

CHAPTER 14

**WHAT WORKS AND WHAT  
COUNTS: VALUING THE  
AFFECTIVE IN NON-TENURE-  
TRACK ADVOCACY**

**Sue Doe**

Colorado State University

**Maria Maisto**

New Faculty Majority and the NFM Foundation

**Janelle Adsit**

Humboldt State University

Threads: Self-Advocacy; Organizing Within and Cross Ranks

It is not uncommon in 2017, even among those seeking social justice, to uncritically accept and use the economic language *du jour* with its allegiance to notions of productivity. We submit that this emphasis on output and efficiency is increasingly characteristic of advocacy discussions around contingency in the academic labor force and that such an emphasis can be deleterious to the people (students in one context and contingent faculty in the other) that it seeks to support. Having now reached a degree of maturity, the academic labor movement is certainly at a moment when material change must be demanded and achieved. Indeed, it is appropriate that at this point we expect to see action and outcomes. Yet it is also important to recognize that social change is not linear but proceeds as a series of starts and stops. Movements go through stages, including one that activist and author Bill Moyer (not to be confused with the journalist) has called the stage of “identity crisis and powerlessness.” At this stage, which often takes place at precisely the moment when a movement has begun to “take off,” it is common for activists, paradoxically, to feel despair. Moyer notes that it is not unusual for activists at this stage to decry the lack of “‘real’ victories.” As Moyer puts it:

This view is unable to accept the progress that the movement has made along the road of success, such as creating a massive grassroots-based social movement, putting the issue on society's agenda, or winning a majority of public opinion. Ironically, involvement in the movement tends to reduce activists' ability to identify short-term successes. Through the movement, activists learn about the enormity of the problem, the agonizing suffering of the victims, and the complicity of powerholders. The intensity of this experience tends to increase despair and the unwillingness to accept any short-term success short of achieving ultimate goals.

In such contexts and impatient to achieve these ultimate goals, activists may fixate on the outcomes of the movement, ignoring subtle but important shifts that have occurred and the emotional reorientations that have followed, both of which may be more difficult to identify and quantify than idealized outcomes. We are particularly interested in emotion both as a catalyst and as a reorientation. As Moyer's observations suggest, the tendency to focus on outcomes and to exclude emotion may, ironically, be coming out of a deeply emotional response to the evolution of the movement—one of doubt, despair, or even a kind of existential agony around lost causes.

A movement's trajectory is not necessarily linear, and it is not necessarily programmable into a set of fixed outcomes. Measuring success by a limited set of predetermined outcomes can cause activists to overlook important work that is not readily measurable and to be dismissive of unexpected variations on success. Wary of the pervasive, market-driven language of productivity, we therefore argue that effective advocacy is not necessarily contained in large-scale attainments but in the small changes that are characteristic of the slow and plodding work of culture change. The ideology of productivity, rooted as it is in the market economy, can risk sanitizing advocacy of the very humanity that underlies its conviction, displacing the circulating emotions that called for a response in the first place. It can be dismissive of hard-wrought incremental victories and unseen important steps and realizations that occur along the way. It can glide over the affective economies associated with the commitment and effort entailed in sustained advocacy. Perhaps most ironically for the academic labor movement, it can trivialize the labor associated with advocacy and as a result demoralize those who undertake it.

The relentless push for productive practices and quantifiable outcomes in advocacy can thus reinforce and appropriate the same managerial approaches that contribute to the exploitation of academics. In calling for a "move beyond

emotion,” we risk falling into a managerial imperative that works to “change the attitude” of the workers it marshals for programmatic ends, without changing the structures that condition these emotions and attitudes. To focus on the programmatic outcomes of activist work to the exclusion of the affective and material realities of its workers is to fall into this kind of managerial discourse wherein disparaging the affective realities of faculty members slides swiftly into an “increasingly negative view of teachers as chaotic, disordered bodies in need of professional [outcomes-based] discipline” (Strickland 64). Calls to “transition from affect to action” implicitly locate the reason for slow change within the contingent faculty members themselves—in pathologizing affect as stymying real change and in privatizing emotion as an internal state, rather than taking seriously the ways that emotion is culturally conditioned and circulating (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*). This suggests a paternalism that adds troubling layers of complexity to the interplay of affect and advocacy.

It is in this highly contested context, querying the role of emotion and affect in adjunct advocacy, that we situate our work. If, as we believe, emotion and outcry foment dissent, then policies, such as professional association position statements, codify the changes demanded by outcry. Emotion and action thus exist in relation to each other and are even, perhaps, commensal. Shortchanging emotion in favor of action risks dismissing the corporeal realities of those who experience the phenomenon of contingency. We therefore argue that the relationship between emotion and action might be explored more fully by considering alternative forms of advocacy, such as listening and storying, which are genres of understanding that connect to the affective. To demonstrate how such affective advocacy can work, we offer a pair of cases where emotion has been connected to real, if incremental, change. Following our affective analyses of these cases, we present our own experiences with affective advocacy, suggesting that these, too, constitute cases while also suggesting usable techniques for moving forward. To begin, though, we justify our varied research approaches as reflective of our feminisms.

## A FEMINIST REVISIONING OF ADVOCACY

The conviction to do something about the academic labor situation is fueled by understandable impatience, but *doing* is accompanied by *feeling*. Emotion causes us to act, and it saturates our action, but this key part of the advocacy process tends to get lost in academic contexts, where faculty members are educated to distrust the pathos of the individual story and to favor the scientific standard of generalizability, to move quickly, one might say, from affect to effect. To signal our resistance to the dominant paradigm of generalizability and emotional

detachment, which we view as part of a masculinist and hegemonic economic metaphor, we discuss documented cases of emotion's role in academic labor advocacy as well as provide personal stories about situations that have motivated us to action. We participate in activities consistent with the ethical, methodological, and epistemological features of feminist research, including self-disclosure, empowerment of participants, the equalization of the status of the researcher and the research subject, considerations of our own positionality and our own critical self-reflexivity—all of which we see as obligatory functions of inquiry and action. With Shalomit Reinharz and Lynn Davidman, we hold ourselves constrained to no single set of approaches but assert instead the right and the necessity of activist rhetoricians to utilize a range of methods as an explicit counterargument to traditional inquiry and reporting practices (12). As such, our approach includes analysis of both texts and experience.

