

[Melissa Fernández Arrigoitia](#), Gwendolyn Beetham, Cara E. Jones, and Sekile Nzinga-Johnson
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Women's Studies and Contingency: Between Exploitation and Resistance

Melissa Fernández Arrigoitia, Gwendolyn Beetham, Cara E. Jones, and
Sekile Nzinga-Johnson

We know the numbers: 76 percent of faculty in US universities is contingent. We are captivated by the viral news pieces—"Thesis Hatement," "Academia's Indentured Servants," "Death of a Professor," and "The PhD Now Comes with Food Stamps"—and we follow hashtags on Twitter—#NotYourAdjunctSidekick. But in what ways does women's studies' relatively precarious place within academia fit into these conversations? How do feminists working in a variety of disciplines reconcile their feminist labor politics with the need to grow their programs and departments under the edicts of the corporate university, particularly when relying upon contingent labor to do so? These questions were at the heart of three collectively organized sessions on feminist contingency at the 2014 annual National Women's Studies Association Conference (NWSA) in San Juan, Puerto Rico, the highlights of which are presented here. This article hopes that the lessons learned in this historic event—lessons about silence-breaking and collectivizing, but also about inequity, privilege, shame, and guilt—will be used in women's studies classrooms, departmental meetings, and beyond, contributing to the growing conversation about this important issue, and perhaps even offering action steps toward solutions.

Keywords: adjunct / contingency / exploitation / higher education / labor / National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) / neoliberal university / women's studies

"If [the department chair] calls me on Thursday with a course, I will have the weekend plus Monday to prepare, as classes begin the next Tuesday. And I can do no pre-preparation

before Thursday because he didn't say what kind of class it might be. I hate waiting. I hate preparing for classes in so little time. Of course I can do it; I will do it. I have prepared for a four-course semester load in 2 ½ weeks—using books I'd never seen in two of the classes and placing last-minute book orders for the other two classes; planning at least two weeks of no-text teaching while waiting for those late orders to be filled. . . . It is Thursday night, and I have heard nothing from the department chair. I fume to my partner, to a friend on the phone, if he calls tomorrow I'm just going to say no, I won't take a class this late. I need more time. But we all know I will take the class, if he calls."

—Jeannie Ludlow

How We Got Here: An Introduction

When we walked into Room 102-C of the Puerto Rico Convention Center, where the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) was hosting its annual membership assembly meeting (a forum where recommendations are presented, debated, and passed by its constituents), our expectations were rather humble, shaped by the knowledge that there were innumerable compelling sessions taking place at the same time, and the hunch that adjunctification—the exponential growth of part-time or contractual faculty members in higher education—was not a very popular or sexy topic. Indeed, some of us feared that few would attend and made a point of not missing the meeting, especially as we had been part of the preliminary conversations that led to a set of proposals to bring contingency to NWSA's attention and centrally into its future work agenda. The response, however, was overwhelming. It was the most-attended membership assembly meeting that the NWSA had recalled in recent years. The attendees, both tenured and untenured, new and longstanding members of NWSA, unanimously voted to approve the first resolution (which asked for travel assistance for contingent faculty), while the second multipronged resolution was tabled for refinement by its author. The support evident in these meetings was contrasted with the fact that, to our knowledge, no women's studies department or program chairs attended any of the roundtable sessions on contingency, although both the director and assistant director of NWSA did attend the final session. These tensions reflect larger, deep-seated ones that are rooted in women's studies' historically precarious location within the academy, as will be explored below.

Although the issue of contingency is a politically tense one within the women's studies community, in retrospect we could have known that interest levels would be high at this particular moment in history. When, less than a year

earlier, coauthor Gwendolyn Beetham solicited an open call to those who would like to participate in an NWSA 2014 conference session on the topic, replies were so numerous that a collaborative effort ensued to fine-tune the proposal into three separate roundtable sessions. Each session was elaborated along the following areas of concern, which we address in the same order within this piece:

- 1.) “The Thin Line between Love and Hate: Feminist Responses to Academic Contingency”
- 2.) “The Adjunct Body: Contingency, (Im)Permanence, and Abjection”
- 3.) “Advocacy and Activism in the Contingent Labor Movement”

Further, the issue of academic contingency had been forefront in the news, reaching beyond the higher education-specific outlets throughout the preceding year, partly as a result of the widely publicized death of Margaret Mary Vojtko in September 2013 (Kovalik 2013). As an 83-year-old woman who had been an adjunct at Duquesne University for twenty-five years and who died without health insurance or other university-supplied benefits, Vojtko’s circumstances shocked those who were unaware of the material realities of many contingent faculty and became a grim story around which advocates mobilized.

In the meantime the material reality of contingency reared its ugly head for our participants. In past years some of the roundtable participants had been part of panels that were disbanded due to the high costs of conference registration, travel expenses, and membership dues. This was no different in 2014, and many whose papers were accepted found themselves unable to attend NWSA’s conference in San Juan. Although we have no official data on the average cost of attending, registration could cost anywhere between \$95 (student/early registration) and \$240 (salary range of \$80,000 plus/late registration), depending on whether one registered before or after the early-bird date of July 15th. This fee did not include the price of accommodation, which ranged between \$50–\$250 per night depending on whether one shared a room, nor did it include travel costs or the cost of becoming an NWSA member, which one had to do to present at the conference and was also priced on a sliding scale from \$90 (student/retired/unemployed) to \$235 (salary range of \$80,000 and over). Without expenses and travel costs this four-day conference could cost anywhere between \$385 and \$1,225.

The lack of adequate funding was obvious and, working alongside allies at the adjunct-advocacy organization New Faculty Majority (NFM) Foundation, Beetham reached out to the NWSA to provide these additional finances, which were subsequently denied. Ideas were circulated about how to best approach this situation, leading to a highly successful crowd-funding campaign through the website Indiegogo. Its meager goal of \$2,500 was quickly reached, allowing for \$500 to be given to each participant in need. Approximately fifty fellow feminists supported the grassroots campaign in the form of both monetary and in-kind donations. It is fair to say that what started as a small outreach effort

galvanized allies from across the country, as well as Puerto Rico and the UK, into a rich assemblage of actions, brainstorming, and bodies, leading to new productive alliances and networks around the topic of contingency—all of which were powerfully conveyed in the NWSA assembly meeting with which this section began.

What follows is our own effort to do some justice to those who voiced their concerns during the three roundtable sessions, as we draw from the rich and purposeful discussions and situate them within larger, and long-standing, conversations about the precarity of women's studies in academe. Before moving on to more detailed accounts of each session (parts 1–3 below), we identify and describe cross-cutting themes that emerged, as well as raise critical methodological points. In recounting the 2014 NWSA conference sessions, the purpose of this article is to suggest future avenues for analysis based on the discussions and re-theorizations of contingency that took place at the conference. It is important to note that the article runs in chronological order and, as such, some definitions of key terms may not appear until later in the recounting. In addition, theoretical positions and/or definitions of key terms may differ among roundtables. This is not a mistake on our part, but indicative of the coauthors' desire to encompass the different meanings and theoretical approaches used by the people whose voices we are carrying forward in the piece. While our writing is, of course, an exercise of both summary and analysis, we took a strong position *against* a meta-reordering of ideas and events and toward a recreation of the organic way in which the discussion progressed throughout the course of the conference. These conversations and our subsequent writing are also indicative of the fact that the feminist conversation on contingency, both theoretically and practically, is in a nascent stage. It is our hope that some of the ongoing and productive tensions that emerged from these discussions will be further dissected and explored in future conversations and collective organizing.

Situating Contingency

Contingency is a variable reality premised on highly flexible and exploitable labor. Compared to their more secure tenured counterparts, this mass of insecure academic workers engage in additional forms of noncontractual labor: they work longer hours for less pay; they are expected to perform at the highest standards irrespective of their work/life balance; and they feel pressured to conform and accept otherwise unreasonable requests—all in the hopes of keeping their current insecure positions or hoping for a different (better) future alternative.

In times of a downsized higher education job market there is a sense that adjuncts should feel grateful for having *some* job, and that they work in positions they have voluntarily accepted. In other words, many are not ready to accept that the “choice” that adjuncts make to take on unfavorable posts is heavily conditioned and constrained by a wider environment of scarcity. Part 2 examines

how this contingent reality operates as a conflicted space of heightened tensions between power and submission, agency and vulnerability, choice and necessity. Often, as so many of the participants in the roundtables attested, the fault lines between those two sets of corresponding axes (that is, power and submission) manifest in elevated or strained states of emotional stress and anxiety. In the context of a lack of institutional care or support and ever-increasing pressures, an inattention to these psychological impacts can exacerbate existing physical and mental health conditions. Contingency is therefore more than an economic set of circumstances: it is a fluctuating, embodied process with both material and emotional states of being.

