of retelling these histories, I discuss how GTAs uniquely experience these issues. I've chosen to first look at contingency and then disability separately so as to paint a clear picture of each before discussing what they can look like when they intersect (see Breslin et al. 166-168 for discussion of the multiple ways intersectionality can be applied).

While GTAs are typically viewed and studied as a category unto themselves, there are too many similarities between GTAs and other contingent faculty types to place them firmly outside the umbrella of contingent labor (see the introduction to Schell & Stock's *Moving a*



*Mountain* for a more detailed description of contingent faculty). The three most apparent similarities are limited contracts, restrictions on how many classes we're allowed to teach, and primarily teaching lower-level courses. In my current program, for example, GTAs are not guaranteed funding through an assistantship after four years; we can only teach nine credit hours a year, not including summer teaching opportunities; and we typically teach 100- and 200-level courses. In addition, many of us are paid stipends that are far too small to survive on, which forces us to have secret side hustles since we also aren't usually allowed to work outside of our assistantship.

Under these contingent conditions, GTAs work from an interesting and frustrating duality of student and teacher and therefore must learn to effectively and efficiently juggle the responsibilities of both identities. We also must choose whether or not to disclose our primary identity as a student to our own students through transparent vulnerability. On the one hand, choosing not to "pass" as another type of faculty member means that we share the commonalities we have with our undergraduate students, lending us credibility when we say that we understand their struggles with college as it is currently, not as it was back when we were undergraduates. On the other hand, it means running the risk of our students not taking us seriously, of them assuming we don't know what we're doing since we are students ourselves.

However, as GTA positions are tied to our graduate education and funding packages that are sometimes guaranteed for a set number of years, I would argue that we have better job security than many other contingent faculty types; unfortunately, living at the intersection of teacher and student means that we also have the added pressures of being good students who bring prestige to our universities through research, publications, retention, graduation, and emerging from an intensely competitive job market with good, secure positions, preferably the gold standard tenure-track positions. In other words, while we're focused on doing well in our teaching assistantships—including lesson planning, grading, and day-to-day teaching activities—we're also working on our own homework, putting our committees together, conducting research, presenting at conferences, figuring out how to publish our work (often for the first time), getting ready for and entering the job market, and trying to make sure we have enough money for bills, food, and student fees that aren't covered by funding packages. As someone who has been both a GTA and a part-time faculty member, life seemed less complicated, though still stressful, when all I had to worry about was being a good teacher.

In addition to our ability to juggle student and teacher responsibilities, and the stress that comes with them, GTAs also have the ability to effect change in academia from a unique space. We are contingent faculty members, our dual status privileges the student status before/above the faculty status, and we're seen as future colleagues by

many of our instructors. It's true that joining the fight for social justice in higher education could put our academic standing and assistantship in jeopardy, a job security issue faced by all contingent faculty members. As students, though, it's a bit safer for us to do this since we're consumers before employees and have larger numbers, potentially giving us a better chance of being heard by administrators. Doing nothing, however, never leads to change. Take Susan Wyche, for example. In "Reflections of an Anonymous Graduate Student on the Wyoming Conference Resolution," she recounts how she stood up at the Wyoming conference and became the catalyst for a movement that led to the Wyoming Resolution through an act that I would consider to be an example of practicing transparent vulnerability. While many accounts have been written about her as the "Anonymous Graduate Student" to protect her identity as she completed her doctoral degree, this was Wyche's first time telling the story from her point of view for publication. She was one graduate student fed up with GTA labor conditions and mistreatment who could no longer stand silently as the scholars around her seemed indifferent to academic labor issues, and she did so in a time period when GTAs were exploited and abused far more often than we are currently.

Over three decades later, we have graduate student unions across the country, like the Teaching Assistants Association (TAA) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the union at the City University of New York (CUNY), where graduate students from all types of backgrounds and departments come together to stand against unfair labor conditions and other injustices with faculty and staff members (see Martin for the history of academic labor unions). If Wyche alone could begin a process for positive change, then, logically, GTAs standing together with the support of their unions and other allies like our students, faculty, and professional organizations should be able to do far more.

While we've come a long way with pushing against the exploitation of GTA labor, we still have a long way to go when it comes to truly being heard by the academic community. GTA positions will always have a place in our academic structure as spaces in which students gain teaching experience alongside the scholarly and research experiences they gain from their graduate education. Because of this, we—current GTAs and future colleagues—can effect some positive changes from our unique positions, such as making the issues GTAs face hypervisible, including issues related to disability.

### **GTAs with Disabilities**

Disabilities have always endured stigma, defined by Bernice A. Pescosolido et al. as "a mark separating individuals from one another based on a socially conferred judgment that some persons or groups are tainted and 'less than'" (431). While this stigma has noticeably reduced over time, especially in the past century, it doesn't mean that it has disappeared. We're still very much living in an able-bodied world and

getting our education from able-bodied institutions. This isn't to say that our institutions specifically discriminate against students and employees with disabilities, but that they aren't recognizing the diverse needs of this population. For example, an older university like NC State can do its best to accommodate students in their classrooms through an office of disability services, but if they don't update their campus to make physical spaces more accessible—like adding elevators to parking decks—they're excluding some members of their campus community. Practicing transparent vulnerability could help to make necessary changes to a campus to make it more or fully inclusive for community members with disabilities.

There's also the issue of how the stigma that continues to linger can keep some GTAs from feeling comfortable enough to request accommodations, a fear that Stephanie L. Kerschbaum explores through faculty members with disabilities in "Access in the Academy." Seeking accommodations means disclosing a disability, at least to those from whom one needs accommodations, which can be an uncomfortable situation if someone isn't ready to disclose their disability. For students, this typically looks like an accommodation letter from an office of disability services, but for faculty, it's a more intimate process since such an office doesn't usually exist for us. On top of this, it can be difficult to get effective accommodations, particularly if the faculty member isn't consulted on what would be the most helpful to them (Kerschbaum, "Access in the Academy" 37).

While getting accommodations as a GTA may seem easy on the surface since we're students before we're faculty members, it can instead be complicated administratively by our dual identities. As students, requesting and receiving accommodations may be as simple as going to the office of disabilities with the required pile of paperwork and then handing letters to our professors, but doing the same in our roles as teachers is just as difficult as it is for any other type of faculty. This is compounded by the fact that many GTAs are new to teaching and are trying to build their professional identities and teacherly personas without attracting uncomfortable attention to themselves. The conflict produced by these dual identities could lead some GTAs to feel "even more excluded, isolated, or inclined to 'pass' than undergraduates, if the nature of their disability makes that possible" (Damiani and Harbour 402). These and other feelings lead some GTAs to rely on self-accommodation rather than disclosing their disabilities to get official/legal accommodations from their institution as either a student or an instructor. Casie Fedukovich and Tracey Ann Morse explore how the GTAs with disabilities involved in their study "worried about how disclosing their disabilities might affect their teaching assistantships" (40), believing that self-disclosure of a disability would lead peers and faculty to see them as ineffective instructors. In some cases, losing a teaching assistantship could mean losing the attached funding package and any hope of finishing the degree.

In less extreme cases, a GTA could be reassigned to a research assistantship that doesn't factor in attendance as much as teaching face-to-face does but also doesn't pay as well as a teaching assistantship. Both cases could lead GTAs to decide that practicing transparent vulnerability is too risky, that it's safer to self-accommodate and, for those who can, attempt to "pass" as able-bodied.

To "pass" or not to "pass," that is the question for faculty members with invisible or hidden disabilities. It was also a question Elizabeth Sierra-Zarella had to answer for herself in graduate school: "[d]enial, shame, social stigma and stubborn defiance against our own limitations motivate many invisibly disabled people to conceal the true nature of their disabilities" (139). Her experience as a GTA with invisible disabilities led her to think and write about how faculty can create inclusive, accessible classrooms, an approach that often benefits all students, not just students with disabilities. Several non-GTA faculty members with invisible disabilities have also written about their experiences with "passing" and self-disclosure. Others discuss personal identification processes and impression/perception management (Olney and Brockelman; Valeras), the ethical and professional challenges surrounding self-disclosure (Lingsom; Tal-Alon and Shapira-Lishchinsky), and how self-disclosure can be used as a teaching strategy in the classroom (Tobin). All of these authors—who, I would argue, are practicing transparent vulnerability through publication—agree that choosing between "passing" and self-disclosure can be a complicated decision to make and is very much situation dependent. It's also a decision impacted by levels of accessibility faculty encounter in academia.

### **GTAs and Accessibility**

As with many terms in academia, "access is a moving target, a concept that sounds promising on its surface yet frequently offers little more than empty gestures" (Brewer 152). In other words, there are innumerable ways to define and discuss accessibility, which is why I began this article with as broad of a definition as I could think of: that something or someplace is accessible when someone is able to reach it with minimal impediments. This section takes this definition and applies it to three particular situations in which GTAs with disabilities experience issues with accessibility: physical spaces, health care and insurance, and job security.

#### *Accessing Physical Spaces*

GTAs, especially those who must work as part-time faculty members at other institutions to survive financially, face accessibility issues with professional physical spaces and becoming oriented to new workplaces (see Street et al.). When it comes to on-campus workspaces, GTAs are rarely afforded the private spaces many full-time NTT and T/TT faculty enjoy. For example, when I was at UNC-Charlotte, all FYW GTAs shared desks with at least one other GTA or PT faculty member in a small, former

computer lab with a single phone to share between all of us. We did, however, have dedicated mailboxes in the building's mailroom. At NC State, we have a larger and nicer dedicated space on the bottom floor of a small building addition, but we have to share our cubicles with at least one peer and share the one printing computer and two desktops with all of our peers. In that space there is no phone, and we have one shared mailbox in another building that most students don't know exists. One way my peers and I at NC State practice transparent vulnerability is by voicing our concerns to our faculty and program administration team through our student association and two student program representatives.

For GTAs also working as adjunct instructors because they are unable to live on the small stipend they receive from their university, stressful working conditions can include teaching at multiple institutions and campuses, having limited contracts that can be canceled without prior notice, unpaid course preparation time, and a general lack of resources, including a workspace. For both GTAs teaching only on their campus and for those teaching at multiple institutions, the lack of access to appropriate workspaces can lead to less face-to-face communication between GTAs and their students and therefore fewer opportunities for GTAs to act as mentors, an issue explored by Amy M. Bippus et al. in "Teacher Access and Mentoring Abilities: Predicting the Outcome Value of Extra Class Communication."

For GTAs with disabilities, numerous issues with accessing physical spaces or being able to work well in them can arise. These issues could manifest as something broader, like a general lack of accessibility on a campus in the form of difficult walking surfaces, or as something more specific, like a tall desk chair one has to climb up into in order to lower it. An issue I recently encountered was a smart podium desk too high for me to stand at without being blocked from my students' view by the large monitor—and that's without it being raised at all since it can also be a standing desk for people taller than my 5'4"—and almost too high for me to be able to hop up onto so I could exist in my preferred teaching spot. That was in an already tiny, cramped computer lab classroom that was difficult for myself and my students to navigate. These were all issues that I addressed in my cohort's pedagogy course as part of a classroom analysis project, a wonderful project that provided all of us with the opportunity to practice transparent vulnerability. Other physical space issues, such as bookbags on the floor blocking walking paths, are often discussed in books and articles focusing on disability issues in academia (see Dolmage's "Mapping Composition" and *Academic Ableism*; Tal-Alon and Shapira-Lishchinsky).

#### *Accessing Health Care and Insurance*

While some GTAs have health insurance—though many with questionable coverage—included in their funding packages, those who don't must purchase health insurance, either through their school or

elsewhere, since having health insurance is a student requirement. GTAs with disabilities who have insurance then face an additional obstacle: going to get the health care they need. Attending appointments can mean canceling the classes we teach and/or missing the classes we take, absences that may need to be explained, especially if the disability requires regular visits to a doctor. For GTAs who have not self-disclosed their disability and aren't comfortable with self-disclosing, this can be a situation in which they're forced to either make up an excuse or practice transparent vulnerability before they're ready to. Or, in the case of some teachers who participated in Noa Tal-Alon and Orly Shapira-Lishchinsky's study, they neglect "their commitment to taking medication or to visiting the doctor because they did not want to miss a day of work" (7). For many GTAs, including myself, canceling or missing class due to a disability can quickly and easily lead to anxiety about how students, supervisors, and professors are perceiving our academic performance and work ethic.

#### *Accessing Job Security*

As suggested by the term "contingent," every contingent faculty member has a temporary position; the only difference in contingency is the timetable. So long as tenure is held up as the gold standard and the only way to achieve true job security in higher education, job security will be a troubling issue for many contingent faculty members for whom teaching is their main source of income. As a part of just-in-time hiring practices, part-time faculty members are often the last ones to receive teaching assignments and the first to lose their courses to full-time faculty—both T/TT and NTT—and GTA peers when enrollment is low. "The unnecessary scale and scope of practices such as 'bumping' clearly undermine the ability of faculty to prepare for their courses" (Street et al. 6), which is especially problematic when they had little (and unpaid) time to prepare in the first place. While GTAs can also experience bumping, this means our programs shift the responsibilities of our assistantships to another class (or something other than teaching) instead of losing our positions entirely. Plus, not all GTAs find a TT or full-time NTT position first thing after graduation, so becoming a part-time faculty member is just a matter of time for many of us.

Job security can also be impacted by attendance and performance as mentioned above. As someone with a physical disability that is served with a side of mobility and cognitive issues, I find that I'm very self-conscious about canceling or missing class because of fibro. Will my supervisors think I don't take teaching seriously? Will my professors think I'm lazy? Will my students think I'm just blowing them off and/or don't care about them? And how about in the case of Tal-Alon and Shapira-Lishchinsky's participants who neglected their self-care to avoid anxiety-inducing questions like these? Perhaps if more of us practiced transparent vulnerability by being open about the accessibility issues we face and the

disabilities we live with, we could work together to create a space in which GTAs and other contingent faculty with or without disabilities can feel more included, more secure, and free of worries about job security because of their medical history.

### **Practicing Transparent Vulnerability**

As I mentioned earlier, it would be highly unethical to ask every GTA to practice transparent vulnerability, so this approach requires a minimum level of comfort in discussing faculty status and/or disability with others, either one-on-one or in a group setting, with students, colleagues, supervisors, and/or professors. For example, I disclose my faculty status and disability to each class I teach at the beginning of the semester as part of my introduction. As a GTA, this means talking about how I'm also a student with homework and papers to write; as an adjunct instructor, this means talking about what a part-time faculty member is/does. In both cases, the conversation can include or induce a discussion of labor conditions. This can be especially helpful as students often don't know that there are different types of faculty and, when they do, can't correctly guess their professor's employment status (see Bippus et al.). For my disability, this means explaining what fibro is, how it affects me, and how it could potentially affect our class. Examples include asking my students to let me know if I'm not making sense, asking them to be patient with me as I attempt to catch the words that elude me, or telling them why I can't always give them notice several days in advance of when I need to cancel class due to a flareup.

I'm already as open and honest with my students as I possibly can be about everything else pertaining to our class, such as why we learn what we do and the purpose of activities and assignments, so talking with them about my position as a contingent faculty member and about my fibro is an extension of that. It also opens up conversations about what it means to be a contingent faculty member, what disabilities can look like, how both can impact our academic lives, and why the continued stigma surrounding them is unnecessary and detrimental. My being so transparent about my faculty status and my invisible physical disability does make me vulnerable to criticism and further stigma, but it also allows my students and me to begin effecting positive change through righting misconceptions and removing the mystery surrounding contingency and invisible disabilities.

What I don't tell my whole class is that I have experience with psychological disabilities, too. I spent the majority of my childhood and teenage years battling clinical depression, and I've dealt with mild obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) my entire life. I've also struggled with whether or not it makes me disingenuous to talk about only one of my disabilities, but that's where level of comfort comes into play when practicing transparent vulnerability: I'm very comfortable talking about my fibro, I'm thankful that I don't quite remember what it's like to be

depressed every day, and I'm very uncomfortable talking about my OCD unless it's the cute I'm-an-organizer-extraordinaire part of my disorder.

However, if a student comes to talk to me about their struggles with either depression or OCD, I disclose my experiences to that particular student to let them know that I sincerely do understand where they're coming from, and that I will by no means judge them. Practicing transparent vulnerability doesn't always mean doing so with an entire group; it can look like having a meaningful conversation with one person at a time. Such conversations let students know that they aren't alone and can help to build or enhance teacher-student relations that are beneficial for both parties (see Abery and Gunson; Spilt et al.). Further examples of one-on-one self-disclosure conversations about disability—what they can look like and how other faculty members experience these conversations—can be found in pieces like Wendy Chrisman's "The Ways We Disclose: When Life-Writing Becomes Writing Your Life," Susan Lingsom's "Invisible Impairments: Dilemmas of Concealment and Disclosure," and Lad Tobin's "Self-Disclosure as a Strategic Teaching Tool: What I Do—and Don't—Tell My Students."

GTAs can also practice transparent vulnerability with their colleagues. Conversations with colleagues, supervisors, and professors can be both more impactful and scarier than conversations with students for the same reason: while we have students for a limited amount of time—sometimes just a single semester or one short session—we work with our colleagues and supervisors much longer; therefore, they have a more direct and longer lasting impact on our professional lives. This can look like talking with other GTAs to determine shared experiences with access issues that a larger group of GTAs could potentially tackle and then expressing concerns with program, department, and upper-level administrators to make such issues hypervisible. While this practice could have a negative outcome, as feared by the faculty members with disabilities mentioned in Kerschbaum's "Access in the Academy," it could also begin or expand conversations about contingency, disability, and access in departments/programs that lead to positive change.

### **Conclusion**

Ultimately, if we don't have more open, public conversations about contingency and disability more often, the stigma clinging to these identities will never fully dissipate. As Kerschbaum says, "[h]aving such conversations is one of the best ways to reduce the misperceptions and lack of awareness that persist around disability, both of which must be reversed if the academy is to cultivate an environment in which disability is truly welcome" ("Access in the Academy" 39). The same can be said about contingency.

Perhaps the best place to begin practicing transparent vulnerability is with each other. There are many graduate student unions in existence across the country, and more are starting up, such as the one at Colorado



State University – Fort Collins described by Zachary B. Marburger in “Away with the Apprentice: Graduate Worker Advocacy Groups and Rhetorical Representation,” or the one that began at my current university around the time I entered my Ph.D. program. One of the best sources of support for a graduate student dealing with the very real stress of graduate life and the looming job market comes from other graduate students. Knowing that we’re not alone is a small thing that can go a long way. Practicing transparent vulnerability with other GTAs on campus and discovering common access issues is the first step to creating a larger conversation across campuses and the country.

For those larger conversations that move beyond GTA circles, no one should be forced to disclose faculty status or disability, and a GTA should only disclose what they’re comfortable with and what they feel is safe, especially since our situations vary from one program, assistantship, and institution to another. For example, I went back and forth for a while on whether or not to self-disclose my OCD in this article. After reading Kerschbaum’s “On Rhetorical Agency” in which she explores self-disclosure in academic writing and after having long conversations with my parents and peers, I decided that while I’m comfortable with disclosing the situations in which I would share my OCD with someone—one-on-one when students and peers share a similar issue with me, or with a supervisor or instructor if my OCD begins to affect my academic/job performance—I’m not comfortable disclosing how my OCD manifests and impacts my life.

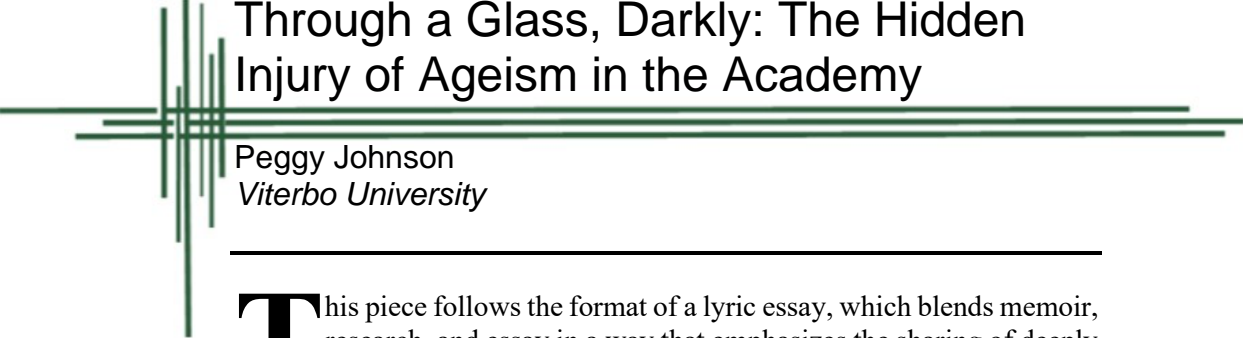
It’s important to understand that choosing not to disclose faculty status or a disability—choosing to “pass”—is not disingenuous: it’s a form of self-care. The goal is to eventually transform academia (and, ideally, the rest of the world) into a welcoming and accessible space for all. I would prefer if no GTAs were harmed in the making of that utopia.

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## Through a Glass, Darkly: The Hidden Injury of Ageism in the Academy

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**T**his piece follows the format of a lyric essay, which blends memoir, research, and essay in a way that emphasizes the sharing of deeply felt emotions over and above the verifiable accuracy of information. Such a format allows a new path of inquiry: not only does it shed light on how I perceived and processed my experiences, but also on how I shaped and gave meaning to those experiences. What the reader finds in this lyric essay is a rumination, a meditation of sorts that attempts to make sense of an interlocking web of circumstances by suggesting, rather than expounding on, conclusions. To the extent that this lyric essay dismisses objectivity in favor of intimacy, this essay may leave the reader with lingering questions. In this process of sharing fragments of my experiences that are meant to tether the reader's attention, this uncertainty is acceptable, even expected.

In this lyric essay, I tell my own story of adversity in action at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, and I rely on a narrative voice to incorporate my identity as a former faculty of practice with over two decades of writing program service at a workplace dominated by a strongly established white male hierarchical power structure with deep religious overtones, which may have had an impact on the marginalization I experienced. I write this lyric essay with the hope that readers will gain a new, more grounded, and more personal perspective of marginalization and will reflect upon their own experiences of laboring in the programs, departments, and, to a larger extent, the universities where they work.

### **My Experience of Disenfranchisement**

The text messages kept coming. *Are you okay? How are you taking the news? What does this mean?* I wasn't sure how to reply to my long-time colleagues who seemed as shocked by the news as I was. I was numb, confused, overwhelmed. All I could answer was, *I'm okay, but the changes*

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*came out of left field, and I'm not sure how I feel.*

I thought back on that meeting a week earlier. There were no hints, no murmurs of changes afloat regarding the operating structure of the campus's academic writing support programs, so the news that Tuesday afternoon last fall came to me as a shock. I learned that after devoting almost 25 years as the Writing Studio and then Writing Across the Curriculum program director at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota undergraduate campus, my title was being demoted to associate director, even though my work responsibilities would remain the same. During the brief meeting that Tuesday, I learned that while the writing programs at the undergraduate and graduate campuses were not being streamlined, the reporting lines were being shifted: no longer would writing programs and services on the undergraduate campus be housed under Student Success but would instead be housed under University Writing Initiatives. The Writing Center director of the graduate campus was chosen to oversee writing platforms at both campuses. While both directors held the same Ph.D. degrees, the younger, less experienced director had less than four years at the institution and less familiarity in shaping and developing new writing programming. No reason for the change in reporting lines was given, nor was there an explanation for the demotion in my job title. Despite my gently imploring emails requesting feedback and an explanation for the choice of new leadership and for the decision to reconfigure my title from director to associate director, reasons were not provided, and emails went unanswered.

Richard Starcher labels this "the chilly climate," or a work environment in which biases "chill the air" (206), pitting the dominant culture against its lesser laborers. I was feeling "chilled out" by college administrators, and while I recognized the tell-tale signs (lack of support, age bias, and isolation, especially toward those in low-status positions), the inability to get answers left me reeling. I realized that if I were to arrive at some sort of depth of understanding of this troubling issue, it would require some dissection. What was at stake? What harm was caused? I sensed that my low status as a non-tenure-track faculty of practice, combined with my gender, played a role in my demotion at the private institution where I spent my career. But those two factors—gender and low-status position—didn't tell the whole story. At over 55 years old, I realized a significant—perhaps the most significant—third factor might be at play: my age.

### **Making Sense of Marginalization: A Critical Framework**

In this lyric essay, I argue that the complex issue of ageism, a much-hidden injustice on college campuses, may be one of the most difficult injustices to fight and overcome, especially when compounded by gender and powerlessness. Perhaps because combating this triple jeopardy requires rich inner resources, not only to battle diminished influence in the academy but also to minimize psychological damage caused by poor

treatment in the workplace, I incorporate a narrative approach interwoven with research to shed light on my own experiences of injury regarding age, class, and gender.

In their research on gendered ageism, Gee et al. found that discrimination involving gendering and ageing is linked to diminished well-being (267). In arguing that gendered ageism (especially of laborers with low standing) has shaped the college workplace culture in harmful and contradictory ways and that responding to injustice with self-awareness is essential to forming an honest cultural critique, this study contributes to the important examination of institutional power structure and its impact on laborers in marginalized positions. At a time when many universities face budget constraints, which may reduce the availability of full-time faculty and faculty of practice altogether or may lead to the elimination of the most senior non-protected laborers (with higher earnings), the issue of ageism, most notably among women who hold limited workplace status, must be addressed if we are to navigate changes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century university. Calling attention to the harm of gendered ageism of low-status laborers might encourage meaningful action and dialogue to ensure that modernizing initiatives are not shutting out the very voices that could be the most valuable.

I spend significant time in the following sections deciphering the issues of gendering, ageism, and classism as they exist at higher education institutions today, the harm these issues cause not only to women but to the future of institutional communities, and why we need to pay attention. When colleges and universities of all types and locations are facing serious problems in today's educational climate, especially regarding issues of diversity and inclusion, enrollment declines, and the reimagining of how education is delivered, the hidden injuries caused to older women with low standing in the academy, may seem trite—to the point of being ignored, dismissed, or denied altogether. But as I show in the following pages, there is a need for greater understanding of the “othering” caused by the intersection of sexism, ageism, and classism in academia and how gendered ageism impacts low-status women's livelihoods, including their sense of self. This topic is especially important given the fact that women in the academy remain over-represented in low-status positions (Granleese and Sayer 513; Gander 109; Sargeant 2), which acts to minimize women's agency in advocating for improved working conditions.

The “silencing” of women without status or power in academia is compounded for women who find themselves younger than 35 and older than 45, or what Jacqueline Granleese and Gemma Sayer refer to as outside of the “golden decade” (512). It should be noted that this lyric essay on gendered ageism is itself ageist: it addresses women who have aged beyond the golden decade and does not include those who have not yet reached the golden decade, most notably because this older age group, especially those from age 50 on, faces significantly more hurdles in a society obsessed with youth and appearance and which embraces the myth

that competency and vibrancy decrease with age (Jyrkinen and McKie 65; Sargeant 2).

It must also be noted that different configurations of inequality occur in different contexts, so the intent of this lyric essay is not to assume outcomes, but to explore the nature and extent of inequality at one particular academic setting, with a specific focus on age inequality, which has received relatively scant attention. While my own experience of gendered ageism does not replicate or represent any other person or group's experiences of inequality, Leslie McCall's research indicates that my experience may suggest there are common conditions among academic settings that may exacerbate (or reduce) gender, age, and class inequality (1777). While structural conditions of academic institutions are dynamic and complex, they also can provide some explanation of the broader issues of social injustice that middle-aged women laboring in non-secure positions in the academy may face.

### **The Institutional Response to Inequality**

Perhaps because academic institutions are dynamic and complex, complications arise regarding the issue of gendered ageism of low-status laborers. Many institutions take a position that is at odds with those laborers who experience marginalization: the position that acts of injustice don't exist at their university. The changing identity and mission of the modern university centers on entrepreneurship, key performance indicators, and number-crunching (Chou), so institutions may not regard their practices of restricting or eliminating female ageing laborers in low-status positions as unjust and, in fact, may cite their targeted hiring and promotion of women in mid-status and high-status positions as evidence. This practice occurred at the institution where I worked: perhaps because the majority of the institution's top-level administrators were male, the institution made the deliberate decision to hire more women in mid-level dean and low-level director positions, to the point where most mid- and low-level positions across the institution were held by women. While top administrators pointed to a more gender-balanced administration, they failed to remark on the result of such decision-making: a stronger and clearer status delineation between top administrative positions, the great majority of which were held by males, and mid-level and low-level administrative positions, the great majority of which were held by females. And in times of budget-crunching, those low-to-mid-level administrative positions held by women were cut first. In the last round of budget cuts stemming from issues related to the coronavirus pandemic, for instance, not one top (male) administrative position was eliminated, while several low-level (mostly female) administrative positions were permanently cut.

While institutions cite their good faith attempt at growing their female administrative rosters, they also defend their right to eliminate all positions that no longer serve the good of the institution, regardless of the gender, age, or class of laborers. Jasper McChesney and Jacqueline Bichel

not only support this right but go a step further: they believe institutions should regard the trend of the ageing university workforce as an opportunity for institutions to shift their resources where they are able, so they can refine and reshape a more diverse workforce to better meet the changing needs and declining enrollments of the university (11). In other words, McChesney and Bichel believe institutions have an obligation to do what is best for the evolving 21st century university and the students they serve, which may require getting rid of some longstanding contingent, non-tenure-track faculty of practice laborers (the great majority of whom are women) who place a burden on the institution's budget or no longer fit the curricular needs of students. What McChesney and Bichel fail to mention is that determining which positions to eliminate "for the good of the university" requires subjective rather than objective problem solving. I am reminded of one talented, dynamic, longstanding female laborer who led the institution's web design team. Rather than retain the high skills of this laborer, the institution chose to eliminate her position and keep a far less experienced and younger laborer under contract. "The good of the university" appeared to be defined by eliminating unprotected higher-wage positions.

Certainly no one in the academy would disagree with an institution's choice to incorporate efficiency and much needed diversity measures or to embrace and uphold those colleagues who potentially can offer the institution different, more innovative thought and insight. As Mark Chou explains, in this age of high competition, institutions most want laborers who are high performers and who will advance the status of the institution. The error exists in prejudicing one group of laborers over another, for valuing the contributions of some as greater than the contributions of others, and for refusing to consider the prospective harm that can result from endorsing one group at another's expense.

