

# Psychological Experiences of Contingent Faculty in Oppressive Working Conditions

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***Abstract:** In higher education, one of the most significant changes in the past few decades has been the growing use and normalization of a flexible group of knowledge workers – contingent faculty. Existing research compares the conditions of tenured faculty with those of contingent faculty, yet the impact of oppressive working conditions has not been explored. This paper explored the oppressive working conditions of contingent faculty through three lenses - powerlessness, marginalization and exploitation. It examined the challenges unique to contingent faculty by examining the psychological consequences of these inequities.*

**Keywords:** neoliberalism, social psychology, contingent faculty, higher education

## Introduction

As a response to environmental constraints such as chronic underfunding and emerging neoliberal ideologies and practices, universities have adopted similar strategies in an attempt to survive and thrive. Perhaps one of the most significant changes in the past few decades has been the growing use and normalization of a flexible group of knowledge workers; namely, contingent faculty. In a time of heightened emphasis on institutional reputation and branding, it can be difficult to see through the façade of promised collegiality, academic freedom, and institutional

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authority. In fact, oppressive working conditions exist in the segmented academic hierarchy, which are prevalent for contingent faculty. The use of contingent faculty began as a temporary response to immediate and short-term institutional pressures, but has since become a continuing feature of the academy.

I begin this paper with a literature review that highlights challenges in higher education that lead to an increased reliance of contingent faculty in the academic workforce. This includes a discussion on the neoliberalization of the university, the financial challenges that reinforce the need for hiring contingent faculty, and the institutional structures that divide the academy. Then, drawing on Young's (2004) "Five Faces of Oppression," I offer a multi-faceted discussion of the inequitable conditions unique to contingent faculty. This framework is selected because it focuses on oppression in the structural sense, as a process that is systematically reproduced in the activities of everyday life. In particular, injustice is described as a consequence of the "structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms" (p. 39), which speaks to the oppression of contingent faculty in the context of neoliberalization. While advocates of neoliberal influence in higher education argue that this culture of efficiency and productivity fuels competition, innovation and advancement, the flipside of the coin is that this approach disguises the inequity that is embedded in dominant systems, such that the psychological health of contingent faculty are overlooked or dismissed. Thus, using this framework and its pillars of exploitation, powerlessness, and marginalization, I will examine the psychological experiences of contingent faculty as a result of their inequitable working conditions in the academy.

In providing clarity with respect to the scope and nature of the term contingent faculty for this paper, I will use Field and Jones' (2016) definition of *contingent faculty*, to include "sessional faculty and all non-permanent faculty members who are working on part-time or limited term contracts outside the tenure-stream" (p. 9). Similarly, Vander Kloet et al. (2007) use the term *contingent instructors* to refer to "instructors in Canadian postsecondary institutions who hold full- or part-time teaching positions for contractually limited time periods" (p. 1). Furthermore, Rajagopal (2002) makes a distinction between "classic" and "contemporary" faculty. Whereas "classic" refers to industry professionals who have alternative careers and are not primarily

dependent on contingent work in the academy, “contemporary” faculty are those who rely on contingent work as their main source of income and are interested in pursuing full-time work at a university.

Importantly, it is critical to give visibility to the experiences of contingent faculty because they are often marginalized in their communities. For example, because formal policies and practices that advocate for their rights are lacking in many institutions, a large number of non-tenure-track faculty engaged in union organizing at the turn of the century – the largest wave of organizing in higher education since the mid-1970s (Dobbie & Robinson, 2008). Moreover, because existing research on non-tenure track faculty has seldom examined their psychological experiences (Reevy & Deason, 2014), this paper contributes to the field by offering a unique perspective on their needs. As such, the current discussion adopts an interdisciplinary approach as both the theorizing and the implications bear on education, organizational psychology, and equity studies.