Institutional disregard of contingency—can be at least partially attributed to the limited understanding we all have regarding the diversity of experiences and realities of adjunct labor. In this sense all roundtables made calls to deepen, broaden, and extend our knowledge and language around it. One clear message was the need to extend current definitions of contingency in order to include the labor conditions of historically exploited and marginalized groups like women of color (see part 1) or academic workers who are subject to compounded forms of stress and discrimination (part 2), as well as to address the wider societal conditions that place them in these multiply precarious circumstances in the first place. The academy—and women’s studies—does not exist in a bubble, but is part of the larger political economy. Contingency therefore needs to be read within that broader socioeconomic context, and our theoretical devices must become more attuned not only to the way in which academic and nonacademic actors produce and reproduce these particular conditions, but also to the diverse lived realities that permeate it.

From Analogous Devaluation to Solidarity

The symbolic and material devaluation of adjunct labor is not unique to higher education, but rather extends to depreciated positions that rely upon expendable bodies, from low-skilled or informal service work to caring, domestic, or mothering roles and even servitude, as discussed in part 2. This resonates with the resolute need to connect adjunct struggles to similarly situated “others” across the social spectrum, as well as to consider adjunct conditions of exploitation within the wider flows of our globalized and interconnected world, all the while noting the crucial structural and power differentials that exist among and within them.

Each session made recurring suggestions to form stronger bridges of solidarity with administrative and service personnel within the university, with students who also live increasingly precarious and debt-ridden lives, and with other contract and tenured faculty, both full- and part-time. However, if bridges are to be built between part-time and full-time tenured and nontenured, as well as among faculty, staff, and administrators, women’s studies should take heed of

its interdisciplinary foundations and ensure that it is doing so with attention to similar struggles in other departments across the higher education sector. Moreover, as our Puerto Rican and UK participants made evident, this plight is not constrained to the United States, but stretches across (the imagined and practiced) national boundaries of the world—a theme that is returned to more explicitly in part 3.

Reform from within or Radical Alternatives

Contingent faculty grapple with some of the very tensions that women's studies has faced since its inception. Historically, feminist academics have been vulnerably positioned, whether within women's studies or other disciplines. But to thrive, women's studies has had to follow and adopt, sometimes uncritically, the models of other disciplines that continue to marginalize, devalue, and diminish certain kinds of knowledge or progressive practices. This is, of course, not unique to women's studies; institutionalization seems to require that certain interests or positions be subsumed, silenced, or merged to produce the illusion of a homogenous unity. What we are seeing in relation to the use of contingent workers is that the imperative to conform with dominant institutional policies betrays some of the fundamental principles of feminist thought, including social justice and equity. And these tensions have not gone unnoticed; as Robyn Wiegman (2002) notes in the introduction to the edited collection *Women's Studies on Its Own*, "Women's Studies [programs] . . . own economic marginality in the institution (and, at times, economic dependence on the disciplines) generates a pipeline of exploitation, with the very functioning of feminist curricula contingent on the feminization of academic labor" (23). This long-documented pipeline of exploitation, which has only expanded in the decade since Wiegman's collection was published, leads us to the question posed throughout the NWSA conference roundtables: Will reforming and improving women's studies alone improve the situation of contingent labor (if we recognize that the situation stretches beyond the field), or do more radical alternatives both within and outside these departments need to be seriously considered?

The Politics of Naming

In writing this article, knowing whose voices to amplify and how to do so raised some important methodological questions for us that resonated directly with key issues discussed in all sessions: mainly, the vulnerability of adjuncts and their allies and the fear of reprisal. We needed to be careful that our actions as coauthors were akin to the very ethos of responsibility and care that drives our common struggle for the recognition of diversified adjunct labor. It became obvious relatively early in the writing process that while breaking silence is often understood as an explicitly political or transgressive act—something that all

participants did in speaking openly about their experiences at the NWSA—disclosure and making oneself visible in all possible platforms or formats, including this publication, is not such a straightforward affair.

The ranges of comfort people feel when talking about issues of contingency are often (but not always) related to the levels of security they face or the strength they have within their respective higher education institutions. For instance, tenured faculty's awkwardness, silence, discomfort, or general unwillingness to engage with the ugly messiness of this topic when confronted by their contingent "others" may be at least partially explained by their position of safety and security, or alternatively by a paralyzing and unproductive sense of guilt. To be fair, many of them may have come from or occupy a state of contingency themselves and are eager to leave it behind as memory; other potential tenured allies feel powerless in the face of administrative decision-making about new hiring lines. Moreover, as is explored in this article (and in this special issue), women's studies itself has always been a contingent space within the academy, so even those whose positions are relatively secure are also sometimes hesitant when discussing issues surrounding contingent labor—a double bind. Such individual acts, however, must not be understood as isolated from the larger and dominant ideological myth of "achievement" and the capitalist narrative of "deserving success," which allow for and structure these affective and collective disconnections.

At the other end of the scale, adjuncts that appear to be in the same kind of formal employment situation as their tenured colleagues (in terms of teaching tasks) may, in fact, be facing very different kinds of everyday institutional pressures, requirements, and power structures. These subjective differences will determine how free they feel to speak about their conditions of exploitation. Some may do so *in spite of* the potential repercussions they face, while others simply cannot risk losing their already-insecure jobs. These differences matter, as do the solidarities that must be bridged within and across them.

The decision of whether or not to be quoted by name in this piece was therefore not a simple or apolitical one. In what follows, those who wanted to or could be named with or without reprisal have been appropriately quoted, while those who chose to remain anonymous have been called "the participant" throughout and all institutional affiliations removed. Being able to cater to both of these was, of course, essential to the production of this text. Our collective instinct was to honor the stories and words of those involved, and to humanize them by recourse to the intimate act of naming. Indeed, for participants who could be quoted we have used their first names throughout (after first mention) as a way of challenging the "objective" distancing that referenced surnames engender, drawing our readers closer (and hopefully more empathetically) to the personal stories being told. The powerful consciousness-raising initiatives of second-wave feminists understood and mobilized these kinds of personalized narratives early on in women's movements, to great political effect. Moreover,

knowing as we do the power and pressures that go along with being referenced within academic publications in our contemporary environments, remaining anonymous could once again work against those already-undervalued scholars whose insightful laborious contributions would not be fully attributed or recognized.

On the other hand, within the context of what is arguably a nascent struggle that is explicitly critical of those dominant systems that pit us against one another *as* individuals, willful anonymity cannot simply be understood here as a measure of individual degrees of vulnerability. The choice to speak out anonymously while aware of the full contradiction of what it means to be both loud and silenced is also a way of making visible an otherwise publicly muted form of personal pain and injury. The missing name echoes the missing value they have been granted; it renders palpable the very real fears and pressures faced by the contingent subject. In this way critical acts of naming and namelessness are a collective manifestation against the conventional neoliberal university.

In parts 1–3 below we engage in a detailed discussion of what was presented at each of the three 2014 NWSA roundtable sessions on contingency. We have also included the original abstracts of each session, as these were not only the calls to which the participants responded, but also the framing devices that structured the ensuing conversations.

Part 1: Thin Line between Love and Hate

“As the firstborn child of grade-school educated, working-poor immigrants, I saw education as my salvation and my future. Since childhood I have also been stubbornly committed to the idea that success means doing what you love, not earning a lot of money. I had no idea how prophetic these childhood visions would be.”

—Jo Trigilio

Like Jo, several panelists who work as contingent *and* tenure-track faculty offered their lived experience “as a basis to develop theory.” Personal testimony, work narratives, academic labor-policy analysis, and women of color feminist-conceptual interventions were used to interrogate the performances and rhetoric of “love-labor” in academia, as well as the capitalist logics and gains, affective tactics, and gendered dimensions of contingent labor. Through collective denunciations of inequity they followed a long feminist tradition of exposing historic gender-based labor injustices. Their analysis also deepened discussions of contingency by noting that whether on or off the tenure track, precarity and disposability continues to be disproportionately experienced by women and people of color.