Furthermore, in asserting the validity of emotion as a component of effective advocacy, we argue along with Sandra Harding for “alternative origins of problematics” (preface) and assert that “there is no such thing as a problem without a person: a problem is always a problem *for* someone or other” (6). Moreover, with Rebecca Campbell and Sharon Wasco, we take the feminist epistemological stance which accepts “women’s stories of their lives as legitimate sources of knowledge” and a feminist methodological approach by undertaking the “ethic of caring through the process of sharing those stories” (778). We further argue along with Campbell and Wasco that there should be an acknowledgement of the emotionality of research, a recognition that feelings shape research and form “a natural part of inquiry” (786). With Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith Cook we offer a “refusal to ignore the emotional dimension of the conduct of inquiry,” arguing instead for the central role of the affective in the production of knowledge (9). Moreover, with feminist methodologists, we elevate the “situation at hand,” or the everyday lived experience of marginalization as an otherwise “hidden process” that we are compelled to uncover (11).

With these theoretical tools, we reexamine examples of both documented and personal activism in light of their affective dimensions and contexts; in doing so, we hope to bring to light the role of affect in effectiveness. We divide this discussion into two major parts. First, we examine two texts as “cases,” starting with the landmark artifact of emotion in academic labor advocacy—the Wyoming Resolution—which arguably launched mainstream discussions of adjunct labor within professional associations. As a second case and textual artifact, we examine Catherine Stukel’s letter to the editor of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, “Is that Whining Adjunct Someone We Want Teaching Our Young?” which came thirty years after Wyoming and shows how slow attitudes can be to change even when advocacy has been robust. We then turn to examine our own

stories, our non-generalizable selves, asserting that it was emotion that got each of us going, and emotion that keeps us going even today as academic laborers and activists. We show how our varying contexts led to techniques that might be described as advocacy fueled by emotion, or affective advocacy—Maria through leadership of a national advocacy nonprofit; Sue through arts-based institutional critique; and Janelle through her own charting of an academic career. Our purpose is to examine the emotions that accompany advocacy and activism, to show how social change is spurred by and maintained through emotion. We put this examination forward in genres of understanding—reading each artifact and testimony as unique windows onto the problem of academic labor.

### **CASE 1: HOW EMOTION CAN CATALYZE ACTION: REVISITING THE WYOMING RESOLUTION**

The Wyoming Resolution was an exercise in emotion and an example of both independent argument and preparation for other arguments (CCCC Committee; CCCC Executive Committee; Robertson et al.). Some might say that the Wyoming Resolution was a single intensely felt moment, followed by years of machinations, intrigue, and inertia, but the importance of Wyoming can hardly be denied as a catalyst, a game-changer that assured it would no longer be possible to glide over the costs of unjust academic labor policies. While some might argue that Wyoming was a failure, justice delayed and hence denied, others would argue that Wyoming was among the first in a series of revelatory moments in the academic labor movement, the end of which is nowhere in sight. Here we describe how the Wyoming Conference and the Resolution that resulted were steeped in emotion, and how emotion did not undermine the argument but instead caused the stage to change, the conversation to reset. The Wyoming Resolution marked a moment wherein the re-alignment of academic labor could no longer be denied or ignored but instead demanded to be noted.

In their 2011 article in *College English*, James McDonald and Eileen Schell describe the role of affect in the event of the Wyoming Conference which eventually led to the Resolution. From McDonald and Schell's description we can envision the intimate context of that Conference wherein friendships and professional relationships were cemented, forged, and catapulted forward. Indeed there seems to have been a kind of hiatus on academic rank hierarchies and untouchable topics that was unofficially called in that space. They describe graduate students conducting "inkshedding" at the end of each day; their versions of the day's events, like the conversation in "the ladies room," offering a different view on events than the official responses and receptions (McDonald and Schell). A context of candor seems to have provided space for growing murmurs of dis-

content and the growth of feeling that eventually bubbled to the surface. James Sledd, in his talk at a regular session, lamented the conditions under which composition instructors and programs labored, to which he received great applause. But then his talk was ignored during the discussion period, leading Susan Wyche, according to Schell and McDonald, to stand up at the urging of others and demand that the conversation follow Sledd's lead. She asked, "What is happening here?" (365). She then spoke of her own oppression and that of her students. Schell and McDonald report this moment in the language of emotion—Wyche describing herself as having "choked out each word" before she "sat down and *burst into tears*" [italics ours] (365). She was subsequently shuttled off to her hotel room and left alone for about an hour, as presumably she needed this time to recover. Senior faculty meanwhile reconvened at a local bar and began discussing strategy and drafting a resolution for the professional association, presumably in the rational, if shaken, tones of senior faculty called to action. McDonald and Schell describe this entire event as "the turning point of the conference" (364).

We repeat this story at some length because we see the affect-reason binary at work in its details. A formal talk's difficult topic (Sledd's talk) was initially sidestepped by attendees, arguably due to its proximity to a felt tear in the fabric of the profession. It was then recovered by Wyche, who had personal experience with that tear. Yet given her positionality as an adjunct, to call out the issue after a sidestepping of it by others of more senior status required confrontation with her own emotions—among them, we imagine, fear and courage—as well as that of others, which likely included shame, embarrassment and anger. Wyche had to summon great strength to speak to her experience and status, thus illustrating the emotional labor demanded of the activist. In turn, the tenured leadership then gathered to strategize, a highly rational approach more readily available to those functioning from a position of power and authority. Yet that rationality appears also to have been tempered by a new-found sense of forceful and resolute conviction that something had to be done. This initial conversation took place in a bar, perhaps connoting that a stiff drink was needed as these leaders took on what they knew to be the difficult task at hand. In any case, a resolution of lasting importance resulted. That this resolution was followed by as yet unfinished decades of discussion and revision does not detract from the importance of Wyoming as a demonstration of emotion's importance and gravity. Rather, this moment, infused as it was with emotion and commitment, sparked efforts to formalize positions and policy statements by the Conference on College Composition and Communication and its parent organization the National Council of Teachers of English as well as the MLA. Arguably, the move toward formalizing and regulating had the effect of diluting and cooling the Wyoming Resolution's call for change, but it did not squelch it. It might be said that

emotion launched the ship of labor advocacy among professional organizations.