## **Literature Review**

### **Neoliberalization of Higher Education**

Macro-structural changes that began in the 1970s, such as globalization and the rise of neoliberal ideology across sectors, have significantly impacted the world of work (Harvey, 1989). Indeed, the growing influence of neoliberal ideology, discourse, and practice has been problematic in higher education (Gould, 2003). In a culture that is driven by cost-benefit analysis and return on investments (ROI), institutions are pressured to be efficient and productive under conditions of chronic underfunding. At the core of the neoliberal approach are values of productivity, innovation and competition (Levin, Alleyeva, & Walker, 2016). Mechanisms of the market and the business-oriented approaches of corporations are adopted, and these translate into tight regulations, performance-based funding, heightened accountability, and increased managerialism. External pressures have also led to changes in cost structures, such as a decrease in faculty salaries alongside an increase in the salaries of senior academic administrators (Schwartz, 2014). Moreover, Brownlee (2015) emphasizes the emergence of intense competition, particularly the preoccupation with institutional reputation and university branding, which has led to greater institutional secrecy and suppression of institutional criticism. As a result, academic freedom

as a social space for critical thought has eroded. Thus, the contemporary university is vulnerable to the influence of neoliberal ideology, and the ways in which it manifests in practice come in many forms. For example, it affects the meaning and objective of post-secondary education, it promotes the commercialization of research findings, and it leads to the quantification of human capital.

First, Amaral, Jones, and Karseth (2002) emphasize an overall shift in governance that poses a threat to the traditional objectives and goals of the university. This is demonstrated in the shift from the social, intellectual, and cultural function of the university to one that is focused on economic imperatives. The idea of a university that is student-centered conflicts with one where students are analogous to customers. Levin et al. (2016) point to an overall reduction of government responsibility for society's educational and cultural needs. For example, the expectation that post-secondary institutions should bear increased responsibility for society's economic needs is evident through the recent emphasis on work-integrated learning (BHER, 2016), the focus on cultivating skilled graduates that are employable and the design of curriculum with employer interests in mind. This has also fueled the growth of private career colleges that further depart from the traditional model of the university, imagined by Flexner (1968) as one that cultivates independent and critical thinkers.

Second, growing out of concern for globalization and rapid technological change, the new research agenda prioritizes the commercialization of research findings, especially in technical fields such as the applied sciences, engineering, technology and medicine (Fallis, 2013). The growing pressure to fulfill market demands results in an unequal distribution of funds that tends to favor the more profitable and marketable STEM research projects over those in the humanities and social sciences (Dennison, 2012). Because of the pressure for knowledge workers to conduct research that is driven by industry interests, the prioritization of profitable research can pose as a barrier to academic freedom (Lyotard, Bennington, & Massumi, 1984). Thus, in the current state of chronic underfunding and cutthroat competition, a question can be asked to what extent can research be conducted under conditions of academic freedom and a true acceptance of the diversity of thought, without the intense pressure to "publish or perish" (Fisher, 1994) and to constantly attract external funding?

Third, institutions are under increasing pressure to quantify and measure the value created by human capital against pre-determined metrics in order to show a desirable return on investment in higher education. The neoliberal imperatives of efficiency and specialization resemble the scientific management approach of Taylorism (Taylor, 1911), which uses a bureaucratic, well-defined and hierarchical approach to work in order to exert power and control over subordinate workers. Following time-and-motion study techniques and logical work designs, this management philosophy largely disregards humanistic concerns in favor of efficiency. While Taylorism was traditionally utilized in the manufacturing sector and applied to industrial and mechanical workers, the underlying principles of scientific management still underpin the newer, post-industrial occupation of the knowledge worker. In what Broudy (1976) calls the scientific and technology approach to education, this perspective characterizes education to the extent that it can be “narrowed, objectified, and its results are publicly identifiable” (p. 106). The term “knowledge worker” emerged in the 1990s alongside the growth of the knowledge-driven economy. Root-Berstein (1989) defines knowledge workers as those who dislike bureaucracy and administration, and work best under conditions that satisfy their curiosity. Similarly, Rosenbaum (1991) characterizes knowledge workers as those who strive for autonomy, achievement, and a sense of self-direction. The best practices for managing knowledge workers include little supervision, high empowerment, and an organizational structure that is high in autonomy, individuality and egalitarianism. However, in most institutions, the contingent faculty work in an environment that does not provide adequate support for knowledge workers. For example, similar to the specialization of work that is prevalent in Taylorism, academic work has also undergone a process of unbundling and fragmentation, which has contributed to deskilling, reduced variety of work, and decreased individual value to the institution (Ovetz, 2015). The extraction of knowledge from workers and the separation from conception to execution is also evident in the rise of middle management and in the creation of roles such as educational technologists or curriculum planners (Jones, 2013), such that the role of contingent faculty is reduced to the dissemination and transmission of knowledge. Thus, the conditions under which contingent faculty work demonstrate the continued dominance and negative impact of neoliberal practices on workers (Harvey, 2005).