Margaret Morganroth Gullette's work on ageism in the academy is especially important to note here. Gullette says employment practices that disparage experience are a form of age shaming, all done in an effort to bring in more innovative ideas (193). This shortsightedness on the part of institutions results in the development of in-groups and out-groups, with newer faculty members rising to the top while ageing faculty are left at the bottom. This practice, as Gullette explains, may ultimately have a negative impact on an institution's productivity (6). When one segment of a university community is not only treated as deficient but is also used as a scapegoat for the institution's woes, the laborers as a whole become distant to one another. They sense a silencing of their respected elders, which results in increased polarization among faculty and staff, weakened governance over curriculum, and a loss of trust in the administration's willingness to offer protection (2).

At the institution where I worked, the removal over a number of years of well-respected, longstanding laborers in the name of budget cutting changed the institutional climate for the worse. The move fostered



fear in laborers at all operational levels, so much so that employees, most notably females, in especially unprotected positions chose to avoid giving input that was considered disagreeable rather than risk having their name added to the “in danger of losing a job” list. In one situation when the group of staff I worked with was asked to give anonymous feedback on our supervisor’s job effectiveness, I gave what I believed was constructive criticism. The supervisor became privy to my comments and determined to make me pay. Over the next few years, the supervisor made false statements about me, painting me as an outcast and troublemaker. In a position with no status and no protection, I was defenseless. Others who were just as powerless, especially those who were newer laborers at the institution, witnessed the harmful treatment and were fearful of the same, so they refused to voice viewpoints that went against the company line. What transpired was a strongly divisive climate in which difference and disagreement were admonished and obedience and like-mindedness were promoted.

The institution where I worked is not the only institution that has overlooked the harm a crushingly divisive work environment can cause. Yet these negative impacts seem to hold little importance for corporate-model institutions in which ageing laborers are not only considered a liability but are also seen as being out of touch, out of date, uncreative, and unproductive (Gullette xi; Gander 123; Jack).

It must be noted that perspectives regarding the relationship between injustice and injury may be very differently understood between low-status laborers and administrators of the programs and departments they serve. Much depends on an institution’s views and values of gendered ageing laborers, which can influence an institution’s decisions regarding those laborers (Sargeant 10). It is precisely because institutions rarely see the “othering” of ageing female low-status workers that conversations about marginalization are so important and valuable in our efforts to promote a fair and inclusive work climate that recognizes the contribution of all laborers, especially contributions from longstanding laborers who offer the institution high intellectual and resource capital. Telling our stories of marginalization may be one of the best ways we can humanize injustice and promote human dignity.

## **Literature Review**

### *Positionality*

Change and renewal typically do not happen without conscious reflection and analysis, and I address that issue throughout this lyric essay by accessing my inner perceptions, sharing those perceptions in a wider context, and reflecting on those perceptions in order to deepen and broaden my own understanding of the marginalization I faced (Reed-Danahay 144; Weick 146). In her perceptive work on positionality, Jennifer Enoch explains that combining the persuasiveness and narrative features of

positionality creates and advances a pedagogical argument (4). But positionality does more than that: it permits me as the author to use agency in a way that can promote my personal well-being and, in the process, teach others about the negative outcomes of low-status gendered ageism. Scholars of positionality Paz Ortiz et al. would agree. The researchers believe positionality has the capability of expanding perspectives by challenging negative universalist ideas on issues of injustice (110). Positionality allows me to navigate my own vulnerability within my story in a way that gives readers (as well as myself) access to information that can foster within them (and me) a change of heart and renew their dedication to work toward social justice.

Finally, because positionality seeks to understand the social conditions that undergird issues of injustice, I use sensemaking as a guide. Sensemaking theory, a longstanding interdisciplinary research format mediated through research and written discourse, enables scholars to give meaning to their experiences by collecting, analyzing, and reflecting on data (Weick 150). Positionality, when combined with sensemaking theory, permits me to negotiate my position as a cultural insider as well as a reflexive outsider. Paz Ortiz and her co-authors insightfully claim it is essential that we not only must examine the marginalized parts of our identities, but that we go further by recognizing and reflecting on the ways we have internalized those structures of power and how those power structures have influenced our perception of self (112). In this way, we make sense of our experiences of marginalization.

It is important to make the point here that positionality, with its emphasis on reflection and narration, is as critical to the evolution of higher education institutions as it is to the evolution of the self. Starcher's discussion on diversity efforts in higher education is valuable in unpacking this point. Starcher says that because institutions often fail to see their own bias, they perpetuate norms and preferences that exclude or disadvantage certain groups of people without realizing they do so. Institution leaders believe themselves to be well-intentioned, so they may have difficulty identifying themselves as oppressors who cause harm to marginalized laborers (210). For this reason, Starcher, who strongly advocates for a diversified work environment, suggests that institutions acknowledge they do not deliberately exclude groups but that their actions may result in some groups not being included (202). Starcher believes if institution leaders regard themselves as good people who are simply unaware of their actions that disadvantage certain groups, they may begin to acknowledge the harmful outcome of their actions and then work to change by establishing the purpose, goals, structure, readiness, and implementation of an institution-wide diversity program.

Positionality theorists, however, may take issue with Starcher's argument. Starcher's reasoning may prove deficient in terms of implementing real change across institutions because it fails to deepen leaders' understanding of the injury they've caused. Positionality gives

voice to inequality; through reliance on personal story, positionality persuades readers of the injury caused by exclusivity and marginalization, something that implementing a diversity program for the right reasons cannot do. Positionality boldly calls out inequality in a way that should rankle leaders to the point that they realize the negative impact their privilege has had on outsider groups. For that reason, applying the lens of positionality is absolutely essential in bringing gendered ageism and classism to light in a way that may affect real change in programs, departments, and the university as a whole.

### *Intersectionality*

Gendered ageism, especially among the institution's low-status positions, is complex and multi-layered, and as such requires significant unfolding; I use a framework of intersectionality to serve that purpose. Intersectionality might be most simply visualized as separate chords braided together: the multiple dimensions of marginalized selves act as chords that entwine to form one fuller dimension, or category, of analysis. Scholar Kimberle Crenshaw provides a valuable metaphor of intersectionality as roads converging at an intersection: multiple marginal identities (each a separate road) meet within a single group (intersection). Like chords, these roads, or categories, are social constructs that govern behavior and expectations, and when we fail to conform to socially prescribed norms in each of these categories, our marginalization broadens and deepens because the categories are mutually formed (Breslin et al. 164). Those experiencing single or double jeopardy, for instance, face fewer threats and trauma from categories of inequality than those experiencing triple or quadruple jeopardy. In essence, the inequality experienced in one category is entangled with and reinforces the inequality experienced in the other categories, resulting in a significant restriction of opportunities.

McCall says that when we study these interlinking categories of social inequality, we shine a light on our own unique experiences as persons who inhabit multiple categories of marginalization. We then can analyze how these simultaneous dimensions interact to cause harm—often to the point of tragic consequences (1780). Take, for example, my own experience of a title demotion and lowered status without fewer work responsibilities, which I referenced in the narrative scene that opens this lyric essay. Through the lens of intersectionality, I see that my experience of marginalization was not simply a result of being female, nor was it a result of my long-term laboring in a low-status position, nor was it the result of being more than a decade past the golden age. Harmful consequences resulted from the relationship among all three of these interlinking categories at the specific and unique institution where I worked, an institution which supported the male over and above the female, which favored the relatively young versus the ageing, and which valued those with status much more than those with little standing.

In her scholarship, McCall aptly describes intersectionality as a tool that helps us piece our various selves together in a way that gives us meaning and helps us reach a clearer understanding of those distinctive yet connected parts of ourselves (1794). It must be noted that none of these single categories of gender, age, and class, nor the relationship among these categories, neatly fits the wide range of experiences of people to the point that they can be regarded as clear-cut master categories. But a framework of intersectionality gives me the ability to provisionally rely on master categories in order to deconstruct my experiences in a way that may contribute to changes in perspectives—at the very least, my own.

The role of intersectionality first guides us in understanding how the interplay of various identities defines our personal experience with oppression and domination at our institution and second, positions us in how best to respond and address oppression and domination at our institution. This response requires us to carry out conversations with one another about how our lives are impacted by structural power and how we might disrupt that structural power, and the last portion of this lyric essay attempts to guide readers in starting these critical conversations. Scholar Lorena Garcia says those who are oppressed must take risks to act from an oppositional position, driven by the need to disrupt or, at the very least, call out instances of injustice. Ultimately, intersectionality is a tool that allows us to “hold ourselves accountable for the work of social justice” (106). This lyric essay attempts to do just that.

*How Low-Status Laboring is Affected by Gender and Ageing*

In their work on gendered dynamics in the university setting, Briodo et al. explain that injustices involving women often are overlooked in the modern university setting because, in ordinary circumstances, people typically “play nice” (599). Interactions involving women are generally regarded as positive in feeling and tone and tend to draw out self-disclosure and helping behavior, even as covert stereotypical attitudes of women are sustained and reinforced.

Take the simple interactions, for instance, at the institution where I worked. During the brewing of a winter storm, the male in our suite of offices (all of us non-tenure-track academic staff) made sure to inform his female co-workers when they should consider leaving the office, so they could avoid the worst of the weather and get home safely. Our male co-worker took on the responsibility of protecting his female colleagues, who generally appreciated their male counterparts watching out for them. In fact, the office worked well under traditional gender role expectations: the social capital of the male colleague rose in his protective role, and the social capital of female colleagues rose as well, so long as they accepted their submissive position.

Another instance of gendering, much less simple, occurred in an office suite not far from mine and involved a male tenured faculty member who had a crush on a female student support staff member. He dropped by

her office on a regular basis, and while the conversations were mildly flirtatious but benign, they satisfied his need for attention. While the female had begun to question what felt like intrusive visits, she didn't want to hurt his feelings by telling him she felt uncomfortable. Both parties had fortified traditional gender role expectations, pitting him as the pursuer and her as the fellow conspirator. In this case, both parties acted out traditional gender roles, which reinforced power imbalance.

Instances like these in which traditional gender roles are accepted and reinforced in everyday interactions are much more common in an institution's low-power and low-status positions (Gander 116), and while these two examples noted above appear tame and fairly harmless, their insidious nature belies the suppression of opportunities for women to take on roles in which they are encouraged to use authority to guide, direct, and influence matters of the institution, even social ones. Instead, because laborers at all levels benefit—at least to some degree—from dominant-submissive gender dynamics, even in personal arenas, they do little to fight against the harm caused by such dynamics. However, the injury caused by traditional gender roles becomes exacerbated in higher-power and higher-status positions, where laborers may recognize a gender imbalance and its implications yet feel unable or powerless to stop it.

A prominent circumstance of gendering at the institution where I worked, much more complex and impactful in scope than the examples noted above, concerns the invisible voices of women in essential decision-making regarding the university's structure and operations. I think of one particularly important administrative committee that had the authority to decide the direction of the institution as well as the responsibility of ensuring not only its survival but the degree of its prosperity. At one committee meeting, the male provost brought forth a plan to develop new hybrid bachelor completion programs, which the mostly male committee members unanimously voted to accept. While the decision itself was innovative and forward thinking and was lauded by all factions of the institution, especially the top administration, it failed to include a broader array of voices, namely those of women who could offer a more comprehensive range of intellectual, social, and institutional capital.

What is revealed in all three of these gendered examples mentioned above is an interlocking system of covert oppression. Briodo and her co-authors characterize these dominant-submissive, intimacy-seeking, and pro-social helping behaviors as “benevolent” sexism (622), which regards women in stereotypical and restricted terms despite the fact that they aren't considered to be overt expressions of sexism. Even though most laborers see themselves as well-intentioned, they may not realize their behaviors and attitudes are indicative of gendering, and they may not fully grasp to what extent and degree benevolent sexism is ongoing throughout the university. Benevolent sexism in institutions, especially those with strong hierarchical structures like the institution where I worked, is injurious. When an institution promotes a patriarchal status

quo, it preserves gender inequality, limits power roles available to women, and perpetuates the practice of hiring more women in low-status positions, where they are already significantly over-represented. In this structure of injustice, male laborers are overvalued, and female laborers are undervalued across all lines of an institution's workforce.

Perhaps the greatest injury of an institution's embracing of benevolent sexist behaviors is that gender imbalance becomes a normal and natural function of its operational structure, even as its laborers may not recognize acts that devalue, demean, and discriminate against women (Briodo et al. 599). When both female and male laborers accept a covert sexist climate, they agree to a diminished sense of teamwork and collaboration and uphold the right of a few select men to guide the direction of an institution. More than that, the practice of advancing male laborers increases their opportunity to accumulate greater intellectual, social, and resource capital while at the same time it diminishes female laborers' opportunity to accumulate the same capital.

One particular situation at the institution where I worked involving faculty mentoring offers an unfortunate but insightful example of the advancement of male laborers at the expense of female laborers. The new faculty mentoring program, the brainchild of two tenured faculty members, one male (within the golden decade) and one female (beyond the golden decade), had been one of the most successful programs at the campus for almost a decade. The leaders of the program dedicated many hours each year to developing and implementing effective programming for faculty who were new to the campus, and the team worked seamlessly together. That relationship collapsed last summer when the new administration declared it wanted a change in leadership. Even though the team members received only a small stipend for their work with new faculty, a stipend they typically refused, the administration decided the mentoring program only needed one faculty leader—so the ageing female faculty member's role was eliminated while the male faculty member's role was elevated. The administrative decision was made without input from either of the team members or from faculty who had previously gone through the new faculty mentoring program.

By granting more power, influence, and status to male laborers at every level of the organization, an institution significantly limits the potential of its female laborers to play a prominent, instrumental, and guiding role in shaping the institution's legacy.

#### *Low-Status Laboring*

Michelle Gander's work on symbolic capital provides enormous insight into the role status plays in an institution's gendering attitudes and behaviors. Gander argues that the injustice of gendering is significantly compounded by classism: while female laborers across all levels are held to different (unequal) standards compared to their male counterparts, female laborers are especially vulnerable to marginalization when they

hold position titles that represent little in terms of status (117). Gander's explanation of symbolic capital (or lack of) is essential in gaining an understanding of the role institutional power dynamics plays in the diminishment of female voices and influence across the board, and especially those in low-standing positions.

Gander explains that all laborers accumulate symbolic capital, or access to power, when they share the values, perspectives, and behaviors of those in the highest status group (119). When laborers meet the standards of the highest status group, they gain social advantage, which grants them easier and more direct access to power. But those laborers whose values, perspectives, and behaviors are different from the highest status group experience not only a deflation in social advantage but face reinforced barriers that reproduce power inequalities. Daniel Griffith says those with social advantage are treated as golden children who receive greater career development opportunities, which often leads to greater chances for advancement. Those with less social advantage find themselves falling further behind as a result of inadequate support. Female laborers at all levels of the corporate-model, hierarchical university hold less social advantage than their male counterparts simply because of their gender, and Gander purports that the injustice female laborers experience is compounded by low job status.

The demarcation of social advantage among laboring groups and the barriers in place that prohibited elevation of social standing, especially women in low standing positions, was prominently displayed at the institution where I worked. Across the institution, laborers who were most eager to gain social advantage—or realized its necessity in terms of job security—began to avoid laborers whose independence was seen as radical because they were determined to maintain their image of being supportive of the administration. I'm reminded of one ageing female academic staff person who chose to stop attending meetings of the diversity and inclusion committee because it was well known that the new administration deeply frowned upon the group's agenda. While she agreed with the committee's philosophy and yearned to have conversations that mattered—to voice her concerns over issues of harm and to be part of bettering the campus culture—she knew she had to be mindful of the lack of power inherent in her position and her relatively low accumulation of social capital as a single, non-Catholic female. After all, the institution was comprised of a conservative, hierarchical administration that regarded healthy disagreement as betrayal and who saw female laborers, especially older ones, as dispensable.

Gander likens the accumulation of symbolic capital, or access to power, in the modern university to a competitive sports game, with players competing for the highest amount of social advantage (108). Female laborers in low-status positions are forced to play the game at a disadvantage because their positions of power differ so radically from those at the top. In order to gain any social advantage, female laborers in

low-status positions must wholeheartedly support the values, beliefs, and actions of those in high power positions or risk being relegated to bottom-class status. However, they face a roadblock: because of the disadvantage of their low-status position, they will never be awarded enough social standing to disrupt or overturn power relations (113). Further, they can only maintain social advantage so long as they adhere to and abide by the norms and standards of the institution, which means they must do their part in reinforcing the power inequalities that exist.

At the institution where I worked, social advantage and access to power were accorded more often to both female and male laborers who were Catholic and who adhered to traditional role expectations (Briodo et al. refer to this as “good-ol’-boys clubs” that reinforce non-members’ second-class status 609). The “Catholic crowd” on campus was composed mostly of males in higher status positions, although both female and male laborers in mid- to low-status positions were allowed entrance if they supported the beliefs and values of those in power. I recall one faculty meeting at which the newly installed president spoke of the many laborers who had shared with him their relief that they could now openly express themselves as Catholic without feeling as though they had to hide their faith beliefs. The unspoken message to laborers was loud and clear: embrace Catholicism or risk losing favor. A secondary message was also clear: a hierarchical structure, with male Catholics at the top, was here to stay.

Griffith explains that many institutions, such as the one where I worked, outwardly champion an inclusive workplace culture, but behind closed doors their decisions regarding laborers are often based on their preferences. While many institutions may not realize they’ve awarded some groups “teacher’s pet” status, other institutions may openly do so; in fact, Griffith says some administrators may not care if one group is openly favored over another. Worse yet are administrators who are committed (consciously or subconsciously) to fostering favoritism. And results of favoritism are dire for those not in the chosen group: their opportunities to influence the institution’s decision-making dry up at all levels, their contributions to the institution are mostly ignored, and they are denied full access to resources for professional advancement.

One situation at the institution where I worked involving employment contracts sheds valuable light on injustices toward out-group laborers. Administrators wanted the 10-month contracts of faculty of practice, including myself, to be extended to 12 months without any wage increase. Our several requests for a written explanation of the non-paid contract extension all went ignored. We had not been given a voice in the discussion, nor had we been told what motivated the decision, especially when other departments did not face similar realignments. While the contract dispute was ultimately resolved in our favor, we were temporarily “chilled out” by administration as punishment for self-advocacy and for not putting the administration’s needs and wants before our own.



There are other instances in which administrators' actions prevent low-status laborers from gaining social advantage and symbolic capital. Administrators may limit opportunities for low-status laborers to serve on university committees, may dictate which working groups they can serve on, or may deny them access to professional development. I recall my own instance of being denied professional research and conference presentation opportunities by a new administration that embraced the institution's corporate, hierarchical structure, a denial that kept me locked in a disadvantaged position. Administrators were eager to endorse only those laborers whom they believed could best position the institution to reach its goals. I was not one of those laborers. The new dean informed me I would not be allowed to publish or present my academic research because it was not listed as a job responsibility on my employment contract. If I wanted to pursue writing, research, and conference presentations, the work involved would have to be completed fully on my own time, a decision that the supervising vice president supported.

It is clear that administrative priorities may induce what Gander calls social closure, or giving an insider group—those with social advantage—a monopoly on professional ascendancy by closing off opportunities to an outsider group (116). Not only does the practice of social closure weaken the social advantage and symbolic capital of low-status laborers like myself, but it reinforces their limits in career advancement, demands that they fit the mainstream organizational culture, and provides little opportunity for them to contribute to the advancement of the institution.

Administrators may believe their (conscious or subconscious) actions to quash low-status laborers are in the best interests of the institution and therefore are not unjust; support exists for that perspective. Griffith says institutions may feel justified in generously rewarding those laborers who can help the institution grow, despite the fact that giving more to those laborers may mean other laborers will receive fewer, or no, rewards. Those with this mindset argue that low-status laborers are not in positions that have the potential to significantly advance the institution's goals or its reputation. Seen this way, institutions may have little control over rejecting low-status laborers (the majority of whom are women) if they want to remain competitive in the higher education market. Under this corporate-model, competitive mindset, inequalities in power relations are reproduced and reinforced, all under the banner of "doing what's right for the institution." What results is administrative action that diminishes its laborers by dividing them into in-groups and out-groups, silences low-status laborers by refusing to acknowledge their essential worth and value to the whole, and instates real barriers to low-status laborers' personal and professional growth—all subversive actions of gendered classism taken so that the institution may shine. My own experiences reflect the injustices inherent in the advancement of in-groups and oppression of out-groups

and underscores institutions' reliance on and reinforcement of bias and prejudice in order to cement its hierarchical, corporate structure.

### *Ageing*

Perhaps nothing screams out-group quite as loudly as those laborers whose very stage of personhood fails to meet the social standards and expectations normalized by hierarchical institutions: the female ageing laborer whose social advantage and access to power has slowed each year she ages past the golden decade. Times of austerity have demonstrated that ageing in university settings is not neutral: it is the institution's gendered ageing laborers who not only are shunned most (Pritchard and Whiting 510) but are used as a managerial strategy for cost-cutting measures and financial viability (Granleese and Sayer 510; Gullette 210). To come to a greater understanding of the extent to which an institution reinforces age bias and prejudice requires examining those laborers whose position at the institution is perhaps the most fragile: those females over 50 in low-status academic posts. They experience the most negative perceptions regarding age and, in some circumstances, face discrimination that is more prominent than other types of discrimination at an institution (Gee et al. 267). Gullette believes ageism to be the most difficult discriminatory practice to overcome (5) because, for the most part, it remains hidden or denied, is spoken of in hushed tones, if at all, and lacks a passionate movement behind it (no #MeToo movement, for instance). Gullette says the real problem of ageism is the human victims it ensnares and the costs involved, most especially the loss or diminishment of professional livelihood (xvii). In other words, when institutions sidestep their ageing workers, refusing to acknowledge their lifetime achievements and contributions (Whitbourne and Montepare 249), they create a distinct win-loss organizational structure—a zero sum game.

In their research on gendering and ageing, Marjut Jyrkinen and Linda McKie argue that values toward ageing play a huge role in age bias. They say the ongoing discrimination women face on the basis of age, especially those women at the later stages of their careers, exists less because of the social categories of gendering, ageing, and low-status laboring and more because of the values attached to those social categories (65). In other words, older women in non-protected positions do not face discrimination *because* of their gender, age, or position; rather, they face discrimination because of the *values* attached to gender, age, and class. Gee et al. explain that these values are represented by the institution's attitudes and perceptions toward gender, age, and class (281). These values shape attitudes and perceptions that (re)create social hierarchies and power relations that sustain inequalities and privileges, as well as promote and maintain negative stereotyping of older people and of the ageing process (Sargeant 2; Gee et al. 282; Whitbourne and Montepare 270).

Jyrkinen and McKie say the dominant value attached to ageing is the false belief that a reduction of skills and energy occurs in the ageing

process, most notably beginning at or around the age of 50 and even as early as the age of 40 (69). Yet this value of declining ability isn't typically applied to people in high-status positions, which are most often male-occupied. In high-status positions where laborers are male and older, Jyrkinsen and McKie found, the category of age is actually valued for offering security and stability (73). But because ageing females in low-status positions often occupy social categories (powerlessness, older age, and womanhood) that are considered as "less suitable" than more masculine categories of power and status, they face subtler and hidden forms of discrimination. Susan Krauss Whitbourne and Joann Montepare suggest that because institutions may regard gendered ageing laborers as stuck in the past or on their way out because of their diminishing physical and mental capacities (250), administrators may exclude them from strategic planning discussions and high-profile committees and relegate them to service on less desirable planning groups or, worse yet, exclude them from service work entirely (Gullette 5).

Perhaps more devastating than being shunned by an institution is to be regarded as without merit, which for many ageing non-protected laborers means job elimination. At the institution where I worked, ageing laborers on non-protected continual contracts, the great majority of whom were women, were the first casualties of cutbacks related to the financial slide from the sudden coronavirus pandemic. Doubt about long-term financial stability required many institutions, especially small privates, to eliminate extra spending and decrease payroll expenses. At the institution where I worked, almost two dozen non-protected laborers (most female and most past the golden decade), including non-tenure-track faculty and academic staff, saw their positions eliminated almost overnight. I was one of them. My long-term professional work in writing programming was cut short, a casualty of "redundancy." One low-level director position was cut, only to be reopened at a much lower salary and title demotion. While seniority at most institutions is a valued commodity, with newer laborers being eliminated first, administrators at the institution where I worked seemed to regard the salaries of long-standing non-protected laborers as over-ripened, so their positions were the first to be eliminated. Women, already over-represented in non-protective positions, were thus over-represented in this round of deep cutbacks. Younger non-protected laborers, insecure about the security of their positions, breathed easier knowing they had heightened status than their more experienced counterparts who were past their prime in the eyes of the institution, and they supported the status division accordingly because it served them professionally.

Whitbourne and Montepare explain that the marginalization of gendered ageing workers based on the perception of their diminished competency has been heightened, especially in recent years, due to the economic fragility of higher education institutions (247). This operational mode of resource threat and scarcity pits groups of laborers against one

another with harmful outcomes: ageing laborers lose significant social advantage garnered from years of institutional wisdom and professional contributions, and they find themselves the target of tension and backlash from younger generations of laborers who fear being denied access to university job opportunities and promotions because ageing laborers won't leave (272). What results is the creation of an "us-versus-them" distinction that blocks workers from interacting in ways that could help overcome ageist divisions.

Robert Zaretsky's research shows that despite being relegated to out-group status by administrators and younger colleagues, ageing laborers want to hold on to their jobs because they want to stay active and productive, and they enjoy their position too much to leave it. Jyrkinen and McKie would agree. They found that gendered laborers over the age of 50 believe they've entered the "best phase of their life" at the institution because of the "knowledge and multifaceted experience" they have gained from decades of employment (70), a perception that may be quite at odds with the institution's mindset. Administrators generally perceive ageing laborers to be less active, less productive, and less relevant than their younger counterparts. Not surprisingly, say Granleese and Sayer, administrators are motivated to offer their ageing workers enhancement deals to quit employment, so that institutions can find younger, cheaper and more productive laborers to replace them (512). Most troubling in this scenario is that ageing gendered laborers feel the most confident and capable in their professional life after the age of 50, the age when administrators have begun to earmark them as potential casualties in the institution's fight to stay relevant (514). When administrators regard ageing laborers as burdens to the institution, they promote the perception that the work lives of ageing laborers are less worthy than the work lives of any other age group.

At the institution where I worked, a hiring situation involving prejudice against ageing comes to mind. During an especially tight job market, the selection committee for a mid-level administrative position discovered that the older female candidates who had applied were by far the most qualified, and many committee members were disgruntled by the lack of a younger hiring pool. I still recall the committee members' comments expressing dismay at the candidates' older appearance and lack of vigor, which they feared wouldn't connect well with students. Needless to say, the selection committee's hiring announcement lacked excitement, and they never shed their negative attitude toward the new administrator's age, nor their belief that she wasn't quite competent in the job.

Gullette labels these perceptions of ageism as institutional macroaggressions. She says the more gendered ageing laborers are perceived as weak, unattractive, and incapable of contribution, the more vicious and injurious the tension (xvii). What has resulted is a systemic problem in which administrators freely violate the very personhood of ageing laborers because they are perceived as not adhering to the norms

and standards of the institution. When that occurs, Zachary Jack says, both institutional governance and worker morale suffer because a valuable collective voice is lost. Its replacement is younger laborers who say yes to intense, performance-based advancement in order to establish a place at the table, knowing themselves to be replaceable (Chou). What is perhaps most striking in the many situations of ageism, according to Gullette (3), is administrators' blatant systematic practice of discrimination—without apology or reflection on the consequences that impact their own institution.

What administrators fail to see in situations of gendered ageism is the emotional, psychological, and physical health impacts on ageing low-status laborers as a result of feeling dismissed and of witnessing their standing in the academy being undermined and weakened. Gullette points to chronic stress as a significant outcome associated with workplace harm (3). Chronic stress may increase the risk of chronic disease, mortality, and other adverse physical health outcomes because it does violence to the body and undermines the need of feeling safe. David Wygant believes one of the most harmful outcomes of falling out of institutional favor is emotional distress (that is, being emotionally “beaten up”) because it changes the perception one holds of oneself. When gendered ageing laborers find themselves marginalized, they engage in negative thoughts of themselves, feel powerless in most aspects of life, become frustrated and angry with themselves, and may eventually spiral out of control. Wygant points out that these negative responses are a normal outcome of feeling emotionally assaulted or mistreated, yet these negative responses can permanently alter one's sense of belonging and self-worth.

### **Final Thoughts**

I recall the email that Tuesday in May 2020 requesting a Zoom meeting with the human resource director the following afternoon. The message gave no agenda, nor any indication of the meeting's purpose. Most likely another addition to my growing workload, I told myself. Perhaps because my direct supervisor did not indicate any change in our department, I was completely unprepared for the shock of that brief meeting: my position was eliminated. No warning, and no sign of appreciation for years of dedicated service. No room for negotiation. No answers as to why my position was chosen for elimination while other positions in the department were kept. Calls, text messages, and emails from colleagues across the institution came. *Are you okay? How are you feeling? I'm so sorry. So sorry. How can I help?* The jolt was so monumental I didn't know how to answer.

Griffith says the most glaring evidence that institutions are treating gendered low-status ageing laborers unfairly is the level of attention, resources, time, and support administrators give to younger laborers at all levels while ignoring or giving significantly less attention, resources, time, and support to ageing laborers. Griffith suggests that if

ageing laborers have made attempts to get open and honest feedback on decisions that appear to be biased or prejudiced, but administrators have not responded to emails or have refused to acknowledge the issue, this may be a red flag that discrimination is at play. And discrimination has harmful effects. Administrators who exclude ageing laborers by taking away their agency, treating them with indifference or condescension, or eliminating their positions altogether are causing injury not only to those laborers but to all persons who witness their reproof (Gullette 6).

The end of my career at the institution was a stunning loss, most notably because of the way it was handled. I felt insignificant, my work invisible, disregarded, and unappreciated. A large piece of my identity for over two decades had been shattered. As Gullette says, there is pain associated with being treated as helpless and weak. That pain must be channeled, not suppressed, in order to dislodge those who feel demoted “from a state of dumb acceptance” (195). While a large part of me felt deep relief from being cut loose from an unhealthy work climate, I also struggled with feelings of loss, uncertainty, and grief. All laborers need to feel recognized as persons of equal worth; this lyric essay has shown that isn’t necessarily the case for gendered ageing non-status laborers who may feel that lack of recognition as a significant loss. Gullette believes the best response to that loss is not wilting, not denying feelings, not becoming silent, not becoming invisible (193). The response to that loss must be owning our feelings, however deeply negative, and having the courage to be honest about our place in the modern university. The power that comes from being truthful with ourselves and others forms the foundation of resilience and motivates us to take steps toward action.