The Wyoming Resolution stands as an essential moment in the affective history of the non-tenure-track faculty movement. It was a moment characterized by a panoply of emotions ranging from incredulity to shame to outrage and then capitulating toward reasoned accommodation and compromise. While the initial moment of galvanization has been followed by years of struggle and eroded expectations, the Wyoming Conference and its associated Resolution nonetheless launched passionate conversations that are still going on. Those conversations have led to some changes, however glacial, which have been fueled by the understandings that were first confronted there. The Wyoming Resolution should thus be read as an important and legitimate advocacy effort, even though it may not fit with certain definitions of “outcomes” or “products.” The example provided by the Wyoming Resolution demonstrates that affective work may not produce linear or predictable results yet may still be a driver for long-term change. The Wyoming Resolution stands in the archives as a clear example of the power of emotion to incite a group toward change and to begin processes that move toward progress.

## **CASE 2: HOW EMOTIONS CAN BE RE- READ: THE WHINING ADJUNCT**

A second artifact suggesting the role of “feeling” in the history and development of effective advocacy efforts is Catherine Stukel’s recent letter to the editor in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* “Is That Whining Adjunct Someone We Want Teaching Our Young?” This artifact suggests that making unhappiness known can be a powerful act of advocacy, but in an environment where happiness is the “expected ‘default position’ for those who are oppressed” (Ahmed, *Promise* 66), there is great risk in expressing unhappiness. Nearly thirty years after Wyoming, Stukel states, “I cannot comprehend why any adjunct professor complains with such entitlement about their inability to get a full-time teaching position.” She characterizes the adjunct professor as an adolescent with a sense of entitlement, “in a new world where every child is special.” Becoming infantilized in this way is one of the risks of making unhappiness known. Stukel’s letter thus represents the ideology that happiness is something that one can achieve or fail to achieve. Happiness is constructed to be a personal endeavor that is divorced from context. “Sometimes we fail to achieve happiness no matter what our line of work or income is,” Stukel writes. The adjunct professor can achieve happiness and “inner peace” despite circumstances, in Stukel’s view, so all the “whining” is unjustified and is a sign of poor personal character—the kind of character that we don’t want in front of the classroom. Stukel’s letter ends with the injunction to

“be happy,” affirming the hegemonic meritocratic belief that those who are not happy have only themselves to blame.

Because of such conceptions of emotion, those who demonstrate unhappiness can become further marginalized. “You might refuse proximity to somebody out of fear that you will be infected by unhappiness,” Ahmed notes, and, in this moving away from the unhappy other, “certain bodies are pushed to the margins, in order that the unhappiness that is assumed to reside within these bodies does not threaten the happiness that has been given” (*Promise* 97-98). The “disgruntled adjunct”—like the “feminist killjoy” or the “unhappy queer”—is further marginalized because of her unhappiness.

Yet “[w]e must stay unhappy with this world” (*Promise* 105), Ahmed claims, if there is cause for changing it. Occluding, pathologizing, or minimizing the emotional constellations that come under the rubric of “unhappiness” is thus a quietist gesture that affirms the status quo. Here Ahmed does not mean to affirm a model of the heroic, unhappy revolutionary “whose suffering is a gift to the world” (169), but she does find a necessity for unhappiness in activist efforts. Happiness signals an acceptance of the status quo. Unhappiness stirs things up. Ahmed sees the “political will to be affected by unhappiness . . . as a political freedom” (195). Unhappy emotions are, in this sense, active. They are “creative responses” to conditions (217), and they are ripe for instigating change.

Making unhappiness known is one step, but effective advocacy may also require conversations about what counts as valid emotion, about emotional normativity and how unhappiness comes up against emotional expectations that affirm the status quo. Stukel’s editorial was prompted by an adjunct union’s use of the Margaret Mary Vojtko story as an emotional appeal to galvanize support. In order for such emotional appeals to be received, open dialogue about the workings and expectations of emotion may be a necessary part of affective advocacy work. Publicly raised questions about how emotions are interpreted and evaluated can prompt critical thought and dialogue about how an adjunct professor comes to be dismissively designated as “whiny.”

This example suggests that to affirm the emotion/rationality and affect/action binaries is not only conceptually problematic, it also may have damaging and marginalizing effects. It can reaffirm the “[p]sychologically reductive accounts that pathologized protest and protesters,” which Deborah Gould notes, “did not die out in the nineteenth century but rather continue to circulate widely today” (19). As Gould explains, those “with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo frequently describe social justice activists as driven by emotion (which they pit against reason) and protest activities as irrational and childish, rather than a legitimate mode” of advocacy (19). Ahmed echoes this point in *The Promise of Happiness*, describing the common conception of the “angry activist”



as one who commits “acts of senseless violence, which stops any hearing of ways in which revolution makes sense. . . . [T]he revolutionaries expose violence, but the violence they expose is not recognized as violence: structural violence is violence that is veiled” (170). These preconceptions surrounding activism help to explain how a sit-in can be construed as a violent act that warrants the use of pepper spray and batons by police counterforces. These preconceptions promote fear as they figure the activist as irrational and violent, the assumed results of an overly emotive positionality. Yet we can think of academic labor activism as exposing the *unhappy effects* of policies and hiring practices that characterize higher education. Identifying the “sadness” of the “sad women in the basement” (Miller) remains a powerful means of recognizing the problems of academic labor conditions. While “sadness equals injustice” is a false equivalence (as we should also not equate the “happy” with the “good”), unhappy emotions—like physical pain—make us acutely aware of the conditions pressed upon us.

