

GLASS CEILINGS

and

IVORY TOWERS

Gender Inequality in the Canadian Academy



Edited by

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Introduction

Gender Inequality in the Canadian Academy

RACHAEL JOHNSTONE and BESSMA MOMANI

Canadian academia has a serious gender problem. Although women have made up a majority of the undergraduate student body for decades, only 31 percent of faculty who self-identify as women¹ are full professors and only 44 percent are associate professors (Statistics Canada 2022a). Women only reached parity as assistant professors in 2020 and continue to be underrepresented in certain disciplines, especially the most lucrative ones (Statistics Canada 2022a). The STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields have the lowest proportion of women undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty compared to all other disciplines (Council of Canadian Academies 2012). Due to poor representation at the lower rungs of academic administration, fewer women are appointed to academic leadership positions, and those that occupy such positions face gender-specific challenges.² Women who are appointed deans in Canada are less likely than men to be reappointed (Lavigne 2020) and the percentage of women among university presidents in Canada has stagnated since the mid-1990s at around 20 percent (Turpin, De Decker, and Boyd 2014). The situation for racialized women is worse. A 2019 study of five major Canadian universities showed racialized women occupying 7.1 percent of associate dean roles, 2.3 percent of deanships, and 2.4 percent of senior executive roles (Johnson et al. 2020). Moreover, even when women do enter high-level leadership positions, they are more likely to be paid less than men (Momani, Dreher, and Williams 2019) and are more likely than men to quit or be fired before the end of their term (Chiose 2016). Given that 30 percent of the senior management positions in the corporate world are held by women, this poor showing in academia is especially alarming (Zippia 2022; McKinsey 2022).

The reasons for women's underrepresentation in academia are manifold. There is ample evidence that women academics face systemic disadvantages in trying to secure funding (Wenneras and Wold 1997), placing peer-reviewed publications in high-ranking journals (Bendels and Muller 2018), having their work cited by colleagues (Ferber and Brün 2011; Larivière et al. 2013), and attaining

high teaching scores (MacNell, Driscoll, and Hunt 2015; Mitchell and Martin 2018), all of which inhibit their ability to land coveted tenure-track positions. Moreover, even if they secure a faculty position, academics who are women are more likely to have lower starting salaries (Perna 2001) and to be pressured to take on a disproportionate amount of service work in their departments (Mitchell and Hesli 2013), work that is undervalued in tenure and promotions.³ As these uneven service expectations illustrate, universities are not insulated from the gendered expectations of care work experienced in Canada more generally.

For women in academia who have young children, or are considering starting a family, the need to balance work and family life is a significant barrier to entering the professorate and thriving once there. In many respects, the demands placed on early-career academics, including the need to publish, network, apply for permanent positions, and secure tenure, are especially ill-suited to accommodating family life. These demands often come at a time when women are having children or thinking about having children (Schoening 2009), leading some women to opt out of academia entirely (Canetto et al. 2017). One study of women graduate students (Mason, Wolfinger, and Goulden 2013, 43) found a high proportion of those surveyed believe a job in academia and family life are “incompatible.”⁴

Concerns about balancing family and work life are justified. Research consistently shows that men often benefit professionally from fatherhood while women in academia who have children contend with “lower promotion rates, high exit patterns and personal vicissitudes such as family breakdowns and divorce” (Troeger and Epifanio 2019, 109). Research utilizing a large database of PhD recipients in the United States, for example, found that women who became mothers as graduate students were half as likely to land a tenure-track position compared to men (Mason and Goulden 2002). They also found that women who attain tenure are more likely not to have children compared to men.⁵ For those who chose to remain in academia, the strain of managing care responsibilities pushes many women with PhDs to become either part-time or sessional instructors, positions that are both poorly remunerated and precarious (Canetto et al. 2017). In Canada, women and racialized people are more likely to hold these positions (see Acker and Muzin 2019).⁶

The “baby gap” in academia is both gendered and glaring (Mason and Goulden 2002). Added care responsibilities and expected norms around motherhood, coupled with a lack of support and an environment of high competition (Pedersen and Minnotte 2017), often leave women faculty stressed (Wilton and Ross 2017), prompting more women than men to leave academia.⁷ The challenge of finding a work-life balance continues to exhaust women in

academia (Wilton and Ross 2017), a reality aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced many women with young children to take on more of the care responsibilities in their households. Studies are now being published that demonstrate what many women with children or eldercare in academia already knew; namely, women were less likely to publish during the pandemic lockdowns when compared to their men counterparts (King and Frederickson 2021; Davis et al. 2022).

Many of the above barriers, and the lack of progress in redressing them, are rooted in gender discrimination. As environmental historian Troy Vettese (2019) explains, sexism and misogyny are reinforced at all levels of academic institutions, from the more banal practices of men supervisors asking women researchers, but not men, to repeat their lab tests to outright sexual harassment in the workplace. The challenges faced by women who are further marginalized because of other factors, including their race, age, and ability, compound this discrimination (see, e.g., Henry et al. 2017; Gutiérrez y Muhs et al. 2012; Johnson and Howsam 2020; Lazos 2012). Sizeism, a prejudice against people based on their size, and other forms of discrimination based on people's appearance, is also part of the toxic misogyny that is prevalent against women working in intellectual pursuits (see Manthey 2017). In short, despite their reputation as some of Canada's most progressive institutions, universities continue to have gender issues at every level.⁸

While significant research on women in academia has been undertaken, particularly in the United States and Europe, the results have been siloed by disciplinary boundaries. Much of this research has also taken the form of narrative and first-hand accounts (see, e.g., Gutiérrez y Muhs et al. 2012; Shelton et al. 2018; Chilly Collective 1995). These accounts are valuable for their ability to "emphasize the personal as being both political and worthy of academic attention" (Shelton et al. 2018, 208) and to highlight the human cost of discrimination, but they often lack the hard numbers and robust science-backed figures necessary to convince some in the profession to commit to institutional change. Our book fills this significant research gap by taking an in-depth look at Canadian academia from a range of disciplinary perspectives and methodologies. The chapters that follow are primarily rooted in data-driven research focusing on the ongoing challenges women in academia face and, in so doing, lay the groundwork for substantive policy change in Canada.

This book brings together academics from different disciplines and at different stages of their careers studying gender in Canadian universities. Our goal is to explore intersections and new ways of interpreting trends in Canadian data to identify core themes and issues and proffer best practice recommendations for women, administrators, and stakeholders in academia. In the chapters that

follow, our authors outline academia's gender problems, consider which women are being counted, explore the role of women as academic leaders, and reflect on strategies for positive change. Through these lines of inquiry, we focus our attention on showcasing evidence-based research. We have taken this approach for two reasons. First, it is rare for a collection on women in Canadian academia to foreground evidence-based research. While such autobiographical narratives found in many other volumes are valuable, we believe that a collection employing quantitative and qualitative data analysis is a necessary catalyst for public debate and policy action (Momani, Dreher, and Williams 2019; Shelton, Flynn, and Grosland 2018; Black and Garvis 2018; Lemon and Garvis 2014). This focus seems especially relevant as Canadian universities are currently undergoing radical changes in their consideration of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), including developing best practices in how to talk about, prepare for, and address systemic discrimination on campuses. Second, there is a persistent complacency concerning the advancement of women in Canadian academia (Momani, Dreher, and Williams 2019; Acker, Webber, and Smyth 2012, 753), with many people mistakenly concluding that issues related to women's advancement have been resolved or will resolve themselves given sufficient time. A common refrain is the presentation of these challenges as a pipeline problem that will self-correct when an adequate supply of women at lower ranks of the academy is attained. Yet, despite improvements to representation at the lower rungs, the lack of representation of women in the most coveted and respected professions of the academy, including full professors, senior administrators, and Canada Research Chairs, suggests that the pipeline is broken and reflects important features of oppression within society at large. In *The Equity Myth*, which focuses on racism in Canadian universities, anthropologist Frances Henry, one of Canada's leading experts in the study of racism and anti-racism, and her colleagues assert that universities represent "a bastion of liberal democracy that enjoys a popular image of an institution free in the pursuit of knowledge, avant-garde in thinking, and fair in practice" (Henry et al. 2017, 3). The authors contend that the internalization of this myth leads to unsubstantiated acceptance of the idea that racism, and we would add sexism and misogyny, do not exist within these institutions. The myth that universities are sites of progressive policies because their faculty ostensibly hold progressive views is unsupported by the evidence we present in this volume. As such, highlighting evidence-based research adds force to our outputs by allowing us to repudiate the cultures of denial that perpetuate gender inequality.