### **A Call to Action: Overcoming Gender, Age, and Class Disenfranchisement**

A valuable point in intersectional studies is the crucial need to examine both the social location, or the intersection of marginalized categories, as well as the social context of the institution, or where the marginalization takes place. By focusing on social location and social context, we call attention to the problematic dominant categories (such as masculinity, relative youth, and power) normalized at an institution as part of its typical functioning. We see how these norms produce forms of oppression and privilege, and we witness the tendency within institutions to sustain rather than eradicate biased treatment. The strength of intersectional analysis derives from exploring and naming the social context in which the intersection of these dimensions of inequality exist.

#### *Part 1*

In order for gendered ageing laborers in low-status positions to overcome disenfranchisement, it’s essential to assemble the voices of those with grievances, so we can begin to change the narrative of our institutions and tackle the task of creating an institutional culture of advocacy so that all

laborers at institutions can prosper. It's a worthy goal. Following are reflective questions for group dialogue that can guide disenfranchised ageing workers in coming to a greater sense of what they need their institutions to be and become. Consider asking these questions in a group discussion:

1. How can we advocate for opportunities that allow disenfranchised laborers to talk openly about their concerns?
2. How do we ask honest questions that will deepen our understanding of our institution's operations model, and how can we advocate for changing the operations model in a way that dignifies the work of all laborers?
3. How can we create and grow peer communities centered on issues of disenfranchisement in our effort to help our institution evolve?
4. How can we overcome academic isolation? How can we encourage conversations that center on lived experiences, ideas, and questions?
5. How do we use conversations with administrators to educate them about harmful practices and advocate for ethical decision-making?

### *Part 2*

The first step in taking action toward institutional healing requires us to own our feelings of disenfranchisement as traumatic and diminishing; the next step is to challenge institutional biases by explaining our feelings in direct and open conversations with people in power. By doing so, we can begin to modify and humanize our institutions. In your conversations with people in power at your institution:

1. Discuss your expectations of basic entitlements, including a safe and supportive workplace for all laborers, including those who are marginalized.
2. Describe acts of suppressive and discriminatory behaviors in detail in an attempt to reconstruct your work life, including its traumas and struggles. Share with administrators the lived experiences of disenfranchised group members.
3. Advocate for ethical decision making. Ethical institutions should seek to identify and correct discrimination, especially as they learn about the devastating trauma it causes.
4. Request that administrative teams be transparent in their motivation behind changes, be willing to consider the voices of those who may be harmed, and be open to providing needed support for those drawing the short stick.
5. Advocate for change in leadership behaviors that seem dismissive and cruel so that the whole of the institution can prosper.


Of course, administrators may choose not to consider potential harmful consequences of their decisions, or they may choose not to implement the support necessary for those who are in distress. They may choose to continue to act unethically, and if that's the case, they should be exposed to judgement. However, institutions may choose to listen to the voices of those who give witness to the destructiveness of gendered ageism of low-status laborers. In those circumstances, recovery can begin, and community relationships can be restored. The task at hand, to fight against issues of gendered age and class discrimination, will require reflection, resilience, and hope, even during times that seem hopeless, in order to advocate for our future.

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# FYC's Unrealized NNEST Egg: Why Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers belong in the First-Year Composition Classroom

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## **Abstract**

Overviewing rhetoric and composition's evolution from “English” to “Englishes,” this article shows how the denigration of non-native English-Speaking Teachers (NNEST) of writing on the basis of English difference disregards linguistics’ understandings of the evolutions of language. Additionally, this essay demonstrates that when we consider writing via the lens of the threshold concepts and see writing as an exercise of mind, ideas and thinking, NNEST of writing can be a strength in twenty-first century First Year Composition (FYC) course.

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s readers of this journal are well aware, issues regarding academic

**A**s the structure of the university forces those who are the most exploited to be themselves “unwitting” accomplices “to the erosion of the academic profession, faculty power, and undergraduate education” (Levin and Shaker 1462). In fact, the current structure of the university may be forcing the field of composition and rhetoric to be another, perhaps unwitting, accomplice to this erosion of power as it employs a significant percentage of non-tenure-track faculty to teach writing classes (e.g., CCCC “Statement on Working”) and utilizes graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) in a kind of “bait and switch” that promises them academic apprenticeships but only offers them treatment as “contingent faculty in a system where tenure lines are decreasing while contingent jobs become more common” (Wright 277).

Such complicity seems untenable, especially since throughout the second part of the twentieth century and all of the twenty-first, the first-year composition (FYC) course has been working toward more inclusive and democratic practices (e.g., Rose; Royster; Flynn). As Wendy S. Hesford observes, part of this trend toward egalitarianism has resulted in the field’s trend toward globalization, with compositionists responding to injustices in the world outside the classroom. However, the field’s responses to injustices and its treatment of globalism may be superficial, as Hesford herself notes in another article written with several co-authors. When universities in the United States speak of globalism, too often it is an inequitable model with, “students from the United States [going] to study in China under the auspices of US professors importing a monolithic Standard English, or bringing international students to the United States to learn from US professors that same monolithic Standard English” (Lalicker 53).

In fact, the university’s internationalism focus on Standard English is curious because there have been continued questioning of the continuation of Standard English being demanded in the composition classroom, with some noting that what is taught in the classroom is actually different from linguistic usage (e.g., Park et al.), and others arguing that our considerations of “mechanics” need to broaden to include the mechanics necessary for multi-modal writing (e.g., Rice).

Certainly, the field of composition and rhetoric might separate itself from the flaws of university’s internationalism focus, especially the university’s prioritization of Standard English, to argue that the field approaches internationalism differently. For example, Margaret K. Willard-Traub pointed out in a 2017 *Composition Forum* article how she creates a cross-cultural experience for multinational students by emphasizing the heteroglossic nature of the transnational classroom. Yet within the work on globalism in the writing classroom, there has been a notable absence of multi(bi)lingual voices. More specifically, the field of composition and rhetoric’s advocacy for egalitarianism, the academic

environment of the composition class appears to be hostile for non-native English-speaking teachers (NNEST) of writing within most universities in the United States.

### **Hostility to NNEST**

We have encountered such hostility firsthand. One of us (Ghimire) is a NNEST of writing from Nepal who has been speaking English since she was five. Ghimire came as a GTA to a graduate rhetoric program in a regional United States university (where most of the graduate students come from the Midwest) with a master's degree in rhetoric from a Nepali university and a publication in a Nepali periodical. One American university administrator, when learning of Ghimire's background before meeting her, expressed concern at Ghimire's ability to teach writing to the university's students. Then, when Ghimire took the university-administered language speaking proficiency test, she was told she could not work as a GTA nor work in the university's writing center—despite that fact that her experience with English composition and rhetoric exceeded many native English-speaking GTA's.

This experience is not unique. Evidence of such prejudice in the field is provided by many scholars who show how NNEST of all disciplines face numerous macroaggressions from students, faculty, and staff. For example, Jacobs and Friedman; Ruecker et al.; and Fitch and Morgan detail how white American students consistently complain about NNEST, blaming NNEST for their own inadequacies. Other studies illustrate how NNEST are perceived as less intelligent and more instinctual (Karamcheti) or as intrusions on students' own "neutral" study (Kopelson). Most significant, NNEST are often not hired when the hiring institution sees a "foreign" name or face (Ramjattan). These problems are exacerbated in the writing classroom, where NNEST must participate in what Christiane Donahue terms the "colonialist practice of composition" (215), where the linguistic and rhetorical norms of the United States are treated as universal, and NNEST of writing face exceptional bias.

Basing their conclusions on multiple examples of NNEST of writing being humiliated and discriminated, many NNEST of writing scholars suggest much of this discrimination is based not on any lack of abilities, but on a bias against an image repertoire of skin, eye, and hair color as well as social backgrounds. Evidence of such prejudice in the composition classroom is borne out in George Braine's study regarding the treatment of NNEST of English. Braine notes that while many Caucasians are NNEST (such as those from Northern Europe), they are mostly viewed by United States students as native speakers. Braine's observations suggest that much of the negativity toward NNEST is not toward their use and knowledge of language and rhetoric, but instead is based on long-standing prejudices of race, ethnicity, language and social-economic background. Supporting this idea, Min-Zhan Lu and Bruce Horner's work on translingual literacy and agency argues that many of the

vilifying practices against multilingual and translingual teachers in the writing class attempt to give the dominant language “agency” while repressing minority Englishes.

### **Overview**

While some might argue that there is much research and interest in multi(bi)lingual voices within our field, a closer examination reveals that most of this scholarship centers on the English as a Second Language (ESL) class and its students. In considering the published texts on NNEST of writing, it seems there may be a belief that the multilingual teacher can be effective only for teaching students in ESL class. As Suresh Canagarajah observes, there seems to be an assumption that the learning trajectory of writing migrates from “communities in the center” to the “geopolitical periphery”; in other words, faculty and students in the United States have nothing to learn from non-American students while these students have much to learn from us (*Transnational* 69). This issue exacerbates the current labor inequities in the field of composition and rhetoric, especially when considering that international contingent faculty and GTAs are either excluded or exploited, and in both scenarios their abilities are criticized and debased.

However, recent developments in the field create an ideal opportunity for all NNEST of writing to lead, and perhaps reverse, some of the discriminatory labor practices in the composition and rhetoric classroom. In particular, the work of Elizabeth Wardle on transferability (767), as well as her work with Linda Adler-Kassner (1-16), illustrates the field’s need to focus more on skills that transfer out of the classroom and to teach particular habits of thinking (threshold concepts) that are essential if any person is to become a good writer.

This article argues that when practitioners of composition and rhetoric consider recent approaches to the FYC class, we are taking a hypocritical stance if we do not consider how the NNEST in the FYC program, whether faculty or graduate students, can be stalwarts to the teaching of critical thinking. NNEST are ideally positioned to advantage the FYC class by incorporating their multidimensional perspectives to help first-year students respond to rhetorical situations. Overviewing our field’s evolution from “English” to “Englishes,” this article shows how the denigration of NNEST of writing on the basis of English difference disregards linguists’ understandings of the evolutions of language. Additionally, this essay demonstrates that when we consider writing via the lens of the threshold concepts and see writing as an exercise of the mind, NNEST of writing can be a strength in the twenty-first century FYC course.

### **Rewriting Non-Native Teachers of English Writing as “Outsiders”**

Within the field of composition and rhetoric, the relationships among language, power, and identity are continual subjects of study. One focus within this study concerns intersectionality, and how each individual’s myriad identities create the lens through which they see the world. For example, in 2017 the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) offered a feminist workshop on “Intersectionality within Writing Programs and Practices.” According to the chairs’ review of the workshop, the session examined how scholars can “use intersectionality to address some of the inequities ... in the classroom, our institution, the field, and communities” (McDermott et al.). Such a focus is much needed, especially since faculty in the field face discriminations coming from various directions. As a 2016 issue of *Inside Higher Education* noted, diversity among faculty is growing within contingent faculty, not tenure-track (Flaherty). With so many of the contingent faculty teaching in composition and rhetoric, many of these diverse faculty are facing the labor crisis in addition to the discriminations of other aspects of their identities.

Such bias is problematic not only because it affirms prejudicial preference to superficial and personal attributes of perceived Caucasian writing instructors, but it also promotes colonialist ideas about language, casting doubt on the rigorous writing methods of and pedagogical practices in teaching writing at non-American universities. As John Docker has articulated, this approach to knowledge is parochial as it warrants its claim with a far-fetched idea: English is an inherently American academic exercise. Docker claims that by disregarding minority cultural values and devaluing NNEST of English, such language systems—dominated by the majority—contribute to a neocolonial façade of segregation.

On the other hand, NNEST of writing themselves have very different views regarding their role in teaching English and the FYC class. According to much of the scholarship in Enric Llurda’s anthology of research on NNEST, a majority of NNEST see themselves as very capable of teaching English, as do many of the students. While some NNEST with less English fluency do recognize their inabilities, NNEST are not the only ones with inabilities: as the BBC notes (though regarding British speakers), many native English speakers are very poor communicators (Morrison).

### **NNEST of Writing as Insiders with Englishes**

Even if the prejudicial biases are not considered, any linguistic biases against NNEST of writing are also unfounded. This is due to the fact that, as most every student of Ferdinand de Saussure recognizes, language is a social phenomenon; it differs in terms of time and context, and it constantly evolves. Saussure states that language is a “semiological

phenomenon” (145), which does not have any inherent relationship of sound image (signifier) to its concept (signified). Instead, the production and use of language is arbitrary (depending on the community of the speakers) and is affected by social facts (time and space) (144). This is an important idea about the evolution and use of language, for he even explains that phonemes, accent, and grammatical application (plural vs singular) of particular words are “imposed on individuals by the weight of collective usage” (156). Considering that the university classroom is increasingly concerned with internationalism, the classroom must recognize that the “collective usage” of English is evolving with the multiple Englishes found across the globe, especially since a majority of English speakers come from outside Anglo countries (e.g., Widdowson; “Who Speaks English”).

In such an evolving world, and hence an evolving FYC class, the issue of the validity of teaching Standard English is increasingly questioned. For example, linguist James W. Tollefson suggests that standard language is a highly ideological construct, one promoting values of the American upper-middle-class society. According to Tollefson, power ideologies of educational institutions play a crucial role in enforcing homogeneous English, whose root is arbitrary. Similarly, Canagarajah dismantles the concept of Standard English and argues that instead classes should be teaching world languages:

English should be treated as a multinational language, one that belongs to diverse communities and not owned only by the metropolitan communities. From this point of view, ‘standard’ Indian English, Nigerian English, and Trinidadian English would enjoy the same status as British English or American English, all of them constituting a heterogeneous system of Global English. (589)

Canagarajah is explicit that all students—whether native or non-native English speakers—need to learn Englishes. He argues that disregarding varieties of Englishes “disables students in the context of linguistic pluralism” (592), and that “in order to be functional postmodern global citizens, even students from the dominant community (i.e., Anglo American) now need to be proficient in negotiating a repertoire of world Englishes” (591). Along these lines, the Irish Ministry of Trade and Employment recognizes that the “‘English is enough’ viewpoint, while superficially appealing, is seriously flawed and needs to be strongly countered ... language skills are complementary to other skills such as science, engineering and technology” (Garcia 99).

The Modern Language Association (MLA) also recognizes the serious limitations to such an “English is enough” perspective. In 2007, the organization released an “ad hoc” report on the need for higher education to recognize the importance of providing students with

translingual competence. Identifying the significance of the United States' language deficit in the post-9/11 environment, the report articulated the ways in which higher education can address this deficit while serving both the country and students. While the report certainly encouraged students within the United States to learn languages other than English, it also noted the importance of having American students better comprehend the relationships among languages, cultural knowledge, and perceptions of reality. To meet these ends, the report offered numerous suggestions, among them having the presence of more non-native educators, so Americans can better understand how language acts as a means of negotiating difference.

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) offers a similar perspective in its 2017 "CCCC Statement on Globalization in Writing Studies Pedagogy and Research." Recognizing the importance of globalization, NCTE states that "all levels" of education, "including first-year/lower-division writing," need to embrace pedagogies that are "sensitive to the complex effects of globalization." In its recommendations, the Statement encourages writing programs to "prepare teachers to address linguistic and multicultural issues," and to help students "expand their language repertoires." One means of doing so is by inviting "exploration of a wide range of sociocultural and linguistic experiences and practices" ("CCCC Statement on Globalization").

With all these sophisticated understandings of language and writing that articulate why North American students need to develop translingual communication skills, regarding NNEST in a writing program as pariah and perceiving heterogenous English as deviant excludes the other greater half of the issues. NNEST of writing have socio-linguistic, cultural, geographical, and various other differences from the native speakers. And these diversities can be strengths rather than hindrances in the twenty-first-century writing classroom.

With these perceptions of language and the need for translingual education, it would seem absurd that anyone would argue against having NNEST in composition and rhetoric classes, yet such an argument is an undercurrent in much of higher education. Though it was almost forty years ago that Kathleen Bailey first made her infamous argument about the "foreign TA problem," the belief in such a problem still lies at the core of many student complaints about NNEST (Khan and Mallette 134-136) as many faculty, administration, and students continue to make this argument, augmenting the arguments regarding clarity and student success with implicit biases—as much of the previously cited research and our own experiences illustrate. While much research discredits this argument (e.g., Khan and Mallette; Fitch and Morgan; Zheng; Medgyes 432; see also Subtirelu; Tsang), the belief persists, exasperated in the 2010s and 2020s by anti-immigration rhetoric. Though such arguments are not found in credible sources, listservs like Reddit have numerous such (often incoherent) claims (e.g., u/throwaway61).



Despite the recognition of such ideals as well-trodden myths (Davie 157), the next sections articulate how—even if we accept these myths—NNEST of writing can enhance the FYC classroom. One obvious advantage is NNEST of writing’s encouragement of multilingualism within the classroom, including the need for students to look for research outside of that published in English. Another is an advantage that might seem almost counter-intuitive: NNEST of writing tend to have better knowledge of language mechanics than do native speakers of English. The final, and perhaps most important, point is that NNEST encourage students to embrace many of composition and rhetoric’s foundational concepts, or what have been termed threshold concepts, via their practice in the classroom.

### **NNEST of Writing and Complex Thinking**

In one of his many articles encouraging composition teachers to embrace a translanguaging approach in their classrooms, Bruce Horner joins with Samantha NeCamp and Christiane Donahue to observe that within North American research and classrooms, our monolingualism is “a practice ingrained institutionally and historically that produces linguistic limitations in scholars that in turn restrict the horizon of what is understood to be possible or realistic” (276). Although expanding our realm of potential scholarship to investigate may be “arduous” (284), it works toward more sophisticated and less limited thinking—goals celebrated by the MLA’s ad hoc committee report and the NCTE’s “Statement on Globalization.”

Increasingly, the metacognitive abilities possessed by NNEST writers are valued in FYC classes as the classes have abandoned the teaching of “correctness” to focus on encouraging student writers to think, first and foremost. This abandonment has been a long time coming, however. For decades, journalists have bemoaned the focus on correctness. In 1974, *Newsweek* explained the necessity for American citizens entering college to learn to think: “Rather than thinking of Writing as the form of triage, inoculation, or clinical diagnostic ... [w]hat writing teachers have known for generations is that ... it is a method of instruction that gives shape to our view of the world and empowers us to engage in discourse with our fellow beings” (14). In many ways, this radical perspective is actually quite old, not only because it was called for in the 1970s but because it is aligned with classical Western rhetoric’s connections with citizenship—e.g., enabling the citizen through the art of argument. The purpose of composition is not to pass a placement test or write what Wardle terms “mutt genre” essays, genres that students will never duplicate once they leave the classroom (Wardle). The purpose is to allow students to transfer what they learn in the textual environment of the composition classroom to prepare for both the professional workplace and their role as citizens.

Overall, then, current practices in composition and rhetoric value practices that involve thinking and ideas more than structures and linguistic correctness. For example, Carol Booth Olson states, “Writing is the vehicle of thought; it plays an important facilitative role in the development of thinking ...The nature of writing means that writing teachers teach thinking” (17). She asserts that there is a dialogic relation between writing and thinking: thinking can mold the writing and writing in turn can change opinion. Thus, writing is social act. It is a way of bringing the discursive universe of self, context, text, and society in intersection with one another.

Heather Bastian would agree. Bastian argues current writing practices require innovation and creation, not the redundant and ornamental use of words in writing. She claims that it would be impossible to teach students all the language and genre knowledge they will need in the future because the various forms of media on which the students will write and the various genres in which they will write in the post-digital age is unpredictable. She states that teachers must instead develop “students’ rhetorical knowledge and flexibility so that they can respond to evolving written texts and composing processes” (8). In this context, trying to instruct a conventional pedagogy of “correctness” will inhibit the students’ abilities to respond in future rhetorical situations. Hence, Bastian illustrates, that from a pragmatic point of view, disrupting the conventions is more essential. A group that is congruous for this task of developing students’ rhetorical knowledge and flexibility is NNEST of writing. Building on Bastian’s observations about the needs of twenty-first-century composition and rhetoric students, this next section explores what Adler-Kassner and Wardle define as “threshold concepts,” and how NNEST of writing can enhance the field’s ability to impart these concepts to its students.

### **Threshold Concepts**

In 2015, Adler-Kassner and Wardle attempted to articulate “what we might call the content of composition: the questions, the kinds of evidence and materials” that define the field (Yancey xviii). Building on economists Erik Meyer and Ray Land’s articulations of threshold concepts that are necessary for a person to master their field, Adler-Kassner, Wardle, and many other scholars identify numerous ways of thinking that need to be encouraged in composition classrooms if students are to write well. If composition and rhetoric is not a field focused on thesis, form, style, and correctness, then what is the field focused on?

With their many contributors, Adler-Kassner and Wardle identify five overarching concepts as the core of composition and rhetoric: 1) writing is a social and rhetorical activity; 2) writing speaks to situations through recognizable forms; 3) writing enacts and creates identities and ideologies; 4) all writers have more to learn; and 5) writing is a cognitive ability. Stressing that these concepts are not “how to” instructions

regarding writing, Adler-Kassner and Wardle instead state that the concepts can inform instructors' curriculum and assessment (9). The concepts provide tools for instructors to use in order to consider whether their assignments and assessments "act out" what the field generally agrees assignments should be teaching and assessments should be measuring. While stating that their list is by no means definitive, Adler-Kassner and Wardle have found their approach to be warmly received within the composition and rhetoric communities—even as it is critiqued (e.g., MLA 2016 "Troubling Threshold Concepts in Composition Studies"; CCCC 2017 "Transfer, Habits of Mind, and Threshold Concepts: Trends Redefining the Field"). They, too, have participated in a critique, editing an assessment of these threshold concepts in *(Re)Considering What We Know*.

NNEST of writing are perfectly suited to teach American students writing since all these threshold concepts involve metacognition, thinking critically about how and what we write. As individuals who are always in situations of negotiating language (Leonard 228; Canagarajah), NNEST are in some ways superior to native speakers for generating curriculum and teaching in writing classes. Whether they have identified these processes of metacognition as "threshold concepts" or not, NNEST have considerable experience with them. As people who live in the United States with a variety of backgrounds, NNEST are experienced with negotiating language within their encounters with new cultures, challenges, and ways of thinking. To manage, they continually need to respond to changing rhetorical situations, using critical thinking skills and logical approaches to arguments. Therefore, rather than considering bilingualism as a taboo or hindrance in a U.S. college composition course, universities need to recognize that NNEST of writing can be an asset, particularly regarding threshold concepts.

To support this claim regarding NNEST of writing's ideal positioning for teaching the threshold concepts (and at the risk of not heeding Adler-Kassner and Wardle's advice of not using these concepts as a list), we want to briefly overview the five meta-threshold concepts and a few of the ways in which NNEST of writing are well-positioned to teach lessons involving these concepts. Through their experiences, NNEST of writing have internalized many of these concepts, and they can use their knowledge and experiences to model their practice for students and to create curriculum based on that knowledge and experience.

### **NNEST and Threshold Concepts**

The first of the threshold concepts, "writing is a social and rhetorical activity," is a concept that NNEST of writing are able to help students within the United States perceive. As Canagarajah observes, NNEST have the ability to switch from one language to another depending on with whom they are talking: "Multilingual people always make adjustments to each other as they modify their accent or syntax to facilitate

communication ... they come with psychological and attitudinal resources, such as patience, tolerance, and humanity, to negotiate the difference of interlocutors” (Place 593). Because of their experience recognizing their varying social and rhetorical situations, NNEST of writing can facilitate U.S. students in recognizing this also. For one thing, merely by being in the class, the NNEST of writing are forcing students to acknowledge that the class is what Mary Louise Pratt terms a “contact zone,” or a space “where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (34). With NNEST of writing in the classroom making explicit the nature of such a contact zone, students will be forced to recognize that norms are not universal, and that there is some social and rhetorical negotiating in order to communicate. Additionally, in this contact zone with the NNEST of writing in the position of power, students might be more willing to recognize their own intersectionality, and how they are always involved in social and rhetorical negotiations of texts. In other words, students who are accustomed to reading texts similar to those they have read throughout their academic lives must recognize that outside the monolingual classroom, they must negotiate numerous types of texts.

Exploring different types of texts with the NNEST of writing can also assist students to pass through the threshold of the second metaconcept: writing speaks to situations through recognizable forms. As we mentioned above, Horner et al. show how NNEST of writing can help composition students develop broader perspectives on research, and this widened perspective can also help students understand that writing speaks to situations through recognizable forms in a slightly different way. NNEST of writing could have U.S. students read academic texts in English from the NNEST’s native cultures. Through the experiences of reading either world language journals and books or translations of those journals and books, students will have a variety of first-hand experiences with ways in which writing enacts disciplinarity. For example, students might read the South Korean journal *Linguistic Research* published in English by the Kyung Hee Institute for the Study of Language and Information. Considering the articles written for a world culture for linguistic experts, students would have to ask themselves if the difficulty they might encounter with the text emanates from the journal’s home culture or home discipline. In other words, students might have difficulty grasping concepts—but not because of their differences in language but because of the complexity of the discipline of linguistics. Reading *Argumentation & Analyse du Discours* in English translation, students might recognize that within the field of rhetoric, international scholars raise similar questions to ones raised in the United States, and the structures of the arguments are much the same as those in rhetoric articles published in the United States. In addition to seeing how disciplines remain relatively stable across cultures, students could also identify the differences between rhetorical situations of cultures. For example, Horner et al. observe that a French

article that Horner might have cited in his earlier work takes a stance regarding monolingualism similar to that held by “English only” advocates; however, the differences in the argument are significant because the French exigencies that promote this monolingualism are different than those that encourage English only arguments.

With U.S. students noticing their positionality within contact zones as they read non-American texts and work with NNEST of writing, the students would also be forced to perceive the third threshold concept: that writing enacts and creates identities and ideologies. The frustration students might feel with texts that do not enact familiar identities for the students can challenge the students’ identities. A NNEST of writing could help students parse cultural assumptions made in the text that differ from assumptions made in the United States. While this frustration could prompt resistance to the NNEST of writing, a NNEST of writing could also guide the students to understand the source of their frustration, and how that recognition can help them as writers. In this scenario, NNEST would differ from native English-speaking teachers who might share frustrations with students and not be able to unpack the different cultural assumptions.

Certainly, some who object to having NNEST in the first-year class might argue such a teacher might make the curriculum too difficult for students. Since the students would need to be continually negotiating meaning with their instructor, they would not have the ability to consider such a range of rhetorical situations. However, the fourth of the threshold concepts outlined by Adler-Kassner and Wardle is the writer’s need to understand how there is always more to learn with writing. Therefore, the NNEST of writing’s ability to prompt college-level students’ immediate recognition of the fourth of these threshold concepts, all writers have more to learn, would certainly be superior to the facile lessons of pre-packaged essay formats. While students with a passing score on the English Language Advanced Placement Test might think they have mastered what there is to know about writing, extensive research on the writing process, context, and transfer illustrates how much more these students need to know. While many students in FYC classes do recognize the writer’s ongoing learning process, too few do not. With NNEST of writing helping students negotiate social and rhetorical negotiations and identities, students would appreciate the need to continually think about writing.

And with this recognition of the continual need to think about writing, students in classes taught by NNEST of writing could better comprehend the fifth of the threshold concepts: writing is a cognitive ability. Working with their NNEST, composition students would have many different kinds of practice in rhetoric and would have experience with negotiating language differences. They would not become entrenched in one particular means of creating texts, a habit that Chris Anson notes can be particularly limiting for students. As Anson discusses, entrenchment can often result when students experience too much

familiarity—and a good NNEST could provide students strategies while challenging students to think differently and not rely on familiar concepts.

These five metacognitive concepts are, however, not the sum total of the threshold concepts. As writers embracing the concepts, Adler-Kassner and Wardle have continued to explore these ideas and listened to suggestions regarding additional threshold concepts, and NNEST of writing are no less able to help students with these. The most relevant of these additional threshold concepts is “literacy is a sociohistorical phenomenon with the potential to liberate or oppress.” As NNEST of writing have continually been oppressed through various biases and histories of colonialism, they are certainly experienced with this concept and can provide American students with first-hand narratives. Additionally, as NNEST of writing work with their students, they can illustrate the fluidity of this sociohistorical phenomenon by using their abilities to liberate the U.S. classroom of biases while liberating U.S. students from their entrenchment in the belief in American norms as universal.

Aside from excelling in instilling the threshold concepts for North American students, NNEST of writing excel in teaching technical aspects of the English language. For example, Ping Li claims L2 speakers (people who do not have English as their native language) have more cognitive control and mental flexibilities with English than do monolingual speakers (512). Medgyes also notes NNEST of writing’s superior insightfulness regarding language. Within his chart on differences between NNEST of writing and native ones, Medgyes observes NNEST of writing focus more on grammar rules and accuracy than do native teachers, who focus more on fluency and colloquial registers (435). Louisa Buckingham’s examination of the English academic writing competence of Turkish students in Turkey might appear to contradict Li’s and Medgyes’ research. Buckingham notes many ways these students were disadvantaged as they composed in English. Yet Buckingham also noted that these Turkish students were aware of their limitations and regularly used rhetorical and linguistic strategies to overcome their limitations and disadvantages. Thus, this research illustrates that NNEST of writing not only have the technical writing skills many of their critics feel they lack, but they also have the metacognitive abilities required to create strong texts.

### **Conclusion**

This overview of the threshold concepts, and its discussion of NNEST of writing’s unique position to help students develop metacognitive and rhetorical awareness, is not by any means conclusive, especially since there is so much to explore regarding the interrelationship between NNEST of writing and the experiences of the threshold concepts. However, this overview argues that while there may be stylistic and rhetorical differences between the English of NNEST of writing and native U.S. instructors and students, these differences—when approached

through the lens of threshold concepts—can benefit the students, NNEST of writing, the academic community, and the world.

In all these threshold concepts, and in the theorizing of writing from generations earlier (e.g., Murray), writing pedagogy concentrates as much on the process of writing as on the finished product. And in this process, students are expected to employ their working brains to anticipate, think, analyze, argue, and criticize. In pedagogical theory for the composition class, the main foci are the texts' rhetorical situations, exigencies, and constraints. In other words, what composition theory ultimately prioritizes for students is the development of their thinking. As Keith Grant-Davie states, "Teaching our writing students to examine the rhetorical situation as a set of interesting influences from which rhetoric arises and which rhetoric in turn influence, is therefore, one of the most important things we can do" (268). Teaching students to respond to the exigency of situation with accurate analyses of pros and cons of various ideas ushers in the fundamental function of writing—a function that students will use throughout their lives in whatever situations they encounter. The writing teacher, in this sense, must have acumen to help students react to the urgencies of situations with analysis of situations' constraints and potential audiences. With this acumen, the teacher can then help the student engage in the process of the writing as much or more than the teacher can by helping the student create the product itself.