The analysis of the dominant higher education systems was continually nuanced in relation to the precarious and uncomfortable position of women's studies within them: on the one hand, as an interdisciplinary field that has struggled to gain legitimacy for over forty years, its survival and proliferation across institutions suggests that the university has both accepted and valued it; but on the other, a closer feminist examination suggests that the discipline continues to be marginalized, and that the neoliberal university looms and threatens it with the slashing of program budgets, the usurpation and reabsorption of our hard-fought forms of institutionalized power and resources by academic top management, and the implementation of corporatized employment practices that casualize and feminize academic labor (Schell 1998). These practices and the ideologies that undergird them are also intensifying historic inequities faced by faculty of color (McMillan Cottom 2014; Osei-Kofi 2012). Such stark forms of labor segmentation and the love-labor premises they are founded on beckon institutionalized, vulnerable academic feminists to engage critically in academic work and class struggles. The first session engaged with these difficult dialogues through three key themes: work valuation, exploitation, and student relationships.

Roundtable 1: Abstract

It is assumed—particularly for women—that if you do what you love, you will do it regardless of monetary and material compensation. However, low wages and nonexistent benefits mean exploitation rather than love for contingent faculty. What racial and socioeconomic assumptions ground love-labor? In what do these broader trends that surround the increasing contingency of the academic labor force mirror the feminization of the global workforce? What feminist responses could be generated about a love-labor that is unhealthy, even abusive?

Invisible Work and Worth

“Too many of the current discussions about how to solve the problems of higher education include only the perspectives of administrators and full-time faculty,” Julianne Guillard explained. Yet, academic managers do not adequately address the economic and material realities of contingent faculty. Instead, the privilege of not knowing (that many of their feminist and working-class colleagues live below the poverty line) and possibly of not caring (that many tenure-track faculty and academic managers are disengaged from academic labor struggles or complicit in order to advance their own precarious and/or individualist careers) suggests an underlying insensibility toward the burgeoning “perma-temp” labor conditions. Troublingly, it also suggests that the place where adjuncts labor and love are hostile terrains to be managed and negotiated individually rather than through collective feminist action.

Testimonies of pain and betrayal convey adjuncts' lack of voice and visibility both in the academy and within women's studies. Yet, gendered and domesticated forms of love-labor, whether at home or in higher education, as one participant noted, has been "rendered invisible"—reflecting a key assumption driving the exploitation of our work: that love-labor does not exist and is not worth a thing. Sekile Nzinga-Johnson (2013) also suggests that women of color's performances of academic labor, particularly those forms that have been imposed or undervalued, deserve greater integration into our academic-labor discourse and struggles. She emphasizes that these performances of love-labor are rendered invisible under newer labor formations and producing compounded forms of inequity for women of color academics. These realities acted as both literal and symbolic salt in the panelists' wounds as they struggled with the paradox of performing the work they were committed to inside systems that they felt did not express a reciprocal commitment to them as workers and institution builders.

In this latter sense, Letizia Guglielmo encouraged the creation of opportunities for contingent scholars who lack support and resources for producing scholarship:

Although the academy views publications as cultural currency and often accepts them as means for purchasing advancement, contingent faculty members are often neither encouraged nor supported in professional development efforts—and may even be discouraged from pursuing scholarly interests. What does it mean when many of our best and most experienced teachers are not involved in the conversations that shape our fields of study? It is essential for all faculty voices to be included in scholarly conversations because as tenure-track positions shrink, so, too, do the number of voices in the scholarship that shapes the field.

Her questions are consistent with those raised by other marginalized and precarious faculty regarding how power and hierarchies in academic institutions are reproduced and managed. Here, she interrogates not only which bodies remain in the academy, but also which bodies of knowledge receive valorization as well. Her curiosities are especially pertinent to the field of women's studies given its stated commitments to feminist scholars and feminist forms of knowledge production and social justice. Her comments also highlight the intellectual and social impact of casualization, which entails losing our colleagues and the knowledge that they have the potential to produce. This resonates with a point made later by Ana Matanzo about how the privatization of universities is dangerously reducing the institutionalized space for critically addressing enduring social problems—what, in theory, should be the guiding ethos of universities.

Privatization from within has reduced the allocation of public funds, systematically diminishing the public university's distinctive features, including the

exploration of new areas of studies which promote individual and collective gains that cannot be easily measured by commercial or market standards. This has created an unjust and discriminating labor system that is a poor model for sustainable social development.

Both Letizia's and Ana's analyses remind us what is at stake beyond the university when we lose critical scholars who have often sought to redress many social injustices and forms of inequity.

In addition to broader structural critiques, panelists in this session also pushed back against a perverse conservative rhetoric that frames contingent laborers as acting within a capitalist "free-choice" market framework, as if contingency were a freely chosen professional position among many others. They interpreted this discourse as misguided, in that it blames individual workers instead of critiquing the larger structures leading to the defunding of higher education and the rerouting of academic budgets in favor of the exponential growth of administrative salaries and to the erosion of tenure.

Julianne referenced Gretchen Reevy and Grace Deason's (2014) findings that suggest that being worried about one's stability, especially when one is deeply committed to their work, contributed to anxiety, stress, and depression. This research resonated with several panelists and attendees and served as an empirical reminder of the human toll produced by capitalist logics cloaked in love-labor discourses. As a response to the invisibilized exploitative conditions of love-labor, Julianne recentered the agency and worth of contingent faculty and suggested that, in addition to unionizing, adjuncts need to mobilize and organize "to make their labor visible and shift the balance of power so that administrators are compelled to listen to our voices and acknowledge what we do."

Exploiting Our Love

The invisible mechanisms through which insecurity is produced and felt generate a second perverse assault on the adjunct: mainly, that insecurity often drives contingent faculty to labor more for less. Naming this modern form of exploitation, several panelists noted how, within a context of instability and competition, they must go above and beyond their tenure-track colleagues to prove their worth and earn their contracts for each course. These forms of workplace injustice Nzinga-Johnson (2013) noted echo and compound those of marginalized faculty of color who have historically and similarly felt the need or are expected to go above and beyond their white counterparts to secure their faculty positions.

Jo also reminded the audience that the suggestion that full-time, nontenure-track faculty have it better than course-by-course hired adjuncts not only breeds tension among worker groups, but also hides the way in which these groups share similar exploitative locations within the academic hierarchy and without access to faculty governance. She clarified an often-overstated notion

of her relative job security and the understated reality of her contracted vulnerability: “full-time, contract members receive better pay and benefits. They are usually provided an office and are often treated as members of their departments. Unfortunately, full-time annual-contract members also find themselves in conditions perfect for exploitation. Annual-contract faculty members are under the constant threat of being replaced by several adjuncts.” Full-time contract faculty members are ripe for exploitation and abuse by their institutions, departments, and their complicit tenure-track colleagues. Jo presented six ways that institutions produce and legitimize forms of worker exploitation and coercion:

- 1.) Because we are treated like members of our departments we are expected to teach the same number of courses, if not more, and perform most of the same duties as tenure-track faculty [for example, attend meetings, advise students, and so on], but receive significantly less pay.
- 2.) When asked to take on a task or teach a new course, we feel that we cannot say no. We feel we must say yes to everything.
- 3.) Because many contract faculty members are more likely to focus on praxis or be practitioners in their fields, we find ourselves mentoring interested students in ways that are not compensated or acknowledged.
- 4.) We are fearful of exercising our freedom of speech, especially during meetings. We keep our heads down and do our work.
- 5.) We work harder, work more hours, and consistently attend all required meetings and events, lest someone voice a complaint about us.
- 6.) Going above and beyond the call of duty is necessary for consideration of contract renewal, but excellent performance never ensures that our contract will be renewed. In other words, we must always operate in excellent mode, even though that will not ensure our job.

Collectively, the panelists offered nuances that extend theorizations of the conditions of contingency and underscore the imperative that coalition-building must occur between full- and part-time adjuncts, as well as between nontenure- and tenure-track faculty. Additionally, Ana strongly advocated for the preservation of tenure as a response to the casualization of academic labor. She noted that contingent faculty do not have a voice in the ways that tenure tracks do and therefore have no power in faculty governance and institutional decisions. She offered insight from the perspective of a faculty member serving on an institutional governing board, noting that “in the last decade I have witnessed the erosion of tenure in the higher education workforce, thus reducing the scope of our academic autonomy or freedom to decide who teaches what, how, and to whom.” Over time, “the increased number of adjunct professors has significantly reduced the faculty representation in academic governance,” and she suggested that we mobilize to ensure that adjuncts be incorporated into university-governance structures. Ana’s remarks remind us that for all faculty

members, tenure and other collectivized forms of democratic power are weakening, but that in signing their contract contingent faculty are forced to accept their condition of disenfranchisement in the name of love-labor.