This book is notable because it is a Canada-specific volume. Of the many titles on gender and women in the academy, there are relatively few that emphasize the struggles faced by women in Canadian universities (exceptions

include Whittaker 2015; Wagner, Acker, and Mayuzumi 2008; Reimer 2004; Chilly Collective 1995). Our book focuses on gender in Canadian academia and collects Canada-specific data from multiple universities of differing sizes and types across the country. We intend for this collection to deepen scholarly understandings of how women experience academia and the factors preventing them from fully participating at all levels of academic life. Given the size and significance of the research and policy gaps that exist about women academics, this book only scratches the surface of the topic of women and gender in Canadian academia.

Our overarching goal in this volume is to launch a national and interdisciplinary conversation to better understand, and thereby more effectively address, the persistent gender imbalance among academics at Canadian universities. This imbalance is apparent in easily measurable categories, like the number of women in specific roles and their salaries, and in more elusive but equally critical metrics, like perceptions of respect and safety. By bringing together researchers for an interdisciplinary exchange, these chapters collectively portray the current gendered situation of faculty and administrators working in Canadian academia and highlight its significance, with an aim to develop strategies to increase the status, participation, and leadership of women academics.

Before laying out the plan of this book, we need to be clear about our terminology. Our book's title suggests a focus on gender in the academy, but we, and many of our contributors, often use terminology related to sex and gender interchangeably. In its simplest form, sex refers to a biological difference, which is typically treated as binary (e.g., male/female), while gender refers to the characteristics often tied to sex (e.g., masculinity and femininity). In everyday parlance, and a significant array of institutional and government documentation, these terms are treated as synonyms, and there is little room to identify outside of this binary. For example, some of the data collected in this book uses official Canadian government statistics that only allow binary male/female designations. Reducing gender to sex assigned at birth strips important statistical information about variations in gender among individuals. This is most obviously true of transgender and nonbinary people, whose assigned sex at birth is not reflective of their gender identity. This leads to consequences ranging from loss of entire analytical categories (e.g., variations of nonbinary identities) to misidentification of a portion of the population (e.g., identifying trans women as male). Loss of categories and misattributions tend to bias data findings and mask the lived realities of people who typically experience more discrimination and lower economic outcomes than cisgender people.⁹ Capturing important nuances to conduct a comprehensive intersectional analysis of gender in academia is further complicated by the challenges of collecting relevant data that accounts for

multiple, interlocking, and cocompounding identities, including race, class, ability, and age (see Acker and Muzin 2019; Henry et al. 2017; Kitossa and Tanyildiz 2022 for work on gender and race in universities).

The concepts of sex and gender are the subjects of a vast literature. Although a more thorough discussion of the literature problematizing these terms is beyond the scope of this collection, and the contributors to this volume were free to use and pursue their own terminology to best capture the nature of their particular studies, it is worth pointing out that the differences between these terms are highly personal, political, and contested. Even though some of our data are limited in this capacity, we are still able to draw significant conclusions about the ongoing significance of gender in the academy, while highlighting fruitful areas for future research.

In the same vein, we recognize that the terms used to describe discrimination based on gender, in particular inequality and inequity, are themselves disputed. The distinction between equality and equity is often portrayed as one of sameness of treatment (equality) versus differential treatment to help individuals achieve the same ends (equity). Like the terminology of sex and gender, these terms are political, and their ongoing use has been shaped by their past application, both in Canada and abroad. However, the use of these terms is more streamlined in Canada than in other locales. Guarantees of equality are part of Canada's constitution and have been consistently interpreted in substantive terms. That is, guarantees of equality do not require that the government must or even should treat people the same in all cases; indeed, "sometimes protecting equality means that we must adapt rules or standards to take account of people's differences" (Department of Justice 2018). Thus, there are few practical differences in the ways that equality and equity are differentiated and legally applied in Canada. Although we did not seek to impose this language on our contributors, whose varied disciplinary backgrounds bring nuances to these terms, we draw attention to the implications of this language to highlight and contextualize further the arguments of our contributors.

PLAN OF THE BOOK

This volume contains thirteen chapters divided into four parts, which move from a micro to macro perspective. Although data is crucial to compel policy change, we also recognize that an overreliance on data risks obscuring the lived experiences of the very individuals whose plight we wish to showcase. In the hopes of humanizing the data we bring to the table, each of the four sections is introduced by a brief vignette, and a final vignette closes out the volume. These vignettes are personal accounts from academics, university staff, and an

academic recruiter who reflect on their individual struggles, share their observations, and remind us of the realities of the personal, professional, and intellectual struggle to achieve equality.

[Part 1](#) examines the daily life of women academics as they balance their roles as instructors, researchers, and service providers. Here we explore issues including the gendered implications of contract teaching and teaching evaluations and the unique challenges faced by women researchers in the ethics approval process. We also delve into the gendered dynamics of service work and its implications for tenure and promotion. [Part 2](#) examines gendered dynamics within university leadership. As is true of the business world, the data show that the “glass ceiling” and, indeed, the “glass cliff” are ongoing problems within universities. This section takes a more holistic view of leadership, which includes the role of women as primary investigators in large-scale research projects as well as middle management and senior leadership in universities – from deans to presidents – to learn about ongoing challenges to women’s representation and power. [Part 3](#) looks at the broader structural and institutional challenges faced by women academics. Here, we investigate long-standing issues of racism and wage discrimination in the academy as well as the physical and psychological difficulties women academics must contend with, including harassment. Finally, [Part 4](#) looks at approaches that are needed to change institutions and practices to make academia more equitable or, in some cases, to dismantle entire systems by levelling the playing field or completely reinventing the game. In this section, we look at alternative pedagogical practices, allyship models, and advocacy platforms that spotlight, navigate, and help mitigate the challenges faced by women academics. In so doing, we reconsider the approaches and ideas currently valued in academia, who is responsible to change these approaches and ideas, and what should be changed.

We begin with a vignette about the gendered challenges and expectations of a newly minted tenure-track professor. Andrea M. Collins explains how universities claim to want change, yet women like her continue to face tokenism. Then, in [Chapter 1](#), Sandra Smele and Andrea Quinlan investigate the intersection of contract teaching and student evaluations, finding serious gender inequities. Numerous studies have demonstrated that student evaluations of teaching (SETs) reflect systemic biases against women academic instructors, especially those marginalized because of race, ethnicity, age, and ability. What is missing from this body of research is a look at the impact SETs have on instructors from equity-seeking groups who are working in contract positions. The precarity of nontenure-track and sessional instructors adds another layer of complexity to how gendered classrooms are experienced by vulnerable and

marginalized academics. Contract teaching positions are on the rise in Canadian postsecondary institutions and women hold a higher percentage of these positions than men (see Webber 2008). This chapter questions how contract academic teaching and SETs contribute to the perpetuation of gender inequities in the academy. To this end, it employs thirty-four interviews with women employed in contract faculty positions at an Ontario university, arguing that SETs must be critically assessed for their negative impact.