Though this notion of threshold concepts of writing in composition is upheld in the field, the notion seems to be abandoned when the question of the NNEST of writing is raised. The potentials of NNEST of writing are considered doubtful, and they, whether instructors or GTAs, are relegated to marginal labor positions within the academic community.

We would like that not to occur. Though the threshold concepts can be amended and extended, we believe in their potential to encourage thinking in students within the first-year classroom. We also believe NNEST of writing are particularly well suited to teach U.S. students lessons on threshold concepts. Embracing these ideas addresses many problems that face our discipline. As the CCCC's "Position Statement on Globalization" states:

On one hand, colleges and universities may recognize, respect, and respond to the complexities of globalization by reimagining administration, teaching, and research. On the other hand, they may use the pretext of globalization in a limited fashion to enhance institutional reputations, identify new sources of revenue, and entrench received standards.

The refusal to accept NNEST of writing or to exclusively use them for ESL classes is an example of such a pretext of globalization. NNEST continually face a lack of respect when first-year programs refuse to

recognize the contributions NNEST can make, or when first-year programs refuse to address the complexities of globalization. As this article illustrates, NNEST of writing can offer rich pedagogies for all students in first-year writing classrooms across the United States—even without too much reimagining of administration, teaching, or research. The theme of globalization needs to be embraced and internalized by college administration, faculty, students, and the United States' first-year writing classes. Such classes are the laboratory of “thinking our thinking” and “thinking other’s thinking.” Unless we can internalize the objective of the threshold concepts and respect the identity of NNEST in writing and composition courses, our classes will be promoting the teaching of cookery rather than of rhetoric.

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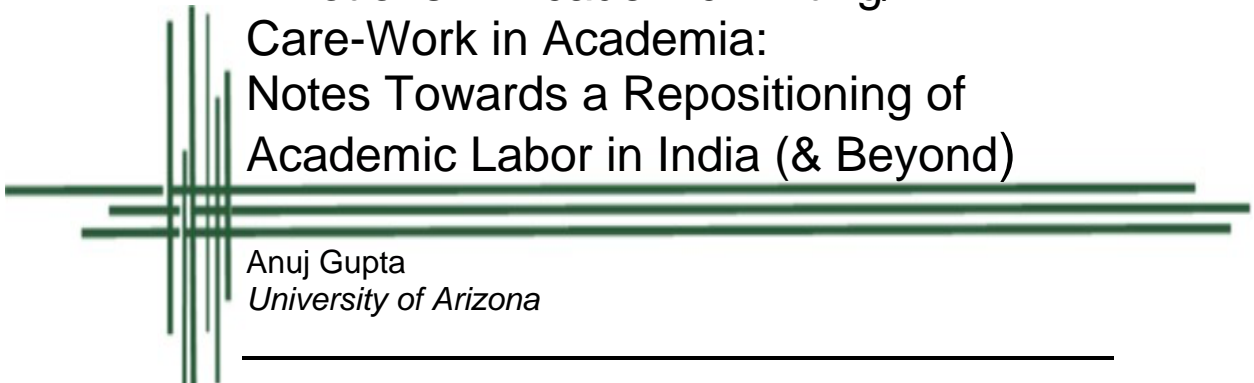


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# Emotions in Academic Writing/ Care-Work in Academia: Notes Towards a Repositioning of Academic Labor in India (& Beyond)

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## **Abstract**

In this article I seek to reflect on a rupture that happened in my college-level writing classroom in India when a student chose to write about her experience of rape and accompanying life-long trauma in a literacy narrative assignment. This rupture, and the ways in which I struggled to engage with it, were initially discomfoting but eventually led to strong convictions about the need to reposition academic writing and labor in Indian universities in a manner that sees the epistemic value of emotions in academic writing and the ethical value of care-work in academia as essential ingredients required to create a socially just world. Both ingredients have the potential to counter the debilitating effects that trauma has on students' abilities to learn and succeed in college, especially for those who are at a higher risk for mental distress due to their marginalized positionalities. Through a thick description of my experiences, I explore the rationale for the call to reposition academic labor; share some practically feasible suggestions which teachers and administrators motivated to work towards social justice can use to experiment in their classrooms; and end by reflecting on the limitations and challenges involved in such experimentation.

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**I**n November 2018 I faced what is perhaps one the most challenging learning experiences that I have had as a teacher of critical writing—an experience that has been instrumental in transforming my pedagogic positionality about what is worth teaching in my Critical Writing class, and how it should be taught.

From 2016-2020 I have taught a graduate level Critical Writing course in an experimental and multidisciplinary one-year post-graduate diploma program at an emerging liberal arts university near New Delhi, India. College-level writing courses, in the American sense of the term, are fairly new to Indian higher education institutions, but over the last two decades more than a dozen such courses and writing centers have sprung up in various Indian universities, along with the importation of the American model of the private liberal arts university. Along with them have also come assignments that ‘invite’ students to write about their personal experiences in ways that may seem natural to many American students, but not yet to Indian students. My work with such assignments has transformed how I understand my position in the classroom, and what I try to achieve with my students.

While faculty in public universities in India sometimes face classes with hundreds of students, my classes over the last four years had about 30 students, generally aged between 21- 28. The program where I taught invites about 300 students who have completed an undergraduate degree and are seeking to experience a multidisciplinary education (something that most, if not all, Indian institutions currently lack) in order to make informed decisions about their future academic and/or professional lives. Within this one-year long program, the Critical Writing course runs for about 10 months and is spread out across the year. It seeks to build critical reading, writing, and thinking abilities. There are 10 sections of this course which consist of about 30 students each which are taught by 10 writing preceptors, or as they are now called, writing faculty. As part of this Critical Writing course, students learn how to write in a range of genres to improve their readiness for academic, social, and professional careers. This readiness usually involves the teaching of academic genres like summaries, reviews, and position papers. After reading some of the work on literacy by scholars in the U.S. discipline of writing studies (see Carter; Corkery; Gee; González et al.), however, I decided to experiment with the literacy narrative genre in order to move beyond the confines of the writing-for-academic-purposes paradigm that is common in India and other countries influenced by British models of education.

When I first introduced this assignment in the fall of 2018, I explained it to students by telling them that this is a kind of long reflective essay on key moments in their experience of acquiring some form of literacy they considered to be central to their lives (Appendix A). After assigning the essay, a female student, whom I will call Zoya, came up to talk to me after class and asked me if it would be okay to write about

literacies gained through difficult personal life experiences. “Of course!” I told her enthusiastically. One week later, she sent me her first draft titled, “To Hell and Back Again – Broken Not Yet, My Journey through Rape and Patriarchy.” Such topics were not what I had expected at all. In it, she described her experience of being raped in graphic detail and the life-long “learnings” this experience had given her. Zoya recounted that what made it worse was her experience of living in a conservative, northwestern Indian family that blamed her for what she went through and subjected her to further violence.

When I read her account of being brutalized, not once but many times, I felt uncomfortable. I felt concerned. I felt numb. What should/could I have done? My initial impulse was to help her in some form, but I couldn’t work out exactly how or what I could do. My second response was to ask whether this kind of work was even part of my job as a teacher of writing. How could I ask her to revise her account of rape?! Should/could this even be a valid topic for a literacy narrative assignment in a writing class, or something that you write about inside any classroom for that matter? Doesn’t it feel wrong and insensitive to think of rape and the subsequent trauma attached to it as a form of literacy? How should I use this draft to provide lessons in style, thesis development, and academic writing?

When such questions come up in American classes, I think students and teachers are often well positioned to draw up counseling services, institutional policies, and established pedagogical protocols. While I did have access to the campus’ counseling services (which also is a rarity in India), I did not have any policies or prior protocols to follow, and this interaction ruptured my sense of what I was teaching and who I was in relation to my students.

In this essay, I will attempt a thick description of the rupture this moment created in the fabric of my classroom—a rupture that, I will argue, has enabled a repositioning of my conventional ideas about what should constitute academic writing and academic labor and helped me recognize how deeply rooted they are in cultural norms, institutional practices, and prevailing hierarchies. It has also opened up possibilities for social justice by helping me realize that many life experiences cause trauma in students’ lives—something that drastically impacts their abilities to excel in academic work (Cole et. al vi). Instead of being an exception, trauma is, in fact, widely prevalent (Davidson 5), and students from marginal positionalities are especially vulnerable to it. By creating the space for students to become more attuned to their emotions through reading, writing, and thinking tasks, and by re-imagining care-work to be valuable academic labor that students, teachers and staff are trained to do, a more resilient, caring, and just world can come into being.

To make this argument, in the first part of this essay, I will narrate my experiences of working with Zoya on her literacy narrative to offer a guide to other teachers who might be faced with similar situations. Here,

I will draw mainly on primary sources, which include my interviews with Zoya as well as a few other students in her class; my reflections on her drafts; my recollections of my conversations with colleagues and friends who I had reached out for help at the time; as well as my reading of Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery*, which had given me a good suggestive framework to initiate myself into thinking about trauma and its relationships to writing at that time. In the second part then, I will contextualize my particular experience using a range of secondary sources from feminist pedagogic movements, trauma studies, education studies, colonial history, and writing pedagogy. While doing this, I will explore the rationale for my call for the repositioning of academic labor; share some practical suggestions which teachers and administrators motivated to work towards social justice can use to experiment in their classrooms and institutions; and reflect on the limitations and challenges involved in such experimentation.

While my positionality as a teacher and writing program administrator in India who is about to begin his graduate studies in rhetoric and composition in the U.S. necessitates that my essay will involve a mixture of Indian and American contexts and resources, I am hoping that my audience will not be limited to only these two contexts, but will also include teachers and administrators from across the world who are interested in exploring ways to make their institutions and classrooms more caring, resilient, and just, while keeping in mind their specific academic, pedagogical, institutional, and cultural contexts.

### **Part One: A Male Teacher's Account of Working with a Female Student Recounting her Experience of Rape in an Assignment**

*Trigger Warning:* The remaining part of the paper includes unedited excerpts from Zoya's drafts about her experience of sexual violence which she has given me permission to use for this essay. Including these excerpts in their original form is important for charting out the pedagogic challenges that my paper entails. I want to request that readers who might be triggered by this decide whether they would like to read this paper further or not, and I respect their decisions either way.

I remember feeling a sense of paralysis on first reading Zoya's draft which started with a graphic description of her being raped by her art teacher when she was thirteen years old:

...He held my head from my forehead and banged it to the corner of the indoor pot, hard. I could feel warmth of the blood trickling. And as I started losing vision, I saw blood on that white pot corner. I was jolted back to consciousness after a while, [...] the metallic smell of blood was strong, but what struck me more was the nasty smell of rotten eggs and the difficulty in breathing. He had shoved his sock in my throat. It was disgusting. I was trying to push it out



with my tongue, it tasted dusty and salty. And I could feel the searing pain from my groin region, with a splashing sound of sorts. He hadn't realized that I had woken up perhaps. I pulled the sock out and started clawing at his eyes and face as vigorously as I could. He just caught my wrist, brought it too my chest and pressed, hard, slowly.. I could see red again and the pain was searing, and I once again lost consciousness. When I regain consciousness again, breathing was extremely painful. Everything was painful. He was still there; I could feel him biting my nipples, biting....., and warmth of blood, the metallic and rotten egg smell. With a great effort, I just moved my legs and managed to kick him near the groin, I think, he withdrew. I could just hear his breathing. I was not completely naked, I had torn clothes on. I pulled the sock out and started to get up. But I wasn't able to escape. And this ordeal ended when he was done. After my parents arrived, the doctor came and was asked to stay shut about the matter. I had 54 bite marks, a dislocated hip and broken ulnar, with 6 broken ribs, broken right zygomatic, subdural hematoma and depressed open linear cranial fracture in the HBL area and Seizure disorder for a decade to come. ("To Hell and Back Again" 2-3)

I was numb after first reading this. A cold sweat ran down my neck as I realized that I don't just have to read this, but I must also give feedback to help Zoya revise. Worse, I must ultimately grade it. My initial discomfort emerged from various layers of complications: as a young, 26-year-old upper-caste<sup>1</sup>, upper-class male who has been privileged enough to not face any sexual violence in his life in India, how do I give feedback to a female student<sup>2</sup> who is almost the same age<sup>3</sup> as me about her narrative of rape? If I ask her to improve her sentence structures, logical coherence,

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<sup>1</sup> Caste is a dehumanizing system of social segregation and oppression that is legally banned but still practised in many overt and subtle shapes and forms across South Asia. In some ways, it is similar to how race operates in contemporary U.S. but not exactly the same. Non-South Asian readers interested in familiarizing themselves with this phenomenon are recommended to read Dr. B. R Ambedkar's *The Annihilation of Caste*.

<sup>2</sup> In order to protect her anonymity, I am unable to reveal any more of Zoya's specific positionality markers even though that would help deepen this analysis. However, it is important for readers to know that apart from her gender, there are certain other positions of marginality, as well as some positions of financial and academic privilege, that inform her subjectivity.

<sup>3</sup> Since many teachers at the unique diploma program where I teach start teaching at a young age right after their Master's degrees, and since the students at this program come having done their Bachelor's degrees and in some cases even their Master's, it is not uncommon in many classes for teachers and students to be in the same age bracket. In fact, in some cases, I have also had students who were a couple of years older to me.

characterization, etc., wouldn't that . . . I still can't find the right word for it . . . be wrong? Sadistic? Voyeuristic? Further complicating the situation was the fact that rape wasn't a one-time occurrence in Zoya's life; she had been a victim of various kinds of mental and physical abuse throughout her life. Should I give her feedback on her writing style or instead reach out to the police, lawyers, and psychologists to help her?

After the initial shock subsided, I realized that I needed to be proactive and could not continue to just stew inside my own head. Zoya had taken so much energy and trust to open up and be vulnerable during this exercise. To leave her in a vacuum of silence would be inhumane. I should respond, but how? While I did have a gut feeling about the need to respond in a meaningful, sensible, empathetic, and constructive manner, none of these adjectives were fitting the initial mumbblings that were forming inside my head in terms of feedback on her writing. This is when I reached out to some of my colleagues and friends for help. In hindsight, I feel reaching out helped make up for the limitation of my privileged positionality as a young, upper-caste, male teacher who did not have any experience of being in such situations before.

First, I spoke to my colleagues, Ratna Menon and Satyendra Singh, who teach writing in the same program. While I ensured that I did not reveal any particular details about either Zoya or her experiences, I shared with them the broad dilemmas that I was struggling with. They offered some key insights that were crucial in helping me avoid what could've been insensitive blunders. First and foremost, they advised me to not report her trauma to any legal authorities<sup>4</sup>. "This is her journey not yours," they told me. "You should provide her with the necessary knowledge about legal and psychological resources—we will send those to you—but it should be her choice whether she wishes to pursue those, not yours. Also, please make sure that you do not ask her again and again if she has reached out to any of the contacts you share with her. It is important to give her the agency and not make her feel judged any further than she has already felt in her life," Ratna added. "Regarding the written feedback, it is absolutely okay to not give her line-by-line comments," Satyendra suggested. "Instead, perhaps what you could do is recommend accounts of other survivors that she could read for inspiration on how to work on her own narrative—Roxane Gay's *Hunger* and Junot Diaz's *The Legacy of Childhood Trauma*—will be good starting points," Ratna recommended. Satyendra finally ended by saying, "At any point, if you

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<sup>4</sup> This is a tricky issue that I believe varies from country to country. While I know that in the U.S. there is a law called "Title IX" that mandates teachers to report to the authorities if any students tell them about any events of sexual violence; in India there aren't any such laws. Ethically, too, we all felt that the agency for reporting should lie with a survivor and not be forced upon them by others who they confide in.

want to, please come speak to us about what you are going through. We are happy to help and support you” (“Personal Conversation” 1).

Next, I reached out to my partner, Suha Gangopadhyay, an online education specialist who has interacted with many victims of sexual trauma due to her experience working as a teaching assistant for a graduate course on gender and sexuality. I also wanted her advice as a woman, who, like countless other women in the world, has had her fair share of experiences pertaining to sexual and gendered violence or trauma. She gave me what turned out to be really important advice at the time:

Instead of overthinking how to respond, it would be best to just be honest with Zoya and tell her about your lack of preparedness as this is the first time that you are engaging with this kind of writing in any assignment. You could also tell her that you don’t want to make it worse for her in any way, which is why, while you will hear her out and support her in the process of writing this, you would like to reserve any judgement or opinion on the writing itself. (“Personal Conversation 2”)

This advice gave me confidence and also made me realize that I needed a framework to approach the issue at hand. I started looking actively for literature that could help me. I was fortunate to come across Judith Herman’s *Trauma and Recovery*. Herman, a well-known scholar and practitioner in the area of trauma studies, describes in a very lucid and powerful manner a three-step process that therapists follow when working with patients of sexual trauma. I didn’t want to determinately rationalise or delimit Zoya’s experience within Herman’s psycho-therapeutic framing, but rather thought of using it as a suggestive to initiate myself into thinking about trauma. It is through Herman that I understood that trauma is a complex psychological response to either a single catastrophic event or multiple, repeated instances of abuse, which creates a sense of disempowerment and disconnection in individuals and leads to a damage of psychological faculties like “trust, autonomy, initiative, competence, identity, and intimacy” (133). The key insight I gleaned from Herman is that trauma has an important discursive dimension; that is, it leads to the rupturing of the meta-narratives that tie together an individual’s sense of self, relationships with others, and their world view. Her approach is to help survivors re-story or reconstruct their trauma in a manner that first establishes safety, then proceeds to help them write and rewrite their trauma story, and gradually reconnect with a community—all of which helps “reconstruct a system of belief that makes sense of [the survivor’s] undeserved suffering” (178).

All of this advice grounded me and gave me important perspectives that my identity and my life experiences hadn’t positioned me to understand. What follows now is a description of the processes through which Zoya and I worked on her literacy narrative using a mixture

of insights that I received from my peers and Herman's work, along with Zoya and my own instincts. For the sake of coherence, I have ordered this part using the structure of the three-step process that Herman mentions in her work, but in reality things happened in a much more crisscrossing and recursive rather than linear manner. Also, it must be kept in mind that these steps shouldn't be thought of as universal or schematic. They are rather a suggestive, guiding template which I presume might manifest in dramatically different ways across different contexts based on the positionalities of the people involved.

*Step 1: Establishing Safety*

According to Herman, “[T]rauma robs the victim of a sense of power and control,” and they “feel unsafe in their bodies . . . as well as in relation to others” (Herman 159-160). This is why in her method, “the guiding principle of recovery is to restore power and control to the victim” which “begins by focusing on control of the body and gradually moves outward toward control of the environment” (Herman 159-160). Therefore, she recommends that it is important to transfer decision making powers to the survivor at this stage; that is, make them understand that anything that happens to their narratives is within their control and not someone else's. We must resist any culturally conditioned desires on our part to be knights in shining armour. While my patriarchal positioning as a privileged, upper-caste male instructor had created an initial impulse like this in me, thankfully, I was able to avoid what could have been a disastrous mistake due to the timely counsel of my peers.

During the first office hour conversation I scheduled with Zoya to discuss her draft, I mustered up courage and spoke about how moving her narrative was, and how I was overwhelmed on reading it. I was honest with her about my own discomfort and inability to give her concrete feedback at the moment, but I also told her, “This is important writing that needs to be put out there. It really has the potential to help many other survivors of sexual violence.” I then added, “I am here to listen whenever you wish to talk. I promise that whatever you disclose or write about will not be shared with anyone without your permission. I will share legal and psychological resources if you wish to consult anyone.”

I then hesitantly summarized what I could about psychological traditions that use narrative writing in the healing of traumas. She broke down while hearing all of this and requested to go to the washroom. When she came back, she apologized for crying. I tried my best to comfort her, by telling her, “There is no need to apologize for anything to anyone!” I couldn't even imagine how she must have gone through what is perhaps the most traumatic experience anyone could have had, and I was moved by the fact that she was deciding to write about this. I wanted to establish some sense of safety and trust by clarifying my position and concern, and this may have encouraged her to embark on this enterprise—something that she spoke about later in an interview as well: “The fact that you

showed you were not just a teacher but you were learning with us really helped me. I needed someone to show me that they were learning along with me instead of just sitting me down and teaching me” (Interview 1 26.45-26.59).

*Step 2: Re-Storying*

One important thing I learned about trauma stories through Herman’s book is that the healing process sometimes involves a telling and gradual transformation or re-signification of the trauma story. Such a re-signification can potentially transform an unexamined and anxiogenic messy bundle of thoughts, feelings, and images into a detailed and coherent account of events contextualized within a new belief system where the narrative brings dignity, strength, and control instead of shame, judgement, and powerlessness (Herman 176-187). This is something that I was conscious of while working with Zoya.

The broad template that I had given all students to work with for the literacy narrative genre asked them to first identify a learning experience or literacy that has been central to shaping their lives; then pinpoint the key moments of this experience, especially ones that involved struggles and conflict; write out these moments by elaborating on their emotional, behavioral, social, political or spiritual/existential dimensions in both descriptive and analytical detail; and finally weave all of them together in a manner that would bring out a sort of coherence and meaning for them and their audiences (see Appendix A). In hindsight, I think this structure was conducive for enabling what Herman recommends happen at this stage of the healing process in which the survivor retells the story in a manner that “includes four elements: context, fact, emotion, and meaning” (Herman 182). If we closely read the descriptions of events that Zoya had written out in her narrative, we see the close intertwining of context, fact, her initial emotional responses full of anxiety, embarrassment, and a sense of being judged to a gradual shift in her meaning-making of the event towards feeling righteous indignation.

She begins her narrative by sharing her father’s initial response to the incident: “I remember my dad *saying apni parvarsi hma kya khami rahi gayi hashe? Shu bhool thai gayi apni? Shu kam aavi nalayak diki jani apne? Aana karta to mari shukam na gayi? — Where did we go wrong in her upbringing? What did we do wrong? Why do we bear the shame of such an undeserving daughter? Why did she not die, instead of putting us through this?*” (“To Hell and Back Again” 1). After this follows the graphic description of her rape I have already mentioned above. While the first draft she sent to me had stopped here almost in a sense of dismay, her final draft developed these initial incidents to create a narrative arc that begins with helplessness, moves through several attempts at fighting back and gaining agency, and ultimately ends with gaining some form of meaning and literacy. The extracts quoted from her narrative so far cover the first part of this arc of helplessness.

In the second part of her narrative, she connects her initial experience of helplessness with descriptions of her life-long attempts to fight against the conservative patriarchal contexts oppressing her. Her narrative is powered by descriptions of a life jostling between highly unsupportive and judgmental positionalities, to strong and independent attempts on her part at regaining power through whatever means available. As an example, while on the one hand she writes that, “I got married to my husband because he was the first person acceptably decent in view who agreed to marry ‘damaged goods’ as I was. The circumstances of my marriage and the patriarchal disadvantages of being a girl child became crystal clear when my mother told me before my marriage —*Pachi janaaza ma avje, nahitar na aavti*, i.e. *come back in a coffin or not at all*” (“To Hell and Back Again” 8); but on the other hand, she also writes that, “I pushed myself deep into work [and entrance examinations for further study, managed to get an] all India rank of 17. This infused me with confidence and helped me find my strength in myself and heal [...] I was exposed to alcohol, weed and cigarettes which helped me forget for a bit, and I really needed to forget, everything, and reinvent myself, my entire personality [...] I did enter a few relationships, but I was never able to hold on to them. I got bored easily of boys and girls and relationships that never lasted. It was through these broken relations, meaningless sex and nascent friendships that I slowly healed [...] my books were my escape from my nightmares and they became my friends. [...] I was a complete mess, but I was a high achieving mess. [...] As I explored new countries, interests, defied every convention I had lived with all these years and as I slowly internalized my locus of power, I healed” (“To Hell and Back Again” 5-7).

What we see in this dialectic of pushing and pulling is the unique ways in which Zoya’s positionality and agency, comprising elements of both marginalization as well as privilege, manifested in her struggles for survival. It is important to remember here that there is no universal writing template rape survivors can or should follow. To think so would be to assume “a category of women unified by a common psychic orientation to social gendering where there is no such category” (Mardorossian 755). Hence, one must be an active listener to the unique ways in which survivors position themselves within their narratives instead of nudging them to fit into any predetermined templates.

In the final parts of her narrative, Zoya expresses her transformed positionality in two very prominent ways. First, she manages to make explicit that what happened to her was wrong not because of anything she did, but because of the patriarchal society that she was a part of, thereby displacing her life-long guilt from her own self to a social fabric that was responsible for her suffering: “Reeling from, reacting to and healing from this incident is a process that has overshadowed my entire life. Time and again my father has blamed me for what happened. For a while I too believed it was my fault. [...] My society did not accept me after this

incident and that hurt more than my scars or their memories” (“To hell and Back Again” 4-5). Second, she also speaks very confidently and directly to her audience and imbues her writing with tones of redemption, new meaning, and power as she writes:

I have never publicly spoken about this literacy and doing so now is cathartic. Healing, Living, Loving is far from something I know of well, I realize that now. I am glad that you are unaware of this. I hope and feverously pray to a god I don't even believe in, that you never come to know how this feels. But unfortunately, every woman has faced these *effects* and *biases* in some capacity or another. I have struggled and am struggling but I am not broken and unmade, Not Yet. And though my story is bittersweet, I hope it helps you speak and heal. (“To Hell and Back Again” 9; emphasis added)

Her choice of words here reveals the changed nature of her narrativization about her trauma. Her choice of "effects" implies that someone else (assaulter, family, and society in general) has caused her trauma and it is their "biases" that have led to her suffering. In her final draft, her emotions are not individualized anymore. The blame for the crime has shifted from her own self onto the social agents and historical-material environment of patriarchy which creates a culture of sexual violence. Through this externalization and reorientation of guilt, a new positionality emerges where she envisions a new solidarity with other women, foregrounding her own resolve to fight patriarchy and presenting this as a new meaning which now imbues her life-story. After triangulating her literacy narrative, her end of year reflection essay, as well as my interviews with her, and upon rereading Herman, I've come to realize that this transformation, from feeling challenged by this kind of writing to ultimately achieving a sense of catharsis through it, happened because she was able to put her raw impressions on paper, distance herself from them, and restructure and signify them in the form of a 'testimonial'—all in the presence of a supportive, empathetic, non-judgmental, and validating community. The latter aspects of this process are what I'll explore next.

### *Step 3: Re-Connecting into a Community*

Herman advises that through the re-storying process, it is important to set up a community where the new narrative can be gradually exercised in a non-judgmental and supportive environment, which helps in the establishment of new relationships, a new self, and gradually a new worldview where the trauma story is no more a source of anxiety and judgement, but rather a source of strength and meaning: “Sharing the traumatic experience with others is a precondition for the restitution of a sense of a meaningful world. [In this,] two responses—recognition and

restitution—are necessary to rebuild the survivor’s sense of order and justice” (Herman 70).

Unlike traumas of war which often get both public recognition as well as restitution: “the most common trauma of women remains confined to the sphere of private life, without formal recognition or restitution from the community. There is no public monument for rape survivors” (Herman 73). It is through narrative forms of writing perhaps that survivors can create their own living monuments and get recognition by connecting with others who understand, accept, and validate their narratives. It is here that I want to mention the most important aspect of this whole process that happened in my class; something that Zoya has also repeatedly mentioned in her interview as important to her writing. As part of this assignment, I had allocated motivation partners to all the students whose task was to support and motivate each other through the writing process. In the past, I had realized that my own attempts at reminding students to complete their assignments through either gentle or disciplinary means were not always fruitful. Instead, assigning motivation partner pairs worked much better in helping students work on their narratives together. Apart from checking up on each other, partners also helped in the process of revision by listening through drafts, offering suggestions, and by providing validation.

“Rameena just came and gave me a hug for 10 mins,” Zoya said when I asked her about the role that her motivation partners Rameena, Reena, and Anushka (names changed) played (“Interview 1” 14.04 - 14.07). I was able to interview two of them—Anushka and Reena—who both started by honestly speaking about their initial discomfort in listening to Zoya’s story, which in many ways mirrored some of my own discomforts about potential discrepancies between the nature of my role in the institution and the work that this exigency was requiring of me. Instead of making their emotions manifest in front of her, however, they took the bold decision to simply listen with care and be there for her through her many revisions, drafts, and narrations. “Motivation comes from acceptance and validation . . . to have someone listen to your work and not judge you makes you realize that maybe I’m not that wrong, maybe I can do this!” spoke Reena, while Anushka stressed that, “I was always listening to her . . . I did not respond to her . . . she just needed someone to listen to her . . . it’s always good to listen to someone who has gone through such experiences. She was older to me and it was also an attempt by me to learn something” (“Interview 2”; “Interview 3”). Together, the four of them brainstormed ideas and shared vulnerabilities. Even if the ones that Rameena, Anushka, or Reena shared weren’t as intense as Zoya’s; nonetheless, the experience of being inside such a community collectively helped all of them develop an empathetic consciousness-raising process that wouldn’t have been possible with just a teacher.

This had a huge impact on Zoya’s experience of writing: “I felt very comfortable after writing about this . . . and the community maybe is



what inspired me to write about it more than anything else . . . because it is very easy to be yourself when you are comfortable and then maybe you can venture out eventually in a space where you are not comfortable” (“Interview 1” 16.00 - 16.24). This experience with the motivation partners was also reflected in the community support that Zoya received during her time at the university, something that she strongly felt was very different from all her social experiences outside of it: “[This university] was a very comfortable space, a cocoon where you can come out . . . the kind of ideas and empathy you feel here is not something you ever feel in the world . . . I realized that this might be the only space where it would be okay to begin with . . . criticism of the event at least would not be part of how I would have to think about it. . . because what happens is that when you are out there you understand how brutal society can be especially on issues like this . . . this [university on the other hand] becomes a very comfortable space where you can start putting ideas together” (“Interview 1” 06.48 - 07.25, 14.15 -15.25).

In some ways, this whole process also mirrored a widely recognized form of therapy developed by two Chilean psychologists which imitates a legal testimony framing and submission method. In this the therapist engages in a formal recording, scripting, revision, narration, and delivery ritual in which “the document is signed by the patient as plaintiff and by the therapist as witness” (Herman 182). This imitation of a legal environment facilitates the patient’s reformation of a belief system and faith in a meaningful world order under which the trauma-narrative can be scaffolded. Unintentionally, perhaps, the act of writing an assignment for a writing course, working through drafts, discussing it during office hours and with peers, and finally submitting it for grading might have mirrored some aspects of that psychotherapeutic convention.