Taken together, the Wyoming Resolution and the Whining Adjunct letter shed light on the false emotion-action binary. Emotions may be a primary means of collective action as they are always already shaping our allegiances and ways of being. Sara Ahmed convincingly makes this case, arguing that “emotions align some bodies with others . . . by the way they move us” (*Cultural Politics* 195). These bodies are part of what Ahmed calls “affective economies,” which are “social and material, as well as psychic” (46). While affect is to some degree beyond our control or decision, as Denise Riley and John Protevi have reminded, we can also make use of emotional resources, knowing that expressions of anger and despair have material effects and can work to bring people together to move toward collectivized action. For Protevi, “Affect is inherently political.” Because “bodies are part of an ecosocial matrix of other bodies, affecting them and being affected by them: affect is part of the basic constitution of bodies politic” (50).

The process of accounting for emotion is not a preliminary or nascent stage of political activism that we need to move beyond. Too often, emotional accounts are dismissed as a type of adolescent need for expression of personal anger and frustration. In these common conceptualizations, emotional expressions of anger and frustration are separated from the “real work” of rational argument and action. Similarly, accounts that emphasize “softer” emotions, such as compassion, are often dismissed as naiveté or cowardice that require replacement with shrewdness and savvy. The logical/affective division implied in such claims is untenable (not least because of the sexism that is embedded within it) as emotions “involve a stance on the world, or a way of apprehending the world” (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 7) that is deeply embedded in the so-called “rational” ways of knowing. Moreover, “cool rationality” is an emotional style, as Lauren Berlant notes (27). She argues that “The seeming detachment of rationality . . .

. is not detachment at all, but an emotional style associated normatively with a rhetorical practice” (27). Real work, it turns out, is always invested and is always emotional. The emotional styles we perform matter, and they should be continually put up for examination.

To claim a need to move beyond emotion is to obscure the role of emotion in social change and erase the material processes that give rise to—and are shaped by—emotional realities. Emphasizing the role of emotion in protest and social change, we can reread social history, as Mihnea Moldoveanu and Nitin Nohria do, “as a set of emotional dynamics, of struggles, games and dialectics played out by embodied feelings” (230).

### **ENTER NOW OUR NON-GENERALIZABLE SELVES, OR HOW MASTER PASSIONS AND AFFECTIVE ATTACHMENTS HAVE GUIDED OUR ACTIONS**

As individuals, we three—Sue, Maria, and Janelle—have experienced moments that catapulted us into action. We explain some of those moments in the paragraphs that follow, situating our stories within the notion of “master passions”—i.e., emotions and emotion-narratives that “cut across people” and both “generate and are generated by social phenomena” (Moldoveanu and Nohria 3)—and inviting others to consider the moments that have moved them toward action. We might all ask: To what extent have affective responses, such as the felt anguish of ourselves or another, moved us to action? We then move toward a discussion of the forms of affective activism these circumstances have led us to undertake.

Maria has told the various stories that comprise her personal journey to activism in several venues (in *Inside Higher Education* and *Working Class Studies* and at the Campaign for the Future of Higher Education Columbus Conference). These stories all have in common the theme of a sudden realization—not the warm illumination of insight and inspiration, but rather the jolting or chilling fear that accompanies the perception of danger and precipitates a fight-or-flight response. In Maria’s case, that response was to fight, and to fuel the determination to fight with the anger that could otherwise be self-destructive.

The first story, which she related in a 2009 *Inside Higher Ed* essay modeled on a 1971 feminist manifesto and titled “The Adjunct’s Moment of Truth,” described how in late 2008, Maria had joined forces with activists across the country who were determined to start a national nonprofit organization—New Faculty Majority—to focus exclusively on the contingent faculty crisis. However, in the spring of 2009 Maria’s husband lost his job, having fallen prey in part to vicious workplace politics. Maria was faced with the terrifying prospect of

singlehandedly supporting, as an adjunct, a very young family, which included a toddler and a child with special needs. At the same time, her fury at the injustice that had been perpetrated on her husband by his employer, a Catholic school, concretized her experience of the institutional hypocrisy that afflicts higher education as deeply as it afflicts the Catholic Church. Maria gratefully accepted the financial support of extended family and the moral support of her newfound colleagues—both critical to her ability and desire to fight rather than to fly.

In later public accounts, one at a conference of the Campaign for the Future of Higher Education and another for the journal *Working Class Studies*, Maria described more complex emotional experiences that sustain her activism but also have roots in fear and anger. At the conference, during a session designed to address the power imbalances between tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty, she described how a tenured male colleague responded to her request for feedback on a teaching demonstration that might have led to a full-time job. Rather than say anything about her teaching, he complimented her on the physical beauty of her hands. Startled and dismayed, even as she was conscious of her need to support her family, she suppressed the desire to confront him and soon found herself mired in the self-doubt and anger that is all too familiar to too many women whose economic vulnerability is deepened by experiences of personal and institutional sexism in both micro and macro forms. Meanwhile, in the *Working Class Studies* piece, she reflected on how her experience of her own family's working class roots helped her understand the class-based fear that stands in the way of many adjunct faculty members' efforts to self-advocate.

In each of these experiences, activism—both in the organizing work and in the public engagement these essays embodied—was not just action for a greater cause but was both consciously and unconsciously, personally and professionally, therapeutic. Not only did the activism mitigate the destructive power of the fear that these experiences engendered, it also revitalized Maria's teaching, as she felt reconnected to pedagogical purpose and process. Maria's example suggests that while particular constellations of local and individual variables will always shape lived experiences, certain "master passions"—often, frustration and anger—emerge from accounts of working conditions. While an equation of "bad feeling equals injustice" is always too simple (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 193), frustration and anger can readily become externalized and channeled into speech and action. Furthermore, by tapping into master passions, it is possible for the iconic slogan "the personal is political" to be deftly flipped, allowing social consciousness to double as self-care, both personal and professional, to the benefit of teacher and students alike.