Students in the Dark, Students Exposed

The destabilization of faculty governance noted above also has implications for student learning (Benjamin 2002). First, the rise of disingenuous institutional-marketing tactics in the neoliberal university relies upon a discursive language of student–teacher connection that hides, for both students and their parents, the exploitation of contingent love-labor that allows that veneer to exist. As Jo explains, “glossy college and university promotional materials boast about their commitments to excellence in teaching, being student-centered, and valuing civic engagement. Paradoxically, the people who perform the bulk of the labor central to the core missions of four-year institutions are the very people who have the lowest status, receive the lowest pay, and are treated poorly.”

Moreover, Sekile noted that “women of color academics find their futures and the futures of their students and their junior colleagues more vulnerable than ever with dwindling institutional resources under neoliberalism.” She further argued that “the undervalued labor performed by social justice–minded faculty, particularly by women of color who often desperately attempt to retain their fellow academic ‘others,’ is structurally exploited, yet these forms of labor simultaneously contribute to the precarity of women of faculty.” Although institutional service and engagement with students, often framed as “love-labor,” are undervalued and invisibilized in the tenure and promotion process, these selfless and often exploited forms of free labor are necessary to retain the structurally vulnerable students they have committed to in their efforts to enact social change.

Julianne wondered that if students and parents were made aware of the negative impact of the casualization of the academic workforce, whether they would care and see how these practices also undermine their own interests. Her sentiments echoed those of Ernst Benjamin (2002) of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), who reminds us that “[t]hose among us—whether policy-makers, faculty, administrators, or educational researchers—who have urged that tenure-track faculty devote more attention to undergraduate learning need to recognize that this requires that there are, in fact, tenure-track faculty assigned and committed to core undergraduate instruction” (4). Without negating the individual investments of contingent faculty members, Benjamin makes a wider systemic case and links the reallocation of tenure-track teaching appointments to the institutional investment in student learning. In other words, the interests of students (undergraduate, in this case) cannot be fully met by faculty, whether contingent or tenure track, until universities designate funds to allow the space and time for teaching to take place without the need for exploitation of the self or others.

During this roundtable Julianne exposed a disturbing trend concerning students and academic staff who have become more cognizant of contingent faculty members' vulnerability and often exploit their precarious labor position by intentionally advising students to register for classes taught by adjuncts to boost grades, secure student-athletes' academic eligibility, or otherwise harass contingent faculty. Feminists and other marginalized scholars have long critiqued the body politics that unfold in the classroom. Contract status, like gender, race, ethnicity, disability, age, and other forms of social inequity, has become yet another marker that fee-paying student customers can draw on and attack in order to seize power in feminist classrooms. These emergent though troubling classroom dynamics point to the ways in which institutionalized noncommitment is lived and felt by contingent bodies.

Resituating Love-Labor

This first session was both revealing and energizing in that it named twenty-first-century labor issues of concern for academic feminists. The diverse roundtable panelists challenged capitalist, heteropatriarchal, and racist assumptions embedded in dominant constructions of love-labor. Collectively, they cogently echoed the themes in Minnie Bruce Pratt's June 2003 NWSA convention's keynote address in New Orleans over a decade ago when she warned that "the oppression of women, the control of our labor—our child-bearing labor, and the labor of our minds and hands and hearts—is essential to maintaining the grip of capitalism on the world and to continuing these huge profits" (2004, 28). She reminds us that the structures and institutions that work to constrain us in the ways posited in this session are always crucially linked to the gendered body.

Part 2: The Adjunct Body—Contingency, (Im)permanence, and Abjection

The mapping of contingency onto both individual and political bodies was the focus of the second roundtable, "Feminist Perspectives on Contingency in Academia." Panelists in this session occupied a variety of positions, from online adjunct laborers to those with one-year visiting positions, to others who had moved from the ranks of the contingent and into more secure positions as tenure-track faculty and administrators. Their shared stories urged listeners to recall the power of consciousness-raising to both understand perspectives from multiply-situated identities as well as to mobilize needed change.

In thinking through the continued and simultaneous exploitation of contingent faculty the question remains: How should we conceptualize the adjunct, particularly from a feminist position? Is she largely powerless within an increasingly two-tiered system that privileges a minority of its workers and devalues those who do the bulk of the labor? Does the adjunct inhabit the ideal docile body: always silent, self-regulating, agreeable, willing to take on any task? What does it mean if those tasks are taken on out of a sense of sheer desperation?

Can we collectively use our own power to fix the system from within, or should we focus our energy on changing the system from outside? Or, as one panelist proposed, should we create a new, alternative space *outside* of the imperialist, corporatized, higher education–industrial complex? A feminist examination of the contingent body, perpetually fluctuating between survival and liberation, addresses the issue of *choice*, asking: Is that choice only within the system as-is, or is it outside it altogether? Are contingent faculty merely caught up in a larger web of institutionalized imperialist, capitalist, white supremacist, heteropatriarchal power dynamics, or can they become the spiders who navigate these systems?²¹

Roundtable 2: Feminist Perspectives on Contingency in Academia

Contingent faculty float, literally and theoretically, in a liminal, borderland space. The word *adjunct* implies supplementary or nonessential personnel; yet, reality reflects a marginalized contingent body essential to the functioning of the current academic system. While acknowledging the benefits to WGSS programs (for example, broader and more frequent course offerings), the second roundtable addressed contingent faculty’s expendability, impermanence, flexibility, and resultant undervaluation. How does the increase in online teaching further complicate contingent faculty’s situation? In what ways is the contingent body further devalued by an imperialist, corporatist academic system when considering gender, race, class, queerness, age, and disability?

Flexible Bodies

While session 1 articulated how adjuncts must remain in constant excellence in order to ensure that they will be rehired or to apply for more stable jobs, the first presentation of session 2 highlighted how adjuncting reproduces gendered hierarchies. It is no secret that the adjunct body is disproportionately female and feminized. As feminist scholars, how should we interpret what some call the “pink collar workforce”? One panelist highlighted the ways in which adjunct labor in women’s studies is analogous to reproductive labor, claiming that contingent positions can become the “mommy track” of academia when partners provide a stable middle-class income and allow adjuncts to pick up one or two classes per semester. Those in this position are not driven to make ends meet on an adjunct’s salary. Thus, despite the multitude of ways that adjunct labor is devalued and dismissed, it nonetheless can offer a (limited) benefit of flexibility, allowing some the possibility of teaching around their maternal and/or domestic duties.

Although adjuncting can offer freedom from the pressures of publication as well as (for those who have the privilege of an already-stable income) the benefit of a more flexible schedule, this maternalization of adjuncts keeps them operating in a rather domestic(ized) role within academia. As Pamela notes,

teaching, particularly within women's studies, often becomes maternal, and in addition to the nurturing of academic inquiry, "we perform daily acts of mothering with our students. We counsel them [when academic advising tells them] that 'women's studies is not a real major.' We lovingly guide them through the consciousness-raising process where they struggle with having 'their eyes opened' to the realities that feminist studies reveals about the society we live in." She added that women's studies faculty often must also "[comfort] students who confess personal stories of rape and domestic abuse." While caring and/or maternal labor may not be unique to women's studies, contingent faculty often bear the largest share of introductory-level courses, where feminized labor is most necessary; they perform such labor in a largely unrecognized way, within institutions that symbolically devalue not only their teaching, but also caring labor in general.

While the maternalized adjunct body can be relied upon without being valued, it is also a flexible body—a body that can bend and shape itself around whatever departmental or student need arises. The corporate university relies upon this flexibility, which is made possible not only by an underlying symbolic devaluation, but by a sufficient number of privileged adjuncts that are supported outside of academe. To highlight the ways in which contingent labor operates within the university it is important to recognize that the flexibility of the contingent body stretches beyond the maternal and is able to perform its labor either in person or digitally. One participant noted that as course offerings and degrees increasingly become digitalized, "online adjuncts are the ideal faculty created of and for today's capitalist, globalized, technologized higher education system: disembodied and fungible, we can be inserted anywhere, anytime, and as easily discarded." Yet, the individual and social costs of this required flexibility are borne largely, if not entirely by the adjunct body. Thus, another participant offered an analysis of the position of adjunct faculty in relation to Puerto Rico's relationship to the United States by observing that adjunct laborers "are to the corporate university what Puerto Rico is to the United States: they 'belong to but are not part of' the institution. It is outright colonization, and we sign a contract on it." Given the NWSA's convention location in Puerto Rico, her claim invites an analysis of academia as imperialist in its use and abuse of contingent labor to benefit itself at the expense of its internal "others." Just as the United States relies upon the embodied labor of Puerto Ricans to support its domestic needs, but keeps Puerto Rico contingent by denying it full autonomy, so also do adjuncts labor not for themselves, but for the larger corporate-academic enterprise. Indeed, this point resounds loudly with the *Chronicle of Higher Education's* recent article encouraging nontenure-track faculty to perceive the university for which they work as "just another client" (Guest Pryal 2015).