What added to this process was the environs of a caring community which valued and attempted to support Zoya’s transformation, even though it might have initially felt as an aberration in their general definitions of work within the university. The many cross-currents of these processes had a positive, cumulative impact on Zoya, who in her final reflective essay on the year gone by wrote that, “I went through [...] reliving my rape and a complete change in the way I saw myself, and one of the reasons I survived and thrived was because of this class, the people and the learnings. Today all that is behind me, I have finally triumphed over the demons that plagued me back then” (WAW 3).

### **Part Two: Bringing Emotions and Care-Work in Academia: The Why, the How, and the Things to Watch Out for**

This entire process has shaped me in two important ways which I believe will also be relevant for many readers of this journal. First, working with Zoya on her literacy narrative has given me some introductory experiential knowledge about how to care for someone who has experienced sexual trauma. Second, it has enabled me to question certain conventional

patriarchal positions in academia. I've come to realize that there is epistemic value of emotions in academic writing and ethical value in care-work in academic life, both of which I now see as vital ingredients to improve student performance in college as well as to make a socially just world. In this final section now, I will first think through the reasons for why I, along with many other scholars and educators am increasingly believing this to be the case. Then I will chart out some strategies and methods by which teachers, researchers, and administrators can experiment with these ideas in their institutional settings. Finally, I will also reflect on some of the challenges and risks that might come with such experimentation.

### *The Why*

Social injustice often exists in a vicious cyclical form whereby different forms of oppression, exclusion, and marginalization in society lead to trauma and mental distress, which then negatively impacts people's cognitive and social skills and severely obstructs their ability to succeed or flourish in college. By creating the space for students to become more attuned to their emotions through reading, writing, and thinking tasks, and by re-imagining care-work to be valuable academic labor that students, teachers and staff are trained to perform for each other, this status quo can be challenged and potentially even changed. But what exactly is trauma? How is it connected to social injustice, and how does it impact learning?

Trauma is defined broadly as an experience in which "a person's internal resources are not adequate to cope with external stressors" (Davidson 4). This includes but is not limited to physical or sexual abuse, abandonment, chronic poverty, domestic violence, bullying, police violence, historical trauma, etc., and it may be a single or ongoing event that causes varying degrees of emotional distress over time (Davidson 4). Students from marginalized positions disproportionately experience trauma due to various ongoing or past stressful events in their lives (Read et al.). Female students are in fact at greater risk for trauma and alienation (Breslau and Kresser), and so are ethnic minorities (Norris and Sloan), students from lower income groups (Breslau et al.), religious minorities (Erum), marginalized caste groups (Pawde), and regional as well as linguistic minorities (Jaaware).

Exposure to trauma can drastically impact students' learning abilities. It can affect their academic performance (decrease in basic linguistic and cognitive abilities, emotional regulation, executive functions, attentiveness, perspective taking, etc.); their classroom behavior (increased aggression, defiance, withdrawal, or desire for excessive perfectionism, etc.); as well their ability to form constructive relationships with school personnel and peers (Cole et al. vi). Inhibiting students to succeed in college ultimately reproduces the inequality and social injustice which had caused the trauma in the first place as opportunities for social mobility are denied.

How can emotions in writing and care-work in institutions help to change this? The former has the capacity to make trauma visible, and if it is made visible in an environment of care, there would be a possibility to accept, acknowledge, and perhaps even transform trauma in a manner that might aid the larger project of social justice in India, a country where most students really have no space to bring their personal, affective selves into academic spaces through writing or otherwise. In fact, students in India are often told that cutting out the personal from the academic is a sign of academic prowess. Anannya Dasgupta, a friend and fellow comrade who teaches writing in India, illustrates this poignantly in her essay “The Writing Self and Enacting Care in Critical Writing Pedagogy,” when she writes about her time in college as a student of literature in one of India’s most prestigious public universities. When a road accident left her bedridden with a cracked rib, she struggled but ultimately managed to complete a class assignment. While submitting it to her teacher, she apologized for the decrease in quality due to her personal circumstances, expecting some sympathy and encouragement. However, what she received was a dismissive and cold retort, “Let’s bracket out the personal.” She triangulates this experience with complaints of her own students about their teachers forcing them to mechanically regurgitate quotations from scholarly sources without any genuine personal engagement with them, as symptomatic of the larger Indian education system that, “is not adequately allowing a space for the experiential selves of students to emerge and learn to derive the joy of owning academic work” (Dasgupta). The denial of selfhood that social oppression and trauma create is thus replicated in models of depersonalized and distant academic writing in college, something that urgently needs to be changed.

Madhura Lohokare, another friend and fellow comrade teaching writing in India, builds upon this sentiment in her essay “Enacting Care in Writing Pedagogy,” to argue that a care-based pedagogy can help facilitate change: “care entails centering the students’ and teachers’ positionality and the students’ voice in the teaching-learning. A care-based ethic of teaching can animate critical writing pedagogy in important ways, given the fact that the latter seeks to enable the student-writer to find and nurture her voice.”

Why has this issue not been addressed more proactively in mainstream Indian academia until now? Why do students’ and teachers’ personal, affective lives continue to be bracketed off in the Indian education system? The answer lies in a mixture of factors, some of which are unique to India, and possibly to other erstwhile colonized nations as well, while others are prevalent across the world, even in many parts of the Western academia. Krishna Kumar, an eminent Indian educationist, provides a good illustration of the factors unique to India through his concept of the colonial “textbook culture” in his book *What is Worth Teaching?* He argues that the depersonalization students and teachers in India face is an inheritance of the long period that India spent under British

colonial rule. In the British colonial imagination, education in India was supposed to primarily provide a cultural base to support the exploitative economic policies Britain used to drain India's natural resources. Thus emerged a "textbook culture" whereby what was considered to be "knowledge" was determined by colonial masters and codified in textbooks which the Indian students and teachers merely had to accept and rote-learn, while never questioning or challenging based on their personal lives and positionalities. This attitude about students' and teachers' positionalities not being seen as worthy sources of knowledge creation has unfortunately carried on even after the British left (Kumar 23-41).

This phenomenon is further compounded by patriarchal, capitalist, and neo-liberal norms that are prevalent across many countries in the Western academic world and which marginalize emotions and care-work from the mainstream academic imagination. Sara Ahmed, a cultural historian of emotions feels that Western academia has traditionally viewed emotion as, "beneath the faculties of thought and reason. To be emotional is to have one's judgement affected" (3). There are clear gendered implications to these norms, as emotions are associated with women, and academia is seen as the "paradigmatic site of pure rationality devoted to the dispassionate and objective search for truth—an emotion-free zone," and this is why "it is not coincidental that women's entry to the academy was resisted on precisely these grounds" (Leathwood and Hey 439). According to Lynch et al., patriarchy, along with neo-liberal capitalism, presents the individualistic, rational, and economic-minded masculine actor as the ideal prototype based on which modern education systems have been designed—something they call the "care-less view of the citizen" (1). This has made the complex, affective relationships of interdependencies and care—that are essential for the survival of all human beings—invisible, thereby devaluing the care-based labor (performed mostly by women) that goes into sustaining these 'ideal' citizens (7).

Colonialism, patriarchy, and neo-liberal capitalism thus intersect inside Indian classrooms in complex ways to prevent students like Zoya from getting a viable chance to reverse the debilitating social experiences and conditions which limit their lives. Creating spaces for bringing their emotions into academic writing in a caring environment has the potential to challenge this status quo.

### *The How*

At the curricular level, literacy narrative genre assignments have immense potential to help bridge students' personal, affective lives and academic discourse. There is a wealth of literature in the American discipline of rhetoric and composition that can be beneficial to writing teachers in India like myself who are interested in exploring the possibilities of this kind of work (see Carter, Corkery, Gee, and González et al.). The particular slant

that I gave to the general literacy narrative assignment can be viewed in the assignment sheet I have attached in Appendix A.

While it may seem counterintuitive at first, there is in fact a growing consensus on the immense value that such assignments can bring, not just in English or writing classrooms, but even in classrooms for STEM! (see Emerson). Another thing that can really help is for teachers to foreground their intentions towards student well-being during the syllabus preparation stage. Jaime Mejia Mayorga, a very inspiring graduate student at the University of Arizona, presents an insightful framework that teachers can use to question how well their courses help improve student well-being. He also recommends including language from this in the actual syllabus for students to see. I have included both documents at the end of this assignment, with his permission (see Appendix B and C). Inspired by his work, I created a self-reflective questionnaire for my students (see Appendix D), which they filled out midway through the course. Based on the trends we saw in the responses, my students and I collectively tweaked the course syllabus and policies through discussions to see how we could modify the remainder of the course to be more meaningful and nourishing not just for our cognitive, but also for our affective selves. I also used a version of this questionnaire in a workshop for the teachers who taught writing at my institution. Ekman's *Atlas of Emotions* is another great tool to help students develop vocabulary that enables them to talk and write about their emotional lives (see Design). The larger goal behind these curricular experiments in many of the classrooms where my peers and I are experimenting with care-based pedagogy has been to, "make space to let denied selves emerge" by providing pastoral care in the form of pedagogic support and by "producing the environment which enables the sharing of vulnerable early drafts, the exchange of critique and the ability to take feedback without feeling humiliation" (Dasgupta).

For readers who are interested in delving deeper into such practices, I also recommend familiarizing yourself with some of the wide range of interdisciplinary research emerging across the world that explores the relationship between trauma, learning, and social justice. Here are just some of the sub-themes and corresponding authors that one can begin to explore: critical emotional praxis (Zembylas; Ahmed); trauma and composition studies (Fox; Anderson and MacCurdy; Borrowman; Richmond); writing and affect (Bazerman; McLeod); writing and psychotherapy (Herman; Pennebaker); trauma-informed pedagogy (Cole et al.; Davidson); trauma and applied linguistics (Busch and McNara); emotional intelligence (Goleman).

In addition, it is really helpful to engage with existing communities of teachers and administrators interested in having conversations about the need to bring emotions and care-work into the ambit of academic work. A recently successful experiment in this regard was the Conference on Writing and Well-Being, organized by the

University of Arizona in January 2020. At this conference, teachers from a wide range of institutional (community colleges, K-12 schools, R-1 institutions, etc.) and national contexts (U.S. and India) came together to discuss their motivations, hesitations, and challenges, as well as successful experiments using these pedagogies. A version of this paper was in fact first presented at this conference as part of a panel titled “Practices of Care in the Postcolonial Classroom: Writing Pedagogy in India.” Here, the conference chair, Stacey Cochran, articulated an ambitious and much-needed plan to develop a body called the International Association for Well-Being in Education that would help incubate such conversations in an effort to “shift the culture of education to prioritize well-being and quality of life over test-taking, rankings, and social comparison” (Cochran 2). I recommend that interested readers follow the proceedings of this conference and try to stay in touch with future events. It is also important to note that while such initiatives are emerging in the U.S., in India, to the best of my knowledge, there is very little happening along these lines. Even if it is happening, it is not happening very visibly or on a large scale—something that needs to be changed soon.

*Things to Watch Out for*

It is important to take all the recommendations mentioned above in a considerate and informed fashion and not experiment with them in too fast or rash a manner. If this work is pushed down the throats of already precarious teachers by administrators without any support or incentive, or if it is taken up by well-meaning teachers without proper deliberation and training, then it will end up doing more harm than good. More often than not, “policy and research discourse positions teachers as agents of social change, as implementers of programme directives, without consideration of the ways in which teachers are differently positioned in their work and lives, positions that are sometimes at odds with reform ideals” (Sriprakash 7). Anyone interested in experimenting with these pedagogies should realize that “educating the carer [*sic*] citizens is not only about learning the know-how or skills for enhancing personal care relations, it is also about learning to produce the necessary social and economic conditions that enable love, care and solidarity relationships to be sustained economically, politically and socially” (Lynch et al. 14). This is why institutions where enough teachers and other stakeholders see the value in such work should be gradually transformed to create the enabling conditions that would allow for such work to happen. But what would these enabling conditions look like?

Based on my experience, I strongly believe that care should be thought of as a network of interlocking relationships between a range of individuals at different social and economic positions, rather than as isolated, unidirectional relationships between any two stakeholders. This is why teachers cannot perform care-work for students, or truly encourage them to see this as a desirable value worth imbibing, unless the institutions

in which they work care for them. The care that institutions perform for teachers should prioritize the creation of manageable teaching loads to allow them to care for students, like I was able to for Zoya. Second, it should involve some degree of employment stability, including space to learn through discovery and failure, that would help teachers feel secure enough to experiment. Third, it should involve a community within the University which acknowledges, values, incentivizes, and provides them with the necessary training to do this work. All of this is what I received at my institution, which enabled me to do the work mentioned in this essay. Apart from the peer support and comfortable teaching loads, I was also grateful to work with an administrator who valued and supported this kind of work.

When I discussed my experiences with the dean of my program, Aniha Brar, she was both sensitive to and concerned about the situation and, at the same time, enthusiastic about finding ways in which we could navigate such situations, not just as individuals or teachers, but as an entire program. Together we designed an orientation workshop where we divided the participating teachers and administrative staff into teams, and each team was given a case study about a difficult moment that had come up in the program in the last few years, and they had to develop a process and an approach to tackle it. One of the case studies was inspired by my experiences with Zoya's writing. At other points in the year we organized sessions with the university's psychological counselling staff to learn more about how to better handle such situations, while also learning how to simultaneously draw boundaries and engage in self-care activities when needed. Combined, these sessions worked to create a pathway through which we could mutually train each other, but perhaps more importantly, it normalized the value of this kind of care-work as part of the collective labor we perform in our program.

An important limitation, as my friend and colleague Sayan Chaudhuri who also teaches at this program very kindly pointed out, is that the way we learn to care and who we care for is also linked to larger distributions of power. The kinds of caring communities we try to form at any institution will be limited by the kinds of identities already represented in them. While we learn to care for whoever is already inside the universities where we work, we shouldn't forget the many who have not been able to get in. Our caring should also try to extend to them, in whatever shapes or forms, while we also work towards figuring out how to create more bridges for them to come inside elite academic institutions.

### **Conclusion**

While the classroom experiences I have chalked out in this paper were affirmative in many ways for Zoya, as well as for me in terms of the thinking and reflection they enabled me to do, it is important that I not lapse into a self-congratulatory register. As a straight upper-caste male, many aspects of my life have been and continue to be very much a part of

the problems that patriarchy and rape-culture create in the world. What is vital for me, as well as for other teachers like me, is to practice deep listening and continuously reflect on our gender and caste privilege—something that makes us part of the problem but also places us in a position of power that has the potential to be repositioned to become part of the solution. If you are a heterosexual, upper-caste male teacher, and your student has written an assignment narrating their experiences of trauma, instead of limiting your thinking and your response into the framework of how *you can help them* (which is how I had begun thinking about Zoya's assignment), it is vital that you also think deeply about your social position and act to remedy the many aspects of your own life—beliefs, behaviours, as well as those of your friends and family members—that create the cultural conditions which enable the suffering your student has written about. This is something that I am trying to do now.

I must also acknowledge that whatever potential energy has emerged through this entire experience should be premised on the environment of care I received at my institution, which is far from the norm. More often than not, teachers engage in care-work inside institutions that are anything but caring towards them. How should those institutions be transformed to value emotions in writing and care-work in labor? That is a big question that unfortunately my current positionality does not enable me to answer. However, I am hopeful that as this paper goes out into the world, I will come in touch with many other teachers and administrators experimenting with care-work in vastly different conditions, and I will be able to learn from and with them. My hope is to work towards connecting these various emergent sparks of caring energy that can inspire not just our classrooms or educational institutions, but also our communities and our countries to create a more caring and just world.

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## Appendix A: Anuj Gupta's Literacy Narrative Assignment Sheet

### I) What is a literacy narrative?

A literacy narrative is a sort of reflective narrative essay that archives a writer's experience of coming in contact with new languages/ dialects/ discourses, communities, and material environments, and it foregrounds the challenges, conflicts, hopes, frustrations, insights, aspirations, and possibilities created through such transitions. The focus, as in all narratives, is on a representation of events, preferably focused through one or more conflicts and their attempted resolutions. Unlike most narratives, however, a literacy narrative does not only represent events, but it also reflects on or ruminates over them.

### II) Examples of literacy narratives

- *Importance of the Act of Reading* by Paulo Friere (highly recommended)
- *Learning to Read and Write* by Frederic Douglas
- *On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer* by John Keats
- *Literacy Behind Bars* by Malcom X
- *Hip-Hop Literacy Narrative* by Jamaal Matters
- *Om Prakash Valmiki's Joothan, Story of My Sanskrit* by Kumud Pawde
- Extracts from Kamala Das's *My Story*
- *Growing Up as a Human Mage: A World of Warcraft Literacy Narrative* (Anonymous)

### III) Writing our own literacy narratives

- **Draft 1: Free-Writing:** Thanks to the reading by Prof. James Paul Gee that we did earlier, you have understood what "literacy" means and how it connects to the concept of "discourses." Sit with a partner and discuss the following questions with them:
  - What are some discourses that you are literate in?
  - What are some discourses that you are currently trying to acquire literacy in?
  - What are some discourses that you want to become literate in?
  - Of these, which particular literacy matters the most to you?
  - Why is this particular literacy important to you?
  - What are the objects, people, institutions, texts, ideas, beliefs, norms, and values that animate this form of discourse?

- What are some key experiences that have been instrumental in shaping your experiences of trying to gain this literacy? Write them out in as much detail as possible. These moments will serve as coordinates around which your literacy narrative will be woven. Here you could think about:
  - some conflicts/problems that you faced in gaining this literacy
  - some important learning experiences that gave you some insights; any particular readings that were instrumental in this journey
  - some experiences that told you about the importance of this kind of literacy
  - the people and their relationships (both within this discourse community and with others outside it) that have mediated your access to this literacy
  - has this literacy had any impact on your identity? If so, how?
- How does this form of literacy-discourse interact with other kinds of literacies and discourses in the world? What is its role in the world?
- What would you say about this literacy to someone who is not familiar with this at all?
- **Draft 2:** In this we will flesh out your anecdotes using the ‘Showing and Telling’ technique as well as using secondary sources.
- **Draft 3:** In this we will connect and structure all your fleshed-out anecdotes together, so that they inter-illuminate each other to reveal the larger ideas about your literacy that you want your readers to grasp.

### **Submission Guidelines**

- After the discussion, do some free-writing that answers these questions. This will serve as the first draft of your literacy narratives.
- Word Limit: 500 - 1000 words
- Submission deadline: 11:59 pm, Sunday, 4 Nov
- Based on this first draft then, we will work closely through in-class workshops and office hours to explore narrative possibilities that help flesh out your literacy

narrative in an insightful and well-structured manner. We will work through 3 drafts in this process and your final submission will be due on December 1.

## Appendix B: Syllabus Creation Guidelines by Jaime Mejiya Mayorga Using Oxford 2016's EMPHATHICS Framework

- 1) **E: Emotion and Empathy:** To what extent will my course provide spaces for emotions to be felt and dealt with? Am I ready to deal with unexpected emotions in the classroom? What assignments might instigate emotions? And what emotions and/or emotional reactions could these assignments have? To what extent am I considering being empathetic to my students? In what situations? Do I promote empathy in the classroom? If so, how do I do it?
- 2) **M: Meaning and Motivation:** Is my class a meaningful learning experience? Is my course full of meaningful content and activities? In what ways could my class contribute to students' meaning of life? Do I motivate students? In what other ways can I contribute to their motivation?
- 3) **P: Perseverance:** Do I provide opportunities for students to persevere? Do I use language/discourse that promotes hope, resilience, and optimism?
- 4) **A: Agency and Autonomy:** To what extent do I treat my students as the adults they are? Do I interact with them in ways that showcase their agency (for example, when students have to submit an assignment on a specific due date)? Do I allow students to be autonomous learners? Do I provide opportunities for them to figure things out?
- 5) **T: Time:** Am I realistic that one or two semesters might have little to no effect on students' writing performance? Am I aware that students are taking other courses, are working, and have other responsibilities in their daily lives? Are my assignments/am I respectful of students' time? Do I share with my students the importance of time for completing assignments and completing other activities?
- 6) **H: Habits:** What habits of mind am I promoting in my course? Besides habits of mind, what other habits am I promoting in the classroom?
- 7) **I: Intelligences:** Do I plan class activities thinking in the 'intelligences' students possess (musical, kinesthetic, intrapersonal, etc.)?

- 8) **C: Characteristics:** Do I provide opportunities for students to use their character strengths individually and collectively?
- 9) **S: Self-Image:** What class activities could help students take a look at themselves? How can I contribute to students' sense of self?



**Appendix C: Foregrounding Intentions for Well-Being in Syllabi through Instructor Statements**

“I am a strong advocate and believer of having positive relationships and emotions in the classroom. I try to incorporate principles of positive psychology in my teaching, so students and myself can feel encouraged, appreciated, loved, understood, and motivated to thrive and flourish as individuals and as members of a learning community. Therefore, you will experience a relaxed, welcoming, and fun class every time you enter our classroom. I really hope that you enjoy our time together and that you become aware of your emotional self as well as the emotional selves of others. Learning, besides being a cognitive endeavor, is also an emotional one.”

*—extracted, with permission, from the syllabus of Jaime Mejia Mayorga, a graduate student and writing instructor at the University of Arizona.*

## **Appendix D: A Collaborative Syllabus Planning Exercise for Teachers and Students by Anuj Gupta**

### **Foregrounding Well-Being in Our Course**

Please answer the following questions to the best of your abilities. Based on your answers then, we will try to reflect on what changes we can make in our syllabus and our course policies to make it more supportive for our collective well-being (these questions are inspired from the PERMA framework created by Dr. Martin Seligman at the University of Pennsylvania).

1. How is your physical health, safety, and financial stability right now? How have these been in the last semester, and how would you like them to be in the next semester? What can we as a community do to help you achieve this?
2. What kind of emotions are you experiencing right now? What has your emotional stream been like in the last semester, and what would you like it to be like in the next semester? What can we do to help you experience more positive emotions in this course together? You could check out this [Atlas of Emotions](#) for help with vocabulary.
3. Have you ever experienced a [flow state](#) in this course? If yes, please describe what you were doing while experiencing it and how it made you feel. What can we do together in this course that might help you experience flow states?
4. Have you ever felt a sense of belonging in this class? Is there someone you feel connected to and supported by? Is there something that you did last semester to help someone feel supported and better connected in the class, especially someone beyond your usual circle of friends? If yes, please describe it and write a note and give it to them today. How can we increase our collective sense of belonging and support each other better next semester?
5. Have you ever felt that you've done something meaningful in this course? Have you ever felt that you belong to and serve something higher than yourself? If yes, please describe it. How can we make this course more meaningful for you and for everyone else?
6. Do you feel that you've accomplished something in the last semester? If yes, please describe it. What are three things that, if achieved, will help you feel a sense of accomplishment next semester?

# We Could Convert the Lines, But Not the People: A Postmortem on Changing Working Conditions in a Writing Program

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## Abstract

In the conversion of part-time adjunct instructor positions at a small college, institutional limits and personal perspectives on what it means to be an adjunct instructor clashed with both newer principles and decades-old arguments in rhetoric and composition to improve working conditions.

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*Departments and programs need to provide equitable working conditions for all faculty, including reasonable workloads and protections against unnecessary changes; access to shared governance and curricular decisions; transparent and fair hiring, evaluation, and renewal processes; access to technology and other resources necessary for job performance; access to professional development and scholarly resources; and fair compensation. To provide such conditions, departments need consistent and transparent policies developed as much as possible in collaboration with NTT faculty.*

—"Statement on Working Conditions for Non-Tenure Track Writing Faculty"  
from the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC)

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In 2012, I used my influence and arguments commonly asserted in the field of writing studies to convert part-time adjunct positions to full-time lecturer positions on my small branch campus of a state university. I did this with the ethical zeal of a new writing program administrator (WPA), arguing for a corrective to the over-reliance on underpaid adjunct instructors. This was my first and only chance while I served in the role of WPA to improve labor conditions for writing instructors on my campus. The new positions were a success in structural terms; however, in human terms, the change may be considered a failure, as it caused both acute and chronic negative effects on people's career paths, program morale, and perceptions of job security.

This article explains the circumstances and effects of this conversion, relying on two theoretical lenses: Breslin et al.'s application of "intersectionality" in questions of decision-making within leadership, and, specifically to the "adjunct problem" within the field of rhetoric and composition, William B. Lalicker and Amy Lynch-Binieck's "Principles For Converting Contingent to Tenure-Track." In particular, I analyze our program's process and rhetoric to secure these positions, which were theoretically sound but created lasting fallout. By emphasizing the needs of adjunct instructors—rightfully bemoaned as second class citizens of the university—intersectionality resists the "either/or" arguments that the leaders of the field of rhetoric and composition have offered as the solutions to the adjunct problem, which seem to fundamentally ignore the desires of many adjuncts. I grapple with these sometimes-problematic arguments, such as suggesting that adjunct positions lead to poor experiences for students. And, I consider this problem from a place of intersectionality myself—as a former part-time adjunct and mother of young children who understands the appeal of part-time intellectual work.

Lalicker and Lynch-Binieck's Principles appear in the 2017 edited collection *Contingency, Exploitation, and Solidarity*, the most recent and comprehensive call to action and compendium of methods to improve conditions for contingent faculty in writing studies (henceforth in this essay referred to as non-tenure-track writing faculty or NTTWF). In their introduction, the editors emphasize that the work to improve conditions for NTTWF is coterminous with efforts to fight "the denigration of composition studies" (Kahn, Lalicker, and Lynch-Binieck 7). Noting the many surveys and change-making efforts within professional organizations such as the Modern Language Association and the Association of American University Professors, the editors argue that, "we know enough [. . .] and it's possible to make concrete changes with what we know *right now*" (4, emphasis in original). The editors note that the vastness and variety of the adjunct problem means there can be no one solution but instead only continued, local efforts, which offer an alternative rhetoric to what they identify as a hollow/horrific binary: "efforts that have led concretely and effectively toward improved adjunct faculty working conditions" (7).

This case from my own university is similar: it is a concrete and effective project. My reporting of it here will explore the key arguments that helped me gain traction on this project—yet, I maintain an alertness to how these arguments sometimes do not align with the desires of people in these roles—an important factor that I believe can go overlooked in rhetoric around contingent faculty and has no easy resolution. I look to intersectionality to do a better job of considering this situation from multiple angles. Then, I will move into a case analysis, applying Lalicker and Lynch-Binieck’s Principles to my program’s project.

### **Improving Working Conditions and/or Improving Jobs**

In a long-standing and complicated scene of debate and activism such as this one, there are many arguments to consider. In this section, I summarize two threads of argument that pertain to “the adjunct problem”: 1) that working conditions of NTTWF impact the respect and health of the field of writing studies; and, 2) that the guiding impetus has involved converting contingent positions to full-time lecturers and, better yet, tenure-track positions attendant with benefits, etc.

In the first perspective, Kahn, Lalicker, and Lynch-Binieck equate the fight for fair pay and improved conditions for NTTWF with the continued effort to resist the denigration of the field of writing studies (7). From a university administrator’s point of view, if anyone will teach writing for any amount of money, even under poor working conditions, it is not “worth” much and, hence, not worth putting extra (or equal) investment of funds towards NTTWF. From this perspective, the status quo is acceptable for many universities—that first-year writing in particular is cheap and easy, financially-speaking, and what Kahn et al. fear, perhaps intellectually-speaking as well. In this way, Kahn et al.’s position is simply about equity, a seemingly clear-cut concept and goal.

Another angle on this argument is the critique of the “internal payoff”—or the acceptance of low pay given the emotional rewards that come with teaching. Kahn cites Eileen Schell when he says: “teachers are expected to find the internal payoff of teaching so high that the financial payoff isn’t relevant. Nowadays, the argument seems to be that anybody who doesn’t find the emotional payoff sufficient is morally bankrupt” (Kahn 110). Schell and Kahn critique this stance, and yet it is quite common. Teachers at all levels sustain themselves emotionally through their passion for their work, even when their pay falls short.

Richard Colby and Rebekah Schultz Colby’s defense of keeping the “teaching” portion and the “research” portion of the teaching of writing on equal footing reflects a worry about the de-professionalization of, or lack of respect afforded to, courses in fields taught by adjuncts. They worry that maintaining separate casts of teaching-focused faculty (usually contingent) and tenured faculty, whose focus is on research, also contributes to the denigration of the field’s esteem: “this separation could potentially de-emphasize scholarship on writing pedagogy, creating an

arbitrary binary between teaching and research and relegating teaching to merely service—a service which, within this separation, becomes mindless, as teaching then becomes separated from the knowledge construction of research” (63). Colby and Schultz Colby suggest that even in the creation of full-time non-tenure-track (FTNTT) positions, “we also want to contend that as representatives of the discipline of composition, a field that still is so often considered merely service, we are in fact scholars of practice with research agendas that improve our teaching and understanding of writing and rhetoric” (68). And, although there are certainly ways to elevate those who mainly focus on teaching in their emphasis on the artistic aspect, or through service-learning, or other values important to the field or the local university, this part of the “good for the field argument” takes the stance that the contingent faculty person who does not contribute to the field through scholarship may be harmful to the field.

The interest in maintaining a program of scholarship and/or professional development in NTTWF positions is the second perspective at issue in my local case. Put more generally, this perspective involves a focus on improving the career path of NTTWF. Colby and Schultz Colby discuss the “conversion” of contingent positions to tenure-track jobs as well as a similar, though perhaps lesser, method of achieving better job security, which is to create full-time lecturer jobs that do not require research but offer commensurate pay, benefits, participation in the department and university governance, and the professional resources, materials, space, etc. listed in the 2016 CCCC “Statement on Working Conditions.” Even while a change such as this improves some aspects of NTTWF’s working conditions, there is a caveat along social lines. Patricia Davies Pytleski explains: “although the terms of this proposal could greatly improve circumstances, involvement, respect, professional development, and conditions for contingent faculty, they would still be relegated to a place of lesser power” (A5).

From my point of view, these two perspectives clash: on the one hand, activists around contingent labor want to help create conditions in which NTTWF earn fair pay in the jobs as they are currently occupied (i.e., teaching-focused); on the other hand, one way to do this is to “professionalize” the jobs and align NTTWF’s work and compensation with the discipline’s values of scholarly practice. Of course, they do not always clash. Many adjuncts would embrace having more responsibility and greater pay in a full-time position with a sustainable wage. Still, the clash between these two values has always been a touchy part of the debate and activism around contingency.