In [Chapter 2](#), Tanya Bandula-Irwin looks at gender and bias in research ethics approval processes. Fieldwork and the research ethics review processes are highly gendered. Ensuring that research and fieldwork abide by standards of ethics and participant safety are crucial for the integrity of academic research and yet it is noteworthy and concerning that women often have a more difficult time securing research ethics approvals than men. This fact, in turn, has implications for the types of research women scholars can or choose to perform. This chapter investigates where and when women scholars can conduct their research. Drawing on data from the research ethics boards of research-intensive universities across Canada, it explores the disparities among men and women in securing ethics approval for fieldwork.

Studies have shown that women faculty members, especially racialized women, often shoulder a larger amount of service responsibilities (Harley 2008). In [Chapter 3](#), Jude Walker, Elena Ignatovich, and Maryam Nabavi examine university service work and its value in tenure and promotion processes. Looking specifically at language in tenure and promotion policies at U15 universities – a “collective of Canada’s most research-intensive universities” (U15 n.d.) – this chapter lays out how service work is reported, recognized, and rewarded in tenure and promotion decisions at U15 universities. This chapter utilizes content analysis of U15 university policies on service and interviews with senior faculty to determine how service is conceptualized, recognized, and distributed. There is often a prioritization of institutional service at the expense of community-based service. These findings are then framed in relation to tenure and promotion policies across all U15 universities and best practices for recording and addressing service workload disparities (see O’Meara et al. 2018). Prioritizing some forms of service over others has gendered implications and the authors demonstrate how this often mirrors the ways women’s care work is valued within society.

In [Part 2](#), we examine the gendered dynamics of university leadership. We begin with a vignette by Amorell Saunders N’Daw, a professional recruiter who helps universities hire senior administrators. She reviews the challenges many women, especially racialized, Black, and Indigenous women, face in attaining these coveted positions. She argues that the F-word – fit – is too often used as

an excuse by institutions failing at inclusion. In [Chapter 4](#), Anne Wagner and Sandra Acker interrogate the gender dimensions of what is often framed as leadership in higher education. Moving beyond conventional understandings of leadership based on administrative and hierarchical structures, they focus on the relatively unexplored area of the leadership activity of principal investigators heading research projects. As part of a larger study of academic research work, Wagner and Acker conducted in-depth, qualitative interviews with twenty-four women scholars in education, social work, sociology, and geography at seven Ontario universities. Participants were chosen based on their substantial records of receiving external funding and their engagement with social justice topics as a means for investigating whether these commitments result in non-traditional forms of leadership. This chapter explores how these principal investigators understand leadership in the context of their research projects. Results suggest a tension between traditional hierarchical forms of leadership that are consistent with the logistics of neoliberal individualism found in the university and the approaches pursued by these leading researchers who prioritized collaboration, community, and caring in their social-justice related projects.

In [Chapter 5](#), Rachael Johnstone and Bessma Momani look at the ways deanships in Canada continue to reflect gendered dynamics. Using both a country-wide survey and one-on-one interviews with university deans across Canada, this chapter seeks to understand whether men and women deans perceive gender to be an influential factor in the career paths of a dean and the extent to which their perceptions are supported by external data. Johnstone and Momani find that gender, as a variable, significantly influences perception divergences for two major survey areas: 1) opportunities to take on deanships and further advance into more senior administrative roles and 2) the wage gap. In both cases, women deans perceived gender to have a significant effect on opportunities and wages, while men did not. When corroborated with existing data, the authors find decisive evidence of the existence of the wage gap for deans. Although it is more difficult to make conclusive claims about opportunity, as the concept itself is not clear-cut and many of the metrics one might use are not publicly accessible, they find indicators that opportunity is also a gendered phenomenon for deans.

Continuing the focus on gendered dynamics of university administration, in [Chapter 6](#), Genevieve Fuji Johnson, Özlem Sensoy, and El Chenier look at five Canadian universities to see how leadership remains highly gendered and racialized. This chapter focuses on identifying the barriers that women, especially Black, Indigenous, and racialized women, face in their career paths through central and senior administration in Canadian universities. The data discussed

in this chapter comes from a diversity audit of five different universities throughout Canada and reveals a sobering diversity gap, especially for racialized women. In fact, in most cases, there is no way for women to even move up to the first step of the administration ladder. In finding ways to address this gap, the authors argue that the only way to bring about meaningful change is to completely rethink the cultural and structural landscapes of universities. Current EDI mechanisms do not address the highly racialized and gendered norms underpinning the university structure.

In [Part 3](#), we examine some of the broader structural and institutional challenges facing academics as they attempt to navigate their profession. Aisha Ahmad's vignette identifies some of the less talked about structural problems in academia; namely, gendered racism. Too often, BIPOC women face a culture that denies their experiences of sexism and racism and retaliates against them for calling it out. Like generations of academics who refused to see the sexist nature of academia, racism needs to be part of our lexicon on structural and institutional change. One way these structural challenges of discrimination manifest is in wage disparity. Moving to [Chapter 7](#), Catherine Beaudry, Laurence Solar-Pelletier, and Carl St-Pierre assess data from a survey of more than five thousand Canadian academics and confirm not only the basic gender wage gap, but also how administrative premiums, wage market premiums, chair, performance, and other bonuses, as well as consulting income, have amplified gendered gaps in earnings. In recent years, gender disparities regarding the salary of university professors in Canada have attracted greater attention from media, scholars, governmental organizations, and unions (see Doolittle and Wang 2021). Among the numerous studies that elucidate the factors affecting salary evolution during a professor's career, none has examined in detail the premiums and bonuses that contribute to exacerbating an already nonnegligible wage gap between men and women in academia.

In [Chapter 8](#), Melanie A. Morrison, Joshua W. Katz, Bidushy Sadika, Jessica M. McCutcheon, and Todd G. Morrison examine whether there is a bias for administrative leaders to have backgrounds in STEM. Building on leadership literature that demonstrates a broader societal bias in favour of leaders who have STEM education and training, the authors investigate whether the same preference for STEM-educated leaders exists in Canada's U15 universities. They find that while such a bias does exist in faculty-level administrative positions like deans and associate deans, there is no statistical difference to be found in senior-level administrative positions like provosts or presidents.

In [Chapter 9](#), Jennifer Chisholm, Kasey Egan, and Kristin Burnett argue that the frequency of sexual harassment in academia has gained more and more

attention in recent years, especially regarding unequal power relations. In this area, however, research into harassment in which the student is the perpetrator and the faculty member is the victim has not gained much attention. Additionally, the range of harassment linked to gender – but not constituting sexual harassment – is largely unexplored. Based on survey data collected from faculty across Canada, the authors focus on the experiences of women faculty with contrapower harassment in the classroom, its relation to teaching responsibilities, and its overarching effects for faculty members. The chapter focuses on the experiences of women who teach women's and gender studies, sexuality studies, Indigenous studies, and subjects that tend to decolonize curriculum or challenge traditional norms, often producing more class disruption and student pushback. The study in this chapter fills a gap in the knowledge concerning faculty members' experiences with contrapower harassment at Canadian institutions while providing empirical support for institutional and policy changes that will help protect faculty.