Vulnerable Bodies

Thinking through the position of adjunct bodies as colonized bodies suggests ways in which contingent bodies are particularly vulnerable. As part 1 revealed, in addition to being largely female, adjuncts must also often negotiate their positions from already-marginalized racial, class, and sexual identities. In this second roundtable one participant highlighted how disability-identity also intersects with contingency in a pernicious fashion. The realities of chronic illness, for instance, can complicate the already-precarious situation of contingency:

In a culture built around the image of the round-the-clock professor and a contingent culture that reports working upwards of 60, 70, or even 80 hours per week, public discussions about the plight of the contingent body confirm that there simply isn't time to be chronically ill if one hopes to succeed in academia. . . . I am already susceptible to and familiar with feelings of fraud, and my need for support further reinforces my belief that I'm just not doing enough. Being in a position of [needing] support reinforces the suspicion that I am incapable as both a chronically ill colleague, as well as a contingent one. I'm asking that we recognize the ways in which being chronically ill exacerbates the contingent experience.

Disabled contingent faculty members are in a complex relationship with the disciplining of the academy: being contingent exacerbates inequalities and forces workers to choose between well-being and employment. This is part of a well-known academic culture in which scholars face ongoing pressures for increased productivity and conflicting obligations, which results in less time for the self-care and -support necessary for the chronically ill. As Susan Wendell (1996) argues, an increased pace of life can create disability where none existed, or can exacerbate already-existing disabilities. Academia, at its core, is a culture of scarcity that values perfectionism; there is never, and can never be, enough time, money, or resources. As academics we are trained to ignore our own embodiment in the pursuit of the "life of the mind," and we continually push beyond our limits in attempting to juggle increasing demands. But for some, denying our own embodiment takes a bigger toll than for others. Those most affected are doubly invisibilized as adjuncts and disabled.

Tensions: What Is Missing from This Conversation?

Two major tensions arose in thinking through theorizing the contingent body. One participant put forward a call for thinking about the plight of adjuncts in terms of slavery. While the invocation of *slavery* holds significant emotional appeal, several authors have cautioned against using it as shorthand for an exploited worker. Yet, Patricia Hill Collins's 1993 essay "Toward a New Vision: Race, Class, and Gender as Categories of Analysis and Connection" can offer feminist grounding on the subject. While "even today, the plantation remains a compelling metaphor for institutional oppression" (31), her analysis strongly

cautions against reading modern exploited workers as slaves because it denies the significant changes that have come about through the efforts of civil rights and women activists. Instead of reading adjuncts as modern-day slaves, the essay asks us to think about the situation institutionally because “the basic relationships between Black men, Black women, elite White women, elite White men, working-class White men and working-class White women remain essentially intact” (ibid.). Thus, the plantation metaphor becomes useful in thinking through questions of who holds power on campuses, particularly among the higher administrators and trustees who control finances and policies. However, Collins makes a distinction between those who are in “classrooms grooming the next generation who will occupy . . . decision-making positions” and those who act as invisible support staff (ibid.). Despite the exploitation of adjuncts, they nonetheless occupy a position of power and have agency to make change, as this very conversation attests.

From her position as both an onsite and online adjunct, Pamela called for unionizing and recognizing that adjuncts “clean up capitalist patriarchal messes.” Her talk ended with the question of whether “we” (adjuncts) wanted a divorce or marriage counseling—arguing that, in posing the question, we must keep asking “What’s best for the kids?” While this provocative proposition signals the need to think seriously about our dependence on what could be regarded as “unhealthy” relationships, some found this call for action, in its assumptions about traditional family-making and –breaking, problematic. Specifically, it is important to use care when employing the dominant patriarchal language of state-sanctioned relationships (marriage) and reproduction (the kids) in a way that can be analogous to the masculinist values of the university, which favor the propagation of existing relationship forms, without questioning the normalizing assumptions and conventional power structures underlying them.

In addition to these tensions, two particularly conspicuous and surprising silences echoed throughout the second session on issues of embodiment and how to talk about contingency as a feminist issue. While each panelist shared stories about working as contingent women’s studies faculty, the material effects of living contingently seemed intangible at times. Yet, a focus on the material realities of contingent living represented the most powerful moments of consciousness-raising. For example, in the opening epigraph of this article in which the panelist describes a last-minute course offering, the department chair, of course, never calls. That presenter’s narrative highlights the frantic, desperate nature of contingent employment in a way that showcases the precarious nature of adjuncting. What is left unspoken, however, is the question of *how* adjuncts survive. If the course falls through at the last minute, how do the bills get paid? What does this sort of precarious existence do to the feminized academic body that is supposed to be limitless in its flexibility and accommodations? And, finally, how are we to think about this from a feminist position? Furthermore, while some participants addressed how adjuncting reinforces dominant

conceptions of femininity, they largely remained silent on how their embodied racial, sexual, and class identities shaped their experiences of adjuncting. Much more needs to be said about how race, gender identity, sexuality, disability, and class intersect in shaping the material realities of contingent bodies.

Bodies in Motion:

Redefining Vulnerability by Making It a Collective Issue

It is not only adjuncts who are vulnerable in an increasingly imperialist, capitalist, white supremacist, heteropatriarchal academic institution; students themselves live more precarious lives, and even tenure-track and tenured faculty members find themselves in compromised positions in which they feel obliged to downplay their politics in order to become tenured, promoted, or simply keep their jobs. As Pamela put it, “feminists in general find ourselves continually cleaning up patriarchal messes. We are now coming to realize that the hallowed halls of higher education are not immune to this dysfunctional relationship.”

Rather than simply operating from a position of reaction, however, Beatriz Figueroa made a clear call for organizing as a political force by creating an “alternative university” because we should remember that without adjuncts operating as a “shadow professoriate, the entire system would collapse” (according to another participant, Lisa Bernstein). The audience picked up on this call and raised existing practices from Brooklyn to Argentina as potential models, which will be addressed below in the conclusion. Seeing our vulnerability as part of an increasingly precarious and untenable situation would allow us to join forces with others. Beatriz noted that “the history of the UPR [University of Puerto Rico] shows resolutely—most recently in the strike of 2010—that the best and most effective political agents are its students. Their capacity for organization and mobilization is almost miraculous, given the barren political panorama in this country. So, we must make alliances with our students.” While adjuncts may embody precarity, any feminist theorization of their position must understand their situation as part of a larger problem, and we must join forces across differences in advocating for social justice.

Part 3: Advocacy and Activism in the Contingent Labor Movement

“It is sickening to be a director/chair of WGST at this time in history. I feel guilty almost all the time.”

—survey respondent

Focused on action and coming on the heels of a successful (at least symbolically) NWSA members’ meeting, the atmosphere in this final session was both forward-looking and hopeful. However, as indicated by the quote above, drawn from a survey of women’s studies’ program and department heads undertaken

by researchers at NFM, the session also continued to expose the contradictory feelings of those working within women's studies programs and departments, thus begging the question posed by participants and NFM representatives Paula Maggio and Marisa Allison: How can those in precarious positions advocate for the precariat? And perhaps more pressingly: What is *stopping* the precarious from advocating for the precariat?

Roundtable 3: Advocacy and Activism in the Contingent Labor Movement

This session looks to the history of the women's movement for lessons of praxis that can be applied to the current crisis of contingent faculty. Time for change is ripe: NFM, a national advocacy group, has the attention of federal lawmakers; Colorado has drafted legislation to improve working conditions for contingent faculty; faculty are striking in Illinois; and experiences of part-time faculty are making the national news. Yet, lasting solutions will need to come from within; therefore this session explores the practical process of creating justice within the contemporary university on local, state, and federal levels. The participants will speak directly to the ways that NWSA can better train, support, and create an accountability system for chairs and directors to become better advocates for contingent faculty at their institutions.