For Sue, the master passion of empathy and the recognition of its complements—anger and care of self—led to advocacy and activism. In the fall of

2004—twenty years into her adjunct career, three years before she obtained that rarest of commodities, a tenure-track position, and ten years since the most recent pay raise to the base salary of contingent faculty in her local setting—a short experiment came to a close. In this experiment, a few instructors had been hired under improved circumstances that were associated with higher pay and the assurance of two years of employment. In the summer of that year, prior to the start of classes and under the leadership of a new dean, it was disclosed that these somewhat secure appointments were in violation of Colorado law which held that all non-tenure-track faculty were employees at-will and that the university had no legal right to enter into contract (for one day, much less two years) with an at-will employee, a law that wasn't rescinded until 2012. When Sue's officemate, who held one of these positions, returned from her second day of teaching having just found out that her "better job" was no longer in place and that she had neither modest job security nor the pay she had been promised nor even the courtesy of notification before the start of the semester, Sue was incensed. Although activated by the sight of her colleague's marginalization, Sue was not yet at the place where she could recognize her own. Rather, at this moment, when Sue's friend and colleague returned from class betrayed and hurt, she saw only that her friend was being badly treated. Sue undertook a series of what were risky acts such as calling the Provost's office and demanding a personal appointment. Within weeks, Sue had organized a press conference and invited state elected officials to hear about the adjunct's plight. A few weeks later, and bolstered by the support of a key tenure-track faculty member, Sue authored a letter to the provost that argued for an immediate salary increase and implicitly threatened a walk-out.

These initial moments, conducted largely in a kind of blinding rage, led to other more measured but arguably less effective approaches. For instance, when asked by her Dean's office (and subsequent to these initial efforts) to lead a newly formed college committee for adjuncts—which was to be exclusively focused on non-tenure-track faculty working conditions and status—Sue started learning about participation in shared governance. She initially imagined there being inherent value in having a seat at the table and saw participation in governance as the coin of the realm. But eventually she saw that her advocacy was being coopted and redirected toward sanctioned efforts led by administrators. Soon she was asked to be part of a task force that eventually led to the creation of a standing committee reporting to the faculty senate, even as contingent faculty had no representation on that senate. Through such flatteries of inclusion was her energy diverted. However, she and colleagues began to chip away at the soft edges of institutional vulnerability, asserting, for instance, that if the faculty manual said faculty had certain rights, then unless it stipulated otherwise, those rights

belonged to all faculty, not just those on the tenure track. These events became an education in the machinations of institutional authority and power, even as they also introduced Sue to the opportunities and limits of non-emotive advocacy. Sue came to understand how a “governance” approach to activism can use existing, rational mechanisms to argue for change, but such efforts also involve the management and control of faculty (of all ranks) and seek to domesticate the emotions of disgruntled workers. Piecemeal participation in shared governance, she began to see, functions less as an opportunity for change agency than as the institutional regulation of faculty emotion, a taming of an unruly body politic.

For Janelle, the master passions of grief and anxiety thread through her experiences of higher education. Janelle lost her sister in a tragic accident in 2007, a week before Janelle graduated from college; consequently, the start of Janelle’s professional life was shaped by the consciousness of the imminent proximity of loss and an acute awareness of the shortness of life. A few short years later, as she reached the end of her Ph.D. program, she realized that when strategizing a career in the anxious context of current academic hiring practices, one cannot assume that things will fall into place—or that they will remain in place. She was again made acutely aware of life’s fragility and her own vulnerability. Learning steadily about the nature of contingency, she found that the scarcity of available positions converted to a sense of urgency, which translated into a felt need—responsibility even—to take the first position that was offered. It was this context—overlaid with the grievable recognition that life can be cut too short—that led Janelle to accept and hold a full-time non-tenure-track teaching position as a writing center director and unofficial WPA before she finished her Ph.D. This position required thirty-five hours a week on campus but did not include office space. Janelle says that new scholars like herself, even if they have not had an experience of great and sudden loss/vulnerability, are receiving the message, intentionally sent or not, that they are working in a market where they must take whatever they can get, whenever they can get it.

Before defending her Ph.D., Janelle had taught at a small Catholic college, a smaller private art school and at a large state research university. The one commonality among the radically different contexts was that they all shared bleak labor conditions—lack of office space, low wages, uncertainty surrounding continued funding, and recurring layoffs. These conditions, Janelle has since concluded, are for new scholars the “air they breathe” since many have known no other reality. This fact conditions their approach to the job market and leads to further disenfranchisement as applicants feel that they are in no position to negotiate for better conditions. To choose to negotiate or to not accept the first position offered, is a great risk—one that Janelle was not initially able to take. Rather, given today’s academic climate and her own personal loss, she was hy-

per-conscious of the potential truncation of life's opportunities, and strategizing a career meant taking the first position that was offered, even when there were clear indications of problems with the work environment. Ultimately, the same survival reflex that prompted Janelle to take the writing center administrative position also motivated her to leave it. Although it took some courage to leave, her professional survival, it became clear, depended upon her doing so. She resigned from this position after less than a year, choosing instead a dedicated research postdoctoral fellowship that would allow her to better position herself on the job market and build toward a better future in higher education.

Acknowledging the master passions and master narratives that maintain and work upon individual careers and institutional policies is an important part of the academic activist project. Master passions motivate us and stick with us as we shape our careers and our institutions. Knowing these master passions and the ways they work can help us to do our work more effectively. Also, the case study, the testimony, the personal story—these genres of understanding—can provide us with intimate knowledge of the master passions as they operate in academic contexts and advocacy efforts. These genres can prompt empathy, but such channeling of emotion actually amounts to more than a mere “change of attitude” or privatizing of emotion. Emotions can enact change. Harnessing this potential is the work of affective advocacy, as we now discuss.

## **OUR ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM: HOW EMOTION INFORMS OUR WORK**

Our initial contexts led to varying forms of advocacy. As Moyer explains in the passage referenced earlier, the experience of disillusionment and despair that comes through intense confrontation with the emotional realities of movement building can best be understood as success rather than failure when the big picture, the “long term strategic framework,” is kept in mind. In light of this, we extend our personal cases to identify some of the techniques of emotion that we have witnessed and used in our activist work.