In [Chapter 10](#), Louise Forsyth looks at the challenges of achieving equality in the highly vaunted Canada Research Chairs (CRC) program, a Tri-Council initiative that invests \$295 million annually to recruit the top research talent for Canadian universities (Canada Research Chairs 2020). Launched in 2000, the CRC program had the vision of recognizing and supporting a new generation of Canadian scholars. The program had the potential to nurture the expansion of research and teaching initiatives into neglected areas and to address inequities in the academic community, but, unfortunately, it did not. In 2003, Forsyth and seven others lodged a complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission alleging that the program was rewarding those already in privileged positions – that is, able-bodied white men – but despite the commission's recognition of their allegations as justified in 2006, little changed. In 2018, they once again engaged in mediation on the same matter. Using an autoethnographic approach, Forsyth, a feminist scholar who has witnessed and fought for gender equality since the mid-1980s, demonstrates the value of collective action in the fight for equality.

Finally, [Part 4](#) examines ways to alter or fundamentally rethink the ways our academic institutions are shaped and the values that underlie them. Michael F. Charles's vignette describes how institutional culture is often an impediment to enacting change and offers compelling proposals to make EDI a lived reality. In [Chapter 11](#), Janice Niemann takes up the focus on the gendered dimensions of SETs unpacked in previous chapters to question how different pedagogical traits can be reformulated, valued, and used to address inequities. The results of Niemann's study show that most solutions are premised on the assumption

that women-coded qualities are worth less than men-coded ones and must be corrected for equitable assessment to be possible. However, following the compassionate turn in pedagogy studies (see Waddington 2017; Gibbs 2017), she argues that kindness and compassion (stereotypically women-coded attributes) are traits for which we should strive, giving women in academia the power to reclaim kindness as an act of empowered pedagogy.

In [Chapter 12](#), Audrey E. Brennan and Katherine V.R. Sullivan examine how Twitter and other social media platforms are providing an alternative space of expression and refuge for women in academia. Building on previous studies that have revealed the democratic potential of social media (see, e.g., Sullivan and Bélanger 2016), Brennan and Sullivan look at how the professional lives of women academics are shared and cultivated online. They find that women in academia have been taking to social media to voice their professional struggles and create a sense of community. This finding echoes other research, which has found that Twitter and other social media platforms have become a space for women to voice their opinions and professional struggles and create a sense of collectiveness and community (Rocheleau and Millette 2015). Their study also identifies key hashtags such as #WomenInAcademia, #WomenAlsoKnowStuff, and #AcademicTwitter that show the positive and supportive space that social media can offer women academics who find university environments alienating.

In [Chapter 13](#), Cheryl N. Collier examines how men's allyship at Canadian universities works. Systemic gender bias and institutional path dependency are two core challenges that hinder progress on the issue of gender equality in Canadian universities. One combative strategy is to employ men's allyship models to turn institutional culture away from these gender biases and toward more acceptance of equality goals (Drury and Kaiser 2014; Sherf, Tangirala, and Weber 2017). This chapter looks at the levels of institutional engagement with this approach of allyship in working toward gender equality in universities through an exploration of EDI strategies and university mission statements. Examining U15 universities, plus a number of smaller institutions, in each province across the country, Collier uses a discourse and content analysis model to assess the public, explicitly stated commitment levels of Canadian institutions to these core equality strategies. While it is true that such statements do not necessarily signify a real commitment, an absence of such a statement is certainly telling of the institution's dedication to the issue. This approach provides a clear scan of institutional willingness to embrace gender equality and allyship models across the country.

Before we turn to our conclusion chapter, Sara Anderson's vignette provides us with a call for action to take reconciliation seriously in the research ecosystem.

As a university staff member, her engagement with faculty highlights the challenges of decolonizing research and, invariably, curriculum. In our conclusion chapter, Lorna A. Turnbull reflects on her role as a feminist legal scholar and former dean of a faculty of law and on her research on inequality flowing from gendered expectations of care work. She ruminates on the need for legal approaches to address social inequality and realize social justice while also recognizing the limitations of law in addressing entrenched inequalities in universities, particularly in the absence of “evidence.” To address systemic inequalities, Turnbull notes the need for more data and considers the challenges volume contributors faced in collecting disaggregated data, especially data disaggregated by race, gender identity, sexuality, and disability. To make a change, we must prove that systemic inequality exists, a key goal of this volume.

We close out the volume with a vignette from a contract professor stuck in a pattern of sessional teaching while trying to apply for tenure-track positions and balance the needs of a young family. Melissa Finn shares her increasingly relatable experience of being unable to get into the coveted ivory tower and the personal and emotional challenges she experienced in her attempts.

NOTES

- 1 For the purposes of this book, the term “women” includes all individuals who self-identify as women. However, it must be noted that when statistics are cited, self-identification may not have been an option, and respondents may have been limited to gender categories that only allow for binary male/female identification.
- 2 In response to these challenges, groups like Senior Women Academic Administrators of Canada (SWAAC) formed to offer guidance to women in leadership positions and to promote women’s leadership in the academy.
- 3 A 2020 study of promotions from associate to full professor in Ontario from 2010 to 2014 showed that men were “more than twice” as likely to be promoted as women (Millar and Barker 2020, 55).
- 4 The women surveyed also noted that their supervisors overwhelmingly discouraged them from having children, and those who did get pregnant noted that they did not get adequate support.
- 5 Specifically, 62 percent of women and 39 percent of men in the humanities and social sciences and 50 percent of women and 30 percent of men in the hard sciences do not have children.
- 6 This reality indicates that understanding and measuring intersectionality in the stratification of university appointments is necessary.
- 7 In a small study of Canadian psychology departments, McCutcheon and Morrison (2016) found that women, on average, spend ten more hours on childcare work each week compared to men. A single US university case study revealed similar findings (see O’Laughlin and Bischoff 2005).

- 8 These gendered dynamics are also apparent outside of Canada. Moreover, as *The Equity Myth* aptly points out, Canadian universities also have a serious problem with racism, equity, and indigenization (see Henry et al. 2017).
- 9 Although most government offices are currently limited to data rooted in the male/female binary, some are now working to give more options for gender self-identification; for example, in 2017, Ontario changed its policies to allow individuals to designate themselves as male (M), female (F), or gender neutral (X) on their driver's license (Government of Ontario 2017), and in 2021, the Canadian census added "at birth" to its sex identification question and included an additional question on gender (Statistics Canada 2022b).

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PART 1

Daily Life of Women Academics

Between Tokenism and Belonging in the Academy

ANDREA M. COLLINS

When I was a master's student in the mid-2000s, my classmates referred to me as “the token feminist.” The label fit and I wore it with pride. I was one of just three students that identified as a woman in my cohort and the lone student who could be relied on to ask questions about gender in our historically male-dominated field of international relations. Up to that point, the training in feminist inquiry I had received was very white, very liberal, and very naïve. I embraced the idea of being the token feminist because the classroom felt like a space in which I belonged, despite the gender gap in representation. Here, I could question everything and feel heard. In these early stages of my academic career, I expected that academia would keep its promise that I could reach the same echelons as men. I graduated that year with cautious optimism about the possible academic career that laid ahead. It would not take long for me to learn that having that seat at the table is not the same as belonging to the group.

Today, as a tenured faculty member, I bristle when I think about embracing the term “token.” Complicit in that joke, I did not recognize the ways academic institutions have tokenized historically disadvantaged and underrepresented people. Many universities have hired more women since then but remain ill-equipped to address sexism, racism, heterosexism, ableism, and transphobia. The increased representation of (white, cis) women like myself has not revolutionized how the academy recognizes gendered divisions of labour within its ranks. It has not fixed the “leaky pipeline” of women, LGBTQ2SIA+, and racialized individuals from undergraduate programs into the academy and particularly its prestigious upper ranks. It has not resolved outdated sexist and heterosexist assumptions about care work, family structures, and home life. It does not challenge gendered expectations about behaviours and styles of leadership. It does not imagine alternative, inclusive cultures of learning and research. The distance between tokenism and belonging has yet to be bridged. I “belong,” but I do not belong all the way.