Before moving on to the main themes of the session, it is important to discuss the opening quote and provide a brief overview of the study from which it was drawn. During the session NFM presented findings from a survey it conducted during 2014 on working conditions in women's studies programs and departments. The survey was sent to 654 women's studies' department chairs and program directors across the country and had a 20 percent response rate. Demographically, a large majority (82 percent) of the respondents identified themselves as female and white, 91 percent were full-time and tenured, 60 percent were located within public universities, and 56 percent made salaries over \$75,000. While the full findings of this unprecedented survey will be published elsewhere, it is important within the context of this article to unpack the sentiment expressed in the quote, particularly as it provides evidence of the affective responses to the issue of contingency from "the other side." By indicating that she is "sickened" by some aspects of her role as director, this quote takes us back to the nuances of "love-labor." Presumably, it was love of the discipline that brought this person to the position of director, and no doubt there is pleasure in this positionality. Under the corporate university structure, however, pleasure and love exist simultaneously with hate and despair, as the director is faced with a decision between that which she loves and the conditions under which it must be performed. Further, while the words of this director both capture and evoke a sense of hopelessness, they also suggest that taking action can

perhaps mitigate the guilt that one experiences working within the context of the corporate university structure, actions that are the focus of this final section.

Before moving on, the definition of *precarity* used by one of the participants (Sharon Mar Adams), taken from Macmillandictionary.com, also helps to provide some clarity—not only for this session, but also when thinking through contingent faculty issues more broadly: “precarity is a condition of existence without predictability or security, affecting material or psychological welfare.” As has been made clear throughout this article, the precarious existence of contingent faculty has both material and psychological implications. While these conditions can be a force that propels the contingent faculty member into collective action (as we demonstrate below), it is also important to recognize that both the material and psychological implications of being contingent must be addressed alongside any attempts to act on these issues. As former-adjunct-turned-contingent-faculty-union-organizer Jessica Lawless has said elsewhere, “we have to find ways to address our emotional collapse, the loss we have experienced in having a brick ceiling laid over our heads at every turn as we tried to build careers. We have individual and collective grief that has to be recognized in whatever organizing we do” (qtd. in Fruscione 2014, n.p.). It is clear from the epigraph at the start of this section and the first-person accounts included throughout this article that addressing the psychological effects of the precarity for all involved must be front and center in both conversations about and organizing around this issue.

What Has Been Done

Adding to the growing list of actions from the previous roundtables from the larger (unionizing, collective actions) to the smaller (discussing the issue with students), this session allowed participants to go into more depth on actions taken in their respective localities. Sharon discussed the advocacy efforts of activists in the Boulder/Denver area who have been successful, under the AAUP, in advancing a “Colorado Community College Faculty Bill of Rights.”² The bill calls for the Colorado community college system to “recommit to the principles of equitable treatment of all faculty, shared governance, and academic freedom.” Moreover, its goal, as AAUP Colorado representative Suzanne Hudson stated in a note to Sharon, is to “end adjunct labor in Colorado’s community colleges.” Hudson went on to say that “for too long, focus has been on making adjunctification palatable, but my contention is that it should go away completely. . . . Having a two-tier system is the problem—it opens the door to all inequities in pay, benefits, job security, shared governance, and academic freedom.”

The continued inequities in a two-tier system were evidenced in participant (and coauthor) Melissa Fernández Arrigoitia’s discussion of the division between academic and research tracks in the UK university system. She described the organizing on behalf of research staff of which she had recently been a part, which sought to bring equilibrium to those working on the academic and

research tracks. She went on to note that “while ‘parity’ was restored, we didn’t . . . sufficiently critique the binary system which is based on symbolic and material differences” and thus failed to establish solidarity and parity with research officers or assistants—that is, anyone below the research fellow level. Further, she noted that the organizers “failed in raising [it] as a feminist issue . . . even though we talked endlessly about the fact that researchers are overwhelmingly women.” Roundtable participants noted that this issue provides further evidence for why people working within women’s studies and/or coming from a feminist perspective should be part of the organizing efforts around these issues.

Melissa’s point, on leaving the “other” behind in collective organizing efforts, leads to a point made by Marisa Allison, a NFM representative and graduate student, on the importance of both including graduate students in the “contingent faculty” category for advocacy, activist, and research purposes and recognizing their “unique constraints”: “One of those constraints comes from a movement away from trying to provide full funding for graduate students and toward giving them adjunct positions . . . that are paid by the course without benefits. . . . The second thing that we must consider about graduate student faculty is that their time to degree is being affected by their teaching and other work loads.”

Another point, made by an audience member (and women’s studies graduate student), was that many graduate students are reliant upon the university for immigration purposes. This becomes even more of an imperative when immigrant students receive doctorates but remain in contingent positions because they cannot remain in the United States without an immigration sponsor, which very few contingent positions are able to provide. All of these factors, of course, throw into question the notion of “choice” that, as has been mentioned throughout, is so often lobbed against contingent faculty members. What does choice mean when the options given within the corporate university structure are so few?

Advocating for the Precariat:

Practical Considerations and Para-academic Conclusions

Before we close with some recommendations for action that emerged from these discussions, in addition to the (very real) administrative threats noted above, there are also some practical considerations to be taken into account. Core among these considerations are money and time, the limits of which were mentioned in all of the sessions. As with women’s studies—and feminist activism more broadly—it is no secret that the vast majority of us are under-funded and over-scheduled. The question “who is going to pay for this?” was echoed frequently during the conference, and not only by our participants. This was so particularly with regard to the NWSA resolution action taken at the conference because one condition for NWSA resolutions to be passed is that they

not “commit Association resources or negatively impact its financial position.”³ Regarding the second issue, *time*, Melissa asked: “How can we organize [broad, transnational coalitions] when time is already so pressed? Adjunctification doesn’t leave a lot of time for organizing . . . let alone for ourselves!”

These constraints take us back to an overarching theme of the sessions: How can the already-precarious fight for the precariat? Further, adjuncts must be viewed within the larger privatization and corporatization of the university system, both in the United States and internationally. As the inclusion of participants who were differently situated around the globe made clear, and as Melissa stated eloquently during the final session, “if we want to think about ways to decolonize the university . . . we also need to bear in mind the geopolitics of higher education, and the colonial, imperialist relations that continue to dominate our global capitalist order and how those, in turn, shape/mold/disfigure and reconfigure academia from within.”

The “within” of Melissa’s assertion is key here because it relates to the concept of *para-academia* as it is explored in an edited collection, *The Para-Academic Handbook*, published as we prepared for our roundtable sessions in 2014. In “We Are All Para-Academics Now,” Gary Rolfe writes that “[para-academics] [are] individuals who work across and against the corporate agenda of . . . the university” (1). Following this definition, one of the most powerful elements of the roundtable sessions was that those working in the margins of academia felt empowered. As described by Sharon in this panel, “I’ve found in meeting with those involved in the three roundtable discussions that, in the short time we’ve had to discuss issues, there is power in having a chance to share our stories. There is power in speaking. . . . It is a very helpful process, and one that truly does threaten the status quo, to simply share our stories with each other.”

It is no surprise that these sentiments echo those of the feminist consciousness-raising groups of the 1970s—the immediate precursors to, and impetus for, the women’s studies we know today. Indeed, the discipline has always been para-academic, moving alongside, and against, the traditional workings of the university system. As we have seen throughout its forty-year history, however, institutionalization has put a damper on the more revolutionary aspects of feminist politics in the name of efficiency, effectiveness, excellence, impact, or whatever else the latest catch-phrase in the ever-expanding corporatization of the university system may be. And this brings the topic of this special issue back into clear focus.

Having been heavily steeped in women’s studies theory and activism both inside and outside of the academy, this section’s author (Beetham) had a specific affective response to the continued marginalization of contingent faculty concerns within the discipline. For her the lack of discussion on the issue at the 2013 annual conference was both the impetus for the organizing of the 2014 sessions, as well as it was reminiscent of her work in a feminist organization during her mid-twenties. Regarding the latter, feminist principles were missing

from the everyday running of the organization (for example, there was no parental-leave policy in place in the office); in short, the author was dismayed to find that her theoretical expectations of what a feminist organization “should be” fell short of the reality.

This feeling is akin to what feminist activist and author Yasmin Nair (2014, n.p.) calls “Class shock: the feeling of inadequacy and anger that arises when one’s class aspirations have been trampled underfoot.” Across the roundtables many participants expressed inadequacy and anger, pain, and betrayal at the predicament of contingent faculty, feelings that were heightened within the context of women’s studies, since the field is believed to be a more progressive and political space. As roundtable participant Maggio (2013) writes in “A Case Study in Systematic Oppression”: “The classism and sexism inherent in the two-tiered faculty structure . . . goes against the underlying principles of feminism and women’s studies. For it is in women’s studies classrooms and offices and hallways that the slogan ‘The personal is the political’ is heard as a daily mantra. And it is in the women’s studies classroom—and program—that actions should speak louder than words” (n.p.).