For instance, the late 1980s brought the first documented conversation around labor conditions in the field of writing studies, which resulted in the “Wyoming Resolution,” a white paper drafted in 1986, published in *College English* in 1987, and endorsed by the Council of Writing Program Administrators in 1988. In their explanation of the

process of its creation, James C. McDonald and Eileen E. Schell explain the blind spots and disagreements on the topic of labor conditions for NTTWF that led to the resolution ultimately not embracing one of its original intents: to create standards for working conditions that the CCCC would hold institutions accountable to with a grievance and censure process. They cite a 1989 draft report by the CCCC that [such a process] would be impractical for CCCC to institute [...] as it ‘would require staffing and legal expenditures that are currently beyond the scope of the organization’” (“CCC Initiatives” 65 as qtd. in McDonald and Schell 370).

Because of that seemingly impossible either/or scenario, it seems the efforts of the project then became focused on how the jobs of part-time faculty could improve, rather than be abolished, emphasizing such changes as a complete hiring and review process leading toward career advancement, the provision of professional development opportunities, and research support and funding opportunities. According to McDonald and Schell, the framers of the “Statement of Principles” resulting from the “Wyoming Resolution” did not anticipate the resistance by part-timers to this “career model;” where part-timers wanted fair pay, benefits, and fair treatment, faculty understood “improving conditions” to mean “becoming full faculty.” McDonald and Schell write: “many contingent faculty and their supporters argued that the CCCC Statement’s emphasis on tenure, research, and publications won out over the discussion of job security and working conditions [...] the conflict over the CCCC Statement was precisely over the range of values about what constitutes work in the profession, who was represented in the statement and who was not” (372). One way to interpret “who was not” represented in the statements may be explored further as embedded assumptions within the two arguments under consideration.

In the “good for the field” argument, those who cannot perform and/or do not benefit in their job progression from conducting and publishing research are not useful and may in fact be harmful to the field. That is quite a leap in logic, given that first-year writing is not necessarily in danger—the field has grown and matured in disciplinarity in the past 40+ years in ways that have been heralded often (see, for recent examples, Leff; Phelps and Ackerman; Malenczyk et al.). Additionally, the “career path” argument may be even more insulting, given that adjunct instructors are Masters- or Ph.D.-holding professionals who have been hired by the very critics of the system with full knowledge that 21<sup>st</sup> century universities need them. These are harsh critiques. I float them here as a way to interrogate the “adjunct problem” and be as critical of my own case study as possible.

To do that fully, I draw on Breslin et al.’s interpretation of Kimberlé Crenshaw’s theory of intersectionality: “By emphasizing multiple and simultaneous dimensions of social inequality—most commonly gender, race, class, and sexuality—intersectionality reveals the unique experiences of individuals who occupy multiple marginalized

social categories” (161). Here, I examine how class in the sense of academic citizenship bears out in the case study and complicates the two arguments above. Gender adds an additional lens, given that many young women and mothers choose their adjunct positions as a way to maintain a professional foothold and earn higher-than-average part-time wages. Intersectionality lays bare that these threads of argument don’t totally represent the lived realities of actual adjunct faculty. There remain some assumptions, and perhaps missing perspectives, from the adjunct faculty themselves, which I, as a former adjunct faculty and young mother, know well and which helped me see why our local project of conversion was not as simply successful as I might have otherwise claimed.

I therefore highlight these clashing identities and values to situate my local case. In moving toward better job stability, pay, and participation in university governance, I advocated to “convert” part-time adjunct instructors who taught up to four sections of first-year writing semester-to-semester into full-time lecturers. The position of “lecturer” already existed on our campus. These jobs guaranteed year-to-year contracts with a full HR review process; better pay standardized by state law; benefits; and a change in status at our university, according them participation in governance and a vote in the department on curricular matters. However, I did not anticipate the way the identities and values would arise and clash, a condition and error which may be simply stated as: we could convert the lines, but not the people.

### **My Local Case**

I became the WPA of a small, public state university branch campus in 2011<sup>5</sup>. I brought to the campus my own history of working as an M.A.-holding adjunct instructor and then as a teaching assistant (TA) in my Ph.D. program for a total of ten years. I already knew the hard-knock life of the adjunct instructor: driving between campuses, unstable enrollment, not enough pay, no health insurance, and balancing a retail job on top of the adjunct work and my graduate studies. After earning my Ph.D. and moving my family 1300 miles away from our home state to become a tenure-track assistant professor, I had a bit of a “bootstraps” attitude toward adjunct instructors: rejecting the conditions of the job and “trading up” was possible; I had done it. If a person accepted the conditions, then they had good reason to. Plenty of adjunct instructors do, whether to balance parenthood or to work in semi-retirement or to pursue artistic projects. I respected adjunct instructors and, frankly, did not hear many complaints on my campus.

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<sup>5</sup> University of Wisconsin-Superior enrolls about 2500 undergraduate students and serves about 400 students in first-year writing courses per year. The program employs about 15 people in a mix of faculty, full-time lecturers, and part-time adjunct instructors.



I then attended the WPA Bootcamp in 2012, after my first year on the job. In this workshop, I was awakened to the topic of labor conditions more fully, and in my mentoring sessions it seemed that a number one priority for the continued improvement of our writing program should be to convert our adjunct instructors to full-time instructors with decent salaries and benefits. I was convinced that this was the kind of stability our program needed, and it coincidentally aligned with the rhetoric of our campus' then-provost, who was interested in raising the profile of adjunct instructors on our campus by limiting the number of sections they taught and changing their titles—perhaps a meager effort, but one that signaled that arguments to improve conditions further might be entertained. This kairotic moment aligned with my interest in shoring up the job security of the devoted adjuncts in our writing program. I spent the flight home brainstorming the arguments I would make to achieve this change.

Because this provost was motivated to change the perception of adjunct instructors, the deal was not that difficult to strike: we made full-time lecturer positions using creative budgeting. We asked the provost to draw from the well of money funded by students enrolled in our Basic Writing class, a 0-credit, pre-college course. This money stood alone and was earmarked for the support of Basic Writing students. Hence, the position descriptions stipulated that the lecturers would teach 50% Basic Writing and 50% mainstream first-year writing courses. Therefore, we didn't spend any more from the "regular" pot of money than otherwise would have been spent to pay adjunct instructors. I felt proud that we would be better and more consistently serving the Basic Writing students with full-time teachers who could re-invest the Basic Writing dollars into its own curriculum and pedagogy through their professional development and stable employment.

The trouble came when the search began. Our HR rules stated that the existing adjunct instructors' positions didn't actually exist—and, therefore, we could not consider these new jobs as conversions of old jobs. These were brand-new jobs that current adjunct instructors had to apply for. Another HR rule stated that we had to advertise these jobs nationally. This would mean, given the job market in the field of rhetoric and composition, that the qualifications of outside candidates would most likely exceed the qualifications of our current adjunct instructors. The reactions to the creation of the positions were mixed. Some did not want to work full-time; some could not compete with outside candidates; some did not want to be tied to Basic Writing. In the end, about three-quarters of the adjunct instructors applied for the jobs, and half were hired. Within a year, the instructors who opted out of applying and who did not get the jobs left the university.

In the intervening year, there was a generalized sense of anger, and acts of hostility were aimed at those who got the jobs. As time progressed, some measure of anxiety remained in the idea that jobs could be changed at any time (as opposed to the previous decades-long

arrangement). And, finally, the new jobs happened to coincide with the arrival of new tenure-track faculty, creating more confusion and some enmity. Where before there existed a two-tiered hierarchy of adjuncts and tenured faculty (with no tenure-track people for many years), we now had a four-tiered hierarchy (adjuncts, full-time lecturers, tenure-track faculty, and tenured faculty). It seemed to some that new roles were less delineated than the previous combination.

When I reflect on this event, I see the clash in values and identities playing out very clearly: in reaching for the material changes that seem to matter most (pay, benefits, and security), the jobs had to become more than “just teaching;” because of the funding source, they became tied to a specialized sub-field which required professional development and, in practice, amounted to attending (or presenting at) conferences, subscribing to and maybe writing for journals, and generally “upping” participation in the field. This is the “good for the field” perspective.

However, that directly influenced the “career path” value, and many of our adjunct instructors didn’t want to do those things. They saw them as extra, difficult, and irrelevant to the fact that they were qualified to and had taught first-year writing successfully for years—with good course evaluations and great relationships with students. They were insulted and argued for themselves using the moral character arguments that Kahn critiques: they were passionate and would have continued working in the given conditions.

### **Lalicker and Lynch-Binieck’s Principles**

In this section, I reflect using Lalicker and Lynch-Binieck’s Principles as if we had not yet converted the lines; in this way, I retrospectively apply the principles as a decision-making or decision-shaping heuristic. My reason for choosing this particular set of principles is that Lalicker and Lynch-Binieck work in Pennsylvania, a state known for teacher solidarity and garnering gains on collective bargaining, is enticing and inspiring to me, as my campus is a branch of a state university in a mid-western state that lost its ability to collectively bargain with the state legislature in 2011, “which virtually eliminated collective bargaining rights for most public-sector workers, as well as slashed those workers’ benefits, among other changes” (Madland and Rowell). Additionally, while other white papers exist for WPAs to consider in regards to improving the working conditions of adjunct faculty such as the “CCCC Statement on Working Conditions for Non-Tenure Track Writing Faculty,” Lalicker and Lynch-Binieck’s Principles are specific to the conversion of positions, and not necessarily the improvement of other elements of the writing program; hence, I use it as my retrospective guide.

*Principle 1: Departments should advertise for, and hire, real compositionists for composition-teaching jobs, not Jacks- and Jills-of-all-trades.* In our case, our program was already able to hold our adjunct instructors to this standard; all of them had Master's degrees that did not privilege literature, thanks to a culture of hiring over time (though not a transparent process) that emphasized a general appreciation for writing of all kinds, and an awareness that what could perhaps be perceived as "preferred" writing genres (such as poetry) were indebted to the composition classes that kept the lights on. Therefore, in adhering to this principle for the new jobs, none of our adjunct instructors were categorically boxed-out of applying for them, but they were out-classed by their competition—or, predicted that they would be and opted out of applying for the jobs.

*Principle 5: Maximize contingent faculty access to the complete collegial life of the department: meetings, policy discussions, social events, scholarly discussions, committee service, and funding for professional development.* This is an area that already worked for our program; we tried to flatten the hierarchy as much as possible around curricular discussions and changes, asking for everyone's input and expertise. Occasionally, we had successfully secured funding to pay contingent instructors for service work outside of their contracted duties, and we had (and still today) maintained a collegial departmental culture with the occasional barbecue and Christmas party.

This makes work fun, and projects go smoothly for the most part; however, it must be said that when academic rank rears its head as a topic of consideration at the university, feelings can get hurt, a situation that leads to the next part of this principles-based analysis in which the "double bind" of the adjunct debate functions as a counter-argument to nearly every remaining best practice in NTTWF hiring: treating adjunct instructors like full citizens inevitably emphasizes that they are not full citizens. This is a double-bind in the sense that 1) it is the right thing to do and yet; 2) it sometimes asks for more work than adjunct instructors are expected to do—thereby recognizing their talents and work beyond "just teaching," but also raising a bar for performance that they are literally not contracted or paid to do. I am not arguing against treating all colleagues like full citizens of the university, but I am pointing out how the effort to do so often circles back to the old problem at hand. The remaining principles-based analysis helps elucidate this claim.

*Principle 2: Hire contingent faculty with as much care and attention to their long-term collegial and scholarly roles as you demonstrate towards regular tenure-track faculty.* In order to activate the university HR processes that would allow a search committee to be formed and the Dean to charge the committee to follow the rules, which would afford the type of "care and attention" the principle suggests, a budget-line job must be

created. This was an institutional-level change we did make by creating the new jobs; however, as I have explained, it caused negative effects. This principle thus seems to loop back on itself, and I see this, again, as a double-bind.

*Principle 4: Make sure all current or long-standing contingent faculty are credited for doing satisfactory service according to the real requirements under which they were hired—“grandparent” them into qualifications when any new requirements for conversion are established by the department or the administration.* I mentioned that some of our adjunct instructors were happy to serve the department (attending meetings, working on curricular or assessment sub-committees, etc.) without the extra pay we could sometimes secure. This condition bumps up against contractual obligations on the part of the department. Since traditional adjunct contracts say nothing about service, the chair best holds up their end of the deal by not expecting it and not rewarding it in the interest of fairness to others who can't or don't want to (by rights) serve. Some adjunct instructors never contributed any service, which had never been used “against” anyone; this begs the question: should the opposite be true?

*Principle 6: Evaluate contingent faculty for their whole set of academic talents, just as you evaluate tenure-track faculty: for teaching, but also for collegial service and scholarship.* Similarly, this principle bumps up against contractual obligations on the part of the department; where traditional adjunct contracts say nothing about service and scholarship, the chair best holds up their end of the deal by not expecting it and not rewarding it, even if it should happen anyway. This is in the interest of fairness to others who can't or don't want to (by rights) serve or produce scholarship.

*Principle 3: New faculty should all be made directly aware of a conversion clause and any departmental policies guiding it.* In this case, this is a moot point; no such policy existed. And, in fact, since our home-made conversion occurred, it has become part of the departmental lore: that former instructors “are gone” because of the jobs. This in some way serves to sever any link to a culture of possibility for promotion or conversion. On the other hand, I can extend this principle to my local context to affirm that any new instructor should be clearly informed of their job's potential to be maintained or increased as university conditions allow. The most humane version of this is to be direct that there are no prospects of being retained semester-to-semester.

Applying Lalicker and Lynch-Binieck's Principles helps explain where my conversion project perhaps went wrong. For instance, in pushing me to think about the service and scholarship portion of potential full-time jobs, I would have asked the questions I ask above about “double binds” in reference to Principles 2, 4, and 6. Such questioning may have

resulted in a more nuanced approach or a wider variety of job categories that were amenable to my part-time colleagues. In particular, I am sure that the desire and capacity to conduct research or approach teaching writing from a more scholarly point of view would have become a more prominent feature in discussions about what the jobs could have been.

To complicate that discussion through the lens of intersectionality further, there are two types of colleagues whose working conditions I will tease out for one final point of consideration: retired teachers and mothers of young children, for whom adjunct teaching was beneficial to their personal and professional goals. I believe the former category is a little more self-explanatory—people in this position enjoyed a very part-time job that drew on their considerable skills and experience. They were aware of and employed the various theories and perspectives in the field and thought deeply about their teaching—call it a “scholarly-informed practice,” one that these colleagues were not interested in contributing to, but in benefitting from. Note that while this was true in my local case, Margaret Betz would term such examples as the “side gig” myth, a perspective that “allows universities to perpetuate a system that exploits contingent academics by willfully ignoring the reality of the situation in favor of protecting the status quo” (Betz).

The latter colleagues have enjoyed more attention in our field’s conversations. Mothers of young children also benefit from the part-time and flexible work of adjunct teaching. (Note that I have never met any fathers in this position.) Sometimes this position lays a foundation for the “career path” arguments; it did for me, as I noted briefly above. As an adjunct instructor, I appreciated the connection I maintained to the field and especially the professional development opportunities that were afforded me. Sometimes, I could not take advantage of them—it depended on how old the baby was or whether it was within, say, a 100-mile drive. But, overall, these working conditions allowed me professional and even intellectually-grounded, part-time employment during a time when I was waiting to be able to work—or attend graduate school—full-time. Once my children were a bit older and able to attend pre-school, my years of having adjunct-taught contributed to my overall career trajectory.

Of course, there are downsides to my story. Giving birth in September one year meant I “missed” a semester and lost my seniority. I had to go to the back of the adjunct line for sections and schedule preferences. This experience precipitated my interest in earning a Ph.D. and securing an assistant professor position. Other women’s experiences focus on how motherhood has damaged or sidelined their careers through what Betz calls the “defective myth,” or the idea that academic mothers are in contingent employment not for their own personal, parenting-related reasons but because being a mother automatically means they are less dedicated or otherwise capable than those in full-faculty positions (Betz).

I’ll admit, my own argument here is getting circular; however, this reflects the larger issue, filled with double-binds with no one solution other

than the radical suggestion of “abolition,” an argument to end first-year writing—the idea of cutting the snake off at the head, providing no reason to employ thousands of people in poor or moderately poor conditions (Russell 133). Ironically, the entrenchment of the first-year required course within the growth of the neoliberal “managed university” puts that project hand-in-hand with the “adjunct problem”—perhaps best attended to and only possible in local projects.

### **Where Are They Now?**

By way of concluding, I’ll mention the status of those in the full-time jobs: they have upped their participation in scholarship and professional development as per their job descriptions. They continue to teach and serve our students very well, as well as perform departmental and university service. One person is the campus writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) coordinator on re-assignment. And another person is pursuing an Ed.D. in developmental education, even while continuing to work full-time. So, that story—that contingent and NTTWF jobs can advance career paths—is playing out well. The “better for the field” argument may also be playing out at a departmental level. Eight years later, our writing program is doing well—we have changed our traditional first-year, two-semester course sequence to a two-year course sequence in the spirit of a “vertical curriculum,” and we continue to respond to trends in enrollment, assessment findings, pedagogy, and creative projects of improvement that I, for one, find reward in.

This is all true despite the lingering “where are they now?” rumors and lore from the job conversions and the real effects on several colleagues whom I imagine would judge this “conversion project” as an unfair and cruel ousting. In attending to the adjunct problem in my local context—even with the support from the WPA Council and my own first-hand experience—I was unprepared to contend with the effects of the clash between the “good for the field” and “career path” perspectives in the adjunct debate. Attuned as I was to the second-class citizenship of, especially, young women in the academy holding adjunct instructor positions, the “adjunct problem” has rendered itself even more clearly to me through this experience. As the years have passed and the attempts in our field to provide lists, advice, and heuristics, including the 2016 CCC Statement and such publications as Lalicker and Lynch-Binieć’s chapter have increased, I am able to identify at least two complicated truths-for-now that have allowed me to better understand and possibly improve my decision-making:

1. The adjunct problem itself is neither universally understood nor accepted, especially by some individual NTTWF, who find “better for the field” claims demeaning and insulting and even embrace the moral character argument on their own behalf.

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2. In my local context, I can convert lines, but not people—a structural limit that can improve working conditions for only some people interested in pursuing professional development down the “career path.”

Identifying these “truths-for-now” has created new goals for improving working conditions on my campus; perhaps my biggest oversight was that the jobs were the problem—there are clearly bigger and deeper structures at play, such as our state university system HR rules. As I go forward, I will continue to rely on multiple lenses and consider the wants and needs of those in positions of lesser power to judge the problem and potential solutions, while continuing to rely on a chief finding of Breslin et al.: “intersectionality demonstrates how shared value assumptions—on the basis of membership in particular social categories—are troubling” (178). Staying attuned to the fact that even our most tested models and principles will reflect the value assumptions of the “upper class” of the field of rhetoric and composition, the caveats and clashes incumbent in a messy and complicated project of social justice can become useful tools for improving the working conditions of adjunct faculty.

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# Administrative Rhetorical Mindfulness: A Professional Development Framework for Administrators in Higher Education

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## Abstract

As part of the post-secondary educational landscape, online programs and courses help institutions reach and enroll more students. To meet the needs of increased enrollments in online education, part-time faculty are often hired to teach online courses. Part-time contingent faculty represent a growing majority across many fields of study in colleges and universities. As Rendahl & Breuch reported, first-year courses, specifically freshman composition, are increasingly taught online. This study uses a mixed-methods design to examine how, and in what ways, writing program administrators (WPAs) approach preparing part-time faculty to teach writing online. The findings reveal that WPAs often encounter workload and funding constraints that limit their ability to help professionalize part-time faculty for online writing instruction; however, participants were mindful of the issues related to contingent employment and the importance of faculty development.

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**F**or many faculty members, occupying a part-time faculty position means getting low wages, few, if any, professional development opportunities, and working in institutions that do not provide adequate resources. As much of the contingent labor research notes, this is an all-too-common occurrence, and these structural impediments have led to instability, inequity, and uncertainty in the contingent faculty labor market (e.g., Ehrenberg; Kazar and Maxey). This work attempts to interrogate how administrator roles can help to support

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and affect the experiences of part-time faculty, especially given the overreliance upon them to teach in fields across the academy. More research is needed to examine how, and in what ways, part-time faculty can take advantage of and pursue opportunities, if they wish, that are designed to enhance their roles as expert practitioners in their fields.

Moreover, this work aims to analyze the dynamics of administration, specifically writing program administration. Writing program administrators typically run or direct the first-year writing programs. My research focuses on professional development of part-time faculty specifically tailored for teaching online writing courses. Ultimately, in this article I argue that administrators recognize the potential for professional development moments in those everyday interactions with part-time contingent faculty. I define this act as Administrative Rhetorical Mindfulness or ARM, a term that emerged as the main theme from my dissertation research (Beavers 109). Likewise, this term and subsequent framework work in conversation with what Cindy Moore describes in “Mentoring WPAs for the Long Term: The Promise of Mindfulness.” She says, “a central premise of mindfulness, and the spiritual and scientific thought that informs it, is that much human suffering results from dwelling in a past we cannot change or worrying about a future we have little control over” (92). Mindfulness, in this sense, means doing more in those moments where one can enact change. Administrative Rhetorical Mindfulness is a heightened or keener awareness of the need for professional development and using any opportunity or interaction with part-time faculty members to foster it (Beavers 109).

In addition, a more deliberate focus on and about issues related to part-time faculty professional development are part and parcel of activism. Liliana Naydan in “Transitioning from Contingent to Tenure-Track Faculty Status as WPA” notes that, “to be in the profession in a meaningful way is to change the profession for the better, to transition it into something better ...” (293). The thrust of the statement speaks to the idea that mindful and meaningful progress occurs when administrators see themselves as real agents of change and justice. For part-time faculty, professional development can serve as a means for change, especially given new and emergent areas of scholarship, like online teaching, and specifically online writing instruction. Continuing to develop faculty to teach in various modalities is what’s missing from conversations about contingency (e.g., Bourelle; Hewett and Mechenbier). Creating avenues for part-time faculty to engage in professional development are rife with constraints. The notion of being a mindful administrator is self-directed. The only thing ARM requires is that one have a desire to do more and a pathway to accomplish reasonable goals. An ARM framework for administration is even more important now, given the fact that the 2020 pandemic has changed, and will continue to change the way higher education functions. This research provides strong evidence that reveals

how WPAs attempt to serve the varied needs and positionalities of their part-time faculty. Therefore, ARM is a framework for understanding the work writing program administrators do. Still, it is useful for any administrator overseeing a program, department, unit, school, or college because it reinforces purposeful thinking that leads to strategic action.

For example, during the Spring 2020 semester, faculty across all institutions of higher education moved their courses into online spaces exclusively in response to the growing coronavirus threat. Most WPAs will likely attest that requiring part-time contingent faculty and graduate students to move their first-year writing courses online came with a host of issues and concerns for administrators to consider. As Jennifer Riley Campbell and Richard Colby remind us, “the WPA wears many hats” (51) and the Spring 2020 semester was no exception. At the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, a four-year, research-based, public institution, I serve as the first-year writing director. In response to the need to shift things to the online environment, I quickly developed a one-day training workshop covering some of the best practices in online writing instruction. The workshop aligned with the Conference on College Composition and Communication’s Online Writing Instruction (OWI) Position Statement. OWI Principle 7 states “Writing Program Administrators (WPAs) for OWI programs and their online writing teachers should receive appropriate OWI-focused training, professional development, and assessment for evaluation and promotion purposes” (“CCCC”). Nevertheless, I did not focus on the training of administrators as suggested in the principle; instead, I focused the workshop on training the part-time faculty. The action I took falls in line with the ARM framework. I recognized the pandemic moment as an opportunity to create a professional development workshop for part-time faculty doing online writing instruction within the first-year writing program.

My goal was to give part-time faculty resources to develop their online courses, as many had little to no experience teaching online. This was a challenging prospect. As such, the work helped to solidify what research (e.g., Hewett and Martini; Bouelle) in rhetoric and composition continues to reveal, that professionalizing part-time faculty, especially those teaching first-year writing online, is essential to student learning, and those faculty members’ growth as teachers.

### **Writing Program Administration**

The goal of this brief review of literature is to provide some context about writing program administrators. The writing program administrator must balance their scholarly activities, often including teaching, research, and service to their institutions alongside the management of the program itself. For instance, Naydan explains that “they often hire, opt against renewing, fire, rehire, and administrate part- and full-time contingent faculty who have emerged as part and parcel of a twenty-first-century higher education workforce that is shaped by corporate forces” (284). This

predicament places the WPA in a dichotomous position because their work for the institution is two-fold, serving as both administrator and faculty. As Donna Strickland notes, “most schools want a writing program administrator, someone to manage a first-year writing program, a writing center, or a writing across the curriculum program. To profess composition, is to study one thing and do quite another” (2). The WPA has one foot planted firmly in monitoring the task of other faculty and the other in the academic work associated with part-time faculty development and performance.

Additionally, many part-time faculty are used to staff the general education or first-year courses. Specifically, first-year writing programs are distinctively situated because many programs employ a high number of contingent faculty members if compared to other programs, and, as noted in much of the research (Khan, Lalicker, and Lynch-Binieki; Bousquet; and Schell), part-time faculty are not paid well for their labor, many first-year programs lack sufficient funding, and there are a number of diverse stakeholder perspectives about the function and utility of writing instruction for first-year college learners. Efforts to increase accountability within higher education, and specifically in first-year writing or composition programs has resulted in leaner budgets. Writing program administrators make decisions about staffing first-year writing courses, in part, based upon the need to cut cost. In *A Rhetoric for Writing Program Administrators* Tom Fox and Rita Malenczyk offered yet another detailed picture of WPA work. They argued that internal institutional influences, such as faculty concerns about curriculum to external influences such as resource allocation, both inform the decisions WPAs must make. Playing in the middle is not easy, especially if a WPA does not have tenure or is in a tenure line position (321). Both authors suggested that WPAs are navigating the waters of what Strickland termed “the managerial unconscious”—a desire to find a balance between the managerial work of administration and the intellectual work of their discipline, rhetoric and composition (86-87). Neither Fox nor Malenczyk described administration and intellectual work as mutually exclusive; both can work in concert. Consequently, much of the literature surrounding WPA work characterizes it as being a balancing act. This research attempts to analyze and ultimately argue that another facet of the role is to serve as advocates of more professional development opportunities for their part-time faculty, which reflects the ARM framework identified within this study.

### **Methodology**

The term Administrative Rhetorical Mindfulness (ARM) came as a result of my dissertation research methodology, which was a qualitative study examining the approaches WPAs use to further the professionalization of part-time faculty, specifically those teaching first-year writing online. I sent a survey to a listserv for administrators of writing programs. The

survey was designed to elicit responses about administrator approaches to faculty training. Additionally, I asked willing participants to sit for a semi-structured interview and 10 agreed. The participants came from across a range of institutional types. One of the questions driving my research was: What methods and/or models of professional development can writing program administrators use to better serve part-time contingent faculty teaching composition online? Part of my rationale for this question was two-fold. First, I wanted to ask a direct question that attempted to pin down exactly what WPAs do as it relates to professional development of part-time faculty. Second, I wanted it to spark thoughts and ideas about the necessity of, and for continued professionalization of part-time contingent faculty.

What emerged as I interrogated the qualitative data was a theme centered directly on how the WPAs in this research attempted to professionalize their part-time faculty. I conducted the research over two phases. Phase I included using the WPA-Listserv to distribute the survey/questionnaire, which contained an open response section. Phase II included using a semi-structured interview protocol to question WPAs about their approaches to professional development. The findings illustrated the phenomenon of professional development endeavors and online writing instruction, through the lens of the WPA's experiences.

My IRB<sup>6</sup> approved qualitative study began in the summer of 2018. I collected three types of data: questionnaire responses, open-ended responses (within the questionnaire), and semi-structured interview answers. Of the 37 participants, 10 agreed to follow-up interviews. The interview questions ranged from issues related to part-time faculty employment and concerns about professional development. My guiding research questions were:

- How do writing program administrators use professional development opportunities to promote part-time faculty inclusion within the writing program and empower with training opportunities to teach writing online?
- How do established norms associated with rank and status limit opportunity and perhaps marginalize those individuals occupying part-time positions?

Furthermore, the qualitative data analysis included a five-step coding process of the questionnaire responses and the interview transcripts. The semi-structured interview questions were designed to gain a complete and more nuanced picture of how writing program administrators approach professionalizing part-time contingent faculty. I triangulated the data to help secure the credibility of the findings.

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<sup>6</sup> Institutional Review Board Request for Review of Protocol # 18-081-R2

WPA research is often grounded within the narratives of what WPAs do. This research is no exception, though what makes it significant is that I attempted to lay the groundwork for a new framework of leadership for WPAs managing writing programs. My research documents what WPAs do and does so through their own words as the main pillar of evidence. Their narratives about professionalization matter as Sura et. al mentions, “narratives are ubiquitous throughout WPA scholarship because they help situate their reader within an otherwise possibly foreign context. It is through narrative that WPAs are best able to share with a larger audience what they do and why and how their work is intellectual” (80). Increased accounts of WPA practical approaches to professionalizing part-time faculty teaching writing online could help to inform and create more opportunities for training and preparation.

I examined the qualitative data, using the NVivo coding method for the participants’ responses to the following question: What role, if any, do you believe the WPA should play in helping prepare part-time faculty to teach first-year writing online? The question represents their thoughts about the various duties associated with administering a writing program, and specifically part-time faculty. Though there was an implicit assumption in the question, that maybe the participants would respond in the affirmative, it was in part based upon research (Phelps; Schell; Strickland).

For example, one participant stated, “I oversee the writing program and all of the faculty in the writing program.” It is possible that WPAs understand their roles through what Strickland describes as “managerial logic, in other words, fundamentally proceeds out of professional culture. Once organizations of any kind are organized hierarchically, with a class of experts structuring and overseeing the work of a group of non-experts, management happens” (58). The nature of management lends itself to leadership; in some ways managing and leading are tethered together. Effective managers are effective leaders. As such, all participants identified as an administrator or director of a writing program, department, or someone who works in a management capacity, helping to facilitate first-year writing throughout their institution. Thus, further interrogating one significant question from the interview transcript data offered more nuanced information about WPA practices and approaches toward professional development of part-time faculty.