University expectations of pretenure women are often contradictory. Despite the 40/40/20 time split that many tenure-track faculty members have for research, teaching, and service, we come to learn that the split is either

artificial or that to meet such demands requires giving more than 100 percent. Many of us – regardless of gender identity – are told to prioritize research. We must apply for grants. Publish or perish. We are advised against service at our own peril. We are told not to put much stock in student course evaluations and perhaps even not to spend too much time on teaching altogether.

The gap between the tokenism of the past and actual belonging shows up in how women must navigate the contradictions between this advice and the expectations of administrators, colleagues, and students. When academic institutions introduce identity-based representation requirements for committees, there can be downward pressure on a select few women or racialized faculty to accept such service roles when these groups are underrepresented. Women are still underrepresented in the STEM fields, among others, and in the senior ranks of universities. Precariously employed or pretenure scholars may not be able to decline requests for service made by people whose support they need for contract renewal or tenure. Many universities also still rely on student course evaluations as the basis for evaluating teaching performance, despite evidence that these evaluations are rife with racism and sexism and are more often reflections of student perceptions rather than learning outcomes. These surveys typically punish groups that are underrepresented in the academy, including women who fail to meet gendered expectations of being sufficiently responsive, caring, or conventionally attractive. We also know that women, LGBTQ2SIA+, and racialized people are more likely to receive inappropriate or abusive comments through these anonymous surveys, and that this is compounded for people who experience intersecting oppressions.

If they demonstrate concern about students' experiences, women faculty may also find themselves responding to students who themselves face discrimination and distress. As a younger, woman faculty member, some see me as more approachable than other university colleagues. As a result, I have mentored or counselled students that I never taught because they did not know who else they could turn to. Please do not misunderstand me: this emotional labour is important, but it is also grounded in common gendered

assumptions about who is or should be capable of delivering this work. Moreover, it is time-consuming, emotionally taxing, undervalued, and unseen. When I pointed out this emotional labour is not reflected in pay or performance reviews, I was told by a senior professor that such work is its own reward.

These expectations of research, teaching, and service are also all couched in the whispered gendered biases that shape perceptions of job performance, sometimes uttered by the same well-meaning people who support gender equality. I have heard gossip about scholars of so-called childbearing age or speculation about which colleagues have the “two body problem” of academic employment (as I do). I have heard about the implicit and explicit ways faculty members inquire about job candidates’ parental or marital status, although they know such questions are prohibited. I have heard students recount how a professor in another discipline told their class that women belong in the home. I have had crude comments about my appearance anonymously written on my office door. These rumblings are the background noise in which we are asked to do the work of the university. The noise can be isolating and alienating.

Universities boast about meeting their goals for hiring women into the faculty ranks, but cultural shifts are needed to ensure lasting and inclusive change. Meaningful change requires faculty and administrators to have a better understanding of the everyday experiences of bias, discrimination, and intersectional oppression, and how members of university communities are complicit in their reproduction. Yes, there are those who make their chauvinism clear for all to see, but they may be a dying breed. It is perhaps more frustrating to see well-meaning faculty members and administrators talk about their personal and institutional commitments to equity, diversity, and inclusion while failing to reckon with the ways their own words and actions stand in the way. I say this as someone that has also failed to do this. True change means letting go of the “add women and stir” fantasy of gender representation in the academy and grappling with what gender-inclusive, antiracist, accessible institutional cultures could look like.

I know my experience as a woman in the academy today still comes from a place of privilege and is not nearly as challenging as it was for my predecessors, but I do not apologize for imagining a better future for all of us. I am inspired by the voices of mentors and colleagues who supported me along the way: the quiet words of confidence from a professor on graduation day; the whisper networks that informed me where dangers lay; the colleague who empathized with the number of service requests and promised to find someone else; the administrator showing me how to buck the expectations imposed from above; and of course, my students that refuse to tolerate sexist, homophobic, transphobic, racist, and ableist discrimination. All of these people are here, too, and their voices help to foster real inclusion and belonging, beyond just seats at the table.

1

The Precarious Work of Contract Teaching and Student Evaluations

SANDRA SMELE and ANDREA QUINLAN

While Canadian universities identify teaching evaluations as necessary for ensuring quality teaching in higher education (see, e.g., University of Toronto 2020; University of British Columbia 2007; McGill University 2014), a growing literature calls the methods of evaluation being used into question. Despite their widespread adoption in Canadian universities, student evaluations of teaching (SETs) have been shown to negatively impact equality in the academy. Existing literature demonstrates that SETs commonly reflect biases against women academic instructors, particularly those marginalized in relation to race, ethnicity, and age (Joye and Wilson 2015; Lazos 2012; Mitchell and Martin 2018; Reinsch, Goltz, and Hietapelto 2020). This literature reveals that SETs contribute to the systematic marginalization of equity-seeking groups in the academy. Missing from this literature, however, is an investigation into the impact of SETs on a growing equity-seeking group in Canadian universities: precariously employed academic women instructors.

Recent studies on neoliberal trends of employment precarity indicate that contract teaching positions are on the rise in Canadian postsecondary institutions and are negatively impacting equity in higher education (Foster and Birdsell Bauer 2018; Pasma and Shaker 2018). Both Ontario-based and nationwide research demonstrate that the majority of contract academic teaching staff are women, with estimated ratios as high as two women to every one man (Field and Jones 2016; Pasma and Shaker 2018), and with roughly a third belonging to racialized groups (Foster and Birdsell Bauer 2018). Given these known links between precarity, SETs, and inequality, it is high time to explore how precarious academic employment and SETs intersect and contribute to inequality. This chapter takes up that challenge by looking specifically at how SETs are experienced by precariously employed academic women. Working from an intersectional feminist framework that seeks to centre marginalized perspectives and attend to lived experiences, this chapter analyzes thirty-four qualitative

interviews with women employed as contract faculty to investigate their experience of SETs.

This chapter analyzes precariously employed academic women's experiences of SETs in relation to the expectations of care and aesthetic labour in teaching in higher education. In so doing, this chapter reveals how these expectations and forms of labour are uniquely shaped by gender, race, and age. We identify how SETs act as a measure of instructors' conformity to expectations of how academic authority and femininity should be performed in the classroom. We explore the harmful impacts this has on precariously employed academic women, both in terms of the additional labour and the mental distress it generates. We also locate these experiences of SETs in the context of the neoliberal imperatives that are increasingly shaping higher education. While existing research has demonstrated the broader, systemic nature of gendered inequities in neoliberal universities, this chapter crucially identifies how SETs are contributing to the perpetuation of these inequities among precariously employed academic women.

CARE AND EMOTIONAL AND AESTHETIC LABOUR

Significant feminist scholarship has been dedicated to problematizing and theorizing care (see, e.g., Armstrong and Braedley 2013; Folbre and Wright 2012; Glenn 2010; Neysmith 1991; Noddings 1984; Sevenhuijsen 1998; Tronto 2013). This is perhaps most evident in works that have examined gendered divisions of paid and unpaid labour (Armstrong 1997; Bezanson and Luxton 2006; Grant et al. 2004), as well as in the work built upon sociologist Arlie Hochschild's (1983) conceptualization of emotional labour in the workplace (see, e.g., Mann and Cowburn 2005; Whitelegg 2002). Important contributions to this scholarship have been made by feminists seeking to demonstrate the multiple power relations that shape and inform care practices and experiences, including those tied to gender, race, citizenship/migration, colonization, sexuality, disability, and class (see, e.g., Arber and Ginn 1992; Cronin and King 2010; Ferguson 2008; Hall 2016; Mirchandani 2003; Thomas 2007; Yeates 2012).