The truth is that, as with mainstream feminism, the institutionalization of women’s studies has always created a disjuncture between actions and words. The efforts, then, to take the discipline back to some mythical roots of radical feminist pedagogy and politics are just that—myths. The university has historically and categorically marginalized all but an elite (white male) few, and this has not changed dramatically with the institutionalization of women’s studies. To paraphrase something that bell hooks asserted in her keynote address to NWSA conference-goers, *today there are a lot of women’s studies programs and departments, but not a lot of feminist politics*. And this, we argue, must end. In closing we offer the words of Wiegman (2002), which were published over a decade ago:

The teaching assistant who makes \$4,890⁴ for teaching an introductory course with 240 students while a full professor makes \$25,000 for the same course surely has no faith in our analytic ability if we ask her to remember . . . that Women’s Studies is marginalized. Nor should any amount of shared governance or collaborative teaching with students serve to defend Women’s Studies programs from apprehending and grappling with the actual hierarchies that inhabit our institutional sites. (24)

And this brings us full circle, back to the love-labor that we who work in women’s studies and beyond are both called to and critical of. Those who love the discipline and the educational ethos of universities should not, and cannot, sit idly by. This is the call that the coauthors of this article heard when we organized these sessions, when we proposed this article, and when we founded the NWSA Contingent Faculty Interest Group after our roundtable sessions last year. It is in the spirit of this productive love that we close, offering a collection

of recommendations for action, as well as a list of resources that you can use in your classes, for teach-ins on the subject and for further information.

Recommendations for Action

While the accomplishments described by participants provided powerful evidence of the efforts taking place around the country (and world), as the nuances described above make clear, there is much more to be done. Below, we describe a few of the ways forward, bearing in mind that providing a wide array of tactics from which to address the issue is useful, particularly for those positioned in women's studies, since some methods can pose a threat for programs and departments that are already institutionally marginalized. For example, as Wiegman notes, “[i]t is not uncommon for Women’s Studies programs to surface as targets of administrative surveillance during . . . campaigns for unionization in ways that traditional disciplines do not” (23).

First, consistent efforts need to be made at the institutional level to give contingent faculty a voice in academic governance. This must be done while recognizing the wider marginalization of faculty voices under the corporate university system. As many roundtable participants pointed out, the latter could be used to help show the importance of collaboration across categories (tenure and nontenure track, graduate student, administrative). Jeannie, a panelist in the second roundtable who had been an adjunct for eighteen years before becoming a tenured department chair, pointed this out most poignantly when she declared that “it is on the strength of your support, on your denouncement of administrative privilege—and sometimes of your own privilege—that we all will succeed” in our efforts to make of academia a strong work environment that values the contributions of its educators.

Second, although few women's studies chairs and department heads attended the roundtable sessions at the conference, many who responded to the NFM survey wanted to know the best practices they could implement in their departments, and efforts are being made as a result of the roundtable sessions to develop a list of these practices. Here, we offer a partial listing, with the disclaimer that organization around these issues, while increasing during the past couple of years is still very much in its beginning stage, both within women's studies and higher education more generally. Bearing this in mind, some of the suggestions that emerged from the roundtable sessions include:

- unionizing;
- creating an alternative university;
- forming alliances with students, letting them know about the situation of adjuncts, and talking openly about precariousness;
- collective performance, adjunct parades;
- conceptualizing precariousness beyond contract status;

- regarding diversity issues as labor issues;
- statements in faculty and other administrative meetings by tenure-track faculty;
- teaching about adjunct labor outside of universities;
- boycotting certain aspects of our work;
- civil disobedience;
- using what privilege we have to speak for the rights of others; and
- regarding vulnerability as not an individual, but rather a collective issue.

No matter what form these actions take, the overarching point of these roundtables and this article is that it is imperative that the women's studies community makes its position known at the individual, institutional, and national levels.

Coincidentally, we are pleased to report that a concrete example of action occurred as we were revising this article, during National Adjunct Walkout Day on February 25, 2015. In addition to the consideration of our resolutions at the NWSA members' meeting, there was a spontaneous resolution from the floor that asked NWSA to release a statement on the issue in time for the day of the walkout. Although our follow-up request to NWSA leadership to issue such a statement was declined, members of the roundtables, under the auspices of the newly formed NWSA Contingent Faculty Interest Group, put forward an "open letter of support" for women's studies contingent faculty on the website change.org. The statement recognized that advocacy will vary according to the needs of each campus, but suggested that those wishing to support contingent faculty might do so by

- supporting graduate students who are organizing for fair wages;
- advocating for salary structures for contingent faculty that are aligned to a comparable-market living wage;
- providing funding opportunities for the professional development of contingent faculty with high teaching loads;
- involving contingent faculty in departmental programing decision-making;
- providing alternative (nontenure-track) professional development opportunities for graduate students;
- keeping records of the placement rates of graduate students, including nontenure-track job-placement statistics in those records; and
- supporting contingent faculty decisions to strike.

As of this writing, the open letter had 371 supporters, including some of the leading scholars in the field, as well as NWSA leadership: Yi-Chun Tricia Lin, Miranda Joseph, Mino Moallem, Katie King, Judith Butler, Roderick Ferguson, and Monica Casper, to name just a few. In addition, several women's studies departments around the country, including the University of Maryland and University of Massachusetts, issued statements of solidarity on February

25th. We call on women's studies departments and programs around the country to duplicate and regularize these efforts—and further, to bolster them with concrete actions for change. In other words, following Collins, hooks, Schell, Wiegman, Pratt, and countless other feminists before us, we call on women's studies to continue its work of transforming the university, however mythical that charge may be.

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Melissa Fernández Arrigoitia is an urban sociologist and research fellow at the London School of Economics and Political Science, focusing on studies of the home, displacement, and belonging. She teaches race and postcolonial studies at Birkbeck University of London and has degrees in gender and development, philosophy, and women's studies. She has also worked in the field of international human rights. She can be reached at M.Fernandez1@lse.ac.uk.

Gwendolyn Beetham is the director of the Global Village at Douglass Residential College, the women's college at Rutgers University. She has worked for women's research institutes and gender justice organizations internationally, and has taught gender studies at the London School of Economics, Rutgers, and Brooklyn College. She received her doctorate from the Gender Institute at the London School of Economics. She can be reached at Gwendolyn.Beetham@rutgers.edu.

Cara E. Jones is a visiting assistant professor of women's studies at Hamilton College, where she teaches courses on the intersections of gender, sexuality, health, and disability. Her research, which won a dissertation fellowship from the AAUW, explores endometriosis as a key site of feminist disability-studies inquiry. She is currently adapting her dissertation into a book manuscript that reads medical and popular discourses about endometriosis to advocate for a model of disability that centralizes gendered and sexualized pain. She received her doctorate in English and women's and gender studies from Louisiana State University in 2013. She can be reached at cjones1@hamilton.edu.

Sekile Nzinga-Johnson is an assistant professor of gender and women's studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and is a former director of women's and

gender studies at Nazareth College. She is an interdisciplinary scholar and educator focusing on race, class, and gender in higher education, and has a PhD in human development and a master's degree in social work. She is the editor of *Laboring Positions: Black Women, Mothering and the Academy* (2013). She can be reached at sekilez@uic.edu.

Notes

1. This is from the plenary session.
2. See <http://aaupcolorado.org/documents/colorado-community-college-faculty-bill-of-rights>.
3. NWSA membership assembly meeting, Puerto Rico Convention Center, 14 November 2014.
4. The NFM survey cited above found that in 2014 contingent faculty received approximately \$3,000 per course.

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Appendix: List of Resources

Contingent Faculty Issues in Mainstream Media

These articles were successful in garnering mainstream media attention for contingent faculty issues. The article by Rebecca Schuman resulted in a series of pieces on contemporary higher education issues at *Slate*, and the *Guardian's* "Higher Education Network" also features regular pieces on contingent faculty.

- Academics Anonymous. 2014. "There Is a Culture of Acceptance Around Mental Health Issues in Academia." *Guardian*, 1 March. <http://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2014/mar/01/mental-health-issue-phd-research-university>.
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Do What You Love

A core part of the narrative around contingent faculty in general, and in women's studies in particular, is the "do what you love" ethos. As explored throughout the roundtable sessions, a key question becomes: When does doing what you love become exploitation or abuse?

- Guest Pryal, Katie Rose. 2014. "A Manifesto for the Freelance Academic." *Chronicle vitae.com*, 31 October. <https://chroniclevitae.com/news/783-a-manifesto-for-the-freelance-academic>.
- Nair, Yasmin. 2014. "Scabs: Academics and Others Who Write for Free." *Yasminnair.net*, 11 March. <http://www.yasminnair.net/content/scabs-academics-and-others-who-write-free>.
- Tokumitsu, Miya. 2014. "In the Name of Love." *Jacobin* 13. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/01/in-the-name-of-love/>.