## **Financial Challenges and the Rise of Contingent Faculty**

When higher education in Canada transitioned from being an elite system to a mass system (Trow, 2000), institutions faced economic pressures as government funding per full-time equivalent (FTE) student fell sharply in the 1970s. In 1977, the federal government combined transfer payments to post-secondary education, medical care and hospital insurance into a single transfer payment based on population and economic growth rates, and the provincial government subsequently oversaw this new transfer payment (Clark et al., 2009). Thus, the issue of underfunding in higher education was aggravated as it became tied to fiscal restraints, rather than actual program costs. Moreover, because of economic recessions and changing public priorities that concentrated on health care and reduced tax rates, resources became continually scarce. In fact, from 1985-86 to 2007-08, federal transfer payments fell almost one-third (Clark et al., 2009). Furthermore, during the same period, enrolment rates increased by 60 percent, which heightened existing financial challenges. As a result of increased enrolment and decreased funding, the number of contingent faculty grew as precariousness also became more prevalent in other industries. The growth of temporary work in the academic workforce is reflective of the precariousness of the broader labor market, which is evident in the increase of part-time work and alternative forms of employment such as self-employment and entrepreneurship (Cranford, Vosko & Zukewich, 2003).

In addition to federal transfer payments, other major sources of funding for higher education include provincial operating grants, tuition fees and mandatory student fees (Jones, 2014). A university funding formula is used to allocate operating grants (per student) to institutions, whereby each student is characterized as a Basic Income Unit (BIU), weighted differentially according to program. One of the most critical factors that is excluded in this formula, however, is employee compensation costs. In fact, salary and benefits constitute up to 75 percent of overall expenditures, and this should be considered in light of the fact that salary rises more quickly than CPI (consumer price index) inflation. This funding formula also excludes the resources needed for increased research capacity, the lack of which largely dampens the strength of the higher education sector. Specifically, during the 10-year period in which the conservative government was in power, there was a decline of research infrastructure, which included reduced funding for

Statistics Canada and the termination of critical surveys and data systems. The lack of an accessible database and consistent data collection process for information about contingent faculty, for example, render their experiences invisible (Brownlee, 2015). In fact, Dobbie and Robinson (2008) argue that institutions have purposefully made it difficult to obtain quantitative data on contingent faculty. Although some government initiatives – such as the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation (CMSF), Canada Council on Learning (CCL) and Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) – were established to alleviate some of these challenges, support for the development of long-term research capacity has yet to be addressed fully. The economic realities of the past few decades paint a landscape that strongly contrasts the “golden age” of the 1960s, where the academy was characterized by the community of collegiality, the privilege of academic freedom and the security of tenure (Rajagopal, 2002). Specifically, as Hendel and Horn (2008) describes, this was a time when “in exchange for teaching, research and service, faculty were . . . granted autonomy, employment security, freedom of intellectual pursuit, and limited administrative duties” (p. 62). For the contemporary university in the neoliberal context, however, the feasibility of that framework is questionable (Muzzin, 2008).

### **Structural Challenges and Divisions**

The adoption of business-oriented approaches in post-secondary institutions has made them more and more hierarchical and bureaucratic. This thickened administrative structure introduces divisions that come into conflict with the collegial culture of the academy. For example, notions of collegiality may exist in tension with centralized decision-making that reside with the administration. The demand for administrative duties has harmful implications on the psychological experiences of faculty. For instance, the faculty workload is filled with “mundane, bureaucratic work” that increases job dissatisfaction and stress (Russell, 2010, p. 62). Moreover, centralization and formalization of work processes have been linked to greater work alienation (Aiken & Hage, 1966). Furthermore, faculty members, who once held a much greater degree of institutional authority and academic freedom, become susceptible to self-censorship and self-regulation in the panoptical academy (Davies & Bansel, 2010). Indeed, managerial reforms have created stress for higher education employees (Shin & Jung, 2014). The

diversification of administrative roles and the introduction of horizontal and vertical fragmentation exacerbate the tensions between tenure-track faculty and contingent faculty. This is because this framework serves to protect the traditional tenure-stream, full-time professor at the expense of contingent faculty (Jones, 2013). Importantly, tenured faculty have not engaged in collective resistance against the inequitable treatment of contingent faculty (Schwartz, 2014). As a matter of fact, contingent faculty often lack support from their tenure-track counterparts (Gappa, Austin, & Trice, 2005).