Much of the scholarship on care focuses on its provision in contexts where care is commonly understood as a central activity (e.g., hospital/health care facility or home/community). Feminized service work, such as hairdressing, retail, and hospitality, has also been the focus of some of this scholarship, particularly in terms of the emotional labour performed by those working in these service sectors to meet the "needs" and desires of clients (Good and Cooper 2016; Toerien and Kitzinger 2007; Watt 2007). Some scholarly attention has also been paid to other contexts not commonly associated with care and emotional labour (see, e.g., Iszatt-White 2013; Mavin 2009; Strongman and Wright 2008). This

literature attends to academic women's experiences, most often regarding teaching and service work expectations (Acker and Feuerverger 1996; Bellas 1999; Guarino and Borden 2017; Tuck 2018) and in terms of childcare and family caregiving (Bos, Sweet-Cushman, and Schneider 2017; Dickson 2018; Huppertz, Sang, and Napier 2018; Nzinga-Johnson 2013; Misra, Lundquist, and Templer 2012). However, the experiences of precariously employed academic women is missing in this literature. Further to this, the relationship between SETs and care-related expectations in contract teaching remains unexamined.

Like the care scholarship, scholarship focusing on aesthetic labour tends to be siloed in particular sectors. Aesthetic labour encompasses expectations of specific "workplace embodiments" (Lipton 2021, 768) that place value on specific stylizations and looks. This form of labour requires skill and effort and involves expending resources, such as time and money. In some cases, aesthetic labour is tied to physical discomfort and can even involve subjecting oneself to health risks. Much of the scholarship on aesthetic labour has focused on the service and professionalized business sectors, where the expectation of this form of labour is generally more explicitly expressed and often closely tied to body work (Cutcher and Achterl 2017; Karlsson 2012; Kelan 2013; Mears 2014; Petersson McIntyre 2016; Ramjattan 2019). Some research has examined the experiences of academic women in relation to expectations about their gender and academic performances (Donaghue 2017; Mählck 2013; Moore and Williams 2014), including early-career women academics' experiences of these expectations (Bono, De Craene, and Kenis 2019; Brown 2017). The relationship between SETs and the reinforcement of these aesthetic expectations of academic women has been explored in some of the literature (see, e.g., Basow and Martin 2013; Lazos 2012). However, to our knowledge, no literature has examined the impact of these expectations on precariously employed academic women's experiences of teaching.

In this chapter, we extend the literature on care and aesthetic labour to examine the impact of SETs on the experiences of precariously employed academic women. To do so, we focus on the impacts of this evaluation tool identified by our research participants and discuss the broader consequences of these impacts for equality in higher education. Crucially, we argue that increasing equality in the academy depends, in part, on examining and addressing the role of SETs in perpetuating the inequities experienced by precariously employed academic women.

METHODS

This chapter draws on thirty-four semi-structured interviews with contract faculty (n = 21) and sessional instructors (n = 13) who identify as women at a

research-intensive university in Ontario. Contract faculty and sessional instructors represent two categories of workers who are precariously employed: sessional instructors are hired for individual courses and contract faculty are hired for one- to three-year terms. The study's sample included twenty-four faculty/instructors from disciplines in the social sciences and humanities and ten from STEM fields. Potential participants were identified through publicly available faculty lists on departmental websites and through snowball sampling and were recruited via email. Efforts were made to obtain as diverse a sample as possible across the categories of age, race, disciplinary background, and years of teaching experience. Ethics clearance for this study was sought and granted through the researchers' institutional ethics board.

While most of the interviews were conducted in person by one or both of us, depending on the participants' preference, a few interviews were conducted over the phone or via video conferencing. Building on existing themes in the literature, interview questions focused on experiences of job precarity in the academy; participants' perceptions of the impact of SETs on teaching experiences; the effectiveness of SETs in measuring teaching performance; how gender, race, ability, and other¹ power relations may have impacted SET responses; the use of SETs in hiring and performance appraisals; and alternative evaluation methods for teaching. All interviews were audiorecorded and transcribed verbatim. Following each interview, we met and discussed emergent themes.

Our analysis was loosely informed by Timmermans and Tavory's (2012) abductive approach to qualitative analysis, which they define as a "creative, inferential process aimed at producing new ... theories based on surprising research evidence" (167). Unlike more traditional forms of qualitative analysis, such as the inductive approach used in Grounded Theory, abductive analysis is grounded in insights from existing literature, which are used to identify patterns and theoretical themes in data. Drawing on this abductive approach, the theoretical literature on care, aesthetic labour, and gender inequality guided the construction of preliminary coding categories from the interview data. Given the study's specific focus on gender and equality, we focused on participants' expressed concerns and experiences of inequities. Following Timmermans and Tavory, we also paid particular attention to "surprising research evidence" or unexpected responses from participants, which was used to further refine the coding categories. Following the initial coding of the transcripts, we then "revisited" the codes, which Timmermans and Tavory suggest is a crucial process for "see[ing] things in new ways," and further refined our codes.

As the following findings illustrate, participants described a range of personal experiences with SETs and their impacts on equality in the academy. Crucially, what these perspectives make clear is that SETs significantly shape precariously

employed instructors' experiences both in and outside of the classroom, often in detrimental ways that go largely unseen in higher education.

FINDINGS

Personal Experiences of Inequities and Their Reflection in the SET Research Literature

Given their occupation as academics, it is perhaps not surprising that many of our participants discussed the research literature on the impact of SETs on equity-seeking groups. They expressed familiarity with “research that finds that they [SETs] are biased against women or minorities or people whose first language is not English” and data that indicate that “teaching evaluations are lower for women, older people, and people of colour.” Importantly, many participants not only were aware of the key findings in the research literature on SETs, but also recognized that their specific experiences were reflected in the research literature.

Several of our participants identified the impact of racism on their experiences of SETs. In some cases, this was expressed through acknowledgment that they experienced white privilege. For example, one lecturer stated that she experiences a “bit of a white girl effect,” while a sessional participant similarly explained that she had not been subjected to racialized discrimination because she is “pretty white-passing.” Women of colour who had experienced racism in the classroom identified racism in the types of comments they received in their SETs and in challenges to their authority in the classroom. One participant commented that these comments originate from those “who feel that they have this power over you because they are white.” In accounting for these kinds of experiences, several participants addressed the impacts of an instructor's race, as well as their gender and age, on SETs. Summarizing this succinctly, one participant said that these “characteristics which we already know from research” help to “determine how you're going to get rated.”

Our participants also recognized how other forms of discrimination that have impacted their personal experiences of SETs are reaffirmed in the research literature. Many described experiences of gender- and/or age-based discrimination. In relation to her personal experiences of sexual objectification through SETs, for instance, one sessional instructor explained, “There's a moment where I become very conscious of the fact that my status as someone who is pretty young and female impacts their perception of me as an instructor.” Another similarly stated, “Oh, yeah, I'm conscious of the fact that they're going to be evaluating me in a gendered way and in an ageist way.” Along the same lines, a contract lecturer described her experience that students “sometimes have an

idea that they don't want a certain professor. And that's ... almost always an older woman," further stating, "I know the data supports this, that the older you get, particularly if you're female, [the] less credible you seem to look."

Having their personal experiences validated in the research literature seemed to add insult to injury for several precariously employed academic women we interviewed. For example, one participant expressed great frustration with the continued use of SETs in light of the research literature, pointing out that it is understood that they are both sexist and racist: "So, why are we continuing to use them at all?" She was not alone in expressing this sentiment. Many sessional instructors and contract lecturers identified the specific impacts of the continued use of SETs on themselves as precariously employed academic women. They expressed frustration that SETs were contributing to the inequities they were experiencing in the university, and that these inequities had been demonstrated by the research literature but remained unaddressed at their institution.