Gender and Contingency in the Academy

As noted in the variety of pieces listed below, feminist scholars critical of the university have been at the forefront of the discussions surrounding contingency in academe for decades. Critically, these contributions highlight the ways in which women's multiple identities—as women of color, as mothers, as immigrants, as differently abled—shape their experience of contingency and the academy more generally.

- Adair, Vivyan C., and Sandra Dahlberg. 2003. *Reclaiming Class: Women, Poverty, and the Promises of Higher Education in America*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
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- Bahn, Kate. 2013. "The Rise of the Lady Adjuncts." *Chroniclevitae.com*, 6 December. <https://chroniclevitae.com/news/206-the-rise-of-the-lady-adjuncts>.
- Bousquet, Marc. 2012. "Lady Academe and Labor-Market Segregation." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 29 October. <http://chronicle.com/article/Lady-Academe-Labor-Market/135284/>.
- Brown, Stacia. 2013. "Walking Tightropes without Nets: The Adjunct as Single Mother." In *Laboring Positions: Black Women, Mothering and the Academy*, edited by Sekile Nzinga-Johnson, 167–78. Toronto: Demeter Press.
- Carr, Felicia. 2001. "The Gender Gap in the Academic Labor Crisis." *Minnesota Review* 52–54 (fall 2001): 271–79.
- Hemmings, Clare. 2011. "In the Aftermath of the Vote to Lift the Cap on HE Fees." *Graduate Journal of Social Science* 8 (1): 37–40.
- Loveday, Vik. 2011. "Affect, Ambivalence and Nostalgia: Experiencing Working-Class Identities in Higher Education" (PhD diss., Goldsmiths, University of London).
- Marr, Vanessa. 2013. "Notes from a Broke Queer Hustling Mama." In *Laboring Positions: Black Women, Mothering and the Academy*, edited by Sekile Nzinga-Johnson, 58–71. Toronto: Demeter Press.
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- Nzinga-Johnson, Sekile. 2013. *Laboring Positions: Black Women, Mothering and the Academy*. Toronto: Demeter Press.

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Contingency in Women's Studies

Women's studies sits tensely within the contingency debate. As an "adjunct-like" field, it has historically faced marginalization within the mainstream academy. However, it too is complicit in the reproduction of contingency through its use and abuse of adjunct labor. The pieces below reflect the debate about how women's studies is responding, or could respond, to this issue.

- Athelstan, Alexa, Cassandra McLuckie, Liz Mills, Angelica Pesarini, Mercedes Poll, and Stefanie C. Boulila. 2011. "Thriving on the Edge of Cuts: Inspirations and Innovations in Women's and Gender Studies." *Graduate Journal of Social Science* 8 (2): 9–20.
- Beetham, Gwendolyn. 2014. "Love in a Time of Contingency: A Letter to Women's and Gender Studies." *Feminist Wire*, 24 July. <http://thefeministwire.com/2014/07/womens-and-gender-studies/>.
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Support from Tenure-Track/Tenured Faculty

Recently, there has been much discussion on the ways that tenure-track and tenured faculty can work in solidarity with contingent faculty. In particular, the blog "Remaking the University," created by Michael Meranze and Christopher

Newfield, has featured a number of articles on the topic, written from the perspective of tenured faculty themselves.

- Harrison-Kahan, Lori. 2014. "Blaming the Victim: Ladder Faculty and the Lack of Adjunct Activism." *Chroniclevitae.com*, 17 July. <https://chroniclevitae.com/news/613-blaming-the-victim-ladder-faculty-and-the-lack-of-adjunct-activism>.
- Ruth, Jennifer. 2013. "When Tenure-Track Faculty Take on the Problem of Adjunctification." *Remaking the University* (blog), 25 May. <http://utotherescue.blogspot.com/2013/05/when-tenure-track-faculty-take-on.html>.
- . 2014. "Who Is Responsible for the University? Lessons from an Almost Strike." *Remaking the University* (blog), 17 April. <http://utotherescue.blogspot.com/2014/04/who-is-responsible-for-university.html>.
- . 2014. "Why Are Faculty Complicit in Creating a Disposable Workforce?" *Remaking the University* (blog), 13 July. <http://utotherescue.blogspot.co.uk/2014/07/why-are-faculty-complicit-in-creating.html?m=1>.

Contingent Faculty, University Staff, and Wider Labor Movements

In addition to support from tenured faculty there have been calls for solidarity and coalition-building work among contingent faculty, university staff, and wider labor movements, such as the fast-food workers' movement. There have also been several responses to the comparisons being made by some advocates between adjunct work and slavery that are important for discussions in the feminist classroom and coalition-building more widely.

- Fruscione, Joseph. 2014. "Adjunct Pay and Anger." *Inside Higher Ed*, 27 August. <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2014/08/27/adjunct-interviews-adjunct-pay-and-working-conditions>.
- Leonard, David. 2013. "Adjuncts Aren't Slaves. Let's Stop Saying They Are." *Chroniclevitae.com*, 4 December. <https://chroniclevitae.com/news/200-adjuncts-aren-t-slaves-let-s-stop-saying-they-are>.
- Maisto, Maria. 2013. "Adjuncts, Class, and Fear." *Working-Class Perspectives* (blog), 15 December. <http://workingclassstudies.wordpress.com/2013/09/23/adjuncts-class-and-fear/>.
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Films and Video

Documentaries on contemporary issues in higher education are starting to be made, and advocacy organizations and research institutes have contributed to the discussion. Although there are many more contributions that could be included in this list, here are a few key conversations that will be useful for starting discussions on the topic in the feminist classroom.

- ConJob*. 2014. Documentary film. Megan Fulwiler and Jennifer Marlow (directors and producers).
- Ivory Tower*. 2014. Documentary film. Andrew Rossi (director). Participant Media.
- Junct: The Trashing of Higher Ed. in America*. Forthcoming. Documentary film. Chris La Bree and Thomas Karwacki (directors). 2255 Films.
- Kendzior, Sarah. 2014. "Conversation with Sarah Kendzior." Video featuring Kendzior in conversation with the Adjunct Action Network. YouTube video, 30:55. 29 August. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WAIqBv-cG4>.
- Maisto, Maria. 2014. "Conversation with Maria Maisto from New Faculty Majority." Video featuring Maisto, the president of NFM, in conversation with the Adjunct Action Network. YouTube video, 31:10, 18 July. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NxOJnq_uDEI.
- "The Multiple Futures of Gender and Sexuality Studies." 2011. Video featuring Kandice Chuh, Ann Pellegrini, Sarita See, and moderator Lisa Duggan, 23 September. "Activism and the Academy: Celebrating Forty Years of Feminist Scholarship and Action," Barnard Center for Research on Women, Barnard College, New York City. <http://bcrw.barnard.edu/videos/the-future-of-gender-and-sexuality-studies/>.

Websites and Additional Resources

Because space prevents us from listing all of the resources available here, we have included a final list of several advocacy organizations and journal special issues that can be useful in finding additional information. We know that this list will grow and shift during the coming years, and are hopeful that those reading this article will use it in such a way that it serves the needs of your institution.

- Adjunct Action Network. <http://adjunctaction.org/>.
- Amsler, Sara. <http://staff.lincoln.ac.uk/samsler>. (Includes a long repository of relevant research she has produced that relate to the topic in this article.)
- Beetham, Gwendolyn, and Melissa Fernandez, eds. 2011. Special issue: "Interdisciplinarity and the New University." *Graduate Journal of Social Science* 8 (1). <http://www.gjss.org/?q=issues/08/01>.
- Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor (COCAL). <http://cocalinternational.org/>.
- Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success. <http://www.thechangingfaculty.org/>.
- Edu-Factory Collective. 2009. *Towards a Global Autonomous University*. New York: Autonomedia. https://www.gold.ac.uk/media/Towards_A_Global_Autonomous_University.pdf.
- Hall, Richard. 2014. "Resisting Neoliberal Education: Alternative Systems, Discourse and Practice." Richard Hall's Space, 15 October. <http://www.richard-hall.org/2014/10/15/resisting-neoliberal-education-alternative-systems-discourse-and-practice/>.
- The Homeless Adjunct (blog). <https://junctrebellion.wordpress.com>.
- New Faculty Majority. Women and Contingency Project. <http://www.newfacultymajority.info/women-and-contingency-project/>.
- Remaking the University (blog). <http://utotherescue.blogspot.co.uk/>.