For Maria, the challenges of establishing and helping to lead a national advocacy organization exclusively focused on transforming academic contingency have, for more than five years, intersected with her efforts to advocate for her son, who is on the autism spectrum. Having discovered that special education students and their teachers are often treated as “adjunct” to the general education population consisting of neurotypical students, she has had to employ many of the same skills and much of the same effort to advocate for his right to what is called in federal legislation a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and to being educated in a Least Restrictive Environment. As she has tried to

negotiate for her son a complex, but legally required, balance between unmarked inclusion and individualized support, the parallels with advocacy for contingent faculty have become apparent. Her son became unable to attend school due in no small part to the school's inability to provide him with appropriate support because it could not (or would not) provide his teachers, especially the ones most committed to supporting him, with the professional support that they need. The slogan "faculty working conditions are student learning conditions" became as real to her and her son as it is for millions of college students and faculty.

Faced then with the prospect of an unwarranted truancy charge, she came to understand what is known as "the school to prison pipeline" which indiscriminately channels "difficult" disadvantaged students—overwhelmingly those who are poor, minorities and/or students with disabilities—into segregated, often disciplinary and punitive programs. This is the school system's preferred method of "bringing to scale" practices which are supposed to address—but more often are meant to control—student need. Maria knows that the school had been expecting her simply to extricate her son from the pipeline that usually hums along without disruption, particularly since she fits the profile of the type of parent who can choose this option. However, aside from the fact that economic reality prevented her from making this choice, she also knew that if she did this, the school would have no incentive to change its coercive and regressive treatment of children on the spectrum. So her personal decision to advocate for her son's rights was also a conscious decision to connect those rights to the rights of all students with disabilities and indeed, by extension, of all students. Indeed, as her advocacy for her son has taken shape, she has realized the degree to which her son's fate, along with those of her other children, are intertwined with the fates of their classmates and their teachers. As a result of this highly personal experience, Maria has found it easier to argue, in the arena of contingent faculty advocacy, for the importance of solidarity in all its forms, highlighting the interconnectedness of members of the educational system. The challenges of forging solidarity between part-timers and full-timers; contingent faculty with M.A.s and those with Ph.D.s; tenure-track faculty and non-tenure-track faculty; faculty and administrators; activists of different gender identities; academic laborers and so-called "unskilled" laborers; college professors and K-12 teachers—all become more real, but also more able to be overcome.

In Sue's case, the period since becoming tenure-track has been as much about learning the ropes as about attempting to use or change them. Her experience has involved a kind of transmogrification, a self-conscious adoption of the language of the master in order to challenge it. With her research agenda focused on the rhetorics of academic labor, she aims to use her tenure to talk back to its privilege, but her sense of vulnerability remains central to the core of her being,

sometimes stifling her voice and her ability to address large concerns. So she was perhaps especially attuned to emerging opportunities when a graduate student introduced her to the work of Jim Walsh and the Romero Theater Troupe of Denver.

The Romero Troupe does advocacy work built on the model of Boal's Theater of the Oppressed; Romero focuses on contingency of all types, challenging immigration law and bringing untold stories of Colorado's minority populations' histories to contemporary Colorado audiences. The troupe confronts audiences with various forms of subjugation and marginalization that exist in the culture using a notion called organic theater wherein the group depicts scenes from the (marginalized) participants' everyday lives. For Sue, this work was liberating. Along with a group of graduate students and non-tenure-track faculty, she began working on a play about faculty contingency and the costs borne by contingent faculty. The campus performance at her home institution led to a linked performance with contingent faculty from the community college just down the road. In turn, both productions featured the voices of public school teachers whose stories of workplace vulnerability, especially in light of education reform, were also integrated into the performance.

In time, these performances, featuring educators from all levels, were linked to the Romero Troupe's concerns, which offer a sprawling depiction of the marginalization and exploitation running throughout mainstream American society. The contingent faculty play that had been done on the university and community college campuses was folded into a larger production of the Romero Troupe. Called *An Adjunct at Ludlow* the production depicted, among other things, scenes of racial profiling by police, deportation proceedings, scenes of homeless veterans, and monologues by young DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals)—so-called DREAMers—who spoke to their hopes for obtaining a college education in the United States. In this space and connecting faculty contingency to broader economic trends, Sue was able to see anew the opportunities for advocacy that were presented by her conversion to tenure; her research focus on academic labor could link higher education's academic labor movement to broader discussions of political and economic violence and marginalization in American society. Furthering this, she saw how those acting in the Romero troupe had, as their greatest hope, the idea of a college education.

Janelle's experience while still a graduate student at SUNY Albany established the context for her internalized vulnerability. Due to a \$640 million budget cut in 2010, the then president of the University at Albany, George Philip, suspended five programs in the humanities. This resulted in outcry from both the campus community and the public—discourses that were saturated in emotion. Professor of French and eminent Derrida translator David Wills expressed



“shock” and “anger” over the decision in an interview with NPR (Adler). H el ene Cixous wrote in an open letter to President George Philip, “You cannot imagine how stupefied and indignant I was to learn that that institution was about to mutilate itself.” This rhetoric made use of emotion, recognizing affect as a technique for advocacy.

Further utilizing techniques of emotion, at a campus protest of the decision, Jil Hanifan, Director of the Writing Center at SUNY Albany, read before a silent crowd the names of the contingent faculty members whose jobs were to be cut. Hanifan’s gesture overtly adopted a mode of memorializing—reciting the names of the “lost.” Hanifan made rhetorical use of the master passion of grief and its performances in genres of memorial. Hanifan’s gesture powerfully revealed how the discourse surrounding the closing of the humanities programs at SUNY Albany tended to focus on the humanities as an important conceptual, intellectual territory, without sufficiently attending to the role of contingency and the lives that would be materially affected by the decision.

Despite these public statements of grief over the ramifications of the SUNY “closing of the humanities,” the decision was at times remembered as a relatively minor occurrence since the tenured faculty members were relocated and didn’t lose their jobs. The effects on the contingent faculty members were less often remembered. The lesson was not lost on Janelle, however, who felt contingency’s sting acutely and set about to find a stable position for herself. However, she ironically situated herself in exactly the kind of position (the writing center administrative job) that would destine her to experience marginalization firsthand. Today Janelle contends that keeping present the grief over the closing of positions and departments would help all in the SUNY local setting remain mindful of the ways that the bottom-line-driven value systems of the academy ignore the professional concerns of the faculty. Indeed, in an illustration of the kind of long-term trajectory that affective advocacy takes, several years later in the fall of 2015, contingent and non-contingent faculty at SUNY Albany came together in solidarity to secure a commitment from the administration to a groundbreaking plan to transform conditions for contingent faculty at the university.