Aesthetic Labour in Response to the Inequities Engendered by SETs

Our participants recognized that SETs are engendering, and to mitigate the inequities, several of them described engaging in various forms of aesthetic labour. One sessional instructor explained that, to appear attractive and professional for students, "I dress well. I'm very fit and stylish. I've found it to be very helpful in my popularity in the classroom. Like, you've gotta win them over somehow. I don't overdo it. I don't always wear a suit jacket, but I look professional, you know, I wear a bit of makeup." Several of our participants described similar work to achieve a look of feminized professionalism, which they hoped would circumvent gendered comments and notions of gender-based competency. In the face of these pressures, for some, the performance of professionalism in the classroom was the one thing they felt they could control. As one sessional put it, "I can't change my physical features, I can't change my gender, I can't change how I look, but what I can do is I can make sure that when I enter that classroom, that I'm professional, that I look professional, and that I act professionally."

These efforts were often unsuccessful in circumventing these gendered dynamics. As one participant put it, "Because I look young, I try to look older than them, even older than I am. When I teach, I'm wearing a dress and I have lipstick and makeup on." She explained that these efforts were ultimately in vain because she still received "the most gendered comments," including students sarcastically asking, "do you like my lipstick?" She also recounted students saying that "she's incompetent and she doesn't know what she's doing." One of our participants summed up the experience of being unable to circumvent or successfully mitigate against these impacts by stating, "I have a PhD. It shouldn't matter what clothes I'm wearing, but it does."

To circumvent discrimination based on their gender, age, and race, many of our participants also described engaging in aesthetic labour that involves performances of academic authority in the classroom. As one contract lecturer explained:

I have very good credentials. I got a PhD from [an ivy league university]. So, I make a point, at the beginning of every class, of spending a lot of time telling them my background, “oh, I did this, I got a PhD, I’ve been to this, I’ve done these internships, I’ve been to these places.” It serves a bunch of purposes. It tells them I am very qualified, so you cannot judge me by my appearance, and you cannot judge me by my gender, and you have to respect me.

Along similar lines, another participant stated: “I make a point of starting the term off like that because it establishes me as a professional, whereas if I just came in and started teaching the material, I’m not sure that they would take me seriously.”

Rather than emphasizing credentials, other participants described how they intentionally draw attention to their teaching expertise. One of our participants explained this as follows: “I will signal to them why I do things, pedagogically communicating why the course is the way it is. I specifically communicate ‘I did this, so you are going to be able to succeed.’ But doing so entails a lot of labour.” Others outlined similar approaches that were also labour intensive, involving the expenditure of significant time and energy to explain their pedagogical approaches and teaching-specific experience or training to students. Like the work of performing feminized professionalism, however, many participants acknowledged that the forms of aesthetic labour used to establish academic authority were not always successful. They explained how their SET scores and comments suggest that students continue to judge their bodies, clothing, or accents according to discriminatory assumptions about who is a “real” academic. In particular, they described how, unlike their older, white, male colleagues, who do not have to work hard to convince students of their professorial status, their gender, age, and racialized characteristics make students less likely to see their competence and skill. Thus, one participant described how she “corrects” her accent to avoid negative comments, recognizing that “if I was white, it wouldn’t be as [much of] a concern.” Some instructors also described instances when students made discriminatory assumptions about them and their status based on their gender and age. As one sessional instructor said:

I’m certain that if someone who looked a lot older than me and who was male walked into the classroom, they would be treated much differently. I do look very

young for my age. I actually once walked into one of my classrooms and someone thought I was a student. I've had male students ask me if I'm single. Because I look like I'm, you know, eighteen, I get a very different response.

For many of these instructors, performing feminized professionalism was one small but often futile way to exercise agency in the face of students' inescapable discriminatory assumptions about their competence and skill.

Many participants also described how being a precariously employed instructor undermined the aesthetic labour of performing and maintaining the academic role. They recognized that the material conditions of their teaching were part of the issue, such as not having an office in which to meet students, but identified the significant role that SETs play in undermining this work. They explained the incongruence of portraying themselves as professionals and being subjected to evaluations that do not measure their teaching abilities. They emphasized the fact that these evaluations determined their future employment prospects, in terms of contract renewal, the possibility of an eventual tenure-track position, or even being pushed out of academe all together, and explained that these threats pushed them to engage in customer-service types of behaviour that detract from their credibility as academics. As one contract lecturer said, "I'm trapped, I'm stuck. I don't think people get how hamstringing that is." They further explained that "what gets me the job two years from now is going to be whether or not these guys are happy and had fun? I'm not a fucking cruise director ... And that's what evaluations engender! They engender cruise directing." These are the kinds of inequities that precariously employed academic women recognized they were uniquely subjected to. The relation between their job (in)security, SETs, and broader gender-based assumptions about academic appearance compelled many to engage in this additional, and often ineffectual or demeaning, labour.

The Hidden Work of Caring

SETs impose unique pressures on precariously employed women instructors to engage in other forms of labour that are often unrelated to teaching and learning. However, in a context where positive evaluations affect continued employment, this labour can feel necessary for the precariously employed. Describing these pressures, many participants spoke about the care work and emotional labour they feel pressured to perform in the classroom. Unlike men, these women instructors said that students expect them to be emotionally sensitive, caring, and "motherly," particularly if they are older women, and evaluate their teaching accordingly. Many suggested that the work of conforming to these expectations

not only adds to their workload, but also has larger impacts on their mental health and well-being. One sessional explained:

I've had a number of courses in which the emotional labour that I had to put into them, for the students not to consider me cold or off-putting, was quite intense. They expect me to be very concerned with the things that are going on in their lives. That's not to say that I'm not, but there is a sense that they're more likely to be more personal with me because I'm female, to tell me about their troubles or specific aspects of their personal lives, which I'm then supposed to make accommodations for.

Along similar lines, another sessional said, "I feel like I have to be nurturing them as well as educating them. There's an expectation that I do these things that may not necessarily be there with male faculty." Some described these expectations as rooted not only in their gender, but also in their age. Older women, many participants said, are often expected to be mothering toward students. Describing this phenomena, one contract instructor asserted, "It's amazing how many of us, all women, most of us older, have students who will send emails saying 'I can't come to class today because I'm having menstrual cramps.' Would you say that to a man? Do you say that to women who look more like your own age, rather than *mom*?" From the perspective of these participants, women, particularly older women, work under unique pressures to "mother" students and respond to their emotional needs in the classroom and beyond.

Not living up to these gendered expectations can have consequences for precariously employed instructors. When expectations are not met, many participants explained that students often become disappointed, frustrated, or angry, which can have negative impacts on quantitative scores and qualitative comments in their SETs. Describing this, one participant said, "I've seen this, not just with me, but with other middle-aged women ... students will sometimes come to us as though we're mom, and if we're not mom, that's disappointing." Expressing a similar sentiment, another participant said, "If we fail to be mom, we're mean." Several participants described how they feel significant pressure to engage in gendered forms of emotional labour when responding to students to avoid negative comments in their SETs that they are insufficiently caring.

Participants also expressed frustration with the fact that the emotional labour they feel pressured to perform is often devalued and unrecognized by their colleagues and supervisors. One contract instructor explained that in the last two years over fifty students had disclosed their experiences of sexual and

physical victimization to her, to which she worked to respond with empathy and compassion. This emotional labour, she said, not only added to her workload, but also went largely unseen and unacknowledged by her colleagues. Reflecting on this experience, she said, “That’s a lot of emotional labour, and I don’t think that anybody sees that. It’s a lot of emotional labour on top of all of the teaching, and the service, and then the research I’m trying to do, and I don’t feel like it’s valued.”