The bureaucratic organizational climate of the academy affects the relationship between faculty and their students as well. Berger (2001) argues that a *collegial* organizational climate is beneficial to student persistence, while a *bureaucratic* or a *political* organizational climate can leave a negative impact. Specifically, each dimension is characterized as such: (a) a *collegial* dimension emphasizes collaboration, equal participation, and democratic means in decision-making; (b) a *bureaucratic* dimension focuses on hierarchy, rules and rationality in decision-making; and (c) a *political* dimension exists when competition for resources and conflicting interests exist within the institution. There are similarities between the fragmentation of the academic workforce and the silos among student affairs professionals and administrators, which suggests a problem with the overall organizational structure of post-secondary institutions. Seifert, Arnold, Burrow, and Brown (2011) use the term *silos* to describe institutions where staff work in discrete units and are less committed to the shared mission of supporting students. In contrast, *spider webs* describe institutions where staff believe that supporting student success is a shared and core commitment of their organizational culture. Employees in the latter collegial culture are also committed to using effective and open communication strategies to build connections and foster relationships across divisions. This is important as open communication helps reduce the sense of isolation and disconnectedness (Green, 2007). This type of culture tends to be more horizontal than hierarchical, with shared core values and visions across divisions. Seifert et al. (2011) found that administration in most post-secondary institutions are characterized by *silos*, while only a small number of institutions have the *spider web* framework as their organizational culture. Thus, the structural divisions in most higher education institutions can pose as barriers to supporting contingent

faculty and can be counterintuitive to fostering collaborative and equitable values.

### **Psychological Implications of Contingent Academic Work**

The privilege of academic freedom, long-term security, and reasonable workloads have clearly diminished over the past two decades since Fisher (1994) noted this trend. Instead, there has been a growing prevalence of non-tenure-track positions, heightened workload demands, and increased pressures to secure external funds and to publish research (Fisher, 1994). In addition, other sources of occupational stress for faculty include work-life balance, heavy administrative roles, and enrollment increases (Kinman, 2011). Similarly, Bolden, Petrov, and Gosling (2009) posit that occupational stress is prevalent in higher education because of the uncertainties associated with remaining competitive, managing job demands and expectations, providing service, and increasing growth. The psychological consequences of these occupational changes are evident in a study that examined stress levels reported by academic staff, which showed higher psychological strain and lower job satisfaction in academic staff than in general staff in the university (Winefield & Jarett, 2001). In addition to these factors, contingent faculty face additional barriers because of their status in the academy. For instance, Gopaul et al. (2016) conducted a Canadian faculty survey in 2007 to 2008 that revealed that full-time faculty have high levels of overall job satisfaction and are pleased with their academic careers. This is in contrast with the dark picture painted by Rajagopal (2002)'s survey of part-timers, which revealed that part-timers have disproportionately lower salaries and benefits, have far less authority and influence over decisions that are central to academic work, and whose interests are underrepresented within the model of institutional self-governance. Therefore, under the neoliberalization of higher education, contingent faculty members are susceptible to oppressive working conditions. Young (2004) conceptualizes oppression as follows:

Oppression designates the disadvantage and injustice some people suffer not because a tyrannical power coerces them, but because of the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society. ... [O]ppression refers to systemic constraints on groups that are not necessarily the result of the intentions of a tyrant. ... [I]ts causes are embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and

symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences of following those rules. (p. 39)

In the next section, I will draw on Young (2004)'s "Five Faces of Oppression" and analyze the oppressive working conditions of contingent faculty from three perspectives – exploitation, powerlessness, and marginalization – and explore the psychological effects of their experiences.

## **Exploitation**

The first aspect of oppression is exploitation, defined by Young (2004) as "the transfer of the results of ... labor of one social group to benefit another ... a systematic process in which the energies of the have-nots are continuously expended to maintain and augment the power, status and wealth of the haves" (p. 46). Exploitation manifests as social rules about what is work, who does what work, how work is compensated and how the processes of work reinforces power relations and inequities. According to Rajagopal (2002), part-timers are often assigned unrealistic workloads and have to teach large classes at inconvenient times at multiple institutions. In terms of compensation, their low wages are disproportionate to the regular salary of full-time professors, and are justified through the misconception that they only teach (without research or service activities). Monks (2007) examined academic salaries using data from the National Center for Education Statistics' National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF) in 1999 and found that full-time, non-tenure-track faculty earn 26 percent less per hour than tenure-track assistant professors; and part-time, non-tenure-track faculty earn 64 percent less than tenure-track assistant professors. Likewise, Field and Jones (2016) revealed that many contingent faculty earn significantly less than the LIM-AT (low income measure after tax) measure of the poverty line, which is \$19,930 for a single adult and \$28,185 for a family (Statistics Canada, 2013). The discourse of academic professionalism plays a role in the justification of pay inequity. Embedded in the traditional value system of academia is that research (as the production of knowledge) is more important than teaching (as the dissemination of knowledge), which is considered secondary and peripheral. Because work becomes tied to the perceived worth of that work, these deeply ingrained notions of academic professionalism justify contingent faculty's inequitable compensation. Another barrier to upward