Janelle contends that continuing to express grief can provide a means of recognition of the affective and material realities of faculty employment. Keeping a collective grief present, and addressing it outright, might reduce the felt vulnerability of graduate students who may be too quick to take the first job that comes their way, as Janelle did. This “keeping present” of emotion is an important advocacy strategy because it refuses the privatization of emotion and understands job cuts, under-compensation, and poor working conditions to be issues of collective concern. Shared affect can actualize the idea that contingency

affects us all. It can prompt and continue action as it works to sustain concern. At the same time, the minority affective position (e.g., unhappiness in a context where happiness is assumed to be the “default” position) can be instigating, a type of counter-force. Such emotions can be productive, in that they produce effects that may not always be documentable but are nonetheless material.

## CONCLUSION

Precarious employment traumatizes the people who bear it, disrupting their foundational narratives. Such trauma can utterly dismantle the narratives of academic success and achievement that are often central to the self-image of persons prepared for and dedicated to careers in higher education. Such affronts to personal and professional agency can prompt both emotion and action, and these manifestations require that the story be re-told, the emotions articulated, the effects registered, as acknowledgement itself becomes an exercise in emotion and empathy. As Howard Zehr points out, the twin acts of listening and testifying bring victim and victimizer together so that the capacity for understanding is increased in both. Zehr’s restorative testimony shares much in common with Wendy Hesford’s notion of layered testimony, through which identities are inscribed and alternative versions of history talk back to dominant culture and to one another. Restorative testimony also allows a confrontation of what Sidonie Smith calls “the limits of the autobiographical” (227) in which extreme identity categories, such as persons in witness protection, or persons with Alzheimer’s may seem unable to “situate themselves in various locations through their personal storytelling” (232). Marginalized academics, functioning without access to traditional modes of shared governance and due process might find themselves similarly silenced by identity category. There is, therefore, an important role to be played by the re-storying of adjunct trauma for both testifier and the witness, wherein emotions, including those of disappointment, loss, hurt, grief, anger, and shame can be told and legitimized, then subsequently integrated and transformed. Such efforts ought not be pushed aside or dismissed by an advocacy agenda bent on outcomes, no matter how essential those outcomes might be.

As the unhappy effects of contingency are brought to the fore, we must also recognize the attachments that keep professionals in exploitive labor conditions. As Sara Ahmed and Lauren Berlant, among others, have theorized “emotion can attach us to the very conditions of our subordination” (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 12). While we must continue to heed Eileen Schell’s warning against the stereotypes of the “dabbling” academic “who is motivated to teach for a ‘psychic income’” (Schell 50), we should also recognize the ways that a psychic income represents a very real force in the labor economy of higher education. Material,

structural forces keep contingent laborers in the classroom, but the “emotional rewards” of the academic life also motivate people to take teaching positions over (potentially better compensated) jobs at places like Starbucks. Many, if not most, faculty members are motivated affectively by their concern for their students and by hope for a model of a non-corporatized university that values the independent, free life of the mind for the sake of the public good.

A priority for academic labor activist efforts is to reevaluate and transform the “cruel optimism” (to use Berlant’s term) that clings to nostalgia for an ideal of the university, trusting that traditional approaches to academic hiring will one day be restored. Rather than preserving this hope for the restoration of previous academic hiring practices, we should instead use as an exigency for action the lasting nature of the shifts in faculty hiring that have occurred. Contingency has become a generalized condition, and it should prompt all of us to act. Even tenured positions may be lost as the university, increasingly driven by the “bottom line,” finds cause to close academic departments. The fantasy of academic job security is quickly fraying, in the midst of other, more widespread “fraying fantasies” including “upward mobility, job security, political and social equality . . . meritocracy, the sense that liberal-capitalist society will reliably provide opportunities for individuals to carve out relations of reciprocity that seem fair and that foster life as a project of adding up to something” (Berlant 3). Anger and frustration at such fraying fantasies can prompt activist efforts that seek to improve working conditions. Within the context of the university, we can make use of the eidolon of secure academic employment to underscore that the “adjunct activist” agenda has the best interests of all faculty in mind. While we know that contingency is not evenly distributed in academe, it is nonetheless the case that contingency affects us all. The idea that tenure means security is rapidly being exposed as anachronistic, if not mythical. This reality should translate into a united cause—contingency as an issue that involves the faculty at large.

We believe that the idiom of affect theory can prompt academic labor theorists to ask questions that may be essential to any possibility for change: What affective bargains do contingent faculty (and arguably tenure-line faculty as well) make to maintain their careers in academe? What emotional habitus maintains the status quo? And what modifications to that habitus are needed for activist work to take hold in a local setting? Effective activism finds resources for reshaping the material-affective structures that condition the lived experiences of the academic worker.

Finally, we argue for reflective rather than reactive approaches and for the validity of emotions. We should read the emotional output of academic labor activists as also effective alongside traditional argumentation and action. We argue for any and all approaches, including emotional and affective efforts, that

define meaningful work in as capacious a way as possible, rather than singularly in service of market values. Moreover, we recommend reflective approaches for evaluating effectiveness in light of contingency's emotional dimensions. Such re-examination stands to reveal that ongoing results are rooted in an understanding that is accessed in affect.

As we reflect on the affective and emotional dimensions of the advocacy work we do in the academy, we need to reconsider what counts as advocacy. What we deploy in our local, regional and national contexts—whether a data-driven rational argument, testimony on Capitol Hill, a piece of theater that generates discomfort, or advice given to new academics—can be valid advocacy work that changes hearts and minds. Taking this stance opens up what we might value as advocacy, honoring the work that people have done and continue to do on behalf of the cause yet oftentimes without a direct connection between effort and outcome. This reorientation sheds new light on the history of academic labor activism, highlighting events that might otherwise be all too casually dismissed. It also places value on the emotional labor tied up in advocacy work, putting it alongside and equal to results that might follow. Would we argue, for instance, that Susan Wyche's stand-and-deliver moment in Wyoming in 1987 was inconsequential because it led to year after year of endless policy machinations? Or was Wyche's statement unimportant because it was steeped in emotion? No to both questions. Her emotion was an essential catalyst and was emotional because it was steeped in importance.