Students’ expectations of women instructors’ emotional labour, as well as the broader consequences of this labour on instructors, have far reaching impacts on equality in the academy. Under the threat of negative teaching evaluations, instructors who identify as women are pressured to do additional labour in the classroom that can be mentally, emotionally, and psychologically draining and which often goes largely unrecognized. These negative impacts are not equally felt across the academic workforce and thus fuel existing inequities in the academy.

IMPACTS ON MENTAL HEALTH AND EQUALITY IN THE ACADEMY

SETs have significant impacts on individual instructors’ mental health, confidence, and well-being. For some, these impacts were most acute when they first started teaching. One contract lecturer stated, “I was scared to look at my evaluations myself. I had to ask a friend, ‘Can you read my evaluations and summarize them for me?’ Yeah, it was very hard on me.” Another participant explained that she briefly stopped teaching because of a particularly negative experience with SETs early in her career, of which she said she still feels the effects; another described how “early on, it was really tough” because her evaluations had contributed to “a sort of spiral into depression” that led her to take antidepressants for several years. Other participants spoke of the unique challenges that new instructors face, and several suggested that the combination of employment precarity and SET pressures made these challenges more difficult to bear. One contract lecturer described living through that experience as follows: “I cried a lot the first couple of years I was here. It was a few years of a kind of hellish, non-existence.”

Others described the SETs’ negative effects on mental health as an ongoing struggle. One sessional explained how demoralizing it can be to read the comments and see the SET scores after a teaching term, while another called SETs “emotionally devastating.” Many participants described the ongoing negative impact that SETs have on their confidence in the classroom. One said, “Negative feedback always impacts my sense of security standing in front of a room,” while another explained, “[SETs] made me fearful, anxious, and changed how I teach. I think I probably do a lot more work than maybe male professors do

in terms of trying to keep students satisfied.” Others went further and talked about SETs in terms of abuse. Expressing this sentiment, one sessional suggested that SETs are “kind of like an abusive relationship. They twist your mind and they make you think that you are the problem.” To manage these negative impacts, several participants said they avoid looking at their SETs. Putting this succinctly, one sessional explained, “I try not to read them because they’re hurtful.” However, others suggested that, unlike their permanently employed colleagues, they do not always have the privilege of not looking at their SETs because they are often forced to include them in job applications for new teaching positions.

The negative impacts of SETs on instructors’ mental health are inequitably distributed across the academic workforce and, in many ways, are exacerbated for precariously employed instructors from equity-seeking groups. One participant described how the pressures to maintain positive SETs are amplified by her employment precarity by saying, “As a sessional instructor who’s very, very aware of the precariousness of her position, formal students evaluations seem more like a ... threat is not really the word, but like they’re just this thing that hangs over you.” By employing SETs, university administrators are relying on a tool that has potential to negatively affect the mental health of their employees, particularly those who are precariously employed and from equity-seeking groups. Given the differential impacts of SETs on precariously employed and permanent instructors, the inequitable conditions of academic work are maintained through the continued use of SETs.

DISCUSSION

An increase in mental distress among academics has been recognized in recent academic literature (Catano et al. 2010; Hall and Bowles 2016). Whereas the academy has long been a highly competitive space for privileged (white, straight, middle-class, able-bodied, and cisgender) men, sociologists Claire Polster and Janice Newson (2015) and many other scholars have demonstrated that neoliberalism, a socioeconomic philosophy and ideology characterized by free-market policies and fiscal austerity, is transforming higher education. Management of universities as corporations driven by the interests of profit is fuelling new distress through the growth of underpaid and precarious teaching positions. Neoliberalism in the academy also engenders “more profound kinds and levels of competition than existed previously in higher education, and ... there are significant qualitative transformations of the academy arising from this competition” (Berg, Huijbens, and Larsen 2016, 172). The increased experience of anxiety and mental distress, moreover, has been recognized as not simply symptomatic of neoliberalism; as sociologist Vik Loveday (2018) explains,

it also perpetuates neoliberalism by inciting precariously employed academics to continuously participate in competitiveness.

More broadly, these research findings demonstrate the importance of attending to the gendered, age-related, and race-related dynamics that contribute to mental distress in the context of the competitive cultures in higher education. The participants in this study demonstrated the fundamental role that SETs play in producing these effects and the unique ways that precariously employed academic women experience them. The participants' engagement in various forms of aesthetic labour was often grounded in their recognition that SETs contribute to gender, age-based, and racial inequities. Giving this labour was an attempt to circumvent or strategically navigate these inequities in their individual lives. As many of them suggested, this work was often unsuccessful in averting these negative outcomes. Aesthetic labour was an additional, substantial form of labour that academic women felt compelled to engage.

Our findings also address the ways that SETs impact the care-related ideals and practices of precariously employed academic women. The small but growing literature on care and precariously employed academic women renders salient the current reality of care in these spaces despite the fact that care is generally ignored or taken for granted in the university context. This scholarship has outlined the challenges that academic women face engaging in caring relations. Care-free masculinized ideals of competition and neoliberal justifications and validations of precarious academic labour remain preeminent (Cardozo 2017; Ivancheva, Lynch, and Keating 2019). Despite work conducted to date, care scholarship places insufficient emphasis on how precariously employed academic women are "forced to care" (Glenn 2010) and how this imperative is experienced by them. Our participants identified SETs as a coercive instrument that forced them to engage in caring behaviours and this experience requires research attention as well.

Acknowledging the potential coerciveness of this form of care work in higher education is an essential part of addressing increasing inequities in higher education. Among those seeking to apply the broader care literature to higher education, those focusing on value care ideals and practices in universities must contend with the reality of coerced care and its impact on precariously employed academic women's mental health. Moreover, while students deserve instructors who care about teaching, and precariously employed academic women deserve to engage in care practices, those who value the ethic of care in higher education will not find it supported by SETs as a tool (for one perspective on how care might be valued in higher education, see Niemann, this volume). SETs do not produce this "vivifying ethic of care that (re)turns

institutional resources toward the providers of the nurturant labor that our society so desperately needs” (Cardozo 2017, 423). Indeed, quite the opposite is true. SETs reinforce the treatment of students as “consumer-critics” and do not engender the “practices that encourage acceptance, trust, inclusion, and openness” (O’Brien 2010, 109, 114). Redress of the inequities caused by SETs is needed to transform institutions of higher education into spaces where caring is neither punished nor coerced and it can serve an ethical foundation for the conditions of education.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates the importance of addressing precariously employed academic women’s experiences of SETs and the impact of SETs on aesthetic labour, caring labour, and mental health. Research on precariously employed academic women’s experiences of SETs is crucial for developing a better understanding of the impact of SETs on inequities in higher education. Applying an intersectional feminist framework to this problem and extending scholarship on emotional labour and care to these experiences can illustrate the contributions of SETs to greater mental distress and additional labour burdens for precariously employed academic women. Our findings clearly demonstrate that this evaluation tool is creating additional labour and mental distress. Moreover, despite recognition of these inequities among precariously employed academic women, and their attempts to circumvent or strategically navigate these negative impacts at an individual level, what is needed is systemic redress of these inequities. Without this redress, these dynamics will continue to perpetuate and deepen inequities within academe.

A starting point for this is recognition of the ways that SETs are implicated in broader neoliberal trends of increased competition, anxiety, and mental distress that combine with gendered, age-related, and race-related dynamics to produce particularly fraught inequitable working and teaching conditions for precariously employed academic women. This redress must also carefully address how SETs sustain coerced forms of caring from precariously employed academic women and more equitably distribute the responsibility for caring within higher education.

NOTE

- 1 During the interviews, we provided our participants the opportunity to share insights about the impact of power relations beyond those we specified in our questions. This elicited some broad discussions of power relations in the context of SETs, as described below.

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