mobility is the limited number of professional development opportunities available to contingent faculty (Meloncon, England, & Ilyasova, 2016) and the lack of support structures (Curtis & Jacobe, 2006) in many (but not all) post-secondary institutions. Indeed, Field and Jones (2016) found that contingent faculty would like more opportunities for professional development and access to university support structures (e.g. teaching and learning centres). However, some institutions do offer support for contingent instructors in the form of handbooks, awards, training sessions, funding and workshops (Vander Kloet et al., 2017).

Equity theory stresses the role of perceived fairness. Perceived equity is the ratio of inputs to return on those efforts (outcomes), and fairness is perceived relative to others' input-outcome ratio. Thus, individuals strive for an equitable or fair exchange between their inputs and outcomes, and the level of equity determines the extent of their job satisfaction (Adams, 1963). Similarly, relative deprivation theory emphasizes the discrepancy between an individual's actual status and the status that he or she expects (Crosby, 1976). Feldman and Turnley (2004) found that relative deprivation is negatively related to career attitudes and job behaviors, such that contingent faculty may find their positions deficient relative to what they expect after years of graduate school or relative to what positions other academics secured after graduation. Furthermore, the person-environment fit model of job stress states that job stress can result from a mismatch between the employee's expectation of what the job involves and what it actually involves (French, Caplan, & Harrison, 1984). Altogether, these theories are related to the concept of cognitive dissonance, whereby discrepancies in a person's thinking, behavior, or perception can cause psychological discomfort and stress (Festinger, 1957). For contingent faculty, cognitive dissonance can arise from a perception of unmet expectations such as the stark contrast between the golden age and the realities of their working conditions. Moreover, cognitive dissonance can arise from perceived inequities compared to tenured faculty – for example, in terms of financial compensation, working conditions and job status. This is important because perceived inequities affect individual wellbeing, satisfaction, and commitment (Gilliland & Chan, 2001). Rajagopal (2002) found that the barriers unique to contingent faculty make them feel like undervalued members of the academy. Not only can this lead to lowered self-esteem, but also a sense of disconnect from the work itself (Schroth & Shah, 2000). Therefore, academics who enter the field with

the expectation of receiving the privileges and security associated with tenure are likely to find themselves in stressful circumstances if short-term contracts and contingent work are the only available options.

### **Powerlessness**

The second aspect of oppression is powerlessness. The powerless, as defined by Young (2004) are “those who lack authority or power, ... those over whom power is exercised without their exercising it [and are] situated so that they must take orders and rarely have the right to give them” (p. 52). Similarly, Suarez-Mendoza and Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara (2008) define powerlessness at work as the feeling that an employee does not have control over the way things are done at work. The dominant structures and power relations in the academy render contingent faculty powerless by excluding them from doing work associated with authority and influence. For example, Rajagopal (2002) found that most full-time faculty members believe that decision-making should be exclusive to full-time faculty because part-timers should not have a legitimate place in the university. As well, they believe that the university does not have a moral obligation to offer full-time positions to long-serving part-timers. Overall, they believe there should be fewer part-time positions and more full-time positions. Moreover, contingent faculty are often unable to advocate for themselves as they lack the time to attend meetings or are limited to decision-making at the grass-roots level without actual influence. Their lack of power and voting rights is exacerbated by the concentration of power in administrators (Dobbie & Robinson, 2008). Furthermore, because the criteria for tenure and promotion is significantly dependent on research productivity and publications, contingent faculty face a major disadvantage as they are typically not equipped with adequate access to resources, time, and funding in most institutions. In fact, Field and Jones (2016) found that many contingent faculty do not have a clear understanding of the system of seniority and promotion at their institutions. As a result, without a regulated process for upward mobility and career progression, they are perpetually bounded by the chains of powerlessness and the cloak of invisibility.