## WORKS CITED

- Adler, Margot. "Cuts To University's Humanities Program Draw Outcry." *NPR.org*, 16 Nov. 2010, [npr.org/2010/11/15/131336270/cuts-to-university-s-humanities-program-draw-outcry](http://npr.org/2010/11/15/131336270/cuts-to-university-s-humanities-program-draw-outcry).
- Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh UP, 2004.
- . *The Promise of Happiness*. Duke UP, 2010.
- Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Duke UP, 2011.
- Campbell, Rebecca, and Sharon M. Wasco. "Feminist Approaches to Social Science: Epistemological and Methodological Tenets." *American Journal of Community Psychology*, vol. 28, no. 6, 2000, pp. 773-91, *Springer Link*, doi:10.1023/A:1005159716099. 28 May 2014.
- Cixous, Hélène. "Open Letter to George Philip, President University at Albany-SUNY." 29 Nov. 2010, [static1.squarespace.com/static/56f092c327d4bd8d421493a4/t/5720ea7722482e2e25b34333/1461774967344/Letter+from+H%C3%A9l%C3%A8ne+Cixous.pdf](http://static1.squarespace.com/static/56f092c327d4bd8d421493a4/t/5720ea7722482e2e25b34333/1461774967344/Letter+from+H%C3%A9l%C3%A8ne+Cixous.pdf).
- CCCC Committee on Professional Standards. "CCCC Initiatives on the Wyoming Conference Resolution: A Draft Report." *College Composition and Communication*,

- vol. 40, no. 1, 1989, pp. 61-72.
- CCCC Executive Committee. "Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 40, no. 3, 1989, pp. 329-36.
- Fonow, Mary Margaret, and Judith A. Cook. *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship As Lived Research*. Indiana UP, 1991.
- Gould, Deborah. "On Affect and Protest." *Political Emotions*, edited by Janet Staiger and Ann Cvetkovich. Routledge, 2010, pp. 18-45.
- Harding, Sandra G. *Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues*. Indiana UP, 1987. EBSCO eBook Collection.
- Hesford, Wendy. "'Ye Are Witnesses': Autobiography and Commemorative Practices." *Framing Identities: Autobiography and Pedagogy*. U of Minnesota P, 1999.
- Maisto, Maria. "Adjuncts, Class, and Fear." *Working-Class Perspectives.*, 23 Sept. 2013, [workingclassstudies.wordpress.com/2013/09/23/adjuncts-class-and-fear/](http://workingclassstudies.wordpress.com/2013/09/23/adjuncts-class-and-fear/).
- . "The Adjunct's Moment of Truth." *InsideHigherEd.com*, 10 Sept. 2009 [insidehighered.com/views/2009/09/10/adjuncts-moment-truth](http://insidehighered.com/views/2009/09/10/adjuncts-moment-truth). Accessed 28 May 2014.
- . Untitled conference paper. *Campaign for the Future of Higher Education Columbus Conference*, Columbus, Ohio, 18 May 2013.
- McDonald, James C., and Eileen E. Schell. "The Spirit and Influence of the Wyoming Resolution: Looking Back to Look Forward." *Contingent Faculty*, special issue of *College English*, vol. 73, no. 4, 2011, pp. 360-78.
- Miller, Susan. *Textual Carnivals: The Politics of Composition*. Southern Illinois UP, 1991.
- Moldoveanu, Mihnea, and Nitin Nohria, editors. *Master Passions: Emotion, Narrative, and the Development of Culture*. MIT P, 2002.
- Moyer, Bill. *The Practical Strategist: Movement Action Plan (MAP) Strategic Theories for Evaluating, Planning, and Conducting Social Movements*. Social Movement Empowerment Project, 1990.
- Protevi, John. *Political Affect: Connecting the Social and the Somatic*. U of Minnesota P, 2009.
- Reinharz, Shulamit, and Lynn Davidman. *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. Oxford UP, 1992.
- Riley, Denise. *Impersonal Passion: Language as Affect*. Duke UP, 2005.
- Robertson, Linda R., et al. "The Wyoming Conference Resolution Opposing Unfair Salaries and Working Conditions for Post-Secondary Teachers of Writing." *College English*, vol. 49, no. 3, 1987, pp. 274-80.
- Schell, Eileen. *Gypsy Academics and Mother-Teachers: Gender, Contingent Labor, and Writing Instruction*. Heinemann, 1998.
- Smith, Sidonie. "Taking It to the Limit One More Time: Autobiography and Autism." *Getting a Life: Everyday Uses of Autobiography*, edited by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. U of Minnesota P, 1996, pp. 226-48.
- Strickland, Donna. *The Managerial Unconscious in the History of Composition Studies*. Southern Illinois UP, 2011.
- Stukel, Catherine. "Is That Whining Adjunct Someone We Want Teaching Our

Young?" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2014, [chronicle.com/blogs/letters/is-that-whining-adjunct-someone-we-want-teaching-our-young/](http://chronicle.com/blogs/letters/is-that-whining-adjunct-someone-we-want-teaching-our-young/).

Waggoner, Jeff. "UAlbany Panel Asks Raises for Adjuncts, UUP Ups the Ante." *Times Union, Capitol Confidential*, 11 Dec. 2015, [blog.timesunion.com/capitol/archives/244270/suny-albany-panel-asks-raises-for-adjuncts-uup-ups-the-ante/](http://blog.timesunion.com/capitol/archives/244270/suny-albany-panel-asks-raises-for-adjuncts-uup-ups-the-ante/).

Zehr, Howard. "Doing Justice, Healing Trauma: The Role of Restorative Justice in Peace Building." Peace Prints. *South Asian Journal of Peace Building*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2008 [rjbc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/Howard\\_Zehr\\_Paper.pdf](http://rjbc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/Howard_Zehr_Paper.pdf).