### **Results: Data Analysis**

The WPAs participating in this study answered several open-ended survey questions. The two that garnered the most responses were about possible barriers and advantages to providing OWI training for part-time contingent faculty. Answering them gave WPAs the chance to describe their experiences in greater detail. I used the terms Funding and Workload as categories to reflect the problems they encountered in their efforts to provide additional professional development. Each term and subsequent

coding category reveal potential WPA perceptions of what preparation means for part-time faculty. These two terms help to illustrate how a WPAs' role can function within an ARM framework. These results help to support my argument that WPAs approaches to training fall within the realm of being a mindful administrator. ARM is a conceptual lens that helps to underscore WPA ideas, thoughts, and attempts to provide professional development for part-time contingent faculty.

### **Funding**

The term funding highlights what participants viewed as a barrier to providing or promoting preparation or training for online writing instruction. Though some used the term itself to describe the difficulties they have experienced in trying to promote or encourage part-time contingent faculty to take advantage of training opportunities, others expressed ideas that seemed to suggest not being able to offer compensation or payment to part-time contingent workers presented a myriad of ethical and administrative difficulties. As one WPA participant stated:

Contingent faculty are paid poorly and are not compensated for additional PD time. As a result, we offer very little PD for them. When we do, the events are either poorly attended or not attended at all. 2) The institution has moved to using Quality Matters (QM) to ensure standards across online courses. I was sent to QM training as was the Associate WPA. The notion (from outside the program) was that we would attend and create course templates within the Course Management System. That way no other faculty would need training. They would simply follow the existing template and grade.

As reported in the participant's response, part-time faculty are paid, but given an amount that is insufficient. One thing to emphasize, based upon the participant's response is the availability of funding for training remained problematic. Training for those actually teaching the courses amounted to using prepackaged course shells.

Further, the participant added that the predesigned course positioned teachers as graders, alluding that the instructor could potentially lose his or her agency. Though instructors could adopt a more engaged approach to pedagogy, using a prepacked course shell might tempt some to run the course on auto pilot and thus adversely impact student outcomes like interaction and presence between students and faculty.

Additionally, another participant added, "Compensation is a big problem; the writing program doesn't have a set budget, and part-time faculty aren't typically compensated for professional development. This means that a more formal OWI program would need to be funded

somehow.” This participant’s comments indicated a lack of resources available to a) pay a part-time faculty member and b) sustain a departmental program designed to prepare faculty for online writing instruction. Similarly, another participant stated “Their time and funding. We can only compensate them for so many hours, and it is unfair to expect them to attend preparations for which they are not paid though many are willing.” Thus, funding becomes a two-pronged concern; a lack of funding to pay part-time faculty and to develop and sustain a program geared toward professional development were key concerns for writing program administrators. The data in this research revealed that funding was a consistent barrier for many participants at their respective institutions.

### **Workload**

WPAs think not only of the workload on themselves but part-time faculty as well. Part-time faculty often do not have the time in their schedules to attend preparatory or training sessions. As one WPA reiterated, “They are often spread thin, so asking them to do more work or finding a convenient time can be challenging.” This response supported previous research (e.g., Nelson; Ochua; Mandernach) that part-time workers typically work at multiple institutions, trying to balance what often amounts to full-time work. Moreover, another participant suggested that, “. . . faculty have little time to participate in a course in online instruction, but they can’t teach online without taking the course.” As a result, many do not take advantage of training offered, given the constraints on their time. Additionally, some participants argue that their (the WPAs) workload did not afford them the time to develop, plan, and implement training for part-time faculty, though some recognized the need for it. Still, time and scheduling play crucial parts. As another participant stated, “Time. We already have impacted weeks with meetings and workshops such that it gets hard to find time to offer something.” The desire, the drive, and the good intentions are present, but the workload gives little to no room for many, if any, professional development opportunities.

Moreover, another participant offered some insight about how time and workload shape and even dictate the choices WPAs are able to make:

The WPA’s responsibilities have evolved a great deal since I joined. The past two years, I’ve had to take a more direct role in schedule building and other issues like managing course evaluations, etc., items that used to be handled by the chair and admin specialist. To some extent, I also feel like I’m usually having to clean up someone else’s mess, on top of serving on committees and managing concurrent enrollment, and also trying to help with recruitment and promotion of our major. In short, teacher training and development (especially of online faculty)



seems to take a back seat to other expectations. I’m trying to work with other faculty members to reverse this trend.

The sentiments expressed in the data seem consistent with the experiences shared in “WPAs in Transition: Navigating Educational Leadership Positions,” specifically Chris Blankenship describes WPA work as, “... stressful and time consuming” (45). The data in this study confirms that while part-time faculty development opportunities are rife with challenges, WPAs understand the value of it; even though obstacles existed, many described the advantages that providing a means to, or a mechanism for training would produce.

The survey participants had the opportunity to answer two open-ended questions about possible barriers and advantages to providing OWI training for part-time contingent faculty. In the first coding stage of the data, the researcher used NVivo coding software to develop categories to use in the first level-coding process for each interview transcript. Since my goal was to document the experiences of writing program administrators and to examine their view of preparation and training for adjunct faculty, coding allowed for “. . . words and short phrases from the participants’ own language in the data record” (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana 74). As such, the researcher identified several common phrases, reduced them to codes, and then into two categories. The survey response codes reflect participants’ views about professional development. Unpacking WPA approaches to training via their responses helped me identify potential emergent themes of WPA training designed to help teach first-year writing online (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Open-Ended Survey Writing Response Codes**

<b>NVivo Code</b>	<b>Category</b>
Paid Poorly	Funding
Not Compensated	Funding
Not Paid Budget	Funding
Spread Thin	Workload
Impacted Weeks	Workload
Evolved Responsibility	Workload

The NVivo codes were consistent phrases that emerged from the open-ended survey responses. In fact, they are precisely the factors which often characterize the climate within many higher education organizations. Thus, the need for a framework like ARM can lead administrators to look for ways to enhance their professionalization efforts. The data across all interviews reflected the participants’ sense of responsibility for those faculty employed in a part-time capacity.

**Discussion: Being A Rhetorically Mindful Administrator**

The data collected revealed the perplexities that exist and arise in WPA work. Funding and workload were the two primary concerns and barriers that WPAs consistently articulated as problematic. Some WPAs described their efforts to minimize the use of part-time contingent faculty, while weighing it against their need to balance budgets, and staff courses. The participants in this study might metaphorically describe themselves as being stuck between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, they were aware of the ethical implications of offering training without pay presented and yet, they must balance that knowledge against their desire to cultivate a culture of professional development for part-time faculty teaching first-year writing. As one participant explained, “the fact that it seems very unfair you know to ask part-time faculty to go above and beyond you know service they should not have service expectations in my opinion.” Their attempts to walk a tightrope, balancing the needs of faculty, the needs of students, being held accountable by administrators all proved challenging. Yet, as the ARM framework recognizes that WPA work is positioned to foster moments that can and do include part-time contingent faculty. Similarly, as one participant noted:

I’m training the new teachers, but also, I am continuing to mentor all of our teaching assistants; it’s open to part-time faculty as well. I tried to work with full-time faculty to offer other professional development sort of activities or meetings throughout the year. Some years are more active than others just based on everything else that happens.

The notion that “training is open to part-time faculty” while on its face may seem like a no brainer, the ethical implications of training without pay or compensation may force some WPAs to forgo it. A rhetorically mindful WPA might not ask part-time faculty members to attend a mandatory scheduled training session, instead they might record the session and place it in a Google drive for part timers to view at their leisure or share presentation slides and ask them to reach out with any questions or concerns.

Even though many WPAs were faced with multiple challenges, they affirmed their strong desire to professionalize part-time faculty. This affirmation is an important part of the ARM framework because it gives WPAs the ability to acknowledge the shortcomings of a program hemmed with budget constraints. As this research suggests, funding and workload are tied to budget concerns and if a budget does not allow for opportunities like a workshop for training to occur, then noteworthy events for faculty development could fall to the sideline. The ARM framework invites WPAs to think about professionalization as something that can occur in the moment. Thus, the framework allows space to push toward continued progress and advocacy for part-time faculty.

Although the two themes of funding and workload emerged as barriers to training, WPAs continually noted the perks of continued professionalization, for example, one participant identified advantages to professional development and training that included efforts to “build a community of scholars, treat part-time faculty as professionals, which adds the expectation that they will do professional type stuff, and that promoting training helps to challenge the misconception that anyone can teach writing.” Not only do these statements reinforce key holistic codes<sup>7</sup> like, Support, Environment, and Community, together they suggest that the participant understood the necessity for well-trained faculty, specifically those teaching writing online.

Becoming a supporting and encouraging administrator are fundamental to the ARM framework. An administrator that attempts to take strong action to perform both is working well within the realm of administrative rhetorical mindfulness. Further examples of the ARM framework within the participant data included asking part-time faculty to seek out opportunities to attend a local or regional conference or observing a part-timer’s online course and offering feedback. These experiences are not only fundamental to the continued development of part-time faculty but they also reveal the administrator’s commitment to maintaining the integrity of the program.

Furthermore, when a WPA takes actions that are steeped in acts that help to support a part-time faculty member’s continued development, this helps to create and promote an inclusive atmosphere for part-time contingent faculty within various departments and programs. This signals to part-time faculty what is being valued. If part-time faculty come to see the WPA as someone that will support, if they can, efforts to stay abreast of research and scholarly activities within the field, then in term it helps part-time faculty feel more like part of the team. As such, their approaches to preparing and training reflected what Ann Penrose defines as crafting a professional identity “research on professional identity among K-12 educators demonstrates a relationship between coherent professional communities and the quality of student learning” (110). What’s instructive about Penrose’s statement and the data in this research was that WPAs, even when faced with budget and equity concerns, still attempted to advance the interests of their part-time faculty.

The interview data in this research indicated that WPAs are attentive to the professional needs of their part-time faculty. In other words, they understand the problematic nature of contingency, especially for those working in a part-time capacity. What’s most instructive about this data is that WPAs are actively engaged in trying to make a more level playing field for all faculty teaching first-year writing in any modality. It’s

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<sup>7</sup> “This method applies a single code to a large unit of data in the corpus, rather than line-by-line coding, to capture a sense of the overall contents and the possible categories that may develop” (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana 77).

all about equity. In some ways, this research shines a light on their attempts to lessen the impact of contingency. Some WPAs sought out ways to bring part-time faculty into the fold, recognizing the positive outcomes associated with more training, while others worried about placing more work on top of an often already full plate.

### **Intersectionality and the WPA**

One question that has emerged as a result of this research is: how do WPAs work to advance the myriad of positions that converge at the center of part-time contingency? For example, consider a part-timer that works at several institutions, is Black American, female-identified, cisgender, middle-aged person. What types of inequities might they face as a result of the multiple intersections of their identity? For many WPAs advancing social justice and equity goals are equally as important as ensuring faculty have access to professional development. While the WPAs in this research did not specifically indicate these desires, their sentiments about their responsibility to faculty and the concern to do as much as they could to further professionalize them, suggests they are clearly in the lane of intersectionality. Although many identified the challenges additional training opportunities often encumbered, they were all aligned to the notion that continued and sustainable development is a good thing. Thus, their roles as WPAs created space for them to advocate and serve others.

Moreover, engaging within an ARM framework, may be one path toward putting intersectionality into practice. In “Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Application, and Praxis,” the authors note as part of building an intersectional framework, “scholars and activists illustrate how practices necessarily informs theory and how theory ideally should inform best practices”...(Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 786). This research attempts to show how some practices, for example being aware of funding or workload issues as it relates to training, and using a moment with a part-time faculty member to discuss how presence and interaction are two key features of keeping students engaged in an online course. That action, that practice, is being a mindful administrator. As the authors correctly identify, it is the practice in this sense that works to inform theory. Even further, Cho, Crenshaw and McCall state:

As such, it is more a heuristic device than a categorical one. Nonetheless, we might broadly differentiate projects along these provisional lines of demarcation by highlighting the ways that some practitioners mobilize intersectionality as a tool to interrogate and intervene in the social plane while others seek to interrogate intersectionality as a theoretical framework through the formal requirements of social theory and methodology. (786)

This research does amplify the work that the participants use to level the playing field in some ways. Even though the participants did not examine their own practices through the lens of intersectionality per se, their concern for part-time faculty did suggest that perhaps building a consistent and sustainable professional development culture would create a more inclusive program.

Nevertheless, at the heart of much of the WPA narrative focused scholarship is a tendency to reflect on practices. As Nayden notes, “In many ways, the story I tell is a story of struggling to position myself as an activist academic . . .” (285). Much like the participants within my study, this WPA’s role is one that pushes toward justice, or a more just work environment for part-time faculty. For example, my own experiences as a WPA, since the spring of 2020 has taught me to think about the multiple scenarios that could come into play within a writing program. Recently, in “Black Perspectives in Writing Program Administration,” Staci Perryman Clark and Collin Craig contend that positionality plays a fundamental role in the administration of a writing program. They state:

More recently, conversations concerning race have been discussed in writing program administration (WPA) scholarship. These conversations have highlighted how making race visible in our intersecting administrative and curricular practices creates opportunities to both explore and problematize writing program administration as a framework for institutional and disciplinary critique. (1)

As a Black, cis-gender, male-identified, homosexual, able, agnostic, middle class-ish academic leading a writing program, I have to account for how these varied cross sections influence and inform the choices I make. The ARM framework compels me to think and act in ways that will support my students and faculty of color. In part, my positionality as a Black male queer administrator gives me a unique perspective. How might my varied positionality influence, change, determine, and center the choices I make? All have helped me to act as a rhetorically mindful administrator, which in part, means understanding one’s own unique positions and moving toward action with intention.

### **In-the-Moment-Take-Action Recommendations**

The ARM framework positions WPAs as leaders within their programs. Given this reality, WPAs might see themselves as agents of change. Adopting a more intersectional lens of administration means “examining the dynamics of difference and sameness” (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 787), which could give WPAs yet another framework necessary to explore practices under the umbrella of professional development. One way to engage with intersectionality is to take a bottom-up approach to

administration, which means looking for specific instances or moments to engage faculty in professional development. For example:

- Take time to examine and explore the needs of faculty, staff, and students whose voices and experiences may have gotten overlooked in terms of curriculum, access to resources, topics for training and conferences.
- Form part-time faculty focus groups to learn what ideas they have and what they might like to contribute.
- Highlight the experiences of faculty of color and highlight them within the program.

Essentially, this research asks WPAs to question what they do, and do not do, that pushes against the grain and allows part-time faculty the same opportunities as their full-time counterparts to fully engage as teaching practitioners within their writing programs.

WPA work requires foresight. As directors of writing programs, administrators must see the bigger picture not only for the programmatic outcomes but to help sustain an inclusive and socially just environment within the program, too. Thus, part of my argument recognizes what Lorena Garcia articulates, “intersectionality has been used in a multitude of ways, both to theorize and in more practical applications (102). As well as, Wendy Sigle-Rushton “at its root, intersectionality posits that different dimensions of social life (hierarchies, axes of differentiation, axes of oppression, social structures, normativities) are intersecting, mutually modifying and inseparable” (3). Given the complexity of WPA work and the range of identities that fill writing programs, means that should act in rhetorically mindful ways. Thus, arguments that advocate for the rights of others, aligns well with Breslin, Pandey, and Riccucci. They state that, “Intersectionality provides a critical analytic lens for expanding our knowledge of leadership in public organization as well as highlighting barriers to leadership opportunities” (161). Moreover, WPAs are well suited to use an intersectional framework, and in some ways, this is what ARM is. When WPAs work toward identifying and dismantling norms associated with rank and/or employment status that restricts opportunities for part-time contingent faculty, they are operating within an intersectional and ARM framework.

In addition, when WPAs work toward creating in the moment and/or more intentional, professional development opportunities for part-time faculty, this invariably helps to build community. Community building can take on a number of iterations; however, the primary purpose is to bring voices, often those that get silenced or overshadowed, to the table. This research reveals that WPAs are attempting to forge a path toward a professional development model that is not only grounded in creating the best outcomes for students but also focuses on the sustained

and continued training of part-time faculty. Conceptualizing Intersectionality and its possible applications within the ARM framework show how approaches to professionalizing part-time faculty work at the programmatic level.

### **Conclusion**

Writing program administrators play an important role in creating a just and fair culture of professional development. Specifically, since many administrators within the field continue to rely upon part-time labor to teach many first-year writing courses, WPAs must provide enough “resources that support comprehensive recruitment and hiring processes, provide structured and consistent orientation experiences, and promote engagement opportunities for adjunct faculty to participate as decision makers in the delivery of distance and online educational programs” (Ridge and Ritt 57). This means WPAs must take flight by taking action. WPAs should take more purposeful action; for example, think of training that happens in the “moment.”

Finally, WPAs are already positioned and primed to do scholarly work that breaks down the walls that contingency often builds. As Garcia states, "Regardless of where and how one situates intellectual labor, engaged scholarship that is intended to be insurgent cannot be done in isolation if it is to be a sustainable component of social justice efforts" (104). By its very nature professional development is outward and/or public facing. While WPAs may find ways to help or foster a culture of professional development, part-time faculty should also feel free to reject or decline any opportunities without fear of repercussions. The professional development work WPAs do on behalf of the faculty who help sustain the program must become a crucial component of maintaining a successful writing program.

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# Contingent Faculty Performing Scholarship and Service: Examining Academic Labor and Identity at a Public Flagship University

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### Abstract

The faculties of many colleges and universities in the United States are comprised of rising numbers of instructional contingent faculty who are ineligible for tenure. Although these positions generally do not require scholarly or service activities because their primary focus is teaching, the extent to which these faculty members still choose to perform like tenure-line faculty, with at least some kind of balance of teaching, research, and service, is understudied. The current study attempted to address this omission in the literature by collecting data from contingent faculty members at a public flagship university (N = 176) about their engagement with scholarly and service activities. A majority of the respondents (63.1%) had engaged in at least one scholarly activity and in at least one service activity (69.9%). This study adds to our understanding of the lived experiences of contingent faculty and concludes that a majority of these faculty members are, at least in part, building an academic identity based off of traditional expectations and activities for tenure-line faculty.

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Contingent faculty—those part- and full-time professors and instructors off the tenure track who are often called non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty—are not newcomers to higher education in the United States. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) reported that 55% of faculty in 1975 were in contingent positions (“Trends”). Since then, hiring trends have continued to tip toward NTT positions; in 2006, Jack H. Schuster and Martin J. Finkelstein noted that “the *majority* of new full-time faculty hires continues to be appointed *off* the tenure track” (xvi), and Adrianna Kezar prefaced her 2012 collection, *Embracing Non-Tenure Track Faculty: Changing Campuses for the New Faculty Majority*, by stating that 75% of faculty hires on college campuses were in NTT positions (x). The consequence of those continued hires has, naturally, been a continued increase in contingent faculty on campuses across the country. Indeed, the national data collected in the past decade confirm that trend. For instance, a United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) report published in 2017 includes Department of Education data showing that “about 70 percent of postsecondary instructional positions nationwide” were contingent positions in 2015. Similarly, the latest data from the AAUP indicates that 73% of U.S. faculty in 2016 were off the tenure track (“Data”). An argument that Schuster and Finkelstein made back in 2006—“Contingency reigns” (xvi)—is thus even more true today.

While contingency may reign, our understanding of contingent faculty is still far too underdeveloped as academia maintains an internal

and external focus on tenure-line faculty. One frame that may be helpful in increasing our understanding of the seemingly ever-expanding group of contingent faculty is the concept of positionality. Introduced by philosopher Linda Alcoff in 1988 in her exploration of women's identities, positionality "makes her identity relative to a constantly shifting context, to a situation that includes a network of elements involving others, the objective economic conditions, cultural and political institutions and ideologies, and so on" (433). Thus, for Alcoff "being a 'woman' is to take up a position within a moving historical context and to be able to choose what we make of this position and how we alter this context" (435). An exploration of contingent faculty members' positionality could offer a number of important revelations about this group of higher education laborers. John S. Levin and Genevieve G. Shaker's 2011 study of full-time NTT faculty at three public research universities began this important work "to place our population within their figured worlds with respect to the status and roles accorded to them" (1465) and found that "the figured world is characterized by dissonance" (1473) because "the work [in the classroom] is satisfying but the conditions [at the university] are not" (1480).

As former contingent faculty members at the University of Mississippi, we know that dissonance all too well. Contingency may reign, but it did not reign in ways that mattered to us as NTT faculty. We met each other in 2016 when we were both in contingent positions, working as what the university (still) disdainfully calls "support" faculty—a term that situates us as separate and unequal to "regular," tenure-line faculty. We worked together closely as part of the [Task Force for Non-Tenure-Track Faculty and Shared Governance](#), which began as an exploratory committee in the Fall of 2016 with a goal of including contingent faculty in university governance. Until a successful vote by tenure-line faculty occurred in August 2018 as a direct result of our task force's efforts, NTT faculty were the only group on campus excluded from shared governance.<sup>8</sup> Our lived experiences illustrated many of the issues that contingent faculty face in their professional lives, and our task force work was part of our response to the social injustices that we saw and experienced on our campus as NTT faculty.

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<sup>8</sup> At the University of Mississippi, NTT faculty do not include graduate students who are the instructors of record for their courses. Those student-instructors are considered *students* first, and they are represented in shared governance by the Graduate Student Council. As of the 2017-2018 academic year, there were about 600 NTT faculty (excluding graduate students) at the university, which represented roughly half of the faculty (Wilson). It is important to note, however, that some of the studies and materials cited throughout this piece include graduate instructors in their data concerning contingent faculty, such as the GAO and AAUP reports.

This study, which grew out of the work we did together on that task force, seeks to examine to what extent contingent faculty on our campus engaged with the kinds of scholarly and service activities more commonly associated with tenure-line faculty. As our tenure-line colleagues and administrators repeatedly questioned the commitment of NTT faculty to our fields and disciplines and to our campus communities, our interest in the scholarly productivity and university service records of contingent faculty grew. Because we wanted to assess the positionality of our university's NTT faculty, we needed to investigate the full context of their labor, which, importantly, included contexts beyond the classrooms where most analyses of contingent labor focus. Following Laurie A. Finke's conclusion in her study of faculty collegiality that "the set of practices or performances that we collect under the term 'collegiality' is at once totally global and hopelessly local" (122), we determined that NTT faculty identities and experiences are similarly global—in that they add to the national discussion of the general contexts within which contingent faculty work—and local—in that they are tightly bound by the specific contexts in which they exist. The research questions this study asked about the participation rates of contingent faculty in scholarly and service activities provide one of the first sets of what we hope are many data collections across the country around contingent faculty's academic activities outside of the classroom. Our experiences as NTT faculty members at the University of Mississippi were, as Finke framed it, "hopelessly local," but this study is our attempt to provide important local data that can inform our more global conversations around contingent faculty labor and their often-overlooked contributions to scholarship and service.

## **Literature Review**

### *NTT Faculty Working Conditions and Job Satisfaction*

Given the long history of contingent faculty in higher education, a number of studies have been conducted on the various working conditions that this ever-expanding faculty group faces. For example, both the typologies of NTT faculty—examining who ends up in contingent positions—and the employment models used to hire and (where applicable) retain NTT faculty have been examined (Baldwin and Chronister; Gansneder et al.; Gappa and Leslie; Gappa et al.). Various studies have also been conducted on the salary levels and other financial supports offered to contingent faculty. The GAO's 2017 report highlighted that NTT faculty at public institutions in North Dakota and Ohio with a primary focus on teaching were paid less than their tenure-line peers: 40% less for full-time and 75% less for part-time NTT faculty. This pay disparity is evident throughout

higher education (Discenna; Drake et al.). NTT faculty similarly receive lower (if not entirely non-existent) levels of professional development funding (Curtis and Thornton; Gappa and Leslie; Gappa et al.). Roger G. Baldwin and Jay L. Chronister noted the irony of the lack of professional development support for contingent faculty since it “is a fundamental requirement if faculty are to remain current in their disciplinary fields and continue contributing to the academic vitality of their institutions” (65). These working conditions undoubtedly impact contingent faculty’s labor outputs. Indeed, a number of studies have found that taking courses from contingent faculty can negatively affect students; Kezar aggregated several studies, concluding that colleges and universities with higher rates of NTT faculty report both lower graduation rates and lower two-year to four-year transfer rates (Preface). Similarly, Randall Bowden and Lynn P. Gonzalez’s 2012 findings painted a bleak picture:

Overall, the results indicate that tenured and tenure-track faculty out-perform contingent faculty on all major items of teaching, research, and service. With few exceptions, contingent faculty can be viewed as less productive faculty members within the historical function of higher education to promote inquiry and advance the sum of human knowledge, provide general instruction to the students, and develop experts for various branches of the public. (5)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, overall job satisfaction levels appear to be lower for contingent faculty than they are for tenure-line faculty. Many full-time contingent faculty in Baldwin and Chronister’s study indicated that they had “concerns about their status on campus” and repeatedly faced “condescending attitudes” from their tenure-line colleagues (139). Anna Drake et al.’s full-time NTT participants experienced “feelings of invisibility and exclusion, unclear perceptions and undervaluation by their colleagues, and the effects of leadership and leadership transitions on [their] roles in their colleges and departments” (1651). Another study, conducted by Levin and Shaker, found relatively high levels of job satisfaction in terms of full-time contingent faculty’s teaching roles but much lower levels of job satisfaction in terms of their standing in the campus community, where the authors determined they faced “restricted self-determination and self-esteem” (1461). Indeed, Levin and Shaker, in examining contingent faculty’s positionality, identified their academic identity as “dualistic at best”: they saw themselves as “experts” in the classroom but as “subalterns” in the university (1479). Drake et al.’s findings concurred, indicating that full-time contingent faculty saw themselves as “particularly vulnerable” in how administrative turnover would impact their campus experiences (1653). Their study also found that inconsistent access to shared governance limited their participants’ job satisfaction levels. That

inconsistent access was demonstrated by Willis A. Jones et al.'s 2018 study, which found that, as of 2016, 15% of the Carnegie Classification highest research doctoral universities did not grant NTT faculty any access to shared governance, with the other 85% offering a wide range of access, some of which, however, offered quite nominal opportunities rather than full shared governance access.

*Measuring NTT Faculty Activities*

Despite the uptick in studies and research on NTT faculty members' activities and efforts, general confusion still predominates about contingent faculty and their working conditions. For instance, in 2009 John G. Cross and Edie N. Goldenberg fundamentally misunderstood contingent faculty members' commitments to their positions:

Faculty members on the tenure track face multiple responsibilities—teaching, generating cutting-edge research, performing university service, and mentoring graduate students. In combination, these obligations can lead to heavy workloads that require work on weekends and during the long vacation periods enjoyed by students and instructors whose responsibilities are limited to teaching alone. (75)

Even for those NTT faculty whose only work expectation is teaching, the need to develop courses, prep materials, and respond to students' submissions nearly always bleeds (often heavily so) into weekends and long breaks. Insightfully, Christine Cucciarre described contingent faculty labor as lacking a distinct shape, size, and scope: "The work that my colleagues and I do operates, in some ways, in the shadows of traditional tenured and tenure-track faculty; we are defined by what we are not. Our contours mimic theirs, but our shape lacks mass" (56). Those shadows often extend into the scholarly literature about contingent faculty, too, as Levin and Shaker argue that too much of that literature relies on information about NTT faculty that comes not from the faculty themselves but instead from administrators, tenure-line faculty, and others. With tenure-line faculty's work set as the norm in higher education, contingent faculty's work, which varies based on local job descriptions, campus policies, and institutional practices, can certainly look odd or wrong—if it is noticed at all. NTT faculty labor is, unfortunately, often overlooked or misunderstood.

A number of studies, nevertheless, have investigated NTT faculty members' research activities. Bowden and Gonzalez found that tenure-line faculty outperformed contingent faculty in all major indicators of scholarly activity. Schuster and Finkelstein found similar results in their study, but they also specified the following: "although research requirements have suffused throughout the four-year sector, the research function for the most part has been limited to the work of the regular, full-

time, core faculty and has largely been squeezed out of the workload of those holding contingent appointments” (325). This divide between tenure-line and contingent faculty, they noted, rests largely on the latter’s appointments to teaching-heavy positions. Baldwin and Chronister similarly highlighted the teaching-focused roles many full-time NTT faculty officially fill at research universities while also noting that the actual work done by NTT faculty at four-year colleges often mirrors that of the tenure-line faculty, including research activities. In looking at these and other data, Bruce M. Gansneder et al. argued that their “findings suggest that traditional productivity measures are inadequate, and probably inappropriate, in judging either the quantity or the quality of the professional contributions of many full-time non-tenure-track faculty” (90). Overall, then, it appears that contingent faculty are engaging in scholarly activities, though it remains unclear to what extent and by what measures those activities can and should be judged.

A similar complication appears to have been uncovered around NTT faculty members’ service contributions. Bowden and Gonzalez found a lower percentage of contingent faculty participated in service activities. Nevertheless, the GAO found that full-time contingent faculty had a wide range of responsibilities, including service to the university and/or scholarly communities to which they belonged, while part-time contingent faculty tended to focus more on teaching but sometimes completed service activities as well. The AAUP, meanwhile, argues that any service done by contingent faculty members is inherently problematic because they are “less likely to take risks” than their tenured faculty peers (“Background”). Beyond the global risk-taking issue, Drake et al.’s study of full-time NTT faculty at one public research university found that their participants were required to “excel” in at least two of the traditional tenure-line faculty activities (teaching, research, and service) if they were to earn promotion, but they were not consistently afforded access to service opportunities. These contingent faculty members therefore often found promotion implausible and faced working within an institution that functioned as if they were dispensable. Similar to the studies examining NTT scholarly activities, then, research has likewise demonstrated that service activities for NTT faculty are complicated in how and whether they can be both accomplished and interpreted.