According to Karasek (1979)’s demand-control theory, individuals experience high levels of stress as a result of high job demands that are coupled with low control and a lack of power. Similarly, under demanding conditions with limited control, individuals

experience job strain, which is characterized by physical and psychological harm (Kuper & Marmot, 2003). These constraints and barriers influence the psychological contact (Rousseau, 1995) between the institution as the employer and contingent faculty as the employee. A psychological contract is a set of unwritten mutual exchanges and expectations. In particular, the psychological contract that describes the relationship between the institution and contingent faculty is *transactional* and short-term. In contrast, a *relational* psychological contact is a long-term agreement for job security in exchange for employees' commitment to the organization. If the employer breaks the psychological contract, the employee experiences discontent, demotivation, distrust and non-commitment (Coyle-Shapira & Kessler, 2000). Anderson (2017) found that contingent faculty who experienced a psychological contract breach felt "a loss of identity as an educator due to the nature of the adjunct faculty relationship with the institution; [a] cycle of grief including attempting to come to terms with the loss of the identity as educator and a subsequent shift to the identity of facilitator; [and a] resignation to the status quo driven by a sense of powerlessness" (p. 144). Thus, the pressures for post-secondary institutions to remain competitive amid the fluctuating pressures of the neoliberal market directly affect the psychological health of contingent faculty.

In addition to stress, another consequence of powerlessness is alienation. Fromm (1955) characterizes alienation as a feeling of estrangement from the self and the environment. Nair and Vohra (2010) found that one in five knowledge workers is likely to feel alienated, and that the strongest predictors of alienation are a lack of meaningful work, a lack of self-expression, and a lack of high-quality work relationships in a collegial work environment. Chisholm and Cummings (1979) examined professional-level technical and managerial employees and found that structural factors, such as organizational characteristics, also play a role in cultivating feelings of alienation and powerlessness. Furthermore, they found that alienation leads to certain behavioral and psychological outcomes. For instance, more alienated employees tend to have lower current performance ratings, lower current salaries and higher negative workplace behavior (e.g. tardiness) than those with more positive psychological work experiences.

Finally, powerlessness is associated with meaninglessness, or the perception that an individual's work is not important or worthwhile

(Suarez-Mendoza & Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara 2008). Deci and Ryan (2004) posit that having control or power over how one's work is conducted is an important job resource that enables individuals to deal with work demands. Moreover, having power over one's work fulfills three psychological needs that are required to foster well-being and motivation at work. According to the self-determination theory (SDT), three needs – competence, relatedness and autonomy – are inversely related to powerlessness (Deci & Ryan, 2004). Moreover, Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory offers another way to conceptualize meaninglessness. He theorizes that individual effort is a joint function of the perceived worth of work outcomes and the perception that effort will actually yield those outcomes. The two main elements are expectancy (how likely it is that effort will pay off in performance) and instrumentality (how likely it is that performance will pay off in rewards). Often, the efforts put forth by contingent faculty members are not rewarded appropriately. For example, because the criteria for tenure and promotion is largely based on research productivity and output, contingent faculty's primary activity of teaching is not always recognized and rewarded. Consequently, contingent faculty may find their work meaningless to some extent. Importantly, meaninglessness is negatively related to engagement at work (May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004), job satisfaction and subsequent work efforts (Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway, & McKee, 2007)

## **Marginalization**

Young (2004) describes the marginalized as “the people [that] the system cannot or will not use” (p. 49). As a precarious workforce who is dependent on fluctuations in enrolment and funding, contingent faculty are disguised as “professionals in reserve” (Rajagopal, 2002). The rise of neoliberal and corporate culture in the higher education sector reinforces their status as temporary workers who serve to alleviate financial problems. Moreover, government underfunding and declining revenues have introduced an encroaching sense of urgency for flexible labor. Across the labor market, the rise of the temporary worker unfolds alongside other organizational changes such as restructuring, downsizing and outsourcing (Fudge & Vosko, 2001). The emphasis on the quantification of outcomes in metrics such as cost-benefit analysis reduces the richness of their identities and contributions into commodified labor – arguably, a process of reductionism that facilitates

their oppressive working conditions. The psychological implications that result from a lack of job security can be explained by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943), which posits that individuals are motivated to achieve certain needs, and that some needs are prioritized over others. The most basic needs are physiological (e.g. food, water, rest), followed by safety needs (e.g. security, safety), then social needs (e.g. relationships, belonging), then ego needs (e.g. self-esteem, recognition), and finally self-actualization (e.g. full potential, creative activities). Maslow proposed that one must satisfy lower level needs before moving on to higher level needs.

Of particular relevance to this discussion is the dimension of safety needs. There are two aspects of security for contingent faculty: the first is job security and the second is psychological safety at work. First, the lack of job security is characterized by unpredictable hiring timelines (Kezar, Maxey & Eaton, 2014) and the short-term nature of contingent work, the uncertainty of which is a cause of stress and personal strain for contingent faculty (Field & Jones, 2016). What are the psychological consequences of being a perpetual temporary worker who lacks job security? Vickers and Parris (2007) conducted a series of interviews with so-called flexible workers and examined their personal experiences after they were terminated from employment. They found an overwhelming sense of rejection, betrayal, humiliation, social isolation and shame among the respondents. For instance, interviewees felt embarrassed to disclose the news to family members. Moreover, they experienced shock, disbelief, and a sense of disempowerment. This led to a fractured sense of identity, accomplishment and self-esteem. Due to the loss of trust resulting from termination, individuals expressed an inability to "bounce back" the same way they used to. Furthermore, after overcoming termination and starting their job search, they often have to settle for lower-quality positions, which can result in underemployment and deskilling.

Second, Kahn (1990) describes psychological safety as "feeling able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career" (p. 708). It is also fostered by supportive and trusting interpersonal relationships at work – which is lacking in the academy, according to Rajagopal (2002)'s survey of administrators and full-time faculty. Moreover, psychological safety exists only for those who stay within the boundaries of organizational

norms, which includes conformity to the ways of being that are deemed desirable by the academy. This is important because in addition to academic work, contingent faculty also perform emotional labor, such that the incongruence between one's own emotions and the organizationally desired emotions could result in disengagement from work (Hochschild, 1983). In other words, psychological safety is difficult to attain in the academic panopticon. As a result of self-censorship, "individualized subject[s] take[] up the responsibility for performing themselves within the terms laid out for them. Their viability depends on compliance, and compliance itself is taken over by economic discourses as a term of accountancy and measurement" (Davies & Bansel, 2010, p. 17). Thus, the lack of psychological safety – both in the form of low job security and self-censorship in the academy – can pose as additional barriers in the psychological experiences of contingent faculty.

Another factor that further marginalizes contingent faculty is the feminization of this group. Rajagopal (2002) found a disproportionate number of female part-timers in the health sciences, humanities and social science, and that female academics have lower wages and higher dissatisfaction with their work compared to their male counterparts. Of particular significance are the various barriers that are unique to females, as male dominance of the academy is evident: first, more women are concentrated in temporary or non-tenure track positions, limited to teaching; second, women are likely to hit the glass ceiling, because consideration for promotion is skewed towards research rather than teaching; third, women face a "chilly climate" in which the inequities unique to women are disregarded; and finally, although the number of women in the academy has risen, there is still a lack of representation in higher levels and in positions of power.

### **Implications for Undergraduate Teaching and Learning**

Because contingent faculty are often assigned to teach large, introductory courses at the undergraduate level (Rajagopal, 2002), they become a critical contact for a vast number of incoming students. While the use of contingent faculty is a cost-saving strategy, it can be highly problematic for the quality of teaching and learning. Umbach (2007) found that "compared to their tenured and tenure-track peers, contingent faculty, particularly part-time faculty, are underperforming in their delivery of undergraduate instruction" (p. 110). Moreover, Johnson (2011) asserts

that compared to tenured faculty, contingent faculty are more likely to assign higher grades, which may decrease academic challenge and student motivation. Other challenges for contingent faculty in undergraduate education include unmanageable class sizes, the lack of private meeting space (Field & Jones, 2016), limited on-campus presence (due to travel to multiple institutions) and time (due to demanding workloads). Field and Jones (2016) found that contingent faculty are concerned about a) a lack of privacy in a shared office space; (b) the difficulties in scheduling office hours with administration; and (c) the challenges in meeting with students due to the lack of private space. There are long-term implications as well; for example, although contingent faculty conduct disproportionately more teaching than their tenured counterparts (Clark, Moran, Skolnik, & Trick, 2009), they often have no control over curriculum development, and are barred from having any significant decision-making authority in this domain due to the specialization of academic work. The unbundling and increasing fragmentation of academic work mean that some academics merely act the medium by which knowledge is transmitted, as learning technologists and administrative staff take on more responsibility for curriculum design and assessment (Macfarlane, 2011). Ward (2008) contends that tenured faculty is essential to the overall quality of an institution, such that “the greater the percentage of tenured faculty, the greater the continuity within the learning enterprise [, and] this influences the overall quality of education at the institution” (p. 58).