A factor necessary to understanding NTT faculty members’ scholarly and service activities is the degree to which contingent faculty members attempt to perform like their tenure-line counterparts—regardless of whether their job descriptions expect them to do that work. While some studies (e.g., Drake et al.) have indicated that at least some full-time contingent faculty members have a promotion ladder they can attempt to climb (as compared to nearly all part-time contingent faculty members), others (e.g., Baldwin and Chronister) found that their full-time NTT faculty participants have no such opportunity available to them. Baldwin and Chronister’s participants, in fact, saw their lack of possible



promotion in the face of tenure-track promotion ladders “discriminatory, demeaning, and demoralizing” (49). Drake et al.’s descriptions of their contingent faculty participants are particularly discerning: “Despite constraints of structure and power dynamics, [full-time] NTT [faculty] make valuable contributions to the university, often invisibly” (1658) and sometimes go “to great lengths to prove legitimacy and earn recognition” (1651). These faculty members’ attempts to make their invisible labor visible—to demonstrate their professional legitimacy—can be seen as performative acts. Judith Butler’s foundational description of how gender is performed can shed some light on these acts: “because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all” (522). Just as “gender is not a fact,” faculty are not a fact—and neither are the activities they perform. The three main activities for faculty—teaching, research, and service—are thus constructs that have been developed over time by the cultures of higher education, and both tenure-line and contingent faculty continue to perform (or not) in those constructed roles. How all faculty manage these performative acts is complicated, but it is especially complicated for the NTT faculty whose roles and professional lives are less well defined overall and are thus generally defined against the standard of tenure-line faculty. As Levin and Shaker have argued, “Unease about their nontenure [sic] status becomes a barrier to their agency: The nontenure identifier is inescapable and overshadows the quality of their contributions” (1479-1480).

Importantly, Kezar has advocated defining NTT status “as another issue of diversity (another marginalized group)” within higher education (“Needed Policies” 21). Obscuring our understanding of contingent faculty even further is the tendency for NTT positions to be filled by faculty who are part of at least one other minority or disadvantaged group. The GAO report highlighted that gender is generally balanced across all faculty types but that women hold a higher percentage of contingent faculty positions than men. The report also indicated that salaries for contingent faculty are far lower than those for tenure-line faculty, which would suggest the possibility of at least more socio-economic insecurity for NTT faculty—if not different class positions entirely. In contrast, the GAO report detailed that racial and ethnic minority groups are fairly equally represented across all faculty types, though that percentage represents another minority: just 25% of faculty overall. NTT faculty therefore often face issues related to intersectionality, which is defined by Kimberlé Crenshaw as the theory that “many of our social justice problems like racism and sexism are often overlapping, creating multiple levels of social injustice” (4:54-5:05). These overlapping layers of identity impact contingent faculty members’ abilities to perform their professional roles because, as Ijeoma Oluo argues, they “combine with each other, compound each other, mitigate each other, and contradict each other” (75).

Jaime Lester pointed out these intersections in her study of how female faculty performed their gender roles as part of their professional work:

In addition to the impact of cultural definitions of gender roles, other aspects of their identities also impacted many of the gender roles that women performed. These women faculty members often discussed only their gender identity, and not their other intersecting identities. But in practice, however, they found that their other identities interacted with and impacted the way in which they do gender. (168)

The other lower-status positions that many NTT faculty occupy, then, impact how those same faculty perceive and respond to the professional second-class status that many NTT faculty describe as their lived reality (as in Baldwin and Chronister's findings). We therefore need more global and local data examining the extent to which contingent faculty perform traditional tenure-line duties, such as scholarship and service, when they are explicitly not in tenure-line positions.

### **Research Questions**

As this review of the literature has demonstrated, there is a need for more research that examines contingent faculty and their experiences. Kezar has argued that “non-tenure track faculty are an extremely heterogeneous group when compared to tenure-track faculty—they have more diverse motivations for being a faculty member, approach the work differently, and may not see this position as their primary employment” (“Needed Policies” 25). That heterogeneity makes understanding NTT faculty and their activities difficult, but it is worth investigating as a means of changing their working conditions. Kezar has pointed out that campus changes result from adjusted policies, practices, and principles (“Needed Policies” 16-26), and she has also argued that data collection is a key factor in making those changes (“We Know”). This study's quantitative examination of contingent faculty members' scholarly and service activities is thus an attempt to add to both the local and global conversations about the roles NTT faculty perform.

The general assumption is that NTT faculty are teaching-focused and are not engaged in the other two traditional (tenure-line) faculty activities: scholarship and service. This assumption may lead to a perception that NTT faculty have abdicated their identity as full academics by no longer “performing” as others in the Ivory Tower do. Our study therefore attempts to answer the following questions related to these assumptions at the University of Mississippi, a public flagship university that, at the time this study was conducted, did not grant NTT faculty access to shared governance:

- (1) To what extent are NTT faculty at the University of Mississippi engaged in scholarly activities?
- (2) To what extent are NTT faculty at the University of Mississippi engaged in service activities?
- (3) Is participation in scholarly activity associated with participation in service activity among NTT faculty at the University of Mississippi?

### **Method**

The data for this study were collected during the Fall 2017 academic semester at the University of Mississippi. A list of all NTT faculty employed at the medium-sized, public university in the southern United States with an R1 Carnegie designation was obtained from the university.<sup>9</sup> An email invitation to an online survey was sent to all NTT faculty (N = 671) with a reminder email sent three weeks later. The survey was designed to assess NTT faculty members' professional and service activities both within their discipline and on campus. All research protocols and materials were approved by the university's Institutional Review Board, and the full survey instrument is available in the Appendix.

A total of 176 faculty participated (a 26.2% response rate). The gender make-up of the sample included 96 female participants (54.5%), 63 male participants (35.8%), 2 non-binary participants (1.1%), and 15 participants who chose not to answer (8.5%). The racial composition of the sample included 135 participants who identified as white (76.7%), 8 who identified as Black (4.5%), 5 each who identified as Asian or Hispanic (2.8% each), 4 who identified as multiracial (2.3%), 2 who identified as other (1.1%), and 17 participants who declined to answer (9.7%). Participants indicated that they had worked in academia for an average of 10 years (SD = 8.51) with a range of 6 months to 38 years (n = 163) and had worked at the university for an average of 6.65 years (SD = 6.27) with a range of 6 months to 29 years (n = 163 and n = 165, respectively). Participants also indicated belonging to a wide range of disciplines, with the most common response being arts and humanities (31.3%). Full disciplinary representation data can be found in Table 1.

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<sup>9</sup> According to the 2018 update to the Carnegie classification system, R1 universities are doctoral-granting universities with "very high research activity"; the R1 designation is the highest rank for institutions that offer doctoral degrees ("Basic Classification Description").

**Table 1: Discipline Representation**

	N	%
Arts & Humanities	55	31.3
Natural Sciences & Mathematics	19	10.8
Social Sciences	11	6.3
Business	8	4.5
Professional Schools	30	17.0
Education	23	13.1
Applied Sciences & Engineering	8	4.5
No Response	22	12.5

## Results

Although not part of our research questions, we did ask faculty to report on their typical teaching load. The most frequent response was a 4/4 teaching load ( $n = 42$ , 23.9%), with a variety of other responses ranging from no teaching obligations (e.g., research faculty) to teaching obligations that vary from semester to semester (e.g., adjunct professors and contingent faculty whose primary duties on campus are administrative). At the University of Mississippi, a 4/4 load is equal to teaching 12 credit hours per semester, which is also what is considered full-time equivalent.

### *Scholarly Activities*

To address Research Question 1—*To what extent are NTT faculty at the University of Mississippi engaged in scholarly activities?*—participants were asked to indicate if they had participated in any scholarly activities since being employed at the university. The list of 20 activities was taken from the university's annual productivity reports and reflects scholarly activities across the range of academic disciplines (e.g., patent applications, peer-reviewed publications, and commissioned artistic works) and can be found in Table 2. A majority of participants ( $n = 111$ , 63.1%) reported engaging in at least one scholarly activity. Among those who reported a scholarly activity, the number ranged from 1 to 11 activities with an average of 3.27 ( $SD = 2.22$ ). The most frequent scholarly activities reported were (a) presenting work at an academic conference ( $n = 59$ , 33.5% of the total sample), (b) submitting an article for publication in a peer-reviewed journal ( $n = 44$ , 25%), (c) publishing an article in a peer-reviewed journal ( $n = 37$ , 21%), (d) applying for a grant ( $n = 37$ , 21%), and (e) serving in a leadership role in a professional organization ( $n = 36$ , 20.5%). At least one faculty member completed each of the 20 possible scholarly activities.

**Table 2: Scholarly Activities and Campus Service**

<i>Scholarly activities engaged in since beginning employment at the University</i>
Obtained a license or patent
Applied for a license or patent
Created/produced an art exhibit
Created/produced an audio production
Created a commissioned artistic work
Created/produced an electronic media project
Created/produced a film or video project
Obtained a grant
Applied for a grant
Written a book/monograph
Written a book chapter
Published an article in a peer-reviewed journal
Submitted an article to a peer-reviewed journal
Reviewed manuscripts for a peer-reviewed journal
Competed in a musical competition
Created a musical composition
Engaged in a musical performance
Engaged in a theater production
Presented work at an academic conference
<i>Campus service engaged in since beginning employment at the University</i>
Served as director of an honors college thesis
Served as reader of an honors college thesis
Served as director of a master's thesis
Served as reader of a master's thesis
Served as director of a dissertation
Served as reader of a dissertation
Served on a department search committee
Served on a university search committee
Served on a departmental committee
Served on a university-wide committee
Served as faculty/staff adviser for a student organization

*Campus Service*

To address Research Question 2—*To what extent are NTT faculty at the University of Mississippi engaged in service activities?*—participants were asked to indicate if they had engaged in any type of on-campus service. A list of 11 service activities were provided and included such items as thesis and dissertation committee service, search committee work, department and university committee work, and student organization

advising (see Table 2). A majority of participants ( $n = 123$ , 69.9%) reported engaging in at least one service activity. Among those who reported a campus service activity, the number ranged from 1 to 11 activities with an average of 2.92 ( $SD = 2.11$ ). The most frequent service activities reported were (a) serving on a departmental committee ( $n = 95$ , 53.9% of the total sample), (b) serving on a search committee ( $n = 68$ , 38.6%), (c) serving as a faculty/staff advisor for a student organization ( $n = 53$ , 30.1%), (d) serving on a university-wide committee ( $n = 39$ , 22.1%), and (e) serving as a reader on an Honors College thesis ( $n = 26$ , 14.8%). At least one faculty member participated in each of the 11 service activities.

An additional question was asked of participants regarding their willingness to serve as faculty senators should representation be granted to NTT faculty. Of the 169 participants who provided an answer to this question, a majority indicated some degree of willingness, with 68 (38.6%) replying “yes” and 67 (38.1%) replying “maybe.”

#### *Scholarly and Service Activities*

To address Research Question 3—*Is participation in scholarly activity associated with participation in service activity among NTT faculty at the University of Mississippi?*—a chi square analysis was conducted. A relationship was found,  $\chi^2 (1) = 4.79$ ,  $p < .05$ . More faculty reported engaging either in both a service and professional activity ( $n = 84$ ) or in neither a service nor professional activity ( $n = 26$ ) than those who participated in only one type of activity alone (service alone [ $n = 39$ ], professional alone [ $n = 27$ ]).

#### **Discussion**

The purpose of the current study was to examine the extent to which NTT faculty engage in performative acts of academia beyond teaching, specifically those of scholarship and service, in order to better understand the contexts of their working conditions. Based on our results, NTT faculty at the University of Mississippi appear to be quite active in both scholarly activities (Research Question 1) and service activities (Research Question 2). In addition, there is a link between engaging in scholarly activities and service activities, suggesting an adherence by NTT faculty to a traditional, tenure-line academic model (Research Question 3). These data suggest that, contrary to common perception, NTT faculty at our university have not abdicated a traditional academic identity but rather continue to perform as “faculty,” at least as imagined for and performed by tenure-line faculty. These NTT faculty, then, tend to have a positionality that includes contexts often overlooked by administrators, tenure-line faculty, and others who perceive them as being solely teaching focused.

Our results examining Research Question 1 offer some new insights about contingent faculty’s engagement with scholarly activities. Prior studies like those performed by Bowden and Gonzalez, as well as

Schuster and Finkelstein, showed that tenure-line faculty outperform NTT faculty in terms of the number of scholarly activities each kind of faculty completed. Our study did not include tenure-line faculty, so a direct comparison between the two groups cannot be made. However, our results do indicate that many of our campus's teaching-focused NTT faculty are doing research and/or creative work beyond their job descriptions. These results are somewhat similar to those of Baldwin and Chronister, who found that some of their NTT faculty participants in many ways mirrored their tenure-line counterparts in their research activities. A notable difference, however, between our study and Baldwin and Chronister's is that their insight about NTT faculty mirroring tenure-line activities came from examining NTT faculty at four-year undergraduate colleges, not NTT faculty at a research university. Indeed, Baldwin and Chronister found instead that contingent faculty at research universities were generally very focused on teaching. Our study, in comparison, suggests that contingent faculty at our research institution are, at least to some degree, mirroring their tenure-line colleagues' scholarly activities. A potential reason for this difference is that all faculty at the University of Mississippi, regardless of rank or status, fill out the same online annual productivity report form. The scholarly activity options on that self-evaluation form were built from expectations for tenure-line faculty. Nevertheless, some NTT faculty may come to believe, through their yearly self-assessment, that they are at least encouraged (if not expected) to complete the activities listed there. In other words, the university-wide faculty form may create the sense for contingent faculty that their participation in the included activities is necessary for their yearly contract renewals—even if those activities are not actually required for continued employment. The form itself puts NTT faculty in a bind to over- or under-perform their positions depending on the angle from which they are viewed.

One unknown factor in our study is the extent to which our NTT participants were supported in performing their scholarly activities. Since material resources are required to maintain most, if not all, scholarly activity, future research should examine this issue. What research does exist suggests that provision of such support is far from universal or even typical. For example, John W. Curtis and Saranna Thornton reported that, even at doctoral/research institutions (which ostensibly have substantial resources and place a high priority on research output), full-time NTT faculty are not fully supported in their scholarly activities: only 51.5% of these institutions provide contingent faculty with travel support to professional meetings, and only 42.8% allow them the ability to submit research grants with institutional support (14). At the University of Mississippi, available funding for contingent faculty's scholarly research is frequently determined by one's academic department or unit, and our conversations with colleagues across the campus, as part of our task force work, divulged a wide range of support—from little-to-no financial or

institutional support to support equal to what tenure-line faculty receive. Contingent faculty may also have a harder time applying for external funding, as they may not receive institutional support in navigating those processes and/or the external sources themselves may resist their applications based on the faculty members' contingent status. Further complicating matters here is that, beyond the financial constraints, the teaching-heavy loads of many of our NTT faculty mean that those faculty may be short not only on funding but also on time. Moreover, our contingent faculty may also lack private office space and/or sufficient (if any) lab space. The fact that a majority of our participants reported engaging in at least one scholarly activity suggests that they are engaged with their scholarly fields, no matter what is contractually required of them as NTT faculty or how their working conditions may impede those efforts.

Our results addressing Research Question 2 similarly cannot compare directly to Bowden and Gonzalez, who found that a lower percentage of NTT faculty participate in community or disciplinary service, since we did not include tenure-line faculty in our participant group. However, our results are in line with the GAO report, which found that at least full-time contingent faculty engage with a wide range of service activities. While we did not ask questions around motivations for performing (or avoiding) service activities, the AAUP has argued that a fear of job loss affects contingent faculty's service ("Background"). Drake et al.'s study also indicated that access to service opportunities was a problem for their participants, and our conversations with colleagues across campus during our task force work suggested that for contingent faculty there was little access to service at the university level, some access to service at the collegiate unit level, and differing access to service at the departmental level (where that access ranged from full to none). As with scholarly activities, the fact that a majority of our NTT participants had completed at least one campus service activity, with the average number of activities completed being nearly three times that amount, suggests that contingent faculty are generally engaged in their campus communities beyond their contractual obligations through service activities.

The data analysis related to Research Question 3, which demonstrated that our NTT participants are more likely to participate in either both scholarly and service activities or neither kind of activity rather than a single activity type, aligns strongly with the results of Drake et al.'s study. That study found that their full-time NTT faculty participants were engaged with research and service activities in an attempt to demonstrate their academic legitimacy through their research and service activities. Like Drake et al.'s participants, many of our campus's contingent faculty have a promotion ladder available to them. According to the University of Mississippi's "Faculty Ranks and Titles" policy, any faculty members hired into the following full-time categories have a promotion ladder available to them: Instructor/Lecturer/Senior Lecturer; Instructional, Clinical, or of Practice Assistant Professor/Associate Professor/Professor;



and Research Assistant Professor/Associate Professor/Professor. While the research ladder is reserved for NTT faculty whose primary responsibility is research, the other two ladders are teaching-focused, and faculty in those positions are expected to demonstrate a consistent history of both scholarly and service activities for successful promotion. Notably, however, unlike tenure-line faculty, contingent faculty in these lines are not required to go up for promotion. Indeed, some faculty in these positions do not attempt to attain promotion. This available choice may help explain the majority of faculty who perform either both or neither of the non-teaching activities. That is, our contingent faculty who have decided to not go up for promotion may never engage with either of these activities, and our contingent faculty who do plan to go up for promotion (or have already successfully been promoted) may engage with both activities. The latter group, through the promise of a better title and a small salary increase, are thus encouraged by the very presence of the ladder to work beyond their contractual obligations. In some ways, these faculty may mirror Drake et al.'s participants, who were determined to prove their legitimacy as academics through their research and service activities.

In many ways, then, the majority of our NTT faculty who participate in both or neither extra activities are performing (or not) their faculty roles as defined less by their own positions than by the traditional tenure-line faculty positions they do not have. This result aligns with Levin and Shaker's finding about positionality that, "in an institutional context, the norms of the institution provide a powerful shaper of behaviors, especially those of professionals" (1465). Since the historically dominant—even if no longer a numerical majority—tenure-line faculty group continues to drive all faculty's academic identity and performative acts, contingent faculty's actions are situated in contexts largely beyond their control.

Our contingent faculty participants also reflected prior research populations in that they were likely to belong to other minority or disadvantaged groups and thus occupy intersectional positions. Under a quarter of our participants identified as non-white, which mirrors national data from the GAO. A majority of our participants were women, which again reflects national data from the GAO as well as a 2017 report on our university by the Chancellor's Commission on the Status of Women; the report indicated that in 2015, women on our campus held 33% of tenured positions, 43% of tenure-track positions, and 55% of NTT positions. While we did not inquire about salary levels in our study, that same university report showed that the median annual salaries of our NTT faculty were far lower than their tenure-track counterparts in 2015: \$51,096 for female NTT faculty and \$63,569 for male NTT faculty compared to \$72,942 for female tenure-track faculty and \$78,849 for male tenure-track faculty. As Lester pointed out, the interplay of these various minority and/or disadvantaged identities impacts the performance of faculty, and it is likely that our participants' abilities to perform their

roles—whether as NTT faculty not interested in promotion or as NTT faculty interested in promotion—was similarly impacted.

### **Conclusions and Further Research Recommendations**

As this special issue asks us to reflect on social justice issues within academia related to positionality and intersectionality, it is worth noting that a majority of participants in our sample group indicated some willingness to participate in shared governance as faculty senators. This result suggests that a majority of our participants were willing to engage with a service activity that had, up to that point, only been filled by their tenure-line colleagues. The motivation for that willingness to serve within our sample group remains unknown, but a number of motivations are possible: some faculty may have believed such service opportunities were overdue for a group of faculty who had thus far been unjustly excluded from shared governance; some faculty may have seen it as an opportunity to demonstrate—indeed, to perform—their abilities as traditional academics (even as they were employed in non-traditional positions); and some faculty may have found themselves adopting both of these positions at once. In some ways, then, the very existence of the promotion ladder for NTT faculty creates an environment where those faculty are being asked to perform as traditional, tenure-line academics without offering them the same incentives in return (e.g., academic freedom and tenure). Allowing and/or asking NTT faculty to serve on the Faculty Senate is thus both necessary for their full inclusion in the campus community and contradictory to their job descriptions. At the same time, a university that does not offer opportunities for scholarly and service performative acts—or the supports necessary to their completion—reifies the second-class status that so many contingent faculty face.

A necessary direction for subsequent research is to examine more directly the desire of NTT faculty to adhere to or eschew their identities as traditional academics. Future research projects that contribute more local data to the national conversations could help everyone understand the complicated positions that contingent faculty occupy. The current study did not ask NTT participants why they did or did not engage in scholarship and service activities. Although we suspect that academic identity is a key factor driving these activities, their link to identity may take multiple forms. For example, an NTT faculty member may engage in these activities to maintain a traditional academic identity, perhaps serving as a source of legitimacy among their current colleagues or as a means by which they can obtain future employment as a tenure-line faculty member. By contrast, another NTT faculty member may embrace their identity as a contingent faculty member and see participating in these “non-NTT” activities as a way to disrupt the common perception of NTT faculty. Still yet another NTT faculty member may elevate their identity as a member of their discipline (e.g., as a sociologist, a writer, or a physicist) over their identity as a professor, thus explaining their activities regardless of the

presence or lack of incentives and resources provided by their institutions. Additional qualitative and quantitative studies on these motivating factors for contingent faculty's performative acts are therefore needed.

Furthermore, subsequent qualitative and quantitative research could also examine the relationships between contingent and tenure-line faculty at various institutions. For example, do the typologies of and employment models for contingent faculty at various institutions affect how individual faculty members both on and off the tenure track perceive their own academic identity and that of their colleagues? That is, how do the (fair and unfair) assumptions about various kinds of faculty members affect their academic identities? Similarly, does the presence (or not) of a promotion ladder for contingent faculty affect how tenure-line and NTT faculty view each other? Relatedly, in what ways does contingent faculty's access to shared governance influence campus culture? Finally, while this study did not focus on the part- or full-time status of its contingent faculty participants, how does the rate of that employment status—as well as the policies and practices regarding it—affect part- and full-time NTT faculty members' academic identity and performative acts of teaching, research, and service? All of these questions deserve special consideration as their answers will indicate what steps are necessary to build more just academic communities—both locally and nationally. Further, it is imperative that NTT faculty themselves be given an opportunity to reflect on and share their experiences both as members of the professoriate and as members of their individual disciplines in order for them and others in higher education to have a true understanding of the ever-evolving nature of academia. Contingent faculty members' positionality cannot be fully understood without their voices about their own experiences providing the foundation for that understanding.

These questions are even more important now as higher education faces both an uncertain future in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and important next steps in response to the Black Lives Matter movement. Contingent faculty, because they tend to have higher teaching loads and less job security than their tenure-line counterparts, will face increased burdens of reaching and supporting their students throughout this pandemic. Both *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (al-Gharbi; Zahneis) and *Inside Higher Ed* (Flaherty, "Next") ran pieces in the first few months of the pandemic that noted the increased precarity and burdens contingent faculty faced inside and outside their (perhaps virtual) classrooms. A number of schools have also announced and/or completed plans to lay off large numbers of their faculty as a budget-saving necessity in response to the Coronavirus, and these layoffs have largely hit both part- and full-time contingent faculty.<sup>10</sup> Given this turbulence, the specific contexts in which

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, the 30% cut of faculty at Missouri Western State University (Flaherty, "Not"), the 100 NTT faculty who lost their jobs at Northern Arizona University (Leingang), the announced cuts of adjunct positions across the City

still-employed contingent faculty's teaching, scholarship, and service activities take place in the coming semesters deserve additional detailed study.

Similarly, as academia reckons with its culpability in constructing and maintaining white supremacy, it will be imperative to explore the experiences of minority NTT faculty members with an intersectional lens. The experiences of these faculty have been and continue to be ignored even as Black voices in non-academic spaces are being elevated. The #BlackInTheIvory Twitter campaign currently seems to focus mostly on students' and tenure-line professors' experiences.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the *Chronicle's* 2019 collection of Black experiences in higher education, "Being a Black Academic in America," has pieces by nine tenure-line faculty members and one graduate student. It is imperative that minority contingent faculty be included in the conversations and research that take place in the continually evolving contexts of race, ethnicity, and academia in order to more fully understand those contexts.

By attempting to explore the detailed professional experiences in one particular location's context, this study has shown that a majority of contingent faculty at the University of Mississippi are performing scholarly and service activities that are traditionally associated with tenure-line faculty positions. Contingent faculty are, in fact, engaged with their fields and campuses and are finding ways to fill those professional roles even as their employment contracts may not require such activities and their working conditions may not support such activities. As the number of contingent positions continues to rise in higher education, it is essential that we better understand those positions—both their positives and their negatives. That understanding is necessary not only for the durability of higher education and the students it serves but also for the social injustices that contingent faculty have faced and continue to face in their local and global contexts. NTT faculty are often caught in a bind: they are essential yet disposable, important yet ancillary. Awareness and recognition of the contexts of their current working conditions and academic identities can help build better policies and practices for all faculty, the fields they cultivate, and the students and campus communities they serve.

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University of New York system (Valbrun), and the 41% cut to lecturers at the University of Michigan at Flint (Flaherty, "Deep").

<sup>11</sup> For instance, Colleen Flaherty's *Inside Higher Ed* piece "'Botched,'" which references #BlackInTheIvory, explores the history of two Black scholars who were recently denied tenure at the University of Virginia.

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**Appendix: NTT Task Force Survey**

Thank you so much for participating in this survey of Non-Tenure-Track faculty! We are hoping this survey will help us understand who NTT faculty are and more about their experiences here at the University of Mississippi.

In which of the following professional activities have you engaged?  
(Check all that apply)

	In the past 3 years?	Since starting work at UM?	In your career?
Obtained a license or patent			
Applied for a license or patent			
Created/produced an art exhibit			
Created/produced an audio production			
Created a commissioned artistic work			
Created/produced an electronic media project			
Created/produced a film or video project			
Obtained a grant			
Applied for a grant			
Written a book/monograph			
Written a book chapter			
Published an article in a peer-reviewed journal			
Submitted an article to a peer-reviewed journal			
Reviewed manuscripts for a peer-reviewed journal			
Competed in a musical competition			



Created a musical composition			
Engaged in a musical performance			
Engaged in a theater production			
Presented work at an academic conference			
Served in a leadership role in a professional organization			

In which of the following mentoring activities have you engaged while at UM? (Check all that apply)

- Served as a director of an SMBHC (Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College) honors thesis
- Served as a reader for an SMBHC honors thesis
- Served as a director of a master's thesis
- Served as a reader of a master's thesis
- Served as a director of a dissertation
- Served as reader of a dissertation

In which of the following university activities have you engaged while at UM? (Check all that apply)

- Served on a departmental search committee
- Served on a university search committee
- Served on a departmental committee
- Served on a university-wide committee
- Served as a faculty/staff adviser for a student organization

In your department, are you...?

	Yes	No	Sometimes	I'm Not Sure
Notified of faculty meetings?				
Allowed to attend faculty meetings?				
Expected to attend faculty meetings?				
Allowed to vote in promotion decisions?				
Allowed to vote in tenure decisions?				
[Excluding promotion and tenure decisions] Allowed to vote in all departmental matters?				
[Excluding promotion and tenure decisions] Allowed to vote in some departmental matters? Allowed to serve on department committees?				
Expected to serve on department committees?				

Which types of courses do you typically teach? (Check all that apply)

- Graduate courses
- Introductory undergraduate courses (100- and 200-level)
- Undergraduate courses that meet general education requirements
- Undergraduate courses that are required for majors
- Undergraduate courses that are cross-listed with other departments
- EDHE 105/EDHE 305 courses
- Lecture courses
- Lab courses
- Traditional, in-person courses
- Hybrid courses
- Compressed video courses
- Online courses
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

What are your contractual teaching obligations?

- Not applicable
- 1/1 (meaning I teach 1 course in the fall and 1 course in the spring)
- 1/2 or 2/1
- 2/2
- 2/3 or 3/2
- 3/3
- 3/4 or 4/3
- 4/4
- Other/Non-traditional \_\_\_\_\_

Indicate which statement is most true of you.

- I regularly teach overloads
- I sometimes teach overloads
- I never teach overloads
- Not applicable

Are you expected to teach overloads?

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

Which of the following degrees do you have? (Check all that apply)

- A Master's Degree
- A terminal Master's Degree (e.g., M.F.A.)
- A Doctoral Degree (e.g., Ph.D., ED.D.)
- A Professional Degree (e.g., J.D., M.D.)

Which of the following describes your employment status and title?  
(Check all that apply)

- Part-time
- Full-time
- Adjunct Faculty
- Visiting Faculty
- Acting Faculty
- Clinical Assistant Professor
- Clinical Associate Professor
- Clinical Professor
- Instructor
- Lecturer
- Senior Lecturer
- Instructional Assistant Professor
- Instructional Associate Professor
- Instructional Professor
- Assistant Professor of Practice
- Associate Professor of Practice
- Professor of Practice
- Research Assistant Professor
- Research Associate Professor
- Research Professor
- Artist in Residence
- Writer in Residence
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

For how many years have you been employed:

a. In academia (excluding assistantships but including residences/post doc positions)? \_\_\_\_\_

b. At the University of Mississippi? \_\_\_\_\_

In which department/unit is your primary appointment?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Is your position funded by "soft money"?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

In thinking about your gender, which of the following statements best describes you?

- I identify as female
- I identify as male
- I identify as both male and female
- I identify as neither male nor female
- Prefer not to answer

With which race(s) do you identify? (Check all that apply)

- White
- Black/African American
- Hispanic, Latino or Spanish Origin (e.g., Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Argentinian, Colombian, Dominican, Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, or Spanish)
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian (e.g., Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Pakistani, or Cambodian)
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Some other race or origin
- Prefer not to answer

Currently, Non-Tenure-Track Faculty are not represented on the Faculty Senate at the University of Mississippi. We are investigating options for representation. If we gained representation in the Senate, would you be willing to serve as a Senator?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

Almost done! This last set of questions is designed to tell us about your attitudes toward your work here at the University.

Please indicate your agreement with each of the following statements.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel like I can make a lot of inputs to deciding how my job gets done.

\_\_\_\_\_ I really like the people I work with.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not feel very competent when I am at work.

\_\_\_\_\_ People at work tell me I am good at what I do.

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel pressured at work.

\_\_\_\_\_ I get along with people at work.

- \_\_\_\_\_ I pretty much keep to myself when I am at work.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am free to express my ideas and opinions on the job.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I consider the people I work with to be my friends.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I have been able to learn interesting new skills on my job.
- \_\_\_\_\_ When I am at work, I have to do what I am told.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Most days I feel a sense of accomplishment from working.
- \_\_\_\_\_ My feelings are taken into consideration at work.
- \_\_\_\_\_ On my job I do not get much of a chance to show how capable I am.
- \_\_\_\_\_ People at work care about me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ There are not many people at work that I am close to.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I feel like I can pretty much be myself at work.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The people I work with do not seem to like me much.
- \_\_\_\_\_ When I am working I often do not feel very capable.
- \_\_\_\_\_ There is not much opportunity for me to decide for myself how to go about my work.
- \_\_\_\_\_ People at work are pretty friendly towards me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ All in all I am satisfied with my job.
- \_\_\_\_\_ In general, I don't like my job.
- \_\_\_\_\_ In general, I like working here.