In some cases, institutions do not equip contingent faculty with the appropriate tools and support for their activities. For example, due to the lack of time, the lack of professional development opportunities, and the unbundling of academic work, contingent faculty may rely on the knowledge transmission model (Bailey, Jaggars & Jenkins, 2015) and may feel reluctant to experiment with new pedagogical approaches due to the dangers of risk-taking and a dependency on teaching evaluations for job security. At the same time, institutions can increase the quality of education by providing opportunities for contingent faculty to engage in “transformative reflection” (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Reflective teaching implies that teaching needs to be adapted to the instructor’s own personal strengths and teaching context, as what works for one instructor or student might not work for another. Through transformative reflection, instructors identify best practices, based on theory, and help

generate innovative solutions to existing problems to improve their pedagogical approaches.

Johnston (2010) suggested effective ways through which instructors can enhance student success by supporting students' intellectual and personal development. This includes using various assessment and feedback techniques, and monitoring student engagement in terms of participation and performance. Moreover, he argued that an effective instructor deploys various classroom techniques, has strong connections with students, and actively develops collaborative learning environments through various pedagogical approaches. Similarly, Chickering and Gamson (1987) proposed that quality undergraduate education should include frequent student-faculty contact in and out of class, active learning, structured exercises, challenging discussions, team projects and peer critiques. Feedback is also important – it has to be prompt, frequent, and should provide suggestions and opportunities for improvement. Moreover, there needs to be a strong sense of shared purpose, strong support from administrators and faculty, and policies and procedures that are consistent with these goals. Lastly, there needs to be adequate funding for professional development for faculty, and minimal bureaucratic regulations in pedagogical development. The reality is that these practices are often infeasible given the institutional barriers that characterize the work environment of contingent faculty.

Furthermore, structural divisions in the contemporary university pose challenges for the quality of undergraduate education as well. Austin and Scherrei (1980) found that collegial organizational cultures are positively correlated to student persistence, while bureaucratic administrative styles have a negative relationship with undergraduate degree attainment. They also found that high levels of humanistic values in administrative behaviors are essential to collegiality, which leads to greater student well-being and decreased attrition rates. Bureaucracy de-personalizes the post-secondary experience, making it difficult for students to have meaningful contact with faculty and administrators. One must be cautious of the potential misalignment between institutional equity statements and the practices that make up lived experiences of contingent faculty. To what extent do statements of equity and anti-oppression of the academy hold true in practice and are they reflective of the everyday experiences of contingent faculty in

academia? Any misalignment has potential implications for students. Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004) discussed two factors that play a role in promoting or dampening student motivation. First, decreased motivation may result due to a loss of institutional integrity, which is the degree to which students perceive institutions to be aligned with its vision and mission. Second, the degree to which institutions are committed to student welfare and care for students can affect motivation as well. It is important to consider these factors because while some institutions convey values of equity, diversity and inclusivity, the systems in place nonetheless facilitates the oppressive working conditions of contingent faculty. Thus, the lack of institutional integrity and a misalignment in policy and practice can play a critical role in affecting student motivation and persistence.

### **Conclusion**

Now more than ever, it is crucial to examine the benefits and harm of the neoliberal agenda in higher education, and to critically assess to what extent these policies and practices facilitate the development and growth of knowledge workers. Not only should institutions strive to correct inequities in the academic hierarchy, but also examine organizational climates that normalize oppression by perpetuating isolation and divisiveness against any collective resistance to oppression. Often, these practices and organizational structures situate contingent faculty members in conditions of powerlessness, marginalization and exploitation that affect their psychological experiences. Interestingly, both Monks (2007) and Rajagopal (2002) found that many part-timers are willing to accept their working conditions and level of compensation, and would still choose the same career path if given the choice to start over. Thus, future research should explore the factors that motivate these individuals to remain resilient in the face of such conditions. The critical approach here informs future investigations on broader systemic-level changes, such as how institutions can strike a balance between relying on contingent faculty and providing adequate support for them, or how institutional policies and programs can cultivate an environment to better address these inequities. Institutions must prioritize the reduction of inequality in the academy – not merely through institutional statements, insignificant changes, or espoused values – but rather through significant changes in policy, culture and practice, so that individuals who bring

their valuable perspectives can genuinely thrive in a more integrative than fragmenting ecosystem.

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